

Text Reuse and Eighteenth-Century Histories of England

Ville Vaara, Aleksi Vesanto & Mikko Tolonen, University of Helsinki

Introduction

David Hume's *History* was published after a period of political turbulence in the British Isles. The foundations of the monarchy had been shaken in a series of crisis, with the revolution of 1688 and the ensuing Civil War being the main foci of Hume's *History*. This conflict between Royalists and Parliamentarians, and later Tories and Whigs sets the context in which the works analysed here were both written and received.

But what kind of history is Hume's *History of England*? Is it an impartial account or is it part of a political project? To what extent was it influenced by seventeenth-century Royalist authors? These questions have been asked since the first Stuart volumes were published in the 1750s. The consensus is that Hume's use of Royalist sources left a crucial mark on his historical project.¹ One aim of this paper is to weigh these claims against our evidence about Hume's use of historical sources. To do this we qualified, clustered and compared 129,646 instances text reuse in Hume's *History*. Additionally, we compared Hume's *History of England* with similar undertakings in the eighteenth-century and got an overview of their composition. We aim to extend the discussion on Hume's *History* in the direction of applying computation methods on understanding the writing of history of England in the eighteenth-century as a genre.²

This paper contributes to the overall development of Digital Humanities by demonstrating how digital methods can help develop and move forward discussion in an existing research case. We don't limit ourselves to general method development, but rather contribute in the specific discussions on Hume's *History* and study of eighteenth-century histories.

Methods and sources

We are aiming to better understand the composition of Hume's *History* by examining the direct quotes in it based on data in Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO). It should be noted that ECCO also includes central seventeenth-century histories and other important documents as reprints. Thus, we do not only include eighteenth-century sources, but, for example, works by Clarendon, John Rushworth and other notable seventeenth-century historians. We compare text reuse in Hume's *History* to that in works of Paul de Rapin, William Guthrie and Thomas Carte, all prominent historians at the time. To our knowledge,

¹ Royce MacGillivray, 'Hume's "Toryism" and the Sources for his Narrative of the Great Rebellion', *Dalhousie Review*, 56, 1987, pp. 682-6; Laird Okie, 'Ideology and Partiality in David Hume's History of England', *Hume Studies*, vol. 11, 1985, pp. 1-32. See also, Ernest Mossner, 'Was Hume a Tory Historian?', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2, 1941, pp. 225-236; B. A. Ring, 'David Hume: Historian or Tory Hack?', *North Dakota Quarterly*, 1968, pp. 50-59; Frances Palgrave, 'Hume and his influence upon History' in vol. 9 of *Collected Historical Works*, e.d R. H. Inglis Palgrave, 10 vols. CUP, 1919-22 and Claudia Schmidt, *Reason in history*, 2010.

² Previous attempts towards this direction include Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon*, CUP, 1997.

similar text mining effort has not been previously undertaken in the field of eighteenth-century historiography.

As a starting point for our analysis, we used a dataset of linked text-reuse fragments found in ECCO, constructed with the BLAST -bioanalysis software³ The basic idea was to create a dataset that identifies similar sequences of characters (from circa 150 to more than 2000 characters each) instead of trying to match individual characters or tokens/words. This helped with the optical character recognition problems that plague ECCO. The methodology has previously been used in matching DNA sequences, where the problem of noisy data is likewise present. We further enriched the results with bibliographical metadata from the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC). This enriching allows us to compare the publication chronology and locations, and to create rough estimates of first edition publication dates.

There is no ready-to-use gold standard for text reuse cluster detection. Therefore, we compared our clusters with the critical edition of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (EHU) to see if text reuse cases of Hume's *Treatise* in EHU are also identified by our method. The results show that we were able to identify all cases included in EHU except those in footnotes. Because some of the changes that Hume made from the *Treatise* to EHU are not evident, this is a promising result.

Analysis

To give a general overview of Hume's *History* in relation to other works considered, we compared their respective volumes of source text reuse (figure 1). The comparison reveals some fundamental stylistic and structural differences. Hume's and Carte's Histories are composed quite differently from Rapin's and Guthrie's, which have roughly three times more reused fragments: Rapin typically opens a chapter with a long quote from a source document, and moves on to discuss the related historical events. Guthrie writes similarly, quoting long passages from sources of his choice. Hume is different: His quotes are more evenly spread, and a greater proportion of the text seems to be his own original formulations.

