



The Algorithmic Turn in Poetry: Digital Platforms, Multimodality and New Forms of Authorship in Contemporary Anglophone Poetics

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Abstract

This research paper examines how digital platforms have transformed contemporary Anglophone poetry from a primarily page-centred literary form into a networked, multimodal, and algorithmically mediated practice. The expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and AI-assisted creative environments has changed not only how poetry is distributed but also how it is written, performed, experienced, and valued. The study develops the concepts of platform poetics and the algorithmic lyric by combining insights from digital humanities, platform studies, multimodality theory, reader-response theory, and artificial intelligence scholarship.

The paper argues that contemporary digital poetry exists within technological ecosystems where algorithms, interfaces, visual design, sound, performance, and audience participation actively influence literary production. Poems are no longer understood only as fixed textual objects; instead, they function as dynamic cultural events shaped by circulation networks, engagement metrics, and participatory communities.

1. Introduction

Poetry has continuously evolved alongside communication technologies, adapting its forms, structures, and modes of circulation according to changing cultural environments. From oral traditions transmitted through memory and performance to manuscript cultures, print publications, recorded performances, and contemporary digital networks, each technological transformation has

reshaped the relationship between poets, texts, audiences, and literary institutions. Historically, poetry was not simply a fixed arrangement of words but a cultural practice influenced by the available modes of production and communication. Oral poetry relied on voice, rhythm, repetition, and collective participation, while manuscript and print cultures gradually emphasized textual stability, individual authorship, and the authority of the written page. In the contemporary period, however, poetry increasingly exists within digital environments where technological platforms influence not only distribution but also creation, visibility, reception, and cultural value.

The emergence of digital platforms has introduced a significant shift from a text-centred understanding of poetry toward a more complex, networked, and multimodal form of literary expression. Contemporary poems are frequently produced and encountered through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, online literary communities, and artificial intelligence-assisted writing environments. These platforms operate as more than simple channels of communication; they actively participate in shaping how poems are written, displayed, circulated, and interpreted. Algorithms determine which poetic works become visible to audiences, recommendation systems influence patterns of discovery, and engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and views contribute to the perceived popularity and cultural relevance of poetic texts. Therefore, digital poetry must be understood not only as literary language but also as a technologically mediated cultural practice.

Between 2015 and 2026, mobile-first digital platforms accelerated the development of new poetic forms, including Instapoetry, short-video poetry, spoken-word performances, and AI-supported creative practices. The rise of Instagram poetry demonstrated how poetic expression could be integrated with visual design, typography, personal identity, and emotional communication. Unlike traditional printed poetry, where meaning is primarily constructed through linguistic structures, digital poems often depend on the interaction between words, images, colours, fonts, spatial arrangement, and platform-specific aesthetics. The visual presentation of a poem becomes part of its meaning, transforming poetry into a multimodal experience rather than a purely verbal composition.

Similarly, TikTok and other short-video platforms have expanded poetry into performative and audiovisual forms. In these environments, poetic meaning emerges through the combination of spoken language, facial expression, body movement, background music, editing techniques, and

audience interaction. A short poem presented through video is not merely read; it is performed, watched, shared, commented upon, and reinterpreted by digital communities. This transformation challenges traditional literary assumptions that separate the written poem from its performance context. Instead, contemporary digital poetry reconnects with aspects of oral traditions while incorporating the technological possibilities of networked media.

The development of digital poetry also challenges conventional ideas of authorship and literary authority. Traditional literary models often position the poet as the primary creator and the reader as the receiver of a completed text. Digital platforms, however, encourage participatory forms of authorship where audiences contribute to the circulation, interpretation, and transformation of poetic works. Readers become active participants through commenting, sharing, remixing, and adapting content. The meaning of a digital poem may therefore continue to evolve after publication through interactions between creators, audiences, and platform systems.

Furthermore, algorithmic processes have become increasingly important in determining poetic visibility. In digital environments, literary recognition is no longer shaped exclusively by publishers, critics, or academic institutions; instead, it is also influenced by computational systems that rank and recommend content according to engagement patterns. This creates new opportunities for emerging poets by allowing wider access to audiences beyond traditional literary networks. At the same time, it introduces questions regarding algorithmic influence, commercialisation, and the possibility that certain poetic styles may become privileged because they perform effectively within platform economies.

