

TNA ACTIVITY REPORT

Visibilities: Mapping the publishing trajectories of mid-to late nineteenth-century Irish Women Writers

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Mentor(s): Professor Christof Schöch, Trier Center for Digital Humanities (TCDH).

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Introduction

The aim of this collaborative project was to acquire expertise in augmenting the digital capacity and capabilities of a dataset of bibliographical information relating to all known and recovered publications by Irish writer, Rosa Mulholland. With a specific focus on her oeuvre, the objective was to target broader research questions: how can the publishing trajectories of mid-to-late nineteenth-century Irish women writers be traced and mapped; how can this work be futureproofed and its functionality maximised? Which digital tools might help to produce meaningful knowledge from the cultural metadata collected?



Background and Methodology

Kathryn's Laing's focus on recovering late nineteenth-century Irish women's writing started with a co-authored study of Hannah Lynch. Subsequently she co-founded the Irish Women's Writing Network (1880-1940) in 2016, with the aim of making the works and profiles of a rich diversity of Irish women writers – poets, novelists, journalists, dramatists, historians, artists - more visible and ultimately accessible. The Network is already a well-established hub with its digital presence as a website that includes regular blog posts, bibliography, and archive pages, as well as social media platforms. Enhancing the digital capacity and reach of the Network remains a key objective.

Geraldine Brassil's doctoral research focused on recovering or reclaiming Irish women writers from nineteenth-century periodicals, examining their diverse writing. The difficulty of marshalling the cultural metadata sourced in the archives into a navigable form was solved by constructing an Excel dataset which catalogues all identifiable Irish women writers across several periodicals and newspapers (1850-1900). The collated data maps Irish women's writing, often highlighting the interconnectivity between what were, in fact, networks of women writers. While this dataset offers a relatively small sample case study, it nevertheless indicates a growing female presence in periodical publishing, and it offers opportunities for expansion for example, other nineteenth-century periodicals can be easily inserted. In her postdoctoral research, Geraldine Brassil continues to focus on nineteenth-century Irish women writers and their contributions to the periodical press.

Working collaboratively on what we describe as our Rosa Mulholland (1841-1921) Project, we have developed a dedicated bibliographical dataset of her *oeuvre*, building on the design of the much larger Excel spreadsheet developed by Geraldine Brassil. Mulholland's visibility, like so many of her female literary compatriots, disappeared swiftly. Aspects of her life and writing have, however, received significant attention from scholars who have turned to the gaps and silences around the narratives of nineteenth-century literary histories. Adding to these processes of

recovery, what became very clear to us is that there is so much more of Mulholland's work waiting to be brought to light across transnational archives. By searching a range of digital periodical archives, we tracked her publishing history, recording it on an Excel spreadsheet. This dataset, extending to date to 551 publications (including her serialised stories), over a diverse range of periodicals and newspapers, was our focus during our CLS INFRA fellowship at Trier. Given Rosa Mulholland's prolific writing, made more evident in regular new discoveries thanks to the ongoing digitisation of nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals, we started out with a number of research questions. These questions continued to evolve.

Research Questions: The Rosa Mulholland Project

- How might we represent her publishing trajectory: where was she published and in what time frame? What insights can we gather from this?
- In which genres did Mulholland write and did this change over time? What factors might have influenced this?
- How prevalent was Mulholland's work across various periodicals, in Ireland and transnationally?
- What does this tell us about publishing trends of the period?

Methodological Plan and Research Questions

One of the many specialist research areas of the TCDH "Digital Literary and Cultural Studies" deals with "the digitization, modeling, indexing, analysis and publication of research objects that are relevant to literary and cultural studies". This specialism spoke directly to our desire to learn how to organise the bibliographic metadata already gathered during completed and current research projects, and ultimately to make them accessible and searchable.

- In relation to computational literary studies methods, what were the shortcomings of our work to date and how could we resolve them in order to answer the above research questions
- Which digital tools might help to produce meaningful knowledge/insights from the cultural metadata collected
- How can our work be futureproofed and its functionality maximised?

Research visit and outcomes

Our initial meetings with some of the DH team, Professor Christof Schöch, Julia Röttgermann and Dr Maria Hinzmann started with a discussion about enhancing the Irish Women's Writing Network website and a presentation of our dataset. Conversations about Linked Open Data followed, as well as an introduction to the collaborative spaces of Wikibase Cloud, and a demonstration of related TCDH projects such as MiMoText Mining and Modeling. Recommendations for our two-week visit included experimenting with the OpenRefine tool to clean up and streamline our metadata. Another suggestion was to add geolocation identifiers. The overall aim was to prepare the dataset for exploring visualisation options in Python, mapping the extraordinary trajectory of Mulholland's career, her diverse literary output and publications, and the astonishing geographical reach of her work.