³ Vesanto, Nivala, Salakoski, Salmi & Ginter: A System for Identifying and Exploring Text Repetition in Large Historical Document Corpora. *Proceedings of the 21st Nordic Conference on Computational Linguistics, NoDaLiDa*, 22-24. May 2017, Gothenburg, Sweden.

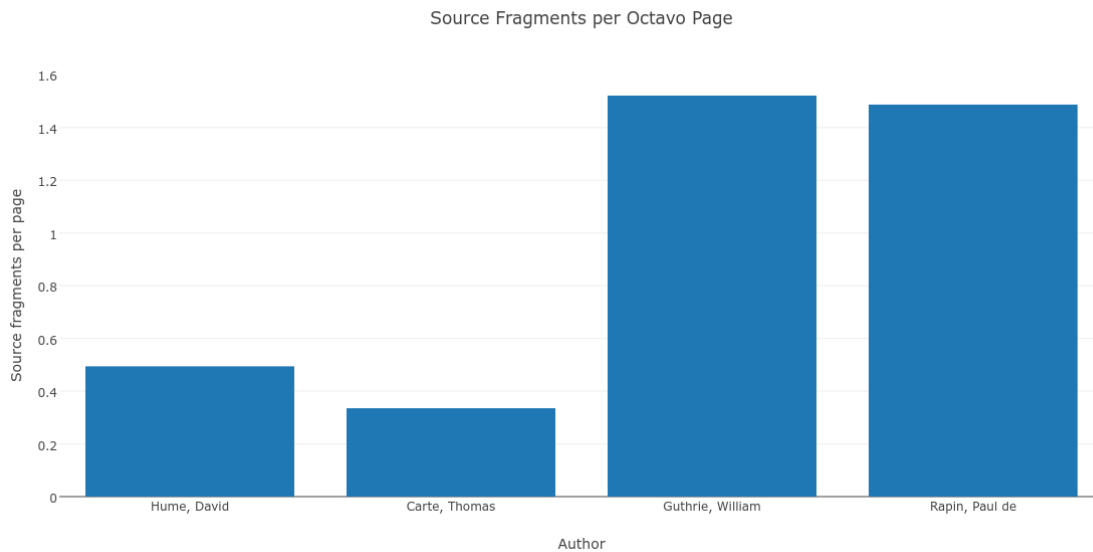


Figure 1.

Change in text reuse in the Histories

All the histories of England considered in our analysis are massive works, comprising of multiple separate volumes. The amount of reused text fragments found in these volumes differs significantly, but the trends are roughly similar. The common overall feature is a rise in the frequency of direct quotes in later volumes.

The increase in text reuse peaks in the volumes covering the reign of Charles I, and the events of the English Civil War, but with respect to both Hume and Rapin (figures 2 & 3), the highest peak is not at the end of Charles' reign, but in the lead up to the confrontation with the parliament. In Guthrie and Carte (figures 4 & 5) the peaks are located in the final volume. Except for Guthrie, all the other historical works considered here have the highest reuse rates located around the period of Charles I's reign that was intensely debated topic among Hume's contemporaries.

