The Expression of Self and Grief in the Nineteenth Century:

An Analysis through Distant Readings

1. Purpose: This paper examines the expression of self and grief in the nineteenth century through distant readings
   1. Claim: Nineteenth-century grief songs were more personal than those in the eighteenth century (Stearns and Knapp 1996)
      1. Inspired by Stearns and Knapp, we examine this claim through the use of pronouns in lyrics
   2. The nineteenth century is commonly characterized as exhibiting a “romantic” ethos (Harré & Parrot 1996)
      1. We examine the full range of song topics and compare to songs specifically about death
   3. We expand our study beyond the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, focusing on music from the seventh century through the twentieth century.
2. Review of the Literature
   1. “Romantic” ethos – the turn to introspection in the nineteenth century
      1. Sentiment has been defined as “a socially constructed pattern of sensations, expressive gestures, and cultural meanings organized around a relationship to a social object, usually another person.” 566
         1. By studying the expressive gestures (music) surrounding that object, we gain understanding of the societal sentiment surround that object (grief).
         2. Gordon, Steven L. "The Sociology of Sentiments and Emotion." Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives. Ed. Morris Rosenberg and RalphH. Turner. New York: Basic, 1981. 562-92
      2. Howard makes a case for conceptualizing sentimentality as a transdisciplinary object of study spanning from neurobiology to anthropology to history. 63
         1. Howard, J. (1999). What is sentimentality? American Literary History, 11(1), 63–81.
   2. Introspection and Pronoun Use
      1. “We” priming induced increased sense of collective identity, whereas “they” and “it” priming were not significantly different. Suggests that we use and understand pronouns as indicating different personal-ness.
         1. B. Brewer, Marilynn & Gardner, Wendi. (1996). Who Is This "We"? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 71. 83-93. 10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83.
      2. Carl, W. (2014). The First-Person Point of View. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
      3. Freedman, P. (2017). Power and Passion in Shakespeare’s Pronouns: Interrogating “you” and “thou.” Routledge.
      4. Hernández, N. (2011). Personal pronouns. In N. Hernández, D. Kolbe, & M. E. Schulz (Eds.), Modals, Pronouns and Complement Clauses. Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER.
      5. Pennebaker, J. W. (2013). The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say About Us. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
      6. “I, writing thus”: Victorian women poets write the dramatic monologue. Williams, Laura Marie. University of Michigan, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1999. 9959891.
   3. Methods for corpus study
      1. In a study of sentimentality in Vicotrian Novels, Steger trains her machine to label chapters as sentimental or unsentimental based on low-level characteristics, and then used the results to test the hypothesis that sentimental texts were used to evoke emotional responses.
         1. Steger, S. (2013). Patterns of Sentimentality in Victorian Novels. Digital Studies/Le Champ Numérique, 3(2). Retrieved from https://www.digitalstudies.org/articles/10.16995/dscn.235/ digitalstudies.org
3. Hypotheses
   1. First- and second-person pronouns increase proportional to text over time
   2. The greatest increase in first- and second-person pronouns occurs in the nineteenth century
   3. First- and second-person pronouns are more pronounced in lyrics dealing with death or sorrow as compared to lyrics dealing with other topics
   4. First- and second-person pronouns are most pronounced in nineteenth-century lyrics
4. Computational Method
   1. Hypothesis 1, 2, 4
      1. Computational search techniques
      2. Manual follow-up
      3. Control for validity
   2. Hypothesis 3
      1. Identification of “grief passages”
      2. Pronoun usage in proximity to grief passages
5. Discussion
   1. This study contributes to the work on the evolution of grief and sadness in the arts during the long nineteenth century
   2. This study provides a framework for future scholars in the digital humanities to further explore such stylistic change

Sources I cannot reasonably obtain:

Erämetsä, Erik. 1951. “A Study of the Word ‘Sentimental’ and of other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth Century Sentimentalism in England.” Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemian Toimituksia: Annales Academiæ Scientiarum Fennicæ 74, Series B. Helsinski: 1-168.

Butler, J. (2013a). Introspection as a Metaphor. In J. Butler (Ed.), Rethinking Introspection: A Pluralist Approach to the First-Person Perspective (pp. 41–50). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Butler, J. (2013b). Introspection through Cognition. In J. Butler (Ed.), Rethinking Introspection: A Pluralist Approach to the First-Person Perspective (pp. 75–98). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Butler, J. (Ed.). (2013c). Introspection through Cognition. In Rethinking Introspection. Palgrave Macmillan.