

EDITORS’ NOTE



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“The Future Is Already Here”:

Artificial Intelligence as an Exercise in Human Redundancy

A moment ago, as I started drafting this Editor’s note, unhappy with the good old cliché, “to see the light of print,” I asked Chat GPT to give me a fresher, more contemporary equivalent of it. It instantly came up with a set of phrases and a sensible rationale: “a more contemporary equivalent for ‘to see the light of print’ is ‘to be published online’ or ‘to be digitally released’.” These reflect the shift from conventional print media to digital platforms in today’s publishing landscape. And once I’ve completed this, I can go into the lecture room and ask ChatGPT to speak for me, in my voice, in a LLD language, i.e. a language of limited diffusion, on a topic of my own choosing. So empowered, I feel as though I “contain multitudes.”

This edition of American, British and Canadian Studies is ‘digitally released’ on the cusp of accelerating change. In the ever-evolving landscape of digital humanities, the intersection of literary studies and artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a consequential realm of enquiry, one of profound significance. Whereas quite a few vintage litterateurs out there will fail to see how the synergy between these two seemingly disparate domains can enrich one’s understanding of literary works, many will ruminate on the compelling questions it raises about the nature of creativity, authorship, authenticity. Ineluctably, one cannot but remain divided between the promising avenues of creative exploration and the ethical concerns that underpin the entwined relationship between literary-linguistic studies, Academia and AI. While Translation and Interpretation Studies have already embraced the change, acting in ‘collusion’ and compliance with AI, literature has, understandably, held back. In literary studies, this burgeoning, potentially empowering synergy is replete with multiple quandaries and ethical considerations.

In criticism, the reliance on AI for literary analysis raises questions about the role of human scholars and the extent to which algorithms influence our textual interpretation. Problematical to say the least, the use of AI in the generation of new literary content prompts discussions about originality, innovation, and imagination, indeed moral integrity. How do we attribute intellectual property to algorithmically produced texts? Can we consider an AI system a legitimate author, or does authorship inherently rely on human intention, deliberateness and authorial consciousness? One of the prominent ethical dilemmas in this context is the potential for bias in AI models. To the extent that literary works reflect and critique societal norms and values, if AI models are trained on biased data, they will perpetuate and reinforce these biases, limiting the plurality of perspectives and voices in literature. The responsible and inclusive application of AI in literary studies is of paramount concern. Where would the novel be without its intrinsic polyphony? Or else, what is literature without conscience?

Harnessed through natural language processing and machine learning techniques, AI has paved the way for a reevaluation of literature, its creation, and its reception, albeit with a whole lot of 'caches.' On the bright side, the experimental application of AI in literary studies has transcended conventional boundaries, offering unprecedented insights into text analysis, stylistic attributes, and even the potential generation of literature. Computational analysis enables the identification of hidden patterns and connections within texts, their contexts, and intertextual contents. AI-driven language models have demonstrated a remarkable ability to craft prose that exhibits a striking semblance to human-authored texts, sparking inspiring, at times disturbing conversations about artistry, intentionality and consciousness.

Authors can use ChatGPT to assist them in various capacities throughout the writing process. To novice AI users, it provides step-by-step guides as to how to leverage the tool effectively toward optimal idea generation, structure and planning. If you're struggling to come up with ideas for your book, a conversation with ChatGPT will most probably deliver at the level of brainstorming concepts, themes and motifs. You can discuss your genre, target audience, and general plot ideas and receive creative suggestions, ingenious or less so, depending on the specificity and accuracy of your prompts. The tool has been proven effective in character profiling

and development. Describe your characters and their backgrounds to ChatGPT, and it can provide you with ideas for their personalities, motivations, idiosyncrasies, and relationships. Create character profiles and use the AI’s insights to build more well-rounded characters. Share your story’s general outline with ChatGPT, and it can provide suggestions to improve the plot, create sophisticated subplots, or resolve any plot holes, or generate riveting scenes or plot twists. If you’re experiencing writer’s block or need help with specific scenes, you can write or outline parts of your book, and ChatGPT will offer recommendations and tips to develop the content further. As well as requesting grammar and style tips for better sentence construction, after completing a draft, you can use ChatGPT to proofread and edit your work for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and consistency. The AI assistant can also provide suggestions for improving overall writing style and clarity.

As part of the unique, in-built architectonics of the novel, world-building is an enormously powerful instrument, the richer and fuller the projected world, the more compelling the effect. Describe your proposed settings to ChatGPT, and it can help you expand and create a more immersive fictional environment. Crafting a realistic and engaging dialogue is equally crucial for any piece of fiction. ChatGPT can help authors come up with plausible, natural-sounding conversations between their characters.

Unlikely though it may seem, one can rely on ChatGPT for peer review and Beta reading, share excerpts of one’s book with ChatGPT to get feedback on specific sections or chapters, refine and improve one’s writing technique.

AI help with publishing is not to be underestimated either. If your agent or publisher are less than efficient, or you haven’t got one or either, ChatGPT can assist with checking out book titles, taglines, and postproduction stages. You can also consult with the tool regarding book cover designs, marketing strategies and promotion.

Yet perhaps the most productive, invaluable research assistance that ChatGPT can provide is readily processed information or summaries on specific topics relevant to a particular story. It will scour and scrape every conceivable and available resource out there and gather nearly exhaustive data, facts, and references that will enhance the accuracy and depth of one’s writing.

Doubtless the inspiration and assistance superintelligent AI systems can provide is controversial at every single level, copyright included, and it is hard to believe any amount of regulating and legislating will contain the potential force it holds. For what it's worth and for now, we can take heart from the last stronghold on the stream of authorship: that the final decisions regarding the content and style of one's work ultimately stem from one's own, genuine creative vision. And there are always those less contentious, more clear-cut areas of application that seem to bear fruit.

A far more straightforward process at that has been the integration of automation and AI into translation and interpretation practice and pedagogy, building on already conventional uses of machine translation. Holding the fort of humanized translation and interpretation has somewhat become a matter of upscaling and upskilling, a lot less problematical, with a lot less ethical baggage. Increase your skill sets and you can maximize the generative AI output and make the most of it in post-editing, which is where the human translator has the edge. Still, promoting transparent, humancentric AI, are we ready to conceive of translation without conscience?

Will linguistics and literature stand divided as far as AI departures are concerned? Are authors in the flesh, like translators and interpreters, about to be made redundant? Can we safeguard the legacy of manned scholarship? And what is the horizon of expectation? With the transformative advent of AI, the 'game-changer,' and the limitless horizon of expectation it brings, are all authors going to be perfect, flawless, and inexhaustible, brimming with sparkle? And are we going to see more Edgar Allan Poes in the profession? Are we going to see avatars of all writers for that matter? While no longer the material of sci fi, the answers have become the fabric of futurology.

Suffice it to say at this stage, that as we navigate this intricate intersection, it is of the essence for scholars in the humanities to engage not in sheer contemplation but in forward-looking, cross-disciplinary dialogue. Collaboration between literary scholars, computer scientists, analysts, ethicists, and other specialists is crucial for addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by AI in literary studies. Fostering transparency and accountability in AI research and

implementation will ensure that the potential benefits of AI are harnessed while its pitfalls mitigated.

The convergence of literary studies and artificial intelligence heralds a promising era of exploration and innovation, opening new horizons for understanding, interpreting, and creating literature. However, it is our collective responsibility to navigate this intersection with care, upholding ethical principles, and safeguarding the integrity of the literary realm. By embracing this synergy while critically examining its implications, we need to stand poised to advance our understanding of the human condition, creativity, and the reinforced power of technology in a mesmerizing digital age.

The present volume comprises human authored contributions by scholars expressing themselves in their best voice, crafted with tremendous effort, inspiration and dedication, harnessed as best humanly possible. It celebrates mastery, excellence, and reveals limitations, revisits the great and the canonical and aims at breaking new ground. For, regardless of whither the humanities, new ground will probably constantly be there to break.

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