

Marija Milojkovic¹
University of Belgrade

A CORPUS STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF MAYA ANGELOU'S 'PRISONER' FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONTEXTUAL PROSODIC THEORY

The paper explores the poem 'Prisoner' by the American writer and activist Maya Angelou (1928-2014), using corpus stylistic techniques favoured by Contextual Prosodic Theory [CPT] (Louw 2000, Louw/Milojkovic 2016). The analysis was supported by a complete corpus of Angelou's poetry and the Corpus of Contemporary American English as the reference corpus. A poet's work may be researched in two directions (Simpson 2014: 48-49), both of which are pursued in this paper, each complementing the other. First, a searchable corpus of a poet's work will contain idiosyncratic tendencies of usage. Secondly, these tendencies, as well as any other instances of foregrounding, may be studied against the background of a large and representative reference corpus of the language.

The methodology of such searches hinges on collocation (Sinclair 1991; Louw and Milojkovic 2016). Firstly, lexical collocation is understood as co-occurrence of two or more lexical items with up to four words intervening. Co-selecting such items in the poet's corpus, or in the reference corpus, will yield 'states of affairs' – a term borrowed by Louw (2010) from Wittgenstein and referring to types of the context of situation (Firth 1957: 182) in the reference corpus and in authorial text. Secondly, wildcarding ensures that a grammar string's most frequent lexical collocates will come up in the reference corpus to show how they determine the string's logical semantic prosody, or subtext (Louw and Milojkovic 2014). Consistent lexico-grammatical usages in a poetry corpus that deviate significantly enough from the reference corpus norm

¹ marija.okon@gmail.com

to warrant the notice of a literary critic are a possible area of study. In the poem, the example is 'even sunlight dares'.

The analysis of 'Prisoner' sheds light on semantic nuances that concern an enigmatic grammar string and motifs such as sunlight vs. night, history and memory. Angelou's idiosyncratic usages of certain lexical items is explicated and connected with the poem's overall interpretation. When it comes to the innovative notion that grammar alone might be idiosyncratically deployed by a writer, the paucity of matches stood in the way of conclusive analysis. Still, the paper contains an illustration of how such an analysis might be performed.

Key words: Maya Angelou, corpus stylistics, collocation, corpus-derived subtext, grammar in poetry

1 Introduction

Corpus stylistics as a discipline was originally launched by Bill Louw in April 1987 (Louw/ Milojkovic, 2014: 263) at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Louw then had at his disposal a reference corpus of 22 million words and used it for the first time to explain stylistic effects in poetry. "The venue at which I first used computational methods was at St Hilda's College, Oxford, funded by The British Council and chaired by Professor Ron Carter. The proceedings were published in my case as a paper *Sub-routines in the Integration of Language and Literature*, British Council, Pergamon Press. Group work involved advanced attention to passages from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [...] I had access to 22 million words of running text. It was all on microfiche because storage on the PDP 11 mainframe computer was patchy. All of the twenty-five or so lexicographers at Cobuild, Westmere Birmingham University had the same full set of *all* concordances. The first edition of Cobuild dictionary ran on 7.5 million words; but was upgraded by scanning on a Kurzweil Data Entry machine to create supplementary corpora with a total of 22 million words. No person or institution had that much corpus data. LOB and Brown corpora were only worth one million words of running text each" (Bill Louw, personal communication). Since then, corpus stylistics developed in two directions, or has existed as two different approaches: either the reference corpus is used to explain the mechanism of foregrounding, or the whole corpus of a particular poet is used to shed light on particular, often idiosyncratic, usages which cannot be manifested to the reader when appearing in isolation (Simpson, 2014: 48-49).

More particularly, Louw studies authorial deviations from the norm in his seminal paper *Irony in the Text or Insincerity in the Writer? The diagnostic potential of semantic prosodies* (1993). Semantic prosody as a language phenomenon had

been discovered at the University of Birmingham as a tendency of a word to occur in a certain semantic environment, which had not been observed prior to the advent of computers; the name was devised by John Sinclair (the founder of the COBUILD² project) together with Bill Louw on the basis of words colouring adjacent collocates with meaning the way the quality of sounds changes due to the proximity of other sounds. The very phenomenon of a 'collocate' to Sinclair entailed co-occurrence in the same co-text, with up to four words intervening, rather than viewing collocations as consisting of words appearing strictly next to one another (Sinclair, 1991: 170). The seminal paper by Louw made him a go-to authority on semantic prosody, with the following definition appearing in most publications discussing the issue: "a consistent *aura of meaning* with which a form is imbued by its collocates" (Louw, 1993: 157; my italics).

It must be noted that the language norm in this case is the frequency of occurrence in the language (and therefore in a balanced and representative reference corpus), and 'frequency' necessitates there being exceptions or different usages with low frequency – otherwise it would be a rule strictly followed by native speakers, of which they would therefore be conscious. Semantic prosodies have been slowly formed and passed down from generation to generation without such an awareness existing (the overwhelming negative prosody of the verb *cause* is a good example, see Stubbs 1995). The popularity of Louw (1993) in the subsequent decade or so is explained by its originality in the approach to foregrounding combined with objectivity and seeming ease of method: Louw claimed that should the author use an expression in opposition to its semantic prosody in the reference corpus, such deviations from the norm will be indicative either of irony or of insincerity. Louw gave a number of convincing examples and opened a well-documented debate (see e.g. Bednarek 2008), which will not be discussed here in order not to jeopardise the direction of this paper.

The next important stage of Louw's research and one that has not been nearly as well scrutinised is his work on logical semantic prosody, also termed by him corpus-derived subtext. In short, Louw claims that the most frequent lexis within or next to a given grammar string (a sequence consisting entirely of grammar, with empty slots for lexis) constitutes the corpus-derived subtext of the given string. For example, in Yeats's "That is no country for old men" (the opening of his poem "Byzantium"), the grammar string is 'that is no * for *', and the two lists of (most frequent) lexical variables provided by the reference corpus for the empty slots constitute its subtext. In the given case, the first slot is most frequently occupied by 'reason' and 'excuse'. This yields privileged insight into the meaning of the opening line (Louw, 2010), as well as into the whole poem, because first lines are known to prospect further developments in texts (Louw/

² Collins Birmingham University International Language Database

Milojkovic 2016: 176-188; Milojkovic, 2020). This particular direction has not been explored elsewhere in the literature, although Louw and Milojkovic (2014; 2016), as publications which first presented it to a wide audience, received positive reviews internationally (Simpson 2014: 101-102; Wang/Humblé 2017: 550-555). The theory behind this development hinges on Russell's notion of 'logical language' as a language that "will be completely analytic and will show at a glance the logical structure of the facts *asserted or denied* [...] It is a language that has only syntax and *no vocabulary whatsoever* [...] *if you add a vocabulary, [it] would be a logically perfect language*" (Russell, 1956: 197, emphasis added). This is in accordance with Wittgenstein's understanding of logical form: "Just as each proposition must share its logical form with the state of affairs it depicts, so language, the totality of propositions, must share with what it depicts *the logical form, 'the form of reality'* (TLP2.18 – apparently equivalent to the 'form of world')" (Glock 2005: 215). Wittgenstein viewed language as a system of rules inherited by an individual and the meanings of words as determined by their usage in that system. This theoretical foundation has been explained in great detail (Milojkovic, 2020). The whole theoretical approach by Louw that utilises deviation from the corpus norm to study foregrounding in the context of situation is referred to as Contextual Prosodic Theory (CPT).

This paper will utilise both corpus linguistic approaches to literature (referring to the author's corpus and a balanced and representative reference corpus) in studying the complete poetry by the American human rights activist and poet Maya Angelou. As giving an account of her whole corpus would exceed the scope of this paper, a poem was chosen that seemed to hinge upon several different types of foregrounding. The poem in question, "Prisoner", containing three stanzas each followed by a refrain, was chosen because of its obvious relevance to the human rights movement. Written from the perspective of the first person singular and abounding in specific day-to-day detail of a prisoner's spiritual condition, it might suggest the experience described has a personal connotation. The fact that Maya Angelou personally never went to prison underlines the prototypical significance she must have ascribed to imprisonment inflicted on an African American.

