

**Personalities and Discourse Styles:
The Cases of Tryan in *Janet's Repentance* and St John in *Jane Eyre***

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1. Introduction

Janet's Repentance (1858; *JR* hereafter), one of the three short novels by George Eliot compiled and published as *Scenes of Clerical Life*, features Edgar Tryan, the new curate in the town of Milby, in a leading role. *Jane Eyre* (1847; *JE* hereafter), written by Charlotte Brontë, features Jane's cousin, St John Rivers, in a key supporting role. Both characters are faithful evangelical curates who work hard for their missions and die young in the early nineteenth century. However, there is one crucial difference between the two clergymen: Tryan's personality can be described as *sympathetic*, and St John's, *arrogant*.

There is no study, as far as I know, that compares the speech styles of these interesting ministers, specifically using a quantitative analysis. This paper first shows how the plots construct the characters of the two clergymen as sympathetic and arrogant respectively. Then it demonstrates how their discourse styles reflect their personalities quantitatively along with a qualitative analysis which enables us to realise their speech styles more in depth, focusing on their use of mental verbs and prohibitive or obligational modal verbs with the subject *you*.

Previous studies based on a quantitative analysis have investigated frequencies of lexical items and phrases in the analysis of fiction style and the interpretation of literary meaning. John F. Burrows analyses Jane Austen's language by investigating the most frequent words and forms in

order to interpret the personalities of the novels' characters on the basis of their idiolects. Tomoji Tabata shows that Dickens's first-person narratives contain many more negatives than his third-person narratives and argues that negatives signal subjectivity. Michael Stubbs analyses Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and demonstrates that repeated lexical items and phrases in the text help form the novel's atmosphere of uncertainty and ignorance. Kieran O'Halloran analyses Joyce's short story "Eveline" and shows that one of the most frequent phrases, for example, her + body parts, in addition to a functional analysis of how free indirect thought is constructed with *would*, predict the ending of the story. Bettina Starcke analyses Austen's novel, *Persuasion*, by examining the most frequent phrases. The article demonstrates how the two phrases, 'she could not' and 'she had been,' help characterize the relationship between two of the novel's protagonists and create the narrative structure. Thus many of the previous studies pay attention to key words or key phrases to decode the literary meaning of a novel. My study, however, pays special attention to the mental and modal verbs with the subject pronouns *you* the characters use, because I believe that the usage of these words with the subject *you* indicates the level of respect the speaker pays to others and the sympathy he or she has for them without any investigation of any other type of verbs or subjects.

2. The personality construction of Tryan and St John in the plots

Sympathy is defined in the *OED* as "The quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of

another or others; fellow-feelings”.¹ For its part, *arrogance* is defined as “the assertion of unwarrantable claims in respect of one’s own importance; undue assumption of dignity, authority or knowledge; aggressive conceit, presumption, or haughtiness”. The following sections show how each personality is constructed in the plot of each novel.

2.1 Tryan’s sympathetic personality

Tryan suffers from the guilt of having caused an innocent girl to leave her family and, as he sees it, commit suicide after she discovers that he does not intend to marry her. He is living as a curate for the sole purpose of repenting and redeeming himself by helping and caring for people, having given up a political career in which he had secured the favour of a high-ranking officer (*JR* 258).² He gives “himself no rest”, living in a poor section of town (*JR* 230). He tells Mr Jerome, an old philanthropist and one of the parish’s wealthiest men, who advises him to move for his ill health, “I like to be among the people. I’ve no face to go and preach resignation to those poor things in their smoky air and comfortless homes, when I come straight from every luxury myself. There are many things quite lawful for other men, which a clergyman must forego if he would do any good in a manufacturing population like this” (*JR* 243).

One cold night, Janet, who is so scared of her husband’s violence when he is drunken that she has also turned to alcohol for solace, is left

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¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary on Compact Disc*, 2nd ed. Version 4.0. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

² According to Marianne Thormählen, “clergyman could live fairly comfortably on half that amount [=half of £700]”, but “many curates, for instance, had to live on less than £80 a year”, though there was plenty of money in the Church (190).

outside by her drunken husband and seeks help from Tryan. He sees at once that what Janet needs most is “to be assured of sympathy” (*JR* 258) and, though he at first hesitates to do so, reveals to her his past guilt. Thus, when he speaks, Janet receives his words “like rain on the parched ground” (*JR* 264). Her confidence in Tryan’s human sympathy constitutes for her a faith in divine love that leads her to fight her temptation to drink. Tryan serves at Milby for two years before his death from consumption. The townspeople mourn him deeply, though most of them felt a great antipathy toward him for his evangelicalism at first.

