

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

21

**LANGUAGE
AND LANGUAGES
IN JOYCE'S FICTION**

Edited by
Serenella Zanotti

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CORPUS STYLISTICS AND *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*: (DE-)CONSTRUCTING THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUL

Pensa alle parole, ti supplico. Il canto non è che un linguaggio alato.

That kind of Christianity called Catholicism seemed to him to stand in his way and forthwith he removed it. (*ST* 152)

What is it that engenders meaning and what is it that dissolves it? What is the semantics of a simple and pure desire for a reworking/manipulation of language? What role does the Word play within the text? Joyce was very much interested in words: “Pensa alle parole, ti supplico. Il canto non è che un linguaggio alato”, he writes to his son, beginning a singing career (qtd. in Schlossman 1985: xxii).

Having refused the call of the Word, having refused ordination, Stephen Dedalus’ interest in religious discourse is displaced toward language itself, “the rhythmic rise and fall of words [...] the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose” (Joyce 2007: 146).

Analyzing the language of literature through the help of a software allows new insights into a classic which seems to be already thoroughly explored.

Stylistics is the linguistic analysis of literary texts. The combination of Stylistics and Corpus Linguistics contributes to the creation of electronically stored literary texts whose meanings can be more generally but also

more systematically analyzed. Large quantities of language data can be stored to investigate on the meanings of specific lexical and grammatical patterns.

There are many ways to define a corpus, but there is an increasing consensus that a 'corpus' is a collection of 'machine-readable, authentic texts, sampled to be representative of a particular language or language variety' (McEnery et al. 2006).

Corpus Stylistics is an emerging field in the discipline of Linguistics which has become increasingly popular during the last decades: applying corpus methods and techniques to the stylistic analysis of literary texts seems to be a successful way of making linguistic evidence, style ornamentations, aesthetic choices, manners of expressions or deviations from language norms, more visible to the eyes of the traditional literary critic or, simply, the reader. Conclusions about the meanings of the gathered data can be based on the assumption that form and meaning are correlated and that new, original interpretations can easily follow after. Yet, such a correlation is neither obvious nor stable and what appears to be an objective feature/actual occurrence can be differently interpreted and can surprisingly lead to interesting and unexpected insights. This is what, after all, Dan McIntyre and Brian Walker insist on in their latest book, *Corpus Stylistics: Theory and Practice* (2019).

Reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man* becomes challenging again if we find new lexical, grammatical patterns and structural features that serve as evidence for our critical hypotheses. Easily and rapidly processed computerized corpora provide useful tools that allow to identify textual patterns that would not be easily and immediately noticeable by a 'traditional' reader.

Given the advantages of using corpora and computers for language study, stylisticians have become more aware of the possibilities offered by corpus resources and techniques, and, consequently, Corpus Stylistics has become a major field of literary linguistic investigation. The term now includes a range of critical approaches, from the plain use of digitized literary texts to the deployment of statistical analyses of literary works to the creation of contrastive and comparative corpora.

Mahlberg (2007) views Corpus Stylistics as a way of bringing the study of language and literature closer together, making use of innovative

descriptive tools that not only fit into linguistic frameworks but also leave room to account for individual qualities of texts and thereby link with literary interpretation. The obvious strength of Corpus Stylistics lies in its ability to show stylistic features recurring or developing over the whole text or text collections in quantitative terms. Nonetheless, the strength itself is the target of criticism. There are still trends of resistance to the most scientific, mathematical, empirical studies of literature as the computational procedures and the quantitative approach seem to destroy the true literariness of texts under study and convey a non-humanist, rather mechanistic/mechanical approach to literature.

Besides, van Peer (1989) and Wynne (2006) remind stylisticians of the danger of literary research becoming preoccupied with computational procedures which lead to a regrettable lack of attention to textuality and the meaning of literary works. They argue that once stylistic features have been transformed into numerical form, in the act of turning textual qualities into data, their dynamic process of meaning formation in a literary work gets irretrievably lost. Quantification runs the risk of reducing a literary text to a non-literary entity by eliminating all relevant contextual factors and neglecting the value of meaning and textuality. Writing literature is a creative process, yet, the abstract mind of the author can be dissected, filtered, governed by the grammatical rules of the language.