Not all poetic deviations from the norm found in this poem will justify separate corpus analyses. For example, Angelou describes sunlight which "trembles through my bars to shimmer dances on the floor". The transitivity of the otherwise intransitive verb 'shimmer' will hardly escape the reader. Still, the verb is described as intransitive by the nowadays corpus-based dictionaries and thus requires no excursions into the reference corpus. Or, the meaning of the verb 'tremble' does not normally suggest that an inanimate entity such as light should tremble (in order) to achieve a purpose such as shimmering dances, because the verb 'tremble' is not normally used with an infinitive of purpose. The other kind of grammatical incoherence in the poem is syntagmatic: "To



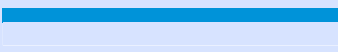


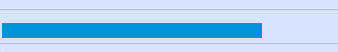


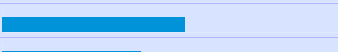


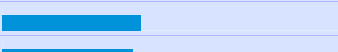


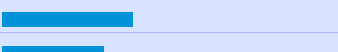


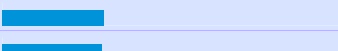


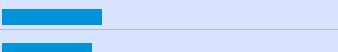


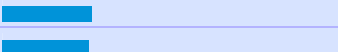


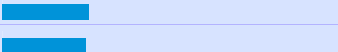



secret hold me deep and close my ears of lulls and clangs and memory of hate.” The opening “to secret hold me deep” contains ‘secret’ used as an adverb instead of ‘secretly’, as well as ‘deep’ used as an adverb in the syntactic slot in which standard English would require the use of the suffix -ly. The latter usage is well documented in the African American variety; the former is idiosyncratic. Such transparent semantic-syntactic and strictly syntactic means of foregrounding do not demand recourse to reference corpora.

The aim of this paper is therefore to discuss sequences that would most benefit from a corpus interpretation. As corpus-derived subtext is the latest and least explored development of CPT, the paper will first discuss a curious case of a grammar string from Angelou’s “Prisoner”. This will be followed by explorations of certain semantic prosodies in Angelou’s corpus that may assist in the stylistic interpretation of the poem. Both readings are an invitation to fully appreciate the poem’s semantic nuances. The paper in its entirety may be viewed as an example of a corpus approach to the stylistics of poetry.



































































2 Grammar as a means of foregrounding

2.1 Corpus-derived subtext as authorial meaning

When studying the poem, which, as previously mentioned, contains a range of different means of foregrounding, I was particularly surprised by a sentence in Stanza 3: “The me myself of me sleeks in the folds and history of fear.” What surprised me was not the originality of the construction itself – this is poetry, after all. Rather, for a prolific and ingenious poet such as Maya Angelou, ‘the me myself of me’ seemed unforgivably amateurish, a waste of space in an otherwise expertly written poetic text. Also, despite the repetition driven to absurdity, or perhaps because of it, I was not quite sure of its meaning. And yet Maja Angelou was so careful with her wordings and meanings. Therefore, the string ‘the * * of *’ was entered into COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and yielded the picture that is recaptured below:

1			THE OTHER SIDE OF THE	10863	
2			THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	4764	
3			THE OTHER END OF THE	3344	
4			THE SECOND HALF OF THE	2547	
5			THE FIRST HALF OF THE	2399	
6			THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH	1866	
7			THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE	1828	
8			THE HELL OUT OF HERE	1647	
9			THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS	1596	
10			THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES	1533	

11	i	★	THE FAR SIDE OF THE	1489	
12	i	★	THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE	1481	
13	i	★	THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF	1460	
14	i	★	THE FAR END OF THE	1440	
15	i	★	THE FUCK OUT OF HERE	1361	
16	i	★	THE LEFT SIDE OF THE	1212	
17	i	★	THE FIRST DAY OF THE	1136	
18	i	★	THE FIRST PART OF THE	1052	
19	i	★	THE FIRST ROUND OF THE	1014	
20	i	★	THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE	963	
21	i	★	THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE	950	
22	i	★	THE EARLY DAYS OF THE	924	
23	i	★	THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY	886	
24	i	★	THE FRONT PAGE OF THE	881	
25	i	★	THE LAST COUPLE OF DAYS	877	
26	i	★	THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE	874	
27	i	★	THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	874	
28	i	★	THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART	848	
29	i	★	THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS	837	
30	i	★	THE HELL OUT OF ME	810	
31	i	★	THE WRONG SIDE OF THE	805	
32	i	★	THE EARLY YEARS OF THE	763	
33	i	★	THE EARLY PART OF THE	743	
34	i	★	THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS	742	
35	i	★	THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE	724	
36	i	★	THE BEST INTEREST OF THE	681	
37	i	★	THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW	638	
38	i	★	THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	614	
39	i	★	THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS	606	
40	i	★	THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS	597	
41	i	★	THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS	592	
42	i	★	THE OTHER HALF OF THE	582	
43	i	★	THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL	573	
44	i	★	THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION	573	
45	i	★	THE LAST DAY OF THE	572	
46	i	★	THE VAST MAJORITY OF PEOPLE	559	
47	i	★	THE SHIT OUT OF ME	557	
48	i	★	THE SECOND PART OF THE	549	
49	i	★	THE BETTER PART OF A	542	
50	i	★	THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY	534	
51	i	★	THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE	527	
52	i	★	THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS	511	
53	i	★	THE U.S. COURT OF APPEALS	504	

54			THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE	501	
55			THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE	501	
56			THE OPPOSITE END OF THE	501	
57			THE FIRST YEAR OF THE	489	
58			THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE	488	
59			THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS	488	
60			THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT	485	
61			THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL	475	
62			THE WEST SIDE OF THE	474	
63			THE EAST SIDE OF THE	473	
64			THE SECOND ROUND OF THE	469	
65			THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE	467	
66			THE LOWER END OF THE	464	
67			THE NORTH SIDE OF THE	458	
68			THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE	457	
69			THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE	455	
70			THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO	452	
71			THE DARK SIDE OF THE	447	
72			THE LATTER HALF OF THE	447	
73			THE LATTER PART OF THE	445	
74			THE CURRENT STATE OF THE	443	
75			THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS	443	

Subsequently, all unfinished sequences were removed from this list of most frequent lexico-grammatical combinations in COCA. 'Unfinished' here means that they were not a syntactic fit to the sequence from Angelou's text. The list of the remaining lines is presented below. The sequences that may act as a syntactic substitute to the author's sequence are presented separately from those that may not. The former are in the left column, the latter in the right, and 21 was chosen as the cut-off point for the reason that will shortly follow:

the * * of *

1 the United States of America 4764	1 the other side of the 10863
2 the National Institutes of Health 1866	2 the other end of the 3350
3 the last couple of years 1596	3 the second half of the 2547
4 the National Academy of Sciences 1533	4 the first half of the 2399
5 the joint chiefs of staff 1460	5 the right side of the 1828
6 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology 886	6 the far side of the 1489
7 the U.S. Department of Education 874	7 the vast majority of the 1487
8 the U.S. Department of Agriculture 874	8 the far end of the 1440
9 the Metropolitan Museum of Art 848	9 the left side of the 1212
10 the past couple of weeks 837	10 the first day of the 1136
11 the U.S. House of Representatives 614	11 the first part of the 1052
12 the Army Corps of Engineers 597	12 the first round of the 1014
13 the next couple of years 592	13 the executive directors of the 963
14 the Federal Bureau of Investigation 573	14 the opposite side of the 950
15 the vast majority of people 559	15 the early days of the 924
16 the U.S. Department of Energy 534	16 the front page of the 881
17 the next couple of weeks 511	17 the wrong side of the 805
18 the U.S Court of Appeals 504	18 the early years of the 769
19 the American Academy of Pediatrics 488	19 the early part of the 743
20 the first day of school 475	20 the best interests of the 730
21 the U.S. Department of Justice 467	21 the best interest of the 681

In the column to the left, the majority of the noun phrases are names of famous American Institutions (14 out of 21), starting with the United States of America. The cut-off point became 'the U.S. Department of Justice' because of its relevance to the poem's context of situation. The remaining lines had mainly to do with time, such as 'the last couple of years' (line 3) and 'the first day of school' (line 20), with the exception of line 15 'the vast majority of people'.

