

## POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES

AS WE NOTED in the previous chapter, there is a cogent argument, first made by Morawski (1939, 334; 1940, 506, 509, 516, 518), that Jehan's work is united by its use of possessive adjectives. In his smaller corpus of poems which he attributes to Jehan, Morawski notes that there are no instances of the analogical use of the masculine possessive adjectives *mon*, *ton*, or *son* before a feminine singular vowel-initial noun. Instead, Jehan appears to consistently prefer to use the earlier system involving the elided forms *m'*, *t'*, and *s'*. This is despite the fact, he argues, that the analogical use of *mon* etc. was increasingly possible in several dialects at the time that Jehan wrote his texts. For Morawski, this is the most important linguistic feature of Jehan's *œuvre*, and in his eyes unifies the corpus to the exclusion of possible external contenders. Munk Olsen (1963b, 155), while critical of Morawski's reliance on this single feature as a means of attributing authorship to Jehan, does not disagree with his analysis, arguing that by the fourteenth century, use

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**ABSTRACT** In this chapter, I address the linguistic feature taken by Joseph Morawski (1939, 1940) to be definitive evidence for the exclusion of texts from Jehan's *œuvre*, namely his apparent non-use of *mon*, *ton*, or *son* before feminine singular vowel-initial nouns. Digital analysis reveals that Jehan is indeed consistent in his preference for elided *m'*, *t'*, and *s'*, and that this consistency is shared in *Guillaume* and *Robert*, supporting their direct attribution. However, while Morawski and Munk Olsen (1963b) view Jehan's preference for elided *ma* etc. as a notable archaism, examination of the *B1-corpus* (a subset of the *B-corpus* contemporary with the *J-corpus*) and the *P-corpus* reveals that Jehan's practice is much more in keeping with fourteenth-century linguistic norms than has previously been assumed. In the cases of *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard*, I identify the variable use of metrically consistent *mon* etc. alongside elided *ma* etc. with feminine vowel-initial nouns, but rather than assuming, as Morawski did, that they must therefore be definitively excluded from Jehan's *œuvre*, I argue instead that, in the context of all the points of overlap observed up to this point, the evidence here supports the suggestion that these two texts are echoes of poems written by Jehan which subsequently underwent significant *remaniement*.

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of *mon*, etc. before a feminine vowel-initial noun was “tout à fait courant,”<sup>1</sup> and that the absence of this feature is therefore a peculiarity of the *J-corpus*.

Of course, finding an instance of *mon* etc. before a feminine vowel-initial noun would not be enough to prove that a text was not written by Jehan. The preferences and linguistic practices of an author will inevitably change over time, and the possible alternation of *mon* etc. with *ma* etc. for reasons of metre means that it is entirely possible that such decisions were not solely due to authorial preference. That said, Morawski’s observation regarding Jehan’s preference for elided *ma*, etc. does appear to be borne out by a holistic analysis of the *J-corpus*: in general, elided *ma* etc. appears before all feminine vowel-initial nouns (Table 25), and *mon* etc. is restricted to use before masculine nouns (Table 26).

Table 25. Examples of elided *ma* etc. preceding feminine vowel-initial nouns within the *J-corpus*.

| Text                   | Line | LH     | KW | RH                                    |
|------------------------|------|--------|----|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Deux chevaliers</i> | 106  | A toi  | m’ | ame et mon corps commant et a Jhesu   |
| <i>Buef</i>            | 617  | “Par   | t’ | ame pren y garde” et celle va tantost |
| <i>Mescreant</i>       | 12   | Jamais | s’ | ame n’avra vers Dieu redemption       |

Table 26. Examples of *mon* etc. preceding masculine vowel-initial nouns within the *J-corpus*.

| Text               | Line | LH                      | KW  | RH                                       |
|--------------------|------|-------------------------|-----|------------------------------------------|
| <i>Pecherresse</i> | 20   | Nient plus qu’a         | mon | enfant ne li voudrai faillir             |
| <i>Narbonne</i>    | 196  |                         | Ton | enfant te vois querre en santé et en vie |
| <i>Pommes</i>      | 328  | Le seigneur se restorne | son | enfant aperçoit                          |

