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Navigating New Horizons: The Place of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Literary Studies

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the 21st century has academically triggered discussions across various fields, including literary studies. Literary studies has traditionally been viewed as anthropocentric engagement, relying on critical analysis, cultural theory, interpretative and analytical methods. However, the advent of AI has obviously introduced a paradigm shift by providing computational techniques that enhance, complement or even challenge traditional methodologies. This paper, therefore, explores the emerging role of AI in literary studies, addressing its potential contributions, ethical considerations and the challenges it presents. The research uses four prominent AI systems: ChatGPT, Bard, Claude and DeepSeek, as case studies to examine practical applications in areas such as textual analysis, authorship attribution and critical interpretation. It is qualitative research adopting Digital Humanities and Critical Posthumanism as theoretical frameworks. The paper concludes that while AI stands as valuable support for literary research, its use must be approached with caution. AI should serve as a complement to human critical insight, not a replacement.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Anthropocentrism, Literary Studies, Digital Humanities, Critical Posthumanism

Introduction

It is a known and established fact that the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into various disciplines has brought about a paradigm shift in the world and has redefined how knowledge is created, analysed and disseminated; this is peculiar, especially with the advent of notably large language models like ChatGPT, Google's Bard, Anthropic's Claude and emerging tools such as DeepSeek which are reshaping many fields of inquiry. In literary studies, in particular, these tools seem to promise new methods of analysis and interpretation but also, at the same time, raise profound questions about authorship, originality, pedagogy and the emotional dimensions inherent in human thought. Researchers have begun to debate the "potential and threats" that AI poses to established humanistic approaches. Literary criticism has traditionally been anthropocentric (human-centered), involving deep interpretation, contextual analysis and subjective judgment, AI's data-driven techniques propose a complementary mode of understanding literature. This study is a qualitative research, employing Digital Humanities approach, a model which combines distant reading techniques by using computational tools to analyze large-scale patterns in literary texts, with qualitative close reading to maintain contextual awareness. Digital methodologies such as text mining, stylometric analysis and metadata modeling are guided by hermeneutic frameworks, ensuring that theoretical insights inform digital processes and that assumptions behind computational methods are critically unpacked. Again, the research draws on Critical Posthumanism, a theoretical stance that decouples the human from its privileged status in literary creation and interpretation. The theory was influenced by scholars such as Donna Haraway (2016), N. Katherine Hayles (1999), and Rosi Braidotti (2013). This paradigm recognizes humans and machines as co-agents in cultural production. It interrogates the biases embedded in anthropocentric methods and reconsiders subjectivity in an era of digital and biological hybridity.

Literature Review

Literary studies, especially text analysis from classical era has embraced a tradition of anthropocentrism, where text analysis and explication depend on humans to shed light. However, the integration of digital technology into literary studies has a history stretching back decades. In the late 20th century, Moretti (2005, p. 109) critically

advocated moving beyond the traditional literary canon by “counting, graphing and mapping” entire literatures. AI-driven techniques such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), machine learning, and neural networks are increasingly revolutionizing the analysis of literary texts, introducing new methodologies that extend far beyond the scope of traditional literary scholarship. These technologies enable the processing of vast amounts of textual data, to offer insights into patterns, themes and stylistic features that may remain imperceptible to the human eye.

One of the primary contributions of AI to literary analysis is its ability to facilitate large-scale textual examination, often referred to as “distant reading.” This concept of “distant reading” was popularized by Moretti (2005, P. 104), using quantitative methods to reveal long-term, large-scale patterns in texts, effectively dissolving the limitations of a small canon into a “larger literary system”. He argues that such approaches allow researchers to discern wider trends in literary history, such as shifts in genre popularity, the emergence of stylistic features or thematic preoccupations across periods. With the application of NLP and machine learning, the analyses provide quantifiable data that can complement traditional close reading by situating individual texts within a larger cultural or historical framework. Sadly enough, the AI approach to literary criticism is a threat to the humanistic essence of literary criticism. It removes the individualistic and impressionistic orientations that traditionally shape the explication of literary texts. Moretti tends to reduce the rich critical literary engagements to mere data point which can obscure contextual subtleties such tone, irony, and socio-cultural and political allusions to a form of misguided algorithmic perception. Again, recurring motif may fall short of its symbolic and historical significance.

