Quantitative Perspectives on European Baroque Drama: Towards a Network Theory-oriented Analysis

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Research question

- There is some consensus that the various "national forms" of **early modern drama**, such as the English Elizabethan theatre, the Spanish *comedias* or the French *théâtre classique*, represent more or less **autonomous systems**, sharply separated from one another by linguistic and cultural boundaries. Accordingly, many studies have neglected truly comparative approaches (Küpper 2019: 20).
- Moretti (1994) argues that national variations of European tragedy were born during the **1650s**, when classical and medieval models, once shared across the continent, began to shatter, while each local instance of drama developed its own set of idiosyncratic stylistic and formal features.
- This projects attempts to empirically verify the scope of this alleged "branching" of the tragedy, extending the investigation to other dramatic genres (such as comedy) and focusing on their **plot structures** as a **key formal indicator** of **literary evolution**.

Corpus

- **150 texts** from the **five major European literary spaces** (FRE-SPA-GER-ITA-ENG)
- Timeframe: from **1561** (Norton & Sackville's *Gorboduc*) to **1711**
- Full chronological coverage: 2 texts for each literary tradition each 10 years
- Non-canonical approach: towards a composite picture of European drama
- Corpus available here: **tinyurl.com/baroque-corpus**

Birthplaces of the 127 corpus authors (data via Wikidata query + manual integration)

Methodology

- Focusing on the patterns of relations among fictional characters, **literary network analysis** investigates textual structures through the use of concepts and metrics from network and graph theory (cf. Trilcke 2013). This now-established methodology provides statistics and visualisations for a variety of scholarly purposes, from the study of plot structures to literary periodisation and genre analysis.
- Thanks to the development of computational techniques, the **extraction of network data** from texts can now be partially automated (see Labatut and Bost 2019). Such advances have allowed the creation of large repositories of networks from textual collections; a prominent example is the **Drama Corpora** (**DraCor**) project (Fischer et al. 2019, dracor.org).

Roadmap

1. **Corpus building**, employing a mix of plays already in DraCor and some newly transcribed and annotated texts → from structured (.xml, .html) or plain (.txt from OCRs) open-access sources to fully formatted, machine-readable XML-TEI files.
2. **Automated extraction** of (co-presence) character networks by means of the DraCor scripts and **visualisation** through Gephi (gephi.org) or similar software.
3. **Computation** and **comparison** of multiple network metrics expressing various aspects of textual structures (characters' roles, plot types etc.).
4. **Critical evaluation** of the results in the context of previous literature, seeking to reconstruct the formal evolution of early modern drama.

References

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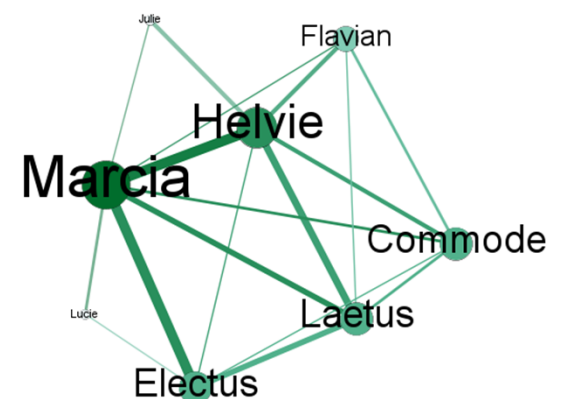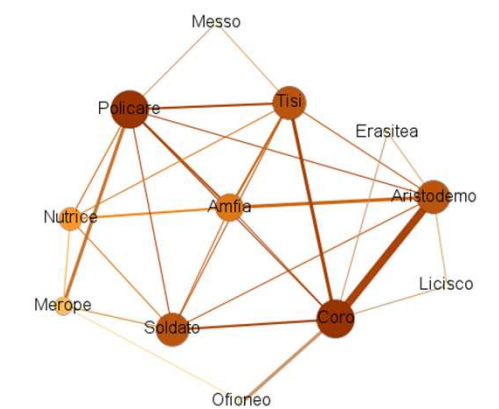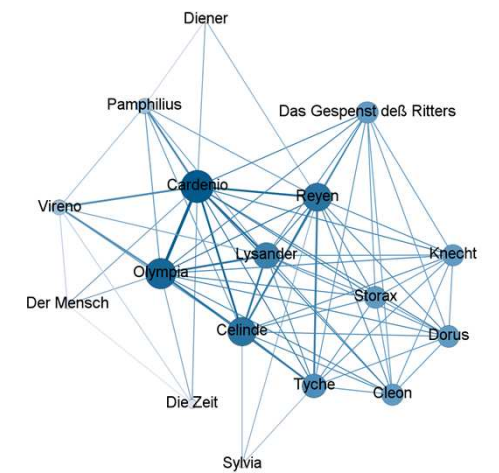
Dramatic networks from three plays from the year 1647 (from above: "Cardenio und Celinde" by A. Gryphius, "Aristodemo" by C. de' Dottori, "La Mort de l'Empereur Commode" by T. Corneille). Gephi elaboration on DraCor data, nodes ranked by degree.