Computational stylistics, Cognitive Grammar, and the *Tragedy of Mariam*: combining formal and contextual approaches in a computational study of early modern tragedy

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Declaration

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to articulate a theoretical framework that will support the application of Burrows-style computational stylistics in a more interpretive context than has previously been the case, and then apply the framework to an area of literary enquiry that up to now has only been considered using traditional critical approaches. My study integrates two, previously unrelated practices, namely Burrows-style computational stylistics and Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar. I argue that the latter offers a theoretical explanation at the linguistic level for the results that are produced in a Burrows-style stylistic analysis, providing a framework for the types of authorship studies that have dominated computational stylistics, and also offering a way of extending the results into more interpretive terrain.

The second part of this thesis uses computational techniques to analyse function words in sixty tragedies printed in England between 1580 and 1641. The study compares twelve closet tragedies loosely associated with Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, with forty-eight tragedies written for the commercial stage, before exploring one of the closet texts – Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* – in more detail. Critical responses to *Mariam* have been somewhat contradictory and I aim to show that the results of a computational stylistic study provide insights that complement criticisms arising from more orthodox approaches.

Burrows-style computational stylistics shows that function word analysis highlights differences as well as points of intersection between diverse early modern dramatic traditions. The combination of Cognitive Grammar and computational stylistics shows that although *Mariam* is identified as a closet play, the text reveals a distinctive use of particular auxiliary verbs, modal auxiliaries, and conjunctions. Using Cognitive Grammar, these features in *Mariam* can be analysed as part of a rhetorical strategy that contributes to a reading of the play as an exercise in moral philosophy and an exploration of epistemological uncertainty.

Keywords: computational stylistics, authorial style, Cognitive Grammar, early modern closet drama, Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam*