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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: ETHICS OF MACHINE CREATIVITY

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Abstract

The intersection of English literature and artificial intelligence (AI) has become an emergent field of inquiry, raising questions about authorship, originality, and the ethics of machine creativity. This paper explores the implications of AI-generated texts within the domain of literature, considering both the opportunities and challenges posed by machine creativity. By drawing on theories of authorship from Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, as well as contemporary debates on digital humanities and computational creativity, the study examines how AI technologies such as large language models transform traditional notions of literary production. Through analysis of ethical concerns—including intellectual property, authenticity, and cultural bias—the paper highlights the tensions between human and machine authorship. It argues that while AI offers unprecedented tools for literary experimentation and democratization, it simultaneously disrupts the human-centred ethics that have historically governed literature. Ultimately, the study positions AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as a collaborator that challenges us to rethink the foundations of literary value and responsibility in the twenty-first century.

1. INTRODUCTION

English literature, traditionally understood as a human-centred cultural production, is undergoing a profound transformation in the digital age. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies—particularly machine learning models capable of generating human-like language—



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has expanded the boundaries of what constitutes literary creation. From poetry composed by algorithms to novels drafted with the assistance of large language models, AI has entered the literary space not merely as a tool but as a potential co-creator (Smith 22). This development has generated significant enthusiasm as well as deep ethical concerns.

The central tension arises from the question: Can a machine truly be creative, and if so, what are the ethical consequences for literature as a human practice? Creativity, long celebrated as a uniquely human attribute, is now shared—at least in partial form—with machines trained on vast datasets of human writing. While some scholars celebrate AI as an enabler of new literary forms and experimental practices (Boden 113), others caution that machine-generated texts may erode the authenticity, originality, and cultural responsibility traditionally associated with authorship (Danaher 96).

This paper examines the ethical dimensions of AI in English literature, focusing on the concept of machine creativity. It situates the discussion within three main areas: (1) the redefinition of authorship in light of AI's generative capacities, (2) the ethical challenges concerning originality, intellectual property, and cultural bias, and (3) the potential for AI to reshape literary pedagogy, criticism, and creative practice. By analyzing these issues through both theoretical and literary lenses, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethical implications of AI's role in literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between literature and technology is not new. The printing press, typewriter, and word processor each altered literary production in their own ways. However, AI presents a qualitatively different challenge because it simulates not just the mechanics of writing but aspects of creativity itself. Scholars in computational creativity argue that AI systems can be considered “creative” when they generate outputs that are novel, surprising, and valuable (Colton and Wiggins 25). Yet, this definition of creativity remains contested in literary studies, where originality and human intentionality have long been seen as central (Caracciolo 41).

3. AUTHORSHIP AND POST-STRUCTURALIST THEORY

The debate over AI authorship intersects with post-structuralist critiques of the author. Roland Barthes' famous proclamation of the “death of the author” argued that the meaning of a text lies not in the author's intent but in the interaction between reader and language (Barthes 148). Similarly, Michel Foucault's essay “What Is an Author?” questioned the stability of authorship as a category, suggesting that the “author-function” is a construct shaped by cultural and institutional forces (Foucault 124). These theoretical perspectives provide fertile ground for analyzing AI-generated literature, as they decentre the human author and allow for a broader consideration of textual production.



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4. AI IN CREATIVE WRITING

Recent years have witnessed an increase in AI-assisted and AI-generated literary projects. GPT-based systems have been used to produce poetry, screenplays, and even novels, some of which have been published or performed (McGregor and Curran 68). Studies in digital humanities highlight the potential of AI to democratize literary creation, giving non-specialists access to sophisticated creative tools (Liu 203). Yet, critics argue that such works often replicate patterns from their training data, raising concerns about plagiarism, bias, and the lack of genuine originality (Hertzmann 57).

➤ Ethical Concerns

The ethical discourse surrounding AI in literature revolves around several key issues:

1. **Originality and Plagiarism:** Since AI models are trained on pre-existing texts, questions arise about whether their outputs are derivative or genuinely creative. Legal scholars highlight the challenge of assigning copyright to AI-generated works (Samuelson 342).
2. **Bias and Representation:** AI systems inherit biases from their training data. As Buolamwini and Gebru (5) argue, these biases can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, a concern that extends to AI-generated narratives.
3. **Labor and Cultural Value:** Critics worry that widespread use of AI in creative industries could devalue human labour, particularly for emerging writers (Danaher 104). At the same time, others see AI as expanding the field of creative participation rather than replacing it.

➤ Gaps in Scholarship

While much research has been conducted on the technical capabilities of AI, fewer studies engage directly with its implications for English literature as a discipline. Theoretical work connecting postcolonial, feminist, and ethical perspectives to AI-generated texts remains in its infancy. This paper contributes to filling that gap by examining AI not merely as a technical innovation but as a cultural and ethical phenomenon within literary studies.

