‘Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say’
A Corpus Approach to *King Lear*

Maria Cristina Consiglio
University of Bari

1. Introduction

In his review of the state of the art of stylistics, Mick Short (2008: 5) has considered corpus stylistics as one of the ‘exciting new approaches and methodologies’ available to stylisticians and had recognized that corpus-based approaches to style and texts analysis – alongside narratological, cognitive and empirical approaches – have provided new insights and new results. In his opinion, corpus stylistics helps scholars ‘to see more clearly lexical patterns spread through texts which contribute to characterization and thematic development, as well as to understand better how word association works in texts’ (Short, 2008: 7-8). Yet, he has warned corpus stylisticians against the danger of being so much involved in technicality that they may miss the final point of their investigation, that is text interpretation (Short, 2008: 8).

Although the growing number of articles proposing corpus approaches to the language of literature, there is still scepticism as regards the effectiveness of such approaches and the relevance of the results obtained. The most “famous” criticism is probably Henry G. Widdowson’s comment (2008) of Michael Stubbs’s corpus analysis of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (2003, 2005). According to Widdowson, Stubbs fails to give an interpretation of the novel because a quantitative analysis of *Heart of Darkness* can only reveal what the novel is about, but does not give insight into its manner of representation, that is about how its theme becomes significant. To state it differently, in Widdowson’s opinion (2008: 300), a corpus analysis is not very helpful in revealing the meaning of a work of art. It is well known that, according to Widdowson, stylistics occupies a place in between literary criticism and linguistics, that is in between personal intuition about literature and statements deriving from the observation of linguistic data. Moreover its purpose is ‘to link the two approaches by extending the linguist’s literary intuitions and the critic’s linguistic observations and making their relation explicit’ (Widdowson, 1975: 5).

Stubbs’s analysis starts form the assumption that, being the aim of stylistics to provide linguistic substantiation for the interpretation of literary texts, corpus tools and methodologies are the best way to reveal textual features in precise detail, to select data objectively and to provide results that can be replicated (Stubbs, 2003: 4). He also believes that pure induction cannot lead to interesting generalizations and only an empirical, observational analysis can say systematically and explicitly what these interesting things to say are (Stubbs, 2003: 21). Stubbs (2003: 4) also recognizes, however, that the textual features the software can find have to be given a literary interpretation by the scholar.

Despite the alleged incompleteness of Stubbs’s analysis, it has functioned as a model for a number of corpus-based studies of literary texts, probably because it offers a clear methodology to follow. Also the corpus analysis of William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* proposed in this article is substantially based on Stubbs’s model, but it aims to move beyond it by trying to link the linguistic data retrieved by the software with an ‘interpretation’ of the play. The software used in Mike Scott’s *WordSmith Tools* version 3.0.

2. Methodology

The first question that any corpus based analysis has to solve is the creation of corpora. In the case of literary texts there are two major issues: the availability of computer-readable texts and the thorny question of copyright limitations. Texts belonging to past ages are available on the Internet and they are usually not subject to strict copyright norms; it is possible to search for them with a commercial search engine (like google) and download them in the format needed in order to be processed by a text-retrieval software. My node corpus, named *Lear corpus*, is made up of the entire text of *King Lear* (a modern standardized edition downloaded from http://shakespeare.mit.edu.html) from which both stage directions and character names denoting who speaks were eliminated. This is because stage directions are almost certainly editorial additions and, in a sense, alter the performance form of the play. Besides they could also affect the results obtained by the software, at least quantitatively.

