

Elements of Monodrama and Autobiography in the Texts of Simona Semenič

An Aspect of Computational Stylometry

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In the article, we deal with the main dramatic opus of the Slovenian playwright Simona Semenič through the method of computational stylometry. Stylometry is the computational analysis of literary style. It can be carried out in the programming languages Java or Python, while the analysis presented here was carried out in the programming language R, using the package “Stylometry with R”. The possibilities of stylometric analysis in this programming environment were developed by researchers Maciej Eder, Jan Rybicki and Mike Kestemont, and have been broadened with present-day investigations of various texts. In stylometry, literary works are automatically arranged into groups according to salient signals, while the researcher recognises and interprets these signals. The advantage of this method, we find, is that it offers the literary researcher a supplementary, objective piece of information on the relations of similarity among the literary texts. Within an author’s opus, the analysis can determine, statistically and objectively, certain nuances of literary style that are less easily perceived in ordinary reading. Stylometry, like any other method, is limited, that is, it delivers only a certain amount of quantitative information, and therefore, in the treatment of literary works, it is necessary to combine it with a close reading and knowledge of the literature under discussion, of literary history, literary theory, the theory of drama, etc.

In the article, we use the stylometric method to point out the different writing styles that a reader may sense in the dramatic writing of Simona Semenič. A particularity in using the stylometric method to treat dramatic texts, compared to other kinds of (literary) texts, is that all mentions of characters’ names placed before their lines have to be removed, because, as these words are frequently repeated, they might influence stylometric analysis, which deals with the vocabulary of a literary work in a holistic manner. Since the stage directions in Simona Semenič’s works do not take a traditional form, but represent an integral part of the dramatic text, they were not omitted.

Stylometric analysis has shown that the work of Simona Semenič is stylistically diverse and that her textual corpus is distinctively heterogeneous. Her dramatic texts, according to computational analysis, fall into three groups. The most obvious criterion for the arrangement of the works into groups are their formal properties. That is to say, the dramatic works can be arranged as monologic, as containing a traditional dialogue form, or as a combination of dialogues and monologues, the latter most visible in longer stage directions. We thus ascertain that the author writes in a similar way when she writes a text in a particular formal framework. We thus infer that the playwright Simona Semenič writes in a similar way when she writes monologic works, and the same holds for dialogues. One would otherwise expect the latter not to be as stylistically congruent, since dialogues include different characters speaking in different idiolects.

Furthermore, we ascertain that stylistically, the texts *i, the victim; do me twice; the second time* and *the feast or the story of a savoury corpse or how roman abramovič, the character janša, julia kristeva, age 24, simona semenič and the initials z.i. found themselves in a tiny cloud of tobacco smoke* (below: *the feast*) stand out in the author's opus, since stylometric analysis places them in a special group. The common trait of these dramatic texts is their monodramatic or monologic nature, since there appears in them a single dramatic character or conveyor of speech, that is, the playwright Simona Semenič, who presents her own point of view. A monodrama is a play with a single dramatic character, representing the point of view of that character. Based on a theoretical analysis and a content analysis of the plays, we ascertain that another characteristic of the above-mentioned group of Simona Semenič's plays is their breaking of dramatic conventions. The author is explicitly identified with the dramatic character; thus, the texts subvert the "traditional" position of the dramatic author, absent from the play. In the monologic part of the dramatic text in the works *i, the victim; the second time* and *do me twice*, it is the playwright as subject who speaks. Similarly, the position of the dramatic author is questioned in *the feast*, in which Simona Semenič figures already in the subtitle. In these texts, the distance between playwright and reader collapses, not least because of the metadramatic or metatheatrical elements of the texts, for example, addressing the audience directly, bringing attention to oneself as author and to the extratextual circumstances of the performance (programme, tickets), referring to characters as characters, etc.

With the stylometric method, we have further compared the vocabulary of the works in which dialogues predominate with the vocabulary of the works of the other group in which the text is mainly monologic. We determined which words are the most frequent in the first group, while being extremely rare or absent in the second – and vice versa. As far as verbs are concerned, it is noticeable that in the works *i, the victim; do me twice; the second time* and *the feast*, verbs in the first-

person singular predominate, which may be explained by the predominant monologic autobiographical form. In the other dramatic texts, verbs in the first-person – plural – appear as well, but also verbs in the imperative, the future, the second-person, etc., which is a consequence of the dialogic form. Another consequence of the dialogues are various interjections that appear in the group of dialogic texts, while being absent from the group of monologic texts. In the group of monologic texts, we find a greater frequency of words pointing to metadramatic elements of the text. They refer to the play as a play, to the author herself, to the viewers, etc. This confirms that those texts by Simona Semenič which contain autobiographical elements and are predominantly monologic have metadramatic effects. This is true of all autobiographical monologic dramatic texts from the corpus, except for *i, the victim*, which contains no vocabulary referring to metadramatic effects. We have also analysed, in the plays of Simona Semenič, the use of pronouns for the first-person singular, which indicate that the dramatic characters are speaking about themselves. Although one would expect the works *do me twice*, *the second time* and *the feast* to stand out due to their monologic form, in their use of dramatic characters speaking about themselves, these works, in their use of unstressed and clitic forms of personal pronouns for the first-person singular, do not stand out compared to other works in Simona Semenič's opus. For its use of first-person pronouns, the only work that stands out is *i, the victim*, in which the subject thus refers to herself the most or engages in a direct confession.

We may conclude that Simona Semenič's different *modi scribendi* are linked to the type of dramatic form the author chooses to write in. The stylistic traits of her dramatic texts differ depending on whether one is dealing with dialogic or monologic dramatic texts. Stylistically, the dramatic works that stand out in the author's opus are those in which it is predominantly one person who speaks, namely, the monodramatic texts *i, the victim*; *do me twice* and *the second time*, but also *the feast*, in which individual dramatic characters speak in alternating monologically fashioned lines. In these works, one finds frequent self-referential expressions pointing to metadramatic elements, which clearly preponderate in precisely that part of Simona Semenič's opus based on the form of monodrama. Although the works *do me twice* and *the second time*, as well as *the feast*, are no less monologic, it is only the work *i, the victim* that stands out in the author's opus by having the dramatic subject speak about herself.

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