ISSN: 1941-0832

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

# AI, Ai, and I: Mapping Marxist and Afrofuturist Approaches to Plagiarism and ChatGPT Through Pauline Hopkins

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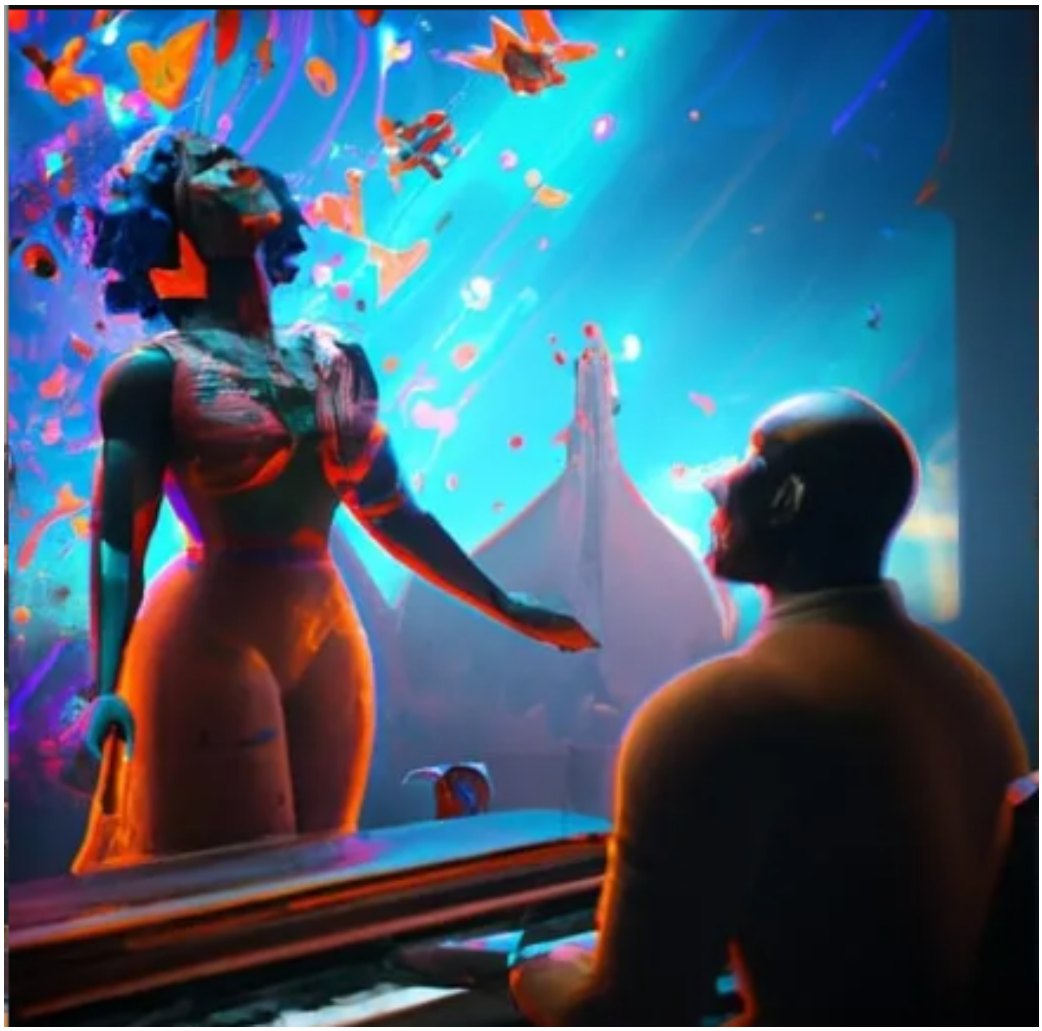

"REUEL AND DIANTHE," IMAGE GENERATED THROUGH DALL-E BY UMASS BOSTON STUDENT GEORGIA BERRY, 6 APRIL 2023, AND USED WITH HER PERMISSION.

## 1. It's Not a Tool: Teaching Generative AI as Expropriated Labor

The sudden rise of ChatGPT and other generative AI language platforms is shaping the writing classroom in ways that have yet to unfold let alone to be fully understood. The AI revolution appears to put the value of writing instruction into question once again, amplifying a broader crisis of confidence among students and teachers. Even the most student-centered of us writing instructors cannot help but feel the effects of ChatGPT in sowing suspicion and distrust in our evaluation of student work. Students, for their part, wonder how the technology may help or hinder their work at a time when many of their peers are using it. While writing that seems too "perfect" has often attracted the suspicion that it was authored by another person, questions are now inevitably raised about whether those words have been made by humans at all. I've found that informal conversations with my colleagues in English Studies now hinge on what we think to be telltale evidence of AI-generated prose, but a worry always haunts these conversations: that the technology will outpace our experienced eyes. Along similar lines, public commentary often turns on enumerating stylistic criteria that only humans can (as of 2025) produce, such as "burstiness"; but these often witty efforts to distinguish self from machine may serve, as Henri Bergson said of humor in general, the purpose of reassurance. Like those informal hallway conversations, funny send-ups of AI-assisted student prose (see Naiman) leave one feeling better about our profession, but the bots seem certain to produce ever spookier and more convincing imitations of "human" writing.

