



Artificial Intelligence And The Reconfiguration Of Authorship In Contemporary Literature

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has fundamentally altered the conditions of literary production, compelling scholars to reconsider long-established concepts of authorship, originality, creativity, and literary value. This paper critically examines how AI disrupts traditional human-centric models of authorship and challenges the ethical, aesthetic, and cultural foundations of literature. Drawing exclusively on secondary theoretical and empirical scholarship, the study argues that AI does not signal the end of literature but rather exposes authorship as a distributed, relational, and institutionally mediated practice. The paper proposes a *symbiotic model of authorship*, wherein human intentionality, ethical responsibility, and cultural situatedness coexist with algorithmic textual productivity. By foregrounding reader reception, originality, literary labour, and the implications for marginal and indigenous literatures, the paper contributes a theoretically grounded framework for understanding literature in the age of artificial intelligence.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; Authorship; Literary Theory; Originality; Creativity; Digital Humanities; Reader Response; Literary Ethics

1. Introduction

The emergence of generative Artificial Intelligence systems capable of producing coherent, stylistically diverse, and contextually appropriate texts has generated intense debate within literary studies. Once considered an exclusively human creative domain, literature now confronts algorithmic systems that can imitate authorial voices, generate narratives, and assist—or in some contexts replace—key stages of the writing process. These developments raise fundamental and persistent questions: Who is the author of an AI-assisted text? What constitutes originality in algorithmic writing? How should literary value and authenticity be evaluated when textual production is partially automated?

Popular discourse often frames AI as either an existential threat to human creativity or a revolutionary tool that democratizes literary production. Such positions, however, rely on technological determinism and obscure deeper theoretical issues that literary studies have long grappled with. Literary theory has repeatedly problematised the notion of a sovereign, autonomous author, foregrounding instead intertextuality, discourse, ideology, and reader reception. From this perspective, AI does not introduce an external crisis into literature; rather, it intensifies contradictions already embedded within modern literary thought.

This paper situates AI within these longstanding theoretical debates and argues that the future of literature depends not on resisting AI, but on critically rethinking authorship, creativity, originality, and ethical responsibility under conditions of algorithmic mediation. By relying exclusively on secondary sources, the paper seeks to offer a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical assessment, contributing to contemporary discussions in literary theory and digital humanities.

2. Authorship Beyond the Human–Machine Binary

Traditional literary criticism often assumes authorship as an intentional, conscious act rooted in individual human experience. This assumption underpins Romantic notions of creativity and continues to shape popular understandings of literary production. However, post-structuralist interventions—most notably Roland Barthes’ declaration of the “death of the author” and Michel Foucault’s formulation of the “author function”—destabilised this model by framing authorship as a discursive, cultural, and institutional construct rather than a purely personal origin of meaning.

AI extends this destabilisation by introducing a new form of textual productivity that is neither human nor fully autonomous. Treating AI merely as a neutral tool under human control ignores its generative capacity, while treating it as an author in its own right risks anthropomorphising a system that lacks consciousness, intention, and moral agency. AI occupies an intermediate and theoretically challenging position: it is productive but not agential.

AI generates language probabilistically, drawing on patterns learned from vast textual corpora. It does not possess intentionality, experience, or ethical accountability. Consequently, it cannot be considered an author in the traditional or theoretical sense. At the same time, its capacity to shape narrative form, style, and structure means it cannot be reduced to a passive instrument.

This paper argues that authorship in the AI age must be understood as **distributed authorship**, characterised by **intentional asymmetry**. Human authors retain conceptual direction, interpretive authority, and ethical responsibility, while AI contributes linguistic abundance, stylistic variation, and procedural efficiency. Authorship thus becomes a relational and negotiated process rather than an individual achievement, aligning with contemporary understandings of cultural production as collaborative and mediated.

3. Originality and Intertextuality in the Age of AI

One of the most persistent anxieties surrounding AI-generated literature concerns originality. Critics often argue that AI cannot be genuinely creative because it merely recombines existing texts. However, literary theory has long rejected the notion of absolute originality. Structuralist and postmodern perspectives emphasise that all literary texts emerge from networks of prior texts, genres, conventions, and discourses. Intertextuality, rather than originality, is the foundational condition of literary production.

AI makes this condition visible in unprecedented ways. Because AI systems operate entirely through recombination, they expose the extent to which literary creativity has always depended on repetition, variation, and transformation. Yet an important distinction must be maintained. Human intertextuality is historically and culturally situated, shaped by memory, emotion, ideology, and lived experience. AI intertextuality, by contrast, is statistical and indifferent. It recombines patterns without understanding, intention, or affect.

