



## Digital Methods in Literary Criticism: A Review of *Digital Humanities and Literary Studies* (2022)

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### Abstract

In *Digital Humanities and Literary Studies*, Martin Paul Eve discusses various cases of digital technology in the analysis of literary studies and examines how digital tools influence literary interpretation. Martin skillfully navigates the complex landscape of digital methodologies, offering readers a holistic view of the transformative influence of literary analysis.

The progress of contemporary technology, particularly AI, has transformed the conventional methods of literary research into digitization from traditional close reading and logical reasoning. Notably, the rise of digital humanities avails literary history of research with digital maps and social networks. To extend the research line along that vein, Martin Paul Eve has crafted a timely book to present the merits and drawbacks of computational approaches and technical analysis integrated into literary exploration. Quite different from the prior works on digital humanities, this book contributes to literary criticism by embracing both proponents and critics, highlighting a more impartial presentation of the cutting edge of digital humanities in literary research. 1

Martin Paul Eve describes the rise of a new paradigm for the humanities in *The Digital Humanities and Literary Studies* [Eve 2022]. He presents a comprehensive review of current research on digital literature and establishes the necessary basis for conducting a more extensive exploration of the field in the years to come. Beyond depicting the influence of digital technology on writers, visualization, mapping, and literary history, Martin provides his unique recommendations and apprehensions regarding the advancement of digital humanities. He examines the impact of digital literary studies, both in the past and ongoing, as well as their potential future contributions. He calls on readers to recognize the advancement of digital humanities within the field and to prioritize improving researchers' computer skills to enable more comprehensive and efficient literary analysis. 2

The book has five sections after an introduction: authors and writing, space and visualization, maps and place, distance and history, and a thought-provoking conclusion on "ethical digitalism". Martin delves into the historical context and future possibilities of digital humanities development in the introduction. In doing so, he succinctly encapsulates the central theme of each section, providing readers with a lucid understanding of the emerging literary studies paradigm in the digital humanities sphere and a holistic conceptualization of his book. 3

Chapter 1 presents a range of methods for digitally quantifying literary style, known as stylometry or digital stylistics. By the software named "Delta", a system for calculating the frequency of words, he uncovers the potential possibilities of stylometry in relation to authorship and understanding of literary genres. That approach makes it feasible to conduct multi-textual comparisons, resulting in a more profound appreciation of the authors' works. It becomes evident that a combination of close and distant reading is essential for a comprehensive understanding of both authorship and the book. Taking the book *Evolution* [Heldén and Jonson 2014] as a case study, Martin continues to provide a brief account of computer-generated writing to show that the purpose of digital practice isn't to generate seemingly objective data as a substitute for traditional narrative and argumentation, but rather to maintain the fundamental function of interpretation 4

and elaboration in literary studies.

Chapter 2 turns to space and visualization. While acknowledging the limitations of visualization in understanding textual differences, he agrees that visualization can help us understand textual and intertextual developmental changes and plot connections. He provides a glimpse into a scarcely examined illicit digital subculture, which creates a unique form of visualized typographic aesthetic artwork. That opens the doors to a new era of interpretation centered on the graphs, maps, and trees of digital humanities and the textual exploration of visualized digital artifacts.

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Chapter 3 focuses on place and maps. Martin argues the spatial shift in literary criticism directs our attention toward how the structure of literary texts can shape our perception of space. In this way, we successfully convert space, plot, and authority into symbolic visual representations. Taking Matthew Sangster's project, *Romantic London*, as an example, Martin explores the relationship between Romantic poetry and place. The deployment of maps and timelines significantly amplifies readers' comprehension of the novel. Indeed, digital humanities practice intertwined with mapping literary and historical texts has become a trend powered by the advancement of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Consequently, literary mapping has blossomed into a substantial subdomain within the field of digital humanities.

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Chapter 4 explores the impact of digital technologies on analyzing literary and digital media history. By reemphasizing "distant reading", a concept often associated with large-scale literary history, Martin stresses that digital methods must not be presented as apolitical. Instead, they are more connected with diverse perspectives, including postcolonialism, disability, race, gender, and class dimensions. Through the lens of digital technology, it becomes feasible to question secondary literary criticism and existing assumptions to propel the humanities forward. Finally, Martin concludes the book with the prospects for developing digital methods and their far-reaching implications for literary studies in the contemporary era.

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Martin addresses the benefits and difficulties of digital humanities' progress in literary criticism. He argues that integrating digital methods with traditional close reading facilitates a deeper appreciation of literary works and fosters a broader understanding of their significance within the context of longer literary histories. Although he suggests that the combination of distant and close reading presents a novel way of interpreting texts, he fails to provide an in-depth exploration of the specific methods needed for successfully integrating close and distant reading into analyzing literature with digital tools. Rather than focusing on the theory and practice of digital humanities, he presents profound possibilities for interpreting literature with digital methods such as delta analysis, kernel density estimate, visualization, etc. However, some of the digital tools discussed in his book might be obsolete when the book reaches readers because the evolution of artificial intelligence agents specializing in natural language generation has been extraordinarily swift. He would have never imagined that ChatGPT and its ilk hold revolutionary potential for computing in the coming years. Moreover, the book's analysis and examples are limited to works written in English and overlooks the realm of multilingual digital humanities practices in a global context.

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Despite the limitations, this book still provokes literary scholars to reconsider the approaches to integrating digital methods with conventional literary criticism, and assess how digital humanities might change the definition of canonical works and literary theories. This book also serves as a valuable resource for individuals interested in comprehending digital humanities and specializing in literary research. As digital methods challenge practical literary criticism, Martin Paul Eve's *Digital Humanities and Literary Studies* offers supplement methods and innovative approaches to literary criticism in the digital era. Meanwhile, the ongoing progress of digital practices within literary studies is captivating and contentious.

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## Works Cited

**Eve 2022** Eve, M. P. *The Digital Humanities and Literary Studies*. Oxford University Press (2022).

**Heldén and Jonson 2014** Heldén, J. and Jonson, H. (2014). *Evolution*. <http://www.textevolution.net/>



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