Most university writing programs have responded by publishing guidelines that are packed with valuable suggestions for students and teachers about responsible use of the technology, alongside admonitions not to short-cut the thinking process with AI. This essay endeavors to do something quite different. Rather than discussing how to prepare our students to use AI more effectively, let alone (misguidedly, in my view) to argue for banning its use in the classroom, I describe how I used the ChatGPT moment at my institution, the University of Massachusetts Boston, to teach the technology not as a tool but as a product of our culture. I suggest ways of historicizing AI for students by pointing to the ways that race and class have figured in the broader privileging of originality in literary culture. Instead of emphasizing distinctively human qualities within thinking and writing, I used the controversy around the partially-plagiarized novel *Of One Blood*, authored by Pauline Hopkins over a century ago, to put concerns over AI into historical perspective, and to encourage students in my "Experiencing Boston" first-year advanced composition course to think through definitions of voice and originality that have been historically been used to exclude those deemed less-than-human. At the same time, ChatGPT's massive theft of centuries of writers' work provides the key discursive overlap between large language models and plagiarism: Who has been entitled to steal from whom, and why? I suggest that these class discussions can generate more socially critical accounts of plagiarism while also addressing the self-critical feelings of students who think they cannot "say something original."

My starting assumption for this pedagogical approach is that ChatGPT is, for all of its novelty, simply another phase in the expropriation of labor, in this case the intellectual labor of millions of writers. The 300 billion words that ChatGPT-3 has "read" in order to remix them constitutes a particularly indiscriminate form of robbery. The flip side of this theft of labor, however, is that AI provides a teachable case for thinking through the limitations of language as individually owned property. AI implicitly undermines the idea of the writing self as the owner-proprietor of its own discourse. ChatGPT incarnates, in this sense, the insights of the discourse analysis school of composition theory, which attended to how language does not originate in the individual writer, but "come[s] *through* the writer and not from the writer" (Bartholomae 8). Good student writers, according to this approach, become better able to manipulate discursive conventions, and more aware (and wary) of "the pre-packaging feature of language, the possibility of taking over phrases and whole sentences without much thought about them" (19). Nearly forty years after David Bartholomae published these words, students are more likely to think of AI than ideology as a source of "pre-packaged" discourse, but teachers might point out to them that AI algorithms simply shortcut the language-to-cash nexus, finding a way to generate private capital out of an inherent feature of language as a social phenomenon.

To make AI-generated prose something to think about, rather than a substitute for thinking, we needed to go beyond a conception of ChatGPT as a tool to use responsibly, as so many writing centers have been suggesting. Instead we need a more radical approach that frames AI as a dramatic new stage in the expropriation of labor. To understand ChatGPT simply as a tool, or something external to the human, is to accede to the logic of capital, which, as with previous industrial processes, seeks to separate craft knowledge from the laborers who honed it through their blood and sweat, and through this separation to alienate this knowledge from its owners by making it available for a managerial capitalist class (Allison). Writing students often express their fear that what they are learning in my class is becoming useless, as ChatGPT composes essays more quickly and perfectly than they can. But I show them the latest data suggesting that rather than replacing human beings, ChatGPT has actually spurred rapid increases in writing jobs. This is not necessarily reassuring, however: those new employees are working cheapened versions of the old writing jobs. The number of administrative service positions, a recent observer notes, has skyrocketed even as artificial intelligence is on the rise, pointing to the debasement of intellectual labor through the proliferation of what David Graeber calls "bullshit jobs" (Brentler). Rather than stoking fears that their writing skills will no longer be useful, in other words, I advise students to worry about the degradation of work. Students readily noted this in

their own courses, telling me about professors whose assignments include querying ChatGPT with the aim of training student-writers to compose better prompts for the bot.

