

A proposed method of clarifying the meaning of contentious political-cultural words: The case of *country* and *nation*

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Abstract

This article discusses how linguistic-combinatory methods can be used to add precision to our understanding of contentious words from the political-cultural field. Eleven English authors' use of the words *country* and *nation* has been investigated and the focus is placed on two authors who show an especially frequent use of *nation* relative to *country*, Shakespeare and Marie Corelli. It is shown that *nation* tends to select human negative-emotional lexical companions to a higher degree than *country*, and that this difference between the two words reflects their original etymological meanings. It is proposed that a more developed test design could be fruitfully used on a larger material.

Keywords: country, nation, nationality words, collocation, etymology, word frequency, Shakespeare, Marie Corelli

1. Preamble

Some ten years ago, I was invited by Solveig Granath and some of her colleagues to be a contributor to a festschrift in honour of Solveig's predecessor, Moira Linnarud, who was then about to retire. My contribution sought to explore how words derived from the names *Britain* and *England* were used by a selection of authors, from Shakespeare to Virginia Woolf (Mobärg 2005). Now I have had yet another invitation from Karlstad, the city of my youth, this time to be part of a festschrift project in honour of Solveig herself. Having the opportunity to celebrate Solveig is something I cherish very much, not least because we were undergraduates together in the friendly study atmosphere of Karlstad in the early 1970s.¹

¹ I would like to thank Professors Sölve Ohlander and Ronald Paul for valuable comments on earlier versions of this article. Any remaining shortcomings are mine alone.

2. The Present Study

This study will replicate some of the method of the previous one, but instead of focusing on specific nationality words, I shall try this time to shed some light on two more general words from the same semantic field, viz. *country* and *nation*, words which are sometimes used as synonyms or near-synonyms, sometimes with more specific and different meanings, as well as being highly contentious words in the current debate on globalisation and similar issues.² Therefore, apart from the two words in themselves, I also would like to explore certain methods in trying to pinpoint differences between contentious, closely related political-cultural words, methods that might be useful in elucidating some of the ideas associated with them.

3. Country and Nation: Etymology³

Both *country* and *nation* are Latin-based words which have entered into the English language via Norman French during medieval times, but whereas *nation* is a ubiquitous international loanword, *country* is far more restricted in its international dissemination and use. It originates from the Latin preposition *contra* ('opposite'), and its suffixed form *contrata* ('that which lies opposite'), and has cognate forms such as Old French *cuntree*, Old Occitan *encontrada*, Italian *contrada*. The typical early meaning appears to be 'the land, area or region that lies before us'. Interestingly, Middle High German has a corresponding word *gegende* (> Ger. *Gegend* 'area' etc.) from the preposition *gegen* ('against'), which is thought to be a calque of Old French *cuntree* or Medieval Latin *contrata* (cf. Duden.de: "Gegend").

The word *nation* has its origin in the Latin stem *nat-* (from *nasci* 'to be born') and the nominal suffix *-io(n)*. Early French forms include *nacion*, *nacioun*, *nation*. The prototypical early meaning appears to be 'people united by language/culture/lineage' etc.⁴

² For the contentiousness of *nation*, see e.g. Anderson (2006), a groundbreaking work which attaches great importance to language as a factor in "imagining" the existence of nations, but which, interestingly and somewhat surprisingly, does not discuss how the word is used.

³ Sections 3 and 4 are largely based on OED.

⁴ For a fuller treatment of the etymology of *nation*, see Kjellmer (1973:61f).

4. Country and Nation: Meanings

Both *country* and *nation* have multiple meanings, some of which are still current in present-day English, whereas some have become obsolete or relegated to certain varieties of the language. Here follow lists of some of the most central meanings according to OED:

Country

Land of one's birth, citizenship, residence; homeland (often preceded by a possessive pronoun: *my, our, their*, etc)⁵, e.g. "Richard's first duty was to his country..." (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*)

Land, terrain, region, e.g. "...torrential rain fell, laying whole tracts of country under water." (Corelli, *Innocent*)

Areas away from conurbations; rural areas (normally preceded by *the*), e.g. "...to be at least equally safe in town as in the country." (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*)

The territory of a political state, e.g. "By this time the king of the country had notice of their arrival..." (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*)

Nation

A people; a political state; people united by descent, language, culture, history, ethnicity, territoriality, etc., so as to form a distinct unit. Political statehood and territoriality do not always coincide with the meaning of *nation*.