In the same vein, Matthew Jockers (2013), Stephen Ramsay (2011), and others have at different fora expanded the issue of computational criticism approach, using algorithms to chart thematic trends, genre evolution and stylistic habits across thousands of novels and poems. Fundamentally, this has been the assumption that digital tools *augment* the critical fervor of human criticism and not to replace the human involvements in text analysis: they can sort, filter and visualize vast textual corpora far beyond what a human could manually survey. Vannevar Bush’s vision of the computer as a “bicycle for the mind” (implying augmentation of cognition) has long resonated in digital humanities (Bush, 1945, p. 101). With the rise of sophisticated AI models, there is a renewed reflection on methodology and ethics. David Berry (2022), a digital-humanities theorist, notes that what earlier generations of scholars called simple automation now gives way to opaque, statistical inference engines. He warns that as text-analysis tools become standardized black-box packages, users may neither understand nor question how the algorithm transforms their data (447). For example, according to Berry (2022, p. 446), “many researchers use the Voyant Tools platform or MALLET software without looking under the hood. Berry explains that such “*automation replaced the human with an algorithm*” introduces distinct ethical issues. (P. 446). He goes further to say that programmers deliberately “black box” complex functions, hiding underlying assumptions and biases (often social or ideological) inside software layer. In literary terms, this could mean algorithmic systems implicitly encode, say, Western-centric canons or aesthetic norms. Berry specifically notes that computational classification tends to impose “quantifiable hierarchies” on texts, for instance, ranking some books as more “important” than others, thereby subtly remaking the canon under the guise of objectivity. This digital-humanities context has set the stage for the AI era. Whereas past tools largely operated on visible rules (e.g. word-frequency counts), modern LLMs generate human-like prose and analysis in ways that their creators themselves struggle to interpret. Berry anticipates such developments and urges scholars to consider what it means for our interpretive practices when an algorithm “analyzes” a text in inscrutable ways.

AI Tools as Research Collaborators

There are several AI tools today and more are surfacing, thereby changing the narrative. One of such is the ChatGPT. Since late 2022, OpenAI’s ChatGPT has become a household name. It was built on the GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 architectures, ChatGPT is trained on massive text corpora spanning books, websites and academic articles. Users can query it in natural language, and it responds with fluent analyses, summaries or creative writing. In literary studies, lecturers and students have begun using ChatGPT for tasks like summarizing opaque theory, brainstorming essay ideas or even modeling text analysis. For example, a recent study by Immanuel and Gloria (2024, P. 1), applied ChatGPT to analyze poems and novels, concluding that ChatGPT “can be used to analyze literature” and that “such inclusion expands our ability to comprehend and interpret text. They found that ChatGPT could highlight themes, propose interpretations and even suggest lines of inquiry that human readers had missed. In effect, ChatGPT acts like a tireless junior scholar, capable of scanning wide-ranging literature and outputting a synthesis in seconds.

However, ChatGPT has well-known limitations. It often “hallucinates” facts, making up information not grounded in its training data. Sparkman and Wit (2025), note that LLMs like ChatGPT can produce “false information” without warning (P.1). **As characteristic of its hallucinatory nature, ChatGPT often produces content out of**

context, especially when dealing with texts that are not part of its training data. For example, during one of my sessions with students, I noticed that their analysis of my poem, presented as part of their classwork, was done using ChatGPT. The analysis lacked contextual depth and ignored the poem's thematic and social implications. Yet, the AI confidently provided interpretations that did not align with the poem's intent. In another instance, a group of students presented on *Hope of the Living Dead* by Ola Rotimi. ChatGPT confidently generated spurious characters that are not part of the text. This can be attributed to the fact that ChatGPT's dataset has a cutoff (for GPT-4, around mid-2021), meaning it lacks knowledge of more recent scholarship or events. However, GPT-4-turbo (sometimes referred to as ChatGPT-4.0) has the ability to access the web for recent materials, if web browsing is enabled and the prompt requires it. Nonetheless, it also does not cite its sources unless explicitly prompted, and even then, it may fabricate references.

Scholars warn that without careful vetting, ChatGPT's outputs can mislead; its strengths in pattern recognition do not guarantee validity. Still, many agree it can accelerate certain workflows: it quickly identifies points of agreement across sources (Sparkman & Witt, 2025, PP,8-12) and can surface unusual connections. In short, ChatGPT is a powerful but fallible research assistant: it helps generate ideas and synthesize information rapidly, but its suggestions always require human oversight. Another powerful AI tool for analysis is Google Bard. Bard is Google's AI chatbot, launched in 2023 and powered by the LaMDA model (now evolving into the Gemini family). Like ChatGPT, Bard generates human-like text, but with a key difference: it can directly draw on up-to-date information from the web. In theory, Bard can answer questions about very recent novels if it is uploaded, current literary trends, or even query Google Scholar-like data. This access to recent content makes Bard attractive for research. One experimental study asked Bard to produce a literature review on the "Metaverse" from academic articles published in the last few years. The results were "promising" but however, imperfect. Bard successfully generated coherent summaries and paraphrases, speeding up the review process. However, its paraphrased texts scored highly on a plagiarism detector, indicating Bard had closely mimicked source phrasing. The author Ö. Aydın (2023), noted that while Bard could "accelerate the collection and expression of knowledge," the reused patterns in its output set off alarm bell (PP. 7-8)