After the creation of the corpus, the first step, according to Stubbs's model, consists in the creation of frequency lists. In Stubbs's words, 'word-frequency is an essential starting point, since there must be some relation between frequent vocabulary and important themes, even if the relation is indirect' (2003: 9). Yet, he recognizes that 'textual frequency is not the same as salience' (Stubbs, 2005: 11), therefore the present study proceeds with the identification of keywords. Keywords are words 'which are significantly more frequent in a sample of text than would be expected, given their frequency in a large general reference corpus' (Stubbs, 2008: 5); it follows that they can be identified only by comparing the node corpus with a reference corpus. The reference corpus used here is made up of all Shakespeare's plays, all modern standardized editions downloaded from the same web site as the *Lear corpus*, deprived of stage directions and characters names denoting who speaks for the same reasons mentioned above.

A further step consists in identifying the collocates of the keywords, since 'it is often collocations which create connotations' (Stubbs, 2003: 13). The software *WordSmith Tools* is able to compute both collocates and clusters, that is those 'words which are found repeatedly in each others' company […] [in] a tighter relationship than collocates' (Scott, 1998: 31). The analysis of collocation and clusters is only revealing of those words with which the keywords tend to co-occur in the immediate co-text, but the meaning of a word can be determined by other words in the surrounding co-text, not necessarily within the 5-word span usually used to identify clusters and collocates. An analysis of the concordance lines of the keywords may allow one to verify the different uses and meanings they take on in any given occurrence, which may help identify their semantic prosody or, at least, their connotation.

3. Frequency, keyness and interpretation

A close reading of the frequency list of the *Lear corpus* has highlighted that the first content word is *sir* (115 occurrences), but an analysis of its collocates and uses has shown that it is used in the appellative form 114 times. The second most used content word is *lord* (97 occurrences) also used mostly in the appellative form, being its most frequent collocate the possessive adjective *my*. The third most frequent content word is the verb *come* (88 occurrences), but an analysis of its collocates has not been significant. Then there is the adjective *good* (85 occurrences) with a strong collocational pattern with the noun *lord*, which implies that the phrase *good lord* is mostly used in the appellative form. The most significant result is the high frequency of use of the verb *know* (74 occurrences), which is not surprising, indeed, since the theme of knowledge is central to *King Lear*. Critics seem to agree upon the relevance of the theme of knowledge in the play. In *King Lear* quite all the characters undergo a process of development and growth which is particularly evident in the cases of Lear, Edgar and Gloucester. As regards the king, when the action starts he is portrayed in his resolution and pride, ‘a magnificent potent’ in Granville-Barker’s words (1961: 285), who has made important decisions and wants his subjects to accept them wholly. Soon afterwards, he painfully realizes that having abdicated the throne he has also abdicated his power which is no longer recognized by his daughters Gonerill and Regan whom he has entrusted with the reign. From this moment on, Lear passes through different stages of suffering and madness which lead him to knowledge (Nameri, 1976: 134,136; Granville-Barker, 1961: 288). His meeting with Edgar disguised as Poor Tom, in particular, makes him understand that fellowship and cooperation are the basic qualities of the human condition and this leads him to embrace a new vision of life (Kettle, 1993: 24) and his acceptance of misfortune – that the character of Poor Tom embodies – brings him in contact with the whole humanity (Granville-Barker, 1961: 290-93). Also Edgar undergoes a process of growth and understanding. On his first appearance, he is colourless and insignificant, but, after he is obliged to sacrifice his own identity and play the part of a poor beggar, he begins realising the scope of human suffering, which marks his transformation ‘from nobody to somebody’ (Granville-Barker, 1961: 319) that turns him into a hero able to accept his fate. At the end of the play, Edgar is fully aware of the woe inherent in human existence as well as of the limitations and fragility of man and is eventually able to cope with reality and act upon it (Lombardo, 1991: xliv). The other character who passes through a painful experience of revelation is Gloucester. At the beginning of the play he trusts in the wrong son, the illegitimate Edmund, and bans the legitimate and loyal Edgar, but after the cruel scene in which he is blinded he paradoxically starts seeing and understanding reality. In this sense, his experience is parallel to Lear’s; the two old man are able to see reality and understand it, that is to know it, only passing through woeful experiences, madness and blindness respectively. This reinforces the idea of the unavoidability of suffering and desperation in any process leading to knowledge.

