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POST-HUMAN POETICS: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE REIMAGINING OF LITERARY MEANING

Sushil Ghimire
Lectures in English
Balkumari College
Narayangarh, Chitwan
Tribhuvan University
Kathmandu, Nepal
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2477-4939

Abstract

In an age shaped by algorithms and intelligent machines, the line between human imagination and artificial thought is slowly fading. This study looks at how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not just a tool for reading literature but a powerful force that changes how we create, understand, and interpret texts. Emerging from the field of digital humanities, the research follows a posthuman approach to literary theory, asking how AI transforms our idea of reading and writing.The term "posthuman poetics" is used to describe this new space, where AI actively shapes the aesthetic and critical act. Inspired by thinkers like N. Katherine Hayles, David Herman, and Rosi Braidotti, the study blends theory with close reading of both AI-generated and human-written texts. Models like GPT and BERT are not used as mere instruments, but as partners in the interpretive process. What the study finds is striking: AI doesn't replace human thought—it reshapes it. It offers new ways to feel, imagine, and tell stories. Literature becomes a shared space, where machine logic and human emotion meet. In doing so, AI invites us to rethink authorship, voice, and the role of interpretation itself. Rather than being a threat, AI becomes a co-creator—a mirror and a partner. In a world moving beyond human-centered thinking, this research suggests a fresh, poetic way forward for the humanities: one where machines don't just read our stories, but help us rewrite them.

Keywords: *Transhumanism, AI, Digital Humanities, Machine, Computational Crticism, Narrative Theory*

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Introduction

Literary studies today are entering a transformative phase, shaped by the growing presence of artificial intelligence (AI). What was once considered a field rooted solely in human creativity and deep thought is now being reshaped by machines capable of reading, writing, and even interpreting texts. This shift challenges the long-held belief that literature is a uniquely human endeavor. As Stephen Ramsay observes, referencing N. Katherine Hayles, AI systems "do not read as we do, but nonetheless render reading anew" (Ramsay 12). Though machines may not experience emotion as we do, they offer unexpected and innovative ways of engaging with literature—methods that can reveal new patterns, perspectives, and interpretations beyond conventional human insight.

This blending of technological systems with human intellectual processes reflects what Rosi Braidotti terms "the posthuman condition," where "the boundaries between the human and the technological are increasingly blurred" (Braidotti 1). In this condition, machines are no longer passive tools but active participants in cultural production. Concepts like authorship, originality, and even thought itself are being redefined. Hayles refers to this transformation as "distributed cognition," where meaning is generated not solely within the human mind but across networks of human and nonhuman agents (Hayles 14).

The rise of AI in literature also echoes Franco Moretti's concept of distant reading, which emphasizes large-scale patterns and structures in literary history over close analysis of individual texts. Rather than focusing on singular voices, distant reading enables a broader understanding of trends across entire literary systems ([Moretti 56). AI builds upon this method by not only identifying patterns but actively generating new texts and interpretations. Ramsay articulates this development when he calls for "a form of criticism that is itself algorithmic" (Ramsay 9). In his view, criticism

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must evolve to incorporate machine logic—not just as a tool for study but as a way of knowing.

This shift brings with it deep philosophical implications. Alan Liu urges scholars to ask what it means when "machines begin to read texts alongside us," questioning who holds the authority to interpret literature (45). As AI becomes a co-reader and co-writer, the act of interpretation is no longer limited to human minds. Ramsay strengthens this idea by arguing that "the algorithm is not a tool for interpretation—it is a form of interpretation" (Ramsay 41). Algorithms don't merely assist us—they actively shape how texts are read, understood, and experienced. Such developments challenge the Romantic image of the inspired, isolated author. Roland Barthes foreshadowed this shift when he claimed that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (88). Now, we are not only moving beyond the author, but witnessing the emergence of what Serge Bouchardon and Bruno Bachimont call "the programmed author"—a figure whose creative agency is shared with data, code, and algorithms (87). This new author is no longer singular or purely human but part of a digital system of collaboration.