In most cases of the use of *mon* etc., the masculine gender of the noun it precedes can be clearly established, either by convention or through the presence of surrounding words with masculine agreement.<sup>2</sup> The only case for which this is not true is a single instance of “mon erreur” found in *Chevalier hermite* (v. 48). The 2020 *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (DMF) lists this

1 “completely normal”

2 The term *affaire*, for example, which appears with *mon* etc. in both *Florence* (v. 237) and *Sauveur* (v. 201), is listed in the DMF as alternating between masculine and feminine, but it can be straightforwardly determined to be masculine in these examples, being accompanied by forms such as *le*, *bon* and *cest* elsewhere in the corpus.

noun as variable between masculine and feminine, and it is not possible to determine the gender of this word in the *J-corpus* by examining the contexts in which it appears. In all three uses of *erreur* across the *J-corpus*, given in Table 27, we can see that there are no surrounding morphosyntactic clues that could provide this information. Even the uses of “grant” in *Pommes* are not definitive since, as we saw in our discussion of the dating of Jehan’s texts, within the *J-corpus* this form is generally favoured over the analogical form *grande* which later comes to replace it.

Table 27. Uses of *erreur* within the *J-corpus*.

| Text                     | Line | LH                                 | KW     |
|--------------------------|------|------------------------------------|--------|
| <i>Pommes</i>            | 162  | Du preudomme dirai qui fu en grant | errour |
| <i>Pommes</i>            | 265  | Li varlés retorna qui fu en grant  | errour |
| <i>Chevalier hermite</i> | 48   | Veil aler a confesse regehir mon   | errour |

We are therefore forced to conclude at the very least that the gender of *erreur* in these cases is unknowable. While it is therefore possible that the example in *Chevalier hermite* is indeed a use of *mon* etc. before a feminine vowel-initial noun, the ambiguity of this example means that it would be insufficient on its own to cause us to reject Morawski’s claims about Jehan’s possessive usage. In the *J-corpus*, at least, Jehan’s preference for use of the elided *ma* etc. therefore appears to be very strong, even if occasional use of *mon* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns is a possibility.

However, even if we accept that Jehan is consistent in his non-use of *mon* etc. before vowel-initial feminine nouns, Morawski and Munk Olsen appear not to have been entirely accurate in their claim that, by the time the texts of the *J-corpus* were composed, around the turn of the fourteenth century, *mon* etc. and *ma* etc. were already being used interchangeably before vowel-initial feminine nouns, in a way that would mark Jehan out amongst his contemporaries.

While surprisingly little linguistic scholarship exists on this feature, Lefèvre et al. (1976–1983, 2:§220) note that as Old French moves towards Middle French, in the period in which Jehan is writing, “les féminins *ma* et *sa* s’élident encore [devant voyelle] malgré un recours de plus en plus fréquent aux masculins *mon*, *son*.”<sup>3</sup> Marchello-Nizia et al. (2020, 706, 710) offer a little more detail, suggesting that over the course of the fourteenth century “les

<sup>3</sup> “the feminine forms *ma* and *sa* still elide [before a vowel] despite increasingly frequent recourse to the masculine forms *mon* and *son*.”

formes atones élidées sont remplacées analogiquement par les formes du masculin,”<sup>4</sup> but that this process of evolution depends on the noun which the possessive is describing. For example, they suggest that the elided form of *ma* etc. is common before *ame*, *amie*, and *amour* even towards the end of the fifteenth century, while *mon* etc. predominate for other nouns as early as the middle of the fourteenth century, becoming the norm by the beginning of the fifteenth. A clear example of this trend comes from *Barbe* in the *A-corpus*, itself a sixteenth-century copy of either a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century text,<sup>5</sup> in which we observe the following line:

Si dist: “Barbe, ma fille, mon espouse et m’amy,  
(*Barbe*, v. 415)

If we take the texts of the *J-corpus* as having been written at the turn of the fourteenth century, we should therefore not be surprised to see no forms of *mon*, etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns, even those for which the possessive system progressed more quickly, since this use is not yet as “courant” (“normal”) as Munk Olsen suggests (1963b, 155). This is especially true given Marchello-Nizia’s suggestion (1979, 138) that this change took place more slowly in Picard dialects, such that we may expect an even later appearance of this feature in texts like those of the *J-corpus* which contain Picard features. As ever, digital textual analysis has a role to play here, enabling us to take a more global view of the *J-corpus*, and to place it more clearly within both its manuscript and linguistic contexts, evaluating both Morawski and Munk Olsen’s claims, as well as those of the linguistic scholarship.

Turning initially to the temporally broader *B-corpus*, we find four verse texts which were composed in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, and therefore are broadly contemporary with the *J-corpus*. These are *Le dit du Prunier*, *Le livre de la Passion*, *La Passion*, and *Le roman de Fauvel*, all of which are written primarily in octosyllabic rhyming couplets and together create a sub-corpus of some sixty-two thousand words (the *B1-corpus*), roughly comparable in length to the *J-corpus*. The diatopic variation present in the *B1-corpus* also helps us identify the extent to which the use of possessive adjectives observed in the *J-corpus* lines up with that observed across a broader range of dialect areas.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “the atonic elided forms are analogically replaced by the masculine forms.”

<sup>5</sup> The manuscript in question, the only one known to contain this text, is Avignon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 615.

<sup>6</sup> The presumed dialects of the authors of the first two texts of the B1-corpus, as determined by the team behind the BFM project (Guillot-Barbance et al. 2022) are

Across the *B1-corpus*, there are forty-seven instances of an elided form of *ma* etc. appearing before a feminine vowel-initial noun, and fifty-five instances of *mon* etc. appearing before a vowel-initial noun, all of which are either masculine, or words for which the gender cannot immediately be determined. There are thus no examples of *mon* etc. before unambiguously feminine vowel-initial nouns in the *B1-corpus*. As such, these texts fit the trend observed across the *J-corpus* in favour of the use of elided forms of *ma* etc. rather than *mon* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns, supporting the suggestion that Jehan's use of possessive adjectives was not unusual, even outside of his immediate dialect area.

Further evidence in support of this comes from the *P-corpus*,<sup>7</sup> containing all the texts of fr. 24432 except for those within the *J-corpus*. Examination of this corpus reveals that of all 215 instances of *mon* etc. appearing before a vowel-initial noun, only nine of these nouns are forms which, according to the DMF, are almost certainly feminine. These examples are given in Table 28.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, there are 151 examples of an elided form of *ma* etc. appearing before a feminine vowel-initial noun, meaning that across the *P-corpus*, just as in the *J-corpus*, the preference appears to be for the avoidance of such an innovation. This is unlikely to be a result of scribal preference either, particularly in the manuscript's poetic texts, since to shift from *mon* etc. to *ma* etc. in this way would have had an impact on the metre of verse lines.

Indeed, it would be tempting to hypothesize that scribal influence could have operated in the other direction since, as we argued in the introduction, fr. 24432 was likely copied towards the middle of the fourteenth century, and certainly after 1345. It is therefore possible that scribes copying a text some decades after its initial composition could have chosen to change *ma* etc. to *mon* etc., particularly in prose texts, as linguistic practice had developed.

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both Picard, while the second two texts are Burgundian and Norman respectively, giving a good spread across what is now northern France.

**7** Comparison with the *F-* or *R-corpora* would be unhelpful here, given these texts largely predate the *J-corpus*, even though on occasion copies of these texts appear in the same manuscripts.