The integration of artificial intelligence into creative practices represents another significant development in contemporary poetry. AI-supported writing tools provide new possibilities for experimentation, revision, translation, and creative exploration. However, they also generate complex debates regarding originality, artistic intention, ownership, and the boundaries between human and machine creativity. Rather than replacing human poets, AI technologies increasingly function as collaborative tools within broader creative ecosystems. The contemporary poet may therefore operate not only as a writer but also as an editor, curator, performer, and collaborator with digital technologies.

These developments demonstrate that contemporary poetry cannot be fully understood through traditional literary approaches alone. The digital poem exists within a wider network of

technological infrastructures, social interactions, economic systems, and cultural practices. Meaning is produced through relationships between language, visual design, sound, performance, algorithms, and audience participation. Consequently, digital poetry requires analytical frameworks that consider both aesthetic qualities and technological conditions.

This research examines contemporary Anglophone poetry from 2015 to 2026 as a period of significant transformation in literary production and reception. The study introduces the concept of **platform poetics** to investigate how digital infrastructures shape poetic creativity, circulation, and interpretation. It also develops the idea of the **algorithmic lyric**, referring to poetic expressions created and experienced within environments where visibility and audience engagement are organised through computational systems. By examining the interaction between poetry, platforms, algorithms, multimodality, and participatory culture, this research seeks to understand how digital technologies are redefining poetic forms and expanding the possibilities of literary authorship in the twenty-first century.

2. Background and Rationale

Digital media has produced a fundamental transformation in literary culture. Electronic literature demonstrated that digital texts are connected with computation, interaction, and interface design. Social-media poetry extends this development by placing poetic expression inside commercial platforms governed by algorithms and attention economies.

Instagram poetry combines concise language with visual aesthetics, personal branding, and emotional communication. TikTok poetry introduces movement, voice, editing, music, and performance into poetic expression. Therefore, literary analysis must consider technological structures alongside traditional textual interpretation.

3. Research Problem

Traditional literary criticism frequently approaches poems as stable verbal artefacts. However, digital poems depend on hashtags, captions, comments, recommendation systems, and audience responses. The central research problem is the absence of an integrated framework explaining how platform infrastructures participate in shaping poetic form, authorship, visibility, and literary recognition.

4. Literature Review

Research in electronic literature, platform studies, multimodality, and participatory culture provides the foundation for this investigation. Digital literature scholars argue that technology is not merely a neutral medium but actively contributes to meaning-making processes.

Platform studies further demonstrate that algorithms, economic models, and governance structures influence cultural visibility. Multimodality scholars highlight that meaning is created through combinations of text, image, sound, typography, and performance.

Studies of Instapoetry reveal debates concerning accessibility, popularity, commercialisation, and literary legitimacy. This research approaches digital poetry beyond simple celebration or criticism by examining aesthetic, technological, cultural, and economic dimensions.

5. Theoretical Framework

The present study develops the concept of **platform poetics** as a theoretical framework for examining the relationship between poetic creativity, digital infrastructures, and contemporary forms of literary production. Traditional literary theories have often approached poetry as an autonomous textual object, focusing primarily on linguistic structure, metaphor, rhythm, and authorial intention. However, poetry produced and circulated through digital platforms operates within complex technological environments where meaning is shaped not only by language but also by interfaces, algorithms, audience participation, and commercial systems. Therefore, platform poetics provides an expanded analytical approach that considers poetry as a networked cultural practice emerging from interactions between human creativity and digital infrastructures.

The concept of platform poetics is based on the assumption that digital platforms are not passive spaces for publishing poetry but active environments that influence how poems are created, distributed, interpreted, and valued. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and AI-assisted creative environments provide specific structures through which poetic expression becomes visible and meaningful. These structures include interface design, recommendation mechanisms, engagement metrics, content policies, and audience networks. As a result, the contemporary poem exists within a broader technological ecosystem where literary value is increasingly connected with patterns of circulation, interaction, and visibility.