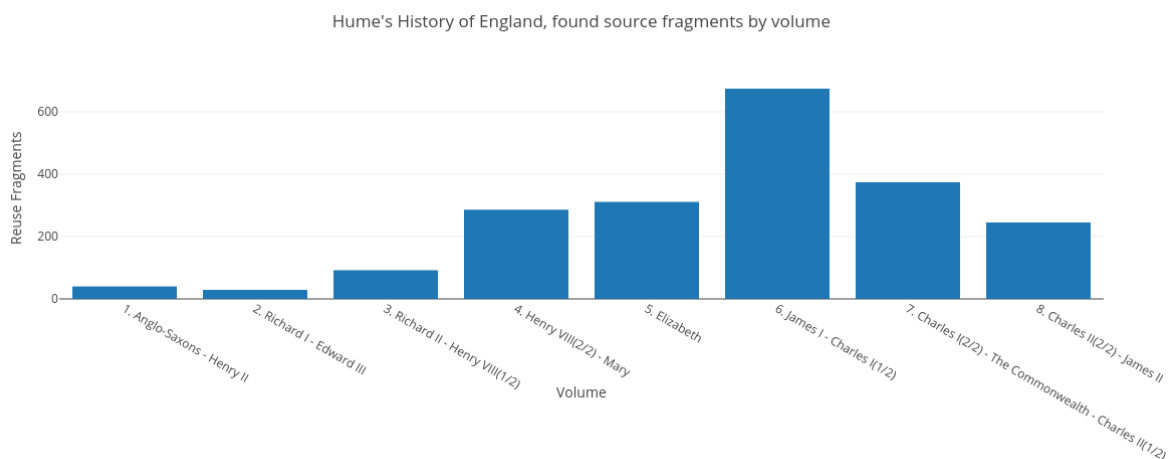


Figure 2.

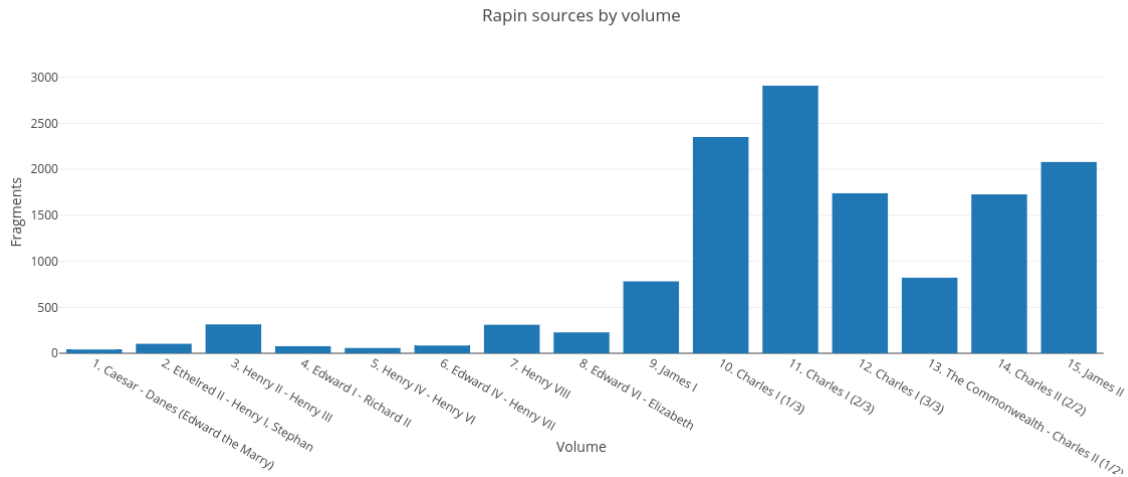
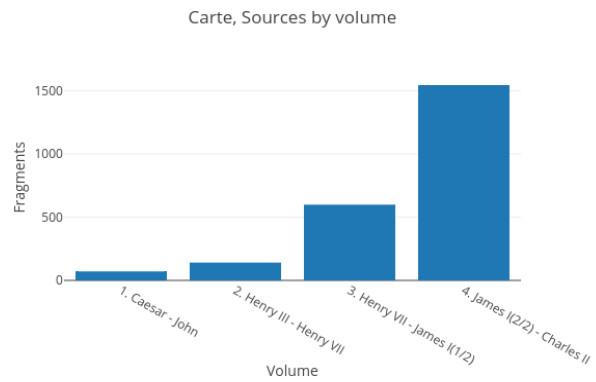
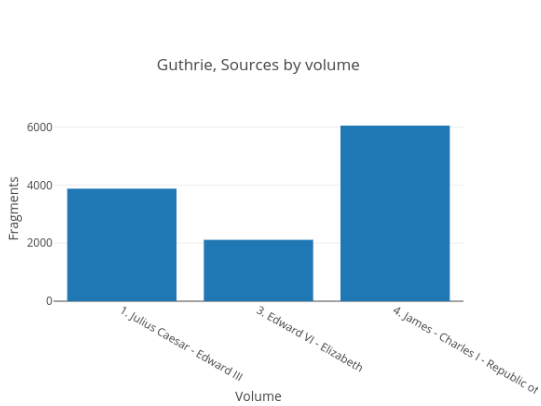


Figure 3.