Following these meetings, we embarked on two tasks, the first to explore Wikibase Cloud and consider creating a pilot project here. The second was to start familiarising ourselves with OpenRefine and experimenting with our dataset. Exploring Wikibase Cloud, conversations with Maria and investigating sample projects, gave us an insight into the potential of this space and our own limitations when it came to working with SPARQL. However, working through examples of starter queries helped us to develop our own when experimenting with OpenRefine.

This tool was the ideal starting point and proved to be immensely helpful for cleaning and aggregating our metadata. Working with OpenRefine inevitably highlighted problems, a necessary part of the process we realised. Alerted to gaps in how we had designed our spreadsheet for knowledge capture, we resolved various issues (for example, we added a new column to indicate serialisations/added places of publication/corrected or condensed descriptive headings) and updated our Rosa Mulholland dataset accordingly. The outcome of this revision process was a more workable dataset for visualisations.

Another task was to identify other research questions that could be translated into queries.

Aims:

- Mapping a list of journal titles and places of publication
- Amalgamating entries as individual or serialised texts based on the new added column identifying serialised publications
- Identifying changes in publication trends over time
- Examining the prevalence of various genres over time in the *Irish Monthly*

We sent a trial version of our newly cleaned dataset to Christof Schöch who wrote a Python programme based on a series of queries we had formulated. As anticipated, the graphs and maps generated provoked further research questions. Figure 1 illustrates Mulholland's global reach, but raises the question of how this was achieved, while Figure 2 demonstrates the dominance of poetry throughout her writing life, but this tails off towards the end of her career. Is this because we have not yet found her later poems or are there other reasons?

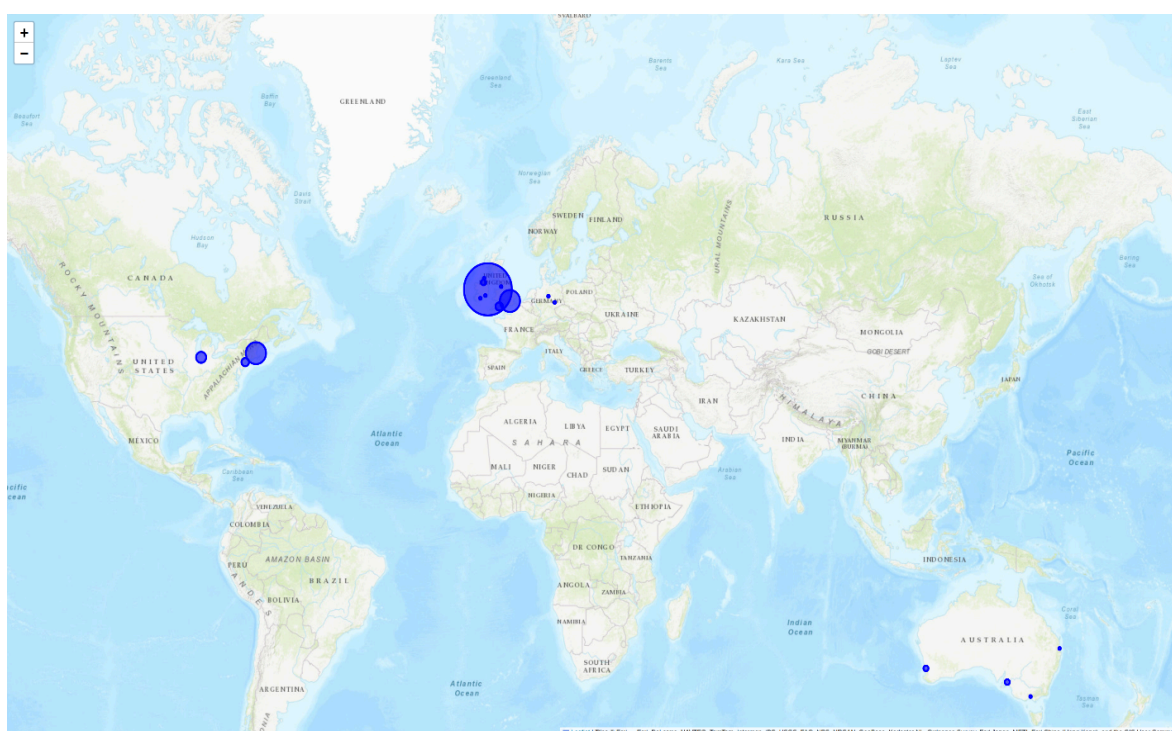


Figure 1: Geographical reach of Rosa Mulholland's work. Our thanks to Christof Schöch for producing this visualisation based on our metadata.