**8** It is notable that five of these nine instances involve *ame*, which is one of the forms identified by Marchello-Nizia et al. (2020) as continuing to appear with elided *ma*, etc. towards the end of the fifteenth century. It is therefore possible that such forms may have been amongst the first vowel-initial feminine nouns to appear with *mon*, etc., but only in part, with the process starting later but being completed more swiftly for other nouns. This is not the focus of our analysis here, however, and further work would be required to prove it.

Table 28. Examples of *mon* etc. before unambiguously feminine vowel-initial nouns in the *P-corpus*.

| Folio | Form  | LH                               | KW  | RH                                   |
|-------|-------|----------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 32va  | Verse |                                  | Son | espie <sup>9</sup> que moult amoit   |
| 50rb  | Verse | Que il voudra semer              | son | orge                                 |
| 91ra  | Verse | [...] ne plus fine,              | Son | aime <sup>10</sup> pour biauté [...] |
| 266rb | Verse | Mais por miex                    | mon | aaise avoir                          |
| 321ra | Prose | [...] acorde son cors et         | son | ame a Dieu [...]                     |
| 372va | Prose | [...] qui fust bien de luy et    | son | acointe [...]                        |
| 373rb | Prose | [...] et de respoitier           | son | ame ausint come [...]                |
| 375rb | Prose | [...] le sauvament de            | mon | ame [...]                            |
| 379va | Prose | [...] donne son cors au monde et | son | ame au deable [...]                  |

On the contrary, in fact, none of the scribes in fr. 24432 appear to have attempted to make any consistent modifications to this feature within the texts that they copied.

Table 28 contains only six such examples from prose across the whole of fr. 24432, suggesting a remarkable consistency in both authorial and scribal practice in a preference for the elided forms of *ma* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns. Even those examples that do appear are seemingly not the result of the preferences of the scribes of fr. 24432. For example, four of the nine examples appear within a few folios of each other (fols. 372va–379va), despite the text containing these examples spanning some fifty-eight folios,<sup>11</sup> where numerous elided forms of *ma* etc. are also found. From the palaeographic evidence it is clear that the scribe who copied this text was a single person, and so the appearance of *mon* etc. between folios 372 and 379 suggests that while the scribe himself preferred elided *ma* etc., the comparable section of his exemplar contained greater use of *mon* etc. before vowel-initial feminine nouns. While there were therefore likely scribes more consistent in their use of *mon* etc. before vowel-initial feminine nouns whose work was circulating in the same context as that in which fr. 24432 was produced, the overwhelming preference within the manuscript does appear to be for the use of elided *ma* etc.

<sup>9</sup> *espie*, “spy.”

<sup>10</sup> As in *ame*.

<sup>11</sup> The text is a vernacular translation of the *Elucidarium* known as *Lucidaire*, edited in Türk (2000).

The scribes of fr. 24432 therefore preferred to retain or introduce elided *ma* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns, but this seemingly does not mean that the usage in earlier versions of Jehan's *œuvre* was more variable. Evidence from later copies of Jehan's texts found outside of fr. 24432 reinforces the suggestion that the author's preference was for elided *ma* etc. regardless of the preferences of the scribes in fr. 24432. Unlike many texts of the *J-corpus*, which are generally *unica*, *Florence* also appears within Grenoble, BM, MS 319, a composite manuscript dating to the fifteenth century. This witness is thus later than fr. 24432, and contains three examples of *mon* etc. used before feminine vowel-initial nouns, presented in Table 30.

Table 29. Uses of *mon* etc. before vowel-initial feminine nouns in the copy of *Florence* found in Grenoble, BM, MS 319, compared to fr. 24432.

| Line | Grenoble, BM, MS 319                                       | fr. 24432                                                 |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 15   | En Dieu servir avoit toute mise <b>son</b> entente         | En Dieu servir avoit bien mise s'esperance                |
| 253  | "En vostre sainte garde commant mon cors et <b>mon</b> ame | "En vostre sainte grace commant mon cors et <b>m'</b> ame |
| 392  | Et puis saicha <b>son</b> espee qui fu de bonne forge      | Puis a sachié l'espee qui fu de bonne forge               |

In each case, the elided form is evidently the preferable option, given that the line containing *mon* etc. otherwise becomes hypermetric. It is therefore clear that Jehan's preference was for elided *ma* etc. in such cases, while the scribe of Grenoble, BM, MS 319 (or one earlier in the chain of transmission) intervened in the text, updating the language to one which more accurately reflected his *scripta*, even at the expense of a coherent metre.