➤ Theoretical Framework

To study the intersection of AI and English literature, this paper draws upon three overlapping theoretical frameworks: post-structuralist theories of authorship, ethical philosophy, and digital humanities approaches.

➤ Post-Structuralist Theories of Authorship

Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author* remains foundational in discussions about textual production. By rejecting the centrality of the author's intent, Barthes (148) opened the door for readers to interpret texts independently of biographical authorship. This decentring of the author provides an important precedent for analyzing AI-generated texts, where no human "author" may exist in the traditional sense. Similarly, Michel Foucault's concept of the "author-function" emphasizes that authorship is not a natural identity but a cultural and institutional category (Foucault 124). In the context of AI, authorship can be understood less as individual ownership and more as a function distributed across programmers, datasets, and algorithms.



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➤ Ethical Philosophy

From an ethical standpoint, the debate hinges on the principles of autonomy, responsibility, and justice. Philosophers such as John Danaher argue that AI creativity must be examined within a framework of ethical responsibility, where questions of labour displacement, intellectual property, and authenticity are central (Danaher 102). Meanwhile, virtue ethics suggests that creativity is intrinsically tied to human flourishing (MacIntyre 187). If AI can mimic creativity, does it undermine the value of human artistic practices, or does it expand them? This tension frames the ethical analysis in this paper.

➤ Digital Humanities and Computational Creativity

The field of digital humanities provides practical and theoretical tools for examining the relationship between literature and technology. As Matthew Kirschenbaum argues, digital texts are not simply new forms of writing but new material conditions of textuality (Kirschenbaum 21). Computational creativity studies, meanwhile, define creativity as the production of outputs that are novel, surprising, and valuable (Colton and Wiggins 28). By these standards, AI-generated literature qualifies as “creative” in certain contexts, though questions remain about intentionality and meaning.

Together, these frameworks establish the foundation for analyzing how AI reshapes the ethical and cultural landscape of English literature.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

➤ Rethinking Authorship

AI challenges one of the most enduring concepts in literary studies: the figure of the author. Traditional views associate literature with individual genius, inspiration, and originality. Yet, if an algorithm trained on millions of texts can produce a sonnet indistinguishable from Shakespeare’s, the uniqueness of human authorship is called into question. Some scholars argue this signals the realization of Barthes’ theoretical vision—where the text is liberated from the author (Barthes 150). Others, however, contend that replacing human authors with machines risks erasing the socio-cultural context that gives literature its ethical and historical weight (Caracciolo 49).

Moreover, AI authorship is not entirely authorless. Behind the machine lie programmers, engineers, and vast communities of human contributors whose texts make up the training data. Thus, AI-generated literature embodies a form of distributed authorship, where creativity emerges from a network rather than a single individual. This distributed model raises ethical questions: should credit be given to programmers, to the dataset contributors, or to the AI itself?

➤ Originality and Authenticity

One of the most contentious issues is whether AI-generated literature can be considered “original.” Since AI models operate by predicting and recombining linguistic patterns from training data, critics argue that they merely remix existing material rather than generating truly novel works (Hertzmann 62). Yet, as Boden points out, human creativity also involves recombination of



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existing knowledge (115). The difference may lie not in the process but in the perception of intentionality.

Authenticity, often linked to the author's lived experience, poses another challenge. Literature has historically been valued for its ability to express the subjective human condition. Can a machine, devoid of consciousness or emotion, produce works that are authentically literary? While AI can simulate emotional tone and narrative structure, it cannot experience joy, grief, or trauma. This gap may limit the authenticity of machine-generated texts, even if they are technically well-formed.

➤ **Ethical Issues of Intellectual Property**

Intellectual property law is struggling to keep pace with AI creativity. Current legal frameworks generally deny copyright to works created without human authorship (Samuelson 348). This creates ambiguity for AI-generated literature: should the rights belong to the programmer, the user who prompted the system, or no one at all? Some argue for new categories of "machine copyright," while others believe AI outputs should remain in the public domain (McGregor and Curran 72).

This debate is not merely legal but ethical. Granting copyright to AI could undermine human authors, while denying it risks discouraging innovation. A balanced approach may involve recognizing AI as a tool rather than an author, with human users retaining ultimate responsibility and ownership.

➤ **Cultural Bias and Representation**

AI models are trained on vast corpora of text, much of which reflect historical and cultural biases. Buolamwini and Gebru demonstrate how AI systems replicate racial and gender stereotypes (7). In literature, this means AI-generated narratives may unconsciously reinforce dominant ideologies while marginalizing underrepresented voices. For instance, if the majority of training texts depict women in stereotypical roles, AI literature may perpetuate such depictions unless carefully curated. Ethically, this raises concerns about diversity and representation in machine creativity. While AI can democratize access to creative tools, it can also reproduce systemic inequalities embedded in its data. Addressing this requires intentional efforts to diversify training datasets and to critically examine AI-generated texts for bias.

