

# Stylistics in Use



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Edited by

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## INTRODUCTION

*Stylistics in Use* is composed of a series of studies about various trends in stylistics. More specifically, its seven chapters analyse, from varied perspectives, literary aspects on the Internet, on television and in literary works. To do so, different approaches have been adopted, such as corpus-driven analysis, translation studies, phraseology, discourse analysis and sociolinguistic approaches, among others. The aim of the book is first and foremost to bring stylistic analyses closer together, thus demonstrating the potential of stylistics as a research area that can benefit from other disciplines and proving its effectiveness in examining literary aspects in literary texts as well as in other mediums. In this regard, we hope that this book will be of interest to a wide academic readership, including not only stylisticians but also those doing corpus analysis, translation studies, phraseology, discourse analysis or sociolinguistics. Finally, we hope that stylisticians in general will be interested in applying some of the analytical methods to other literary analyses to test their efficacy and thus demonstrate the replicability of the studies comprising this book.

Pablo Ruano San Segundo  
Guadalupe Nieto Caballero



## CHAPTER ONE

# “BUT ME NO BUTS”: ALLUSION, INTERTEXTUALITY, AND OTHER THINGS CORPORA CAN’T SEE

GUSTAVO A. RODRÍGUEZ MARTÍN

### 1. Introduction

The history of literary language in English is filled with popular catchphrases. Some of them epitomize the idiolect of a particular fictional character for posterity (e.g., “I would prefer not to”) whereas others transcend individual works and become widespread in the literary canon of a specific period. For instance, many Elizabethan plays written around 1590 include “paucis pallabris” or a variation thereof<sup>1</sup>—a phrase that constitutes one of the earliest recorded examples of systematic intertextuality in secular texts. Some other popular literary phrases, however, do not comprise a fixed set of words, but rather a syntactic structure that becomes very productive by virtue of paradigmatic substitution. In other words, one is looking at a phraseological unit that is actualized for stylistic purposes by changing one or more of its constituents.

These multi-word sequences containing one or more free slots are often referred to in the field of phraseology as a “collocational frameworks” (Renouf and Sinclair 1991, 128) or “phrase frames” (Stubbs 2007).<sup>2</sup> In the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (In.i.5, “paucas pallabris”) and *Much Ado About Nothing* (III.v.16, simply “palabras”), and Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (III.xiv.118 “pocas palabras”).

<sup>2</sup> Although terminological disputes are beyond the scope of this essay, “phrase frame” will be the term of choice henceforth because the definition for “collocational framework” specifies that it is “a discontinuous sequence of two words, positioned at one word remove from each other.” Evidently, “X me no Xs” meets neither criterion.

case in point, as we shall see, the phrase frame “\* me no \*s”<sup>3</sup> may result in concrete realizations such as “but me no buts,” “diamond me no diamonds” or “virgin me no virgins”—to name but a few.

As the title of this chapter suggests, “but me no buts” is the most popular realization of the “\* me no \*s” phrase frame. Indeed, it is the only formulation of it that has made its way into the phrasicon (i.e., the whole catalogue of conventionalized phraseological units in a language). Thus, it is recorded in several phraseological dictionaries.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, “but me no buts” can be classified as what Gläser (1986b; 2001) calls “quotations and winged words”—that is, propositions (sentence-like phraseological units) that are commonly known and can be traced back to a known source, even if the meaning and pragmatic use of the expression no longer correspond to that of its original source. In the case of “but me no buts,” its first recorded use is to be found in Susanna Centlivre’s *The Busie Body* (1708), although several sources claim<sup>5</sup> that it was its use in Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816) that popularized it. In fact, it has become so widespread as a stereotypical formulation that it is often misattributed to Shakespeare.<sup>6</sup>

This particular expression of the frame, however, is by no means the only documented use. As noted above—and within literary language alone—we can list many other examples, such as “clerk me no clerks” or “front me no fronts.” Such has been the popularity of this phrase frame as a source of literary creativity that some early studies attempted to compile a catalogue of the existing instances of this manifestation of intertextuality. John Bartlett (1905, 861), for example, enumerates nineteen different realizations of “\* me no \*s” from literary works dated anywhere between the Elizabethan period and the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Appendix A). Soon after this, Potter (1915) set out to expand Bartlett’s records in a short paper exclusively dedicated to listing further examples of the same phrase frame. He compiles another fifteen examples of the “\* me no \*s” pattern (see Appendix A) and finds new occurrences of Bartlett’s examples in different works of literature. It is also worthy of remark that he notes for the first time that “this locution” also “crops up in contemporary writers.” A year after Potter’s note, Cooper (1916) submitted to the same publication an addendum to the former’s collection. It supplies a further 33 examples (Appendix A), for one of which he admits the references to be lacking. All the examples that Cooper

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<sup>3</sup> We follow the convention of utilizing an asterisk (\*) to denote a free slot in a string of text where any word may be used in its stead.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Kumar (1998), Jewell (2002) or Manser (2006).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Partridge (2005 [1940], 58) and Stevenson (1948, 1218)

<sup>6</sup> See Bernard Levin (1983), as quoted in Wells and Shaw (2005 [1998], 82).

enumerates are once again taken from works of literature, the majority of which are late Tudor and Restoration drama. He does not seem to have read Bartlett’s book, however, or he would have noticed that some of the “new” examples he records had already been listed by Bartlett. In all, the popularity of this phrase frame as a literary device is well attested, to the extent that it is sometimes used to illustrate lexical creativity, word formation, and other linguistic phenomena.<sup>7</sup>