But before we bravely embrace a new world in which "prompt engineering" takes its place along the compare-and-contrast essay or the personal narrative, should writing instructors not use this moment of distrust on all sides to historicize generative AI? While writing programs everywhere are publishing guidelines for the "responsible use" of generative AI, there seems to be notably little attention to putting the technology into critical historical perspective. Students and indeed writing instructors may think that ChatGPT is a tool that can serve them, but if the object is simply to write better ChatGPT prompts, we are merely serving the new tech factories. *The Communist Manifesto* famously noted that industrial production, having learned from centuries of labor, now makes the laborer "an appendage of the machine" (qtd. in Lovely 74). Along similar lines, we should think about ChatGPT's large language model as an extension of human life, rather than simply a tool that can enrich or impoverish it.

Struggling to find a way to frame this insight for the class, I found in composition scholar Salena Sampson Anderson's essay on generative AI a teachable metaphor to understand the new technology. I asked students to read Anderson's suggestion that the "large language model" from which ChatGPT feeds is better understood as a blood bank than as a toolbox:

> To facilitate the understanding of this aspect of ChatGPT's design and output, metaphors that combine human and technological elements may be useful. Consider, for example, blood products, which—like ChatGPT's training corpus and output texts—are composed of human elements that are taken from their natural context, aggregated, and then stored and processed by various technologies for use by another person. [...] This dense aggregation and mixing of a precious human resource—whether blood or words—is both priceless and costly. [...]
>
> The metaphors of tools and collaborators are much more comfortable: they are in line with our current culture of writing. We use tools, like word processors and dictionaries; and we coauthor with collaborators, whom we can name and credit (though even what counts as "word processing" becomes murkier with predictive text). But as ChatGPT becomes more mainstream, interfacing with Microsoft products, this technology challenges the boundaries of tools and coauthors, asking us to forget the human components of the machine. (9-10)

A particularly rich point in our discussion of Anderson's metaphor is her consideration of similarities between the corpus of text with which ChatGPT trains its writing bot and the experimental subject as constructed by twentieth-century medicine. Researchers used the blood of the African American cancer patient Henrietta Lacks to develop the immortal HeLa stem line which has resulted in many of the most dramatic medical advances of the twentieth century. Unable to pay for medical care or to offer free consent, the dying Lacks unknowingly gave her blood to a corporation that can reproduce and sell her cells for all eternity. In Lacks's case, the expropriation of her blood literalizes Marx's well-known image of capitalism as a vampire, as it compulsively sucks from the living to keep itself alive (342). If we combine Anderson's and Marx's images, does not ChatGPT seem to depend both on its existing corpus of texts and on the next generation, those living students whom writing teachers may be training to become its new appendages?

Blood banks are also, of course, sources of great social benefit, so the question raised by the Lacks case is *who* benefits from *whom* as technology advances. Generative AI can scrape at will from the mass of no-name writers on the internet while the *New York Times* can fight back with lawsuits to exclude its text from the corpus. This phenomenon is illuminated by Marxist critic Yasmin Nair's series of essays on plagiarism, which are notably unsparing in their denunciation of any theft of words—a point for hot student debates—while also showing that the real problem with plagiarism is its economic dynamic, which turns not on the theft of individual property but on the systematic exploitation of labor (as more socially powerful writers, such as senior scholars, typically steal with license from the more vulnerable, such as graduate students). This insight helped us to think about the way that ChatGPT and related bots are raiding the dead labor of centuries of writers. At this stage, I decided that we needed to consider race in addition to class as a key factor in the expropriation of labor. After all, the alienation of working people's labor during the Industrial Revolution was preceded, indeed enabled, by the prior dynamics of Atlantic chattel slavery. So I reconsidered an African American novel that would help us put generative AI into historical perspective—and did so, moreover, by exploring the metaphor of blood.

## 2. Introducing Ai as Embodied Knowledge

If AI is not just a shiny new invention, but a phase in the expropriation of labor, then we need to find ways to put it into historical context for our students. If nothing else, historicization can put both apocalyptic and utopian conceptions of AI to rest, and focus our critical attention on its real place in our creative economy. Here I found it useful to connect generative AI with the ancient discourse of plagiarism with which all students are familiar. I wanted to show that plagiarism has a long and controversial history, and decided to assign a canonical work as a test case in literary controversy. In its titular thematic as well as (I will suggest) its method of composition, Pauline Hopkins's magazine novel *Of One Blood* (1903) offers an Afritopian locus for the large language models that we are grappling with 120 years later. The novel tells the story of Harvard students who stumble upon the ancient East African city of Telassar, whose residents, they discover, possess a capacity for universal knowledge that transcends time and space.[1] That the novel was probably the unacknowledged inspiration for Ryan Coogler's *Black*

*Panther* (2018) adds a prophetic dimension to its place in cultural history. By setting a pivotal scene in MIT, the sequel *Wakanda Forever* (2022) perhaps belatedly nods to Hopkins, who worked at the university over the last decades of her life. That the filmmakers failed to credit Hopkins makes her, perhaps somewhat like Henrietta Lacks, an unacknowledged foremother, in this case of a line of seminal films. Similarly, the Smithsonian Museum of African American History's otherwise admirable exhibit on Afrofuturism traces its genealogy to W.E.B. DuBois's "The Comet" (1920), which enjoys a poster in the gallery, without any equivalent for Hopkins's earlier novel.