Figures 4, 5.

We can further break down the the sources of reused text fragments by political affiliation of their authors (figure 6). A significant portion of the detected text reuse cases by Hume link to authors with no strong political leaning in the wider Whig-Tory context. It is obvious that serious antiquary work that is politically neutral forms the main body of seventeenth-century historiography in England. With the later volumes, the amount of text reuses cases tracing back to authors with a political affiliation increases, as might be expected with more heavily politically loaded topics.

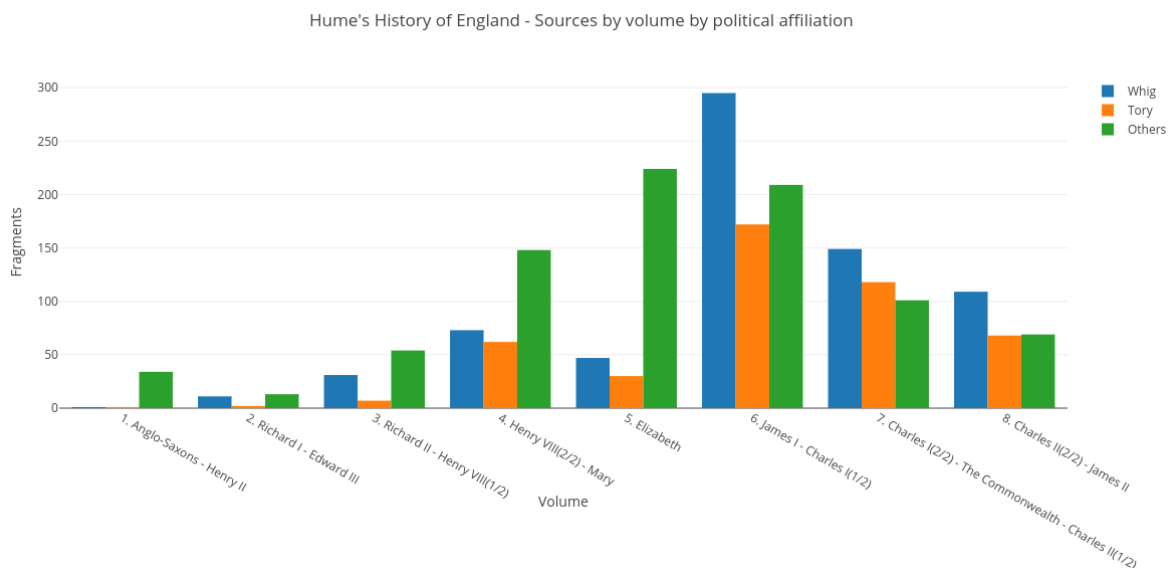


Figure 6.

Charles I execution and Hume's impartiality

A relatively limited list of authors are responsible for majority of the text fragments in Hume's *History*. As one might intuitively expect, the use of particular authors is concentrated in particular chapters. In general, the unevenness in the use of quotes can be seen as more of a norm than an exception.

However, there is at least one central chapter in Hume's Stuart history that breaks this pattern. That is, Chapter LIX - perhaps the most famous chapter in the whole work, covering the execution of Charles I. Nineteenth-century Whig commentators argued, with great enthusiasm, that Hume's use of sources, especially in this particular chapter, and Hume's description of Charles's execution, followed Royalist sources and the Jacobite Thomas Carte in particular. Thus, more carefully balanced use of sources in this particular chapter reveals a clear intention of wanting to be (or appear to be) impartial on this specific topic (figure 7).

Of course, there is John Stuart Mill's claim⁴ that Hume only uses Whigs when they support his Royalist bias. In the light of our data, this seems unlikely. If we compare Hume's use of Royalist sources in his treatment of the execution of Charles I to the chapter covering the topic in Carte's work, we note that here Carte relies especially heavily on Royalists, whereas Hume's source use is aligned with his use of Tories elsewhere in the volume.

⁴ John Stuart Mill, 'Brodie's History of the British Empire', Robson et al. ed. *Collected works*, vol. 6, pp. 3-58.

Source Fragments per Author per Header in Hume's History (vol. 7)

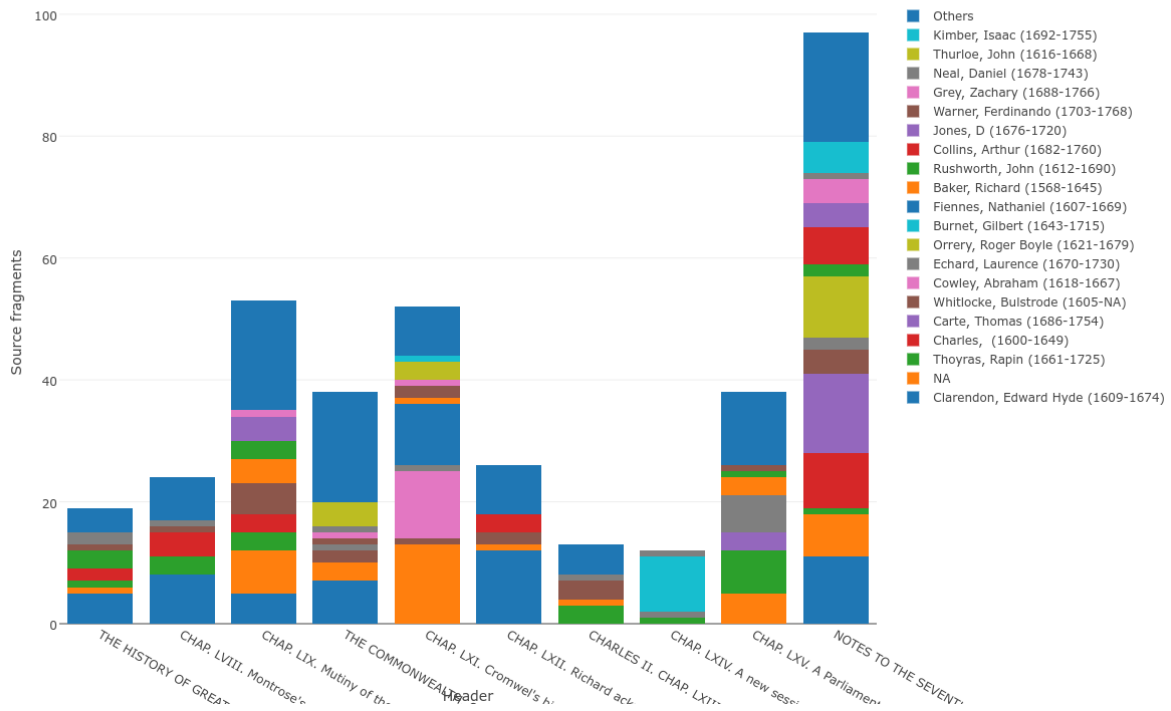


Figure 7.

Hume's influence on later Histories

A final area of interest in terms of text reuse is what it can tell us about an author's influence on later writers. The reuse totals of Hume's *History* in works following its publication are surprisingly evenly spread out over all the volumes (figure 8), and in this respect differ from the other historians considered here (figures 9 - 11). The only exception is the last volume where a drop in the amount of detected reuse fragments differs from the overall image.

Of all the authors only Hume has a high point in reuse at the volumes discussing the Civil War. The reception of Hume's first Stuart volume, the first published volume of his *History* is well known. It is notable that the next volumes published, that is the following Stuart volumes, possibly written with the angry reception of the first Stuart volume in mind, are the ones that seem to have given rise to least discussion.

