What can computers bring to the study of literary form? How might computational methods, like machine learning, help us study these forms at different scales? This talk addresses such questions by way of the Japanese haiku. At the turn of the 20th century, the haiku embarked on a global journey that took it to France, England, Latin America, and the United States. Its influence on Anglo-American modernists is well documented, but the form enjoyed a much wider popularity, saturating the US poetry field by the 1920s. Large-scale text analysis offers a means to read this diffusion at a scale other than that of the individual text, or the literary coterie. First by helping to detect formal and linguistic patterns across large numbers of texts. Second by revealing internal differences within these patterns across time and across different corpora. In learning to read these patterns, we can better understand what it means to subject literary texts to the principled logic of the machine, but also what it is to read the machine back into histories of literary form.

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Literary Pattern Recognition: A Machine Reading of Modernist Form

Guerlac Room, A.D. White House, Cornell University  Wednesday, November 5 4:30 p.m.

This public lecture is part of Cornell Library’s Conversations in Digital Humanities Speaker Series