A superficial glance at the examples recorded by the authors cited above seems to suggest that “\* me no \*s” has been especially productive roughly during the 250 years between the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with some occasional later occurrences. Other than this, there is very little that can be derived from the data available in earlier studies, and there is no evidence to suggest that this phrase frame is used regularly outside literary discourse. However, it is my contention in this chapter that this particular phrase frame is a ubiquitous stylistic device in other genres and registers (e.g. journalism and colloquial web genres). Also, other potentially relevant circumstances in the distribution and use of this frame are also to be explored: geographical, chronological, social. In order to gauge whether and to what extent these elements are germane to this research, the analysis draws in the main from a corpus-based methodology. In addition, the data from the different corpora available is presented with a purpose that goes beyond the primary research objective stated before. Indeed, as we shall see, one of the reasons why so little data is available has to do with the limitations of the corpora at our disposal. Therefore, in this study we not only analyze a particular phrase frame from the point of view of corpus-based phraseo-stylistics,<sup>8</sup> but we also try to overcome the restrictions imposed by corpora that were not compiled—and neither were their search interfaces—with these phenomena in mind. Thus, as a derived objective, we set out to mark the most relevant methodological caveats for future research on this or related questions.

## 2. Corpus Data: An Overview

This section presents the data from the different corpora that have been consulted and provides critical feedback on the—sometimes insurmountable—obstacles that those corpora pose for the analysis of the “\* me no \*s” frame. At the outset of each subsection, the specific corpus is briefly

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Crystal (2005a; 2005b; 2007).

<sup>8</sup> See Gläser (1986b) and related research on the wake of her paper, like Oncins-Martínez (2005).

described in terms of its composition and, hence, its scope.

Before the analysis of the data proper, it seems convenient to outline the technical details of the search parameters in all the corpora for, as they are practically identical, they may be mentioned here and frame the whole section. In specific terms, the query was always either “\* me no \*s” or “me no \*s,” depending on whether the corpus interface allowed for one or two wildcard signs. As the \* wildcard stands for any letter combination (word) but they need not be identical when more than one is used, many of the results were irrelevant for this study. Among the irrelevant items that were retrieved, some of the most frequent include “asked me no questions,” “tells me no lies,” and “gave me no problems”—or variations thereof. All these were ignored, and only those results where the original frame is recognizable have been taken into consideration. This does not mean that the retrieved words occupying the place of each asterisk wildcard must be the same, but they must have an obvious lexical connection. Such is the case, as we shall see, of “behoove me no ill-behooves.” This adjustment is only natural if we consider that the examples listed by Bartlett, Potter, and Cooper also include some cases where the first and second replaceable element in the frame are cognates or derivatives, not the same word (i.e., “leave me no leaving” or “confer me no conferrings”).

## 2.1. British National Corpus (BNC)

The British National Corpus<sup>9</sup> contains 100 million words from different sources. It is “designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English, both spoken and written, from the late twentieth century,” specifically from the early 80s to the mid-90s. Detailed technical data (text types, number of words) are available on their website.<sup>10</sup>

The search query “\* me no \*s” retrieves only 9 results from the BNC (Figure 1-1), and only two of those are relevant for the present study, namely “diamond me no diamonds” and “wonder me no wonders.” Although both of them are novel occurrences in that they do not come from any of the sources cited in Appendix A, “diamond me no diamonds” was already used by Tennyson. At any rate, both examples belong to literary works<sup>11</sup> (novels) and as such, they are still confined to the same type of discourse.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml?ID=numbers>.

<sup>11</sup> “Wonder me no wonders” is from Alistair MacLean’s *Santorini* and “Diamond me no diamonds” from Pamela Haines’s *The diamond waterfall*. The publication details of the editions of literary works in all the corpora can be consulted by displaying the contextual menu of each result.

**Figure 1-1. Results from the British National Corpus**

	■	CONTEXT	FREQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	WONDER ME NO WONDERS	1
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	PAY ME NO WAGES	1
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	LEFT ME NO RICHES	1
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	GIVEN ME NO INSTRUCTIONS	1
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	GIVE ME NO HAPPINESS	1
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	GAVE ME NO CLUES	1
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	FOR ME NO LESS	1
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	DIAMOND ME NO DIAMONDS	1
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	ADVISED ME NO COS	1
		TOTAL	9

## 2.2. Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

In this case we have a larger text sample at our disposal (450 million words) from a different geographical source (United States) and, perhaps most importantly, it has undergone regular updates so that at present it comprises texts from 1990 to 2015.<sup>12</sup> The Corpus of Contemporary American English retrieves 44 raw results for the query “\* me no \*s”—a figure that is proportionally larger than what is to be expected by comparison with the size of the BNC. The number of relevant results, however, is also rather small at 3 (Figure 1-2). All three instances of the phrase frame in question belong to literary works,<sup>13</sup> and only two of them had not been recorded previously “name me no names” and “behoove me no ill-behooves.” The third one is another utilization of the popular “but me no buts.”

Once again, neither the distribution nor the frequency of the results suggests that there has been any change in the use of the phrase frame primarily as a restricted stylistic device in literary genres.

<sup>12</sup> <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Name me no names” is from Cynthia Ozick’s collection of short stories *Dictation: A Quartet* and “but me no buts” was retrieved from Tobias Wolff’s *This Boy’s Life*. The case of “behoove me no ill-behooves” is rather tricky, because it belongs to the movie script of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, but it does not appear in the text of the original novel.