Before introducing the book, I showed the students the MIT clip from *Wakanda Forever* as well as the Smithsonian website in order to provide deeper context for the turn our discussion would take. Lest the students see Hopkins principally as a plagiarist, I wanted to suggest that she was more stolen from than stealing. This was in service to my case that not only the novel's content, but its form of composition and its subsequent legacy are prophetic in our historical moment. Though indisputably an ur-text of twenty-first-century film and fiction, *Of One Blood* can also be presented to students as a case study in which the author raids the corpus of nineteenth-century literature, helping herself to any verbiage that was useful to her composing process. If the novel's plot demonstrates that the characters who inhabit both sides of the color line actually share "blood," then Hopkins's freewheeling plagiarism from other writers treats literary tradition as a blood bank of words. Plagiarism, as I've suggested, works both ways with Hopkins; the dispossession of her enslaved ancestors' labor, which depended on the dehumanization of Africans, produces its inversion in Hopkins's creation of a robot-text that remixes the words of hundreds of other authors in ways strikingly reminiscent of ChatGPT.

I had taught *Of One Blood* before because it is so compellingly original and weird, but came back to it more reluctantly now, feeling initially dismayed by the discovery that its language, though not the story, is highly derivative. Between 2015 and 2020, the scholar Geoffrey Sanborn showed, in a series of articles and chapters, that *Of One Blood* contains unacknowledged borrowings from hundreds of other authors: at least 20% of the novel's text consists of these other authors' words, for which the term plagiarism would not have been too severe a designation. Even at the time of its publication, Sanborn shows, such extended borrowing would have been rare, and the consequences might have been severe for a vulnerable African American woman writer, as the career-ending charges against Nella Larsen would show a generation later. Every chapter of Hopkins's novel contains dozens of words from other writers; in some parts, the theft underlies almost half of Hopkins's finished product (46% of chapter 10, for example, comes from 6 sources).[2] These revelations gave me pause about revisiting Hopkins's text, which is surely based on a writing practice that I would ordinarily deplore in my students' papers.

Although Sanborn thoughtfully explores the implications of plagiarism for rethinking classic American literature, I faced the context of a writing classroom, in which the conventions for acceptable student writing were very much at stake. For all of my hesitations, I embraced the opportunity to discuss expectations for writers, including student writers, who often worry that they "can't say anything original." Would it be worthwhile to treat expectations around originality as matters for discussion, debate, and–most important of all–critique? I wanted to explore with students how the discourse around plagiarism has marked the limits of the human, belittling non-white subjects with the broader charge of "imitativeness," when white plagiarists have faced the lesser charge of being dependent epigones, failsons living in the shadow of their forebears' influence. Hopkins's position as a Black woman writer has meant that she is judged by higher standards for originality not applied to white writers whose well-known works are derivative in other ways.[3] After all, a racist vein of literary criticism has treated Black women writers since Phillis Wheatley Peters as mere mimics.

Lest we think this discourse is behind us, I reminded students, let's consider the case of Harvard's first Black president Claudine Gay, forced to resign in January 2024. Gay's small borrowings of choice phrases, rather than any theft of ideas, legitimated the sabotage of her credibility. To state the real objection–her insufficient militancy in punishing critics of Israel–would have placed her words within the realm of ideological contestation, so the cry of plagiarism provided a more "objective" basis for disqualification. Over and over again, Gay's small borrowings were framed as an inability to achieve originality, instead of a failure to demonstrate intellectual independence.[4] Understandable concerns over the rise of AI-generated writing have been paralleled in public discourse by the right-wing targeting of often non-white scholars, even when, as in Gay's case, they could hardly be called dissidents. The pattern remains the same with these charges of plagiarism, whether leveled against Gay, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Ward Churchill. While supposedly dispassionate and neutral, these critiques have been uncannily aligned with QAnon conspiracy-mongering about not-quite-humans, notably lizard-people, running the world.

