A Question of Style: individual voices and corporate identity in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1814-1820

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A Question of Style: individual voices and corporate identity in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1814-1820

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Research question

Did the *Edinburgh Review* create a “transauthorial discourse” (Klancher 1987) that hid the voices of individual contributors behind a corporate style?

Funded by the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Field Development Grant (January-October 2017)
The *Edinburgh Review*

Most influential periodical in early 19th C.

Edited by Francis Jeffrey, who could make alterations to any article

All articles published anonymously
Edinburgh staunchly Whig (liberal)

Tory rival, Quarterly Review started 1809 to counter it

Often reviewed same texts

Some authors wrote for both
Corpus at project end

Edinburgh Review:
• 325,000 ‘words’
• 60 articles

Quarterly Review:
• 175,000 ‘words’
• 20 articles

Chosen from reviews of literature, travel writing, history, politics and economics
Corpus preparation

- Corpus selection
- OCR correction
- TEI encoding
- Analysis with computational tools
- Interpretation of results
Corpus selection

not conjecturing the cause of the mourning which he saw in the family of Alcestes, although he knew that the death of Alcestes was inevitable, is very ridiculous; but the scene in which he comes upon the stage drunk, and bawling out to the attendants (hæse' ókhræn) maxims fit for a club of good fellows, is a lamentable interruption to those feelings of commiseration, which the calamities of Alcestes had excited in the minds of the spectators. The conclusion is better managed; but the effect is in a great measure destroyed by a fault, for which Euripides is notorious, viz. the granting his audience to understand very clearly beforehand, what the catastrophe is to be. In this respect he is not to be put in competition with Sophocles.

Having premised these observations upon the defects which characterize the writings of Euripides, and this play in particular, we now proceed to discharge that part of our duty as critics, which concerns rather the editor than the author.

Professor Monk has published the Alcestes upon the same plan which he pursued in his edition of the Hippolytus, of which we gave an account in a former volume of this journal; that is to say, he has given us a correct text, with notes critical and explanatory; the former containing his reasons for rejecting or adopting a new reading, the latter such philological illustration as was necessary to elucidate the text. It is the almost total absence of this species of commentary, which renders Porson’s editions of the first four plays of Euripides so ill adapted to young students. His notes are, in themselves, perfect specimens of Greek criticism; but they have too often little or nothing to do with the passage to which they are appended. They are precious jewels out of place. But Porson was no perfect master of this kind of critical writing, that we are not certain whether we regret that he did not bestow any portion of his time and labour upon philological illustration. At least we are certain that we should have lost by any change of plan, which might have caused him to withhold from us any of those exquisite morceaux of criticism, which his notes on Euripides abound. There can be no doubt that the form of Professor Monk’s edition is much better adapted to the necessities of ninety nine readers out of a hundred; for that is, perhaps, about the proportion of those who care nothing for critical remarks to those who have any relish for them. The ordinary Greek reader will find short and satisfactory explanations of the difficult passages and rare words, while the more advanced student may sharpen his tasks upon the tough and knotty points which are discussed in the critical remarks. The general editor does not deviate from his author; he is content to convey a good writer’s critical information in a simple and chaste style.
Corpus selection
Corpus selection

We wanted pages 172–208 in a complete, consecutive sequence…

We got…

172
173
...
178
179
182
183
180
181
186
187
...
207
208
OCR correction

Most scans are good.
Most OCR is good.

Building a library of before and after texts from which we can prepare an alignment, from which we can identify error patterns.

Farewt'u!
a
won!
ijiat
must
be,
and
liallii
been
—
A
sound
nliicb
makes
us
linger;

Farewell!
a
word
that
must
be,
and
hath
been
—
A
sound
which
makes
us
linger;
OCR correction

Typical incorrect recognition of individual characters:
w → vv, vi, iv
h → li

Some run in two directions:
  rn ↔ m
  u ↔ n
  s ↔ a
BUT

We want stylistic quirks:
public or publick to day or to-day

We do not want words normalised:
surprized to surprised Shak[e]spear[e]
But

Croker reviewing Scott's *Guy Mannering* writes 'gipsys' in his analysis, whereas Scott writes 'gipsies' in the story itself.
OCR correction

Some good tools already exist for issues such as:
• normalisation
• long S
• hyphenation

No point trying to reinvent them.

Instead:
• building a set of post-processing scripts to aid manual review, eg, to highlight all occurrences of die and its possible confusion with the in a text, helped by n-grams to assess confidence.
• porting TEI header, footer and paragraph insertion scripts from previous work to speed up mark-up.
Analysis – Stylometry

The study of how hidden stylistic traits can be measured through statistical methods to trace an author's voice

Made better known by John Burrows in his 2001 Busa Award lectures and beyond

Perception of authorial “voice” is quite subjective
  • e.g. Duncan Wu (Introduction, *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, 2007)
Two interpretations of *style*

**Style as fingerprint**

*Unconscious* elements in the way we write

(e.g. Van Halteren et al. "Existence of a human stylome." (2005))

Reflected by use of **Most Frequent Words**

**Style as signature**

*Conscious* choice of words, sentences, tone

(e.g. Van Dalen-Oskam *Riddle of Literary Quality* project)

Still **unsure** how to identify with stylometry

* as defined by Sarah Allison at DH2016, Stylistics workshop, 12 July 2016
Fingerprint - Delta method

“Delta is the mean of the absolute differences between the z-scores for a set of word-variables in a given text-group and the z-scores for the same set of word-variables in a target text.”

Delta – continued

Delta works on the Most Frequent Words present in a given set of texts

All authors use Most Frequent Words differently

Underpinned by solid mathematical and linguistic foundations
## Delta – example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Moore</th>
<th>Coleridge</th>
<th>Godwin</th>
<th>Southey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>7.71%</td>
<td>6.40%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>5.85%</td>
<td>5.06%</td>
<td>4.49%</td>
<td>3.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>2.83%</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
<td>3.52%</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
<td>3.04%</td>
<td>3.01%</td>
<td>3.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Signature – possible routes

Van Dalen-Oskam
• vocabulary richness?
• word length?
• sentence length?

Allison
• medium-frequency words?
• words used vs. words avoided?

Mahlberg
• Corpus stylistics
Analysis – false clusters

Female pronouns

- Moore_French_Novels_34_1820_corr 36%
- Jeffrey_Edgeworth_28_1817 33%
- anon_christabel_edinburgh_review_27_1816 32%
- Jeffrey_Lalla_Rookh_29_1817 23%
- Brougham_melanges_30_1818 21%

...and 10 texts contained no female pronouns at all
Fingerprint vs Signature

Both attempt to remove the influence of content over style in the analysis

Fingerprint – MFW
- Frequent words
- Choose what to *include* in the analysis
- Unconscious style?

Signature – TF:IDF
- Significant words
- Choose what to *exclude* from the analysis
- Conscious style?
Ongoing work

Enhance scripts
Include more texts
Expand reference corpora
Share scripts and TEI texts
Evaluate and critique
A Question of Style Project

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David King

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
The Open University
Milton Keynes

Project blog:
http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/styleproject/
Project outputs (in 2018):
https://ou.figshare.com/