



Computational ± Imperial Stylistics:

J. M. Coetzee and the Limits of the Digital



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3:30 p.m.

GRUCCI ROOM • 102 BURROWS BUILDING

Before he wrote his first novel; before he won a Nobel prize; before he became a polarizing and widely discussed bellwether of postcolonial literary studies, J. M. Coetzee was a professional computer programmer. In the 1960s he worked for IBM and International Computers and then brought his programming skills to the University of Texas, where he wrote a doctoral dissertation about mathematical and computer-aided approaches to the study of literary style. This talk re-examines Coetzee's early programming work in light of far more recent efforts to unite computational and literary expertise. While contemporary scholars have applied machine learning, network analysis, GIS software, and other digital tools toward the analysis of literature, Coetzee's extended foray into—and his unceremonious break with—computational stylistics points toward an alternative conception of computer-oriented criticism: one that is informed by rigorous technical training in computing, but which is otherwise grounded in the methods and critical imperatives of the decolonial-era humanities.

MAX LARSON is a postdoctoral teaching Fellow at Penn State University Park, where he is writing a book about the relationship between computational and critical methods of textual analysis since the Second World War. His research has been published in *Diacritics*.