\*\*\*\*Prospective contributors should submit:

A 1000-word proposal (excluding citations) that clearly indicates the subject and scope of the study, its relation to the digital humanities and the results. Supporting material, including but not limited to charts, screen shorts of digital resources, and music examples, may also be included. Documentation in the form of footnotes/endnotes and a bibliography are strongly encouraged. In addition, please include a 300-word biography of each contributor.\*\*\*\*

Historians have traced changes in emotional expression over the course of history. For example, Stearns and Knapp 1996 chronicled how within Western culture, public expressions of grief in response to death adapted to an evolving cultural context. In the case of music-related expressions of emotions, they have speculated about changing attitudes toward grief as reflected in musical lyrics: "In contrast to eighteenth-century songs about death, which were set in the artificial pastoral world of shepherds and written in the third person, Victorian grief songs were personal and immediate… Literally hundreds of songs about dying girls were published, particularly in the 1860s" (136).

Stearns and Knapp do not cite any empirical evidence in support of the above claims. Even if the claim that grief songs become more personal were true, it is not clear that this change might be limited to grief songs alone. In particular, the nineteenth century has been commonly characterized as exhibiting a "romantic" ethos, in which passionate emotions were more commonly expressed (Harré & Parrot 1996). Hence, any change related to grief songs may simply be reflective of broad changes evident across many genres of music.

As it stands, the Stearns and Knapp conjecture raises a number of issues. For example, Stearns and Knapp limit their claim to songs specifically about death. However, it is possible that any change of language between the 18th and 19th centuries was a general change and not limited, per se, to songs about death. This means that we will need to examine the full range

of song topics, and then compare the results to songs specifically about death. As we will see later, there are a number of technical problems associated with the use of third person pronouns. Because of these difficulties, it will be necessary to focus on the use of first- and second-person pronouns. In other words, instead of directly testing third-person

usage, we will test the reciprocal use of first- and second-person pronoun use. Finally, rather than limit our study to the contrast between 18th and 19th century musics, we will expand our study to include music spanning three centuries.

Hypotheses

Inspired by Stearns and Knapp, we propose to examine the use of pronouns in lyrics. Specifically, we will assume that the use of first- and second-person pronouns (I/me, you) are symptomatic of a more intimate or personal expression than the use of third-person pronouns (he/she/him/her).

If this conjecture is true, then we might expect to observe a change of first person pronouns in the lyrics over the history of Western music. For the purposes of this initial study, we propose to limit the research to Scottish ballads found in broadsides published between 1650 and 1910.

In approaching a test of the Stearns and Knapp conjecture, we propose to text four hypotheses that successively refine the research question. That is, we will begin with more general tests that provide useful contexts for interpreting the subsequent results. The hypotheses are as follows:

H1. That first- and second-person pronouns increase

proportional to text length over time.

H2. That the greatest increase in first- and second-person

pronouns occurs in the 19th century.

H3. That first- and second-person pronouns are

more pronounced in vocal texts dealing with death or sorrow

compared with texts dealing with other topics.

H4. That first- and second-person pronouns are

most pronounced in vocal sorrowful texts from the 19th century.

Once again, note that the Stearns and Knapp conjecture relates to the use of third-person pronouns. For technical reasons, we will focus instead on the use of first- and second-person pronouns. In switching our focus, it is important to note that we are not claiming that there is some sort of reciprocal relationship between first-/second- and third-person pronoun use. That is, we do not want to assume that reducing the number of third-person pronouns will necessarily result in an increase in first- or second-person pronouns. Instead, we propose that the Stearns and Knapp claim is principally a claim about the “intimacy" of the language expression. To the extent that first- and second-person pronouns are more intimate, it makes sense to re-interpret the Stearns and Knapp conjecture as better related to first- and second person pronoun use, rather than to third-person pronouns.

Method

In brief, the study involves assembling a database of 911 ballads spanning 1650 to 1910, and tallying the pronoun use.

Sample

Rather than attempting to assemble a representative sample of Western music over the 300-year period, we assembled a single corpus of Scottish ballads. In creating this corpus, we relied principally on the collection of broadsides entitled “The Word on the Street,” which was compiled by the National Library of Scotland. Our corpus is best regarded as a convenience sample rather than a representative sample.

Procedure

In any utterance or text, a number of issues arise when identifying pronouns. An important distinction relates to the use of plurals. In English, the first-person singular "I" is more intimate than the first-person plural "we." Indeed, Queen Elizabeth I famously used "we" as a way to defuse and depersonalize criticisms, such as "We are not amused" versus "I am not amused." Accordingly, for the purposes of this study, we are more interested in first-person singular, rather than first-person plural pronouns.

Similarly, a distinction can be made between second-person singular and second-person plural pronouns. In English, the same word "you" is used for both the singular and plural forms. Accordingly, "you" is somewhat ambiguous.

In light of the above considerations, we might operationalize our overarching hypotheses

with the specific predictions that the pronouns “I” and “we” will both increase in the nineteenth century.

Since our procedure will employ automated text-processing methods, many of the above conjectures cannot be tested without human interpretation/intervention. Thus, we will use simple search techniques to count the pertinent instances in our corpus and follow up with manual techniques.

To assure validity, we will randomly extract keyword-in-context passages to give to language-knowledgeable volunteers who will resolve the ambiguity and classify the pronoun use into the appropriate categories.

In music, lyrics are often repeated. In order to avoid undue influence of repetition in our sample of ballads, duplicate text lines will be discarded. A duplicate line will be defined as an exact repetition of an earlier line, excluding punctuation.

Grief-Related Content

In order to test our second hypothesis, we will need to identify lyrics that exhibit grief-related subject matter. To this end, we will make use of an automated procedure that has the benefit of reducing potential experimenter bias. Specifically, we identify a number of keywords that we deem symptomatic of grief-relatee content. In English, this includes the words cry, death, die, died, dying, sad, sadness, pain, loss, loose, tears, and lament. Rather than identifying "grief songs," we will simply identify "grief passages." Specifically, we will tally the pronouns within close proximity of the a priori grief-related words. A pronoun will be deemed to be proximate if it is on the same line as the grief-related word, or if it occurs in the immediately preceding or ensuing line.

We plan to carry out a linear regression to test our hypothesis. Along with the year of composition, each piece will be represented by two numerical values, one reflecting the amount of first-person pronouns used, and the other reflecting the "personalness" of the piece as calculated by the number of first-person pronouns in grief-related passages. Using this data, we will aim to calculate a Pearson's correlation coefficient. This test assumes that the data are normally distributed.

REFERENCES

Stearns, Peter N. & Mark Knapp (1996). Historical perspectives on grief. In: Rom Harré & W. Gerrod Parrott (Eds.). "The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions." London: Sage Publications.

Barlow, H. & Morgenstern, S.  (1976). "Dictionary of Opera and Song Themes." New York: Crown Publishers.

<300-word biography for Elizabeth Monzingo:

Elizabeth Monzingo is a doctoral student at Louisiana State University where she studies music theory, teaches aural skills courses, and manages the Music Cognition and Computation Lab. Her research interests include the areas of working memory, aural skills, and musical schemata. She is currently investigating student dictation competencies as they are influenced by primary instrument and genre preference. She also collaborates in other research, ranging from assessing melodic dictation variance to investigating associations between working memory performance and musical aptitude.