

ENGL 2095, Literature by the Numbers
MW, 11:50-1:10, BU C 204 and LIB 1110
(Mac Lab)

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Literature by the Numbers

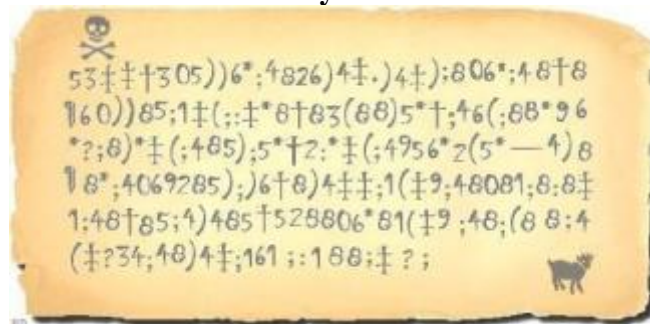


Image from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug"

In the emerging field of the Digital Humanities, computational tools allow readers to apply new forms of “objective” (or at least statistically quantifiable) critique to the study of literature, and, in complementary fashion, enable writers to generate literary texts that are shaped by digitally-powered formal constraints. In some ways, this “Literature by the Numbers” approach might seem incompatible with tradition. Conventional literary study, after all, involves close reading, demands careful interpretation, and generates multiple and sometimes even contradictory conclusions. And yet literature itself has always been constrained by form, genre, and cultural mores. And some instances of literature, in particular, such as mysteries, puzzles, and algorithmically generated texts, invite a more specific analytic approach, requiring readers to deduce a single solution or methodology before any meaning can be explicated. In this course we will look at examples of such texts, as well as how a variety of computational tools might assist us in making sense of them and literary production in general.

Note that although this course involves frequent hands-on interaction with digital tools, no special knowledge of computing is required or expected.

Required texts include:

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

Kirn, Walter. *The Unbinding*.

Moretti, Franco. *Maps, Graphs, Trees*

Other, shorter readings will be available in pdf.