Despite the centrality of the theme of knowledge in the play, an analysis of the collocational patterns of the verb *know* has shown that its most frequent collocate is the adverb *not* and an analysis of the clusters has highlighted 12 occurrences of the phrase *I know not* and 4 occurrences of the phrase *know not what*. The verb *know* also collocates with the auxiliary *dost* (6 occurrences), all found in the cluster *dost thou know*, which strengthens the feeling of uncertainty that pervades the whole play. The numerical significance of these data is even more evident when concordance lines are taken into account:

```
      and she is yours. I know no answer. Will you
     per? Ask me not what I know. Go after her: she
      belike, something. I know not what: I'll love
nuptial breaches, and I know not what. How long have
       uffering; that not know'st fools do those
      hope. Thou didst not know on't. who comes here
     e is he? I do not well know, my lord. If it shall
  I have hope. You less know how to value her desert
        make it, that you know me not. Till time
     should know you, and know this man; yet I am
        I will drink it. I know you do not love
  thee. What dost thou know me for? A knave; a r
   thee. Doth any here know me? This is not Lear
    grown foppish. They know not how their wits
    acknowledged. Do you know this noble gentle
  ah! You beastly knave, know you no reverence?
 mind; methinks I should know you, and know this
tend upon my father? I know not, madam: 'tis too
  is that yet you do not know. Fie on this storm
never afflict yourself to know the cause; but let
     put up that letter? I know no news, my lord
      farewell. And yet I know not how conceit may
```

Figure 1: concordances of *know*

As can be seen, there are several instances of 'negative' sentences having the verb *know* as node word, even when the negative adverb is not in the vicinity of the verb.

After creating frequency lists for both the *Lear corpus* and the reference corpus it was possible to compare them and identify the keywords; the identification of the keywords was made without altering the settings in the program, i.e. without posing any numerical limit to the search. The following figure shows the keywords, arranged according to their keyness:

WORD	FREQ.	LEAR.txt %	FREQ.	REF.txt %	KEYNESS
Edmund	**31**	**0.12**	**15**		**157.8**
Cordelia	21	0.08	0		145.6
Regan	18	0.07	0		124.8
Daughters	28	0.11	27		119.6
Lear	17	0.07	0		117.8
Nuncle	17	0.07	0		117.8
Kent	19	0.07	15		86.0
Tom	16	0.06	6		85.5
Edgar	12	0.05	0		83.2
Cornwall	11	0.04	0		76.3
Goneril	10	0.04	0		69.3
Dover	11	0.04	2		65.2
Fool	**47**	**0.18**	**334**	**0.04**	**62.4**
Sister	**31**	**0.12**	**145**	**0.02**	**60.3**
Fiend	19	0.07	44		57.4
Gloucester	22	0.09	85	0.01	49.2
Sisters	12	0.05	17		44.9
Father	**66**	**0.26**	**772**	**0.10**	**44.4**
Tom's	7	0.03	1		42.6
Albany	6	0.02	0		41.6
Nature	**36**	**0.14**	**308**	**0.04**	**38.5**
Alack	16	0.06	60		36.5
Stocks	10	0.04	16		35.7
Letter	25	0.10	180	0.02	32.7
Poor	**48**	**0.19**	**574**	**0.07**	**31.1**
Burgundy	11	0.04	29		31.0
Old	**48**	**0.19**	**575**	**0.07**	**31.0**
Hovel	5	0.02	1		29.3
Inform'd	7	0.03	9		27.2
Knights	10	0.04	29		26.8
Rain	11	0.04	43		24.4
Legitimate	5	0.02	3		24.3

Figure 2: keywords in *King Lear*

The results obtained are not surprising since keywords should reflect what a given text is about and the words in figure 2 offer a sort of summary of the plot of *King Lear*: the play is about a family that tragically breaks its bonds and, since the protagonists belong to a royal family, their inability to restore the lost order entails repercussions on the whole court. The presence of proper names in the keyword list is due to the fact that in dramatic texts 'characters are especially important to the overall purpose, and […] each character relates intensely to the others' (Scott, 2006: 70). In the Elizabethan theatre, particularly, where there were no costumes and no scenery and where the same actor could play more than a role, the praxis was to make the characters refer to one another by using proper names, which helped the audience recognize who was speaking to whom.

