Anonymity, Individuality and Commonality in Writing in British Periodicals — 1830 to 1890:

A Computational Stylistics Approach.

by

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Alexis Antonia

Preface and Acknowledgements

My first debt of gratitude belongs to Emeritus Professor John Burrows and the Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing (CLLC) which he established at the University of Newcastle. In asking me to become the Centre's research assistant, he introduced me – by a process of osmosis – to the field of computational stylistics. In working for John, I learned the value of patience, thoroughness and exactitude in undertaking projects involving computer-assisted analysis of texts.

Particular thanks are due to my two supervisors, Professor Hugh Craig and Dr. Ellen Jordan, who both helped me in a myriad of different ways. Hugh assumed the directorship of the Centre at a time when the horizons for computer technology were rapidly expanding, and, in working for him, I was introduced to the age of on-line texts, hyper-texts and an ever-increasing array of custom-built programs. When Ellen approached Hugh with an attribution problem in the Victorian periodicals, I learned of the existence of this vast body of interesting and well-written articles. As the research assistant working on this project, I became more and more fascinated with the field. It was Ellen's suggestion that I undertake a higher research degree project involving the periodicals. Since I now had a topic I could be passionate about and two excellent supervisors at hand, I submitted my application and was accepted as a candidate.

Dr. Jordan's expertise in the Victorian era led to two of the projects reported in the thesis. The first topic came about when Eileen Curran approached Ellen with the suggestion that the CLLC might apply its methods to suspected misattributions in the *Wellesley Index*. As the Centre's research assistant, I was responsible for carrying out the work involved in this project. The second topic stemmed from Ellen's awareness of the authorship mystery surrounding the 'anti-women's movement' articles published in the *Saturday Review* shortly after its inception in 1855. The initial findings of this project were published in

Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies. Since some of the findings of the thesis suggested another way of investigating the topic, a second series of tests were carried out and these revised findings are presented in the thesis.

I would like to acknowledge infra-structure funding support to the CLLC from the School of Humanities and Social Science which allowed me to employ Elizabeth Lidbury and Alison Carroll to keyboard a number of periodical articles. With their help, I was able to obtain electronic versions of many unpublished articles. The text collections for this thesis represent a valuable resource. Anyone with a particular interest in the periodicals, who would like access to any of this material, is welcome to contact the CLLC. Finally, I thank those family members and friends who have provided support and encouragement and patiently endured my endless pre-occupation with the periodicals.

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IN committing this Work to the judgment of the Public, the Editors have but little to observe.

It will be easily perceived, that it forms no part of their object, to take notice of every production that issues from the Press: and that they wish their Journal to be distinguished, rather for the selection, than for the number, of its articles.

Of the books that are daily presented to the world, a very large proportion is evidently destined to obscurity, by the insignificance of their subjects, or the defects of their execution; and it seems unreasonable to expect that the Public should be interested by any account of performances, which have never attracted any share of its attention. A review of such productions, like the biography of private individuals, could afford gratification only to the partiality of friends, or the malignity of enemies.—The very lowest order of publications are rejected, accordingly, by most of the literary journals of which the Public is already in possession. But the Conductors of the EDINBURGH REVIEW propose to carry this principle of selection a good deal farther; to decline any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature; and to confine their notice, in a great degree, to works that either have attained, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity.

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tion, that they may always have before them a greater variety for selection, and be occasionally guided in their choice by the tendencies of public opinion.

In a Review which is published at so long intervals, it would be improper to continue any article from one Number to another; and, for this reason, as well as for the full discussion of important subjects, it may, sometimes, be found necessary to extend these articles to a greater length, than is usual in works of this nature. Even with these allowances, perhaps the reader may think, that some apology is necessary for the length of a few articles in the present Number. If he cannot find an excuse for them, in the extraordinary interests of the subjects, his candour will probably lead him to impute this defect to that inexperience, which subjects the beginning of all such undertakings to so many other disadvantages.

October 1802.