It should then be recognized that Corpus Stylistics is not and must not be considered a purely quantitative study of literature and that the researcher can only offer one among many interpretations: it is, or better, must be seen as a qualitative stylistic approach to the study of the language of creativity, combined with and supported by the help of technology. Thanks to the use of *Antconc*, a free concordance program, developed by Lawrence Anthony, an attempt will therefore be made to analyze the electronic version of *A Portrait* to single out some of its stylistic peculiarities, as well as connections and correlations between different patterns of written language and shifts in literary style, also in comparison with the 383 pages long manuscript of *Stephen Hero*.

In particular, the software allows to produce a simple word list which can be useful for different linguistic purposes and activities:

- to study the type of vocabulary used;
- to identify common word clusters;

- to compare the frequency of a word in different text files (*Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, for instance) or across genres (Joyce's novels vs Joyce's play or poems);
- to compare the frequencies of cognate words;
- to get a concordance of one or more words in a list.

The concordance program typically highlights and centers the examples found, with one example appearing per line. Concordance softwares can usually extract and present other types of information, for example, identifying the words that most commonly appear near a target word. Concordances are used to compare different usages of the same word; to analyze keywords, to find and examine phrases and idioms, to create indexes and wordlists.

An initial comparative glance at the first and the last chapter of *A Portrait* finds noticeable style shifts. In Chapter I, for instance, a simpler style is used in order to recreate the less refined, more naïve point of view of the young protagonist, opposed to the more complex style of the fifth chapter. This translates into longer sentences, a much higher quantity of commas per number of words and the richer lexical variety of Chapter V, which has twice the number of word types compared to Chapter I: 4592 vs 2345.



Figure 1. Concordance Plot showing the number of words used in and the length of Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 of *A Portrait*

As previously suggested, a comparison between two corpora, *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero*, is necessary in order to confirm (but also to dismantle) already established opinions about the differences between the younger and

much longer draft of the definite text: containing 67,617 word tokens, as opposed to the already mentioned 88,865 of *A Portrait*, not only is *Stephen Hero*'s reduced lexical density quite surprising, but also indicative of an economy of content which can be here considered as verbose redundancy or, simply, an abstract illumination of aspects of Joyce's later works.

Observations and hypotheses can be then made on the gradual, drastic and complete changes that some of the motifs exploited in a book undergo in the other. *Stephen Hero*'s limited scope seems to undermine Stephen's catholicism, re-written, amplified and modified in *A Portrait*, while being posited in a theological context that imbricates sin. Stephen will eventually attempt to free him from all kind of authority and establish his own sense of identity outside Catholicism: thus he is mainly portrayed in opposition to the Church.

The sacred is at the centre of Joyce's experience as a writer, extremely influenced by an ambivalent attitude towards religion and the Church, epitomized on one hand by his mother's fervent Catholicism and on the other by his father's unmistakably and overtly scornful attitude, represented through the character of Stephen's father.

This is reflected on the semantic area of religion – represented by both concrete and abstract words – so that, as readers, we have the feeling that something is missing: in *Stephen Hero*, confrontation with theology is hinted at, but, never fully experienced nor depicted; it never takes place, even though, the Church and the Word are there to finally leave room for art: religion is made human with Jesus described ('hairy Jesus', Joyce 1969: 118; 'sooty Jesus', Joyce 1969: 143) and criticized.

Antconc certainly helps to identify and single out all the words pertaining to the semantic area of religion. The list only shows some of the most frequent words occurring in *A Portrait* in order of frequency:

God (217)	saint (38)	heaven (27)
Soul (169)		
Dark (95)	death (35)	mass (27)
Priest (74)	holy (35)	died (26)
Light (74)	pain (35)	Jesus (26)
Hell (63)	church (34)	knelt (26)
Fire (62)	fear (33)	sins (26)
Father (55)	faint (31)	bent (25)
Silence (50)	souls (31)	eternity (25)

Chapel (47)	altar (29)	fall (25)
Fell (44)	dead (29)	shame (23)
Water (39)	book (29)	terrible (23)

The spiritual inner world of the protagonist is here characterised by a richer number of words, but, among them, two stand out: ‘God’ and ‘soul’.

