CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH HISPANIC LITERATURE THROUGH GENERATIVE AI

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Abstract

In this presentation, I will demonstrate how generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools can be leveraged to foster creative engagement and deeper comprehension in intermediate low to intermediate advanced Hispanic literature courses. Specifically, I will showcase practical ways to integrate AI-driven image generation, large language models (LLMs), and music creation platforms such as Suno to help students produce original works—ranging from poetry to fully realized songs—inspired by the themes and historical context of canonical texts. By guiding students to experiment with AI image prompts, they can visualize and interpret literary motifs in new ways, thereby broadening their interpretive lens. Similarly, encouraging the writing of poetry and lyrics with AI support empowers students to refine their language skills while exploring how form and diction shape meaning. Transforming these poetic creations into songs via AI music composition provides an immersive, multimodal approach to learning, as students select style, tone, and instrumentation relevant to their textual analyses. I will also illustrate how ChatGPT's Voice Chat feature can simulate conversations with historical authors, offering deeper cultural and historical insights. A key focus will be on responsible use of AI—teaching students strategies for harnessing these tools ethically and effectively to enhance critical thinking, master course content, and push the boundaries of their own creative expression. During the session, I will share classroom-tested examples that demonstrate how AI-based activities help students move beyond passive reading to develop an active, imaginative relationship with literature.

***Keywords**: Generative AI, Hispanic Literature, Multimodal Learning, Language Pedagogy, Critical Digital Literacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid integration of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) into society represents a defining challenge and opportunity for higher education. Beyond its disciplinary applications, AI is reshaping the core functions of the university, forcing a re-evaluation of everything from academic integrity and assessment to the very nature of knowledge creation [1]. As institutions grapple with this paradigm shift, the central question is no longer *if* AI should be used, but *how* it can be integrated into the curriculum in a way that deepens learning and fosters critical, rather than passive, engagement. The imperative is to develop new pedagogical frameworks that prepare students for a future where human-AI collaboration is the norm [2]. A key driver of this transformation is the emergence of multimodal AI systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude, Flux, and Suno. Unlike earlier text-only models, these tools expand the expressive possibilities for students by allowing them to synthesize information and create original work across different formats, including text, image, and audio. This technological leap provides, as Küchemann et al. emphasize,"has reshaped our previous perceptions, bringing to the table a fresh set of opportunities and challenges for education" [3]. For the language and literature classroom, where the goal is holistic communicative competence, these multimodal capabilities offer a unique opportunity to preserve the rigor of textual analysis while appealing to auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners. At the University of Delaware, integrating AI into Spanish literature courses has made textual study more interactive and reflective. This paper responds to the call for new AI pedagogies by illustrating a multimodal model in action through classroom activities centered on the poetry of Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido) and Rubén Darío. The examples provided were created in my fall 2024 course, Survey of Latin-American Literature from the Pre-Columbian Era Through Modernismo. Their work demonstrates how image generation, poetic composition, song creation, and AI voice chat can foster critical engagement and creative comprehension. As Stefania Giannini states in the forward to UNESCO's 2023 guidance report, "GenAI tools are increasingly able to automate some basic levels of writing and artwork creation, they are forcing education policy-makers and institutions to revisit why, what and how we learn. These are now critical considerations for education in this new phase of the digital era" [4]. This study serves as a practical example of such a reflection, grounding AiI use in a communicative and constructivist pedagogy where the technology becomes a co-creator and a catalyst for discussion.

This approach transforms reading into a multimodal inquiry, enabling students to advance their linguistic fluency, interpretive precision, and awareness of how language, culture, and technology intersect. Rather than replacing human insight, the AI stimulates students to evaluate style, tone, and cultural context from multiple perspectives. This aligns with the core argument of multimodal digital storytelling, an approach that Hui-Chun Chu et al. summarize from recent literature as not only a tool for personal expression, “but [one that] is also widely applied in educational settings, offering learners a rich and engaging experience that cultivates various abilities and behaviors, such as motivation, engagement, digital literacy, creativity, and critical thinking.” [5]

2. VISUALIZING POETRY: PLÁCIDO’S LA FLOR DE LA CAÑA

Fig. 1. Student AI-created image based on poem.

Fig. 2. Student AI-created image of the poem's subject.

Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido), an Afro-Cuban poet of the early nineteenth century, wrote verse that intertwined beauty and political resistance. His poem “La flor de la caña” (The Sugarcane Flower) [6] narrates a forbidden love between a plantation owner and a mixed-race tobacco worker, using the flower as a symbol of tenderness, labor, and fragility to reveal the racial and social inequalities that make their love impossible.

“Yo vi una veguera /
trigueña tostada, /
que el sol envidioso /
de sus lindas gracias /
o quizá bajando / de su esfera sacra /
prendado de ella, /

le quemó la cara. /
Y es tierna y modesta, /
como cuando saca /
sus primeros tilos /
la flor de la caña."
"I saw a tobacco worker, wheat-skinned and sun-kissed; so lovely that the jealous sun, descending perhaps from its sacred sphere, enamored of her grace, burned her face with fire. She is tender and modest, like the sugarcane flower when it softly unfurls its first blossoms."
When students created images with ChatGPT 4o and Flux inspired by Plácido's poem, they moved from describing what they read to interpreting it visually. This process helped them see how symbols such as the sugarcane flower express both beauty and fragility. At the same time, it revealed the limitations of AI systems. Many first attempts produced light-skinned or European-looking women, even though the poem clearly describes a mixed-race tobacco worker. Students then adjusted their prompts to emphasize Afro-Cuban identity and colonial-era context, learning how language choices affected visual outcomes. The activity helped them become more precise in Spanish while also recognizing how digital tools can reproduce old racial hierarchies.
In Figure 2, the *trigueña* woman appeared with smooth skin and delicate features that resembled a white ideal of beauty. Her appearance was calm and decorative, without signs of physical labor or the social reality of her position. This representation erased the tension between love, race, and class that runs through the poem. Plácido's words describe a woman whose skin had been darkened by the sun, linking her beauty to work and the natural world, but the AI image turned her into a romantic figure detached from history. In contrast, Figure 1, which showed the sugarcane flower, succeeded as a symbolic interpretation because it focused on imagery rather than the human figure. Together, the two images showed both the creative possibilities and the risks of using AI to visualize literature.
Through this project, students saw that every AI image was an interpretation shaped by hidden data and cultural bias. The process taught them that errors in AI output could be useful for learning. As one student wrote, "The AI's mistakes showed us the colonial gaze—it was educational in a different way." By combining close reading with visual analysis, students developed a deeper understanding of Plácido's poem and learned to question how technology represents race and history.

2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM VISUAL CREATION

This activity confirmed that visual production strengthens comprehension and cultural interpretation. As.J.Heilala et al.argue, "integrating multimodal AI-driven tools for visual and auditory content could extend possibilities beyond the capabilities of traditional LLMs by offering richer and more dynamic learning experiences […] language education, and the natural sciences, fields such as the arts, social sciences, and humanities could also benefit from multimodal approaches in generative AI by enhancing creativity, critical and creative thinking, and interactive learning experiences" [7]. By visualizing the poem, students internalized its central motifs of fragility and resistance while recognizing its racial and political undertones.
The task appealed to multimodal learners by helping them translate metaphors into tangible images. Notably, when models defaulted to Eurocentric depictions, it sparked a discussion on colonial aesthetics, transforming a technical limitation into a cultural lesson. As O. Guest et al. argue,"without critical engagement, AI risks becoming a tool for intellectual outsourcing, eroding the very skills of analysis, argumentation, and creativity that education is meant to foster" [8]. By reacting critically in groups and refine prompts and comparing results, students engaged in collaborative and creative thinking. As Küchemann et al. remind us, AI does not replace critical thought but can scaffold it by offering alternate perspectives for comparison [3].

3. FROM VERSE TO SONG: REWRITING PLÁCIDO'S STYLE

The next activity shifted from visual to musical expression. After analyzing "La flor de la caña," students used ChatGPT to compose new poems in Plácido's style and then transformed them into songs using Suno. Students discovered that while AI could replicate rhyme and rhythm, it often missed the emotional depth of Plácido's language. This aligns with the observations of Robert Godwin-Jones, who notes that because AI systems lack lived social experience, their output can be "pragmatically challenged" [9]. "It got the rhyme right," one student remarked, "but it missed the emotion." Another observed, "AI made the poem sound more heroic but less human." These critiques sharpened their understanding of poetic tone and historical context. As Cohn et al. point out, it is the role of the educator to identify how the AI can be

used to complement and augment student learning rather than replace the critical and creative thinking that is central to education [10].

