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AI, Algorithms, and Narrative Authority in 21st-Century Fiction

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Abstract-

Positioned at the intersection of narratology, platform studies, and AI research, this article traces a genealogy from print conventions and hypertext experiments to procedurally generated and AI-assisted storytelling in the twenty-first century. We argue that algorithmic infrastructures redistribute power among authors, readers, and computational agents, creating hybrid regimes of control and agency. Through cases spanning novels, interactive fiction, and multimedia franchises, the analysis shows how platform logics, recommendation systems, and datafied attention economies shape plot construction, narrative voice, and focalization. Reader agency is theorized as choice, navigation, and co-creation, while design strategies (branching architectures, constraint systems) channel or limit participation. Ethical-legal issues—authorship, licensing, accountability—are examined alongside technical concerns such as bias, opacity, and provenance. A comparative lens foregrounds non-Western contributions and counters the Anglophone dystopia/utopia binary by revealing plural cultural imaginaries of AI. Methodologically, the article combines close reading with system-aware critique to map how computational procedures function simultaneously as narrative devices and institutional conditions of production. We conclude that AI intensifies long-standing tensions between control and openness: it decenters singular authorship yet demands new editorial stewardship, disclosure norms, and reader literacies. Narrative authority thus becomes distributed, situational, and continually negotiated across human and nonhuman actors, with implications for pedagogy, publishing policy, and future research on digital literature.

Keywords: AI narratives; algorithmic storytelling; narrative authority; reader agency; platformization; authorship and copyright; bias and opacity.

Introduction

The study examines the interrelation of artificial intelligence, algorithms, and narrative authority in 21st-century fiction. In the modern literary environment, authors and readers have access to a greater variety of storytelling techniques than ever before. Writers experiment with conventional and unconventional narrative modes, ranging from traditional devices established by literary history to interactive and algorithmic narrative strategies made possible through digital media technologies. The widespread incorporation of both AI and algorithms into fictional production has led to complex interactions between these technologies within the realm of narrative authority, which

raises important questions about literary practice and (dystopian or utopian) cultural imagination (Chubb et al., 2022).

The Evolution of Narrative Forms

Tracing the evolution of storytelling forms reveals that 21st-century fiction featuring algorithmic and AI-driven narratives represents a confluence and expansion of emergent narrative traditions. Key lineage strands are briefly surveyed to contextualize contemporary developments. Traditional narrative modes established a foundation of conventions, as the authoritative role of the author supplanted emblematic epics of bards and prophets. Early popular culture introduced serialized storytelling, enabling complex character arcs across temporally distant installments that sought reader loyalty. Digital technology enabled more elaborate iterations, exemplified by serial narrative in multimedia franchises such as Star Wars and Herbie. Construction of storyworlds across interstitial gaps depended on reader extrapolation and imagination, conjoining author and audience under a shared interpretive burden.

Narratology investigated the accommodation of novels within the modern storytelling paradigm. Austen's Pride and Prejudice was recognized as the first to instantiate modern narrative techniques. The novel, as a storage device for narrative information, extended that information outside the scope of the storyworld, indirectly enhancing audience engagement. Tracing the narrative traces extracted from recollected experience establishes an exigency for narration within the story itself, and does not account for the unfolding of narrated events as an analogue to film. The narrative perspective points to the option of Extended Discourse-Worlds (EDW) consisting of one or more characters actively narrating the telling of events; the speaker's interpretation shapes how the story is shaped. Intentionality is granted to the machine once information inputs become sufficiently diverse and structured (Chubb et al., 2022).

Procedural narrative emerged from gaming's focus on interactive storytelling, with the narrative geometry defined by infrastructures and entities. Infrastructure is the "accumulated framework," comprising constructed spaces and figures, while entity narrative denotes events surrounding individual characters or objects, themselves potentially acting as infrastructure. Narrative conditioning channels the potentially boundless emergence of story by prescribing certain boundaries or allowances. When hyperlink is realized, agency is transferred to the reader through choice within computable structures, predicated on the concept of the rhizome. Cross-linking of story elements combines with reader agency to create rhizomatic hypertext narratives, as exemplified by Sessaka's Perpetual Noon. Projection to algorithmic franchises implies that the expository function must be enhanced to indicate departures from a comprehensible baseline framework. Franchise serves as a comprehensive narrative paradigm known as the multiperspective narrative. By franchise is meant an interlinked multimedia heptalogy combining novel series, music samples, video games, and a feature film; ultimate goal is to produce a trace of events. Multifarious perspectives record occurrences from interactive game sessions, novels, forums, and maps, with in-game world objects linked to a novel series. Projects like the Internet of Narrative are working toward the "great-franchise" concept with interconnected multimedia narratives studied to understand the distribution of critical elements.(Karnan, S. L., 2023)

Artificial intelligence generally describes the attempt to create computers or computer-controlled machines that are capable of performing activities considered to require intelligence. AI can help with playing a game like chess, making a diagnosis, interpreting speech, or, as in animal hypnosis, performing a task that requires intelligence. How such intelligence differs from human intelligence has been a subject of dispute and also of a developing friendship with AI as a creative partner.

(i) Defining AI in Literary Context

Artificial intelligence is a broad subject that collapses topics such as computer science, philosophy, psychology, and cybernetics. Definitions of AI have waxed and waned across different literary and cultural moments. In the 1950s, when the academic field of AI was consolidated, computers had just solved two of Icon's challenges: playing checkers and chess. Industry, military, and academic focus on AI consolidated by the 1980s, at which point the field began to decentralize and fracture as the focus shifted more toward the network. Cybernetics emerged and developed in the 1940s and 1950s, which extends the concept of AI beyond the computer and studies systems that regulate themselves and process information, deflecting any direct notion of intelligence. By the 1980s and 1990s, neural nets expand the field's scope further still, enabling a return to strong AI by adding an additional layer of biological speculation to cybernetics (Zhu, 2022). As such, this chapter uses AI to designate the many systems that investigate relationships between data and information processing and intelligence, especially when defined in opposition to human intelligence, comprising artificial neural networks, knowledge systems, artificial life and evolution, and other fields that still engage this deconstruction of information-based intelligence (Hou et al., 2022).

(ii) Historical Perspectives on AI in Fiction

Concerns over the impact of AI and algorithms on society have characterised Western discourse for decades (Chubb et al., 2022). Their effect on literature is apparent in the sustained engagement with AI in fiction. Portrayals of AI have encompassed utopian optimism alongside apocalyptic forebodings. Horror stories, pulp thrillers, futuristic science-fiction, and Hollywood blockbusters have each shaped the perception of these technologies.

Early examples include Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968) and the film Blade Runner (1982). The latter of which envisioned a collection of humanoid replicants engineered to act as slave labour. The subject also gained prominence in the wake of worldwide youth culture, eventually inspiring 1980s cyberpunk fiction. Theorists conceived the idea of a digital cyberworld, while its popularisation by books and film helped to familiarise society with the concept. Fiction evoked by the emerging networked technology featured disembodied 'ghosts' embodied in the modern technological apparatus.

Algorithmic Narratives

The advent of digital media and platforms has challenged collective assumptions about narrative possibilities and raised related ontological concerns. This section concentrates on a subset of these experimental narratives—found in contemporary novels and short stories—that are constructed, or in the process of construction, by artificial intelligence and/or algorithms. Algorithms function as general computational procedures for calculating or executing a process (Chubb et al., 2022). Many twenty-first-century fictional narratives, as well as some films and computer games, elevate algorithms from behind-the-scenes mechanisms to the status of characters, often as agents of transformation. They also feature at the level of plot, particularly those dealing with the dynamics of social media, and remain central to the depiction of the information economy and Big Data. This section draws on fiction published between 2017 and 2020 to illustrate a variety of approaches to the deployment of algorithms as storytelling devices. An overview of the implications of AI for narrative authority concludes the discussion and establishes the context within which the section on "Narrative authority" is situated.