**Figure 1-2. Results from the Corpus of Contemporary American English**

34	<input type="checkbox"/>	GAVE ME NO EGGS	1
35	<input type="checkbox"/>	FRIGHTENED ME NO LESS	1
36	<input type="checkbox"/>	DID ME NO FAVORS	1
37	<input type="checkbox"/>	CAUSE ME NO FUSS	1
38	<input type="checkbox"/>	BUY ME NO SHOES	1
39	<input type="checkbox"/>	BUT ME NO BUTS	1
40	<input type="checkbox"/>	BROUGHT ME NO MIKANS	1
41	<input type="checkbox"/>	BRING ME NO PAPERS	1
42	<input type="checkbox"/>	BRING ME NO EPIPHANIES	1
43	<input type="checkbox"/>	BORE ME NO KIDS	1
44	<input type="checkbox"/>	BEHOOVE ME NO ILL-BEHOOVES	1
TOTAL			60

### 2.3. Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)

This corpus represents a contrast with the other two that have been discussed thus far because it has a much wider chronological scope while it still covers contemporary English (1810-2009)—albeit within the geographical sphere of North America.<sup>14</sup> The data from this corpus was expected to shed some light on the evolution in the use of this phrase frame and provide evidence to explain the scanty data in other, exclusively contemporary, corpora.

At first sight, the Corpus of Historical American English produces what seems like a very promising number of unrefined results (242 tokens in 147 separate formulations), despite a comparatively small number of words (400 million). A closer look at the data reveals that only 18 examples match the phrase frame analyzed here, but with only 8 separate, relevant wordings. Out of those, “but me no buts” is by far the most frequent (11 occurrences) and, as Figure 1-3 shows, all of them belong to works of fiction—some of which are duplicated in the corpus.

Among the other seven examples, each of which has only one occurrence, we cannot find a single case that is used outside literary language. Perhaps more significantly, the vast majority belong to novels published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the most recent example dates from 1969.<sup>15</sup> This would seem to corroborate the notion that this phrase frame is

<sup>14</sup> <http://corpus.byu.edu/coha/>.

<sup>15</sup> The list of phrases and works is the following (in chronological order of publication): “Lord me no lords” (John Bray, *The Tooth-Ache*, 1814), “dear me no

rare, if not practically obsolete, in contemporary language. In addition, the claim that the stylistic exploitation of this structure is productive and, as such, creative, is put into question by the fact that previously recorded examples recur; e.g., “diamond me no diamonds” or “lord me no lords,” apart from the strongly lexicalized “but me no buts.”

**Figure 1-3. Examples of “but me no buts” in the Corpus of Historical American English**

1	1820	FIC	MountainTorrent	A	B	C	hem, ha! Lud. Ludovico Dear! But -- Mar. Marco <b>But me no buts!</b> I never entrust my
2	1855	FIC	WorksEdgarAllan	A	B	C	now rather at a loss what to say, " but sir- " <b>But me no buts,</b> sir, " interrupts the di
3	1855	FIC	WorksEdgarAllan	A	B	C	slamming the door after him, as he makes his escape. -- " <b>But me no buts,</b> sir, and
4	1885	FIC	TwoWives	A	B	C	make a capital preacher, ha? " " But Carlton " -- " <b>But me no buts,</b> my hearty! " and
5	1902	FIC	Play:Herrick	A	B	C	father, but -- AUNT TEMPLE Nay, nay, but -- SIR TEMPLE <b>But me no buts,</b> I'll not driv
6	1902	FIC	Play:Herrick	A	B	C	of fear. Herrick go on. p. 56 HERRICK But -- SIR TEMPLE <b>But me no buts</b> I say, go o
7	1906	FIC	ColonelRedHuzzars	A	B	C	. " " But, Your Highness, " - - - Lady Helen began. " <b>But me no buts,</b> " said Dehra;
8	1940	FIC	FarewellMyLovely	A	B	C	put me in your private funny house? " " But -- " " <b>But me no buts.</b> I'll make a sop of
9	1946	FIC	Play:MotherUsAll	A	B	C	said Susan B. no, said Susan B. No. But said Anne. <b>But me no buts</b> said Susan B. I l
10	1977	FIC	PublicBurning	A	B	C	Do you mind? " " Well, no, but -- " " <b>But me no buts,</b> son, you got ta learn to give a
11	1986	FIC	ShatteredSilk	A	B	C	" " There are extras on the hall table. But -- " " <b>But me no buts.</b> You'd better get dre

## 2.4. Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE)

The queries up to this point have yielded no remarkable data either historically or in contemporary English for Britain and the USA. In this regard, the Corpus of Global Web-Based English<sup>16</sup> is the most appropriate yardstick to gauge whether the scarcity of relevant data has to do with the varieties of English under scrutiny. In the case in question, the GloWbE contains over 1.9 billion words from twenty English-speaking countries—regardless of the status of English in that country (official, assistant)—from Canada to Australia, from Nigeria to Singapore. Additionally, the fact that all the texts in the corpus are web-based guarantees a certain deviation from literary genres, at the same time that it theoretically restricts the chronological range of the corpus. Indeed, as the information

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dears” (Richard H. Dana, *Poems and Prose Writings*, 1833), “brother me no brothers” (William G. Simms, *The Kinsmen; or, The Black Riders of Congaree*, 1841), “beggar-maid me no beggar-maids!” (Frances H. Burnett, *Vagabondia 1884*, 1884), “diamond me no diamonds” (George Washington Cable, *Bonaventure A Prose Pastoral of Acadian Louisiana*, 1888), “fellow me no fellows” (Owen Davis, *Robin Hood or the Merry Outlaws of Sherwood Forest*, 1923), and “Jew me no Jews” (Ivan Gold, *Sick Friends*, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> <http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe/>.

available on their website states, “the web pages were collected in December 2012.” Although this does not presuppose that all the words compiled from each web page date from that period, the use of two genre labels (“blog” and “general,” based on the Google search options with which they performed the searches for their corpus material) at least implies that the majority of the text in the blog category is likely to be contemporary.