The column to the right contains one instance of 'majority' in the second lexical slot as close to the top frequencies as line 7, as well as some temporal references (lines 10, possibly 12, 15, 18, 19), but the greatest number of the lines refers to a part of a whole. 'Side' appears in lines 1, 5, 6, 9, 14, and 17; 'end' in lines 2 and 8; 'half' in lines 3 and 4; 'part' in lines 11 and 19. From this perspective, the lexical variable 'majority' is also a part of something. Then, given that the string originally studied was 'the me myself of me', the search was narrowed down to include 'me' in its original slot:

the * * of me

- 1 the other side of me 61
- 2 the other part of me 49
- 3 the other half of me 33
- 4 the best part of me 22

- 5 the only part of me 14
- 6 the road ahead of me 12
- 7 the cynical side of me 11
- 8 the wrong impression of me 11
- 9 the car ahead of me 9
- 10 the best version of me 8

In the first ten lines of the concordance yielded by COCA, ‘side’ is most frequent, appearing in lines 1 and 7, followed by ‘part’ in lines 2, 4, and 5, and ‘half’ in line 3. This is the meaning supported by the ‘unfinished’ category of sequences referred to above.

These findings seem to suggest the following interpretation. In Maya Angelou’s time imprisonment was, as arguably it still is, a prototypical situation for Africa’s descendants in the U.S. The refrain “It’s jail, and bail, then rails to run” emphasises the hopelessness of pursuing a different life. The corpus-derived subtext suggests that the persona chooses to establish himself or herself almost as an institution (hence references to “history” and “memory” in the same stanza, to be discussed in Section 4). The persona is indeed an institution – an incarcerated African American. On the other hand, the corpus-derived subtext simultaneously suggests another reading: under the pressure of imprisonment, the persona is struggling to keep himself or herself whole. Hence the repetitiveness of “me myself of me”. The cruel and faceless prison conditions take their toll on a person’s identity and test the limits of one’s endurance as an individual. Angelou makes her point with unexpected cogency.

2.2 Refutation of Section 2.1

The reader will now be well entitled to ask if the reasoning employed in Section 2.1 applies to every instance of any author deploying the string ‘the * of *’ in their text. Or if at least this same reasoning applies to every instance of Angelou using ‘the * * of *’ in her corpus. To pursue this line of inquiry to its logical conclusion, all such instances in Angelou’s corpus were isolated and studied in context. A classification was adopted which seemed best suited to the data gathered, although it is by no means the only classification possible. Several grammatical patterns emerged. Below, grammatically similar sequences are grouped together, quoted in their broader contexts, and given a possible unifying interpretation in the form of a concise comment.

(a) ‘the+ADJ+N+of+NP(Npl)

1. the cold disguise of sad and wise decisions
2. the unutterable ignorance of dark, cold caves

3. the axe-keen intent of all our days
4. the gelid breath of old manors

1 now thread my voice / with lies / of lightness / force within / my mirror eyes /
the cold disguise / of sad and wise / decisions.

2 Great souls die and / our reality, bound to / them, takes leave of us. / Our souls, / dependent upon their / nurture, / now shrink, wizened. / Our minds, formed / and informed by their / radiance, / fall away. / We are not so much maddened / as reduced to **the unutterable ignorance / of dark, cold / caves.**

3 **The axe-keen / intent of all our / days** for this brief / moment lies soft, nuzzling / the breast of morning, / crooning, still sleep-besotted, / of childish pranks with / angels.

4 Flush on inner cottage walls / Antiquitous faces, / Used to **the gelid breath / Of old manors**, glare disdainfully / Over breached time.

Comment: Apart from the obvious negativity of these contexts, we may detect a sense of despair in the first three. The negativity is strongly suggested by the adjectives used.

(b) the+PPart+Npl+of+NP

5. the charred bones of four very small very black very young children
6. the cocktailed afternoons of what I can do
7. the lettered strivings of etched Pharaonic walls

5 Ministers make novena **with the / charred bones of four / very small / very black / very young children**

6 No / **the cocktailed afternoons / of what can I do.** / In my white layered pink world / / I've let your men cram my mouth / with their black throbbing hate / and I swallowed after

7 She shared **the lettered strivings / of etched Pharaonic walls** / and Reconstruction's anguish / resounded down the halls / of all her / dry dreams

Comment: These contexts seem to be coloured with irony (Context 7) and bitter sarcasm (Contexts 5 and 6).

(c) The+NP(idiomatic)+of+NP

8. the back porches of forever
9. the drop seats of buses
10. the open flies of war
11. the back seat of **the** car

8, 9, 10 I have waited /toes curled, hat rolled /heart and genitals
/in hand /on **the back porches /of forever** /in the kitchens and fields
/of rejections /on the cold marble steps /of America's White Out-House
/in **the drop seats of buses /and the open flies of war**

11 Your daughter wears a jock strap, /Your son he wears a bra, /
Your brother joneded your cousin /in **the back seat of the car.** /The
thirteens. Right On.

Comment: Contexts 8, 9, 10 present a truly horrible picture of the state of rejection. Context 11 comes from the poem 'The Thirteens', referring to 13th amendment, which abolished slavery. Strictly speaking, its structure does contain the definite article before the noun, creating an exception. But for the idiomatic nature of 'the back seat', the definite article would have justified moving it to category (k). In its critical spirit and implied generalisation, the sequence belongs here rather than in (k).

(d) the+ADJ+N(sg)+of+N(uncount)

12. the shabby curtain of youth

13. the awful fear of losing

14. the quiet slope of memory

12 Other acquainted years /sidle /with modest /decorum /across the
scrim of toughened /tears and to a stage /planked with laughter
boards /and waxed with rueful loss. /But forty /with the authorized
/brazenness of a uniformed /cop stomps /no-knocking /into the script
/ /bumps a funky grind on **the /shabby curtain of youth** /and delays
the action.

13 Beside you, prone, /my naked skin finds/fault *in* touching./Yet it
is you /who draws away./The tacit fact is:/**the awful fear of losing**/
is not enough to cause/a fleeing love/to stay.

14 Evicted from sleep's mute palace, /I wait in silence /for the
bridal croon; /your legs rubbing /insistent /rhythm against my thighs,
/your breath moaning /a canticle in my hair. /But the solemn /moments,
/unuttering, pass in /unaccompanied procession. /You, whose chanteys
hummed /my life alive, have withdrawn /your music and lean inaudibly
/on **the quiet slope of memory.**

Comment: The feeling in these lines is that of longing and/or nostalgia rather than acute despair or sarcasm expressed in the context previously studied. Context 12 comes from 'On Reaching Forty', a poem on the personal (though generalizable) history of an individual. In contexts 13 ('Prelude to a Parting') and 14 ('Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?') the setting is intimate, and the feeling is that of regret. Both refer (indirectly in 13 and directly in 14) to a history of the persona's love affair. It should be noted that, *given the absence of grammatical endings as well as the noun phrase after 'of' consisting of one noun, this category is the best syntactic fit to the original studied line.*

(e) the+PPart+N+of+NP

15.the stilled repair of groans
 16.the famed paint of dead masters
 15 Or is guilt your nightly mare /bucking wake your evenings' share /of **the stilled repair of groans** /and the absence of despair /over yonder?