Several factors contribute to the emergence of literary AI and algorithmic fiction. Advances in the underlying web technologies enable authors to construct complex, multi-

layered narratives of considerable length and scale. Increasingly realistic AI also prompts experiments with machine intelligence as a narrative topic. Moreover, algorithmic forms and processes give writers additional, built-in narrative techniques (Chubb et al., 2022). On the conceptual side, narratives are among the very few cultural constructs that pre-date algorithms in human history. Meanwhile, the migration of literature to digital platforms makes the use of algorithms a natural step (Daniel Eisenberg, 2018). Together, these factors support a widening flow of literary AI and algorithmic stories that once had little visible presence, and the broader 21st-century moment in which they constitute a distinct form and field of practice.

Narrative Authority

The term "narrative authority" designates the power possessed by the narrator of a story to determine what will be narrated and when. As a concept, narrative authority engages the tension between the role of authorial control and the construction of reader agency. Formal analyses of narrative authority are complemented by a critical perspective focused on the dynamic composed of narrative control and dependency between an author, a story, and a reader or audience. Interactive digital systems have altered the play between narrative control and dependency wherein readers move through and engage with fictional stories. Web 2.0 technologies—broadly encapsulated in the digital media ecosystem of Internet services and platforms composed of search engines, social networks, news aggregators, content portals, collaborative media, digital libraries, and online markets—saturate everyday life with interactive forms, with much of the online content distributed and monetised today being textual or multimedia storytelling. This digital infrastructure enables a broad and proliferating class of interactive media focused on branching, choice-based, and highly stratified multimedia narratives, which have reordered the relations between narrator, author, text, and audience, destabilising the conventional modalities of narrative authority. (Chubb et al., 2022)

(i) The Role of the Author

Narrative authority concerns the role of the author during a period in which narratives are increasingly calculated and engineered. Scholars refer to this shift with a variety of terms, including algorithmic narrative, machine learning, digital authorship, and technogenesis (Hou et al., 2022). Indeed, the involvement of algorithms and artificial intelligence in narrative construction can augment a reader's commanding role to the point of subverting traditional notions of narrative authority. The position of the author has undergone dramatic change in the histories of literature, film, and theatre. In the classical period of Greek and Roman antiquity, for example, playwrights were merely technical service providers; the aristocratic elite had already invented what we now conceptualize as authorship by circumscribing the act of creation. The Romantic and Modern periods subsequently promulgated an authoritative and charismatic conception of the author, an interpretation that parallels nineteenth-century code and copyright systems. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, literary structuralism and post-structuralism had annulled most of the author's authority. The current widespread deployment of algorithms and artificial intelligence allows the author's discourse once again to resurface in a novel form (Perkins & Roe, 2024). In the long view, therefore, the technological activation or deactivation of the author's discourse cannot be regarded as immanent to the concept of literature, but rather as an effect of specific historical configurations with particular media apparatuses.

(ii) Reader Agency in Digital Narratives

A form of agency that has yet to be fully explored in experimental narratives is reader agency—the extent to which readers influence the direction of a story. In a

traditional printed work, readers do not participate actively in the course of the narrative; a printed story cannot be reprogrammed or modified. However, in digital writing the reader can exercise more power and control. Interactive fiction and hypertext fiction, for example, afford the reader opportunities to influence events by finding and following links, making decisions, or choosing from a menu of options. When interactivity is available, the reader is not wholly passive but plays a role in shaping the course and meaning of the work (Pope, 2020). This shift does not necessarily diminish narrative authority; rather, it transforms the role of authorial control and decentralizes power by distributing it to complementary sources, including computer algorithms and readers. Narrative authority in presenting a fictional universe can now be shared among several entities where it had once been dominated by the author alone. (Shamim, M., Tripathi, S. M., & Kumar, M. 2025)

Impact of Technology on Storytelling

Digital platforms have profoundly influenced the forms and distribution of fiction, fostering the growth of interactive storytelling. Computer games and e-books have proliferated and matured, while the internet is a domain in which much fiction resides. Writers have long considered the potential of hyperlink networks, and the personal computer affords easy and immediate access to the internet. Meanwhile, paper-based popular fiction has seen the resurgence of the branching- narrative form typified by the Choose Your Own Adventure series (Chubb et al., 2022). Interactive fiction affords readers unprecedented narrative agency—occasionally exerted with deliberate authorial circumspection—and many related and emerging forms exploit the potential of the digital to reconsider how stories might unfold. Prose narrative in particular is poised to become a gradient between linear and interactive, resulting in a form both revitalized and fragile.