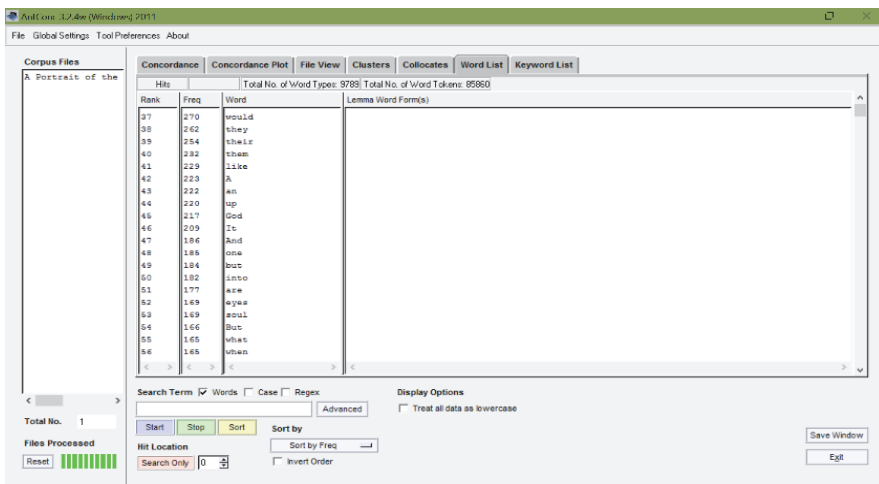


Figure 2. Wordlist of *A Portrait*, showing some of the most often found words, among them ‘God’, occurring 217 times, and ‘soul’, occurring 169 times.

As *Antconc* shows, the wordlist of the book immediately gives an idea of the most frequent words of the book, which contains 88,865 word tokens and 10,198 word types, apart from grammar items (prepositions, adjectives, articles and conjunctions), pronouns (mostly, *he* and *you*) and verbs (mostly in the past).

What looks interesting is the number of the occurrences of the word ‘God’, i.e. 217 times. The concordance plot shows where, approximately and accurately, the word occurs: the blackish part displays a heavy usage of the word in the central part of the book, whereas its almost complete absence, not astonishingly, distinguishes the last chapter, unlike what happens in *Stephen Hero*, where the term seems to be generally used until the very end of the story.

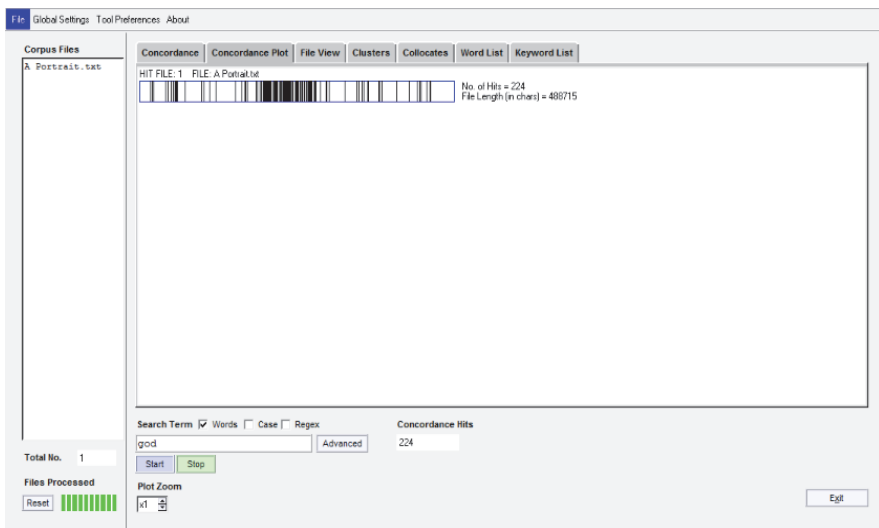


Figure 3. Concordance plot showing where the term ‘God’ occurs within *A Portrait*.