It will be obvious that the original basic meanings of the two words, *country* and *nation*, where the former often refers to the physical territory – the *land*, to use a Germanic word (which might also have been investigated here), whereas the latter has more to do with the communality of people, are still intact in many

⁵ It is certainly true that *country* is often preceded by a possessive pronoun, but it may be more interesting to see to what extent the various possessive pronouns are used in this connection. Here are the number of occurrences in the British National Corpus (BNC; 100,000,000 words) of possessive pronoun + *country* in falling order: *his country* (586), *their country* (426), *our country* (363), *my country* (172), *your country* (133), *her country* (68). By comparison, *nation* occurs very rarely together with a possessive pronoun. *My nation*, for instance, does not occur at all in BNC. The only possessive pronoun to be used more often with *nation* than with *country* (corrected for *country* being six times as common as *nation* in BNC) is *our*, *our nation* having 91 occurrences. This suggests that *nation*, more than *country*, is a word that is typically used to emphasise the belonging-togetherness of the speaker/writer and their recipients.

cases; but also that the two words have come to influence one another, or overlap, so that in present-day English, they may sometimes be used synonymously, as in the title and content of Michael Porter's seminal book, *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (Porter 1998), where the reference clearly is to 'political state'.⁶

5. Investigation

In this study, we shall, to begin with, see how often the words *country* and *nation* (including plural and genitive forms) are used in a selection of writings by eleven English authors who together cover most of the Early Modern and Modern English period up until the mid-twentieth century: William Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Marie Corelli, Virginia Woolf. The selection of authors is the same as in Mobärg (2005) and has been retrieved from the same database: the "Hyper-Concordance" of *The Victorian Literary Studies Archive* of Nagoya University.⁷ It goes without saying that this "corpus" cannot pretend to be statistically representative of 350 years of English language development, and so the analysis, while offering some crude quantitative information, will necessarily be quantitatively indicative at most.

5.1 Country and Nation: General Frequencies

Before looking into the corpus statistics, it should be noticed that while both words clearly belong to the central vocabulary of English, *country* is a more common word than *nation*. In the British National Corpus (BNC), *country* (the lemma) has a frequency of 521/m, which means that it is on a par with words such as *house*, *different*, *week*, taking the 193rd position

⁶ An interesting detail is that words ultimately derived from *nation*, such as *national*, *nationalism*, *nationality* often carry more specific, narrower, meanings than the word *nation* itself, *national* and *nationality* being mainly concerned with nation as political state, *nationalism* with culture, ethnicity etc.

⁷ <http://victorian.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/concordance/>. (The database is called "Victorian", but has greater coverage than that.) All texts by each respective author made available in the database have been used, totalling some 8,758,000 tokens, which does not necessarily mean the complete writings by the authors, but a very substantial selection. The database has been added to since my 2005 article, so the text coverage is marginally greater now than it was then, but the authors investigated are the same.

in the frequency ranking of English. *Nation*, on the other hand, has a frequency of 85/m, similar to e.g. *obvious* and *confirm*, holding position 1,192 in the same ranking.⁸ Thus, other things being equal, we should on average expect *country* to appear about six times as often as *nation* in English text. Notwithstanding the fact that BNC is based on relatively modern text material, whereas the present material is historical, BNC frequencies will be used as points of reference.