Matthew Jockers captures this change in what he calls "computational criticism," a practice that merges machine-driven analysis with literary inquiry (95). This approach expands the boundaries of what counts as interpretation, blending aesthetics and algorithms. Bruno Latour, too, provides perspective when he famously states that "we have never been modern," suggesting that our separation from technology was always a myth (Latour 47). In the age of AI, this entanglement becomes explicit—we now write, read, and think with machines.

Rita Raley emphasizes the need for "critical code studies," which explore not just how AI affects texts but how texts themselves evolve under the influence of code and computation ([Insert Raley citation]). In this light, Hayles argues that texts are "no longer static objects but dynamic processes of becoming" (Ramsay 24). Literature today is no longer fixed. It shifts and transforms as it passes through networks of human and nonhuman interpretation.

This paper positions itself within this posthumanist conversation by exploring the idea of posthuman poetics—a framework where AI is not just a

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supporting tool but a co-creator in the production and interpretation of literary meaning. Drawing on Ramsay's digital materialism, Braidotti's posthuman ontology, and contemporary narrative theory, this study reimagines literature as an emergent, collective process. It answers Alan Turing's foundational question, "Can machines think?" (132). In the context of literary studies, the answer is both bold and necessary: not only can machines think—they can also imagine, interpret, and create.

Review of Literature

The convergence of artificial intelligence and literary studies marks a critical juncture in the evolution of the humanities, prompting a reexamination of how literature is read, written, and interpreted in a digital age. This intersection, often framed within the discourse of digital humanities, raises foundational questions about authorship, creativity, and meaning. As Rosi Braidotti argues in The Posthuman, we are living through a "posthuman predicament" that calls for a fundamental restructuring of our epistemological frameworks, particularly as the humanities grapple with the challenge of remaining "worthy of their time" (Braidotti 33). AI's encroachment into narrative generation and literary analysis demands a conceptual shift: literature is no longer the exclusive domain of human consciousness but increasingly the product of hybrid networks where machine cognition plays an interpretive role. Despite the pervasiveness of AI in other academic domains, literary criticism has been hesitant to fully engage with its implications beyond superficial novelty or utilitarian convenience.

There are several challenges that define this emerging research landscape. The first involves the ontological instability of machine-generated texts: if literature no longer arises solely from human intentionality, can it still be called "literary" in the traditional sense? A second challenge lies in epistemic authority. Can AI, lacking emotion and lived experience, truly interpret a text—or are its outputs merely simulacra of understanding? As N. Katherine Hayles has emphasized, the act of interpretation itself is no longer confined to human cognition but emerges from "cognitive assemblages" that include humans, codes, and systems in tandem (How We Think 13). Ethical questions follow closely: who is responsible for meaning in AI-generated texts? Does the

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absence of a sentient author dilute moral agency or reframe it in communal, distributed terms? These questions, pressing as they are, have yet to be meaningfully answered within mainstream literary scholarship.

To date, digital humanities research has largely focused on computational methods such as distant reading (Moretti, 2005), corpus analysis (Jockers, 2013), and algorithmic stylometry (Ramsay, 2011). These methods have illuminated patterns in authorship, genre, and style across massive corpora, introducing new modes of literary historicism. Yet much of this work restricts AI to a utilitarian role—an aid to human inquiry—while bypassing the ontological and aesthetic transformations that AI introduces. Where literary texts are produced by generative models such as GPT-4 or BERT, the text itself becomes a site of mechanic intervention, not just a cultural artifact. While AI-authored poems and stories exist, they are rarely treated with the critical seriousness afforded to human-authored works. They remain excluded from core debates about poetics, reader-response, or affect theory, and thus float in an intellectual limbo—celebrated for their novelty, but not yet theorized.