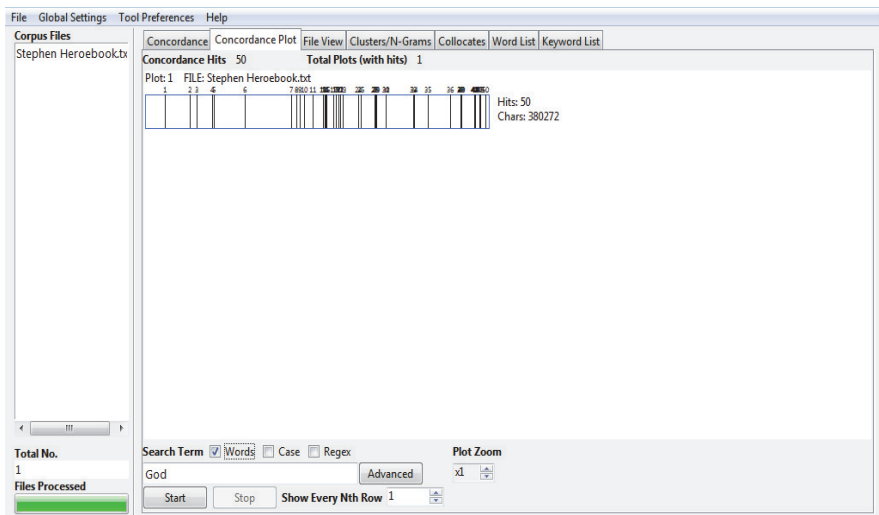


Figure 4. Concordance plot showing where the term ‘God’ occurs within *Stephen Hero*.

If we then look more closely at its usage within each single chapter, evidence of what has been highlighted will be further provided. Chapter III distinguishes itself for being extremely rich with religious meaning, burdened by a constant imagery which will be seemingly neglected during the following chapter, to appear again, with different connotations, in the final one.

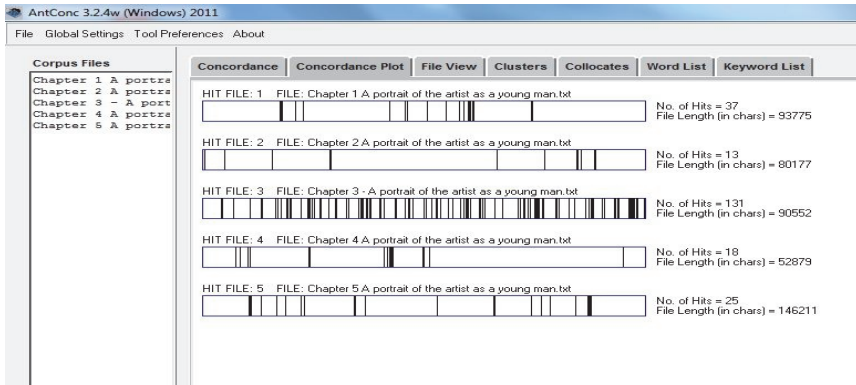


Figure 5. Concordance plot tool showing where the term ‘God’ occurs in each single chapter of *A Portrait*

Occurring 169 times (rank 54), ‘soul’ signals the protagonist’s growth while following Stephen’s life through childhood, adolescence to manhood. Apart from its plural form (‘souls’, occurring 31 times), it is the fifth most frequent lexical item in the text after the words ‘Stephen’, ‘God’, ‘father’ and ‘eyes’ and, as the figure below shows, it is present mainly from Chapter III onwards to the final part of the book:

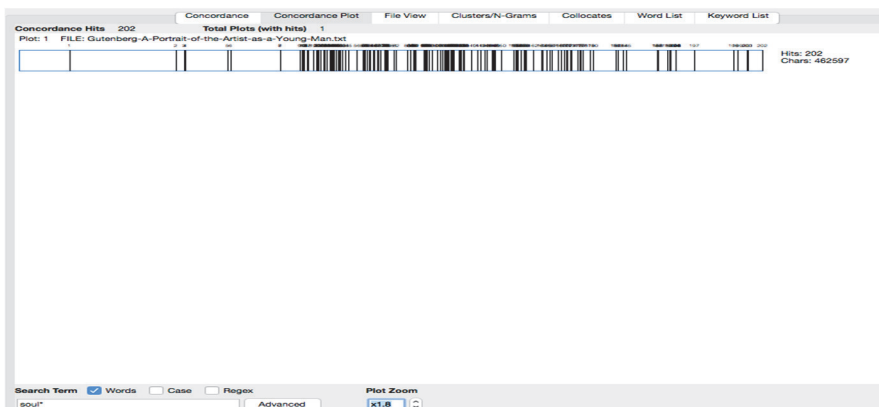


Figure 6. Concordance plot of the word ‘soul’ in *A Portrait*

There is only one occurrence of ‘soul’ in Chapter I, which features in a child song Stephen has been taught:

*Dingdong! The castle bell!
 Farewell, my mother!
 Bury me in the old churchyard
 Beside my eldest brother.
 My coffin shall be black,
 Six angels at my back,
 Two to sing and two to pray
 And two to carry **my soul** away.*

