

## THE DIGITAL STUDY OF LITERATURE: OLD PARADOX OR NEW PARADIGM?

**The Digital Humanities and Literary Studies.** By Martin Paul Eve. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 208. ISBN 978-0-19-885048-9.

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For university students interested in digital humanities, the works of Ted Underwood, such as *Distant Horizons* (2019), can be a great starting point to discover what digital humanities can provide to researchers. However, to understand the diversity of digital humanities scholarship, one can turn to Martin Paul Eve's *The Digital Humanities and Literary Studies* for further insights. The book adeptly illustrates how technology converges with traditional humanistic studies to reshape our understanding of human culture, literature, and history in a style that appeals to readers of varying backgrounds.

In the introductory chapter, Eve delves into the many concerns regarding the potential for digital humanities to bring about a shift back to an apolitical and formalist approach in the academic fields it intersects with, particularly literary studies. Scholars worry that the emphasis on computational analysis and quantitative methods, as embraced in some forms of digital humanities, might overlook or neglect critical aspects such as the social contexts, cultural diversity, and power dynamics prevalent in literary works. However, Eve argues that digital methods, instead of taking away the joy of reading, in fact, “bring us closer to literary texts” (4). He also gives an overview of previous scholarly discourse on the intersection between ethics and digital humanities, from Benjamin Ruha and Charlton D. McIlwain to Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein. The introduction also sets the tone for the subsequent chapters, outlining the book’s structure: it plans to explore the contributions and potential of digital literary studies.

The book opens with a meticulous exploration of the shifting role of authors and writing in the digital age in the chapter “Authors and Writing.” From delving into Gertrude Stein’s stylistic innovations in *The Making of Americans* to questioning the ethical implications of computer-generated texts, Eve offers thought-provoking analyses of how technology intertwines with traditional writing practices. Moreover, he introduces the concept of “digital abundance” and explains how it relates to the vast amount of textual data available for analysis. However, he argues that the abundance of the digital realm relies on the labour of creating and maintaining electronic infrastructure, which is often overlooked. The second chapter, “Space and Visualization”

focuses on the importance of multi-dimensional feature-sets visualisation in digital humanities studies. Here, Eve highlights the emerging concept of computational colonialism. Within font designs and NFO files, this concept manifests through an oversight of the historical and cultural importance of non-English glyphs. NFO files, utilised for sharing information about pirated software, notably overlook the original textual forms of non-Latin characters such as those from Czech or Portuguese, representing them simplistically in ASCII art. This practice tends to favour the English language and Latin characters, inadvertently neglecting linguistic diversity within computing and digital expression. Eve emphasises that the use of these glyphs, while lacking explicit awareness of their colonial connotations, might inadvertently carry historical implications associated with cultures impacted by colonialism. This oversight exemplifies a facet of computational colonialism, where the historical context of these characters in digital representations is often disregarded.

Eve goes into the specifics of visualisation in the third chapter, “Maps and Place.” One of the most intriguing discussions in the book takes place in this chapter, when Eve analyses *I’m Jack* (2015), a novel by Mark Blacklock in which what is said and how it is communicated matter more than the content itself. The linguistic style of the novel (the use of the Wearside accent of Sunderland) serves to create a sense of time and place within the narrative, while the spatial and temporal metadata of the hoax letters and their impact on the investigation emphasises the importance of location and timing in the story. Eve ends the chapter with a thought-provoking inquiry about the purpose of digital maps and their relationship between literary representation and the reality it represents. As he sums up, “digital mapping approaches demonstrate to us the problems in transposing literary texts, which use their space as narrative structuration devices, onto maps that purport to represent an extra-textual reality” (128).

The fourth chapter, “Distance and History,” explores the ways computational analysis contributes to understanding literary history and challenges established literary critical narratives. It introduces the work of Andrew Piper, who employs computational methods to examine punctuation in poetry, exploring patterns and trends but also highlighting the limitations in understanding the deeper meanings and nuances. Piper’s approach showcases a symbiosis between computational findings and the need for close, human-centred reading to grasp the complexities. Furthermore, Eve offers new perspectives on genre conventions, textual analysis, and gender representation in fiction. He emphasises the intersection of digital approaches with political and social issues, such as gender, race, class, and more, revealing the implications and limitations of applying computational methodologies to literary studies.

Finally, the concluding chapter emphasises that digital literary studies is not a recent field, but one that has been around for years. Addressing the challenges of the area underscores the difficulty in verifying or disproving computational analyses and questions about causal reproducibility in computational processes. Despite these challenges, Eve advocates for the invaluable contribution of digital methods in offering fresh perspectives and a deeper understanding of literary texts. In this chapter, he emphasises the harmony between traditional close reading and newer distant reading approaches. He also highlights that the digital paradigm challenges established literary periodisation and provides a new scale for considering literary history. Furthermore, he notes the balance needed between descriptive methods and interpretation to ground literary analyses.

Martin Paul Eve's *The Digital Humanities and Literary Studies* is a thought-provoking inquiry into the interdisciplinary realm of digital humanities and its integration with literary analysis. Eve's arguments regarding the shift in the role of authors and writing in the digital age are well-supported and compelling. One of the most unique aspects of the book is its accessibility; it caters to both students and experts in the field. The various original and third-party case studies also complement its accessibility; and Eve's portrayal of how colonialism, font design, and the use of non-English glyphs in digital contexts reflect an overlooked history is particularly insightful. The inclusion of the ethical implications of computer-generated texts further enhances its value and makes it more significant in an age where AI seems to be taking over the writing landscape. Yet, Eve leaves readers with an optimistic outlook, signifying that digital methods pave the way for a renewed appreciation and deeper understanding of literary texts.