Artificial Intelligence and Literary Interpretation: Rethinking Reading in the Twenty-First Century through Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping literary studies by making summarisation, pattern detection, and the generation of interpretive hypotheses increasingly accessible. This paper asks how AI-mediated reading changes the relationship between text, reader, and meaning through a comparative close reading of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818) and Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go (2005). It examines specific moments of narrative framing, language acquisition, delayed disclosure, and institutional euphemism alongside reader-response theory, interpretive communities, and digital reading practices. In Frankenstein, Victor's description of the Creature's creation and the Creature's later account of learning language complicate the authority of the first narrator. In Never Let Me Go, the terms "carer," "donor," and "completion," together with Kathy's retrospective narration, show how exploitation is normalised through ordinary language and gradual revelation. Building on scholarship on machine reading and AI-assisted interpretation, the paper proposes a passage-level human–AI workflow: formulate a question, generate provisional hypotheses, verify them against the cited text, test competing readings through theory and scholarship, and justify or reject each claim with evidence. The paper is conceptual, not an empirical test of a particular AI system. It argues that AI can widen interpretive inquiry, but literary claims become persuasive only when textual detail, form, context, and ethical reasoning are made explicit.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Literary Interpretation, Digital Humanities, Reader-Response Theory, Machine Reading, Frankenstein, Never Let Me Go

INTRODUCTION

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new possibilities and questions into literary studies. Current tools can summarise texts, identify recurring motifs, compare characters, explain figurative language, and suggest interpretations. These functions can support research and teaching, but they raise a fundamental question: does producing a plausible interpretation amount to literary understanding? A fluent explanation may identify a theme without accounting for how narrative form, historical circumstance, ambiguity, and ethical tension shape its significance. The distinction at issue is not simply whether a human or a machine can produce a reading; it is how each claim is supported, qualified, and tested.

Digital humanities scholarship provides an important context for this question. In How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis, N. Katherine Hayles distinguishes among close reading, hyperreading, and machine reading as practices with different affordances (55–80). Franco Moretti's "distant reading" shifts attention from the exhaustive analysis of individual texts towards literary patterns at a larger scale. Neither practice should be collapsed into generative AI: distant reading is a methodological orientation, while language models are computational systems that generate responses from learned linguistic patterns. These methods can be brought into conversation, but their findings do not interpret themselves. A frequency or repeated phrase becomes critically significant only when a researcher explains its function in a particular text and checks the claim against context.

Reader-oriented theories further complicate the idea that meaning is simply extracted from a text. Roland

Barthes challenges the author's position as the final authority over meaning; Wolfgang Iser describes reading as an activity through which readers respond to gaps and revise expectations; and Stanley Fish locates interpretation within socially formed interpretive communities. These theories do not make a language model equivalent to a human reader. Instead, they help distinguish several questions: who or what appears to authorise a reading, how readers connect textual gaps, and which cultural assumptions make an interpretation seem plausible. AI-assisted interpretation can be examined through these questions without either anthropomorphising the model or assuming that human readings are automatically unbiased.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818) and Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go (2005) offer a productive comparative frame because both novels represent lives shaped by acts of creation and systems of control, while prompting readers to revise their judgments as information emerges. Shelley's layered narration complicates the authority of Victor Frankenstein's account; Ishiguro's retrospective narration reveals how a social institution makes the exploitation of clones appear ordinary. Existing scholarship illuminates biotechnology and purpose in Ishiguro's novel (Tsao), the ethics of posthuman reading (Mattar; Sloane), and the use of AI alongside research literature and textual analysis tools (O'Halloran). This paper's specific contribution is to adapt the logic of collaborative, evidence-led interpretation to close reading across two novels and to set out a transparent procedure for verifying, revising, and justifying AI-generated hypotheses, rather than treating "collaboration" as a general aspiration.