➤ **The Role of AI in Literary Pedagogy**

Beyond creative production, AI also has implications for how literature is taught and studied. In classrooms, AI tools can generate examples, assist in translation, and even provide alternative interpretations of texts. This offers opportunities for enriching pedagogy but also risks encouraging passivity among students if over-relied upon. Educators must strike a balance between leveraging AI's capabilities and preserving critical thinking, close reading, and human creativity as essential skills. Furthermore, literary criticism itself may evolve in response to AI. Scholars may begin to analyze not only human-authored texts but also AI-generated works, examining what they reveal about language, culture, and technology. In this sense, AI expands the field of literary studies rather than diminishing it.



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➤ Human-AI Collaboration

Rather than viewing AI as a threat, some writers embrace it as a collaborator. Projects such as AI-assisted poetry workshops or co-written novels demonstrate the potential for human-machine synergy (Liu 210). In these cases, AI functions less as a replacement and more as a creative partner, generating prompts, variations, and unexpected possibilities. This collaborative model reframes the ethical debate: the issue is not whether machines can be creative on their own but how humans choose to use them in creative practice.

Human-AI collaboration aligns with what N. Katherine Hayles describes as “posthuman” literature, where the boundaries between human and machine blur (Hayles 289). Such collaborations raise exciting questions about the future of storytelling: will the literature of tomorrow be authored by humans, machines, or hybrid collectives?

6. FINDINGS

The exploration of artificial intelligence in English literature reveals a multifaceted and evolving relationship between machine creativity and human cultural practices. Several key findings emerge from this study.

First, AI challenges the centrality of the human author, destabilizing traditional notions of authorship. While post-structuralist theories prepared the ground by questioning the primacy of authorial intent, AI embodies this shift in practice. Authorship, as demonstrated, becomes a distributed function shared among programmers, datasets, users, and algorithms. This finding underscores the need to rethink literary value not as the product of individual genius but as the outcome of collaborative and networked processes.

Second, the question of originality remains unresolved. While AI outputs are technically novel, their reliance on pre-existing data complicates claims of genuine creativity. This mirrors the recombinatory nature of human creativity but also highlights the absence of intentionality and lived experience in machine outputs. Authenticity, therefore, remains a uniquely human domain, though machines can convincingly simulate it.

Third, the ethical dimensions of intellectual property and bias are particularly pressing. AI-generated literature exposes gaps in current copyright law, raising the question of ownership and responsibility. At the same time, the risk of perpetuating cultural and linguistic biases underscores the need for critical scrutiny of training datasets and generated texts. Without such vigilance, AI literature risks reproducing inequalities rather than democratizing creativity.

Fourth, the pedagogical and cultural implications of AI are significant. Far from rendering literature obsolete, AI expands the scope of literary practice. In classrooms, AI can support teaching, inspire experimentation, and challenge students to critically engage with both human and machine texts. In creative practice, human-AI collaboration points toward a hybrid future in which authorship and creativity are shared.

Finally, the study finds that AI is best understood not as a replacement for human creativity but as a collaborator and provocateur. By exposing the assumptions embedded in our definitions of



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originality, authorship, and authenticity, AI invites us to reconsider the ethical foundations of literature itself.

7. CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence has introduced a paradigm shift in the domain of English literature, compelling scholars, writers, and educators to grapple with the ethics of machine creativity. While AI challenges traditional notions of authorship and originality, it also offers opportunities for expanding creative possibilities and rethinking cultural practices. The post-structuralist critique of the author provides a useful theoretical lens, but the ethical questions surrounding authenticity, bias, and intellectual property remain unresolved.

The findings suggest that the debate is not about whether AI can truly be creative in a human sense, but about how society chooses to integrate machine creativity into its cultural and ethical frameworks. Rather than resisting AI as a threat, literary studies can benefit from engaging with it critically, acknowledging both its limitations and its transformative potential.

The future of English literature in the age of AI will likely be hybrid. Human writers will continue to provide the intentionality, emotional depth, and cultural context that machines lack, while AI will serve as a tool for experimentation, collaboration, and the expansion of literary forms. This hybrid model requires ethical responsibility: curating diverse datasets, ensuring equitable representation, and safeguarding the cultural and economic value of human creativity.

Ultimately, the ethics of machine creativity lie not in the capabilities of the technology itself but in the choices made by its human users. English literature, far from being eclipsed, stands to be enriched by this new partnership—provided that ethical reflection remains central. AI compels us to revisit fundamental questions about the meaning of authorship, the value of originality, and the responsibilities of literature in representing human experience. In doing so, it reaffirms the enduring role of literature as a site of negotiation between tradition and innovation, humanity and technology.

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9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

10. PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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