In Chapter II there are seven occurrences of the word “soul”. As the next figure shows, the noun is often preceded by the possessive adjective, except for one example. The emotionally emphatic stylistic function has the aim of showing Stephen’s first adolescent yearnings as a way of meditation upon his own feelings: the idea of movement conveyed by the verb ‘to stir’ and ‘disquieted’ almost anticipates the later turmoil and refusal of religion. In the empty space of Stephen’s interior life, the driving force that is compelling him to change is “a cold and cruel and loveless lust”:

Nothing stirred within **his soul** but a cold and cruel and loveless lust.
 His childhood was dead or lost and with it **his soul** capable of simple

joys and he was drifting amid life like the barren shell of the moon.
(Joyce 2007: 84)

It was towards the close of his first term in the college when he was in number six. His sensitive nature was still smarting under the lashes of an undivined and squalid way of life. **His soul** was still disquieted and cast down by the dull phenomenon of Dublin. (Joyce 2007: 68-69)

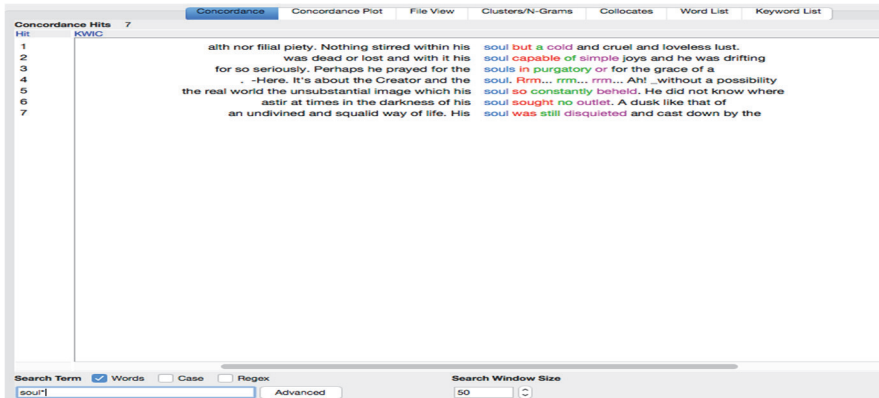


Figure 7. Concordance of the word ‘soul’ in Chapter II

Total No. of Cluster Types			Concordance			Concordance Plot			File View			Clusters/N-Grams			Collocates			Word List			Keyword List		
Rank	Freq	Range	Total No. of Cluster Tokens																				
1	32	1	his soul																				
2	12	1	the soul																				
3	4	1	the souls																				
4	3	1	our souls																				
5	3	1	own soul																				
6	3	1	poor soul																				
7	3	1	s soul																				
8	3	1	that soul																				
9	2	1	a soul																				
10	2	1	damned souls																				
11	2	1	human soul																				
12	2	1	immortal soul																				
13	2	1	lost souls																				
14	2	1	of soul																				
15	2	1	their souls																				
16	2	1	those souls																				
17	1	1	aching soul																				
18	1	1	all souls																				
19	1	1	and soul																				
20	1	1	blood, soul																				
21	1	1	created soul																				
22	1	1	demon souls																				
23	1	1	every soul																				
24	1	1	glimmering souls																				
25	1	1	immortal souls																				
26	1	1	its soul																				
27	1	1	lost soul																				

28	1	1	loving soul
29	1	1	lower soul
30	1	1	more souls
31	1	1	of souls
32	1	1	one soul
33	1	1	or soul
34	1	1	other souls
35	1	1	sinful soul
36	1	1	single soul
37	1	1	thousand souls
38	1	1	tiny soul
39	1	1	your soul
40	1	1	your souls

Search Term	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Words	<input type="checkbox"/> Case	<input type="checkbox"/> Regex	<input type="checkbox"/> N-Grams	Cluster Size
soul*	Advanced				Min. 2 Max. 2

Figure 8. Clusters of “soul”; cluster size = 2; search term position on the right

As figure no. 8 shows, the collocations of the word in question reflect and describe a state of mind, which is not necessarily religious, nor exclusively material. It is meant to be the reflection of the body, capable of breathing, experiencing, of living; where the spiritual meets the bodily, finally taking over. Different faculties of Stephen’s become separate voices, leading to a sort of dialogue between the soul and the body, meeting and exchanging variations. In anticipation of Stephen’s breakfast at the beginning of Chapter V, for instance, the soul is given a physical substantiality, whereas the body has acquired a full vitality.