Despite the geographical diversity and the abundant text sample, the results from GloWbE are disheartening and, as we shall see, even misleading. The custom search terms retrieve 272 total occurrences of 167 different phrases that fit the “\* me no \*s” frame. The country whose data contains the most results is the USA (79), whereas four countries contribute only two examples (Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Kenya, and Tanzania). Out of all these results, however, only 8 tokens are relevant—four of which correspond to the proverbial “but me no butts.” Indeed, the phraseological status of this expression is so well-established that one of the instances found in this corpus may be deemed a creative modification of it (“butt me no butts,” in an Australian sport article). Other than these two cases, the other three different renditions of this phrase frame are “clerk me no clerks” (India), “Flaubert me no Flauberts,” and “plan me no plans” (both from the USA).

Although the data are limited, there are three aspects that are worth noting here. The first two have to do with the usual deviation of the results from the hypothesis suggested in our research question; that is to say, that the majority of the cases are forms that had already been recorded (“but me no butts” getting the lion’s share) and that practically all the pertinent examples are to be found in literary texts or in related genres (movie scripts, literary criticism) with a single interesting yet inconsequential exception in sport journalism.

The third aspect that necessitates further commentary is of methodological nature, however, and exposes the problematic nature of corpus compilation and design.<sup>17</sup> As stated before, one of the valid examples (“clerk me no clerks”) is listed under the country heading of India. The phrase in question, paradoxically, was extracted from the text of Walter Scott’s

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<sup>17</sup> The methodological challenges of corpus compilation and corpus design have received scholarly attention from the very inception of the modern concept of text corpus. Issues include the geographical variety to be studied (e.g., Douglas 2003), the level of linguistic phenomenology under scrutiny (e.g., Leitner 1992), the types of text to be compiled (e.g., Hundt et al. 2007), and representativeness (e.g., Biber 2015), just to mention a few. This chapter simply provides a few modest observations that may result in valuable feedback for corpus designers.

*Ivanhoe*—it is in fact the same example that Bartlett records (see Appendix A). The explanation behind this geographical conundrum is a mystery to the author: the web-based text that was selected for the corpus is Chapter 20 of the digitized version of *Ivanhoe* hosted by The Literature Network (<http://www.online-literature.com/>). Why this should be considered a text from India is not at all clear, because there is no indication in the digitized text that it is the reproduction of an edition published in India,<sup>18</sup> and the publisher of the site that stores the digitized text is Jalic Incorporated (<http://www.jalic.com/>), “an Internet company located in East Lansing, Michigan, USA.” Whatever the case may be, and even if the text had either been published in India or was hosted by a website with an Indian IP, classifying the text of Scott’s novel as if it represented the English written or spoken in India is a serious blunder. Furthermore, the consequences of this distortion can be disastrous for a large-scale study in which the size of the sample is too large to inspect each individual result and discard these erroneously attributed texts. Finally, this misrepresented example also points to another element that may detract from the validity of the results obtained from this corpus. Namely, one should not take the label “web-based” as a guarantee that the texts in the corpus exemplify contemporary English. As we have been able to observe, the digitized text of a 19th-century novel counts as 21st-century prose if it has been uploaded in 2012; and a preliminary examination attests to the remarkable number of parallel cases.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.5. Google Books Corpus

Given that—up to this point—practically all the examples have been retrieved from literary works, the data in this corpus would be expected to provide an exhaustive list of all the occurrences and different forms of the “\* me no \*s” phrase frame in literary texts. This, in turn, would at least be a sound starting point in order to assess the degree of creativity in the different formulations of the frame over time. The numbers seem to buttress this notion, for the Google Books Corpus, as the description in its

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<sup>18</sup> There has been a relatively recent edition published in Mumbai (2004, Wilco Publishing House).

<sup>19</sup> To quote two random test queries that were performed in order to explore this circumstance, “Bouderby” retrieves almost 100 results, most of which are duplicated quotations from *Hard Times* or fragments of the digitized text of the novel. Also, the text of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Xanadu” is repeated four times in the corpus.

web interface indicates,<sup>20</sup> “allows you to search more than 200 billion words (200,000,000,000) of data in both the American and British English datasets.” In addition, the dataset comprises texts between the 1500s and the 2000s; this chronological range covers contemporary usage as well as the epoch of the earliest recorded examples in Appendix A.

The number of results (both the raw data and the relevant examples) is larger than in any previous queries. Specifically, out of an initial batch of 93 phrase frames and more than 16,000 realizations (Figure 1-4), we are left with 15 relevant formulations of the frame, which account for 2,669 occurrences.

**Figure 1-4. Results from the Google Books Corpus**

84	offers me no crowns	G	42					
85	gave me no answers	G	42					
86	ax me no questions	G	41				4	1
87	before me no less	G	41		2			4
88	find me no less	G	41	2	3	1		2
89	Give me no thanks	G	41					
90	on me no chains	G	40			4	20	1
91	To me no bays	G	40			3	4	10
92	give me no hopes	G	39				3	1
93	give me no less	G	37		1			
		TOTAL	16,004	76	165	343	462	699

Nevertheless, all the examples have two characteristics in common that—however foreseeable because of the nature of the corpus—once again seem to reject our initial hypothesis that the “\* me no \*s” frame was productive outside literary discourse in contemporary English. First of all, all the results had been recorded on the initial lists compiled by Bartlett, Potter, and Cooper (Appendix A). In addition, all of them are found in works of literature or scholarly works that quote them for illustrative purposes. Apart from these descriptive questions, a closer look at the data reveals a series of flaws in the corpus—or, at least, a series of caveats that researchers may not be aware of—that distorts the results and the conclusions drawn from them. But before we describe the challenges posed by the present condition of the corpus and its interface, let us look at

<sup>20</sup> <http://googlebooks.byu.edu/x.asp>.

the instances one by one so that the extent of this portrayal can be faithfully estimated quantitatively and qualitatively.