16 His lupin fields spurn old /Deceit and agile poppies dance /In golden riot. Each day is /Fulminant, exploding brightly /Under the gaze of his exquisite /Sires, frozen in **the famed paint /Of dead /masters**. Audacious /Sunlight casts defiance /At their feet.

Comment: The contexts differ in their message and implications. The first belongs to Angelou's political poetry, the second is a contemplative description. However, irony is a unifying feature of both contexts, and in this sense they are a variation of category (b), with a singular noun in the first lexical slot.

(f) the+ADJ+Npl+of+NP

- 17. the small fists of sleeping children
- 18. the juicy secrets of black thighs
- 19. the jobless streets of wine and wondering
- 20. the big ears of overcurious adults
- 21. the liquid notes of sorrow songs
- 22. the unsung notes of night

17 I keep on dying again. /Veins collapse, opening like **the /Small fists of sleeping / Children**. /Memory of old tombs, /Rotting flesh and worms do /Not convince me against /The challenge. The years /And cold defeat live deep in /Lines along my face. /They dull my eyes, yet /I keep on dying, /Because I love to live.

18 People. Black and fast. Scattered /Watermelon seeds on /A summer street. rinning in /Ritual, sassy in pomp. /From a slow-moving train /They are precious. Stolen gems /Unsaleable and dear. Those / Dusky undulations sweat of forest /Nights, damp dancing, **the juicy / Secrets of black thighs**.

19 Our woman notes:/(This coffee's much too strong). /**The jobless streets of /Wine and wandering** when /Mornings promise no bright relief

20 You fought to die, thinking /In destruction lies the seed /Of birth. You may be right. /I will remember silent walks in /Southern woods and long talks /In low voices /Shielding meaning from **the big ears /Of overcurious adults**. /You may be right. /Your slow return from /Regions of terror and bloody /Screams, races my heart.

21 We swallow the odors of Southern cities, /Fatback boiled to submission, /Tender evening poignancies of /Magnolia and the great green /Smell of fresh sweat. /In Southern fields, /The sound of distant /Feet running, or dancing, /And **the liquid notes of /Sorrow songs,** /Waltzes, screams and /French quadrilles float over /The loam of Georgia.

22 In the night noisy with /street cries and the triumph /of amorous insects, I focus beyond /those cacophonies for /the anthem of your hands and swelling chest, /for the perfect harmonies which are/your lips. Yet darkness brings /no syncopated promise. I rest somewhere /between **the unsung notes of night**. / Shaker, why don't you sing?

Comment: Interestingly, these seemingly disparate contexts do have something in common. Contexts 18, 19, and 21 contain mentions of human anatomy. Contexts 19, 20, and 22 describe the way of life of a particular populace. Contexts 21 and 22 share the same variable in the first lexical slot, hence Context 22 was included here, while the structure warranted its inclusion in (d), and the passive meaning of 'unsung' in (e).

(g) the+ADJ+Npl+of+N

- 23. the familiar bonds of disconsolation
- 24. the killing floor of innocents
- 25. the red hills of Georgia
- 26. the grinding blades of ignorance

23 Hope fades, day is gone /into its irredeemable place /and I am thrown back into **the familiar /bonds of disconsolation**

24 Yes./Unless you keep walking more /and talking less./Yes. /Unless the keeper of our lives /releases me from all commandments. /Yes. /And your lives,/never mine to live, /will be executed upon **the killing floor of innocents**. /Unless you match my heart and words, /saying with me, /I shall not be moved

25 In Virginia tobacco fields,/leaning into the curve / /of Steinway /pianos, along Arkansas roads,/in **the red hills of Georgia**,/into the palms of her chained hands, /she /cried against calamity, /You have tried to destroy me /and though I perish daily, /I shall not be moved.

26 They sprouted like young weeds,/but she could not shield their growth /from **the grinding blades of ignorance**, nor /shape them into symbolic topiaries. /She sent them away,/underground, overland, in coaches and /shoeless.

Comment: In context 23 the persona examines her states of mind during the day and at night; the given sequence belongs to the description of night. In contexts 24-26 the struggles are not spiritual; they come from the same poem ('Our Grandmothers') and refer to the defiance of enslaved women and mothers. Here one could point to struggle and suffering as the underlying unifying principle. Context 24 is an exception grammatically, because the first noun is in the singular and the second in the plural, in complete opposition to the general pattern. This particular pattern (the+ADJ+Nsg+of+Npl) does not exist in Angelou's corpus, so possibly context 24 should have remained unclassified.

(h) the+ADJ+of+my+N/NP

- 27.the slack walls of my purse, pulsing
- 28.the slithering sound of my own skin
- 29.the green shoots of my carefully planted years

27 The slack /walls of my purse, pulsing /pudenda, await you with /a new bride's longing.

28 His lidless eye slid sideways,/and he rose into my deepest / yearning, bringing gifts of ready rhythms, and /hourly wound around /my chest, /holding me fast in taut /security. /Then, glistening like /diamonds strewn / upon a black girl's belly, he left me. And nothing /remains. Beneath my left /breast, two perfect identical punctures, /through which I claim /the air I breathe and / the slithering sound of my own skin /moving in the dark.

29 The loss of love and youth /and fire came raiding,/riding, /a horde of plunderers /on one caparisoned steed,/sucking up the sun drops, / trampling the green shoots /of my carefully planted years.

Comment: There is a unifying principle. The first two contexts are about sexual encounters, real (context 26) and figuratively described (context 27), and the third is about 'loss of *love* (my emphasis) and youth'.

(i) the+ADJ+N+OF+Det+NP/N

- 30.the sinuous cemetery of my many brothers
- 31.the rippled surface of our grave

30. Father. /I wait for you /wrapped in /the entrails of /whales. Your /blood now /blues /spume /over /**the rippled /surface of our /grave.**

31. No / the gap-legg'd whore / of the eastern shore / enticing Europe to COME in her /and turns her pigeon-shit back to me /to me /who stoked the coal that drove the ships /which brought her over **the sinuous cemetery /of my many brothers**

Comment: As an exception, this category was formed according to meaning, since both contexts refer to the Atlantic ocean as the burial ground containing the remains of African slaves-to-be. In terms of structure, context 29 belongs to (h).

(j) the+ADJ+N+of+a+ADJ+N

- 31.the authorized brazenness of a uniformed cop
- 32.the fingered work of a toothless woman in Pakistan
- 33.the gentle buttocks of a young giant

31 But forty /with the authorized /brazenness of a uniformed /cop
stomps /no-knocking
into the script /bumps a funky grind on the /shabby curtain of youth
/and delays the action.

32 There is no warning rattle at the door /nor heavy feet to stomp the
foyer boards./Safe in the dark prison, I know that /light slides over
/the fingered work of a toothless/woman in Pakistan.

33 The eye follows, the land /Slips upward, creases down, forms /The
gentle buttocks of a young /Giant. In the nestle,/Old adobe bricks,
washed of /Whiteness, paled to umber,/Await another century.

Comment: Context 31 describe the intrusion of middle age; context 32 the intrusion of dawn. Context 33 praises a landscape. In contexts 31 and 33, the sequences in question are metaphors, unlike in context 32.

(k) the+ADJ+N+of+the+NP

- 34 the wonderful word of the Son of God
- 35 the east wall of the warehouse

34 Joy, joy / Your word. /Joy Joy /The wonderful word of **the Son** of
God.

35 sneered at /the way Coleridge shifted /a ton of canned goods from
/**the east wall of the warehouse** /all the way to the west,

Comment: The two contexts have nothing in common. The first is praise of the word of Christ, the second is part of a description of a key character's habitual activities. The character in question suffers persecution at work and inflicts it at home. This paradox is in the focus of the poem. Evaluatively, both contexts are opposites.

