



Meaningful Machines: Exploring Creative Programming for Creative Writing

Lillian-Yvonne Bertram

UMASS Boston

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to discuss how computation and exploratory programming can be incorporated into a creative writing curriculum at undergraduate and graduate levels, for the creation of new work (such as web-based digital literary art), analysis of current writing, and revision of “traditional” written work.

Computation, programming, and creative writing is often viewed with a lot of skepticism and fear: that “the AI” will usurp our creative voices and do away with the author altogether—that everything will “sound like a computer”. However, the rich history of digital and computational poetics shows that this isn’t the case, and that there is actually much to gain from incorporating programming and computation into creative writing. Authors like Allison Parish, Milton Laufer, Rafeal Perez y Perez, Stephanie Strickland, Nick Montfort, and more, build and use computational tools expressly for creative writing. These tools and processes foreground a “poetics of programming”, the poetic, literary, and rhetorical choices that go into composing creative writing. A poetics of programming can serve to reconceptualize how students can look critically at their own ways of writing, and how they can find new forms for their writing. This paper will look at some of the ways programming and computation can be incorporated into a creative writing curriculum and the kinds of composition strategies that are afforded by these tools. Questions to be considered may include “How do we introduce the value of creative programming to students and departments?”, “How can we make creative programming accessible and inclusive, particularly for students in marginalized populations?”, and “What resources are available for students and teachers?”

Introducing students of creative writing to computation and digital literary arts is of particular interest and significance as the humanities further emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches to traditional fields like literature and writing. Digital literary arts, electronic literature, and creative computing for arts and humanities have steadily increased as offerings in undergraduate and graduate school curriculums (Allegheny College, Brown University, and MIT, as examples). This is also significant as more of these technologies (such as transformer-based text generators) become available to the public and are structured with creative writing uses in mind.

Meaningful Machines: