

CONCLUSION

AS WE HAVE SEEN throughout this study, there is no silver bullet within either digital or traditional methods that can prove beyond doubt that Jehan wrote these and only these poems. Our best chance of accurately attributing texts to him comes instead from a holistic, cumulative examination of as many types of evidence as possible. Munk Olsen (1963b, 163), who is so critical of Morawski's willingness to assign or not assign texts to Jehan based on a single feature, nevertheless acknowledges the value of these individual strands of evidence when taken as a whole:

[U]n critère isolé ne prouve rien ou plutôt peut prouver n'importe quoi, ce qui est encore pire. La seule méthode adéquate est d'établir une convergence des ressemblances entre les [...] œuvres.

[A]n isolated criterion proves nothing, or rather can prove anything, which is even worse. The only adequate method is to establish a convergence of similarities between the [...] works.

This is exactly what I have attempted in this study, in which digital and statistical methods of analysis unavailable to previous generations of scholarship have allowed us to widen the variety of evidence brought to bear on the shared-author hypothesis. In any era, the presence or absence of a particular feature in a text cannot, in any concrete, scientific manner, prove that it shares authorship with another. This is even more the case for medieval texts, given that they exist within a climate of textual borrowing, influence, reworking, and reuse. Yet, by taking a global, holistic, and humanistic view of a variety of different strands of analysis, we gain a much clearer picture than any one strand alone might suggest.

Through the examination carried out in this study, we have found that in the case of Jehan's texts, as observed for example in his versificatory practices, significant variability between the texts of the corpus can, without the right analysis, mask the extent to which the texts are still collectively different from others. We have also discovered that a given author will not differ from those in his literary milieu in every metric which we may consider, as with our examination of Jehan's use of certain types of discourse onset. This is not to say that such metrics should never be considered, rather it

reinforces the value of a holistic approach to authorial attribution which allows for the possibility of overlap with other corpora, providing that the overall picture points consistently in a particular direction. Doing so has allowed us to assert with greater confidence that the texts of the *J-corpus* can all be comfortably attributed to Jehan. Our approach has also facilitated the attribution to the same author of a further two texts in their current form, namely *Guillaume* and *Robert*, as well as the putative earlier forms of *Richard* and *Jehan Paulus*. These attributions have been made not based on any one point of similarity, but rather following the holistic examination of a large amount of diverse evidence.

While it can be useful to draw conclusions from large-scale data on the basis purely of statistical trends, our examination of the generic descriptors appearing within and alongside Jehan's texts, as well as the terms of address he uses for his audience, has also revealed the value of the use of such techniques in the context of a broader understanding of the function and content of the source material as a whole. After all, the significance of a particular feature within the work of a given author cannot be determined only in isolation, and can instead only be reached after a careful reading of a text and close engagement with its context. Texts are not just bags of words, and any approach that treats them as such must go hand in hand with more interpretive methods.

Beyond the question of Jehan's authorship, we have seen that the methods of analysis used in this study are broadly applicable to a wide array of Medieval French texts. Through our examination of the *F-* and *R-corpora*, we have observed, independently of the *J-corpus*, that these corpora of more frequently studied texts display notable areas of coherence alongside a good deal of variation. The methods presented in this study could therefore also lend themselves to a comparative evaluation of the unattributed *fabliaux*, for example, as well as the texts in Rutebeuf's *œuvre* for which attribution is more tentative.¹ Outside of the texts of these reference corpora, it is also possible to foresee these methods having utility when applied to some of the most difficult questions of authorship surrounding texts in Medieval French, such as that of the *Lai d'Aristote*,²

1 In his 1989–1990 edition of Rutebeuf's texts, for example, Michel Zink places doubt on the attribution of both *La Vie du monde* and *Les neuf joies de Notre Dame*. An analysis of the kind that we have carried out here for Jehan's texts could shed further light on the matter.

2 See Corbellari (2004) and Zufferey (2004) for a combined study which follows many of the same lines of inquiry as followed by Morawski (1939, 1940) and Munk

as well as several of the more peripheral texts attributed to Chrétien de Troyes.³

Analysis of these cohesive reference corpora, when combined with the broader *P-* and *B-corpora*, has allowed us to come to new conclusions of value to historical linguistic studies surrounding the extent to which a given feature, such as the analogical use of *mon* etc. before a feminine vowel-initial noun, may be considered typical for a given temporal and dialectal context. Most importantly for questions of authorship, it has also allowed us to tackle the thorny question of whether a shared feature of a corpus is a result of shared authorship or a more standard feature within medieval French. For this reason, it is necessary for future studies of authorship using these methods to always consider a similarly broad selection of reference corpora, to determine when a shared feature may genuinely be an indicator of shared authorship.

In the case of narrative poems written in alexandrine monorhyme quatrains, the *A-corpus* in particular has revealed that form and genre play a significant role in the use of features such as feminine rhymes, as well as choices of discourse onset, and yet significant variability within a single genre is possible, and individual authors are able to make their preferences felt within their texts. Similarly, features such as the rates of use of words at the beginnings of lines, as well as associated rhymes and admixtures, appear to be more consistently the result of authorial preference.

To close this study let us end, as we began, with an examination of the question of why, if at all, one would attempt to attribute a medieval text to a specific author. The evidence for attributing medieval authorship will almost always be tentative, yet whether or not there was in fact a poet named Jehan de Saint-Quentin who composed these texts, it tells us a lot about the texts themselves that scholarship, and potentially also some earlier readers, have believed that they were all the work of the same individual, despite limited self-attribution to support that claim. Throughout our analysis, we have considered how the texts which we have attributed to Jehan display both unity as a group, and distinctiveness from other texts. We have done so as a means of determining shared authorship, but these features may also be fruitfully considered from a more literary perspective. Such an approach allows us to encounter Jehan's *œuvre* as a network of interconnected texts, each of

Olsen (1963a, 1963b, 1978) for Jehan's texts, but which does not venture into the methods presented in this study.

3 See, for example, the possible attribution to Chrétien of the longer version of the tale found in *Guillaume*, discussed p. 142n4.

which contains features that call to mind those of another. Jehan's didacticism, his attempts to ease the sins of mankind, and his desire simply to tell an engaging story all come to the fore even more when we read his texts as a united collection, rather than when a given text is encountered in isolation. Adding *Guillaume*, *Robert*, and the putative earlier versions of *Richard* and *Jehan Paulus* to Jehan's *œuvre* acts as an encouragement for future scholars to bring these texts into conversation with each other and with those texts previously attributed to Jehan, opening up new avenues for literary analysis.

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As Jehan so often does in his own texts, we end with a stanza of verse in the form of a prayer, this time generated by ChatGPT (OpenAI 2022a), after having been given a selection of Jehan's epilogues as inspiration:

Or prions humblement le Seigneur souverain
Qu'il éclaire nos pas sur son divin chemin.
En sa grace infinie, qu'il guide notre main
Vers un destin certain en son royaume serein.

Emerging technologies such as generative AI reveal more than ever that the unique identity of an author is a fragile notion which can so easily be broken by imitation and influence, and yet an author is not a Large Language Model. Digital and statistical methods of analysis have a significant role to play in the identification and attribution of authorship, but such an approach can only be effective when used in a bespoke, humanistic way, combining scientific techniques with literary understanding.