Against such racist discourse, Hopkins's approach may seem paradoxical. Instead of acceding to the patronizing move of "humanizing" Black people, she may have decided to lean into the call-and-response method of remixing, which produces results that are not imitative at all even when the phrasing comes from elsewhere. Hopkins surely had a similar response to the representation of Africans as parahuman as the Nigerian exponent of Afrofuturism Nnedi Okorafor, who has stated, "I've always sided with the robots. That whole idea of creating these creatures that are humanlike and then have them be in servitude to us, that is not my fantasy and I find it highly problematic that it would be anyone's."[5] Okorafor calls attention to the implicit conflation of the robot and the enslaved in racist fantasy, who reemerges as the vengeful agent of the return of the repressed. Little wonder that Hopkins decided to make a robot-like prime minister a hero-figure in the novel.

As the American characters in *Of One Blood* discover a hidden advanced civilization in Telassar, they meet its most authoritative character, who exemplifies universal knowledge. Discussing this character provided the clearest entry-point for the relevance of discourse analysis to the specific challenges of college writers during the ChatGPT revolution. Here an African character named Ai supersedes a white British professor-explorer as the source of definitive information about not only Africa but the world at large. Ai is the middle-aged prime minister of Telassar who has been running the world's most advanced civilization as he waits for its rightful heirs to return. That Hopkins's Ai, whom she invented in 1902, shares a name with "artificial intelligence" is, of course, happenstance. My class played around with various decodings of the name, including the Ethiopian princess Aida from the well-known opera (Aljoe). But perhaps his name is also short for the "African intelligence" that had been denied by Europeans to justify the slave trade, but which Ai has kept carefully guarded from Western eyes since then.

Initially, the coincidental nature of the AI/Ai connection led me to dismiss the pedagogical opportunity it presented. But, on further reflection, the importance of Ai to the novel seemed too convenient a chance to pass up, as I could reframe Hopkins's practice of textual borrowing as something like the ChatGPT of fin-de-siècle culture. Hopkins's own vast library offered the author her own personal "large language model." Was there creative potential in Hopkins's plagiarisms, in which the confluence between her voice and that of her sources was precisely beside the point? Instead of introducing the novel's intertextuality as a "dialogue" with previous authors, I presented Hopkins's borrowings to students as a sort of blood transfusion, as words from one textual corpus (dozens of other books) gave new life to another (here called a "novel"), with Ai regulating the flow of words. In this sense, Ai does not so much embody universal knowledge as manage the textual corpus that contains it: like ChatGPT's corpus, he does not really "know" anything so much as he possesses the secret of access to the blood bank that, unbeknownst to the other characters, links the world's peoples in a common humanity.

This, then, seemed to be the most prophetically inventive dimension of the novel: the radical Afrofuturist possibility that Ai could be read as AI. We probed the stakes of this speculative move with the following discussion questions: What if we considered the fictive universality of ChatGPT-generated content from an African perspective? How might Hopkins's suggestion that the ancient African city of Telassar contains nearly all human knowledge help us to confront ChatGPT's vast textual corpus? Hopkins's story repeatedly affirms Ai's proclamation that "from Ethiopia came all the arts and cunning inventions that make your modern glory" (145). If the "future" in Afrofuturism comes by way of the past, summarized (perhaps too patly) as the recognition that "you had everything you needed from the start" (Womack 1), Hopkins's novel represents her characters' trip to their ancestral homeland as an opportunity to access the world's greatest corpus of stored knowledge. But the preservation of this knowledge comes with an important difference: it does not just take the characteristically Western form of a universal library of texts. Instead, Ai's archive is also corporeal: while Telassar has, like Wakanda, developed some mind-bending gadgets, the strangest objects of preservation are perishable organic life (of beautiful human bodies as well as flowers) lying in wait for the arrival of the character whose bloodline enables him to claim these technologies as his. In Hopkins's original words, Ai explains that Telassar's "preserved natural flowers" may be counted among its great aesthetic achievements: "I am told that the modern world has not solved this simple process,' he said, with a gentle smile of ridicule. 'We preserve the bodies of our most beautiful women in the same way'" (147). Telassar is ultimately a society dedicated to the preservation of bloodlines, technological expertise being passed down on the model of a blood bank organized around an unacknowledged maternal line.

Of course, Hopkins's novel is a text, not a body, but preserved organic life provides an intriguing metaphor for understanding its hybrid textual corpus, drawing attention as the metaphor does to the blood and sweat that produce knowledge and beauty before they are stored and remixed. It is too early to know what hybrid products ChatGPT may produce in the college classroom, but before contemplating any use of the technology, we teachers of writing should, as Anderson suggests, think about seeing generative AI as tied to biological life rather than a tool that can be separated from human labor. The preservation of knowledge and beauty preserved for African descendants in Ai's archive both mirrors and repairs the biological exploitation of Black women such as Henrietta Lacks. If knowledge is corporealized as blood or flowers here, then it undoes a dichotomy between mind and body, between intellect and labor. While the narrative of African slavery has focused on the suffering body, Hopkins's Afrofuturist vision of buried African intelligence calls our attention also to the theft of knowledge.