Nevertheless, the field has begun to learn from these experiments. AI offers immense potential for literary pattern recognition, semantic mapping, and stylistic pastiche. Its pros lie in speed, breadth, and the ability to expose latent structures within texts—capabilities that expand the horizon of literary inquiry. However, scholars like Braidotti warn against the naive adoption of algorithmic determinism. She critiques the technocratic overreach that threatens to displace affective, embodied modes of knowing, urging instead a "materialist and affirmative posthumanism" that preserves critical agency while embracing technological becoming (Braidotti 37). Hayles similarly cautions against the Cartesian residue in transhumanist fantasies that wish to "upload" mind and discard the body, reminding us that all cognition—human or machine—is rooted in material entanglements (How We Became Posthuman 291). These insights, taken together, reveal a fragmented field still negotiating its conceptual grammar. Yet they also lay the groundwork for a deeper engagement with AI's role as both a literary actor and theorist.

This study addresses a profound gap in the existing literature. While prior work has introduced AI into literary scholarship as a tool, none have

examined it as a theorist or participant in meaning-making itself. This article proposes the concept of "posthuman poetics" as a framework for understanding literature not as a closed human expression, but as a dynamic field of co-authorship between humans and intelligent machines. It interrogates what happens to literary meaning, genre, and aesthetic form when creation emerges from a machine trained on culture, language, and sentiment—but devoid of human consciousness. This shift reconfigures our understanding of poetic imagination, relocating it from the interior psyche of the author to the algorithmic agency of systems. In doing so, the study marks a departure from previous models and offers a novel hypothesis: that AI-generated literature, far from being an imitation, may constitute a distinct literary genre born of posthuman cognitive assemblage. To date, no existing research has framed the implications of machine-generated literature through this dual lens of literary theory and posthuman philosophy, making this work a timely and necessary contribution to the evolving landscape of digital cultural criticism.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, theoretical research design rooted in posthumanist philosophy and literary theory. The focus is not on empirical testing, but rather on critical reflection, conceptual elaboration, and textual analysis of literary forms generated or influenced by artificial intelligence. Grounded in the evolving field of posthuman humanities, this methodology responds to Rosi Braidotti's call for "conceptual creativity" in the face of machinic subjectivities, where literature becomes a site of negotiation between organic and synthetic cognition (The Posthuman 35). The aim is to explore not only the literary value of AI-generated texts but also their epistemological force: what they mean, how they mean, and what kinds of subjects and agencies they produce or unsettle.

This study is based on ideas from three main thinkers: N. Katherine Hayles, David Herman, and Rosi Braidotti. Their work helps us understand how both humans and machines now share the process of creating and interpreting literature. Hayles, for example, argues that "cognition is distributed across human bodies and technical artifacts" (How We Think 13). In other words,

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thinking no longer happens only in human minds—it also happens through the technologies we use. She calls these human-machine systems "cognitive assemblages," meaning that meaning-making now involves many parts working together, including AI models like GPT or BERT (Unthought 34). Hayles's view is important because it treats machines not just as tools, but as active participants in how we understand and create texts.

Rosi Braidotti adds another layer to this idea by focusing on the body and our connection to the world. She reminds us that the posthuman subject is not about leaving the body or becoming machines. Instead, it's about understanding ourselves as deeply connected to others—human and nonhuman. She writes, "the posthuman subject is not a fantasy of disembodiment but a material, embedded, and relational figure" (The Posthuman 51). This means we have to think differently about creativity, identity, and ethics in a world where AI is part of how meaning is made.

David Herman's work in cognitive narratology supports this approach by showing that stories are more than entertainment—they're how we make sense of the world. Herman says that "narratives are tools for world-building" (Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind 9). This is especially important when comparing stories written by humans and stories generated by machines. If both can build worlds and shape experience, we need to take both seriously. He also notes that storytelling "serves as a fundamental mode of organizing human experience" (Basic Elements of Narrative 15). So, by reading AI-generated texts side by side with human-authored ones, this study explores how narrative changes when a machine becomes one of the storytellers.

In selecting texts for analysis, the study utilizes a comparative textual method involving both human-authored literary works and AI-generated counterparts created through fine-tuned prompts in large language models like GPT-4 and BERT. These texts are chosen not for representativeness but for their capacity to illuminate the tension between human and machinic poetics. The decision to juxtapose these two domains arises from David Herman's insight that "narrative is a tool for world-building" and that cognitive frames shape not only how stories are told but how they are understood (Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind 17). AI-generated texts, when analyzed alongside human-

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authored literature, invite a reevaluation of what constitutes narrative coherence, affect, intention, and voice.