Beyond the case of this one manuscript, it is notable that this preference among later scribes for the modification of elided *ma* etc. to *mon* etc. does not appear with any consistency. *Sauveur* and *Abesse*, the two texts of the *J-corpus* not to appear within fr. 24432, display no use of *mon* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns, nor does the additional copy of *Anelés* found in the late fifteenth-century manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 5036. While it was therefore certainly possible for later scribes to modify Jehan's use of this feature to fit their own linguistic practices, this is not a universal trend, and in the earliest copies of the texts of the *J-corpus*, it is almost certainly true that elided *ma* etc. predominated before feminine vowel-initial nouns.

This observation proves useful when considering those texts outside the *J-corpus* to which we have also extended the shared-author hypothesis. *Guillaume* and *Robert* do not contain examples of *mon* etc. before a feminine

vowel-initial noun, reinforcing the validity of the attribution of these two texts to Jehan in their surviving form. *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard*, however, display more varied use, as presented in the tables below. Morawski is therefore right to observe, as he does for both these texts (1940, 516, 518), that they apparently display a use of possessive adjectives which is different to that of the *J-corpus*.

Table 30. Examples of *mon* etc. before unambiguously feminine vowel-initial nouns in *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard*.

| Text                | Line | LH                              | KW  | RH                                       |
|---------------------|------|---------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------------|
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 328  | Emporterent                     | son | ame en chantant liement                  |
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 351  | De la Vierge Marie et en        | son | oroyson                                  |
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 360  | Enterrer fist l’ermite dessoubz | son | oroyson                                  |
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 127  | Lors quiert                     | son | oroyson et crie hautement                |
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 146  | Il quiert                       | son | oroyson mais il l’avoit gettee           |
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 343  | Osta                            | son | oroyson quant il l’ot pronuncee          |
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 162  |                                 | Son | oroyson regrette dolent est qu’il ne l’a |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 314  | Dedans                          | son | abbaye dont party fut tout seulx         |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 304  | Mais s’en                       | son | abbaye tout droit arriere va             |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 285  | S’en vault avoir                | son | ame mais il n’y a povoir                 |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 557  | Or avra ja Richart le diable en | son | aye                                      |

Table 31. Examples of *ma* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns in *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard*.

| Text                | Line | LH                                      | KW | RH                            |
|---------------------|------|-----------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| <i>Jehan Paulus</i> | 144  | Que tel penance face que                | s’ | ame soit sauvee               |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 276  | Et quant il fut levé de                 | s’ | abbaye yssi                   |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 303  | S’il s’en va sur                        | s’ | amie le diable l’avra         |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 291  | Se noya tout ainsi qu’il alloit sus     | s’ | amye                          |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 681  | Et croy selon                           | m’ | entente que j’eüsse esté mors |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 474  | Je te pourfenderay de                   | m’ | espee esmoulue                |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 175  | Que je ne luy donnasse de               | m’ | espee le trenchant            |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 556  | Que nulz homs vous assaille que a       | m’ | espee n’octie                 |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 425  | Certes c’est covardise d’en avoir trait | s’ | espee                         |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 406  | Fors que tant que                       | s’ | espee sacha le duc courtoys   |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 247  | Alla sacher                             | s’ | espee tout le detrancha lors  |
| <i>Richard</i>      | 389  | Et Richart demoura pour veiller         | s’ | espousee                      |

