A TRUE GUIDE TO GLORY: WOMEN, SOCIAL ORDER, AND GENDER

EXPECTATIONS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH FUNERAL SERMONS

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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BY

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This project is currently available at: historyweb.aws.bsu.edu/amkinnen/atrueguidetoglory/

A True Guide to Glory: Women, Social Order, and Gender Expectations in Seventeenth-Century English Funeral Sermons, began as a discussion of finding a discreet, manageable set of primary sources that would lend itself to the application of digital humanities methods and tools. This paper will trace the process of taking that idea to its final conclusions as a 3-credit 698 Creative Project in digital history.

During the Summer of 2017, I did an Independent Study course with Dr. Tara Wood that focused on public memory, commemoration, as well as death rituals and traditions in early modern England. That course led to a discussion of using funeral sermons for seventeenth-century women as a way to examine issues of gender and commemoration during the period. In the Fall of 2017, I took a course on Tudor and Stuart England that provided a good understanding of the larger historical debates during that era. That semester's work also included a digital history seminar where I learned the value of and skills of digital scholarship. This seminar allowed me to create my own digital research module. I took the opportunity to begin work with the funeral sermons using a smaller corpus of sermons as a "proof of concept" before grappling with the larger corpus of sermons from the entire seventeenth century. This coursework prepared me for working on this creative project. This project is much larger in scale, 206 sermons, and covers the entire seventeenth century. My seminar project preliminarily examined the gendered nature of the funeral sermons through textual analysis, but this project broadens the scope and depth of that analysis in order to create a better comparison between funeral sermons for women and men. Extending the chronological scope to encompass the years 1600 to 1700 allows for additional analysis about the numbers of sermons, as well as the impact of political, social, and religious events and trends across the century.

Primary source research may be the largest portion of any research project but secondary source comprehension should not be overlooked. Since the Summer of 2017 I have reviewed the relevant scholarship on the different topics that pertain to my project. Having a good working knowledge of the secondary source material that exists is an important part of any good research. This review allowed me to situate my research within the field. Ensuring that I was familiar with the current scholarship prepared me for my own research.

While the idea for this research has stayed quite stable throughout most of the process, there are always unexpected roadblocks one must face while trying to gather primary source material. As previously mentioned, the corpus for this project consists of 206 funeral sermons, as well as seven book collection catalogs. The *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) database provided the primary source material in the form of full transcriptions downloaded from the database. I gained access and gathered the necessary data. I searched 'funeral sermons' in the range of 1600-1699 and sifted through the thousands of results to end up with the 200+ sources. Simply obtaining the transcriptions proved challenging and took more than two weeks to complete. EEBO is an invaluable resource, but the website is antiquated and slow. Even so, having searchable electronic access to all books printed in Britain since 1475 made this project possible—a circumstance not possible for scholars even twenty years ago. I needed to devise a clear, precise file naming scheme. In addition, I needed to organize the data in different ways: chronologically, by gender, etc.

This creative project needed to be digital for a few reasons. Early modern funeral sermons tended to be very lengthy and with more than 200 sermons, an individual reading and analysis of each would be infeasible. In fact, the questions of comparison, trends in word usage and themes, as well as detecting gendered differences among the sermons would prove nearly

impossible without digital tools. This problem can be amended with the use of digital analysis tools, in this case Voyant is the primary tool that I used. Voyant is a "web-based reading and analysis environment for digital texts" (http://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!/guide/about). This tool allows the user to upload their own corpus of digital texts that can then be analyzed through the different tools contained within Voyant. Some of the most useful tools for my own project have been Cirrus, Contexts, and TermsBerry. Cirrus is a word cloud tool that shows the highest frequency terms within a corpus, or individual document. This is very useful as a starting point for analysis. Seeing which words, and then perhaps themes, that appear most frequently reveals important concepts within these sermons. Similarly, TermsBerry not only allows the user to visualize high frequency terms, but it also adds the component of proximity to show a better understanding of how often and where things appear in the text. The Context tool shows a word (which the user chooses) with a few words that come before and after it. This helps to explain the different contexts that an important word (perhaps one found through Cirrus or TermsBerry) is used in the text.

I used other digital tools and resources for this project, including Templated, a website with downloadable HTML and CSS templates (https://templated.co/) and Google's Ngram Viewer, "an online search engine that charts the frequencies of any set of comma-delimited search strings using a yearly count of n-grams found in sources printed between 1500 and 2008" (https://books.google.com/ngrams). Digital resources that focus on the networks that existed at the time include the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (http://www.ocforddnb.com/), Six Degrees of Francis Bacon, "a digital reconstruction of the early modern social network" hosted by Carnegie Mellon University Libraries (www.sixdegreesoffrancisbacon/com/), and The London Book Trades Wiki (http://lbt.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mediawiki/index.php/Main_Page). All of

these resources helped with either the analysis side of this project or providing a greater understanding of some of the more complex relationships that existed during the seventeenth century.

Determining the right design for a digital project is very important. The way in which information is presented impacts how people respond and interact with it. While I had been working with my digital template for most of the semester, it was not until the research was done that I could go in and finish tweaking the user interface design so it fit my needs. Changing things like the layout and links on pages as well as making sure each page fits the model is not a particularly difficult task but it is time consuming and took a number of hours to complete. Because I employ Windows, NoteTab Light is the program that I used for all of my HTML and CSS editing. FileZilla, an FTP, allows me to upload files that I create onto the server *A True Guide to Glory* is hosted. Being able to use these various tools has allowed me many experiences that would not have been available had I decided to try and write a conventional print thesis. First of all, the size of my corpus would have been considerably smaller due to time restrictions. Second, using these tools has allowed me to discover more about the process of research. It is important to understand that while these digital tools help to facilitate scholarship, they do not do the work for you. The process of research and analysis is the same, in this case, it is just presented in a different way. Digital scholarship is becoming more and more prevalent and it is important to grasp both its assets and limitations before embarking on a research project.