In practice, Bard's live-web feature is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can incorporate the latest research and news; on the other, it may also echo the biases and errors of its search results. There is need for caution, Bard, like ChatGPT, may still hallucinate or invent references if pushed beyond its competence. Compared to ChatGPT, Bard tends to cite more sources (since it's integrated with Google), but it may offer a false sense of authority. In one reported case, Bard confidently gave a wrong answer about the James Webb telescope and cited a nonexistent paper, a high-profile mistake that led to a public correction by Google. In literary contexts, then, Bard's real-time knowledge could help with surveys of recent criticism, but scholars must verify anything it claims. To test the efficiency of Bard, I keyed in the poem "Oghionba", which is not available on the web. I prompted the AI to analyze it. The result was impressive in terms of structural analysis and identification of generic themes. However, like ChatGPT, Bard failed to address the cultural and political dimensions that resonate deeply within the poem. Again, Bard falsely identified the title as the poem's persona. I then prompted Bard to provide a detailed analysis of the novel *The New Gift* by Joseph Onokpasa. The AI was able to produce a plot summary with accurately identified characters. Although the novel is relatively new, Bard performed well because my students have conducted critical works on the text that are hosted online.

Next, I submitted a prompt on a play by Nnaemeka Enyi-Uzendu titled *Unique Oracle*. Bard responded as follows:

"It's challenging to provide a detailed analysis of Nnaemeka Enyi-Uzendu's *Unique Oracle* without direct access to the play's text or more specific plot summaries and critical reviews. My search results indicate that Nnaemeka Enyi-Uzendu is a researcher in education, but there's no readily available information about a play by that title or author. However, I can offer a general framework for analyzing a play like *Unique Oracle*, assuming it is indeed a dramatic work. If you can provide more details about the plot, characters, or any specific themes you've noticed, I can give a more targeted analysis." The AI could not provide a proper analysis because the play is not hosted online. This demonstrates that in literary analysis and criticism, AI functions best as an assistant; the role of the human critic remains indispensable. As Aydın (2023) concludes, Bard and similar tools will "be used more and more effectively in academic literature," but for now, they still require critical oversight (PP. 5-7). Another AI to look at in this research is Claude AI. Anthropic's Claude is a chatbot launched around the same time as ChatGPT and Bard. Designed with safety as a priority, Claude emphasizes low "hallucination" rates and the ability to handle very long texts. For example, Claude can ingest an entire 75,000 word novel or research report and analyze it, something ChatGPT often cannot do in a single prompt. This makes Claude attractive for tasks like summarizing full books or generating detailed outlines of long texts. In their experiment comparing a human literature review

to one produced by Claude, Sparkman and Witt (2025) observed that Claude excelled at “quickly summarizing points of agreement across sources” (P. 8) It reliably identified key themes and sources from a large bibliography. However, it also showed limitations: Claude struggled with deeper synthesis of complex arguments, sometimes omitted context, and still “hallucinated false information” (PP. 10-11). In the end, Sparkman and Witt found that Claude’s AI-generated review could not “*stand on its own*” without human commentary and editing (PP. 8-12).

Claude’s reputed advantage is the context window: it can keep track of hundreds of pages of material at once. This makes it a promising tool for literature courses where one might want to feed an entire novel or all the poems of a poet into the AI. In those cases, Claude can discuss patterns across the whole text rather than answer piecemeal questions. On the flip side, Claude’s creators caution that any claims it makes should be double-checked. Though safer by design, it is not error-proof. In short, Claude represents a step toward more transparent AI assistance, but, as Sparkman and Witt emphasize, the human scholar must remain “in the loop” to ensure accuracy and critical insight (P.12). In our scope, the last AI to consider in this essay is DeepSeek R1. DeepSeek R1 is a newer entrant, positioning as a free, “democratized” academic LLM. In the euphoria of its Marketing materials (e.g. a January 2025 LinkedIn article by DeepSeek’s co-founder Jeffrey Butcher) claim that DeepSeek can “analyze its own architecture, articulate its strengths, and even guide users on how to leverage its capabilities” (Butcher, 2025). The claim is that DeepSeek’s transparency sets it apart from more secretive models like ChatGPT. For instance, Butcher highlights that DeepSeek “avoided common pitfalls like hallucinations” by rigorously grounding its answers in verifiable documentation. He even notes that DeepSeek is trained on diverse datasets (technical manuals, academic papers, literature, etc.), enabling it to “switch seamlessly” between topics.