## 3. I Teach Discourse Analysis Through Hopkins

Only after we finished reading the whole novel did we look back at the book for a more granular look at Hopkins's writing practice. The excitement of talking through the *Black Panther*-like plot was behind us, and it was time for us to take a look at Hopkins's borrowings in detail with an understanding of the larger stakes. I got us a computer lab, and we spent two class sessions working through the relationship Hopkins built to her source texts. Sanborn's painstaking itemization of passages from the novel, with links to Hopkins's source materials, provides an easy portal to crowd-sourced close study of her reading.[6] But in a classroom where students' feelings about plagiarism often go no further than shame, I wanted to frame this source material as something more complex than incriminating evidence. In the absence of Hopkins's own explanation of her writing practice, I listed for students a few ways that scholars often frame the relationship between a text under discussion and source material:

- First, *allusion*, which allows us to watch a great writer engage in revision of her predecessors. However, while Hopkins does often have her characters explicitly allude to touchstones such as Milton or Hawthorne, the concept of allusion does not describe the wholesale incorporation of other writers' material that troubled and interested me.[7]
- Second, and more pertinent to the composition classroom, was a framing that would use the classroom to put Hopkins into *dialogue* with the writers whose words she reused. A familiar model comes to mind: the "They Say/I Say" dialogue used to teach argument (Graff and Birkenstein). Hopkins's positionality might then be presented to students as a Black female writer responding to her mostly white, British, upper-class authors. But Hopkins does not consistently "write back" against more socially privileged authors. If Hopkins is engaged in a dialogue with her sources, then it is more like the dialogue offered by ChatGPT, whose vaunted superiority to traditional search engines is its "conversational" quality.
- A third approach is *pragmatic and biographical*: as students look ahead to paper due dates, they can easily understand the predicament of a harried magazine writer struggling to meet deadlines for the next issue. Yet while I appreciated the students' sympathy, I also noted that, with the exception of the univocal and large-scale repurposing of single authors in the final chapters, Hopkins's borrowings are too complex and polyvocal, too painstaking not to have made writing "original" words easier.[8]

Having considered this list of explanations, we recognized their inadequacy, and critiqued existing models in literary studies for understanding the relationship between source texts and novels. Hopkins's composing practice might be understood not just as a literary "tool," a rhetorical "technique," or a writerly "skill" marshaled to get her work in on time, but also as a reflection of her decision to steal back the corpus of African intelligence from the way Atlantic history had rendered it invisible. To get this point across, we considered a single borrowing together as a class. Here is a multilayered passage from Chapter Ten, in which I marked borrowed text for students with underlining, italics, or superscript to distinguish it from Hopkins's own words:

> Reuel watched the scene–a landscape strange in form, which would have delighted him and filled him with transports of joy; now he felt something akin to indifference.
>
> *The ripples that* flit *the burnished surface of the long undulating billows tinkle*d *continually on the sides of the vessel.* He was *aware of a low-lying spectral-pale band of shore. That portion of Africa whose nudity is only covered by the fallow mantle of the desert* gave *a most sad impression to the gazer. The Moors* call it *"Bled el Ateusch," the Country of Thirst; and, as there is an intimate relation between the character of a country and that of its people,* Reuel *realized* vividly *that the race who dwelt here must be different from those of the rest of the world.*
>
> "Ah! that is our first glimpse of Africa, is it?" said Adonis's voice, full of delight, beside him.
>
> He turned to see his friend offering him a telescope. "At last we are here. In the morning we shall set our feet on the enchanted ground."
>
> In the distance one could indeed make out upon the deep blue of the sky the profile of Djema el Gomgi, the great mosque on the shores of the Mediterranean. At a few cable lengths away the city smiles at them with all the fascination of a modern Cleopatra, circled with an oasis of palms studded with hundreds of domes and minarets. Against a sky of amethyst the city stands forth *with a penetrating charm. It is the eternal enchantment of the cities of the Orient seen at a distance; but, alas! set foot within them, the illusion vanishes and disgust seizes you. Like beautiful bodies they have the appearance of life, but within the worm of decay and death eats ceaselessly.*(84-85)

Characteristically, Hopkins stitches language from several texts in her library together, but the seams become clearest when we take the time to examine the original sources. Words from a novel about Saigon (underlined) provide narrative context for a nonfictional firsthand report about Tripoli (italicized) and an African American sailor's report on North Africa (superscript) (Gaboriau 136; Jacassy 37-38; Campbell 3-4).[9] The initial payoff of unraveling the text in this way for me was not, of course, to show that Hopkins didn't write all of the words, let alone the fact that she did not have firsthand knowledge of Tripoli, but to reveal that this Western construction of Africa was the product of "pre-packaged," historically specific discourse. This approach shows how the novel's Orientalist discourse comes *through* Hopkins as much as *from* her. Just as we have seen with ChatGPT, her plagiarism incarnates ideology.