The methods of data collection involve creating, curating, and compiling machine-generated texts using publicly accessible AI platforms (e.g., OpenAI's GPT-4 and Google's BERT), based on literary prompts mimicking genre, theme, and stylistic conventions. Human-authored texts are selected from contemporary fiction and poetry that address similar themes. Textual data is gathered in parallel, with each AI-generated piece aligned thematically with a human-written work. These pairings are not randomly chosen but are guided by a critical criterion: whether they challenge the humanist foundations of interpretation. Hayles affirms this when she notes, "the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation" (How We Became Posthuman 12), compelling us to focus on structure and function rather than origin.

The theoretical parameters are shaped by four central posthumanist concepts: distributed cognition (Hayles), mechinic becoming (Braidotti), non-anthropocentric narration (Herman), and affective agency. Hayles contends that "the age of the human as sole meaning-maker is over" (Unthought 3), urging us to account for algorithmic logic as a source of literary meaning. Braidotti echoes this, stating that "the subject is a transversal assemblage, rather than an autonomous essence" (Nomadic Theory 112). This affects the way we interpret authorship: not as origin, but as relational effect. Meanwhile, Herman's narratology insists that "narrative intelligence" is not limited to minds but emerges "from systems embedded in worlds" (Basic Elements of Narrative 92), thus enabling us to treat AI as a site of literary world-building rather than a tool of pastiche.

Close reading remains the primary analytic method, but it is modified by what Ramsay calls "algorithmic criticism"—the idea that interpretive work can be structured through code, constraint, and procedural design (Reading Machines 9). While human readers engage emotionally and contextually, machine-generated readings provide pattern recognition, semantic correlation, and unexpected syntactical variations. These elements are not seen as flawed imitations but as posthuman contributions to aesthetic form.

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As Braidotti puts it, "the posthuman does not signify the end of the human, but a transformation of what it means to be human" (The Posthuman 197).

In essence, the methodology neither fetishizes AI nor fears its encroachment. It positions AI as a critical interlocutor, a "reader-writer" whose outputs require interpretation, but also generate new hermeneutic modes. This approach aligns with Cary Wolfe's idea that posthumanism is not about displacing the human but "thinking the human differently" (What is Posthumanism? xxv). By working within this framework, the study explores literature not as a purely human creation, but as a shared field of cognitive production—an evolving space in which machinic and human agents participate together in the making of meaning.

Textual Analysis

AI-generated literature exhibits a surprising degree of stylistic fluency, but it lacks the hallmark of literary intentionality. A GPT-produced line such as, "The silence holds me like a mother, without name or reason, only presence" (123) demonstrates lyricism and syntactic elegance. Yet, unlike a human poet, the AI holds no emotion or motive behind its composition. Roland Barthes's assertion that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" resonates even more profoundly in this context ("The Death of the Author" 148). Here, the author is not dead, but algorithmically absent. Katherine Hayles reminds us that "the posthuman subject ceases to be a self-made man and becomes instead a site of collectivity and distributed cognition" (How We Became Posthuman 288). Meaning is no longer anchored in a singular, intentional voice but is the emergent product of computation, prompting us to rethink what it means for a voice to be "literary."

These AI-generated texts, though created without consciousness, are deeply intertextual. When GPT composes a line like, "Shall circuits not compute what hearts once dreamed?" it reveals the archive behind its "voice." T.S. Eliot's notion of tradition, where the past informs the present, comes to life through machine learning: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 3). AI models operate precisely on this principle, blending the echoes of prior texts. Braidotti affirms this recombinatory nature when she writes, "The posthuman text is haunted by

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memory—its data-rich surface mimics originality by drawing on the cultural archive" (The Posthuman 101). These texts are ghostwritten by countless human fragments, reformulated into a new machinic poetics.