These declarations suggest DeepSeek R1 is meant to be a writing and research assistant that “collaborates” rather than mystifies. Because it is openly accessible, educators can test its output directly. Early reports (e.g. blog posts on DeepSeek’s website) find that it indeed responds more modestly about its own knowledge and limitations. However, independent evaluations are still scarce. Some critics have remarked (anecdotally) that DeepSeek’s writing, while generally competent, tends toward dryness and marketing-speak; it may lack the creative spark that other models sometimes produce. In practice, DeepSeek offers scholars the appeal of a large LLM without subscription fees. Its exact performance relative to GPT-4 or Claude requires more benchmarking. For now, DeepSeek stands as an emerging case study in the democratization of AI: its success will be measured by how well it can assist literature research without perpetuating hallucinations or introducing unseen biases. Based on the acclaimed efficiency of DeepSeek, I submitted the same prompt I had earlier given to Bard, one in which Bard honestly admitted it had limited information on the text. However, DeepSeek, in contrast, hallucinated a response by relying on generic knowledge of African cosmology and the connotations of an “oracle,” resulting in a false interpretation of the play *Unique Oracle*. This tendency of DeepSeek to generate responses even when it lacks sufficient information is problematic.

Although part of DeepSeek’s response acknowledged that detailed information about the text was unavailable, it still went ahead to produce spurious content under the guise of literary analysis. The response states:

Unique Oracle is a play by Nigerian playwright Nnaemeka Enyi-Uzendu that explores themes of destiny, cultural identity, power, and human agency. While detailed information about the play is limited due to its relatively obscure status in mainstream literary circles, we can analyse its possible thematic and stylistic elements based on Enyi-Uzendu's known influences and Nigerian theatrical traditions.

1. Themes

- *Destiny vs. Free Will:* The title *Unique Oracle* suggests a focus on prophecy, fate, and whether individuals can alter their predestined paths. This aligns with traditional African beliefs in oracles and divination (e.g., the Oracle of Delphi in Greek mythology or the Igbo *Afa* divination system).
- *Cultural Conflict:* Many Nigerian plays examine clashes between tradition and modernity. The "Oracle" may symbolize ancestral wisdom conflicting with contemporary values.
- *Power and Manipulation:* Oracles often hold authority over people's lives. The play might critique how spiritual or political leaders exploit belief systems for control.
- *Identity and Self-Discovery:* The protagonist may undergo a journey to understand their role in a world governed by unseen forces.

2. Style and Structure

- *Symbolism:* The "Oracle" likely functions as a metaphor—perhaps representing religion, political ideology, or societal expectations.

- *Language*: Enyi-Uzendu may use proverbs, allegories, and pidgin English to root the play in Nigerian oral traditions.
- *Dramatic Tension*: The conflict between individuals and the oracle's decrees could drive the plot, leading to a climax where characters either submit or rebel.”

This speculative and assumptive nature of the response is misleading and counterproductive in literary criticism, if not outright harmful. A lazy student may take such output as a concise analysis of the play, whereas the content is entirely fabricated. As with other AI models, responsible use requires treating them as tools that support human inquiry, not as infallible oracles.

AI in Literary Analysis and Interpretation

It is undeniable that AI has become a permanent force in shaping contemporary intellectual engagements. The question that bothers the mind is how these tools are concretely deployed in literary studies? Several emerging practices are worth highlighting:

AI can assist in close reading. Traditionally, close reading is definitely a slow practice, line-by-line engagement with a text. However, researchers tend to experiment with having AI provide its own reading. For example, one might feed ChatGPT a stanza or scene and ask, “What are the main symbols and themes here?” The AI will often surface common motifs (e.g. “the dove as symbol of purity in *The African Dream*”) and even some secondary interpretations. In some cases this can be helpful: a student unfamiliar with a poem might get a sensible and valid explication to compare with. But such output must be scrutinized. A study Immanuel and Gloria (2024) had students critique ChatGPT’s literary analyses, finding that the AI often produced “generic” and sometimes incorrect interpretations. ChatGPT’s readings usually reflect mainstream commentary from its training: it might regurgitate a canonical interpretation rather than offer a novel and critical insight. Therefore, the caution is that an AI close reading can flatten a poem’s complexity into a laundry list of obvious features. Yet as a pedagogical tool, guiding students through AI-generated analysis can also train them to think critically: students compare AI’s take with their own, spotting where detailed analysis was lost. Sparkman and Witt (2024) mention that LLMs are “quickly summarizing points of agreement across sources” (P. 20). In a similar way, they summarize textual content at surface level. Thus AI close readings exemplify both utility (broad-stroke summaries) and limitations (loss of depth). Reading is not merely an intellectual activity but an emotional and imaginative one, shaped by personal context and cultural background. While sentiment analysis can quantify emotional tones in a text, it cannot replicate the individualized responses that readers bring to literature. A poem might evoke vastly different emotions in different readers, depending on their experiences, beliefs and moods. This subjectivity is central to the humanistic study of literature and remains beyond the reach of computational methods.

