Dear Cornelia, Samuel, Cassie, and Eugene,

This is a sophisticated piece of technical and literary analysis—it takes particular talent to be able to so deftly move among both the STEM and humanistic implications of poetic analysis. This is most impressive and convincing work indeed! Bravo!

I’m not the best equipped to judge the technical aspects of the project, but I wondered why the length of the poems would impact the world frequencies or associations, as you noted in section 4.4. (Assumptions and Limitations).

Thanks for introducing me to this fascinating and no doubt juicy editorial debate. It certainly reminds me of the debate about a contested line in one of John Donne’s poems between William Empson and Helen Gardner – a public literary showdown that unfolded in the New York Review of Books in the 80s. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1982/03/04/there-is-no-penance-due-to-innocence-an-exchange/>

I love a good editorial dispute, and since neither Moore nor Livingstone are familiar writers to me, and neither are really canonical, I would have loved to have learned more from you about their biography and writings. I wanted to hear more about the controversy between them and what might have led to the tensions—it seems odd that two men would want to claim a Christmas jingle as their own! What might have had to this showdown? Was it monetary? What about the idea of an ur-source for the poem? Has anyone considered that both men might have independently read or heard it from yet a third source? And since you come down on the side of Livingstone, what do you think might be the wider implications for editorial, biographical, and cultural studies about how we understand the poem and Livingstone’s purported authorship? How do your findings contribute to the contemporary scholarship on Livingstone, Moore, and the poem? These are all questions I had while reading—which speaks to the value that your project holds for future scholarship in on this strange editorial moment.

This is superb work and perhaps even publishable. I don’t know enough about the editorial contexts of the Livingstone and Moore controversy to know what the current view is of the poem’s authorship, but if you think that you might want to publish your piece (since it is of article length), I wonder if Alastair Gornall might have some recommendations for digital humanities journals with a literary focus. It might be worth talking to him about this option if you want to pursue this further, especially since I believe you mentioned that he has an interest in this controversy.

Warm best,

Rhema

Paper grade: A