As Thomas S. Noble points out, Eliot’s message in this novel is not primarily a Christian one; indeed, “if every reference to God were taken out, the essential message of the book would be unchanged” (90).³ The non-denominationalism of this ethic of solidarity is reflected in the words of Mr Jerome: “Ah, friends, this pleasant world is a sad one, too, isn’t it? Let us help one another, let us help one another” (*JR* 215). Eliot writes in a letter to Charles Bray, dated 15 November 1857, the year before the publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life*: “My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy” (*Letters* vol. ii, 402) Thus, it might be said that she envisions Tryan as a model of virtue with human sympathy at its core.

2.2 St John’s arrogant personality

St John is arguably the most important person in the story after Jane and Rochester. He saves Jane’s life while she is starving after she left Rochester to

³ Gilbert and Gubar also focus on the effect of Tryan’s human sympathy (489).

avoid his bigamy, gives her blood relatives for whom she always yearned and almost talked her into marrying him and going to India as a missionary wife.

Like Tryan, St John is a highly intelligent curate who devotes a large proportion of his time to “visiting the sick and poor among the scattered population of his parish” (*JE* 351). However, unlike Tryan, he is not especially interested in people and nature per se. He crushes the “snowy heads” of daisies with his foot (*JE* 363). His sermons lack “consolatory gentleness” filled with stern “doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation” (*JR* 352). He regards his mission in India as even “dearer than the blood in my [his] veins”, because it is his “foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven” (*JR* 374).⁴ St John loves the young woman Rosamond passionately, but he chooses the vocation of a missionary without hesitation, knowing that she will not make a good missionary’s wife. As Barry V. Qualls says, St John is comparable to the dogmatic characters Brocklehurst and Eliza in the way religion causes people to enter the insensitive states of an “automaton” (46).

St John regards himself as a spokesperson for God’s will on Earth and regards Jane also as “one of [God’s] chosen” (*JE* 414). St John, unlike Rochester (who does not lack flaws either), never thinks of the necessity of respecting Jane’s identity. Instead, he declares, “... you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you must—shall be” (*JE* 402). He is not pleased with her worldly pleasures, such as her preparation for Christmas (*JE* 390), and forces her to study “Hindostanee” in preparation for missionary activity (*JE* 397). It annoys him to see Jane freely express herself and complain about her duties (*JE* 396-7). He cannot learn anything from Jane. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Imlay says, St John considers sexual compatibility

⁴ According to Ian Bradley, Anglican evangelicals, through the Church’s Missionary Society, sent missionaries to India, Africa, New Zealand, and other regions. They felt strongly the need to push forward Britain’s Christianizing and civilizing missions (83).

or even compatible temperaments irrelevant to marriage (61). He wants a wife to be “the sole helpmeet” he can “influence efficiently in life and retain absolutely till death” (*JE* 406). It would be unbearable for Jane to be “forced to keep the fire of my [her] nature continually low, to compel it to burn inward, and never utter a cry” (*JE* 408).

Thus, St John aims to join the saints in heaven but lacks human sympathy and is overconfident in his knowledge of what is right. Furthermore, he appears to believe that God’s infallibility extends to him, an attitude that can reasonably be called arrogant and presumptuous.⁵ As Susan V. Gallagher points out, however, here we should realize that St John is no hypocrite like Brocklehurst (66). Though his dedication to missionary work comes in part from impure motivations, his belief that glory in Heaven awaits him at the end, it cannot be denied that he has chosen and devotes himself to an extremely difficult job of serving foreign people as a missionary far from home. This is one of the reasons the story ends with his letter to Jane, reporting his joy of coming near Heaven, quoting Revelation 22:20.⁶

3. Methodology of the quantitative analysis

The electronic text used for this study comprises the spoken dialogue of Tryan, St John, and other selected characters. In order to take into consideration stylistic differences between the novels, the utterances of four other important characters—Dempster, Janet, Rochester, and Jane—have also been compiled into an electronic text for reference. The text of each book was extracted from Project Gutenberg eBooks (Plain Text UTF-8) and

⁵ See Beaty 197 and Thomählen 209.

⁶ According to Imlay, some readers in the Victorian era thought that Jane should have married St. John (67).

checked against the Oxford Classics versions. Ultimately, this electronic text consists of 4,517 words from Tryan, 8,171 from St John, 2,574 from Dempster, 4,289 from Janet, 27,218 from Rochester, and 22,596 from Jane. This study also used AntConc 3.3.1w for concordance software.

