

CASE STUDY

Eighteenth Century Collections Online

Students at Ca' Foscari University quickly realise the importance of *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* to their research. Understanding the 18th century couldn't be done without it!

RESOURCES

Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) contains over 180,000 titles (200,000 volumes) and more than 32 million pages, making *ECCO* an indispensable leading resource for 18th century research. Users of *ECCO Part I* and *Part II* can search the full text collections via an intuitive user interface.

ABOUT

Professor Flavio Gregori has been teaching English Literature in the Ca' Foscari University since 1995, at various levels. He currently runs two courses. One is a three-year bachelor's degree course on English Literature, focussed on the early years of the 18th century; the other is a two-year first-level Masters course, focussed on representation of the city during the first half of the 18th century from an economic and literary perspective, linked with criminality. Professor Gregori has been studying the 18th century for 40 years, and although his specific interests have changed during this time, much of his research has been centred on three authors – Sterne, Swift and Pope.

In 2016, Professor Gregori curated a critical edition of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* with Mondadori Meridiani.

THE CHALLENGES

Professor Gregori spoke of the challenges they encountered before using *ECCO*, "*The only way to get materials in the past was by going to the library. Personally, I had to go to the British Library, and the Bodleian Library, and I had to go through many volumes to find what I needed. In the '90s I did archival research for a biography, and I had to go to the Public Record Office of London.*"

Professor Gregori went on to explain, "*The main problem was accessing texts. Our students of English and French literature were quite lucky because our library has a lot of volumes, but they couldn't access this old material in a systematic way. Before the digitisation of old 18th century books, we had to travel abroad to research materials, which was very costly and time consuming. Digitising these materials has enabled far greater access to these resources, saving time and money.*"



Professor Flavio Gregori





Professor Gregori also stated, *“If used intelligently you can get good focussed research. A challenge with students is getting them to understand how to use ECCO to aid their research, and that it isn’t just a kind of text warehouse, but an environment where these texts can be better understood and analysed, and a deeper knowledge of the period can be developed.”*

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Discussing the impact of *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* on his students, Professor Gregori stated, *“The Ca’ Foscari University ECCO is mostly used by students studying English Literature. Other students use ECCO because their topic of research is linked with the 18th century, as in the case of the history of cinema. I use ECCO with my students; the main topic I cover is Literature and Cultural History. I explain to them how to access the resource and the materials, how to use keywords, what they can find and what insights they can develop from these texts. Professor Gregori went on to explain, “Some of these students can decide to continue and to start a Masters thesis on topics related to the 18th century. We have the Literature module of ECCO, and can explore many types of material. Currently I am using ECCO to prepare lessons, so I am taking texts, poetry, satirical pamphlets or books relating to the mapping of the city and the development of certain city districts. This is very useful because it creates important historical context for the students.”*

“Digitising these materials has enabled far greater access to these resources, saving time and money.”

Professor Gregori also stated, *“The students quickly understand the importance of this tool during the thesis stage of topics related to the 18th century. Research on the 18th century couldn’t be done without it!”*

Professor Gregori spoke of one particular student’s use of ECCO, *“I had a student who got her degree and continued studying for her PhD. She studied a topic related to the late 17th century and the 18th century regarding sermons of the Anglican Church, and she analysed the keywords within these texts. ECCO enabled her to search these keywords in other 18th century books. She used ECCO to improve her research and get better results. Her good results were partly due to ECCO.”*

IMPACT ON RESEARCH

When asked if he thought these kinds of resources might be used to advance scholarship in the field of Digital Humanities, Professor Gregori stated, *“Yes, I think so, as it can create dialogue between people that have the know-how to progress scholarship within the Humanities. I am talking about networks they can develop within research facilities, independent or privately financed, inside the university system. We must set up similar research networks for 18th century studies, and create interactions between scholars using primary sources and databases. It would be helpful to create collaborations in the UK, but also in Europe too. It would also be interesting to create a board for that purpose.”*

Talking about his own research, Professor Gregori concluded, *“I used ECCO extensively during my research and it was very useful and convenient as I didn’t have to travel. When I curated Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* the editorial material and the notes were extensive, but it was only through ECCO that I had the chance to verify existing editions. In some cases, I confirmed the results, in some other cases not. ECCO allowed me to search for materials my previous colleagues wouldn’t have had access to. As a result, I’m now sharing my interest in ECCO with my colleagues who study the 18th century.”*