

Data Mining Shakespeare

Using the data-mining software Voyant, create four different visual representations of *Hamlet*'s text, each accompanied by a short paragraph of interpretation. If you have not yet read the entire play, your analysis will be speculative. That's fine. The point of the assignment is to gain a different perspective on the text than we typically do by traditional close reading. A subsidiary rationale of the assignment is to use software to experiment with a long, difficult play.

Data-mining software gives you the ability to step back from the close reading of texts and allow you to "distant read." Such reading reduces and abstracts the text, providing a different point of view. With fewer elements, you have a sharper sense of overall connectedness.

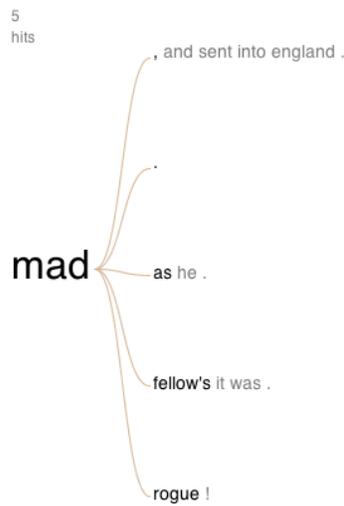
Start with a word cloud of the entire work of *Hamlet*. (As it's a play, your data will be stronger if you remove the speakers' labels.) What stands out? A word or phrase? A surprising emphasis? Use the initial visuals to start "mining" the text for more focused trends. Then experiment with more of the tools as you trace an idea, a word, or a concept through the text.

Audience: Imagine your audience to be other educated, intellectually curious people who have read *Hamlet*. You do not need to summarize the play.

Submission: Save your visual data-mining images in a Word document with clearly labeled headings explaining what the graphics represent (see example below). Print and staple your document and submit it at the beginning of class.

Technology: [Voyant](#) is a free on-line software

The word “mad” is also used by the gravediggers five times, furthering the prominent theme of insanity in the play. It was interesting to see how the fools used the word because they are supposed to be mad themselves.



As a further comparison, I looked at the Fool’s lines from *Twelfth Night*, and found that he uses the word “Madonna” 10 times. This is not insignificant, and considering the sexual and religious connotations attached to the word, it must serve to perpetuate some kind of theme. Perhaps it has something to do with obsession with sexuality and virginity that is also prominent throughout the play, particularly on the part of Orsino. Or maybe the Fool is just making fun of Olivia’s vow of abstinence. Either way, the fools are interesting because of their unique situation. They are typically peasants, yet they are privy to the lives of the upper class. The fools are able to quietly observe under the disguise of madness, and can therefore see a situation for what it really is.

