

Inter-artistic contexts for the development of the early English novel

Re-reading the English novel in its early phase of development, this project investigates how the genre developed in the eighteenth century through a creative dialogue with other art forms. We explore its engagement with aesthetic theories, real or imaginary art-works, typical artistic fields, such as the visual arts, the performative arts and spatial design, as well as studying the genre's responsiveness to newly-defined "arts", including the art of elocution, the art of sociability, the art of sensibility, the art of travel and the art of reading. We examine those interactions against the cultural background of the time, characterized by new sociable practices, developing print technologies and distribution networks, and the birth of the first public galleries and museums. Significantly expanding the current state of knowledge, the project broadens our understanding of the novel's inter-artistic contexts by exploring both neglected and emerging territories and offering unconventional perspectives on the field, informed by the most recent findings in digital humanities, print culture studies and the sociology of literature. Our research in this project benefits from the considerable growth in datasets comprising digitized texts, images, photographs of multidimensional objects, and musical scores and recordings, which enables unprecedented public access to a vast array of creative products. This allows us to identify various networks of association between these different forms, opening up new research perspectives on book illustration, allusions to art and artists in the novel, the material attributes of the novel, such as bookbinding, fonts, title pages, the layout of the page, and the presence of novelistic content across the arts. Our project is also inclusive of a social perspective that emphasizes the actual connections between writers, artists, and consumers. Inter-artistic clubs and societies, such as the society of the Dilettanti, as well as family circles and coteries, such as the Burneys, the Wrest coterie or the Walpole circle exhibit the key role played by social connections in generating fresh artistic activity.

The key output of this project will be a landmark collective publication titled *Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel and the Arts*, to be published by a major academic press in 2024. This volume will cover the above aspects of the inter-artistic conversations the novel experienced throughout the long eighteenth century and will offer a definitively comprehensive study of the field. This collective publication, supervised by the project team, will consist of contributions written by over 30 scholars from North America, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the UK.

The complementary output in late 2021 will be an online exhibition of inter-artist contexts for the literary career of Tobias Smollett (1721-1771), commemorating this author's double anniversary. The exhibition will be created on the open access platform "Curations" on Art UK's website and will offer a cross-disciplinary view of this frequently neglected author's literary ventures, showing how his novels, plays, poems and non-fiction prose (travel writing, criticism, historiography) intersected with other fields of artistic activity at the time (book illustration, theatre, the art of travel and the art of sociability).

This project is implemented in cooperation with Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Cambridge.