

MASCULINITY IN 20TH CENTURY IRISH THEATRE THROUGH CORPUS LINGUISTICS

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Ireland, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was witness to a cultural, literary, and nationalistic rebirth named the Irish Literary Revival in which authors like W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge were immersed in the search of an Irish identity prior to the English colonisation. Hence, through the promotion of the Irish language and literature, Irish people could feel proud of their nation as an independent state. The Abbey Theatre was one of the focal points during the Irish Renaissance in which the aforementioned authors cultivated works of art inspired by the folklore and the mythological past of Ireland. What these Irish authors wanted to show through their plays was not only the nationalistic propaganda for the independent movement but to also define and craft that mythological Gaelic identity.

1. Masculinity and language

Early studies on language and gender were focused on how women interacted and used language in order to perform their gender in opposition to men's language and performance of gender in society (see Lakoff (1973), Tannen (1990), or Holmes (1995)). Amongst the first scholars to name the performance of hegemonic masculinity as the dominant one was Connell (2005) and Kiesling (2007:660), who discerned how whereas women are taught to maintain community, men on the other hand are concerned with agency and maintaining their own status in a competitive, and hierarchical world. However, regarding Irish identity and masculinity, very few men feel powerful at all. Ní Laoire (2002) after several studies on rural masculinity and how masculinity is performed and perceived in Ireland, realises how performance of gender in a group is both an affirmation of the normative boundaries of masculinity and a stigmatisation of what is not masculine. In the context of hegemonic masculinities, 'being a man' implies values of hard work, tenacity, duty, and responsibility (Ni Laoire, 2002, p. 17). The performance of gender being a verbal category as well (Wetherall and Gallois, 2004, p. 505) involves that speech is continually being adapted to the social context. In my selection of plays to analyse through Corpus Linguistics, I looked at ways male characters address each other, and how that positions them in a status of subordination or domination.

2. Corpus Linguistics

Corpus Linguistics as a digital tool for studying Humanities has had a growing impact in the study of literary texts and has provided a new methodology to research patterns in language that may have otherwise been hidden from human observation (Mahlberg, 2013, p. 1). Baker and McEnery (2015, p. 1) also consider CL a powerful tool with which to identify accurately regularities among many millions of words from ‘tweets’ to multilingual corpora, newspapers, text messages or literature. In this preliminary study I compiled my corpus of six plays, first by collecting them from public domain sites, such as The Project Gutenberg and the Oxford Text Archive, then by storing them in simple .txt format, and finally by checking them with the original printed version of the six plays. These plays were J. M. Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903), and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), and Seán O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy, conformed by *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), with a total of 56,922 words.

I used AntConc (Antony, 2019) to analyse my corpus, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit which allows the study and breakdown of a number of linguistic features, and amongst all of them the one I use is the *concordance* one, also known as *KWIC* (key word in context), that is, the frequency of a word in the text. In order to do this, I will search for instances of male vocatives in the plays, that is, the way characters address each other, focusing on the ones used to address male characters. In figure 1 below I show the interface display of AntConc and one of the words searched for, *fellow*. On the right side of the image, the play where the concordance is taken from appears, and on the top of the image, the number of hits this word has: 55 hits.