The central research question is: how does AI-mediated reading complicate the relationship between text, reader, and meaning, and what do Frankenstein and Never Let Me Go reveal about the limits of computational analysis? The paper argues that AI can help generate useful hypotheses, including nuanced ones, but those hypotheses require verification through language, narrative structure, historical and cultural context, and critical debate. It does not argue that human interpretation is infallible or that machines cannot produce valuable observations. Instead, it argues that interpretive authority should rest on evidence and reasoned adjudication, not on a response's fluency or the presumed superiority of either human or machine.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This paper uses a qualitative, comparative method based on close reading of selected passages and a theoretically informed discussion of AI-assisted interpretation. The analysis concentrates on Victor's description of the Creature's animation and abandonment (Shelley, vol. I, ch. IV), the Creature's acquisition of language and rejection by the De Lacey family (Shelley, vol. II, chs. IV–VII), and Victor's destruction of the unfinished female creature (Shelley, vol. III, ch. III). In Never Let Me Go, it examines Madame's encounter with the students (Ishiguro, ch. 3), Miss Lucy's disclosure that the students have been "told and not told" (Ishiguro, ch. 7), and the explanation of Hailsham's Gallery (Ishiguro, ch. 22). Citations to Frankenstein follow the volume-and-chapter structure of the 1818 text cited in Works Cited; citations to Ishiguro use chapter numbers because pagination can vary across printings. The theoretical discussion draws on Barthes, Iser, Fish, Hayles, and Moretti, with scholarship by Tsao, Mattar, Snaza, Sloane, and O'Halloran providing critical context.

This study can be considered conceptual instead of empirical performance testing of a specific AI model. There was no controlled set of model outputs gathered; therefore, the study claims no accuracy rate or results. This paper mentions what an AI system might capture, but it does so in terms of examples, and not conclusions of some experiment that wasn't reported in this study.

The practical implication comes in the form of the recommended protocol that renders the interpretation process auditable: prompts and temporary claims should be recorded; quotations and references should be checked against the given edition; both formal and contextual evidence should be analysed; alternative interpretations should be checked against each other, and the claim made final. Future empirical research can check this protocol against specific prompts and outputs, but that goes beyond the scope of the paper.

Theoretical Framework: Readers, Communities, and Machines

Barthes' "The Death of the Author" shifts interpretive attention away from the author as the final authority

and towards the reader's encounter with language. His claim that "the birth of the reader must be paid for by the death of the author" (Barthes 148) challenges the idea that authorial intention alone can settle a text's meaning. Applied to AI-assisted reading, the argument asks where authority resides: in a system's output, the language of the text, the data and conventions informing the model, or the scholar who evaluates the response. Barthes does not license any interpretation whatsoever; the text still constrains what can persuasively be claimed. Thus, a fluent AI response is best treated as a proposal whose authority has yet to be earned through evidence.

Iser's The Act of Reading provides useful insight into the distinction between listing textual features and interpreting their functions. We see that literary texts create gaps, provide information, and force readers to alter their expectations. So, while a computer may be capable of recognizing repetitions, identifying shifts in point-of-view, etc., the critic must demonstrate the impact of that textual element or elements on the reading experience. For example, in Frankenstein, the Creature's narrative alters the meaning of Victor's prior description; similarly, in Never Let Me Go, Kathy's later thoughts alter the significance of ordinary details. Thus, Iser's idea of temporal revision helps bridge the gap between close reading and AI-based pattern recognition.

Fish's concepts of interpretive communities bring a new social dimension. Readers approach texts from certain contexts; underlying beliefs, education, and culture give rise to certain meanings perceived as common-sense or credible. Since AI technologies learn on the basis of human language, machines may show prevailing critical thinking practices and avoid less conventional interpretations. Nevertheless, humans may also inherit biases from the interpretive community they belong to. As a result, Fish provides the idea of relationships between biased machine and an unbiased human interpreter with greater complexity. Serious analysis of this relationship involves considering the assumptions that sustain every reading and the evidence selected for discourse.

Hayles' explanation of close, hyper-, and machine reading, considered within the context of Moretti's concept of distant reading, explains how scales of attention can be complementary. For instance, pattern-based readings can identify usages of a particular phrase that might otherwise go unnoticed, while close readings can interpret the significance of those usages in the context of a particular shot, scene, or narrative instance. Nevertheless, these methods cannot be substituted for each other. A computer algorithm cannot reveal the moral implications of using a euphemism, while a close reading of a text cannot generate sufficient evidence to support a generalization.