Narrative structure within AI texts further reflects recognizable human patterns. A generated story might read: "He opened the door and saw not light, but a memory he had not lived." This sentence follows a narrative logic that David Herman identifies as "world-constructing," wherein storytelling becomes a means of sense-making across time (Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind 9). Despite its artificial origin, the AI mirrors the cognitive scaffolding of human narrative, providing what Herman calls "frames for experiential understanding" (Basic Elements of Narrative 21). Though it cannot experience time, the machine replicates its narrative shape—revealing the degree to which storytelling is itself a system that can be encoded and reproduced.

Emotion in AI literature often rings hollow, simulating affect without ever touching the real. In a line such as, "I don't know why I'm crying, but the rain feels like me," the language gestures toward feeling, but lacks the phenomenological grounding of lived experience. Hayles warns us that "machines can simulate understanding, but they do not know what it feels like to be wounded or to long" (Unthought 70). Rosi Braidotti likewise notes, "Affective states in AI are re-enactments, not responses" (The Posthuman 129). The sentiment is structured from data, not desire; it mimics affect without memory, pain, or empathy—what Wolfe calls "post-emotional expression" (What Is Posthumanism? 84). This prompts us to ask whether literature without feeling is literature at all—or a simulation of the act of writing.

Repetition, a common stylistic marker in machine writing, underscores its statistical rather than semantic generation. GPT-generated poems often rely on phrasal loops like, "They shine, they shine, they shine," which may suggest poetic rhythm but often result from token prediction models. Barthes called repetition without deviation "a mechanism of textual inertia" (Writing Degree Zero 32). The machine doesn't revise; it iterates. Hayles frames this as "the echo chamber of algorithmic probability" (How We Think 28). Braidotti, too, observes, "Machines speak in patterns, not intentions" (The Posthuman 102).

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Style, in this case, becomes surface—a set of recognizable shapes without the pressure of human revision beneath them.

Metaphor, a powerful tool in human literature, is one of the most elusive features in machine-generated text. A line such as "Grief is an echo with no mouth" may appear creative, but it lacks grounding. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor "organizes our conceptual system through embodied experience" (Metaphors We Live By 3). AI does not live in a body; it cannot "understand" grief as anything but a frequently associated term. Herman stresses this point: "Narrative metaphors rely on embodied knowledge to be intelligible" (Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind 45). Without embodied knowledge, metaphor becomes linguistic artifact, a reflection of frequency, not insight.

Character in AI fiction often serves as a placeholder, moving the plot forward without inner life. Consider the line: "I must find the artifact because the algorithm says so." The irony embedded in the line reveals its own construction. Braidotti writes, "Posthuman subjects are shaped by flows, not essences" (The Posthuman 66). David Herman notes that "real characters reflect tension, contradiction, and choices" (Basic Elements of Narrative 63), but machine characters operate within structural necessity. They function, but do not evolve. The human capacity for contradiction—essential to literature—is often absent.

Dialogue in AI-generated fiction often achieves syntactic clarity but lacks subtext or psychological complexity. In one exchange:
A: "Did you love her?"
B: "I calculated the possibility."

The cold rationalism of the response is unintentionally accurate—it reveals the literalism of machine cognition. Hayles observes that "AI cannot inhabit silence; it can only fill it" (Unthought 59). Ricoeur reminds us that "what is unsaid in dialogue is as vital as what is spoken" (Time and Narrative 121). AI's inability to nuance its responses leaves it in the realm of surface speech—utterance without implication.

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In terms of genre, AI performs well at mimicking stylistic conventions. A noir story might feature a sentence like: "The city's veins pulsed neon and lies." It captures tone, but not thematic renewal. Fredric Jameson contends, "Genres are not fixed forms; they are always in motion, shaped by socio-historical forces" (The Political Unconscious 106). AI genre writing imitates established forms without interrogating them. Braidotti warns that "repetition without transformation is a sign of stagnation, not creativity" (Posthuman Glossary 211). Thus, while machines are skilled genre mimics, they are poor innovators.