Concordance Hits	15	File
1	awoke. O what sweet music! His soul was all dewy wet. Over his	A Portrait.txt
2	om all eternity. Gradually, as his soul was enriched with spiritual	A Portrait.txt
3	with slow boorish insistence. His soul was fattening and congeali	A Portrait.txt
4	science and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin. Yes, th	A Portrait.txt
5	peside them but it was hard. His soul was foul with sin and he da	A Portrait.txt
6	led in an ecstasy of fear and his soul was in flight. His soul was s	A Portrait.txt
7	l of the wet leaves and bark, his soul was loosed of her miseries.	A Portrait.txt
8	herged in a moving breath. One soul was lost; a tiny soul: his. It f	A Portrait.txt
9	and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy onc	A Portrait.txt
10	ed itself idly in his memory. His soul was not there to hear and c	A Portrait.txt
11	ar and his soul was in flight. His soul was soaring in an air beyor	A Portrait.txt
12	ined and squalid way of life. His soul was still disquieted and cas	A Portrait.txt
13	ge light of some new world. His soul was swooning into some n	A Portrait.txt
14	ooks and had wondered why his soul was unable to harbour ther	A Portrait.txt

Figure 9. Concordances of ‘soul was’ in *A Portrait*

As example no. 3 in figure 9 shows, Stephen’s ‘soul’ is not strictly assigned a religious meaning. Presented in its full length, the instance confirms the author’s predilection for making the spiritual physical and mortal, thus finding his own, this time explicit, way of opposing institutionalised religion:

His soul was fattening and congealing into a gross grease, plunging ever deeper in its dull fear into a sombre threatening dusk while the body that was his stood, listless and dishonoured, gazing out of darkened eyes, helpless, perturbed, and human for a bovine god to stare upon. (Joyce 2007: 98)

What Joyce then refers to is the protagonist’s inner self, his spirit and identity, inevitably influenced, or better, devoured by national traditions and beliefs. Identified with the mere faculty of thinking and feeling, Stephen seems to be troubled by its power, from which he finally declares to be freed.

A careful reader could perhaps wonder why Joyce uses the term ‘soul’ only 29 times in *Stephen Hero*, substituting it with the word ‘spirit’, which occurs 26 times.

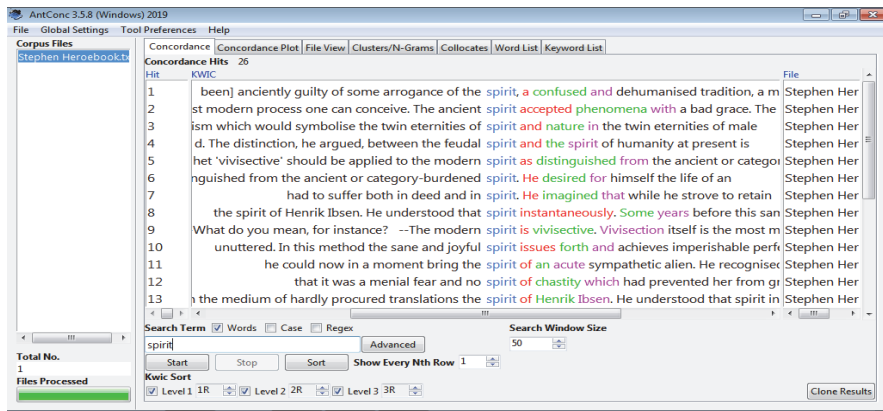


Figure 10. Concordances of ‘spirit’ within *Stephen Hero*, 1-13.

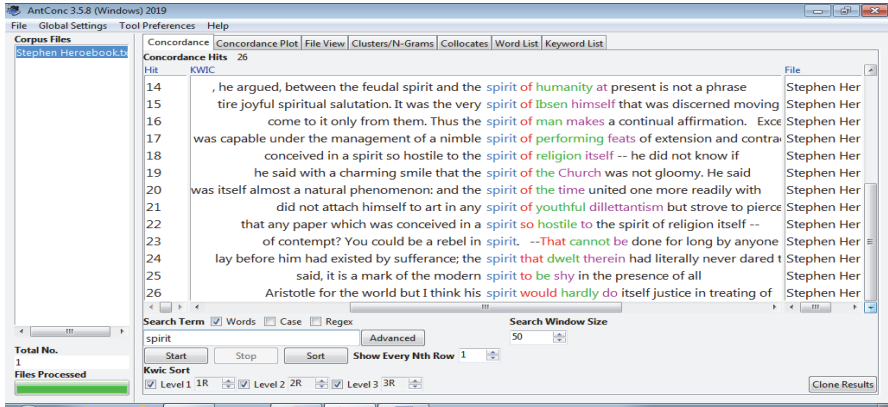


Figure 11. Concordances of 'spirit' within *Stephen Hero*, 13-26.