These theories are useful because they are not reducible to one idea about reading. Barthes puts doubt on the authority of the author**,** and Iser highlights the moment of interaction with the text, which consists of filling the gaps in time; Fish explains how social factors influence the interpretation of the text, whereas the works of Hayles and Moretti stress the different information available due to computational treatments. Their contradictions are important, since AI may be able to identify textual patterns and come up with conclusions, but it does not mean it has an experience of reading the text and being part of Fish's interpretive community. At the same time, the act of reading cannot be self-justifying. This paper applies these theories as methods or tests for finding out whether a proposed interpretation is valid or not.

AI as an Interpretive Resource

Generative AI can perform functions such as performing text summarization, recognizing motifs, comparing narrators, explaining figurative language, and giving alternative interpretations. These functions can be more effective when the inquiry is more specific than a generic plot summary. For instance, searching the sequence of the Creature's acquisition of language and the results could lead to key questions on the effect of language on social status. Alternatively, a search for the words "carer," "donor" and "completion" can lead to the conclusion that the vocabulary of the institution in Ishiguro' novels turns human beings into instruments. These are only first observations that the scholar must then keep testing by finding relevant snippets of text, checking the phrasing, examining the immediate context and posing the question of whether there is any truth in the given pattern.

Kieran O'Halloran's "Digital Assemblages with AI for Creative Interpretation of Short Stories" illustrates a precedent in the field. His methodology synthesizes relevant literature research, text analysis software, and a generative language model for interpreting Poe's "The Black Cat." The peculiarity of this methodology is that it allows us to understand AI in the context of developing various evidence and methods, as opposed to establishing the model's original answer as the definite interpretation. In this paper, I want to follow the same principle but reshape it in accordance with my task of comparing two novels through close reading, where narrative succession and intentional gaps in narrative are fundamental. Additionally, my approach will be marked by the need to implement the adjudication procedure tracking the relationship between an AI-suggested claim and a particular textual segment that will help to either keep a claim justified or discard it.

The errors involve not only factual inaccuracies. A model might create fake quotations, assign a credible but wrong chapter number, summarize a formal action in the form of themes, or display an established critical viewpoint without showing enough textual evidence. It might also make a real contribution or provide an interesting comment, for example, that a novel's repetitive words allow the interpretation of a violent system as administrative, while disregarding the tonal uncertainty. Of course, the opinion about this uncertainty may differ among readers but this does not automatically imply inconsistency from one of the points of view. The standards to be used in evaluation are accuracy of the text, attention to reality, context, the possibility of explanation, and the readiness for counterarguments.

Frankenstein: Creation, Narrative Mediation, and Responsibility

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus examines creation alongside the responsibilities that follow it. In the 1818 text, Victor’s account of animation in volume I, chapter IV is a compact demonstration of how narrative language shapes judgment. He recalls that after the Creature comes to life, “the beauty of the dream vanished” and “breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley, vol. I, ch. IV). The contrast between “dream” and “horror” makes Victor’s ambition appear unstable: the moment of success is immediately recast as a personal catastrophe. More importantly, the Creature is first introduced through Victor’s disgust, not through an independent account of his character. A thematic summary might identify creation and abandonment; close reading shows how Victor’s evaluative vocabulary attempts to settle the reader’s response before the Creature has been allowed to speak.

The Creature’s embedded narrative complicates that first judgment by representing learning as a gradual, social process. While observing the De Lacey family, he moves from naming material objects to recognising more abstract and affective terms, including “good, dearest, unhappy” (Shelley, vol. II, ch. IV). The progression matters: language initially gives the Creature access to the surrounding world, but it also lets him perceive relationships and suffering. He learns through watching the family’s care for one another, so his education is not simply the accumulation of vocabulary; it is an interpretation of social conduct. This detail makes it insufficient to describe him only as a manufactured being. The novel asks readers to judge how a being who learns sympathy is received by the society from which he seeks recognition.