“But me no buts” is by far the most frequent realization of “\* me no \*s” in the Google Books Corpus, as it occurs 998 times. When the actual texts in the corpus are displayed, one can see that practically all the cases fall into one of three broad categories: a) an entry in a phraseological dictionary or a dictionary of quotations; b) the phrase in use in the relevant work of several authors (Edgar Allan Poe, Lord Byron, Susanna Centlivre, and Henry Fielding); and c) a reference to this realization of the frame in a critical edition of a literary work as a way to illustrate another of its formulations in that work. Occasionally, one encounters a case that has been used in a different work of fiction,<sup>21</sup> but the phraseological nature of this frame and its use in well-known classical works diminishes its potential stylistic effect.

“Thank me no thankings” (378) and “proud me no prouds” (432) usually go together, as most of the results are from editions of *Romeo and Juliet* (“Thank me no thankings nor proud me no prouds,” Act III, Sc. v). In addition, as in the previous case, dictionaries of quotations and scholarly publications (on Shakespeare, but also on linguistics and other areas of study within the humanities) make up the entirety of this set of results.

The rest of the results follows a similar pattern. The number of occurrences is usually a combination of examples in dictionaries of quotations and scholarly works plus the original example in different editions of the same literary work. Thus, we find “prize me no prizes” and “diamond me no diamonds” (145 and 157 results respectively, quoted from Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*), “petition me no petitions” (112 from Henry Fielding’s *Tom Thumb*), “virgin me no virgins,” “end me no ends,” and “cause me no causes” (111, 85, and 82 results respectively, all from Philip Massinger’s *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*), “digest me no digestions” (95 from a letter from the Count of Essex to recommend Francis Bacon for Attorney General, edited or quoted in different publications), “plot me no plots” (94 from Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*), “parish me no parishes” (74 results from George Peele’s *The Old Wife’s Tale*), “map me no maps” (71 results quoted originally from Henry Fielding’s *The Justice Caught in His Own Trap*),

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<sup>21</sup> Such is the case of Robert Rankin’s *The Hollow Chocolate Bunnies of the Apocalypse* and Henri Barbusse’s *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*. The latter is perhaps one of the few cases that deserves further exploration, as it is a translation of the original French and “but me no buts” is used twice in the same passage.

“clerk me no clerks” (56 results from Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*), and “vow me no vows” (49 results from John Fletcher’s *Wit Without Money*).

Even if the purpose of this study were to track the use of the examples recorded in Appendix A in the history of literary criticism, the Google Book Corpus presents a series of problematic elements that would mar the validity of such a study. The first of them is of technical nature. After the initial query was performed (\* me no \*s), each of the relevant results was tested in the search interface as a literal text string; i.e., I searched for “but me no buts,” “diamond me no diamonds,” “clerk me no clerks,” and all the other instances of the phrase frame. In doing so, I discovered that—for reasons unknown to me—the web-based interface retrieved two different search lines for certain formulations, one of which had a slightly altered spelling because a random letter was capitalized (Figure 1-5). These two different set of results did appear in the initial result list in the case of “but me no buts/But me no buts”—albeit far apart from each other because of the difference in number of occurrences. “Diamond me No diamonds,” on the contrary, was absent from the first list. Thus, neither the number of occurrences nor the distribution of the sources were initially accurate, and these additional findings had to be added to arrive at the figures discussed above.

**Figure 1-5. Spelling discrepancies for the same search terms**

CLICK ON A WORD/PHRASE OR NUMBER BELOW TO SEE IT IN GOOGLE BOOKS [HELP..]

	WORD(S)	CHARTS	TOTAL	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
1	Diamond me No diamonds	G	103					2
2	Diamond me no diamonds	G	54					
		TOTAL	157	0	0	0	0	2

CLICK ON A WORD/PHRASE OR NUMBER BELOW TO SEE IT IN GOOGLE BOOKS [HELP..]

	WORD(S)	CHARTS	TOTAL	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880
1	But me no buts	G	831	1		7	10	33	17	26	36
2	but me no buts	G	167		1	1	1	1	3	4	5
		TOTAL	998	1	1	8	11	34	20	30	41

The second caveat has to do with the large quantity of redundant material; for each literary work that utilizes one of the relevant examples Google Books stores and retrieves sometimes dozens of editions. This increases artificially the number of examples—an issue that is more acute when the duplicate editions are of dictionaries or of scholarly works that record many of the specific phrase frames in a single volume. For example,

**Figure 1-6. Five different editions of the same work make the number of results increase by fivefold**

Gaskell's Compendium of Forms - Page 832



<https://books.google.com/books?id=NVJBAQAAMAAJ>  
 1884 - Snippet view - More editions  
 W'ld Gau'm") D'yd" S/mhpgn, 1730:1777 Play me no plays. (The Knight.)  
 Foale. \_\_\_ ' i77i-1833. **Clerk me no clerks.** (Ivanhoe) Scull. 1593'163'-  
 ThflegtzigjgrbSIR "5 they Pamt hm" Used by Funerl 1809-1832. **Diamond**  
**me no diamonds!**

Gaskell's Compendium of Forms, Educational, Social, Legal ...



<https://books.google.com/books?id=qqZDAQAAMAAJ>  
 George A. Gaskell - 1883 - Snippet view  
 1120-177, Play me no plays. (The Knight.) Foote. ' ' \_ ' \_ - 1771-1832. **Clerk**  
**me no clerks.** (Ivanhoe.) Scott. 1593'1633- Thitholzsrq'zesjbfjQ "5 the) Pan"  
 mm" Us" by Fun", 1809-1832. **Diamond me no diamonds!** Prize me no  
 prizes. (Elaine.) ...