First, the sentences including the pronoun *you* are extracted for each character by the concordance, as shown in the following examples:

be visibly contradicted. What do *you* think of the plan? I have tod
on the subject.” “Perhaps,” “since *you* are not very strong, my dear
ill as Mrs Jerome suggests, that *you* should not run the risk of an
risk of any excitement.” “thank *you*, Mr Jerome, thank you.” “The

As the above examples show, the pronoun *you* appears in both subject and object positions. Hence, at the next stage, only the instances of the subject pronoun *you* are extracted manually.

The first quantitative analysis (4.1) treats mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you*, such as “[b]ut you will not *feel* the need of me as you have done” (*JR* 300, my italics). In this study, mental verbs are defined in accordance with Biber et al. as those that “denote a wide range of activities and states experienced by humans; they do not involve physical action and do not necessarily entail volition” (362-3). Mental verbs are divided into the following categories (ibid.):

*Cognitive activities (*calculate, consider, decide, discover, examine, learn, read, solve, study, hear, etc.*)

*Cognitive states (*believe, doubt, know, remember, understand, etc.*)

*Emotional/attitudinal states (*enjoy, fear, feel, hate, like, love, prefer, suspect, want, etc.*)

*Perceptions (*see, taste, etc.*)

Here we can see that *hear* is categorised under “cognitive activities”, a group which involves “receipt of communication” (Biber et al. 362). However, according to the *OED*, *hear* can be defined not only as “to learn or get to know by hearing”, which fits for “cognitive activities”, but also “to perceive, or have the sensation of, sound”, as in the statement “What have you *heard*? What do you see?” (*JE* 419, my italics), which belongs to “perceptions”. In my study, *hear* of the former meaning falls into the category of “cognitive activities”, while *hear* of the latter meaning is categorised under “perceptions”. Thus the same mental verb can be categorised under different groups, according to its meaning in each case, referring to the *OED*.

Words such as *think, thinks, thinking* (a present participle), and *thought* (the past tense and a past-tense participle) are treated as the same lemma. The past-tense participles in the passive voice are disregarded, because they do not describe the mental state or activity of the subject. Phrasal verbs such as *look forward to* are also ignored, because it is possible to deduce the characteristics of speech styles by examining single mental verbs alone.

Following section **4.1**, the second quantitative analysis (**4.2**) addresses modal verbs that have obligational or prohibitive meanings, as in “Indeed, I *must* hurry away now” (*JR* 193, my italics) or “when our will strains after a path we *may not* follow” (*JE* 361, my italics). This study defines modal verbs following Quirk et al (141-3, 219-36). and treats not only central modal verbs, such as *should* and *must*, but also semi-auxiliaries,

such as *have to* and *be bound to*, as in “you are bound to impart them to no living being” (JE 309, my italics). Specifically, this study examines the following obligational or prohibitive modal verbs:

may not (may neither); must, must not; should, should not; need; ought to, ought not to; had better, had better not; be to, have to, be bound to, be obliged to; and shall, shall not

May, need not, be not bound to, and be not obliged to are considered irrelevant and not examined here because they refer to neither obligation nor prohibition. While *must not* is always paid attention to as prohibition, *must* is analysed only when they have obligational meanings, as in “You must prove your identity of course” (JE 382) and *must* with the meaning of logical necessity, for example, in “... you must be hungry” (JE 48) is excluded. Finally, *shall* and *shall not* are put into consideration only when they express obligation or prohibition with the subject pronoun *you*.

4. Quantitative analysis

4.1 Mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you*

Here, we examine the frequencies of the mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you* by Tryan and St John in comparison with their uses of the other characters. The tables below show as percentages the ratios of mental verbs in each category used with the subject pronoun *you* by each character to the total number of the verbs used with the subject pronoun *you* by that character. The figures in parentheses indicate the raw frequencies.

Table 1-1 Frequencies of mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you*
by Tryan and St John

	Tryan	St John
Cognitive activities and states	26.2% (17/65)	19.3% (40/207)
Emotions/attitudes	9.2% (6/65)	3.9% (8/207)
Perceptions	0.0% (0/65)	1.9% (4/207)
Total	35.4% (23/65)	25.1% (52/207)

Table 1-2 Frequencies of mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you*
by the other characters

	Dempster	Janet	Rochester	Jane
Cognitive activities and states	20.7% (12/59)	17.3% (13/75)	17.1% (135/788)	13.4% (72/535)
Emotions/attitudes	1.7% (1/59)	4.0% (3/75)	5.7% (45/788)	9.9% (53/535)
Perceptions	3.4% (2/59)	2.7% (2/75)	2.4% (19/788)	1.3% (7/535)
Total	25.9% (15/59)	24.0% (18/75)	25.3% (199/788)	24.7% (132/535)