The experience of trying to converse with the De Lacey family, only to be abruptly turned away, assists the Creature in understanding the concept of language and the idea of belonging (Shelley, vol. II, chs. VI–VII). The way the story is told does not suggest neutrality: it is narrated in flashbacks by the Creature itself and contains information about his craving for company as well as his violent deeds. The narration does not diminish the Creature’s guilt but also makes it impossible to define his actions as the outcome of his wicked character. Thus, we can say that the complexity of Shelley’s narrative structure is essential for the moral dilemma of the novel. The story starts with the letters by Walton, while Victor’s account contains the Creature’s testimony. Each account specifies the details but also hides some information from the audience. According to Iser, the next witness makes up for the disadvantages of the previous narrator, while in Barthes, one can find an explanation of why one should not rely on the first witness too much. Reading Fish, one can see that there are some reasons why readers would prefer Victor’s version of events.

The complexity of the Creature’s relationship to people today shows that the comparison is not as straightforward as it may seem. A language program can create convincing texts written from a first-person point of view; it can recognize the mixed narratives of the text, but none of these skills provides the Creature

with any experience comparable to the embodiment, social exclusion, or suffering. An advanced AI reading can recognize that language used by Victor has a significant influence on the perception, but if it claims that Shelley predicted the appearance of AI technology, then it becomes simplistic. The comparison would be justified if the questions concerning creation, responsibility, and the consequences of the actions of the creator were raised. One does not want to argue that Shelley wrote a story about technology; one aims to use the contradictions of the story as a test for the ideas discussed today.

Victor's act of destroying the incomplete female creature heightens the issue of unilateral authority (Shelley, vol. III, ch. III). He determines what the new creature might be prior to her becoming a speaking subject, justifying her destruction with his fears of possible future events. This demonstrates the fundamental distinction between evidence and assumption: Victor's choice relies on a projected future which the female creature is denied the chance to contest. The author may find his feelings understandable but does not accept their authority to act on their own. This scene indicates the necessity of an ethical reading which emphasizes the issue of agency rather than merely the theme of scientific aspiration. In an AI debate, it can raise questions concerning who decides and who should suffer but does not provide a simple practical answer.

Frankenstein thus demonstrates how the reading of the text needs to account for the way evidence is narrated. The creation scene provides the reader with the opportunity to look at the creature from the perspective of Victor’s disgust; the lessons and words of the creature complicate things later; and, finally, the death of the female creature shows us what the impact of those decisions might be without any consideration of the victim’s voice. The components are connected, but they are not interchangeable parts of one general theme. The authorial concept is based on the order of the events, the choice of words, and the level of authority in narration.

Never Let Me Go: Personhood, Memory, and Institutional Language

Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go presents clones who possess memories, attachments, fears, and creative ambitions but are raised within a system that prepares them for organ donation. Its ethical force lies not only in what the system does, but in the language and narrative practices that make that system appear ordinary. Kathy’s retrospective voice gives the reader intimate access to remembered experience while postponing a full explanation of the social arrangement. The novel therefore tests both computational pattern recognition and reader-response theory: repeated terms can be identified, but their disturbing force changes as the reader revises the meaning of earlier scenes.

In chapter 3, the experience of encountering Madame is a case of delayed recognition. Kathy remembers how the students involved in experimenting with Ruth’s thinking about whether Madame was afraid of them acted as a unified group to pass her deliberately. Kathy uses the metaphor of a familiar mirror that reveals something peculiar (Ishiguro, ch. 3). Here, an encounter becomes a source of evidence of Madame being afraid. Also, the reader is given a chance to see the students’ reflection through the lens of a fearful world. Since Kathy speaks for herself at a somewhat later age, she makes the reader see the episode both through the eyes of a child and through the concept of social hierarchy that children have yet to learn.

The institutional vocabulary extends this process. In chapter 7, Miss Lucy tells the students that they have been “told and not told” about their future (Ishiguro, ch. 7). The repeated verb captures a system in which information is technically available but not made fully intelligible. Terms such as “carer,” “donor,” and “completion” then organise human lives through assigned functions: “completion” turns death into an administrative endpoint, while “donor” obscures the coercive conditions under which organs are taken. The euphemisms do not merely soften unpleasant facts; they make the arrangement easier to repeat without naming its violence. Mattar’s work on language and posthuman ethics helps situate this detail within the novel’s larger challenge to the categories through which some lives are valued, and others instrumentalized.

Hailsham’s Gallery complicates the apparent connection between creativity and recognition. The students’ artwork is collected because the guardians hope to demonstrate that the clones possess inner lives; in chapter 22, Miss Emily explains that the reformers wanted to “prove you had souls at all” (Ishiguro, ch. 22). The phrase exposes the condition built into the experiment: art is treated as evidence offered to people who have reserved the power to decide whether the students count as fully human. The Gallery may register a humane

impulse, but it does not dismantle the donation system or protect the students from it. This tension is more precise than saying that creativity fails to grant recognition. The novel questions a society that makes moral consideration conditional upon demonstrable signs of inner life. It also cautions against equating human characters' denied rights with present-day questions about the status of AI-generated art; the comparison is ethical and methodological, not an assertion of equivalent personhood.

The restrained voice of Kathy makes the reading process difficult instead of easy. This is because she tends to relay unpleasant facts in an indirect way via recollections, qualifications, and specific details rather than through consistent denunciation. One possible explanation is that this tone reflects how thoroughly the institution has legitimated exploitation. The other option is that entering into retrospective narration allows Kathy to keep some intimacy and deal with her sorrow without having to deal with its repercussions. A machine reader may spot the repeated euphemisms and draw the conclusion regarding the ideological conditioning, or it may make a more sophisticated observation that some restraint serves both as a narrative device and a survival strategy. Humans may rightfully disagree in their assessment of the validity of both explanations.

The chapters about Madame, Miss Lucy, and Miss Emily show how a literary interpretation must connect diction to narrative sequence. "Told and not told" is not only a phrase to count; it describes the novel's own method of disclosure, in which readers receive partial information before learning how it fits into the system. Likewise, "donor" and "completion" become ethically charged because the narrative gradually reveals the lives hidden by those labels. Snaza's discussion of Hailsham and the limits of humanising education and Sloane's work on empathy and posthuman reading provide critical contexts for these patterns. A strong reading uses such scholarship to sharpen, rather than replace, attention to the chapters themselves. AI can help trace recurrent vocabulary, but a scholar must show how recurrence, tone, and timing combine to shape the reader's response.

Comparative Discussion: From Pattern Recognition to Interpretation

When comparing Frankenstein to Never Let Me Go, it becomes evident that both novels deal with themes associated with the idea of failure to take responsibility. In Frankenstein, the Creature's account of his experiences stands in contradiction to the labels assigned to him by his creator, Victor. The themes outlined above manifest themselves clearly in both novels. The situations depicted in both of the novels demonstrate that after the initial process of creation and responsible behaviour on the part of the creator is over, it is almost impossible to control the process. While in Frankenstein emphasis is placed on narration, in Never Let Me Go the focus is placed on the language of institutions.

The two books thus render reading a revising act. After the Creature's version, Victor's previous descriptions take on new ethical significance, although that does not mean that the Creature's subsequent violence is exempt from being judged. Similarly, Kathy's later knowledge changes seemingly incidental trivial details and euphemisms into the instruments of systemic oppression, but it does not mean that her narrative restraint must be of a single type. These are not only instances of thematic similarities: they are similar processes in the format that make the reader reconsider the previous conclusions. Iser helps to explain the time structure of that revision, Fish encourages investigating the thought process behind it, while Hayles's differentiation of reading strategies explains how computing pattern-recognition might help notice something that requires to be interpreted closely.

As a result, the comparison adds specificity to the original proposition about collaboration. The power of AI can assist with identifying particular patterns in the data, uncovering the use of certain words, providing information about the potential linkages, and proposing multiple interpretations. The distinctive job of the researcher is not just to "add human judgment," but rather to ensure the whole reasoning process is decipherable, meaning that she has to identify the portion of text, demonstrate certain features connected with the wording, verify this against the context and the relevant scholarly sources, compare one of the possible interpretations with another one, and explain why it is better to use this reading rather than leave it to chance. This method also imposes limitations on the authority of the computer, since even the most elegant statement

cannot be supported without evidence from the text. The same limitation is applied to humans since there should be a motive behind the statement and the reasoning has to be explained.

