

*'Counting'*: quality and quantity in literary language and tools for investigating it

(Jonathan Hope, Strathclyde University, Glasgow)

The transcription of a substantial proportion of Early Modern English books by the Text Creation Partnership has placed more than 60,000 digital texts in the hands of literary and linguistic researchers. Linguists are in many cases used to dealing with large electronic corpora, but for literary scholars this is a new experience. Used to arguing from the quality, rather than quantity of evidence, literary scholars have a new set of norms and procedures to learn, and are faced with the exciting, or perhaps depressing, prospect that their object of study has changed.

In this talk I'll look at some specific case studies that illustrate the potential, and the problems, of quantity-based studies – and will highlight key areas where literary scholars need to reassess their expectations of 'evidence', and the texts we use. A possible alternative title might be 'Learning to live with error: gappy texts and crappy metadata'.