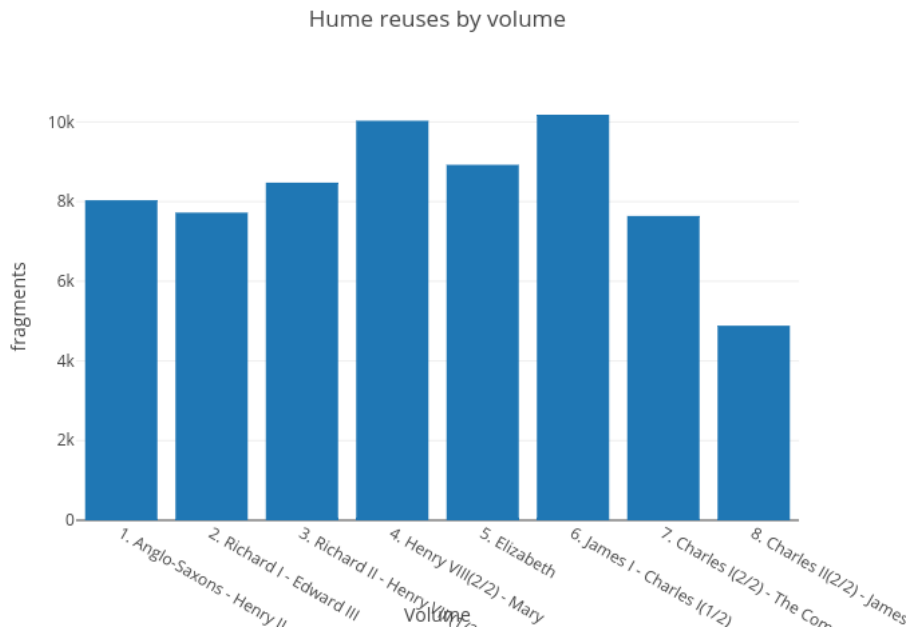


Figure 8.

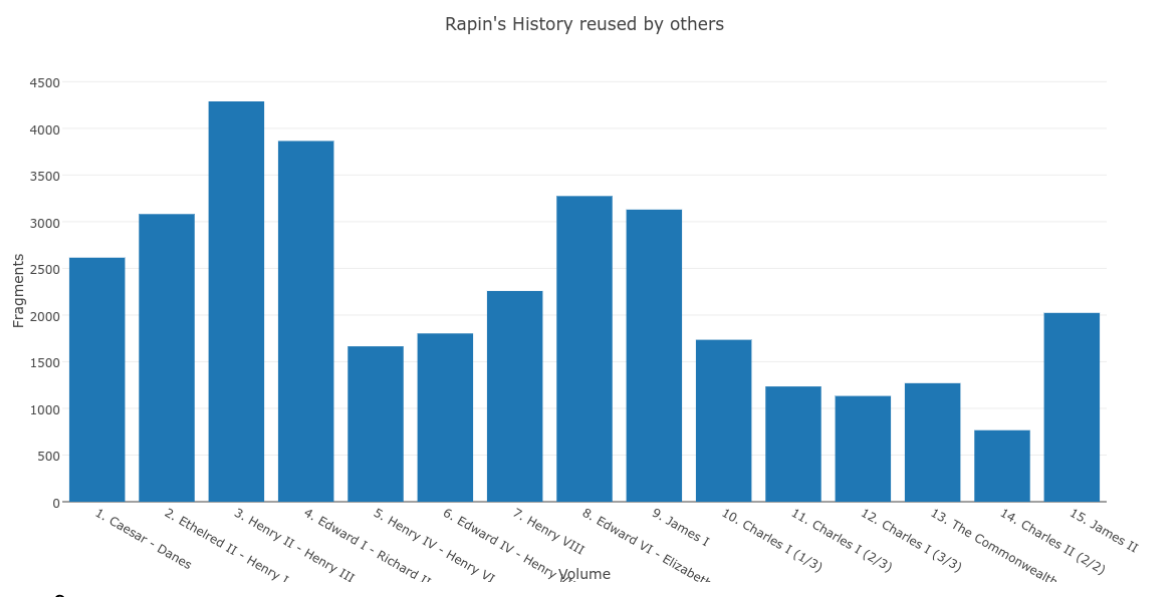
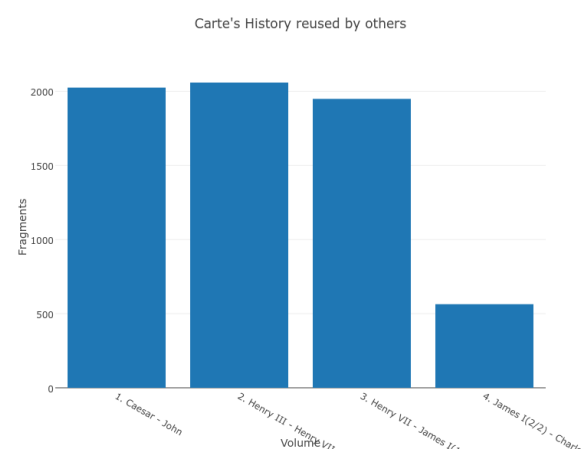
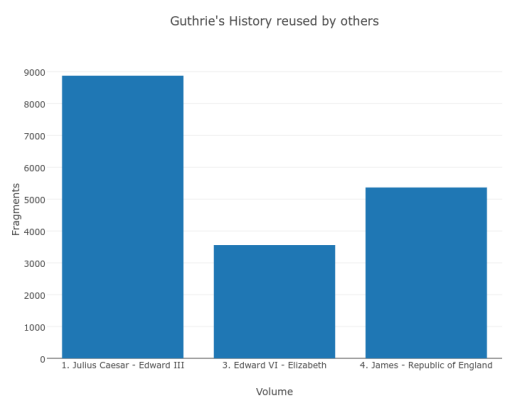