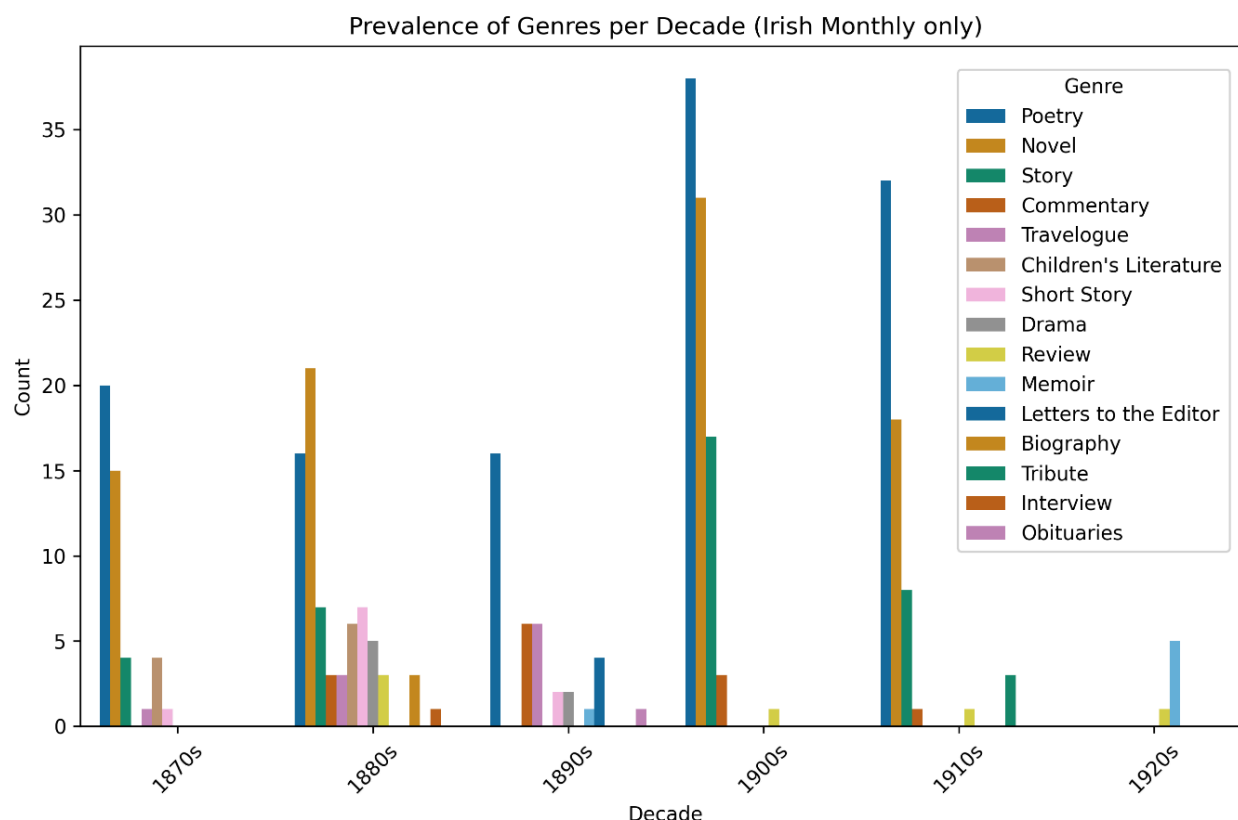


Figure 2 Rosa Mulholland's presence in the *Irish Monthly* from 1873-1921. A publication is counted as more than one if serialised or produced in parts over multiple issues of the *Irish Monthly*. Our thanks to Christof Schöch for producing this visualisation based on our metadata.

Conclusions

While we were familiar with working with Excel and had knowledge of related larger digital projects in and beyond our field of research interests, the CLS INFRA Transnational Fellowship gave us the opportunity of a two-week introduction to work with, explore and assess some of the digital tools and methods available to produce meaningful knowledge from our ever-increasing collection of cultural metadata. At the interface between literary studies and digital humanities, though still beginners in the latter field, our experience in Trier has given us increased understanding and confidence to move forward with our project. A blog we have written makes tangible this meeting of literary and digital elements as we trace the combination of our learning experiences in the TCDH with a reading of a little-known short story written by Rosa Mulholland included in our dataset. One of those 551 publications collected through painstaking archival trawls, this story acquired a new significance when we

realised it was set in late nineteenth-century Trier and more than likely based on Mulholland's visit to this city. Link to blog [here](#)

Future Work

Our experience overall demonstrated very clearly for us the potential of these digital tools, and the relevance of computational literary studies methods more broadly, to working with the huge, scattered corpus of work by writers like Rosa Mulholland, and to recovery projects focused on nineteenth-century Irish women's writing in general. The insights and skills gained during our fellowship will shape future directions of our Rosa Mulholland Project and future research.

We are grateful to CLS INFRA for this opportunity and to the Transnational Access Fellowship team for their support.