Platform poetics in this research consists of five interconnected dimensions: **textual form and language, multimodal design, algorithmic visibility, participatory reception, and the political economy of digital platforms.**

The first dimension, **textual form and language**, examines how digital environments influence poetic structures, vocabulary, style, and modes of expression. Contemporary digital poetry often demonstrates characteristics different from traditional print poetry, including brevity, immediacy, emotional directness, conversational language, and adaptation to screen-based reading practices. The limited attention span associated with mobile platforms has encouraged the development of concise poetic forms designed for rapid consumption and sharing. However, these changes do not necessarily represent a decline in poetic complexity; rather, they demonstrate how poetic language adapts to new communication environments.

The second dimension, **multimodal design**, focuses on the integration of multiple forms of meaning-making, including images, typography, colour, sound, video, and performance. Unlike printed poetry, where visual presentation is usually secondary to verbal content, digital poetry frequently relies on the interaction between text and visual elements. Instagram poetry, for example, often combines carefully designed backgrounds, illustrations, fonts, and spatial arrangements to create an emotional and aesthetic experience. Similarly, TikTok poetry incorporates voice, movement, music, editing, and visual storytelling. Through these multimodal features, digital poetry expands beyond written language and becomes an interactive sensory experience.

The third dimension, **algorithmic visibility**, explores the role of computational systems in determining which poetic works gain attention and recognition. In digital platforms, visibility is increasingly influenced by algorithms that organise content according to engagement indicators such as views, likes, comments, and sharing patterns. This introduces a new relationship between literary production and technological systems. Poets may consider platform expectations, audience preferences, and algorithmic patterns when creating and presenting their work. Consequently, the circulation of poetry is no longer controlled only by traditional literary institutions but also by computational processes that influence discovery and popularity.

The fourth dimension, **participatory reception**, examines the changing relationship between poets and audiences. Digital platforms transform readers from passive recipients into active

participants who engage with poetry through comments, reposts, reactions, adaptations, and collaborative practices. The meaning of a digital poem may continue to develop after publication as audiences interpret, discuss, and circulate the work across different networks. This participatory model challenges traditional concepts of authorship by highlighting the collective processes involved in contemporary literary communication.

The fifth dimension, **political economy of platforms**, considers the economic and institutional structures that shape digital poetic production. Although digital platforms provide opportunities for wider participation and accessibility, they also operate within commercial systems driven by advertising, data collection, and user engagement. The visibility of poetic content may therefore be influenced by economic priorities and platform governance. Understanding digital poetry requires attention not only to creativity and aesthetics but also to the technological and economic conditions under which literary production takes place.

Within this theoretical framework, the study introduces the concept of the **algorithmic lyric** to describe poetry created and experienced within algorithmically organised environments. The algorithmic lyric represents a transformation in the relationship between personal expression, audience attention, and technological mediation. Traditional lyric poetry has often been associated with individual voice, emotional reflection, and subjective experience. However, contemporary digital lyric expression exists within systems where audience attention is measured, predicted, and distributed through computational processes.

The algorithmic lyric does not suggest that technology replaces human creativity; instead, it highlights how poetic expression is increasingly shaped through interactions between human authors, audiences, and digital systems. The poet becomes both a creator and a participant within platform environments, while algorithms influence the pathways through which poetic works reach audiences. This framework allows the study to examine how digital technologies reshape concepts of voice, intimacy, creativity, and literary authorship.

6. Methodology

This research adopts a **qualitative interdisciplinary methodology** to investigate the transformation of contemporary Anglophone poetry within digital environments. Since digital poetry operates through interactions between textual, visual, technological, and social elements, a

single analytical approach is insufficient. Therefore, the study combines close reading, multimodal analysis, platform analysis, digital ethnography, and engagement mapping to examine how poetic forms are produced, circulated, and interpreted within contemporary digital cultures.