As a result, originality in AI-mediated literature cannot be evaluated solely at the level of linguistic novelty or stylistic deviation. Instead, originality shifts toward **conceptual design, framing, selection, and intervention**. The creative act increasingly lies in how human authors guide, constrain, and contextualise

AI output—through prompts, revision, and narrative intention—rather than in the mechanical production of sentences.

This shift demands new critical frameworks for evaluating literary value. Rather than asking whether AI-generated text is original, literary criticism must ask how originality is redistributed across human–machine interaction.

4. Reader Reception and the Question of Authenticity

Empirical studies on reader response consistently demonstrate that readers evaluate AI-generated texts differently once authorship is disclosed. Even when stylistic quality remains constant, AI-authored or AI-assisted texts are often perceived as less authentic, emotionally resonant, or meaningful. This suggests that authenticity is not an inherent property of the text itself but a culturally mediated expectation.

Reception theory provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. Meaning emerges through the interaction between text and reader expectations, shaped by cultural norms and interpretive communities. Readers often seek traces of lived experience, emotional vulnerability, and historical struggle—qualities they associate with human authorship. AI disrupts these expectations by severing the assumed link between text and experience.

However, this does not imply the wholesale rejection of AI-assisted literature. Instead, it points toward a reconfiguration of literary legitimacy. Expressive, confessional, and autobiographical genres may continue to privilege human authorship, while experimental, procedural, and collaborative forms may increasingly accommodate AI. Reader ethics, rather than technological capability, will play a decisive role in shaping the future literary field.

5. Style, Voice, and the Politics of Imitation

AI's ability to imitate authorial styles has generated anxiety about the erosion of literary voice. Yet imitation has always been central to literary history. Literary movements, genres, and traditions depend on stylistic repetition and transformation. What distinguishes AI imitation is the absence of apprenticeship, struggle, and historical positioning.

When style becomes detachable from experience, literary voice risks being reduced to aesthetic surface. This development threatens to commodify voice while erasing the social, political, and cultural conditions that produce it. At the same time, this limitation of AI may reaffirm the value of **situated literatures**, particularly indigenous, regional, and oral traditions.

For literatures rooted in lived cultural practices—such as those emerging from India's North-East—AI cannot replicate indigenous epistemologies, oral memory, or communal authorship without flattening their meaning. These literary forms derive significance not from stylistic novelty but from cultural continuity and embodied knowledge. In this sense, AI may paradoxically intensify the critical importance of marginal and indigenous literary voices.

6. Ethics, Copyright, and Literary Labour

The ethical crisis surrounding AI and literature extends beyond copyright infringement to the recognition of literary labour. When AI systems are trained on vast corpora of literary texts without consent or compensation, authorship is treated as raw data rather than intellectual work. This raises fundamental questions about ownership, exploitation, and creative rights.

From a materialist perspective, AI exacerbates the historical separation between creative labour and ownership. Authors risk losing both economic security and control over their stylistic identities, as AI systems reproduce and monetise literary patterns without accountability. This is not merely a technological issue but an institutional one, demanding legal, regulatory, and ethical intervention.

Rather than prohibiting AI, this paper argues for transparency, disclosure norms, and frameworks that reaffirm human accountability and labour recognition in literary production. Ethical authorship in the AI age must be grounded in responsibility rather than technological novelty.

7. Toward a Symbiotic Model of Authorship

The future of literature is neither purely human nor fully automated. Instead, it is likely to be characterised by stratified modes of production:

- Human-exclusive literary creation grounded in lived experience and authenticity
- Human–AI collaborative writing emphasising experimentation, accessibility, and productivity
- Fully automated texts serving functional or commercial purposes

This paper proposes a **symbiotic model of authorship**, where AI functions as a co-creative system under human conceptual and ethical control. In this model, literary value emerges not from opposition between human and machine but from their negotiated interaction within cultural and institutional frameworks.

8. Conclusion

AI does not herald the end of literature; it marks a transformation in how literature is produced, evaluated, and understood. By exposing authorship as a distributed, ethical, and conceptual practice, AI compels literary studies to rethink foundational assumptions about creativity, originality, and literary value. The task of criticism is not to defend a romanticised notion of the author, but to articulate frameworks that preserve human responsibility, cultural specificity, and ethical accountability in an algorithmic age.