(i) Digital Platforms and Their Influence

Digital platforms serve as distributive venues where users encounter narratives influenced by the structuration of informational flows they access (Grandinetti, 2021). Corporations such as Facebook, Google, and Instagram have transcended the status of mere communicative sites; in some cases, they have attained cultural ubiquity, becoming part of the social fabric itself (Grafanaki, 2019). When situated within a wider process of sociocultural relativization, digital platforms—generally—have an impact on a broad range of cultural productions, whether literary or otherwise. Both web fiction and social-media-driven experiments suggest patterns that echo across the boundaries of platformism, dissemination, and genres traditionally concerned with narrative authority.

The relationship between platformic and telecommunications networks correlates with widespread cultural and anthropological shifts brought on by the late and postmodern condition, with the structural change in the cultural climate and the widespread dissemination of various forms of representational media. The workplace and the organization of labor have undergone massive transformations in the postmodern age, with the decline of traditional industries such as steel-mills and the signing industry, as well as the advent of new technologies and technologies of management, on which contemporary industrial systems increasingly rely. Later shifts include the development of knowledge economies, the multiplication of multi-media and of cultural interfaces, on-line and off-line, including the widespread legislation of auto-organizational and self-exposure regimes for such systems as ecology, health, and risk. Shifts in literary production, distribution, and consumption have also taken place at the same time; network technology and cybernetic media, themselves, become at once metaphors and modalities of information production, criteria of cultural testing,

historical analogy, and aesthetic program. (Swathi, M., & Dhayalakrishnan, R., 2024)

(ii) Interactive Fiction and User Engagement

Web 2.0 literary fiction collections, such as Andy Campbell's Galactic Suburbia and Joe Milutis's postindustrial poetry, merge Hypercard, Dreamcast, and PDF sites with a close relationship to literary "tradition," weaving over the curvilinear narratives of Fordism and regionalism associated with Joyce, Robinson Jeffers, and Steinbeck. The result is at once personal and fresh, while still being elegant, poignant, and politically resonant. Interactive fiction structures encourage user involvement, and the ever-advancing state of computation—now at the cursory stage of Web 2.0 implementation—has given rise to new artistic, academic, and research opportunities at the nexus of literature, software, and personal computing (Graham et al., 2010). Strategies for writing interactive fiction are varied and often application-specific; adaptations illustrate approaches such as twine, programmed choice-based storytelling, and chatbot architectures. The Interactive Fiction Competition (IFComp) provides a showcase for an array of styles and narrative solutions.

Ethical Considerations

The emergence of AI writing systems poses difficult questions about what constitutes authorship. Services such as AI Dungeon or Sudowrite assist human creators but also generate texts independently, blurring the line between collaborative and autonomous creation. Algorithms trained on corpora of existing fiction reflect and potentially amplify biases contained in those sources. Widespread use of faulty or prejudiced heuristics threatens to reify erroneous assumptions and reinforce stereotypes. Given the ethical quandaries involved and the speculative nature of current understandings, the discussion of artificial intelligence and narrative authority refrains from exactly determining narrative responsibility. Instead, it highlights the importance of defining interpretive channels that enable careful consideration and negotiation of any system reliant on opaque or semi-transparent processes.