The research corpus will consist of approximately **180–240 poetic works** collected from major digital platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, digital literary archives, and selected print adaptations of digitally produced poetry. The corpus will represent diverse forms of contemporary Anglophone poetry, including written digital poems, visual poetry, spoken-word performances, short-video poetry, and AI-assisted poetic experiments.

The first methodological approach, **close reading**, will analyse traditional literary features including diction, imagery, metaphor, narrative structure, emotional expression, and poetic voice. This approach allows the study to examine how established poetic techniques continue to operate within digital environments.

The second approach, **multimodal analysis**, will investigate the interaction between language and other communicative modes. The analysis will consider typography, colour, image selection, sound, visual arrangement, performance style, and platform-specific presentation. This approach recognises that digital poems communicate meaning through combinations of different semiotic resources rather than through words alone.

The third approach, **platform analysis**, will examine how technological environments influence poetic production and circulation. This includes analysis of interface structures, recommendation systems, engagement mechanisms, hashtags, audience metrics, and platform-specific conventions. The purpose is to understand how digital infrastructures participate in shaping literary visibility and cultural value.

The fourth approach, **digital ethnography**, will explore patterns of interaction between poets and audiences. This includes observing comments, sharing practices, community formation, and participatory responses. Through this approach, the study examines how digital poetry functions as a social practice rather than only a literary object.

The fifth approach, **engagement mapping**, will analyse how poetic works move across digital networks. This includes examining patterns of circulation, audience responses, cross-platform adaptation, and transformations between online and offline literary spaces.

AI-assisted poetry will receive particular attention within the methodology. The research will examine documented creative processes involving artificial intelligence tools, including prompts, generated outputs, human revisions, editing decisions, and questions of authorship. Rather than treating AI as an independent creator, the study investigates AI as part of a broader technological ecosystem where human creativity interacts with computational assistance.

7. Discussion

Digital platforms have significantly transformed the role of poets within contemporary literary culture. The digital poet increasingly performs multiple identities simultaneously: writer, performer, visual designer, curator, and public figure. Unlike traditional publishing models where literary production and reception were separated, digital platforms create continuous interaction between creation, publication, and audience response.

Readers have also become active participants in poetic communication. Through sharing, commenting, remixing, and adapting poetic content, audiences contribute to the ongoing social life of poems. This participatory environment expands literary engagement but also challenges traditional boundaries between author and reader.

However, increased accessibility exists alongside algorithmic dependency. While digital platforms allow emerging poets to reach global audiences, visibility may depend on platform-specific systems and engagement patterns. Certain poetic forms, styles, or themes may receive greater exposure because they align with algorithmic preferences. Therefore, contemporary digital poetry exists within a tension between creative freedom and technological constraint.

8. AI and Future Poetic Authorship

Generative artificial intelligence introduces new questions regarding creativity, originality, ownership, and authorship in contemporary poetry. AI systems can support poets through brainstorming, revision, translation, experimentation, and stylistic exploration. These technologies provide new opportunities for literary innovation while simultaneously challenging traditional understandings of creativity.

Questions regarding human intention and responsibility remain central. Although AI can generate linguistic patterns and poetic structures, human creators continue to provide cultural context,

emotional purpose, ethical judgment, and artistic direction. Therefore, AI-assisted poetry should be understood as a collaborative process involving both human and technological agents.

This research considers artificial intelligence as part of a wider platform ecology in which humans and machines increasingly interact in literary production. The future of poetry may therefore involve new hybrid forms of authorship where creativity emerges through collaboration between human imagination and computational systems.

9. Conclusion

Contemporary poetry cannot be fully understood without analysing the digital infrastructures that increasingly shape literary production and reception. Digital platforms have transformed poetry from a primarily page-based form into a multimodal, participatory, and algorithmically mediated practice. The concepts of **platform poetics** and the **algorithmic lyric** provide valuable theoretical tools for examining how technological systems influence poetic creativity, visibility, authorship, and audience engagement.

By exploring the relationships between language, multimodality, algorithms, participation, and artificial intelligence, this research demonstrates that digital poetry represents not simply a technological extension of traditional literature but a significant transformation in the ways poetry is created, experienced, and valued in the twenty-first century.

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