Across both texts, there are eleven examples of *mon* etc. used before an unambiguously feminine vowel-initial noun, and twelve of the inverse, where elided *ma* etc. is used. *Jehan Paulus* displays a preference for *mon* etc. over elided *ma* etc., while the inverse is true for *Richard*. It is especially notable that in the case of *ame* in *Jehan Paulus* and *abbaye* in *Richard*, the usage fluctuates, with at least one example of each, suggesting at least the possibility that the uses of *mon* etc. before unambiguously feminine nouns are the result of later modifications to the text. Indeed, it is possible for all of the examples in Table 30 to hypothesize an earlier form involving elided *ma* etc., which a later *remanieur* could have modified either by shifting from diuresis to syneresis, removing filler words, choosing not to pronounce the *e-muet* at the caesura (which occurs elsewhere in Jehan's poetry), or performing elision elsewhere in the line, thus allowing them to make use of *mon* etc. before a feminine vowel-initial noun, which better fitted their *scripta*.

As we have noted, *Jehan Paulus* appears in the same manuscript as the later copy of *Florence* that contains *mon* etc. before feminine nouns, and so we may be tempted to suggest that scribal preference was also at play here. However, even though the modifications necessary to adjust the language of *Jehan Paulus* from a putative earlier version are not especially drastic, there is evidence in favour of a more significant reworking than small scribal modifications alone. In *Florence*, the scribal modifications resulted in hypermetric lines, and were therefore clearly carried out in passing by an individual who was not concerned with the lines' metre. In the examples in *Jehan Paulus*, by contrast, all seven lines fit the alexandrine metre, such that the intervention of a more committed *remanieur* would have been required to ensure that the modified forms still retained the desired metre.

The evidence presented in this chapter has therefore reinforced Munk Olsen's warning that attribution cannot be made on this feature alone, and it has also suggested that the non-use of *mon* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns in the *J-corpus*, *Guillaume*, and *Robert* is not especially surprising, given their temporal and codicological context. Nevertheless, it has also strengthened the utility of this feature as a means of negative attribution: the metrically consistent use of *mon* etc. before feminine vowel-initial nouns in *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard* does appear to be enough to exclude them from the core of Jehan's *œuvre*, at least in their current form. The undeniable proximity of these texts to the *J-corpus*, based on the other features that we have examined so far in this study, must instead be taken as evidence that these are examples of earlier texts by Jehan which were significantly, albeit not entirely, reworked by later poets.

## Building the Case for the Shared-Author Hypothesis

The linguistic evidence examined in this chapter allows us to nuance the shared-author hypothesis by distinguishing between those texts that merit direct attribution to Jehan, and those that are later reworkings of earlier poems by the same author. The consistency in the use of elided *m'*, *t'*, and *s'* before feminine vowel-initial nouns in the *J-corpus* offers an additional unifying characteristic to the corpus, while the strict adherence of *Guillaume* and *Robert* to this practice makes them clear candidates for direct inclusion in Jehan's *œuvre*. *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard*, meanwhile, display a fluctuating usage which mixes elided forms with the analogical use of *mon*, *ton*, and *son* which later becomes the norm. Because these analogical forms do not produce hypermetric lines, they point towards the intervention of one or more later *remanieurs* who updated what they saw as archaic usage in an earlier poem by Jehan. This observation is crucial to the shared-author hypothesis, in that it identifies *Jehan Paulus* and *Richard* as echoes of texts originally composed by Jehan which were then significantly, though not entirely, reworked by a later poet with different linguistic preferences.

## Methodological Contribution

In this chapter, I have shown how digital methods can offer a rigorous, falsifiable base from which to critically interrogate the assertions of traditional philology. Through the examination of reference corpora which are contemporary with our target corpus, I have demonstrated that features previously considered unique to a specific author may in fact be consistent with broader temporal and dialectal norms, and that awareness of such norms can prevent the misattribution of authorship based solely on the identification of widespread linguistic features. Moreover, by examining the metrical consistency of apparent modifications, I have demonstrated the value of such an approach in distinguishing between a text that has been reworked by a *remanieur*, and one which may simply have been modified by a copyist with a preference for a given linguistic feature.