

Summer Thesis Fellowship: Work to be Completed

The first two chapters of my dissertation take up the idea of “popularity” as it is manifested in the titles printed in England between 1789 and 1799. The first chapter builds a corpus of titles printed during that decade, and identifies reprints. The second chapter builds on the same corpus of texts, using topic modelling to compare the subject matter of texts in different digital archives and in the late eighteenth century marketplace. The corpus is complete and I am currently developing my code to computationally identify reprints: the first chapter will reach a competent draft by March 1, qualifying me for the summer thesis fellowship. During the summer, I will complete my experimentation and begin writing for my second chapter.

In May I will develop the code for my topic modelling. Because I ask a question more complex than out-of-the-box topic modelling tools can answer (since I wish to use the same “topics” across multiple corpora, in order to compare these corpora), I must write my own code in R. A month should suffice for me to finalize my experimental design, pre-process my corpora for topic modelling, train my topic models, and run the final code on each of my corpora. During this time, I will take detailed notes on my process, which will produce prose for a “methodology” section or appendix.

In the first weeks of June I will examine the resulting data, and perhaps run a second smaller experiment if interesting findings warrant further exploration. (This would involve tweaking and re-running my code, not writing a new program from scratch.) By the middle of June, I will begin the “raw write-up” which simply sets forth the data of my results. This raw write-up will likely not form part of the resulting chapter “as is,” but will instead be reorganized and recontextualized by later critical reading; nonetheless, it is useful to put all of the details in writing as soon as experimentation completes. By the end of June, I will have written a few thousand words of raw material, and be ready to begin my critical analysis.

By July, I will be ready to turn back to more “analog” forms of literary study. On the basis of my findings, I will identify and read additional relevant literary criticism and literary texts. The steps for this reading and thinking are harder to break down in detail, because they are harder to predict. By the end of July, I will have produced several thousand words of reading notes (not directly part of the chapter) and should understand my argument for chapter two.

In August, I will outline the chapter as a whole, organizing my raw data write-up and my reading notes around the flow of my argument. I will select my key texts and the key materials to be used from each, and begin the process of polishing my notes into finished prose. By the end of August, I will not yet have a fully polished chapter draft, but I will have the raw materials and the roadmap to produce one.