Gaskell's Compendium of Forms, Educational, Social, Legal ...



<https://books.google.com/books?id=WF5CAQAAMAAJ>  
 George Arthur Gaskell - 1882 - Snippet view  
 Used by Dean Swift after 2113;331:112 lilyidaplhljtig'gtgd 3.22:2" D'rydm'  
 Shakyer 17714832. **Clerk me no clerks.** (Ivanhoe) Scott. 1593'1632- The  
 no" is "Qt 5" fierce "5 they Paint him- Used by F "11" 1809-1832. **Diamond**  
**me no diamonds!**

Gaskell's Compendium of Forms, Educational, Social, Legal ...



<https://books.google.com/books?id=bGICAAAYAAJ>  
 George Arthur Gaskell - 1882 - Snippet view - More editions  
 Shakspre. 1771-1832. **Clerk me no clerks.** (Ivanhoe.) Scott. 1593-1632.  
 The lion is not so fierce as they paint him. Used by Fuller, 1809-1833.  
**Diamond me no diamonds!** Prize me no prizes. (Elaine.) after Lord Herbert.  
 Tennyson. 1586-1616.

Gaskell's Compendium of Forms, Educational, Social, Legal ...



<https://books.google.com/books?id=OpAGAQAIAAJ>  
 George Arthur Gaskell - 1881 - Snippet view - More editions  
 (Tom Thumb.) Ibid. 1631-1701. Madam me no madam. (The Wild Gallant.)  
 Dryden. 1720-1777 Play me no plays. (The Knight.) Foote. 1771-1832. **Clerk**  
**me no clerks.** (Ivanhoe.) Scott. 1S09-1S32. **Diamond me no diamonds!**  
 Prize me no prizes.

the results include five different editions of *Gaskell's Compendium of Forms: Educational, Social, Legal and Commercial* (Figure 1-6), a book that cites eighteen of these phrase frames.<sup>22</sup> In other words, this book alone accounts for 90 out of the grand total of 2,669 (3,37%) individual occurrences of the phrase frame. As a consequence, not only do we find a

<sup>22</sup> Gaskell's manual predates Bartlett's and, as such, it is the earliest catalogue of examples of the “\* me no \*s” phrase frame I have been able to find.

sharp literary/scholarly slant in the distribution and use of the examples, but there are also fewer instances that we may initially be led to believe. It is worth noting here that this duplication of texts in the corpus had also been detected in the Corpus of Historical American English, although the significance of the phenomenon was not nearly as high.

Regardless of the methodological questions raised above, the fact remains that there are practically no examples of novel uses of the “\* me no \*s” frame beyond the cases enumerated in Appendix A. Furthermore, the intertextual reproduction of these expressions in contemporary English occurs almost exclusively in literary language. Up to this point there is no evidence to suggest that these formulations may be used at present in different genres with any frequency.

## 2.6 WebCorp

Perhaps the most suitable corpora for assessing whether “\* me no \*s” has any prevalence outside literary language—and if such prevalence entails some sort of creative strain—are those compiled at WebCorp.<sup>23</sup> Initially, the WebCorp Live suite presents the ideal capabilities, for it “allows access to the World Wide Web as a corpus—a large collection of texts from which facts about the language can be extracted.”<sup>24</sup> However, after the first few queries retrieved fewer results than one would expect, I filled in a feedback form online and received a message stating that the “Google Search API is limited to a maximum of 64 search results.” If we consider for a moment what 64 results represent in the larger scheme of the whole Internet, it follows naturally that WebCorp Live cannot be used for the present research purposes. In addition, the Google API is the only one that allows wildcard queries (only one), so none of the others available is of any use.

Fortunately, WebCorp also has three other digital corpora that have been compiled by “extracting textual content from web pages.”<sup>25</sup> These are the Diachronic English Web Corpus<sup>26</sup> (130 million words), the Synchronic English Web Corpus<sup>27</sup> (470 million words), and the Birmingham Blog Corpus<sup>28</sup> (630 million words). The data from these corpora are accessible through their website and it does not depend on an

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.webcorp.org.uk/live/>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.webcorp.org.uk/live/guide.jsp>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://wse1.webcorp.org.uk/>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://wse1.webcorp.org.uk/cgi-bin/DIA/index.cgi>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://wse1.webcorp.org.uk/cgi-bin/SYN/index.cgi>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://wse1.webcorp.org.uk/cgi-bin/BLOG/index.cgi>.

external API. Although only one wildcard symbol (\*) can be used per query, this does not affect the relevance of the results or hamper the weeding out of the irrelevant cases. Additionally, no limitations on the number of search results exist.

The case of the Diachronic English Web Corpus deserves little commentary. It retrieves 20 results, none of which fits the “\* me no \*s” frame. Paradoxically, as we read on the main page of the corpus, it “covers the period Jan 2000 - Dec 2010. Each month contains 1 million words.” Once again, it seems that this phrase frame is not in current use in English.