The keyword list above is too long to be significant and some of the words identified do not seem related to the aboutness of the play, therefore further analysis is done only on those keywords with more than 30 occurrences, those highlighted in bold font in figure 2.

Interestingly enough, the only character's name is *Edmund*, the villain, the illegitimate son, who also embodies a new vision of the world, no longer based on feudal values. Edmund is characterized as a wicked, unscrupulous man who cannot accept his position in the world and, prey to the melancholic humour (black bile), tries to contrast his fate following his natural instincts. He is also 'the private enterprise man' (Kettle, 1993: 19) who believes in the feudal values no longer and, consequently, rejects morality and makes his vows to the lowest natural elements. An analysis of the concordance lines of *Edmund*, however, has highlighted that it is quite always used in the appellative form, which confirms, if necessary, Scott's statement about the importance of proper names in dramatic texts, but adds nothing to traditional interpretation of the character of Edmund.

The presence of the word *fool* is not surprising, given the importance of the character of the Fool and its relevance in the overall meaning of the play. Folly and madness, indeed, are important themes in the tragedy which stages the contrast between Lear's real madness, the Fool's licensed folly and Edgar's pretended insanity. The strong co-occurrence of the word *fool* with the possessive *my* (14), in fact, suggests that the word *fool* is often used as a noun, probably referred to the character of the motley fool, who, indeed, is much more that a wearer of motley, he is a touchstone to wisdom and moral insight. The Fool is the only character who is able to see things as they really are and, thanks to his license of speaking clearly and frankly, helps Lear in his process of understating (Granville-Barker, 1961: 290).

The analysis of collocates has also pointed out the co-occurrence of the word *fool* with words referring to Lear, like *sir* (6), *Lear* (2), *nuncle* (2) and *father* (1), which strengthens the parallel between the Fool and the king. This suggests that not only does the word *fool* refer to the character of the motley fool, but it may refer to other characters in the play, particularly to Lear. A hypothesis confirmed by a reading of the concordance lines:

```
   between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?
 whiles thou, a moral fool, sit’st still, and
   ld’st make a gook fool. To take it again
  eve a fool. A bitter fool! Dost thou know the
  will turn us all to fools and madmen. Take
this your all-licensed fool, but other of your i
 thou art now; I am a fool, thou are nothing
 hat’s a wise man and a fool. Alas, sir, are you
```

here. Dost thou call me **fool**, boy? All thy other
go you, and call my **fool** hither. You, you,
services are due: my **fool** usurps my body.
now, by my life, old **fools** are babes again;
neither wise man nor **fool**. Rumble thy bellyful
to this great stage of **fools**: this is a good block
speeches, as I were a **fool**? Goose, if I had y
itude! If thou wert my **fool**, nuncle, I'ld have
I am even the natural **fool** of fortune. Use
will not let me have all **fool** to myself; they'll
fly: the knave turns to **fool** that runs away; the
kind o' thing than a **fool**: and yet I would

Figure 3: concordances of *fool*

As can be noticed, the word *fool* refers metaphorically to those who do not understand the surrounding world, fool as a victim of misfortune; in this sense all the characters in the play who find themselves on the wrong side of the wheel of fortune are fools and, in fact, the appellative is directed to more than one character in the play. The table shows that when it is used in the plural form, or in a general sense, or when it is preceded by indefinite article, the word should be intended metaphorically whereas when it is preceded by a possessive or by another adjective specifying it, it refers to the character of the Fool.