(l) Unclassified

- 27.the slick feel of other people's property
- 28.the 30's version of everybody in the pool

27 Her arms semaphore fat triangles,/Pudgy hands bunched on layered
hips /Where bones idle under years of fatback /And lima beans. /Her
jowls shiver in accusation /Of crimes cliched by /Repetition. Her
children, strangers /To childhood's toys, play /Best the games of
darkened doorways,/Rooftop tag, and know **the slick feel of /Other
people's property.**

28 His nerves stretched two thousand miles /found a flinging singing
lady,
breasting a bar /calling straights on the dice, /gin over ice, /and
the 30's version of /everybody in the /pool. /(She didn't want him.)

Comment: Perhaps these contexts might be distinguished by a grammar word at the beginning of the object of 'of'. The evaluation of the experiences described is negative, with a touch of bitter irony.

The classification presented here is far from unproblematic. Since there were few perfect matches (identical grammatical patterns), the principle adopted here was that in the sequences after 'of' more variation was allowed. This was done on the hunch that in the sequence 'the * * of *', the lexical slots preceding 'of' semantically carried more weight. Such a hunch, however, interfered with the Russellian definition of logical language: the grammar remains in place, it is the vocabulary that varies. This alone invalidates this procedure from the perspective of Contextual Prosodic Theory. Also, the analysis in this section contains several disclaimers: in one case a grammar string was categorised because it contained the same lexical variable as another in the group (context 22 in category (c)), and in several cases a sequence was simply classified together with other sequences on the basis of its meaning (e.g. in (i) both noun phrases refer to the ocean as the grave of generations of transported slaves; otherwise context 30 should belong to (h) and context 31 to (e) since it contains a past participle). Although both these tactics were resorted to for the classification to make some sense to the reader in the presence of too much variation, they directly undermine the basic principle of logical form that Contextual Prosodic Theory rests upon.

It is no wonder, then, that such a categorisation yielded unimpressive results. Although in the majority of cases some authorial tendency could be observed when it came to particular patterns (e.g. negative tone, bitter irony, description of nostalgia or exploitation), we cannot declare that this tendency was conclusive. Although it was somewhat more specific than could have been warranted by the reader's expectations from grammatical meanings of articles, determiners, plural endings and passive meanings of past participles, it was in the majority of cases not specific enough to have significantly contributed to our further understanding or appreciation of Angelou's style.

Grammatically speaking, the only category close enough to 'the me myself of me' was (d). Firstly, it did not contain forms marked with endings such as -s, -ed or -ing, and secondly, the lexical slot after 'of' was filled with one word. Here, encouragingly, the unifying principle was sufficiently clear: 'longing and nostalgia rather than acute despair' in contexts of the persona's 'personal history'. But does it fit very well with the tone of "Prisoner"? Let us consider two possible responses.

Response 1: Possibly not. It is certainly the case that all three contexts in section (d) ('the shabby curtain of youth', 'the awful fear of losing' and 'the quiet slope of memory') are contemplatively focused on the self (not on social critique for instance, unlike so many other contexts studied in this section),

which is in agreement with 'me myself of me'. Still, they are concerned with the issues of private life, not despair or mere survival. In any case, these three instances might not be enough for us to pronounce that this must be the general meaning Angelou tended to attribute to this sequence in her writing. However, we still may take it into account when interpreting 'Prisoner'.

Response 2: Possibly. The only category strictly conforming to 'the * * of *' showed a certain semantic tendency. From the Russellian perspective, this is a finding. Besides, the poem says: "The me myself of me sneaks in the folds and history of fear". The persona reminisces about the past, although not from a romantic or nostalgic point of view, as in category (d). A semantic tendency of viewing oneself from the point of view of memory ('memory' being a key word in Context 14) is clearly in place. Regrettably, there are only three lines in the whole authorial corpus.

Overall, this section has shown that Angelou's use of specific grammatical patterns, at least where 'the * * of *' is concerned, might not be generalizable enough to inform the enigmatic sequence 'the me myself of me' with a particular meaning. This may be due in part to the very diverse patterns that generally fit this search line in the English language, and, in particular, the diversity of Adj+N combinations that so frequently fill the two first lexical slots in it. Given this, it is encouraging that some pattern was still observed. Are we then entitled to any generalisations in the language when it comes to Angelou's 'me myself of me'? Can the reference corpus be of any use at all, or is CPT at fault? This will be addressed in the next section.

2.3 Verdict on 'me myself of me'

The previous section was concerned with observing patterns of meaning in sequences fitting the searchline 'the * * of *' in Angelou's corpus. This was done to answer the following question: since Contextual Prosodic Theory routinely compares authorial grammar strings with those in the reference corpus in order to interpret authorial text, does this mean that all grammar strings in any text 'mean the same'? The analytical scheme implemented in the previous section showed that they do not, although some tendencies of meaning and use may be observed. However, the discussion of results in the previous section leads to the conclusion that very few instances discussed were a perfect match with the line from "Prisoner" for a conclusive finding to emerge, whereas studying imperfect matches made little sense from the Russellian perspective. The semantic tendency observed in category (d) may suggest, together with the collocate 'history' in the original text, that the persona's understanding of 'self' involves a sense of personal history, touched by nostalgia. To anyone intrigued by the poem, this is a finding.

Studying a grammatical pattern in an author's corpus in the hope of finding significant tendencies of use might prove rewarding, but possibly not

as much or not in this instance. It is certainly possible to say that comparing an author's grammar string with its exact matches in the reference corpus is both Russellian and will yield sufficient corpus data to draw civilised scientific conclusions. This is consistent with Wittgenstein's idea of a system underlying usage, expressed in his last philosophical work 'On Certainty':

141. When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)

142. It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.

144. [...] What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.

What do we then make of 'me myself of me' and does it mean 'the United States of America' (and/or 'the other side of me')? The answer is twofold. By creating a nonexistent repetitive combination Angelou appeals to what is in it ***the most prototypical***. This is simply because it does not exist, and its repetitive volatility might as well be understood by the recipient as a combination of empty slots. On the other hand, 'me myself of me' is pure grammar 'and no vocabulary whatsoever' (Russell, 1956: 197; see also Louw and Milojkovic 2015). Since it lacks vocabulary, wildcarding the grammar slots as quasi-propositional (lexical) variables with a view to establishing a meaning could be viewed as unscientifically optimistic. Given all the analyses so far presented, of both the reference and the authorial corpus, we might conclude that 'the me myself of me' might mean 'the private, sentimental and nostalgic side of me'. This conclusion is tentative, following a complex analysis, but can more be expected of a work of poetry? And is poetry not always in between prototypicality and idiosyncrasy? The analysis, however, seems worth doing.

3 Opposition of "sun*" and "night"

The opening lines of the poem catch the reader's eye because of an inherent paradox: "Even sunlight dares / and trembles through / my bars / to shimmer / dances on / the floor." Perhaps the surprise is not so much the animate nature of the sun, but that the sun, an elemental force, is presented as a weaker and challenging entity ("even sunlight dares"). Can anything on Earth be so ruthless as to intimidate the sun itself to the point of trembling? But the stylistic effect of surprise is achieved by more than lexical collocation. The syntactic structure of the opening line is also paradoxical. What follows is the concordance of 'even *dare*' from COCA.

1 A herd of ibex grazed on a cliff high above the Judean Desert each of their tiny, antelope-like bodies dwarfed by a pair of giant, curved horns. A welcome breeze blew across their backs as they searched for what little shrubbery there was here in the great big nothing, each of them pushing their hot, cracked noses across the hot, cracked earth, gnawing at whatever succulent bits of green had managed to push their way through. One ibex tempted by the sight of a few lonely blades of grass on the cliff's edge grazed apart from the others, closer to the bone-shattering drop **than even they dared go.**

2 Despite the evidence of the box office, he still believed that his type of plays and songs had an audience, and virtually none of his work had yet been preserved on film. The care and effort of both men would be rewarded more amply **than perhaps even they dared hope.** Cagney won his only Best Actor Oscar and established forever the breadth of his range as a performer. Cohan, whose plays have almost disappeared from circulation, is best remembered today for the songs in the movie and as the character played by Cagney, the cocky guy with the stiff-legged strut who dances right up the side of the stage.