Table 1-1 shows that Tryan uses emotional and attitudinal mental verbs six times, accounting for 9.2% (6/65) of all the verbs he uses with the subject pronoun *you*, while St John uses them at the less frequent rate of 3.9% (8/207). On the other hand, the figures in Table 1-2 show that the frequency of these verbs for Dempster is 1.7% (1/59), that for Janet is 4.0% (3/75), that for Rochester is 5.7% (45/788) and that for Jane is 9.9% (53/535). This implies that the average frequency of these verbs of the other characters in *JR* is 3.0%

(4/134) and far lower than the ratio 7.4% (98/1323) of the other characters in *JE*. Therefore, we can safely say that Tryan uses emotional and attitudinal verbs far more frequently than St John, disregarding the stylistic difference between the novels. This result leads us to infer that Tryan pays much more attention to the emotions and attitudes of other people than does St John.

Table 1-1 also shows that Tryan uses cognitive mental verbs more frequently than St John. However, the other characters in the same novel also use them more often than those in *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, Tryan's predominance might come from the stylistic difference of the two novels. Moreover, as for cognitive mental verbs, we must be fully aware that they might be used to show doubt about the cognitive ability of the person referred to. We will investigate this respect fully in the section of the qualitative analysis.

4.2 Modal verbs for obligation or prohibition with the subject pronoun *you*

Here, we examine the frequency of modal verbs with obligational or prohibitive meanings used with the subject pronoun *you* by Tryan and St John. The tables below show as percentages the ratios of these verbs to the total number of verbs used with the subject pronoun *you* by each character and, in parentheses, show the raw frequencies of these verbs.

Table 2-1 Frequency of modal verbs for obligation or prohibition used with the subject pronoun *you* by Tryan and St John

Tryan	St John
4.6% (3/65)	8.2% (17/207)

Table 2-2 Frequency of modal verbs for obligation or prohibition

used with the subject pronoun *you* by the other characters

Dempster	Janet	Rochester	Jane
3.4% (2/59)	5.3% (4/75)	5.1% (40/788)	4.3% (23/535)

The results show that Tryan uses obligational or prohibitive modal verbs three times, accounting for 4.6% (3/65) of the total verbs he uses with the pronoun *you*. St John, in contrast, uses them 17 times, accounting for 8.2% (17/207) of the total. On the other hand, the frequency of these kinds of modal verbs of Dempster is 3.4% (2/59), that of Janet is 5.3% (4/75), that of Rochester is 5.1% (40/788) and that of Jane is 4.3% (23/535). This suggests that the average frequency of these modal verbs for the other characters in *JR*, 4.4% (6/134), is very close to that for the other characters in *JE*, 4.8% (63/1323). Therefore, we can safely say that regardless of the stylistic difference between the novels, St John uses far more obligational or prohibitive modal verbs than Tryan. This result enables us to infer that St John tends to impose obligations or prohibitions on others more frequently than does Tryan. Here we are interested in how Tryan uses prohibitive or obligational modal verbs in his few cases and why St John needs these verbs so frequently, which is clarified in the next section of qualitative analysis.

5. Qualitative analysis

In the previous sections, we found that Tryan uses far more emotional and attitudinal mental verbs, more cognitive mental verbs and far fewer obligational or prohibitive modal verbs with the subject pronoun *you* than does St John. In the current section, we examine individual uses of

cognitive mental verbs and obligational or prohibitive modals in order to understand more fully how they work to express the personalities of the two clergymen.

5.1 Cognitive mental verbs with the subject pronoun *you*

The table below has interesting implications regarding the cognitive mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you* by Tryan and St John. A close look at the table shows that St John uses negative cognitive mental verbs (in his case, verbs such as *misinterpret*, *misunderstand*, and *neglect*) to signal his distrust of the cognitive abilities of his interlocutor, which is not something that Tryan does.

Table 3 Cognitive mental verbs used with the subject pronoun *you* by Tryan and St John

	Tryan	St John
Cognitive activities and states	<i>know, think, forget, see, find, tell</i>	<i>know, see, think, mean, find, hear, consider, expect, comprehend, contemplate, decide, forget, learn, look, misinterpret, misunderstand, neglect, recall</i>

Next, we examine the remaining cases in which St John uses cognitive mental verbs to deny the cognitive ability of those to whom he speaks, as well as the single case in which Tryan also does so. Sentence (1) belongs to Tryan and sentence (2) through (7) to St John—in each of the latter’s sentences, he finds fault with Jane, the interlocutor (my emphases).