The presence in the list of the words *sister* and *father* seems to point to the centrality of the couple Lear, the father, and Cordelia, the sister, which also seems to foreground the clash between fathers and sons, the initial critical condition that gives start to the series of tragic events that make up the plot of the play. An analysis of the collocates has shown that *father* tends to collocate with *child* (5), *son* (5), and *love* (5), but the position of the collocates does not seem significant and that *sister* only collocates with grammatical words. It has been hypothesised that the word *sister* might refer to Cordelia, given the importance of her character both in the development of the plot and in Lear's process of "knowing" the surrounding reality. Yet, an analysis of the concordance lines of *sister* has shown that it is often used to refer also to Gonerill and Regan:

Edmund, keep you our **sister** company: the rev
Give ear, sir, to my **sister**; for those that
I'll write straight to my **sister**, to hold my very
dislike it, let him to our **sister**, whose mind and
with much ado: your **sister** is the better
what might import my **sister's** letter to him?
messengers from our **sister** and the king.
eyes; nor thy fierce **sister** in his anointed
pray you, that to our **sister** you do make return
ll answer that. My **sister** may receive it
and sojourn with my **sister**, dismissing half
same metal that my **sister** is, and prize me
I cannot think my **sister** in the least would
et's that? I know't, my **sister's**: this approves
writ that letter to my **sister**? Yes, madam. Take

Figure 4: concordances of *sister*

Gonerill and Regan often refer to each other by using the word *sister*, even when it is preceded by the possessive *our*, which suggests that their roles are interchangeable; indeed they are both characterized as wicked and cruel and their behaviour is one of the causes of Lear's suffering. This seems to be reflected on the plot that sees the old king moving from one daughter to the other in search of a hospitality that would mark the recognition of his (lost) role. Yet, in order to verify to what character the word *sister* is referred to, a reading of the concordance lines only does not suffice, it is necessary to expand the span to see a greater portion of co-text, and sometimes to go back to the text.

As regards the word *father*, it has been suggested that it refers to Lear, but it may also refer to Gloucester. Given the parallel between the two old men's destiny, a look at the concordance lines may help verify whether there is a difference in the connotation of the word *father* according to the character it is referred to, considered Lear's and Gloucester's different social status:

wast thou fain; poor **father**, to hovel thee with
But who comes here? My **father**, poorly led? World
Dear love, and our aged **father's** right: soon may I
You! Did you? I pray you, **father**, being weak, seem so
From bias of nature; there's **father** against child. We
Gods, thy brother, and thy **father**; conspirant 'gainst
Had you not been their **father**, these white flakes
This business. A credulous **father**! and a brother noble
kicked the poor king her **father**. Come hither, mistre
n the miseries of your **father**? By nursing them
The music there! O my dear **father**! Restoration hang thy
must have your land: our **father's** love is to the bas
get my nature. so kind a **father**! Be my horses ready
My king, loved as my **father** as my master follow'd
The food of thy abused **father's** wrath? Might I but
untented woundings of a **father's** curse pierce every
hearts against their **father**, fool me not so
upon your traitorous **father** are not fit for

Figure 5: concordances of *father*

The figure shows that the word *father*, whether it is referred to Lear or to Gloucester, is very often associated with words or adjectives with a negative connotation, as to indicate that the two men are old, weak and unable to understand the changing world around them and, therefore, unable to control the situation, that is why both Edmund and Gonerill and Regan want to substitute their fathers as public figures. On the other hand, when the word *father* is used in the vicinity of words with a positive connotation, by expanding the span it was possible to see that the lines are spoken either by Cordelia or by Edgar, the two loving sons who fight to save their fathers' lives and to restore the lost order. This implies that the ides of fatherhood is linked to the idea of government and the two parties who use the word *father* in different ways have, indeed, two different visions of the world. Edgar and Cordelia share the same feudal rules as Lear and Gloucester; Edmund, Gonerill and Regan, instead, embody the modern idea of entrepreneurism and, in order to change the world, they are willing to kill their own fathers.