Of course, students do not need to be exposed to Hopkins's source materials to identify texts as historically and culturally conditioned discourse. Before learning that such passages were taken from other sources, I'd taught them simply as typical of their time and place, suggesting that they served Western imperial interests by representing North Africa as seductive and backward.[10] In that earlier course, a brief introduction to Edward Said's work also helped to demonstrate the ways that Western power rested to no small extent on its generation of knowledge about the "other." But allowing students to follow Hopkins to her original sources allows them to do some of the work of historical contextualization themselves. With this thought in mind, I assigned each of my students a chapter from Hopkins's novel, then asked them to follow Sanborn's links to the texts from which they were derived. Students could then mentally bookmark these passages to enable us to revisit the

theme for understanding the novel as a whole, which could point up stronger continuities between the United States and North Africa as products of a single human bloodline, whereby "decay and death" lie within rather than without post-emancipation America. A similar analysis might be done with other ideologically laden discourses in the novel, from medicine (appearing to emphasize the male medical gaze and passive female bodies) to religion (seeming to ground the self-evidence of Christian belief systems in nature), in which Hopkins's novel borrows languages from these discourses wholesale and then elsewhere appears to undermine them.

Assigning each student two chapters after we had finished the novel, I asked them to look at a plagiarized passage and consider the following questions:

- Follow in Hopkins's footsteps by formulating questions for AI.com that might produce something like the text of the passage. How similar was your result to the wording in *Of One Blood*?
- Describe your process of invention as you worked with ChatGPT. How was it similar or different to what you imagine to be Hopkins's process as she worked with her library?
- Use AI.com's side-project, DALL-E, to produce an illustration of a scene in your chapters. You might use it to produce an image that might have inspired something in the novel (such as the Nubian statuary Hopkins may have seen at the Museum of Fine Arts). Or you might use it to produce an image that could illustrate the novel or might be used to adapt the novel for the screen.

So I had finally succumbed to teaching prompt engineering! But I did so in order to draw attention to the difference between Hopkins's practice and generative AI's. Students quickly learned to modify their prompts to AI to produce language that is well over a century old—older still when her sources were Victorian novels. A chatbot, they learned, can conjure antiquated styles with a few keystrokes, just as Hopkins herself injected new blood into texts already old in her day, thereby mirroring her plotline. Students were interested in ChatGPT's ability to "write" fiction (one writing, "I learned how ChatGPT can create works of prose. I have only ever seen it used before to create non-fiction writing such as essays"), which stimulated discussion of the way that Hopkins's magazine novel also produces a knowledge-effect as it weaves the information into imaginative writing. Asked to reflect on the difference between Hopkins's method and ChatGPT's in producing a knowledge-effect, students hedged on the similarities and differences: "while plagiarism is involved in both cases, Hopkins actually read all the material that she 'borrowed' from […] ChatGPT does create 'original' sentences, but works around things that have been fed to it, so it is not really original. This is similar to how Hopkins wrote her own original work, but also used from other texts she knew."[11]

Yet students also noted that Hopkins's use of the preexisting corpus was not systematic, let alone algorithmic. And unlike the massive invisible corpus (reportedly consisting of some 300 billion words the engine has "read") processed by ChatGPT-3's black box, Hopkins's source material is now transparent thanks to the efforts of scholars. And while ChatGPT can write in particular discourses and styles, we found it incapable of the critique sometimes evident in Hopkins's use of her source material. Trained on an enormous corpus of existing text, ChatGPT inevitably mirrors the Eurocentric corpus, which it uses to generate new text. The well-documented racial biases of AI's illustration engine, DALL-E,[12] became evident as students asked it to produce visual approximations of scenes from the novel (e.g., if the prompt "Harvard students studying for a science exam" does not specify the mixed racial ancestry of the novel's characters).

