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?

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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 Admetus, although he knew that the death of Alcestis was inevitable, is very ridiculous; but the scene in which he comes upon the stage drunk, and bawling out to the attendants (drama chœas) maxima fit for a club of good fellows, is a lamentable interruption to those feelings of commiseration, which the calamities of Admetus 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 grasping 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 Alcestis 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 so perfect a 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 fast by any change of plan, which might have caused him to withhold from us any of those exquisite morceaux of criticism with which his notes on Euripides abounded. 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 gross and general statement of his facts into remembrance.
Corpus selection

"... with the subjects which were to be discussed, the issue naturally... difficult to follow the speakers, or rather the readers..." — L. H. B.

Notwithstanding this several, that she could not suffer... understand, what was said, though she was present, attentive to the subject of the discourses... She... gives an account of the several speeches... and finally concludes by condemning the whole instance in a lump.

"... something wearied by the dissertation and declamatory tone... I... so long listened to, and the particular care... or the subjects or compositions of the various discourses... I... with my ear... strain so much by the dressing up of the discourse... which... as a whole... gave me an impression: I mean... to incorporate... learning, or confederacies of taste..." — p. 365.

And this condemnation of academies in general... she supports by the absurd observation, that... member Homer not Osiris, messenger to an academy..." — p. 166.
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:

\[
\begin{align*}
    w & \rightarrow \text{vv, vi, iv} \\
    h & \rightarrow \text{li}
\end{align*}
\]

Some run in two directions:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{rn} & \leftrightarrow \text{m} \\
    \text{u} & \leftrightarrow \text{n} \\
    \text{s} & \leftrightarrow \text{a}
\end{align*}
\]
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 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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Project blog:
http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/styleproject/

Project outputs (in 2018):
https://ou.figshare.com/