The most interesting keyword is *nature* which has been identified as thematic word by almost all the scholars who have investigated the relationship between language and theme in *King Lear*. It is generally acknowledged that the natural world is to be seen as a plane parallel to the human, and the breach in the family, also due to the presence of an illegitimate heir, is reflected in the pouring rain, which makes the finding of a shelter necessary. Wolfgang Clemen, for instance, has suggested that, being the strong parallel between people and cosmos one of the main themes of the tragedy, the dominating images in the play make reference to nature; in his words, 'man and nature stand in a continuous relationship and the imagery serves to emphasise this kinship (Clemen, 1959: 94). This parallel is particularly evident in the scenes of madness (III,ii and IV,iv) where the king cannot see the people around him and speaks to an imaginary addressee – the elements, nature, the heavens – whose forces are awakened in the audience's mind by the imagery used which also contributes to render Lear's suffering universal, to reflect human matters on a universal plane (Clemen, 1959: 137). B.I. Evans seems to agree with Clemen about the relevance of nature in the overall thematic development of the play; in his words, in 'the merciless cruelty of man, so fierce and unreasonable that only the savagery of beasts can give it an appropriate symbol [lies] the central imaginative theme' (Evans, 1952: 171). Also Northrop Frye has considered the word nature as a keyword in the play; he has suggested that, in order to orientate themselves in the complex structure of *King Lear*, readers should look for hints among those words that the author repeats in the text so insistently that he seems to influence the public by means of suggestion, and these words are *nature*, *fool* and *nothing* (Frye, 1986: 113).

An analysis of the collocates of *nature* has pointed out a noteworthy co-occurrence of *nature* with the possessive *my*, which suggests that the word nature is also used with the meaning of *temperament*, *disposition*, in both positive and negative sense, depending upon what character uses it:

```
    sir, you are old.  Nature in you stands on
    falls from bias of nature; there's father
k conduct.  Oppressed nature sleeps:  This rest
You  cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee:
r your disposition:  That nature, which contemns
case.  I will forget my nature. So kind a father
 wrench'd my frame of nature  From the fix'd pl
  garb  Quite from his nature: he cannot flatter
  ing could have subdued nature  To such a lown
 and i' the heat.  Thou, nature, art my goddess;
at breach in his abused nature!  The untuned an
 be so, my lord.  Hear, nature, hear; dear godd
    Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
 brother noble,  Whose nature is so far from do
   Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,  The w
know'st  The offices of nature, bond of childhoo
   not ourselves  When nature, being oppress'd,
  and loathed part of nature should  Burn itsel
    O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world
in the lusty stealth of nature, take  More comp
   though the wisdom of nature can  reason it
```

Figure 6: concordances of *nature*

The word *nature* is used in both positive and negative sense, since it is linked to the different visions of the world presented in *King Lear*. In the Elizabethan period, nature was seen either as an ordered hierarchy or as a negative force linked to the lowest level of the chain of being; the former meaning was related to a stable and fixed vision of the world, that embodied by the characters of Lear, Cordelia, and Edgar, the latter meaning, instead, was related to the animal world and to man's basic instincts (it should be noticed, in this respect, that the play contains 30 references to animals). By expanding the span of the concordance lines, it is possible to disambiguate the connotation of nature; there has emerged that Lear and the characters associated to him intend nature as order and that for them love, authority, compliance, and loyalty are natural because they are human, whereas Edmund makes his vow to the lowest level of nature, its instinctive and predatory part. The co-text helps interpret the word: the presence of expressions like *lusty stealth* or *loathed part* make reference to nature as instinct, whereas expressions like *wisdom of nature* or *offices of nature* make reference to nature as an harmonious set of rules.