Another important function of AIs is the ability to delineate thematic and stylistic analysis. On a macro scale, AIs excel at detecting patterns across large text collections. One of such application is *AI-driven stylometry*: which uses machine learning to classify texts by author or style, typically to analyze, attribute or compare written texts. The challenge here is the problem of erroneous attribution, especially ascribing text to canonical author. For instance, Immanuel and Gloria (2024) describe an “Authorship Analysis of Literary Texts using Machine Learning” where algorithms (support vector machines, neural nets, etc.) successfully attributed anonymous texts to their known writers (P.52). Recent AI research in stylometry involves training machine learning models on the distinctive prose style of individual authors and then evaluating new writing samples to determine, for example, “Which of these texts is most likely written by Franz Kafka?” This modern approach builds upon a long-standing tradition of authorship attribution studies. A foundational milestone in this tradition was the work of Frederick Mosteller and David Wallace, who in the 1960s used Bayesian statistical methods to analyze the *Federalist Papers* and determine which essays were authored by Alexander Hamilton versus James Madison. Their work demonstrated the effectiveness of using function word frequencies as stylistic fingerprints. Decades later, Juola (2006), a computational linguist, developed the Java Graphical Authorship Attribution Program (JGAAP), an open-source software framework that allows researchers to perform stylometric analysis using various textual features and statistical models. Today’s methods advance these earlier innovations by integrating deep learning techniques, such as neural networks and transformer-based language models, which can capture complex patterns in syntax, semantics and stylistic details, thus enabling more sophisticated and scalable authorship analysis. They can cluster novels by era or dialect, too. ChatGPT itself can assist here: by prompting it with passages from different authors, one can see how confidently it “recognizes” a voice. However, stylometric inference remains probabilistic. Gary Olson and others have noted that algorithmic authorship studies can be thrown off by emulation (an author intentionally imitating a style) or by non-traditional narratives. Though stylometry is promising, it not definitive, and it raises its own interpretative questions (e.g. what exactly are the measured style dimensions?).

In the same vein, AIs are used for theme extraction and sentiment analysis. By training on labeled texts, a model like BERT (Google’s bidirectional transformer) can classify passages by mood or topic. Immanuel and Gloria’s summary of AI applications notes that “sophisticated NLP algorithms can be powered by AI to read and interpret huge chunks of literature about sentiment detection, prevalent themes, and important message extraction” (P. 54). For example, one could feed all of Jane Austen’s novels into an AI and ask it to quantify how often “class” or “marriage” appear as themes compared to other authors. The AI might find that Austen’s work heavily features marriage plots, whereas contemporaries focus on political events. Such analysis might confirm known scholarship or reveal hidden analogies. But again, comprehensive explication, interpretation and analysis are at risk: sentiment models might misread irony and thematic categorization depends on the analyst’s labels. Thus these tools can produce intriguing visualizations (word clouds, graphs) that spark discussion, but imperatively, the human scholar must interpret the meaning of those patterns.

A growing trend in literary scholarship involves utilizing AI to generate both creative texts and critical essays. In creative writing, some authors have increasingly co-authored poems or stories with AI systems. Ironically, these collaborations have even earned recognition in certain literary prize circles. In literary criticism, scholars have begun deploying Turing-style evaluations, in which AI-generated analyses are subjected to human scrutiny. For instance, Christie Cole (2024) from the University of North Dakota outlines an educational exercise titled “Interrogating a ChatGPT-Generated Literary Analysis”, in which undergraduate students are tasked with identifying errors and biases in AI-produced interpretations. These pedagogical strategies underscore that AI serves not only as a research aid but also as a cautionary example to demonstrate how an AI might confidently misinterpret symbolism or overlook historical and cultural contexts in literary criticism. However, recent advances in generative AI have opened up intriguing interpretive possibilities in literary scholarship. Tools like Claude and ChatGPT can propose alternative endings to novels, reimagine scenes in different literary styles, or even “speak” as characters who narrate their own stories. For instance, in an experiment detailed by Khursheed Ahmad Qazi and Adam Hussain, the researchers used ChatGPT to generate an alternate ending to John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, merging its dual conclusions while maintaining the stylistic tone of the novel. These creative experimentation with AI has prompted series of academic inquiries: what does it mean to reinterpret a text through AI’s “imagination”? While it’s essential to label such outputs as synthetic, they can meaningfully enrich literary discussions. For example, asking an AI to paraphrase a passage from Old English poetry, such as a stanza of *Beowulf*, into contemporary prose can help students grasp thematic meaning without being hindered by archaic diction. In all cases, though, one must remember that the AI is remixing patterns learned from existing literature; its “creativity” emerges from recombination rather than genuine inspiration or eclectic, critically engaged literary enthusiasm.