3.1 STUDENT POEMS AND MUSICAL ADAPTATIONS

To illustrate this process, we will analyze two representative poems created by student groups and their subsequent transformation into song.

Poem 1: "Canto del Oprimido" (Song of the Oppressed)
One group focused on the themes of suffering and resilience, producing the following sonnet:
“Como sombra errante bajo el sol ardiente,
camino entre cadenas, sudor y llanto,
pero en mi pecho vive el fuego santo
de un espíritu audaz y permanente.
El viento eleva al cielo mi lamento,
y el aire mismo tiembla de tristeza;
mi duelo sigue, eco sin pereza,
de corazones llenos de tormento.
Oh libertad, estrella que me llama,
a ti mis versos lanzo con ternura;
volar contigo es toda mi esperanza.
Aunque la noche densa cubra mi llama,
brilla aún la hermosura en su amargura.”
“Like a wandering shadow beneath the burning sun, I walk in chains, in sweat and silent cries, Yet in my chest, a bold spirit never dies, Its yearning pulses, fierce and never done. The wind lifts up my pleas into the skies, And air itself trembles, sorrow-spun; My mourning echoes on, a constant run, From hearts where grief and hope together rise. O liberty, bright star that calls to me, To you I send my verse with tenderness— To rise with you in flight is all I seek. Though dense the night that veils my flame may be, There shines the beauty—bold, in its distress— Of one who lives and dies for skies so bleak.”
When converting this poem to music, the students chose the style of Cuban *trova*. They specified a simple arrangement with a lone acoustic guitar and a melancholic male voice. This choice was deliberate; they learned that *trova* is a genre historically associated with poetic expression, social commentary, and emotion. The slow, lamenting melody they generated with Suno amplified the poem’s themes of persistent sorrow and longing for freedom. The musical format made the abstract ideal of "liberty" feel like a deeply personal, almost tangible yearning.

Poem 2: "Flor del Viento" (Windflower)
Another group chose to focus on Plácido’s use of nature as a metaphor for fragility and transient beauty:
“Bajo el manto azul del cielo,
una flor brota en la arena,
frágil como los anhelos
que se alzan libres, sin pena.
El viento la mece en calma,
sus pétalos de cristal
bailan con voz muy callada,
un alma que va al final.
Oh flor que suspiras leve,
eres sombra, eres fulgor,
tiemblas en la brisa breve,
con el alba y su dolor.
Tu esencia es dulce canto,
eco perdido en el mar,
que se disuelve en el llanto
de un tierno adiós al pasar.”
“Beneath the sky’s blue mantle, A flower blooms in the sand, Fragile like the hopes we hold, That rise and soar in open land. The wind rocks her in stillness, Her crystal petals sway, They dance with silent whispers— A soul that drifts away. O flower that softly sighs, You are shadow, you are light, You tremble in the fleeting breeze, With the dawn as your plight. Your essence is a gentle song, An echo lost at sea, That fades into the sorrow Of a tender, brief goodbye from me.”

For this poem, the students selected the musical style of a *bolero*. They prompted Suno for a soft, rhythmic percussion, gentle piano chords, and a breathy female vocal. The *bolero*, with its traditional themes of romance, loss, and delicate emotion, perfectly matched the poem's mood. The students noted that the gentle, swaying rhythm of the music mimicked the wind rocking the flower. This auditory reinforcement of the central visual metaphor created a powerful, multisensory experience, linking the poem's emotional state directly to its soundscape.

3.2 INTEGRATED LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM POETIC AND SONG CREATION

The complementary activities of writing poems and transforming them into songs worked in tandem to strengthen linguistic mastery, analytical depth, and emotional resonance. By first composing poetry in Plácido's style and then adapting those verses musically, students experienced the intimate relationship between language, rhythm, and meaning.

Enhanced Literary and Historical Understanding: To imitate Plácido's style, students first had to deconstruct it. This went beyond simple rhyme and meter; they had to analyze his specific use of Romantic symbolism, his connection of nature to the human condition, and the subtle ways he embedded political resistance within lyrical verse. This analytical groundwork deepened their appreciation for the complexities of nineteenth-century Cuban literature and its colonial context. Adapting these new poems into song further reinforced this understanding, as students had to make conscious choices about musical genre that reflected their interpretation of the poem's tone and historical setting.