5.2 Quantitative Observations of the Corpus as a Whole

Table 1. Sample sizes, frequency of *country* and *nation* and *nation/country* quotient per author in the material

	<i>tot tokens</i>	<i>country</i> (freq/m)	<i>nation</i> (freq/m)	n/c
Shakespeare	890,063	172	43	0.25
Defoe	467,381	920	75	0.08
Swift	144,665	1,659	145	0.09
Richardson	652,609	93	15	0.16
Austen	834,828	283	10	0.04
Brontës ⁹	1,102,698	159	24	0.15
Eliot	1,740,411	206	21	0.10
Corelli	1,739,498	233	125	0.54
Woolf	1,186,086	257	16	0.06
BNC	100,000,000	521	85	0.16

As expected, all the authors use *country* more frequently than *nation*, but there is a great deal of variation between them. Swift is something of an outlier in having a particularly high frequency for *country*, 1,659/m, which is more than three times higher than the BNC frequency for that

⁸ Word frequency is in this article expressed per million words of running text. BNC frequencies and ranks have been retrieved from <http://www.kilgarriff.co.uk/BNClists/lemma.num> (access date 15 April 2015).

⁹ The Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily, have here been treated as one statistical unit. It is Charlotte who has the clearly greatest use of both *country* and *nation*. Her frequency of *country* is 108 (Anne: 33, Emily: 18) and all Brontë instances of *nation* are by her.

word. In fact, he is the only author in this selection who has a higher frequency for *country* than BNC. *Nation*, too, is especially frequent in the Swift texts, although not quite as much as *country*. This state of affairs could be attributed to *Gulliver's Travels*, which makes up almost the entire Swift sample. That book famously describes journeys to "several remote nations", which will naturally invite the abundant use of both *country* and *nation*. We also note that Austen's use of *nation* is remarkably small; in fact, in all but three of her texts, she does not use the word at all, which is a nice reflection of the fact that in literary texts, subject matter obviously affects the choice of words, Austen's textual microcosm very rarely touching on issues of nation.¹⁰

More interestingly, two authors, Shakespeare and Corelli, stand out from the rest in having a larger relative proportion of *nation* than expected. Shakespeare's use of *nation* in frequency terms is about a quarter of his use of *country*. But the clear top scorer in relative use of *nation* is Corelli, whose use of that word amounts to more than half of her use of *country*. The following discussion will therefore concentrate on these two authors.

5.3 Nation and Country in Shakespeare

5.3.1 Nation

Out of the total of 38 *nation* in the Shakespeare texts, more than half (20) come from four plays, *Henry V* (7), *Henry VI part 1* (5), *The Merchant of Venice* (4), and *Hamlet* (4). Almost all of the instances in *Henry V* come from one and the same exchange, where the stage Irish speaking Captain MacMorris famously exclaims:

What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a basterd, and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation? (Act III Sc. 2)

¹⁰ Austen's use of *country* also appears to consist predominantly of *country* = 'rural area'. Incidentally, one of Austen's few uses of *nation* refers very clearly to people, witness the use of a predicate verb in the plural: "...and it will, I believe, be everywhere found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation." (*Mansfield Park*). Cf. also Austen's scant use of words derived from *Britain* (Mobärg 2005:135f.)

This oft-quoted passage seems to place the concept of nation in a surprisingly modern (or post-modern) relativistic position which implicitly problematises nationality and nationalism (cf. Holderness 1991:86f.). On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent Irishness in Shakespeare's days – and in this quotation – was mainly considered a political-territorial matter, or an ethnic-linguistic one, i.e. whether *my nation* is here referring to 'my country' or 'my people'.¹¹ Also in *Henry V*, the Arch Bishop of Canterbury advises the king, saying that if we cannot defend our homeland, “[I]et us be worried, and our nation lose the name of hardiness and policy” (Act I Sc. 2), an indication of existing national traits, which might suggest the existence of 16th-century nationalism in England, something which has been proposed as well as contested by scholars for a long time (cf. Kumar 2003, ch. 5). In *Henry V*, there is also a reference to the “law of nature and of nations” (Act II Sc. 4), an expression which is mirrored in *Troilus and Cressida* (Act II Sc. 2). “Law of nations” was an expression which began to be used in the 16th century, forestalling the modern concept of international law (Hood Phillips 2005 [1972]:129), where *nation* must be understood as synonymous with *state*. In *Henry VI part 1*, all instances of *nation* represent the country personified as an agent or a human aggregate of some kind:

Nor should that nation boast it so with us (Act III, Sc. 3)
 a lordly nation (Act III Sc. 3)
 a fickle wavering nation [about France] (Act IV Sc. 1)
 Our nation's terror (Act IV Sc. 2)
 Betwixt our nation and the aspiring French (Act V Sc. 5)

This is in fact the case for about a third of Shakespeare's uses of *nation*. Here are examples from other plays:

an impudent nation (*All's Well that Ends Well*)
 The courtesy of nations (*As You Like It*)
 such a gentle nation (*The Comedy of Errors*)
 and the nation holds it to no sin to tarre them to controversy (*Hamlet*)
 This heavy-headed revel [...] Makes us traduc'd and tax'd of other nations
 (*Hamlet*)

¹¹ Henry VIII made himself King of Ireland in 1542, which was the starting-point of strongly increased English dominance over Ireland.

permit the curiosity of nations to deprive me (*King Lear*)
 O nation miserable! (*Macbeth*)
 O nation, that thou couldst remove! (*King John*)
 our tardy apish nation (*Richard II*)
 But it was always yet the trick of our English nation, if they [N.B plural pronoun]
 have a good thing, to make it too common. (*Henry IV* part 2 Act 1 Sc. 2)

The special use of *nation* which OED defines as “people having a single ethnic, tribal, or religious affiliation, but without a separate or politically independent territory” (OED *nation* 1.c), is duly represented in *The Merchant of Venice*, where all four instances of the word have this meaning, in particular the first three:

He hates our sacred nation (Act I Sc. 3)
 He [---] scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains (Act III Sc. 1)
 the curse never fell upon our nation till now (Act III Sc. 1)

These quotations are all from lines spoken by Shylock, “a rich Jew” according to the play’s *Dramatis Personae*, and indeed, OED has a special note mentioning that *nation* is “[f]req. used of the Jewish people in the Diaspora.” Other examples of the same use of the word, although not from Shakespeare, are e.g. “the Zulu Nation” (124,000 Google hits) and “the Navajo Nation” (453,000 Google hits). Compare also the quotation from *Henry V* above (“What ish my nation?”), which might carry some of that meaning.¹²

5.3.2 Country

The word *country* is predominantly used by Shakespeare in two senses, both fully productive even today: (1) ‘political state’, ‘homeland’; (2) ‘countryside’, ‘rural area’. Here are two examples of either use:

What country, friends, is this? (*Twelfth Night* Act I Sc. 2)
 Wit shall not go unrewarded while I am king of this country. (*The Tempest* Act IV Sc. 1)

¹² Even though *nation* is a ubiquitous international loanword, all potential meanings of the word need not be present in all languages using the word. This particular “ethnic” use of the word is listed by SAOB as obsolete in Swedish, the examples supplied being from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (SAOB *NATION* 1.c).

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Good husband, let us every one go home, And laugh this sport o'er by a country fire – Sir John and all. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* Act V Sc. 5)

Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court. (*As You Like It* Act III Sc. 2)

Associated with the 'rural' category is also Hamlet's bawdy pun when teasing Ophelia while they are waiting for the play within the play to begin (*Hamlet* Act III Sc. 2).

Hamlet. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Ophelia. No, my lord.

Hamlet. I mean, my head upon your lap?

Ophelia. Ay, my lord.

Hamlet. Do you think I meant country matters?

Ophelia. I think nothing, my lord.

Here the double entendre in *country* refers both to rough country behaviour and to the female pudenda, "the one unfailing lodestar" among female sexual features in Shakespeare according to Partridge (1968:21, cf. also *ibid.* p. 87).

There are also cases in the Shakespeare material where *country* takes on a personalised function in a way similar to *nation*, but in no way as often and in as obvious a fashion:

... when it shall please my country to need my death (*Julius Caesar* Act III Sc. 2)

Bleed, bleed, poor country! (*Macbeth* Act IV Sc. 3)

... base lackey peasants, whom their o'er-cloyed country vomits forth ... (*Richard III* Act V Sc. 3)

A further meaning of *country*, 'land', 'terrain', 'region' (OED, cf. above), finds some limited representation in Shakespeare, e.g.

The undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns (*Hamlet* Act III Sc. 1)

5.4 Nation and Country in Corelli

Marie Corelli (pen name of Mary Mackay 1855–1924) is one of the now all but forgotten success stories of English literature. Her literary career

coincided with the peak period of the British Empire, when she outsold most other novelists, only to be left in oblivion by posterity.¹³

5.4.1 Investigating the Corelli Sample

The Corelli sample is one of the biggest in this investigation, numbering well over 1.7 million words. In addition, as noted, Corelli stands out as the clearly most lavish user of *nation*, relative to *country*, in the present material. It is therefore of particular interest to try and see what semantic (or stylistic; or rhetorical) needs are fulfilled by these two words, respectively, which might help to explain the author's choice.

One way of doing that is to apply a contextual-collocational approach to the two words, i.e. to know them by the company they keep, to paraphrase Firth.¹⁴ We have already seen that in terms of dictionary definitions, *country* and *nation* can sometimes be used as near-synonyms, but often they have meanings which refer back to their etymological origins; *country* is a more concrete word, which can represent the land, the countryside, and the terrain, as well as the political state, whereas *nation* is typically associated with some kind of human communality.

The method I propose, and will be testing on the Corelli sample, is to investigate how *country* and *nation* (including inflected forms), behave in the following contextual-semantic roles/situations:

- (1) What *country/nation* 'is', i.e., what adjectival modifiers, etc., the word is used together with, e.g. 'a strong country'; 'the country is strong' etc. Reporting results, I will call this category 'descriptive'.
- (2) What *country/nation* can 'do', i.e. what predicate verb the word is used together with when it is 'agentive', most typically as subject, e.g. 'the nation accepts...'

¹³ For substantial information about the life and works of Marie Corelli, see e.g. Ransom (1999).

¹⁴ Referring to Firth does not imply that I am subscribing to his semantics, that the meaning of a word is determined by its "company", but rather that its company may add stylistic, rhetorical, ideological, etc., nuances to our understanding of the word, which may secondarily rub off onto the word itself.

- (3) What you can ‘do to’ *country/nation*, i.e. what verb is used with *country/nation* when the latter is ‘patientive’, most typically as direct object, e.g. ‘to love one’s country’.¹⁵

Henceforth, I will use the expression ‘companion’ as a common term for whatever word co-functions with *country/nation* in these three ways, thus avoiding the term ‘collocate’, which may carry too many implications of prefabricated or fixed expressions to suit my purpose. The syntactic relationships that make up these co-functions may vary; a nominalisation like ‘her love for her country’ would here count for the same as ‘she loves her country’. In the same vein, a genitive construction such as ‘a country’s honour’ will here be equated with ‘the country has/shows/displays honour’.¹⁶ The identified companions will then be classified according to whether they have a predominantly positive, negative or neutral meaning (e.g. ‘support’ [pos.]; ‘enslave’ [neg.] ‘do sth to’ [neut.]).

In addition, it will also be investigated whether the companions of *country/nation* are prototypically ‘human’ (e.g. ‘astonished’) or ‘non-human’ (e.g. ‘decaying’). In a few cases it will not be possible to make that distinction and so a neutral category will be used wherever necessary (e.g. ‘known’).

It goes without saying that there is an element of uncertainty and subjectivity in making these kinds of distinctions, but in view of the fact that this is merely an explorative investigation partly set up to test a way of approaching the meaning of contentious words, we need go no further into technical detail in the present context.

5.4.2 *The Corelli Sample: Results*

5.4.2.1 *Overall Quantities*

Table 2 shows those particular instances of *country* and *nation* which occur with descriptive, agentive and patientive companions according to the method presented above. Thus, we see that even though Corelli in her

¹⁵ Cf. Quirk et al. (1985:741), who use the term “affected” rather than “patientive”.