In terms of literary education, AI proves to be an instrument of both scrutiny and research. Students can compare their first readings with responses generated by AI, check the validity of quotes and references, see what remains unmentioned in the summary, and defend the revision of a text with the help of evidence from the text. A well-constructed task will reward the substantiation of argumentative positions rather than simple provision of an answer that says 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe'. This practice can promote the critical use of digital literacy tools without claiming that AI is always good to apply nor that all disagreements in interpretation can be settled. The described workflow is to be regarded merely as an example of the authors' conceptual framework, not as a research project or validated experiment.

An Illustrative Passage-Level Human–AI Workflow

An example of the model in action can be seen by way of the question posed in Never Let Me Go regarding how the narrative facilitates exploitation before revealing its repercussions. Below is a set of procedures that can be applied to follow the interpretative process. These are not records of an AI experiment undertaken for this assignment.

Step 1: Come up with the question. Start by identifying the interpretative issue stemming from the textual feature, for example, reliance upon the terms of donor and completion and how the novel gradually reveals organ donation. Conduct an initial reading of the text before approaching AI so that it does not determine the research issue.

Step 2: Create temporary hypotheses. Ask AI for more than a summary; require several variants of explanations of how the language works, along with the evidence that each of them would require to be supported and what alternative interpretations can be presented. Each piece of information received from AI is a hypothesis, not a source.

Step 3: Confirm the textual anchor**.** Refer back to the Faber and Faber version and trace each relevant instance. It is important to verify the wording of the quotations, the chapter, the person speaking and the narrative circumstances. Any suggestions based on quotations that do not exist, incorrect references, or cannot be traced in the book are to be excluded from consideration.

Step 4: Examine form, content and contradiction. One should see if the suggested reading accounts for narrative order and mood and compare this with the pertinent writings and credible alternatives. For instance, with regard to Kathy's cautious narrative, both the notions of "normalization of exploitation" and "grieving narrative strategy" are applicable only partially.

Stage 5: Revise and justify. The hypotheses have to be kept, confirmed, combined, or dismissed in accordance with the evidence. The last paragraph should include the interpretative claim, illustrate how the use of particular terms and formal decisions serve to prove it, indicate the disconfirming alternative when appropriate, and mention the consulted text.

Researchers using AI in a research effort are encouraged to keep not only the text of the prompt but also its model/version, results, and modifications if applicable.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of artificial intelligence does not signify the disappearance of literary interpretation. On the contrary, it serves as evidence of a change in the situation and a man's capabilities. The reader-response theory and interpretive communities show that meaning can exist only if there is social interpretation; the creators of the methodology state the possibility of changing the approaches to the creation of literary interpretation and employing computational techniques for that purpose, taking into account their disadvantages. Despite the similarity of the approaches, they cannot be interchanged, partially because they do not provide absolute

interpretations and leave many questions unanswered. The latter may include such questions as: What are the patterns of reading? How does the form set the expectations? What are the cultural assumptions of the initial interpretation?

By analyzing Frankenstein and Never Let Me Go, it is clear that such aspects as form and language play a crucial role in forming the ethical message. It is Victor's horror that provides the definition for the Creature before the Creature is able to speak for itself. Moreover, the knowledge and storytelling of the Creature play the role of complication for this definition. The peculiar narrative structure and usage of euphemism in Ishiguro's story indicate that the concepts of soliciting and exploitation became normalized. On the contrary, Kathy's self-control can have lots of meanings. The analysis of the materials used shows that labels for themes are not sufficient; a proper interpretation must explain how those themes are created, changed and complicated in the text.

In this paper, we discuss the need for a Human-AI collaboration at the passage level as opposed to giving one party full control over the other's reading. Any interpretation resulting from Artificial Intelligence must remain a tentative hypothesis grounded in textual evidence, context, other possible readings, or even reasoning. Given that the current research is purely conceptual, the passage-level collaboration between Humans and AI is only an idea for the time being. Further studies have to analyze the prompts and outcomes of the collaboration between the two parties. While AI has the potential to expand the set of questions for literary scholars, it cannot substitute careful reading of texts with all their uncertainties.

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