The results from the Synchronic English Web Corpus are not much more promising: 131 results, only three of which are relevant (two instances of “but me no buts” and one of “clerk me no clerks”). Here, once again, one detects a problematic methodological issue in the compilation of the corpus: If each of these three results is analyzed individually, it is striking to find that all of them have been extracted from different issues of the British satirical magazine *Punch*.<sup>29</sup> This poses, at least, two caveats for researchers using WebCorp at large. First, these three texts are obviously not from the 2000-2010 period, regardless of the date when they were uploaded to Project Gutenberg. Thus, any chronological conclusions based on these corpora and drawn from larger datasets must be taken with a grain of salt, because unless each individual concordance line is checked, there is no way of knowing whether we are looking at texts *written* in the last few years. Second, on closer inspection we learn that these three examples come from a sub-corpus called “Mini-web Sample,” described as “339,907,995 words from 100,000 randomly selected web-pages to form a sample of the distribution of texts throughout the web.” Although the randomization of the sample ensures robust results—especially when selected from such a large data source as the web, the specific information on the precise sub-corpus and/or domain is only accessible at a glance if the appropriate option is selected from the “Display Info” drop-down menu. Otherwise, each concordance line must be clicked on to prompt a contextual menu that lists that sort of information (Figure 1-7). Let this be a technical recommendation to anyone using the WebCorp suite.

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<sup>29</sup> The first occurrence of “but me no buts” is from Vol. 1 (August 7, 1841); the second “but me no buts” is to be found in Vol. 153 (November 7, 1917), whereas the only instance of “clerk me no clerks” dates from March 26, 1892 (Vol. 102). All the texts were taken from the Project Gutenberg site (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>) which, by the way, stores a phenomenal digitized collection of *Punch* (over 500 issues).

**Figure 1-7. Contextual menu for the concordance line “Clerk me no clerks” on the Synchronic English Web Corpus**

30:	you it for 15	Me No thanks	Bum But I'm hungry
31:	and Edward Andrews (Send	Me No Flowers	[1964 Nice surprise! James
32:	THE MORNING-YOU KNOW CLERK	ME NO CLERKS	." It seems Sir E.C.,
33:	and people said t	32: Text Webpage Cache	e
34:	7:45. Thou gaves	http://www.gutenberg.org/files...	ince
35:	but they have give	Date: 20 December 2004 (1)	ugh
36:	not the one f	Domain: miniweb	
37:	No illness can tric	Format: HTML	ways be
38:	person, so don't ask	Tokens: 10520	
39:	them. Then it hit		me no questions , yo. I've only seen
40:	officer, and as signed		me, no characters were ever encountering the me no others , with this exception, viz:

As regards the pertinent issues for the scope of this essay, it is worthy of note that this is the first batch of results that—despite not having a novel formulation—are used in satirical, creative discourse outside the domain of mainstream literature. In all, however, the chronological and geographical limitations of the sample—not to mention their size—do not justify any interpretation that goes beyond a stylistic oddity.

The third WebCorp corpus (Birmingham Blog Corpus) also retrieves a sizeable set of examples (142) for the “me no \*s” query, with the usual minuscule set of relevant results (1). This case is, unsurprisingly, another instance of “but me no buts”<sup>30</sup> in its canonical, phraseological sense. There are, however, two “silver linings” in this use of the frame: First, it occurs outside literary language. In fact, it is merely found in a comment to the original blog post—blogging being susceptible to utilizing stylistic traits from literature. Second, one can be sure that the example was written in 2010, as indicated by the date in the heading of the comment.

### 3. What Corpora Can’t See

If one were to draw some tentative conclusions from the data retrieved from the corpora studied here (containing an aggregate of more than 205 billion words), there would be no gainsaying the fact that there is no evidence of any consistent use of the “\* me no \*s” phrase frame outside literary language. Furthermore, even within literary language, there is little evidence of any creative, novel exploitation of this frame after 1900, when practically all the examples recorded by Bartlett, Potter, and Gaskell had

<sup>30</sup> <http://whatever.scalzi.com/2009/12/31/final-notes-on-obamas-2009/>.

already been documented. After all the queries discussed throughout this chapter, there is only one truly novel exploitation of the frame (“butt me no butts”) and only a couple of valid examples in genres like journalism or blogging.

In a last attempt to verify the validity and replicability of my findings outside the corpora available, I decided to take a more inductive approach: I set out to brainstorm for possible realizations of the phrase frame, Google them in quotation marks so that all the search results would include an exact match of the proposed formulation, and record them systematically. I decided to use words that begin with the letter *b* only; not because of any conscious decision, but because the starting point was the eponymous “but me no butts.” The results were unexpectedly positive.

All the relevant examples; i.e., those random combinations that had been used in a particular text, are listed in Table 1-1 below, together with the url of the website where they were found. Thus, what follows is only a brief commentary about their lexical components, the genre in which they are used, and their stylistic function.

**Table 1-1. Novel forms of the phrase frame found through web search of random word combinations (letter “b”)**

Examples	URL
Bite me no bites	<a href="http://eastwickpress.com/news/2012/09/bite-me-no-bites/">http://eastwickpress.com/news/2012/09/bite-me-no-bites/</a>
Bush me no Bushes	<a href="http://midtermmadness.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/11/08/roves-losing-strategy/?_r=0">http://midtermmadness.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/11/08/roves-losing-strategy/?_r=0</a> <a href="http://www.pageglance.com/trolls-bush.be">http://www.pageglance.com/trolls-bush.be</a>
Bad me no bads	<a href="http://shaksper.net/archive/2003/199-february/17674-re-bbc-series-sp-783493134">http://shaksper.net/archive/2003/199-february/17674-re-bbc-series-sp-783493134</a>
Bill me no bills	<a href="http://cronymag.com/c/?p=128">http://cronymag.com/c/?p=128</a>
Blush me no blushes	<a href="http://www.wetdryvac.net/November3rdClub/2006/11-06/fiction/nicaragua.htm">http://www.wetdryvac.net/November3rdClub/2006/11-06/fiction/nicaragua.htm</a>
Bass me no bass	<a href="http://flyfishinginnh.com/vforum/archive/index.php/f-10-p-10.html">http://flyfishinginnh.com/vforum/archive/index.php/f-10-p-10.html</a>
Bing me no Bings	<a href="http://it.slashdot.org/story/09/06/15/2352200/apple-finally-patches-java-vulnerability">http://it.slashdot.org/story/09/06/15/2352200/apple-finally-patches-java-vulnerability</a>
Bath me no baths	<a href="https://groups.google.com/d/msg/alt.usage.english/MhzKoYEBNE/eiGNTab12EJ">https://groups.google.com/d/msg/alt.usage.english/MhzKoYEBNE/eiGNTab12EJ</a>
Blog me no blogs	<a href="http://www.blog-me-no-blogs.blogspot.com">http://www.blog-me-no-blogs.blogspot.com</a>
Brand me no brands	<a href="http://terrifavro.ca/post/133466186967/unbrand-that-writer">http://terrifavro.ca/post/133466186967/unbrand-that-writer</a>
Bake me no bakes	<a href="https://twitter.com/KLong1724/status/552330819508109313">https://twitter.com/KLong1724/status/552330819508109313</a>
Blast me no blasts	<a href="http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2015_Fall_Walther.php">http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2015_Fall_Walther.php</a>