(i) Authorship and Copyright Issues

The question of authorship and copyright has become vital in researching the relationship between 21st-century fiction and artificial intelligence and algorithms. Copyright laws have provided strong argument in favour of retaining the authorial status of literary AI, and are now being closely examined in relation to both AI-driven literature and music. Copyright is one of several intellectual property rights designed to protect artistic creations. It safeguards original material derived from an author's creative skill and labour, including the following literary forms: novels, short stories, poems, articles, essays, and journals. Literary copyright in 21st-century fiction turns upon whether the text has an identifiable human author, and if so, who the author is. It may be that AI and algorithms are able to perform enough intellectual work in the production of a literary text that the work is effectively untraceable to a human originator (L. Butler, 1982). There is also the possibility, discussed with regard to AI and music, that the conceptual contribution of human programmers and users is not sufficient to justify the attribution of authorship (Sarkar, 2023). However, a number of remedies to these difficulties are offered by copyright law itself, including the sharing or transferring of authorship to a human originator or to the owner of the intellectual property to which narrative AI and algorithms are attached. It is also conceivable that a fictional author be appointed to the production; that is, an artificially generated, yet legally recognized, person capable of authorship (ibid.).

(ii) Bias in AI Algorithms

Algorithms today often reproduce existing structures of inequality through reproducing societal assumptions and stereotypes (Zajko, 2020). Much effort addresses

bias in AI algorithms by developing more accurate measurements to detect and eliminate unfairness; however, this method addresses symptoms rather than underlying causes. Counteracting bias with further bias is inadequate for advancing the field when societal bias is embedded within their mathematical framework. Instead, rejecting efforts to simply correct bias without understanding its social construction compels consideration of alternative paths toward fairness in light of AI's trajectories. A genuine contribution emerges from exposing specific pathways for their perpetuation. (Glover, E. 2024, February 28)

The Future of Narrative in Literature

Within literature, AI and algorithms have become an integral component of innovative storytelling. These technologies facilitate multiple narrative voices, reflect on the author's status, and alter the relationship between reader and text. The result is a new arrangement of narrative authority, in which readers must assume more responsibility and risk more vulnerability—similar to long-established forms of narrative, but nonetheless novel within this emerging mode of storytelling. The "bedroom culture" produced by the Internet has contributed to a turbulent shifting of discursive authority from author to reader, in part through a rise in participant audio-visual media and related fan fiction. At the same time, the fantasy of predestined outcomes still dominates the public imagination about the future of narratives (Chubb et al., 2022). Departing from this fantasy, authors whose work features algorithms and AI attempt to install alternative futures at the centre of twenty-first-century fiction. Critical discussions have called for a broader application of these insights to questions of race and gender, followed by a comparative analysis involving recent publications by non-Western authors. Predicting the impact of artificial intelligence remains fraught, but the technological development and cultural penetration of these systems merit literary attention. By examining twenty-first-century fiction, novels reveal the growing prominence of algorithms and AI within literature and society. Informed by a wide-ranging survey and twelve interpretative case studies, this survey explores how narrative authority shifts when AI and algorithmic technologies appear in storytelling. (Verma, M. 2025) Fiction is an aerosol spray of signs directed at no one in particular: a flutter of shadows, a long volley of images aimed at an indefinite elsewhere. Even so, these signs still provide the basic puzzle of narration: how do they speak, how do they become messages? They deliver a voice without a source, require or invite an addressee who remains concealed—and yet they seem to announce a normality beyond words or voices, a life uncontaminated by fiction, a tale told by an automaton. "Fiction," writes Roland Barthes, "is a masked ball, a mug's game, a form without origin." The ultimate absurdity, beyond literature or philosophy, the sorrow and joy of an event without subject, agent or author. For decades, academics and journalists alike have noticed the prominence of algorithms in everyday life, and suggested that the emphasis placed on their role risks obscuring social and political issues. Even though understanding how to "read" an algorithm is a complicated process, one that far exceeds the capacity of most users to carry out, the notion of "algorithmicity" nevertheless represents a framework both broad and elastic enough to keep pace with the proliferating range of technological devices and software platforms involved. With aid from an artificial intelligence system, the blockchain technology called "SingularityNET" deployed an AI-generated short story, "The Day A Computer Writes A Novel," for submission in a literary contest, raising significant questions about fiction's future. (Chubb et al., 2022)