Also the words *old* and *poor* make reference to important themes in the tragedy: the recognition of the limitations of old age, poverty and destitution are central in Lear's and Edgar's development. An analysis of the collocates has highlighted that the adjective *old* tends to co-occur with the noun *man* (10 times in position R1 – i.e. the first word after the keyword), which confirms that old age is a major concern in the play, and the adjective *poor* with the proper noun *Tom*, which, indeed, is not surprising since Edgar always makes reference to himself in disguise as Poor Tom as if the adjective was part of his name. *Old* and *poor*, for their very nature of adjectives, need further analysis. Here follow some relevant results of the concordance lines of *old*:

Adieu; he'll shape his **old** course in a country
I am a very foolish **old** man, fourscore
Away! Now, by my life, **old** fools are babes aga
ttles 'gainst a head so **old** and white as this.
Why, art thou mad, **old** fellow? How fell
for sallets; swallows the **old** rat and the ditch-dog
during the life of this **old** majesty, to him our
forget and forgive: I am **old** and foolish. Holds it
thee beaten for being **old** before thy time.
e put him on the **old** man's death
with you, sir! Away, **old** man, give me thy
heavens, if you do love **old** men, if your sweet
here, you gods, a poor **old** man, as full of grief
I confess that I am **old**; age is unnecessary
in the end meet the **old** course of death, o
it fit to send the **old** and miserable king
catastrophe of the **old** comedy: my cue is
lord? O, madam, my **old** heart is cracked, it's
weak, and despised **old** man: but yet I call
ounger rises when the **old** doth fall. Here is the
be over-rules. Idle **old** man, that still would

Figure 7: concordances of *old*

As can be seen, the adjective *old* has a negative connotation, being often associated with nouns and/or verbs making reference to death, madness, or fall. This suggests that the old are useless, weak and desperate and that the few years left to them are idle and full of pain, or at least, it is so in the young's opinion. This is in line with the plot of the play where the clash between different generations, a sort of generation gap *ante litteram*, is pivotal.

As has already been pointed out, the adjective *poor* is very often associated to the character of Edgar in disguise, but there are other occurrences of the adjective:

that makes breath **poor** and speech unable
since. Well, sir, the **poor** distressed Lear's i'
O, see, see! And my **poor** fool is hanged! No
butterflies, and hear **poor** rogues talk of court
lightning? To watch – **poor** perdu! – with this
nails pluck out his **poor** old eyes; worthy
your gait, and let the **poor** volk pass. An chu
I stand, your slave, a **poor**, infirm, weak, and
is no more but such a **poor** bare, forked animal
us. Come, your hovel. **Poor** fool and knave, I
ich parted from you? A **poor** unfortunate beggar
then I'll sleep. **Poor** naked wretches
it would be thus, **poor** banished man! The
sembly, she kicked the **poor** king her father. Come
ject, from low farms, **poor** pelting villages, ep
here, you gods, as **poor** old man, as full of
nce. Well, sir, the **poor** distressed Lear's in

heat, and hurts the **poor** creatures of earth
ly can venge! But, o **poor** Gloucester! Lost he
highness' love. The **poor** Cordelia! And yet

Figure 8: concordances of *poor*

As can be seen, not only does it relate to a lack of wealth, but it quite always makes reference to a miserable condition, to the absence of hope. The presence of words like *wretches*, *beggar*, *slave*, and *knave* suggests that in a society where there are no rules, where all bonds are broken, poverty is a real danger for everyone. Yet, it should be noted that Lear's experience of destitution and poverty is a way to knowledge and understanding, only when he is deprived of everything and once he has experienced madness, he can see the truth and reconcile himself with his beloved Cordelia, even if too late.

4. Conclusion

The analysis presented so far has brought some interesting results. On the one hand, it has highlighted some features completely in line with those pointed out by traditional literary criticism, like the centrality of the word nature, the relevance of the theme of knowledge, the importance of the character of the Fool. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis in particular has allowed to notice some features which would have been difficult, if not impossible, to identify without a corpus approach. The presence of the words *father*, *sister*, *old* and *poor* in the keyword list, as well as their connotation and uses, suggests their relevance in the general meaning of *King Lear* and their relation with the aboutness of the play, which has not always been emphasised in traditional criticism. It is true, however, that as far as interpretation is concerned it was necessary to go back to the text and/or rely on traditional literary criticism, which answers to Short's warning not to be too much involved in technicality.

This analysis seems to suggest that traditional literary criticism and corpus analysis are to be seen as complementary. The former is based on what critics "feel" about a text, the latter allows them to retrieve objective linguistic data thus indicating them "what they ought to say". A joint use of traditional criticism and objectively retrieved linguistic data, on the one hand, may be the answer to the so-called "Fish dilemma" (Fish, 1973), that is stylisticians' tendency to be circular and arbitrary in the selection of data and, on the other hand, confirms Widdowson's conviction that literary texts as such 'can only be subjectively interpreted' (2008: 303). Computer-retrieved data may pose a limit to the unlimited possible interpretations of a given text, which is in line with Short's belief (2008: 13) that stylistics has to reject the easy assumption common in modern literary studies that there are as many interpretations of a text as there are readers to understand it.

Works cited

Clemen W. (1959) The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery. London: Methuen.

Evans B.I. (1952) The Language of Shakespeare's Plays. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Fish S. (1973/1996) 'What is Stylistics and Why They Are Saying Such Terrible Things About It?', in J.J. Weber (ed) The Stylistic Reader, pp. 94-116. London: Arnold.

Frye N. (1986) Northrop Frye on Shakespeare, ed. by R. Sandler. New Haven / London: Yale University Press [Italian translation by A. Carosso, *Shakespeare. Nove Lezioni* Torino: Einaudi].

Granville-Barker H. (1961) Prefaces to Shakespeare. London: Batsford.

Kettle A. (1993) 'The Humanity of King Lear', in K. Ryan (ed) William Shakespeare: King Lear, pp. 17-30. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Lombardo A. (1991) 'Prefazione', in W. Shakespeare. Re Lear, pp. xxxvii-xlvii. Milano: Garzanti.

Nameri D.E. (1976) Three Versions of King Lear. Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press.

Scott M. (1998) WordSmith Tools. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scott M. (1998) WordSmith Tools Manual version 3.0. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scott M. (2006) 'Key Words of Individual Texts', in M. Scott and C. Trimble (eds) Textual Patterns. Key Words and Corpus Analysis in Language Education, pp. 55-72. Amsterdam: John Benjamin.

Shakespeare W. (2000) Complete Works. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu.html>.

Short M. (2008) '"Where Are You Going to My Pretty Maid?" "For Detailed Analysis", Sir, She Said', in G. Watson (ed) The State of Stylistics, pp. 4-29. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.

Stubbs, M. (2003) 'Conrad, Concordance, Collocation: Heart of Darkness or Light at the end of the Tunnel?', paper delivered at the University of Birmingham (8 May 2003). <http://www.uni-trier.de/fileadmin/fb2/ANG/Linguistik/Stubbs/stubbs-2003-conrad-lecture.pdf>.

Stubbs, M. (2005) 'Conrad in the Computer: examples of quantitative stylistic methods', Language & Literature 14(1): 5-24.

Stubbs, M. (2008) 'Three Concepts of Keywords. <http://www.uni-trier.de/fileadmin/fb2/ANG/Linguistik/Stubbs/stubbs-2008-keywords.pdf>.

Widdowson H. (1975) Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature. London: Longman.

Widdowson H. (2008) 'The Novel Features of Text. Corpus Analysis and Stylistics', in A. Gerbig, O. Mason (eds) Language, People, Numbers: Corpus Linguistics and Society, pp. 293-304. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.