3 "Namangan is a religious town," explains Mahmud Imakov, a Birlik activist who went there to investigate the incident. "Not **even Uzbeks dare** to touch women. Russians have never been known to do so. "

4 The criminals, led by Ivan the Brown, decided to get hold of the young man's apparel. They proposed a card game with clothing at stake. Everybody knew that this lad would soon be naked, but no one could do anything about it; **even Sazikov dared not intervene.** The camp rule was that whoever interfered would be killed.

5 We are told that Nairobi is a dangerous place at night. Dangerous? I ask him has he ever seen YouTube footage of the Park Slope riots when they've run out of chai lattes? He says "I don't believe you, not **even Nairobi dares** run out of chai lattes," and strongly advises us not to traipse about at night because NaiROBi (as it has been called) is quite capable of living up to its nickname.

6 Because the groups span the political spectrum, nonprofit reform isn't any party's plank, and cozy relations between established nonprofits and incumbent politicians mean that Congress isn't likely to press the IRS for tighter oversight. And with nonprofits providing rich sources of official-sounding quotes from every known political angle at daily " educational " forums, not **even journalists dare** to take note.

7 Can you open it? I can not. Then what are you working on? Oh, this is for me. A forgetting potion. I know too much about my future. The only way to protect it is to forget it. Well, what about this wand? You said that could help us. Oh, that. Well, apparently only those who used the portal can reopen it. So unless you can wield magic, I'm afraid you're going nowhere. Can you? Thought not. So you just expect us to stay here? What about protecting your precious future? That's exactly what I'm going to do. - He means to kill us, Swan. [Cackles] - No. I mean to put you someplace safe... someplace **even I dare** not go. Where I store the magic that is too dark or unpredictable even for me.

There are seven contexts overall. In contexts 3-7 the action of daring is negated. In contexts 1-2 the sequence is preceded by 'than', turning the action of daring into an impossible task (in context 2 the task verges on the possible because of the epistemic adverbial 'perhaps'). Since negation is implicit in the first two contexts and explicit in the remaining five, the overall implication is that even the entity theoretically entitled to daring does *not* dare. Sunlight in Angelou's opening line breaks rules of syntax by daring tremblingly to enter the space of the prison. This effect must be felt by the reader to some extent, and the corpus helps to explicate it fully.

Is this a consistent tendency of meaning ascribed to sunlight by Angelou? In the following concordance of 'sun*' from Angelou's authorial corpus, lines 7-9 come from "Prisoner":

1 Look you bright, you dusty sun, Array your golden coaches.
2 Warm mouths of Brandy Fine, Cautious sunlight on a patterned rug
Coughing laughte
3 ttle dyings and skies sated of ruddy sunsets of roseate dawns roil
ceaselessly in
4own caramel days of youth. Reject the sun-sucked tit of childhood
mornings. Poke a
5 permarket roasting' like the noonday sun national guard nervous
with his shining
6 On to the Sahara in a caravan the sun struck like an arrow but the
nights were
7 Even sunlight dares and trembles through my bars
8 and heels and blood-dried guns. Even sunshine dares. It's jail and
bail then rail
9 concrete death and beans. Then pale sun stumbles through the
poles of iron to wa
10 those apertures I see the rain. The sunfelt warmth now jabs
within my space and
11 u rose into my life Like a promised sunrise. Brightening my days
with the light
12 y, it's in the arch of my back, The sun of my smile, The ride of
my breasts, the
13 ed paint of dead masters. Audacious sunlight casts defiance at
their feet.
14 earth is much too red for comfort. Sunrise seems to hesitate and
in that second
15 stle in the autumn leaves "When the sun rises I am the time. When
the children s
16 A young body, light As winter sunshine, a new Seed's burning
promise Hung
17 nd the cotton to pick. Shine on me, sunshine, Rain on me, rain
Fall softly dewdr
18 Sun, rain, curving sky Mountain, oceans, lea
19 There ain't no pay beneath the sun As sweet as rest when a job's
well done.
20 ays and bygone And lone nights long Sun rays and sea waves And
star and stone Ma
21 ving room. Just like moons and like suns With the certainty of
tides, Just like

22 ringing the welcome rain Bad as the sun burning orange hot at
 midday Lifting the
 23 elfare line Below the rim where the sun don't shine But getting
 up stays on my m
 24 ried out to Thee In the heat of the sun, The cool of the moon, My
 screams search
 25 Some thought because they'd seen sunrise They'd see it rise
 again. But death
 26 The sun rises at midday. Nubile breasts sag to w
 27 nds and dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim
 the sky. But a b
 28 ogs my throat. It is upon me. It is sunrise, with Hope, its
 arrogant rider. My m
 29 each Your vaulted boudoirs, And the sun, capriciously, Struck
 silver fire from w
 30 ool, slick body toward the altar of sunlight. He was guileless,
 and slid into my
 31 untaintop. Love's warmth and Aton's sun disc caressed his skin,
 and once-dulled
 32 in too-large sweaters dream of the sunrise days of the British
 Raj. Awfully que
 33 caparisoned steed, sucking up the sun drops, trampling the green
 shoots of my

There are 33 lines overall. The concordance shows that in the majority of contexts the sun is presented as a force of nature, strong and independent, sometimes too hot to bear (e.g. lines 5, 6, 22, 24). However, in four lines it is 'cautious' (line 2), hesitant (line 14), 'light' (line 16) and 'casts defiance' (line 13). The idea of the weaker sun challenging a stronger force is clearly pursued in line 13, although generally this understanding is not typical of Angelou. Line 13 is the ending to "California Prodigal", in which the image of sunlight entering a closed space enforces the idea of nature rebelling against artificial imposition, especially given the adjective 'dead': "Each day is /Fulminant, exploding brightly /Under the gaze of his exquisite /Sires, frozen in the famed paint /Of **dead** masters. **Audacious /Sunlight casts defiance /At their feet.**"

Night in "Prisoner" is in clear opposition to the sun. This is the beginning of stanza 3: "Black night. The me /myself of me sleeks /in the folds and history /of fear." 'Black night' followed by a full stop comes across as the ultimate state of affairs, seemingly irreversible. The following is a concordance of 'night' from Angelou's authorial corpus:

1 y smile, my wit, my hips, they'd spend one night, or two or three.
 But.
 2 ravan, The sun struck like an arrow but the nights were grand, and
 that's how I fo
 3 Lying thinking Last night How to find my soul a home Where
 4 She wished of him a lover's kiss and nights of coupled twining.
 They laced
 5 e years to find itself at the flophouse of night to sleep and be
 seen no more. Wi