Critical and Creative Thinking: This activity positioned students as critical collaborators with AI. They quickly learned to evaluate the AI's creative boundaries, often noting that its generated verses, while technically proficient, lacked authentic nuance or emotional weight. Their task became one of refinement and co-creation: they acted as editors and artists, revising awkward phrasing, replacing anachronistic words, and injecting the human context the AI could not grasp. This process transformed them from passive users of technology into active interpreters who thoughtfully curated and improved AI outputs to better serve their historical and artistic goals.

Emotional and Cognitive Engagement: Setting poetry to music powerfully amplified affective learning. Music adds an auditory and embodied dimension to the text, making abstract concepts like longing, oppression, and hope feel more tangible. The act of selecting a melody, tempo, and instrumentation required students to interpret and then *express* the poem's emotional core. This multimodal layering aids cognitive recall, as evidenced by one student's summary: "I remember every line of our song—it's the first time a poem stayed in my head like music."

Accessibility and Collaboration: A nineteenth-century poem can feel distant to modern students. The act of creating a song served as a bridge across that historical gap, making Plácido's themes of social injustice and forbidden love feel immediate and relevant. Furthermore, the process was inherently collaborative. In small groups, students had to negotiate meaning entirely in Spanish—debating word choices, refining lyrics, and making collective artistic decisions. This fostered authentic, communicative language practice and teamwork.

4. RUBÉN DARÍO AND MODERNISMO THROUGH VOICE

Rubén Darío (1867–1916), widely considered the father of Spanish-language *modernismo* [11], was a Nicaraguan poet whose work reshaped literary aesthetics through its radical musicality, innovation, and cosmopolitan imagery. Before engaging with generative AI, our class dedicated significant time to his biography and style, exploring how his life as a traveler and diplomat influenced his artistic vision. We then traced the evolution of his poetry, analyzing the progression from the Parnassian and Symbolist explorations in *Azul...* (1888), to the aesthetic plenitude of *Prosas profanas* (1896), and finally to the more introspective and philosophical tone of his masterpiece, *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905). To synthesize this knowledge creatively, students used ChatGPT's voice feature to engage Darío in a simulated dialogue. This capstone activity invited them to "speak" with the author they had studied, asking questions and evaluating the AI's responses for historical accuracy and stylistic authenticity based on their understanding of his life and work.

4.1 EXAMPLES OF STUDENT PROMPTS AND AI REPLIES

Gloria: *"¿Piensas que Latinoamérica hubiera tenido más éxito sin la intervención de los Estados Unidos?"* [Do you think that Latin America would have been more successful without the intervention of the United States?]

AI Darío: *“Querida Gloria, es posible que sin la intervención de los Estados Unidos, Latinoamérica hubiera seguido un camino más autónomo; pero la historia es un tejido complejo, y cada hilo, por foráneo que sea, forma parte de nuestra identidad.”*
Translation: "Dear Gloria, it is possible that without the intervention of the United States, Latin America would have followed a more autonomous path; but history is a complex tapestry, and every thread, however foreign, is part of our identity."
Anniina: *“¿Qué elementos de su trabajo ejemplifican el modernismo?”* [Which elements of your work exemplify *modernismo*?]
AI Darío: *“Mi querida Anniina, en ‘Azul…’ y ‘Prosas profanas’ uní la musicalidad del verso con imágenes exóticas y simbólicas, buscando siempre la belleza y lo íntimo.”*
Translation: "My dear Anniina, in ‘Azul…’ and ‘Prosas profanas’ I united the musicality of verse with exotic and symbolic images, always seeking beauty and intimacy."
Ben: *“¿Por qué su abuelo le cambió el nombre a Rubén Darío?”* [Why did your grandfather change your name to Rubén Darío?]
AI Darío: *“Estimado Ben, mi abuelo decidió cambiar mi nombre original por Rubén Darío para honrar el linaje familiar.”*
Translation: "Esteemed Ben, my grandfather decided to change my original name to Rubén Darío to honor the family lineage."
Students found the exchanges enlightening yet complex. The language was eloquent but inconsistent in register, using *querida* for women and *estimado* for men. This led to a discussion about gender bias in AI training data versus historical manners.