- (1) “How can you *tell* but that the hardest trials you have known have been only the road by which he was leading you to that complete sense of your own sin and helplessness, without which you would never have renounced all other hopes, and trusted in His love again?” (JR 258)

In Sentence (1), Tryan makes this utterance as he is trying to dispel Janet’s anxiety about being unable to escape from her husband’s violence and her own dependence on alcohol. His aim in expressing distrust of her cognitive ability is to save her from despair.

- (2) “...because you *do not know* what it is to possess” (JE 387).
(3) “Do you *hear*, Jane?” (JE 391)
(4) “Do you not *see* it, Jane?” (JE 405)
(5) “Do you *think* God will be satisfied with half an oblation?” (JE 406)
(6) “And now you *recall* your promise, and will not go to India at all, I presume?” (JE 413)
(7) “The interest you cherish is lawless and unconsecrated.... You *think* of Mr Rochester?” (JE 414)

In sentence (2), St John is opposing Jane’s proposal to share the money bequeathed to her by her uncle with St John and his sisters, thinking lightly of her ignorance of the ways of the world. In sentence (3), he is expressing disapproval of Jane, who is enjoying cleaning and preparing for Christmas and for her returning cousins; he advises her to have loftier goals. Here, he even fails to thank her for improving the interior of his house. In sentences

(4) to (7), St John is trying to persuade Jane to go to India as his wife. He accuses and even threatens her when she insists that she could only accompany him to India as his sister, as if he were a spokesman of God. Thus, St John's remarks throughout these examples show his complete lack of respect and sympathy for Jane, while Tryan, in his only negative use of cognitive verbs, aims to save his interlocutor, Janet, from her emotional situation of despair, expressing distrust of her cognitive ability.

5.2 Modal verbs for obligation or prohibition with the subject pronoun *you*

As for modal verbs for obligation or prohibition used with the pronoun *you*, analysis of individual cases shows that Tryan, in his rare use of these types of modal verbs, is always trying to release the person he is talking to from some obligation as in sentences (8) to (10). On the other hand, St John is sometimes blaming the person to whom he speaks and trying to impose his desire as God's will, as in sentences (11) and (12) (my emphases).

(8) “[I]t will be well, as Mrs Jerome suggests, that you *should not* run the risk of any excitement” (*JR* 218).

(9) “He does not tell you, as your fellow-men do, that you *must* first merit His love” (*JR* 260).

(10) “You *have only to* rest on him [God] as a child rests on its mother's arms” (*ibid.*).

In sentence (8), Tryan tries to stop Mr Jerome from joining the procession of the Tryanites to the church among and against the mob of Anti-Tryanites on the first day of his evening lecture. In sentence (9) and (10), he

encourages Jane to resume her confidence in herself through her faith in God.

(11) “God and nature intended you for a missionary wife.... you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you *must—shall* be” (*JE* 402).

(12) “The interest you cherish is lawless and unconsecrated.... now you *should* blush to allude to it” (*JE* 414).

On the other hand, in sentence (11), St John forces Jane to accept his proposal as God’s will, ignoring Jane’s passionate personality like “fire” longing for love (*JE* 383). In sentence (12), he shames and even threatens Jane for her lingering love for Rochester. Thus St John uses obligational or prohibitive modal verbs to impose his will on his interlocutor, while Tryan always uses obligational or prohibitive modal verbs in his rare uses (cf. 4.2) to release the person he is talking to from some obligation.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study show not only that the plots support the reading of Tryan’s personality as sympathetic and St John’s as arrogant, but that their discourse styles also reveal a considerable difference between the two clergymen. They adhere to the aforementioned personality types in their use of mental verbs and obligational or prohibitive modal verbs used with the subject pronoun *you*.

First, Tryan uses emotional and attitudinal mental verbs specifically more frequently than St John. This finding is interpreted to mean that Tryan pays more regard than St John to the emotions and attitudes of other people.

As for the cognitive mental verbs, St John not only uses them less frequently than Tryan, but he often expresses doubt about the cognitive ability of those he is speaking to and also blames them. On the other hand, Tryan, even in his only one case of such a negative use, aims to rescue Janet, the person he is speaking to, from her mental agony by denying her cognitive ability.

Second, as for obligational or prohibitive modal verbs following *you*, the findings show that St John not only uses them more frequently than Tryan but aims to impose his will as God's will on the person he is speaking to, while Tryan employs these types of modal verbs, in his rare use, in order to release people from an obligation. Thus I believe that this paper has cast a new light on an interesting feature of these novels, that is, how the personalities of the characters are reflected in their discourse styles, by analysing them both quantitatively and qualitatively.

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