Authorship and Originality in the AI Age

One of the most fraught issues raised by AI in literature is authorship. In the humanities, traditionally, authorship is historically emphasis on the singular, intentional and creative mind behind a work of art. The Romantic ideal of the author as a solitary genius crafting original works is fundamentally challenged with AIs capable of producing publishable-quality text, questions arise: Who, if anyone, is the author of an AI-generated poem or essay? Legal authorship aside, literary studies must grapple with this conceptually. The critic, Roland Barthes, proclaimed the “death of the author,” emphasizing reader interpretation over authorial intent. Some see AI as a literalization of this: if an AI writes, whose “voice” is authoritative? Does the credit go to the programmer, the user who prompted it, or the AI itself? As a result, there is the need for us to be wary of several pitfalls. According to Premkumar (2024), AI’s rise “challenge[s] traditional concepts of authorship, creativity and critical analysis (P. 12). The worry is that AI-generated works could “devalue” human creativity and upset notions of originality. For example, Smith and Jones (2020) question whether algorithmic authorship “challenges the intersection of AI and creativity” and explore how AI-generated texts may flood the literary landscape, potentially overwhelming genuine, human-authored works (P. 59). Also, Mark Browne (2022) argues that AI’s growth risks undermining traditional literary craftsmanship and diluting stylistic originality, thereby “devaluing human creativity” in literary production (PP. 115–132).

The questions that bother the mind are if a student uses ChatGPT to draft a literary essay, is that plagiarism? Or consider an author who uses an AI for brainstorming: is the final novel theirs or a hybrid co-authored by code? Even the question of what counts as “literature”, its nature in literary criticism, is under scrutiny. Some argue AI prose should be regarded as a new genre of machine writing, distinct from human-authored literature but still worthy of analysis. Others urge strict boundaries: texts must have a human origin to be considered “literature” in the traditional sense. To this end, Jeanette Winterson (2025), in a *Guardian* piece on AI-generated fiction, asserts that “Humans will always want to read what other humans have to say, but like it or not, humans will be living

around non-biological entities,” emphasizing the irreplaceable connection between writer and reader. She contends that while AI may produce technically competent prose, it cannot replicate the emotional resonance and existential insight afforded by human-authored literature. AI systems generate texts not by experiencing or imagining but by analyzing patterns in massive datasets. This form of “creativity” is algorithmic and derivative. This corroborates the fact that literature fundamentally operates as a dialogue between human minds, something AI cannot authentically replicate. Also, Geoffrey K. Pullum, (quoted in O'Moore-Klopf, 2025), stresses that AI, while proficient in processing language, “exhibits not a flicker of actual linguistic understanding.” He argues that complex human linguistic features, like humor, puns and cultural nuance, remain beyond AI’s true comprehension. This underscores the unique value of individual translators and interpreters in literature. One can submit that AI imitates stylistic elements, it ultimately falls short of human creativity and insight, thereby lacking the emotional, cultural and linguistic depth that imbues literature with its meaning. However, only time shall tell if AI will not blur these, going by the rapid innovation in the tech-world. There is serious apprehension among writer as AI is fast merging the boundaries.

At the 2023 African Writers Conference in Accra (November 2–5), a panel titled “Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for African Writers” which comprising writer across African continent, Funminiyi Akinrinade (2023) expressed concern that AI might result in the “assimilation” of African literary voices, diluting their distinctiveness, creativity and originality. He emphasized the need to set clear boundaries for AI-human collaboration in literature to ensure AI supports rather than supplants authentic storytelling. Akinrinade acknowledged that AI could be useful for tasks like editing or generating ideas, but cautioned against relying on it to produce full creative works, warning this could lead to a gradual homogenization of African narratives. The implications of AI-generated literature also calls for concern in the area of literary theory. AI’s role in literary theory is reshaping how we think about the act of interpretation. Posthumanist theories, which decenter the human subject and explore the entanglement of humans with technology, are apt for understanding AI’s influence. Posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric assumption that literature is uniquely tied to human creativity and human-centric modes of interpretation. In this view, the inclusion of AI in the literary ecosystem signifies a shift toward recognizing non-human actors as participants in cultural production. AI’s ability to process and analyse texts at scale further supports this perspective, demonstrating that meaning can be discerned through computational rather than purely human interpretive frameworks. AI critical interpretation must be well scrutinized to avoid bias and undesired responses. Opara’s (2024) *StyloAI* research, for example, shows that AI-generated text has detectable stylistic fingerprints. Stylometric classifiers can often distinguish a GPT-3 output from a human essay, because models tend to favour certain patterns (shorter sentences, higher consistency in punctuation, etc.). In this way, one could talk about an “AI authorial style” emerging, just as decades ago we talked about the syntax and diction characteristic to Shakespeare versus Marlowe. If generative models are trained on 20th-century novels, perhaps the next generation of AI will have its own “school” of literary style. This possibility raises deep questions: will future scholars study not just “19th-century British literature” but “21st-century AI literature” as a separate category?