4.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM THE DARÍO DIALOGUE

This conversational exercise yielded several key pedagogical benefits that integrated linguistic skills with literary analysis.
Expanded Cultural and Historical Knowledge: The AI dialogue transformed abstract biographical facts into a simulated, experiential encounter. By asking Darío about his life and receiving answers in his distinctive stylistic voice, students made tangible connections between his cosmopolitan experiences and the formal, innovative nature of his poetry. This process moved their understanding from passive knowledge to active, contextualized insight, making history feel immediate and relevant.
Improved Oral Proficiency: The activity provided a low-stakes “conversational sandbox” for practicing spontaneous speech. Speaking with an AI rather than a human partner reduced student anxiety about making grammatical errors or pausing to formulate thoughts. The AI served as a patient, non-judgmental conversational partner, encouraging students to take risks with pronunciation and syntax, which helped build their confidence for real-time oral communication.
Critical Reflection and Bias Detection: The AI’s use of gendered language (*querida* vs. *estimado*) became a pivotal learning moment. The ambiguity of the AI’s choice—was it accurately reflecting the courtly manners of the era or revealing a modern algorithmic bias from its training data?—prompted a sophisticated discussion. This inquiry forced students to think simultaneously as literary historians and critical digital citizens, recognizing that AI is not a neutral oracle but a product of human data. It was a practical lesson in bias detection and the importance of questioning the source and context of AI-generated content.
Authentic Engagement with Authorial Style: After studying Darío’s poetry, students were primed to recognize his stylistic signatures. Hearing the AI mimic his musical cadence, elevated vocabulary (*léxico culto*), and complex sentence structures in conversational prose provided a new, auditory modality for analysis. It allowed them to *hear* his *modernista* style, reinforcing the literary concepts they had learned through close reading. As Liu et al. highlight, this kind of exercise demonstrates how “multimodal AI enables students to monitor contextual meaning and tone through speech and text” [5], effectively bridging the gap between linguistic practice and literary interpretation.

5. CONCLUSION: CREATIVE AI BEYOND GAMIFICATION

These multimodal activities demonstrate that creative AI in the classroom extends far beyond novelty into the realm of deep pedagogical practice. When thoughtfully implemented, these tools cultivate critical thinking, enhance literary comprehension, and appeal to diverse learners by transforming textual analysis into an immersive, creative act. This approach directly answers the call from researchers to move beyond the simple application of AI and address the lack of critical reflection of challenges and risks of AIEd [AI in Education] and the weak connection to theoretical pedagogical perspectives often found in its

implementation. As O. Zawacki-Richter et al. note "It is crucial to emphasise that educational technology is not (only) about technology – it is the pedagogical, ethical, social, cultural and economic dimensions of AIEd we should be concerned about." [12].

A central achievement of this pedagogical model is the cultivation of ethical AI literacy. The activities described are intentionally designed to improve learning outcomes, not circumvent them. It is the job of the faculty to frame AI not as a tool for cheating, but as a powerful instrument for inquiry and creativity. By engaging with AI as a flawed but potent collaborator, students learn practical bias detection—as seen with the Eurocentric images of the *veguera* and the gendered language of the AI Darío—and develop a critical stance toward all digitally-generated content. As Godwin-Jones notes, the value of these tools is not automatic; authenticity in AI-assisted learning "depends on critical framing rather than automation" [9]. This critical framing is the cornerstone of responsible AI pedagogy. This approach adds a crucial fifth skill to the traditional linguistic repertoire, complementing reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The ability to ethically and effectively collaborate with artificial intelligence—to engineer effective prompts, critically evaluate outputs, and creatively refine results—is a skill that will make students more marketable in the modern workforce. More importantly, it makes them stronger language learners, more nuanced critical thinkers, and more adaptable collaborators, preparing them for a future where human-AI partnership is increasingly the norm. Ultimately, generative AI served as both a mirror and a mediator in the classroom: it reflected students' own interpretive choices while mediating between the literary past and their creative present. As Küchemann et al. describe, AI serves as a bridge between creative production and reflective analysis [3], affirming that it can deepen, not dilute, the interpretive goals of humanistic education.

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