

QuanTM

Institute for
Quantitative
Theory and
Methods



Matthew Jockers

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Computing the Shape of Stories: A Macroanalysis

Jockers will open his lecture with an argument about the applicability of quantitative methods to literary studies. He'll offer his answer to the "so what" question that is frequently asked by humanists who are unaccustomed to thinking about literature as data on the one hand and quantitative evidence on the other. After sketching the broad outlines of how quantitative data might and should be employed in literary studies, Jockers will move to a "proof of concept" derived from his own recent work charting plot structure in 40,000 narratives. In this section Jockers will discuss how he employed tools and techniques from natural language processing, sentiment analysis, signal processing, and machine learning in order to extract and compare the plot structures of novels in a corpus of texts spanning the two hundred year period from 1800-2011. He'll explore the six core plot archetypes revealed by the technique and how these shapes change from the 19th to the 20th century. He'll then compare the plot structures of 1,800 contemporary best sellers to the larger corpus in order to suggest that at least one element of market success is related to plot shape.

◆ April 14th, 2014 ◆ 12:00 – 1:30 PM ◆ Jones Room, Woodruff Library ◆

RSVP to IQTM@emory.edu by April 7th
Lunch will be provided

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