AI also influences questions of ownership. The Authors Guild and other organizations have issued guidelines about writers using AI: essentially, authors can use these tools but must acknowledge them, and publishers are investigating how to handle AI-assisted work. In academic publishing, journals grapple with whether AI can be listed as a “co-author” (the consensus is currently no, since it cannot take responsibility). But the lines blur in the classroom. A student might hand in an essay partly generated by AI; is that against academic integrity policies? Many universities are rewriting honor codes to address AI explicitly. Still, as Sparkman and Witt note in the context of literature reviews, the tool itself “cannot produce [academic work] that would stand on its own” without student input. It is advisable to emphasize that even when AI contributes heavily, the final interpretation should reflect the student’s understanding. Considering the impact on the literary canon itself, Berry (2022) cautions that algorithms can skew which texts are deemed important, embedding new forms of bias into cultural taste. AI raises another pattern: what if the most “popular” texts (i.e. those most prevalent in training sets) become even more dominant? If a model is trained primarily on widely read English novels, its outputs are likely to repeatedly highlight those works. This presents a dilemma for AI-assisted analysis of African novels and plays, particularly for those not included in the dataset. Without careful design, AI may misinterpret or entirely overlook these texts, leading to erroneous conclusions. It can unintentionally amplify existing canonical biases, mirroring the “filter bubble” effect observed in AI-driven publishing, where recommendations reinforce what’s already popular, marginalizing new voices. Conversely, AI also holds potential as a catalyst for discovery. For instance, a student might prompt ChatGPT to write in the voice of a historically marginalized author, which could spark renewed interest in underrepresented narratives. Thus, AI’s influence on the canon is still unfolding, it may entrench old hierarchies or foster re-evaluation and inclusivity, depending on how one guides its use.

Pedagogical Implications

In the classroom, AI is both a tool and a challenge. Instructors have begun to build assignments that incorporate chatbots, teaching students to use them critically rather than banning them outright. For example, one pedagogical strategy is to ask students to *debate* with ChatGPT: each student group compares their own analysis of a text with the AI's version, discussing differences. In another approach, a lecturer might require students to feed research ideas to Bard or ChatGPT and then annotate the output, identifying where it is useful and where it falls short. Such exercises can deepen students' understanding of textual analysis and sharpen their critical thinking about sources. A student can also submit a prompt for a research proposal in the Chisquare Toolkit, and evaluate the outcome with what he or she has written. However, there is no denying the temptation to misuse AI. Sparkman and Witt cite widespread concern about LLMs enabling academic misconduct. Indeed, countless reports from teachers have shown that students have asked ChatGPT to write essays or code, which amounts to plagiarized content. In literary studies, this might look like a first-year student getting ChatGPT to summarize *Things Fall Apart* instead of reading it. To counter this, tutors can design assessments that are AI-resistant (for instance, in-class writing or projects requiring personal reflection on the text) or selecting novels which are relatively new for students to analyze. Instructors could also embrace the change by teaching AI literacy: for example, showing students how to discern an AI-generated passage by its markers. The normative stance is emerging that AI is a legitimate research tool when used responsibly. Sparkman and Witt's examination of an AI-written literature review concluded that, when "leveraged responsibly alongside human scholars," LLMs can augment and accelerate research workflows (P.1). In humanities, this might translate to using ChatGPT to quickly outline a complex theory, freeing students to engage more deeply with the subtleties. On the flip side, there are also systemic concerns: if undergraduates rely too much on AI for analysis, will their close-reading skills shrivel? Will they become passive consumers of AI interpretations? These are valid pedagogical fears. Some departments have updated syllabi to include discussions of AI ethics, teaching students to approach even digital humanities tools with criticality.