6 ome poets sing their melodies tendering my nights sweetly. My
pencil halts and wi
7 , a death of coke. A kill of horse eternal night's barbiturates.
One hundred yout
8 s afraid of men, sin and the humors of the night. When she saw a
bed locks clicke
9 a laugh (longer ago than the smile). Open night news-eyed I watch
channels of hu
**10 's jail and bail then rails to run. Black night. The me myself of
me sleeks in t**
**11 lulls and clangs and memory of hate. Then night and sleep and
dreams. It's jail**
12 thern spas lash fast their doors upon the night when winds of
death blow down yo
13 es Keen toed shoes High water pants Saddy night dance Red soda
water and anybody
14 . Those Dusky undulations sweat of forest Nights, damp dancing,
the juicy Secret
15 Her lips are ridged and fleshy. Purpled night birds snuggled to
rest. The mout
16 Byways and bygone And lone nights long Sun rays and sea waves And
17 o cave my home This is my torture My long nights, lone
18 rows criss-cross the world And dead-tired nights of yearning
Thunderbolts on lea
19 every baby crying Shame the blanket of my night And all my days
are dying
20 elling I bear in the tide. Leaving behind nights of terror and
fear I rise Into
21 n't they fine? Black like the hour of the night When your love
turns and wriggle
22 t all. Tough guys in a fight All alone at night Life doesn't
frighten me at all.
23 I was out balling the town down Saturday night. Thank you, Lord.
I want to than
24 I want to thank You. I went to sleep last night And I arose with
the dawn, I kno
25 ms, Columbus. A cool new moon, a Winter's night, calm blood,
Sluggish, moving on
26 came home (I might be forgiven) that last night, I had been
running in the Big b
27 rose, would make her write, both day and night, the most
rewarding prose. She'd
28 nd for me, press steady, as the weight of night. And I will show
cascades of bri
29 There are some nights when sleep plays coy, aloof and
30 right, They ought to study me on Saturday night. My job at the
plant ain't the b
31 d have the luck to be Black on a Saturday night.
32 hina all the earth is horror and the dark night long. Then Before
the dawning, b
33 ory. O Shaker, why don't you sing? In the night noisy with street
cries and the
34 est somewhere between the unsung notes of night. Shaker, why
don't you sing?
35 wondered (the next day, or even the same night). Everybody. But
the weasy littl
36 terror with dread in every glance. Their nights are threatened
daily by a grim

The opposition of 'sun*' and 'night' in the poem is a reminder of the same technique used to study the complete corpus of the British poet Philip Larkin (Milojkovic, 2011). Angelou's corpus contains a roughly similar number of references to 'sun*' and 'night' (33 vs. 36). Milojkovic (2011) compares 'day' and 'night' in Larkin's corpus and finds a similar number of lines (71 for 'day' and 72 for 'night'). Larkin was known to suffer from depression and the (un)surprising conclusion in Milojkovic (2011) was that the persona found 'day' troublesome, while 'night' brought relief. Not so in Angelou's corpus, in which 'night' is the scene of a range of occurrences: lovers' encounters (e.g. lines 1, 4, 8), contemplation (e.g. line 3), forbidden practices (e.g. line 7), and generally enjoyments and frustrations of all sorts. Life itself unfolds in the concordance. When it comes to "Prisoner", the night is not described as 'dark', which is the more frequent qualifier in the corpus (there are 690 instances of 'dark night' in COCA), but as 'black' (162 instances of 'black night'). When Angelou's corpus was searched for 'black', a convincing positive semantic prosody was discovered (23 positive, 5 negative and 3 neutral contexts). The same applied to 'Black', capitalised when referring to African Americans (26 positive, 3 negative and one neutral context). 'Black night' in "Prisoner" is, after all, a friendly presence. It is indeed a time of "sleep and dreams", bringing relief to the prisoner.

Overall, this section has used a variety of corpus stylistic tactics to elucidate the relationship between 'sun*' and 'night' in the poem "Prisoner". While sunlight breaks the rules of syntax to appear a hardly relevant, but impossibly daring force in the persona's encounter with evil, it is the night that envelops the prisoner in its secure blackness. The latter is confirmed by the study of lexical collocation both in the reference corpus and in Angelou's authorial corpus. The concordances of 'sun*' and 'night' showed enough attitudinal variation to suggest that stylistically both these key words are not used atypically in the poem under discussion. Still, the daring of the sun and the saving grace of the night are specific to the poem, and, which is more relevant to the purpose of this paper, these semantic nuances were uncovered by means of corpus stylistics.

4 Opposition of the present and the past

It is the third stanza of 'Prisoner' that contains references to the past: 'history of fear' and 'memory of hate'. Here is the stanza in full:

Black night. The me
myself of me sleeks
in the folds and **history**
of fear. To secret hold
me deep and close my

ears of lulls and clangs
and **memory of hate**.
Then night and sleep
and dreams.

It's jail
and bail
then rails to run.

This is what Louw (2000) calls "underprovided context of situation": both 'history of' and 'memory of' followed by a noun appear to be used more negatively by Angelou than by mankind in general. Surely these structures do not carry negative semantic prosody in the reference corpus? This is the frequency list of noun collocates of 'history of *' from COCA:

science (578), art (456), **violence** (366), mankind (344), **heart** (202), life (190), **drug** (176), philosophy (175), women (173), medicine (167), **breast** (159), **slavery** (139), man (134), Christianity (131), **abuse** (127), ideas (124), humanity (120), music (115), time (114), **cancer** (113), **depression** (103), civilisation (102), television (101), baseball (96), **diabetes** (91), **discrimination** (91), **substance** (90), love (89), Islam (88), rock (80), **racism** (79)

Among the top 31 collocates, there are 11 negative ones. One third is considerable, but not predominant, therefore the finding is that there is no negative semantic prosody in the corpus. Then, a closer look at the collocates suggests that the meaning of these combinations is not uniform. Below is the list of the negative collocates of 'history of' together with brief notes on how they are used in the corpus.

violence – mostly individual, but there are exceptions (e.g. 'part of what it means to be human. Our history of violence stretches to the dawn of humanity')

'heart' – only 'disease' and such

'drug' – abuse and related issues; mostly individual, although there are exceptions ('drug policy')

'breast' – either a family or a personal history of breast cancer

'abuse' – either personal or family history

'slavery' – might refer to an individual family, more often to a community; or general history

'cancer' – either personal or family history

'diabetes' – either family or personal history

'substance' – substance abuse or related disorders

'racism' – either a racist individual or a racist community

Except for the collocates 'slavery' and 'racism', which may be used of both a community and an individual, the remaining nine collocates are used when discussing an individual's illness or disorder or a family history of such an illness/disorder. Also, if the source discusses an individual or family history, normally the structure is preceded by a determiner, such as the indefinite article or a possessive (e.g. "he had a history of drug abuse"; "treatment of heart attack patients depends on their history of cancer"). Angelou's wording is preceded by 'the' in "the folds and history of fear". In the corpus, the definite article is likelier to be used of communities (e.g. "which acknowledged the history of racism in the United States and reaffirmed our commitment to its eradication"; "the history of drug abuse, illegal drugs and federal drug law enforcement in America"). At this point we may safely turn to the corpus-based Collins, whose lexicographers have done their work on the word 'history' more thoroughly than it is possible to achieve within the limits of this paper, and who single out seven meanings of the word. Three meanings are of interest to us:

1. 'You can refer to the events of the past as **history**. You can also refer to the past events which concern a particular topic or place as its history' (one of the examples given is "religious history").

2. 'If a person or a place has a **history of** something, it has been very common or has happened frequently in their past' (the example given is "a history of drink problems").

3. 'Someone's **history** is the set of facts that are known about their past' (the example given is "He couldn't get a new job because of his medical history").

So whose history exactly does Angelou mean by "history of fear"? The person's history, or America's history? The definite article suggests the latter. Below is the list of the first 15 noun collocates of 'the history of' in COCA, and they all suggest general, and not an individual's history:

science (459), art (321), mankind (315), philosophy (148), life (146), medicine (133), women (111), man (108), ideas (99), Christianity (93), music (87), television (86), baseball (85), humanity (80), civilization (79)

Also, in the 113 instances of 'history of cancer' in COCA the definite article is used of an individual only twice, in one and the same context recorded twice: 'and he had the history of cancer'. In the 103 instances of 'history of depression', the definite article appears once when discussing a particular individual ("the abuse he must have suffered, not to mention the long history of depression") and two times when talking about a rule, any individual (which meaning also fits Angelou's text). We cannot therefore rule out either sense and must conclude that Angelou may be referring both to the history of America/the

African American community, and to the persona's history. Such a duality of meaning would fit the corpus-derived subtext of 'me myself of me' as discussed in Section 2.