Critical Reception of AI-Driven Narratives

The era of AI and algorithms in fiction is witnessing robust debates about the comparative values, disadvantages, and implications of artificial intelligence for

contemporary storytelling—as well as the cultural consequences of the lack of narratives about AI and algorithms more generally (Chubb et al., 2022). Some scholars refer to "a story crisis" or "a narrative crisis" in AI. Others note a discernible tendency in the discussions to conflate computers and algorithms, the inefficiency of which has long been pointed out (see above). Still others premise their arguments on the concerning observation that "AI narratives affect our sense-making in different areas of societal and private life, and by different cultures". The emergence of literary, cultural, and media interest in AI- and algorithm-influenced narrative authority prominently surfaces in the 2010s. Contemporary 21st-century creations by novelists, writers, and theorists specialising in fiction investigation explore AI and algorithmic narrative structures across a broad spectrum of mediums, including novels, short stories, radio broadcasts, and multiple formats presented on digital platforms. Narrative authority encompasses the power relations between the writer or author and the characters, between the author and the reader, and even among the characters themselves. In digital fiction, reading practices are affected by the dynamic between the reader and the narrative, with the author's role remaining crucial despite the narrative presence of autonomous entities driving the plot forward through agency or programmatic direction (Chubb et al., 2022).

Over the past two decades, artificial intelligence, algorithms, and storytelling have become entwined. One illustration of this complex relationship within popular culture is 10-volume hardback set, A Survey of Algorithms, created by Dmitry Morozov and JLS (Neil Cooke and Dave Whyte). A Survey of Algorithms is an eclectic collection of fact and fiction: the texts purportedly represent A Survey of Algorithms that can tell a story, while the commentaries provide A Survey of Opinions about Algorithms that Can Tell Stories. Its blending of non-fiction and fiction reflects current fascination with machine learning and the narrative-driving capabilities of recommendation.

Global Perspectives on AI Narratives

The global proliferation of AI potentially enables a comparably wide availability of literatures of and about AI—a proposition aligning with observations that "AI fiction" now arises in many linguistic and cultural contexts. Literature and media illustrate distinctive—and highly consequential—styles of interacting with and understanding AI and, by extension, the innovation pathways within the cultures in or from which they emerge (Chubb et al., 2022).

Many stories about artificial intelligence come from the United States. Researchers from the Universities of Nottingham and Lancaster recently interviewed scholars in computing, media, literary studies, education, and AI ethics. The resulting report identifies dominant polarised narratives about AI, favouring visions of a dystopian future or unfounded utopian expectations. These preconceptions repeatedly appear in novels, films, and television. The team discovered few narratives about how people would like to use AI in everyday life; such stories are less immediately dramatic or financially rewarding. The development and dissemination of narratives depends on social power; groups behind dominant narratives continue to benefit. The authors advocate producing responsible narratives that challenge established tropes. Additional attention towards questions such as storyteller, purpose, and genre is recommended to develop stories which serve the public interest (Chubb et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Fiction is a critical site where readers and authors explore the effects of artificial intelligence and algorithms, examining how this contemporary technology affects who holds authority over the narrative. The twelve sections of the essay demonstrate these concentric interconnections by first situating the technologies within their literary and

cultural contexts. Next, the essay identifies the experimental narrative techniques that stem from AI and algorithmic technologies and the ways those techniques shift narrative authority toward more dynamic and interactive relationships between readers and authors. It then investigates representative twenty-first-century examples in which authors employ those techniques to explore the changes AI and algorithmic technologies have induced in publishing, geopolitics, and science fiction. Finally, the essay concludes by synthesizing the insights gained throughout the preceding sections and reflecting on the implications of those changes for contemporary literature. Artificial intelligence, algorithms, and narrative authority extend across literature into numerous other domains, so the open questions they provoke exceed the scope and means of any single investigation.

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