The illustrations on pages iii-v were scanned from a microfilm copy of the first edition of the Edinburgh Review published in October 1802.

THE

EDINBURGH REVIEW,

OCTOBER, 1802.

NO. I.

ART. I. *De L'Influence attribuée aux Philosophes, aux Francs-Maçons, et aux Illuminés, sur la Revolution de France.* Par J. J. Mounier. Tubingen. pp. 245.

M. MOUNIER, "a man of talents and of virtue," according to the great anti-revolutionary writer of this country, the antagonist of Mirabeau, and the popular president of the first National Assembly, is well entitled to be heard upon the causes of the French revolution. He was not only a witness, but an actor, in those scenes, of the origin of which he is treating; and must therefore have felt in himself, or observed in others, the influence of every principle that really contributed to their production. His testimony, it may also be observed, is now given, after ten years of exile may be presumed to have detached him from the factions of his country, and made him independent of the gratitude or resentment of its rulers.

With all these claims to our attention, M. Mounier cannot, however, expect that his authority should be taken for decisive upon so vast and complicated a question. In an affair of this nature, it is not enough to have had a good opportunity for observation. Where so many interests are concerned, and so many motives put in action, a man cannot always give an account of every thing he sees, or even of every thing he has contributed to do. His associates may have acted upon principles very different from his; and he may have been the dupe of his opponents, even while he was most zealous in his resistance. It will be remembered, too, that M. Mounier, after co-operating in a revolution that was to consummate the felicity of his country, was obliged to leave it to the mercy of an unprincipled faction; and it may perhaps be conjectured, that he who was disappointed in the issue of these transactions, has also been mistaken as to their cause. M. Mounier, finally, is a man of letters, and is entitled to feel for philosophers some of the partialities of a brother. In denying that they had any share in the French revolution, he vindicates them from a charge that sounds heavy in the ears of mankind; and

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to use computational stylistics, and in particular the methods pioneered by John Burrows, to explore aspects of the nineteenth-century periodical genre. Published for the most part anonymously, periodical articles were written by an extraordinary range of authors on an incredible variety of topics. The standard of writing in the thousands of articles appearing in the 'higher' or 'literary' journals has generally been agreed by scholars to be 'remarkably good'. Beginning in 1802 and flourishing for most of the century, this outstanding genre of writing had all but disappeared by the beginning of the twentieth century. The text collection for the thesis consists of almost two million words by twenty-two authors. My study employs a variety of statistical tests on these texts to examine the effect of such factors as anonymity, commonality, authorial individuality, gender, house-style, text-type and chronology on the periodicals.

I begin by taking a broad view of the field: first allowing the articles to 'speak for themselves' and to exhibit their commonalities and individual differences; then exploring the significance of both the intra-generic focus of the article – the stance taken in a particular article – and the author's own idiosyncratic preferences in determining the incidence of function words in these articles. The interplay between these two factors provided an explanation as to why the articles of some authors invariably grouped together while those of other authors displayed marked variability. The use of lists of authorial 'marker words' – those words used relatively more or relatively less frequently by individual authors – showed that one can think of this large group of mostly anonymous periodical articles as a set of authorial *oeuvres*.

I also look at the frequently made assertion that authors adapted their writing to the ‘house style’ of particular journals, and come to the conclusion that it does not significantly affect the deeper level of style revealed by function word usage. I then examine the question of whether or not there are differences between men’s and women’s usages of function words, coming to the conclusion that, although differences can be seen to exist, it is not at present possible to come up with sets of ‘marker words’ that reveal gender in the way that is possible with authorship. I use ‘marker words’ to identify the characteristics of one major author, George Eliot, and to show how she modified her stylistic practices when she moved from the periodical essay to fiction. I demonstrate how the techniques of computational stylistics can be used to check the legitimacy of some of the attributions made in the *Wellesley Index*, and I attribute one much-discussed anonymous group of articles on ‘the woman question’ to Robert Cecil 3rd Marquess of Salisbury and Prime Minister of England.