¹⁶ This is the analysis chosen, but it is of course not self-evident. ‘A country’s honour’ could also be seen as semantically deriving from/related to ‘an honourable country’, which would be a descriptive companion in the terminology used here.

total sample uses *country* almost twice as often as *nation* (rightmost column), the present method elicits a much larger share of her *nation* than of her *country*: As much as two-thirds of her total *nation* surfaces in this investigation, compared to less than a fifth of her total *country*. There appears to be a particularly strong tendency in Corelli's texts for *nation*, relative to *country*, to 'do' things; a strong, but less so, tendency for *nation* to 'have something done to it', again relative to *country*; whereas the two words are equal in number of descriptive companionships (adjective modifiers etc.).

Table 2. Number of occurrences of *country* and *nation* per category of companionship in the Corelli sample. Number of occurrences unique to either *country* or *nation* in brackets. For comparison, the total number (tokens) of *country* and *nation* in the Corelli sample is given far right.

	<i>Descriptive</i>	<i>Agentive</i>	<i>Patientive</i>	<i>Total D/A/P</i>	<i>Corelli tot</i>
<i>Country</i>	32 (30)	24 (21)	20 (16)	76 (67)	405
<i>Nation</i>	32 (30)	67 (64)	45 (41)	144 (135)	217

5.4.2.2 Country/Nation Overlapping

In only a few cases do *country* and *nation* share the same companions. Here is the full list:

Descriptive: *strong, worthless*

Agentive: *accept, fight, vote*

Patientive: *destroy, love, put something to, rule (over)*

These overlapping words, interesting as they may be, will be disregarded in the following discussion as our main interest is to trace combinatory differences, rather than similarities, between *country* and *nation*. Thus, it is the numbers in brackets in Table 2, i.e. companions unique to either *country* or *nation*, that form the basis of the following discussion.

It would take up too much space to list all words relevant to the following sections. Instead I will concentrate on the main tendencies, while offering a few illuminating examples.

5.4.2.3 Descriptive: Companions Unique to Country

There are 30 instances in all in the Corelli sample of the “descriptive” type *country* used uniquely (multiple instances only counted once here and throughout). The largest homogeneous group ($\approx 40\%$) concerns *country* as ‘land’, ‘terrain’, where among the companions used we find *far-off*, *green*, *tropical* and *undiscovered*.

About a third of the descriptive companions are positive, e.g. *civilized*, *healthy*, *prosperous*. Less than a handful are negative: *cheerless*, *inglorious*, [subject to] *curse* making up the full list. There are also a few companions that defy the positive/negative classification, e.g. *old*.

As could be expected, “non-human” companions tend to coincide with *country* as ‘land’, ‘terrain’, even if some such companions could have a secondary meaning that is potentially human, e.g. *fair*, *sweet*. There are altogether nine companions that have been marked as “human”, most of which are positive (e.g. *at peace*, *healthy*); only a couple are negative (e.g. *cheerless*) or unclassifiable.

5.4.2.4 Descriptive: Companions Unique to Nation

By coincidence, Corelli’s unique use of *nation* with “descriptive” companions amounts to the same number of instances as for *country*: 30. With *nation* we do not need to consider a physical sense of the word (‘land’, ‘terrain’), since such a meaning has never been available for that word. On the other hand, there are a couple of examples of a very special type of companion to go with *nation*: nationality adjectives (*American*, *French*). Such words would not easily collocate with *country*, other than in phrases including the “rural” sense of the word (*French country cooking*). In other words, a country as a whole does not have a nationality, but a nation does – a good reflection of a case where the original distinction between place and people is maintained.

The clearest tendency to come out here is that the majority of the unique descriptive companions of *nation* are human (e.g. *astonished*, *dying*, *hypocritical*, even *unmusical*), whereas only a couple of them are non-human (e.g. *decaying*). About a third of the companions cannot be classified according to human/non-human (e.g. *known*).

Unlike the situation for *country* above, where positive companions were more numerous than negative ones, it is somewhat more common

($\approx 40\%$) for *nation* to take negative descriptive companions (e.g. *degenerate, as frightened children*), but there are also several cases ($\approx 30\%$) with positive companions (*friendly, happy*).