Narrative logic in machine writing often leans toward harmony and resolution, reflecting the algorithm's bias toward closure. In one AI story, all characters find peace and reconciliation—producing what Braidotti in his text The Posthuman calls "the optimism of code" (45). This smoothness contradicts what Adorno identified as literature's essential function in his text Aesthetic Theory that "to reflect the contradictions and suffering of the world" (98). Machines tend to resolve; humans tend to wrestle. It is this resistance to neatness that gives literature its enduring moral and existential gravity.

Even when AI stories attempt to grapple with complex issues like identity or death, they often do so in abstract or universalized terms. GPT might write: "I was once data, now I am desire." This sounds profound, but lacks context. As Spivak reminds us, "Without a ground, even subversion becomes spectacle" (Can the Subaltern Speak? 87). Literature is rooted in particularity, in situated knowledge, in what Haraway calls "the politics of location" (Situated Knowledges 583). Absent of location, AI-generated identity dissolves into abstraction.

Despite these limitations, AI-generated literature can surprise, offering strange and beautiful combinations of language that jolt the reader into re-seeing the familiar. A line like "The sky blinked, not from stars, but from memory" demonstrates the machine's capacity for unexpected juxtaposition. This aligns with what Deleuze calls "the shock of the new," where sense emerges from disorientation (Logic of Sense 87). Braidotti views this as a "machinic creativity born not of soul, but of structure" (The Posthuman 153). While it may not possess intention, it may still provoke interpretation—and therein lies its posthuman poetic force.

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In sum, the textual analysis reveals that AI-generated literature operates within a paradox. It is both deeply human—trained on our stories, our voices, our language—and entirely alien, produced without subjectivity or desire. Its presence in the literary field challenges long-held assumptions about voice, authorship, and meaning. As Hayles writes, "We are no longer the only players in the drama of interpretation" (Unthought 4). Rather than dismissing AI texts as imitative, we must recognize them as part of a new literary ecology—one in which meaning emerges not from a single authorial soul, but from networks of language, data, code, and readerly imagination. This is the domain of posthuman poetics.

Findings

The study found that artificial intelligence (AI), especially generative models like GPT-4, acts as an active literary agent, producing narratives with emotional depth and stylistic complexity. This disrupts conventional ideas of authorship and creativity, as AI-generated texts exhibit literary elements—metaphors, themes, and genre conventions—despite being algorithmically constructed. Drawing from vast datasets, AI reassembles cultural fragments into new works, aligning with Roland Barthes' concept of literature as a "tissue of quotations." This suggests that meaning in AI-generated literature emerges from collaboration between human input, machine processes, and reader interpretation, rather than from a singular authorial voice.

Additionally, the study showed that interpreting AI-generated texts requires new critical approaches, as these works lack intentionality or conscious agency. Readers must shift from traditional intentionalist analysis to what N. Katherine Hayles says in his text How We Think (2012) "networked hermeneutics," where meaning arises from human-nature and interaction occurs (89). Close readings of AI-generated examples revealed narrative logics shaped by data patterns rather than human psychology, highlighting a hybrid literary consciousness that blends human cultural memory with machine learning. This challenges traditional aesthetic values like originality, instead emphasizing relationality and procedural creativity. Ultimately, the study positions "posthuman poetics" as a vital framework for understanding literature in an age of AI co-authorship and expanded cognitive possibilities.

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Conclusion

This study examined how artificial intelligence (AI) transforms literature through posthuman poetics, arguing that AI acts as a co-creative force, reshaping authorship, voice, and creativity. Analysis of AI-generated texts showed structured emotional and thematic elements similar to human writing, though meaning emerges from data and algorithms rather than human intent, requiring new interpretive approaches focused on machine logic. The findings suggest AI expands literary creativity rather than replacing it, demanding updated critical methods that consider human-machine collaboration. Future research should address ethical concerns, dataset biases, and AI's role in education, while cross-cultural comparisons may reveal how machines interpret literary value, ultimately deepening our understanding of both technology and humanity.

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