

Introduction

The field of digital literary studies continues to grow as an ever-widening range of tools enables new readings and expands our textual explorations. This work is not a refutation but rather a continuation of traditional literary research; new findings are tested against established theories while computational approaches are used to challenge intuitive hypotheses with more systematic data. Familiar hermeneutical questions yield new answers when approached from unfamiliar angles, and data-driven observations help us develop new perspectives on texts. For the most part, this methodological turn to computational tools has been well received by poetry scholars, who have long been preoccupied with quantitative material. The counting and sorting of metres, syllables, rhymes, patterns and the like have been enhanced by the use of digital corpora, natural language processing, databases and computation, and we are now turning to machine learning to automatize processes. Inside the vast sphere of the digital humanities, the community of poetry scholars is an active subgroup whose shared interests span many language areas and time periods as well as hermeneutic questions and techniques.

Founded after a conference in Basel, Switzerland in 2017, the group *Plotting Poetry* is a dedicated platform for computationally-minded poetry scholars. The name of the group is based on a—perfectly serious—pun by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire. In his 1917 reflections on poetry and modernity, Apollinaire used the phrase “*machiner la poésie*”, which can be understood as a call for poets to mechanise poetry although “*machiner*” really means to plot as one might plot a coup. Playing on this pun in its English translation, our group name embraces the double meaning of plot: *Plotting Poetry* brings together researchers who try to plot literary phenomena on their graphs and are plotting to overcome their own limitations. The latter plot is staged by combining computational methods with scholarly thoroughness and traditional questions with new approaches.

When the *Plotting Poetry* collective decided to hold a conference in Prague in the autumn of 2020, we knew what our goals were and how we wanted to achieve them. We hoped to strengthen our platform for poetry scholars from different regions and to ensure that these researchers at different career stages could meet, connect, share good practices and start new collaborations. We agreed on the timeliness of a discussion about methods and tools. And so, after

considering how to foster exchanges and encourage the reporting of failures as well as successes, we carefully planned our event. Then, when the Covid-19 pandemic came and persisted, we found that—like everyone else over the last two years—we needed to revise and reshape plans.

After an initial effort to reschedule our conference, we decided to forego the pleasure of meeting in person. However, holding an online meeting felt so far removed from the convivial spirit of past *Plotting Poetry* events that we opted to come together instead in this volume of selected articles. The resulting work reports on a broad sweep of current research in the computational study of poetry. Its contributors have developed innovative methods and pursued interdisciplinary inquiries along unexpected paths. We hope the reader will find here the dynamic mix of ideas and backgrounds that *Plotting Poetry* aims to foster.

In *Tackling the Toolkit*, we have chosen to focus on the methodological innovations, challenges, obstacles and even shortcomings associated with applying quantitative methods to poetry specifically and poetics more broadly. Using tools including natural language processing, web ontologies, similarity detection devices and machine learning, our contributors explore not only metres, stanzas, stresses and rhythms but also genres, subgenres, lexical material and cognitive processes. Whether they are testing old theories and laws, making complex concepts machine-readable or developing new lines of textual analysis, their works challenge standard descriptions of norms and variations.

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