## Conclusion

The discourse around AI-generated writing seems certain to change rapidly as the technology evolves. Yet while ChatGPT may leave us teachers scrambling for a new vocabulary, some old words to describe social relations (class- and race-based forms of exploitation) still prove most useful in addressing this new technology. Discussions of *Of One Blood* with my students helped me, as Anderson's unsettled writing teacher, to put ChatGPT into the kind of historical perspective that allows us to deliver class- and race-based critiques. For all of its apparent similarities, Hopkins's plagiarism did not depend on the exploitation of less powerful writers that characterizes both ChatGPT and much of the plagiarism committed with impunity. Neither separable from human beings (as tool) nor our agential equal (as a collaborator), the textual corpus scraped into ChatGPT's black box remains invisible, while Hopkins's much more modest use of her predecessors can be traced back through pathways that lend themselves to historical critique and, just as importantly, to repair.

In the end, this practice also allowed us to revisit the problem of plagiarism. If plagiarism is a kind of theft, then it is of paramount importance to address the question of *who* steals from *whom*, with attention to the social power of the parties involved. ChatGPT bypasses the transparency needed for collective intellectual accountability, but was Hopkins guilty of an analogous violation of individual property right? How might our recognition of her status as an African American woman writer influence our judgment? Inevitably turning to recent events, we debated whether Claudine Gay was held to too high or too low a standard: was it true, as some commentators claimed, that Harvard students would have been expelled if they had done the same? or did Gay's race mean that she was charged with an incapacity for "original thought" that even students are spared when they are urged simply to think independently, not necessarily originally?

In conclusion, then, our class felt it imperative not just to understand generative AI as a new tool, in which

our guiding questions might be how to use it responsibly. Instead, we needed to frame the new platform as a type of theft of intellectual labor that is not new, and which can help us revisit questions of plagiarism that arise in any writing-intensive classroom. Our novel, and the recent controversy around it, offered a particularly opportune way to understand the ways that the expropriation of labor has been racialized.

## Notes

The author expresses his gratitude to the editors and anonymous readers, as well as to his colleague Joe Ramsey, for commenting on a draft of this essay.

1. The artwork and introduction accompanying the recent MIT Press edition draws attention to this prophetic feature of the novel, though the editor, Minister Faust, prefers the term "Afritopianism." While not scholarly (it replicates minor misprints from previous editions of the novel), I used this edition for its ready availability and fine introduction. Parenthetical page references refer to this edition.

2. My calculations are derived from Sanborn, "Pleasure." The percentage has increased as ever-larger textual corpuses become available to Sanborn's diligent research, first published in 2010. Sanborn's unsparing term "plagiarism," rather than the softer language of "adaptation" used in the Broadview edition (also 2022), more accurately reflects Hopkins's unacknowledged use of these sources, even as Sanborn also treats plagiarism in this case as a generative writing practice rather than cause to dismiss the work.

3. For example, Nathanael West notoriously remixed Horatio Alger novels into the same percentage of his *A Cool Million*. More seriously, T.S. Eliot found a title and subject for his most famous work, *The Waste Land*, in the poem of writer Madison Cawein who was conveniently dead and little-known, a theft for which Eliot's welter of footnotes referencing just about everything else might be seen as an alibi.

4. Nair suggests that writing programs too often present plagiarism as a failure of "original thinking," which it is unfair to expect of students; instead the learning goal must be "independent" thinking.

5. Qtd. in Wallace and Schwartz, 10.

6. Sanborn, "Pleasure," concluding links.

7. Ricks elegantly summarizes the antinomy between plagiarism and allusion: "plagiarism [is] incompatible with allusion [...] Allusion is posited upon our calling the earlier work into play, whereas the one thing that plagiarism hopes is that the earlier work will not enter our heads" (231–32).

8. I acknowledge here that I first considered Sanborn's own reflections on using his discoveries in the classroom. While I agree with Sanborn that "Hopkins's importation of fragments of other texts" can become for students a powerful vehicle for recognizing and subverting our culture of possessive individualism ("Coming" 227), my advanced composition course at the University of Massachusetts Boston, which is a more-or-less open-admission public university, presents different challenges for teachers than an advanced course in cultural and literary theory might for an Amherst College professor. My audience here is beginning college students confronting the challenges of plagiarism and AI-generated text. I am more interested than Sanborn in having students begin by examining on their own the specific relation between Hopkins's text and her source materials.

9. The phrase "the race who dwelt here must be different from those of the rest of the world" is italicized and double-underlined because while it originates in Jacassy, it also appears in Campbell in the magazine edited by Hopkins herself (4).

10. An insightful reading of the novel's negotiation of Black cosmopolitanism and U.S. imperialism as reflected in passages like the one quoted above is Murphy 121–46.

11. Student responses quoted here were originally collected in Google Forms.

12. For a summary of this research, see Johnson.

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