Figure 9.



Figures 10 & 11.

Conclusion

The preliminary results presented above demonstrate how digital methods can open new approaches to historiography. Mapping intertextual connections at a similar volume has not been previously possible, and at best our approach can lead to discovery of overlooked or even unknown influences in literary history. Regarding Hume's *History*, our results reinforce claims that seek to nullify the previously persistent myth of Hume's Toryism, and therefore providing a reason for a closer look at Hume's own ideas about his political impartiality. Additionally, our approach can be further refined and developed towards a tool for mapping out an author's fingerprint of source use and hidden literary influences.

Bibliography

Original sources

- Eighteenth-century Collections Online (GALE)
English Short-Title Catalogue (British Library)
Thomas Carte, *General History of England*, 4 vols., 1747-1755.
William Guthrie, *History of Great Britain*, 3 vols., 1744-1751.
David Hume, *History of England*, 8 vols., 1778.
David Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, OUP, 2000.
Paul de Rapin, *History of England*, 15 vols., 1726-32.

Secondary sources

- Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and his history*, 1944.
John Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought*, 1988.
Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, Cambridge, 1975.
James Harris, *Hume. An intellectual biography*, 2015.
Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past. Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689–1830*, Cambridge, 1993.
Royce MacGillivray, 'Hume's "Toryism" and the Sources for his Narrative of the Great Rebellion', *Dalhousie Review*, 56, 1987, pp. 682-6.
John Stuart Mill, 'Brodie's History of the British Empire', Robson et al. ed. *Collected works*, vol. 6, pp. 3-58.
(<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/mill-the-collected-works-of-john-stuart-mill-volume-vi-essays-on-england-ireland-and-the-empire>)
Ernest Mossner, 'Was Hume a Tory Historian?', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2, 1941, pp. 225-236.
Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon*, CUP, 1997.
Laird Okie, 'Ideology and Partiality in David Hume's History of England', *Hume Studies*, vol. 11, 1985, pp. 1-32.
Frances Palgrave, 'Hume and his influence upon History' in vol. 9 of *Collected Historical Works*, ed. R. H. Inglis Palgrave, 10 vols. CUP, 1919-22.
John Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, vols. 1-2.
B. A. Ring, 'David Hume: Historian or Tory Hack?', *North Dakota Quarterly*, 1968, pp. 50-59.

Claudia Schmidt, *Reason in history*, 2010.

Mark Spencer, 'David Hume, Philosophical Historian: "contemptible Thief" or "honest and industrious Manufacturer"?', Hume conference, Brown, 2017.

Vesanto, Nivala, Salakoski, Salmi & Ginter: A System for Identifying and Exploring Text Repetition in Large Historical Document Corpora. *Proceedings of the 21st Nordic Conference on Computational Linguistics, NoDaLiDa*, 22-24. May 2017, Gothenburg, Sweden.
(<http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/131/049/ecp17131049.pdf>)