Bear me no bears	<a href="http://www.khakain.com/archdeco/vault/swirve/vetinari/board.cgi%3Fboardset=vetinari&amp;boardid=assassin&amp;thread=17&amp;startmsg=20.html">http://www.khakain.com/archdeco/vault/swirve/vetinari/board.cgi%3Fboardset=vetinari&amp;boardid=assassin&amp;thread=17&amp;startmsg=20.html</a>
Bogus me no boguses	<a href="http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1998/nov/17/further-commons-amendment-in-lieu">http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1998/nov/17/further-commons-amendment-in-lieu</a>
Boob me no boobs	<a href="http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/615805-the-elder-scrolls-v-skyrim/62221568">http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/615805-the-elder-scrolls-v-skyrim/62221568</a>
Boot me no boots	<a href="http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/VUW1931Spik-fig-VUW1931Spik001a.html">http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/VUW1931Spik-fig-VUW1931Spik001a.html</a>
Frost me no frost, scoop me no scoop, brown me no browns	<a href="http://darcysheartstirrings.blogspot.com.es/2011/02/fyi.html">http://darcysheartstirrings.blogspot.com.es/2011/02/fyi.html</a>
Brew me no brews	<a href="http://www.soxaholix.com/tp/2012/04/ mailing-it-in.html">http://www.soxaholix.com/tp/2012/04/ mailing-it-in.html</a>
Brook me no brooks	<a href="http://languagehat.com/two-etymologies-2/">http://languagehat.com/two-etymologies-2/</a>
Brother me no brothers	<a href="https://books.google.es/books?id=ucatAAAAQBAJ&amp;lpg=PT48&amp;ots=EXMR9uMNG3&amp;dq=%22brother%20me%20no%20brothers%22&amp;pg=PT48#v=onepage&amp;q=%22brother%20me%20no%20brothers%22&amp;f=false">https://books.google.es/books?id=ucatAAAAQBAJ&amp;lpg=PT48&amp;ots=EXMR9uMNG3&amp;dq=%22brother%20me%20no%20brothers%22&amp;pg=PT48#v=onepage&amp;q=%22brother%20me%20no%20brothers%22&amp;f=false</a>
Bud me no buds	<a href="https://www.flickr.com/photos/onkel_wart/2513880577">https://www.flickr.com/photos/onkel_wart/2513880577</a> <a href="https://www.flickr.com/photos/62322566@N00/5950203924/">https://www.flickr.com/photos/62322566@N00/5950203924/</a>
Budget me no budgets	<a href="http://www.ebay.com/itm/1902-DAN-LENO-Espinosa-ballet-Ms-Bernard-Beere-actress-photo-article-1-/222010159482?hash=item33b0d6317a:g:6UUAASwnLdWrLbe">http://www.ebay.com/itm/1902-DAN-LENO-Espinosa-ballet-Ms-Bernard-Beere-actress-photo-article-1-/222010159482?hash=item33b0d6317a:g:6UUAASwnLdWrLbe</a>
Butt me no butts	In addition to the news item found in the GloWbE corpus, there are dozens of examples of this formulation in recent websites alone. We reproduce a few here as a way of illustration. <a href="http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140624/letters/letters5.html">http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140624/letters/letters5.html</a> <a href="http://confusedofcalcutta.com/2008/01/19/butt-me-no-butts-a-sideways-look-at-the-because-effect/">http://confusedofcalcutta.com/2008/01/19/butt-me-no-butts-a-sideways-look-at-the-because-effect/</a> <a href="http://life-and-vincent.blogspot.com.es/2010/09/butt-me-no-butts.html">http://life-and-vincent.blogspot.com.es/2010/09/butt-me-no-butts.html</a> <a href="http://barticles.blogs.timesdispatch.com/2012/01/09/butt-me-no-butts/">http://barticles.blogs.timesdispatch.com/2012/01/09/butt-me-no-butts/</a>

The most obvious notion that this random sample illustrates is that there are many more exploited versions of “\* me no \*s” than one may initially believe. If one considers that all these novel<sup>31</sup> combinations have been retrieved by brainstorming words in front of a computer screen for an hour, and that only words beginning with the letter b have been chosen, it is easy to imagine that the real figure must be larger by an order of magnitude. This estimate does not take into account the possibility that there should be a sizeable proportion of parallel phrase frames that do not use the first person pronoun (“me”), and use some other instead—as in the “force him no forces” that Cooper cites (Appendix A). Furthermore, the

<sup>31</sup> A few of them had been recorded elsewhere, but none of them has any intertextual connection to the source cited in Appendix A.