Ethical and Epistemological Concerns

Beyond practical use cases, the emergence of AI forces us to re-examine foundational epistemological issues in literary studies. If an AI claims X about a text, what does that knowledge mean? Since we have established the fact that AI knowledge is inherently derivative: that is, entirely from statistical patterns in data, not from lived experience or intentional study, it therefore raises the "black box" problem Berry describes: we often cannot trace why an AI interpreted "red" as symbolizing love or "green" as jealousy; it might have learned these associations from its training texts without human labeling (PP. 11-12). Thus, the reliability of any AI analysis is questionable. AI models do not provide a rationale beyond raw inference. This challenges the transparency expected in scholarship. Human critics typically explain *how* they arrived at an interpretation, citing passages and theoretical reasoning. As Berry warns, with AI, we get the conclusion without the chain of thought. The lack of transparency (the "explanatory deficit") undermines the trust we place in a conclusion.

Another ethical issue is bias. AI systems learn the biases present in their data. If a literary corpus is skewed (e.g. majority Western authors), the AI's suggestions may unconsciously reflect those biases. For instance, a chatbot might downplay or overlook emerging African authors and their texts which are not part of the dataset. Or it might more readily identify issues of race, gender, identity and a vague pontification of power dynamics as the thematic engagements of African literature, ignoring salient contemporaneous issues African authors are grappling with. Berry and others warn that underlying code and data carry assumptions about what is valuable or worthy of analysis. Indeed, Berry cautions that unsupervised AI classification can inadvertently prioritize certain narratives (like a canonical Western novel) over others. Literary scholars must therefore be vigilant: using AI without examining its biases can reinforce existing inequities in the canon and disservice to critical engagements. Intellectual property is another concern. Since these AIs were trained on copyrighted texts, issues of fair use arise. If ChatGPT reproduces a famous line verbatim, did it infringe copyright? Some AI outputs are close paraphrases; others are original wording but clearly derivative of a particular style. The legal field is still debating AI and IP, but from an academic standpoint, the question is whether the AI's output can be cited or anthologized. Most editors currently advise caution. However, there is an epistemic humility to maintain. AI can be spectacularly wrong. Sparkman and Witt remind us of hallucinations, fabricated data that the model simply invents. An AI might confidently state that a poet wrote a poem on a date, or that a critic said something they never did, therefore, users must double-check every fact. Some have begun using AI-detection algorithms, but those too can be fooled or biased. The prudent stance is to treat AI output as a draft viewpoint, not a final verdict. As Immanuel and Gloria (2024) suggest, researchers should approach AI analyses "with criticism" because the models have their own defects (P.52). In short, AI can propose ideas and spot patterns, but the academy must remain gatekeeper: interpreting, validating and contextualizing any AI-generated content.

Conclusion

Although AI contents embody limitations, inaccuracies, biases and a lack of true literary understanding. The consensus among experts is clear: AI must be used *with* human scholars, not as a replacement for them. Berry's warnings about black boxes and hidden norms ring especially true today. Users of AI in the humanities should maintain a reflective stance – constantly questioning what the machine knows, how it knows it and what it overlooks. Looking ahead, literary studies may well be enriched by AI-assisted methods. Close-reading exercises could be complemented by distant-reading scans, and instructional practice may incorporate AI as one more perspective through which to interrogate a text. However, a fully “optimistic” view that AI will revolutionize criticism without cost is unwarranted. Nor is outright rejection advisable, as these tools can reveal patterns no human could easily detect. The balanced approach is to remain critical, flexible, and open-minded. As Premkumar's (2024) study concludes, the future of literature will likely involve a dynamic interplay between human creativity and machine intelligence (P.40). Our task as scholars is to shape that interplay, ensuring that AI serves to illuminate literature's depths rather than to obscure them.

Recommendation

1. In view of the growing influence of artificial intelligence on literary scholarship, this study strongly recommends the responsible and critical integration of AI tools into literary criticism.
2. AI should not be viewed as a replacement for human insight but as an analytical partner capable of augmenting scholarly inquiry.
3. Literary critics and educators are encouraged to adopt AI as a means of enhancing pattern recognition, expanding access to underexplored texts and generating fresh interpretive frameworks, especially when applied within the theoretical contexts of Digital Humanities and Critical Posthumanism.
4. However, such integration must be anchored in rigorous critical reflection, ensuring that algorithmic outputs are interpreted with attention to details, cultural specificity, and ethical concerns. Scholars must remain vigilant about the biases embedded in training data, the risk of reinforcing canonical hierarchies and the potential erosion of authorial agency.
5. Ultimately, the future of literary criticism lies in a hybrid approach, where human creativity and machine efficiency collaborate without compromising the intellectual depth, emotional resonance, and ethical integrity that define the humanities.
6. Institutions and curricula should thus invest in AI literacy for literary scholars, preparing a new generation of critics equipped to navigate and shape this emerging scholarly frontier.

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