Even if all the three meanings singled out by Collins might be attributed to Angelou's poem, she clearly uses the sequence 'history of' negatively, whereas in COCA it is negative only in one third of the first 31 instances. "Prisoner" is by no means an exception in Angelou's writing. Below is the concordance of 'history' from Angelou's corpus. The node is underlined, and the negative collocates are marked in bold:

1 **ams loud and vain** remember her riches her history **slain** now she is
striding although she had

2 e me myself of me **sleeks** in the folds and history of **fear**. To secret hold
me deep and close

3 You may write me down in history With your **bitter**,
twisted lies, You may t

4 Out of the huts of history's **shame** I rise Up from a
past that's roote

5 **warm of Unclean badgers, to consume** Their history. **Tired now of pedestal
existence** For **fear**

6 ever understand? We have lived a **painful** history, we know the **shameful
past**, but I keep on

7 he names, swirling ribbons in the wind of history: **nigger, nigger bitch,
heifer, mammy, prop**

8 For this bright morning dawning for you. History, despite its **wrenching
pain**, Cannot be un

The concordance clearly shows that Angelou's use of 'history' is overwhelmingly negative, without a single exception. 'History' is twice co-selected with 'pain*', and twice with 'shame*'. This is the picture of the kind of heritage an African American is born with, according to Angelou.

When it comes to the sequence 'memory of' in "Prisoner", the context of situation in the poem is even more "underprovided" than in the case of 'history of'. Below is the frequency list for 'memory of' followed by a noun from COCA (35 top collocates of 'memory of', 5 was the cut-off point):

things (27), target (26), childhood (24), Dr (23), events (23), water (21), **pain** (18), light (17), man (17), people (15), love (14), Mr (13), time (11), **war** (11), world (11), life (10), **slavery** (10), jet (9), children (8), Miss (8), Mrs (8), **death** (7), fire (7), happiness (6), mother (6), music (6), president (6), **suffering** (6), summer (6), Americans (5), facts (5), home (5), mankind (5), men (5), sunshine (5)

Overall, the semantic prosody of ‘memory of’ in COCA is less negative than of ‘history of’: one seventh of the top noun collocates are negative (in the case of ‘history of NOUN’, it was one third). It should be noted that the SP of ‘fire’ in the corpus is mixed, so it cannot be considered a negative collocate. When it comes to ‘memory of’ followed by a title – Mr, Mrs or Miss – these are isolated memories, not necessarily in the context of paying respects, so they do not render the overall impression more negative. For the sake of comparison, below is the concordance of ‘memory’ from Angelou’s corpus. The semantic prosody is clearly negative:

1 **greed** and why were they? **Enfeebled** thrones a memory of mortal kindness **exiled** from this ea

2 ep and close my ears of lulls and **clangs** and memory of hate. Then night and sleep and dreams

3 ng like the Small fists of sleeping Children. Memory of old **tombs, Rotting flesh and worms** do

4 the world And **dea** Memory Cotton rows crisscross

5 sic and lean inaudibly on the quiet slope of memory. O Shaker, why don’t you sing?

6 es, briefly, see with a **hurtful** clarity. Our memory, suddenly sharpened, examines, **gnaws** on

The concordance consists of five lines, and negative collocates are present in four. Is the persona the object or the generator of hate? Since Angelou’s structure is ‘ears of... memory of hate’, the persona is not an active agent, but the recipient of hatred. Either he or she has been rendered too passive to actively hate, or this is a response in the Christian spirit unmentioned here but sung elsewhere in Angelou’s corpus (e.g. “Just like Job” and in particular “Our Grandmothers”, where the victim appears “clothed in the finery of faith”). This line of inquiry, namely a corpus investigation of Angelou’s connection with Christianity, could be pursued further. Overall, judging by the semantic prosody of ‘history’ and ‘memory’ emerging from Angelou’s corpus in the whole context of the poem, the persona can barely survive under the pressure of evil faced as part of their personal and collective history.

What connects past and present experiences in the poem is the alliteration of ‘rails to run’ in the refrain. Despite the repetition, which seems to contribute to the spirit of doom, the semantic prosody of Npl+to+V in COCA is in fact positive. These are the top fifteen most frequent combinations:

ways to get (2050), **ways to make** (2001), things to say (1539), things **to come** (1030), points to close (1020), **ways to go** (828), **ways to improve** (807),

ages **to contribute** (778), **ways to help** (760), questions to ask (657), **ways to use** (633), **efforts to improve** (621), **students to learn** (608), **generations to come** (595), **ways to keep** (574)

The constructive semantic prosody of 'ways' as the most frequent QPV in the first lexical slot, and 'get', 'make', 'improve', 'use' in the second lexical slot is interestingly restricted by 'things to come' in position 4 and 'generations to come' in position 14. The persona, dreaming of escape, is also aware of the vicious circle of future imprisonments: "It's jail/ and bail/ then rails to run." The subtext of "rails to run" is both hopeful and fatalistic, but at the moment the promise of freedom seems to be more dominant in the persona's mind.

5. Conclusion

The paper offers a corpus stylistic analysis of Maya Angelou's poem 'Prisoner'. By corpus stylistic analysis we mean analysing particular sequences in texts by comparing them to those in the reference corpus. This procedure hinges on exploring deviations from semantic prosody when it comes to lexis, and corpus-derived subtext when it comes to grammar strings. These two searches are at the core of Contextual Prosodic Theory, a corpus stylistic theory explained in the Introduction.

An author's text can be interpreted in two ways: the wordings may be juxtaposed with other instances of usage in the authorial corpus; this will lead to highlighting specificities of the author's style, as well as of meanings he or she may attach to such wordings. Alternatively, or as step two, authorial lexical or lexico-grammatical combinations may be compared to those in a balanced and representative corpus of the language in question, for the specificities of use and meaning to become fully apparent. Both these principles were resorted to. In the latter procedure, the reference corpus in question was the Corpus of Contemporary American English.

The paper first focuses on the seemingly least interpretable sequence of words: "the me myself of me". By comparing it to the most frequent combinations in the reference corpus yielded by the searchline 'the * * of *', it might be concluded that the combination prototypically evokes either an institution (e.g. the most frequent combination, 'the United States of America'), or an inner conflict (e.g. 'the other side of me' as the most frequent combination of 'the * * of me'). The persona upholds his or her immediate personhood almost as an institution, while at the same time having difficulty keeping it whole while under pressure. On the other hand, Angelou's three authorial sequences answering to the searchline 'the * * of *' focused more on private issues than social criticism, and were all three used in contexts less dramatic. There were, however, context

clues in the poem that might tentatively connect the private aspect in Angelou's corpus with the social perspective from which the whole poem was written. That connection was the suffering of an individual as a result of social injustice – a motif running through the whole poem. The paucity of matches in the authorial corpus prevented further elaboration.

In the subsequent sections, the paper shows that the relationship between 'sunlight' and 'night' in the poem is not that of struggle, but rather of night's ability to give more relief to the prisoner. Sunlight is too weak to seriously engage the evil that oppresses the persona, although it does put up a fight. Such an understanding of the friendly presence of night and the rebelliousness of the daring but delicate sun is present in some instances in the authorial corpus, and on the whole is not atypical of Angelou. These conclusions were reached by studying the semantic prosody of 'sun*' and 'night' in Angelou's corpus.

At the same time, the persona's passive survival revolves around awareness of the past, both collective and individual. Angelou's use of the sequences 'history of' and 'memory of' is far more negative than in the reference corpus, but consistent with the authorial corpus: Angelou's use of 'history' and 'memory' is generally explicitly negative. The corpus-derived subtext of the suggestive alliteration "rails to run" betrays the prisoner's immediate desire to escape. The notion that they are doomed to being caught and released again, perhaps for 'generations to come', comes second on the frequency list. For the reader, this notion is reinforced by the repetitiveness of the refrain, and is foregrounded over the constructive implications of 'rails to run'.

The paper has shown the possibilities of corpus stylistic analysis for unpacking the subtleties of meaning in a poetic text. When it comes to the innovative suggestion that authorial grammar strings may also inhere meanings peculiar to the author, the sample studied on this occasion has not proved sufficient for definitive conclusions.

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