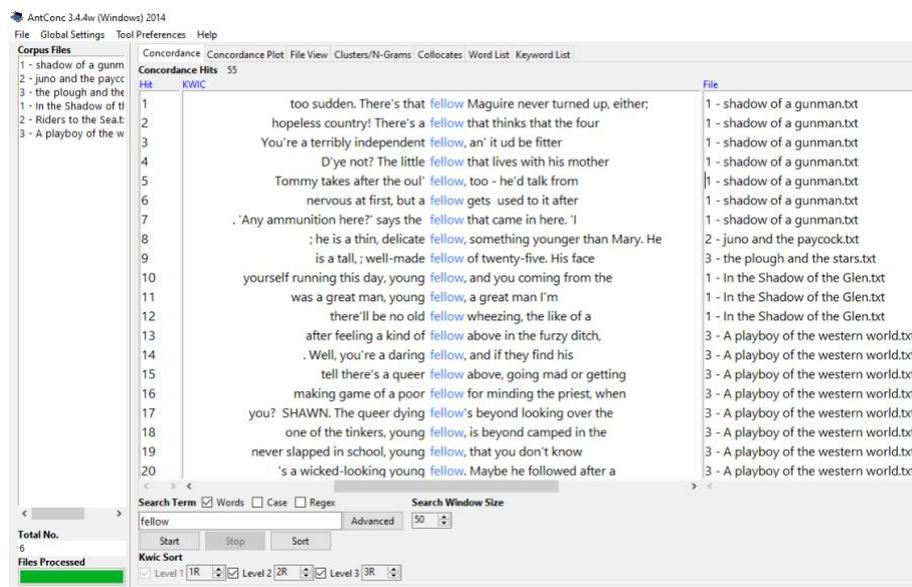


Figure 1. AntConc interface and display of *fellow*. Source: AntConc, own corpus

3. Analysis

In table 1 below I present the results of the KWIC search showing thus, that the most common vocative is one that shows comradeship: *fellow*, with the highest occurrence in the corpus of one time per a thousand words. Other vocatives that show friendship and a close relationship are *fella*, *butty*, *chap*, or *comrade*. In the first example, Michael uses *young fellow*, both to show friendliness and also, to position himself in the same social status as Christy.

- (1) MICHAEL [to Christy.] The blessing of God and the holy angels on your head, young fellow.
(Synge, 1996, p. 157).

In the second example, I show how the Covey, a fiery socialist who decides to go to the pub instead of fighting in a rebellion, tries to level himself with another male character who has called him out for cowardice. The Covey defends his honour by using not only some philosophical notions but also by conveying that the other man is a *comrade* of his, and that as they are all humans, he cannot be shamed into fighting.

- (2) THE COVEY (with hand outstretched, and in a professional tone) Look here, comrade, there's no such thing as an Irishman, or an Englishman, or a German or a Turk; we're all only human bein's.
(O'Casey, 1998, p. 160).

Table 1. Concordance of male forms of address.

Token	Frequency	Occurrences per 1000 words
Fellow	55	0,97
Lad	37	0,65
Fella	24	0,42
Boy	22	0,39
Comrade	19	0,33
Butty	7	0,12
Chap	2	0,04

Source: AntConc, own corpus

Amongst the vocatives presented, there is one which can be used to belittle: *boy*. In the speech of male characters, belittling another male character by degrading a man as a mere boy is a common but effective feature in language. Seumas, for instance, in example three, calling Davoren *me boy* is a show of dismissal, and again in example four, when Mrs Boyle addresses her son as *me boy* as a reprimand for his arrogant stance.

- (3) SEUMAS Go on, me boy; I'll have a right laugh at you when both of us are dead.
 DAVOREN You're welcome to laugh as much as you like at me when both of us are dead
 (O'Casey, 1998, p. 7).
- (4) JOHNNY [boastfully] I 'd do it agen, ma, I'd do it agen; for a principle's a principle.
 MRS BOYLE Ah, you lost your best principle, me boy, when you lost your arm; them's the only
 sort o' principles that's any good to a workin' man (O'Casey, 1998, p. 85).

Thus, through the linking and interdisciplinary methodologies of analysing literary texts through software tools like AntConc, it is possible to discern aspects and features that were not possible to identify simply by reading a text. As this was only a preliminary study, it could be also possible to do a thorough search of the other forms of address and see whether this aspect is still salient in a wider and larger corpus or not and how that affects the social status of the characters in the depiction of a male world.

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Cassandra S. Tully (Badajoz, 25 de marzo de 1993) es Graduada en Estudios Ingleses por la Universidad de Sevilla (2015). Realizó un primer Máster en Formación del Profesorado de Educación Secundaria (2016) y un segundo Máster de Investigación en Humanidades (2018) ambos por la Universidad de Extremadura. Actualmente reside en Cáceres y compatibiliza sus estudios de Doctorado sobre género, estilística de corpus y literatura irlandesa con docencia en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Cáceres).

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