Comparing Corelli's *country* and *nation*, therefore, appears to suggest that *nation*, more than *country*, invites negative descriptive companions, whereas the two words appear to be more similar in attracting positive companions.

5.4.2.5 Agentive: Companions Unique to Country

Out of the 21 combinations where *country* is uniquely used agentively (typically as subject), two-thirds take human companions (e.g. *claim, go mad over something, breathe freely*) and one-third non-human ones (e.g. *remain*). Over half take positive companions (e.g. *get on without, have honour, wish*) and only very few take negative ones (e.g. *abuse*). Just under a third cannot be judged by positive-negative (e.g. *find*).

5.4.2.6 Agentive: Companions Unique to Nation

As already noted, agentive *nation* in Corelli is three times as common as agentive *country*. This circumstance in itself is probably the most important finding: *nation* appears to be a clearly more natural choice than *country* when it comes to “doing” things. Furthermore, unique companions to agentive *nation* are overwhelmingly human ($\approx 85\%$; e.g. *love, praise, shudder*). On the other hand, even though there is a certain majority ($\approx 40\%$) for positive companions with agentive *nation* (e.g. *bless, have/show heart and soul, revere*) compared to negative companions ($\approx 30\%$; e.g. *decay, hate*) the majority is clearly less marked than was the case for *country*.

5.4.2.7 Patientive: Companions Unique to Country

There are 16 unique cases in Corelli where *country* is patientive. All but one have human companions (e.g. *be true to, love, save*). Positive companions (like the ones just mentioned) are somewhat more common ($\approx 50\%$) than negative ones ($\approx 35\%$; e.g. *betray, enslave*).

5.4.2.8 Patientive: Companions Unique to Nation

Overall figures (Table 2) show that not only does *nation* seem to be a more attractive choice than *country* for “doing things”, but also for “having things done to it”, even though the difference is less extreme in the patientive context. On the other hand, unlike the situation for *country*, there is a clear dominance of negative companions with patientive *nation* ($\approx 50\%$; e.g. *cripple*, *exterminate*, *put in peril*), the remaining cases being shared equally between positive companions ($\approx 25\%$; e.g. *bless*, *rely on*) and such as could not be classified for positive/negative ($\approx 25\%$; e.g. *manage*, *return to*). Human companions outnumber non-human ones by nine to one.

5.4.3 Final Remarks

A breakdown of these findings would suggest the following:

- (1) When *country* is used with a descriptive companion, it is predominantly the “rural” meaning of the word that we find, as in the example, “... who has never visited wide-spreading country, over-canopied by large stretches of spreading open sky”, where furthermore the companion is practically always, and expectedly so, non-human;
- (2) A descriptive companion together with *nation* is most likely human, and there is a tendency for it to be negative, a typical example being, “... England is running a neck and neck race with other less hypocritical nations in pursuit of social vice”;
- (3) When used agentively (typically as subject), the main tendency for both *country* and *nation* seems to be to combine with human and positive companions, but that human companions are far more common with *nation*, e.g. “A veritable queen, to whom nations shall pay homage”;
- (4) When used patientively (typically as direct object), there is a strong tendency for both *country* and *nation* to combine with human companions, but the most conspicuous finding is the strong dominance of negative companions with *nation*, e.g. “No need to exterminate nations with your destructive stuff”.

This in turn suggests that *nation*, more than *country*, does maintain more of a human-related quality of meaning, but also that it might have a greater emotional potential than *country* in inviting negative companions. In any case, the method employed would seem to constitute a feasible way of investigating the relative meaning of contentious political-cultural words with related meanings, to the benefit of enhanced semantic

precision in general, and, from a practical perspective, lexicographical work. Including further words from the semantic field studied here, e.g. *state, land, realm, dominion*, maybe *kingdom*, etc., expanding the corpus of study, and refining the criteria for co-functioning as well as the semantic classification would seem to be useful ways forward.

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