As figure no. 10 and figure no. 11 show, different meanings are assigned to the term, making it again not necessarily endowed with religious or spiritual connotations: 'spirit' – very much like 'soul' equals essence, being, mood, nature etc. already in *Stephen Hero*, thus making the reader conclude that an anti/religious message is already there even though less evident than in a *A Portrait*.

Was Joyce then completely free from its religious meaning? Did Joyce read the Book of Matthew and the Book of Mark, where Jesus urges his disciples to let go of their soul, abandoning it to God's care (Mt. 16:25, Mk. 8:35)? Did he equally believe that 'soul' is a release from earthly matters, an almost blind acceptance and awareness of immortal life?

Was Stephen's deprivation or better, liberation a complete and definite refusal of religion so that he could now fulfil his dream of becoming an artist? Perhaps, not; we would expect, on the contrary, some drastic Icarus-like failure, as the associations with the Greek hero would naturally imply.

Catholic theology then seems to be a perfect opportunity for Joyce to create his artistic and more organic labyrinth, rich with philosophical and aesthetic concerns (which will dominate Chapter V of *A Portrait*) in *Stephen Hero* on one hand, and with the history of young Catholic boy who suffers as a man meditating upon religion and upon life in *A Por-*

trait, on the other. Yet, before reaching this finale, we learn about the Roman Catholic religion and matters of doctrine, while being asked to assist to the long sermon. We are provided with examples of masses being celebrated and presented as pure drama by a young boy who, repeating the preacher's quotation from Jeremiah during the retreat, adopts Lucifer's motto as his own and borrows terms – like 'epiphany' – from theology to describe moments of transfiguration in his own story.

It is no wonder then, if in *A Portrait*, the narrator's language, which gradually becomes more articulate – and the corpus findings show this – becomes more analytic as Stephen's intellect and capacities for abstraction develop: his Catholicism is a literary excuse, well grounded on meanings, concepts, rituals which are not merely religious but are also intrinsically existential. Joyce re-imagines himself, or better, his literary alter ego in relation to himself and to society, while constructing a subject of belief, or better, of disbelief that questioned important notions of Irish life. No wonder if the respect for the Catholic Church was purely a literary one, a system, as Joyce would write to the sculptor August Suter, to arrange things in a logical and coherent way (Noon 1963). His unbelief is then, not specifically in relation to God, but in relation to the Catholic Church, reflected, represented in the reality of Ireland's capital city: it is offered as an important alternative to art, abandoned in his later works, in the hands of a misbeliever, who understands and uses the faith, appropriating and transforming it for his own ends.

If Stephen is finally soul free – as he writes in his diary – he becomes, religiously and literally, deprived of what matters most (Matthew, 16:26), hence he is doomed to fail.

Joyce's message is clear, simple, intelligible. Religion and the language which expresses it, is founded upon the concept of probability: what is probable is also what can be hardly described, grasped and entirely be accepted. Religious experience refuses all idea of complete devotion and total commitment and poses the big question of how we can, as thinkers, as would-be believers, as readers, verify the spiritual deductions and represent human experience.

Words then must, as a consequence, comply with the strange nature of the object in question: describing and referring to God apart from

expressing apocalyptic and prophetic concepts are certainly tasks of religious language and not of literary language.

Joyce's fictional programme of narrating the nation as a non-nation is stylistically, lexically exemplified by the final *non serviam*, a refusal of the parochial patriotism; a post religion/ous refusal of the past and of the uniqueness of one word, one language, now distant predecessor of the more complex babel of sounds and voices present in *Finnegans Wake*; a sort of *ante litteram* pluridialectal, translinguistic and transcultural microcosm of alienating exile, in which the Word comes forth as an erotic venture, leading to the success, or most likely, to the fall of the artist.

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