Literariness Journal

Literariness Journal
A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies

P-ISSN: 3108-1614
E-ISSN: 3108-172X

LiterarinessJournal.org

Vol. 1, Issue. 3 June 2026

© 2026 by the author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

A Literariness.org Project

The Inherited Voice: AI, Authorship, and the Irony of Machine Recognition

PARTHI CHAKRABORTY
Darrang College, Tezpur, Assam
parthichakraborty@gmail.com

Abstract: Not long ago, I submitted an article I had written entirely on my own to an agency. Their software flagged it as 75% AI-generated. Another machine had decided my writing was not human enough. I sat with that for a while. Barthes said the author was dead. Foucault asked what the author even does. But neither of them could have imagined a morning where a writer sits at her desk, finishes something real, something felt, and gets told by an algorithm that it probably was not her at all. AI has spent years reading us. It has watched how we build sentences, where we pause, how we reach for emotion. It has taken all of that in and learned to sound like us. That is not creativity. That is inheritance. And inheritance, when it happens without permission, starts to feel like loss. This paper asks what that loss actually is. Not the loss of jobs or relevance, but something quieter – the loss of a voice you thought was only yours. Drawing on Barthes and Foucault, and starting from that one rejected article, it tries to work out what human writing actually holds that machine writing only borrows.

Keywords: *Authorship, Artificial Intelligence, Barthes, Foucault, Creative Identity, AI Detection, Human Voice*

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is no longer a distant concept. It is inside the tools we use to write, the platforms we use to publish, and increasingly, the systems used to judge whether what we have written is genuinely ours. At the centre of this shift is generative AI, which produces text, images, and music from nothing more than a typed prompt. The outputs are often polished. Sometimes they are indistinguishable from human work. And that is precisely where the trouble starts.

The legal world has not caught up. Copyright law was built on a simple assumption: creative work has a human author who owns it, can be credited for it, and can be held responsible for it. AI breaks that assumption without offering anything to replace it. When a machine produces an essay or a poem, the question of who owns it, who made it, and who stands behind it has no clean answer. Scholars working in intellectual property law now openly admit that AI-generated content sits in territory existing frameworks were never designed to handle.

This is not only a legal problem. It is a problem about what authorship actually means. The authorship process, as we have understood it, involved more than producing words. It involved editing, selecting, deciding, and above all taking responsibility for what was said. Javed argues that AI is pushing authorship toward a hybrid form, a collaboration between human and machine where technology increasingly controls more of the process than we admit. She suggests that AI writing still needs human-created context around it to make sense to readers, because readers feel something unfamiliar in it even when they cannot name what it is (Javed 559). That feeling is worth paying attention to.

Writing has always been understood as something that comes from somewhere. Victor Hugo called a writer "a world trapped in a person." Meg Rosoff described a writer's voice as the place where readers hear the contents of a mind, a heart, a soul. These are not romantic exaggerations. They point to something precise: that writing carries the weight of a life behind it, that a sentence is never just a sentence but a record of how a particular consciousness moved through the world. This understanding of authorship is now under pressure in a way it has never been before, because we have built systems that can produce sentences without having lived anything at all.

Artificial intelligence does not create the way humans do. It generates by pulling patterns from data it has absorbed, responding to prompts, producing text that looks like writing without having experienced anything writing usually comes from. Generative AI systems produce essays, poems, arguments, and articles based on nothing more than a typed instruction. The results are often convincing. T.S. Eliot argued in 1919 that great writing requires the extinction of personality, that the

writer must step back and let the work speak. Barthes declared the author dead in 1967. Foucault, a year later, asked what the author-function actually does. Each of these arguments tried to reduce the importance of the human behind the text. None of them imagined a moment when there would be no human behind the text at all. That moment is now.

The problem does not begin with AI. It begins with us. We trained these systems on our own writing, our sentences, our rhythms, our ways of reaching for emotion and the more we use them, the more they absorb. AI writes the way it does because humans wrote first, constantly, and made all of it available. We built the machine and fed it everything we knew. Now we use that same machine to verify whether human writing is genuine. An algorithm decides whether a person's words are real. I know this not as a theoretical concern but as a lived one. I once submitted an article I had written entirely on my own. The software flagged it as 75% AI-generated. A machine looked at my words and decided they did not sound human enough. That is where this paper begins.

The debate is no longer theoretical. In January 2025, the Authors Guild launched its Human Authored Certification programme, allowing writers to formally certify that their books were written by a human being (Authors Guild). That such a programme now needs to exist tells you everything about where we are. The United States Copyright Office, in its January 2025 report, confirmed that purely AI-generated content cannot be copyrighted, while AI-assisted works with meaningful human creative input retain full protection (United States Copyright Office 3). The law is trying to hold the line. But the line keeps moving. A Princeton study published in March 2026 showed that generative AI models produce what researchers call regression toward the mean, where the variance in output shrinks compared to real-world distributions, meaning AI produces relentlessly average output (Xie and Xie 2026). And yet that average output is flooding every platform, every inbox, every submission portal. Writers are being asked to prove their humanity. Algorithms are deciding whether they succeed. This paper is written from inside that reality, not from a comfortable distance from it.

The Romantic Author: Writing as Self-Expression

The Romantics believed that poetry originated not from rigid rules or imitation of the past, but from the inner soul of the poet, shaped by imagination, intense emotion, and spontaneous inspiration. Writing was not a craft to be learned so much as a force to be channelled. The author was not a technician. The author was a vessel.

Wordsworth, in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (Wordsworth 263). This was not a casual description. It was a manifesto. It said that what made a poem a poem was not its

formal properties but where it came from. From inside a living, feeling human being who had experienced something and needed to give it language. Blake held a similar conviction but pushed it further. When he wrote "The Tyger," he was not constructing an image from technique. He believed something was moving through him, a prophetic energy, a divine vision that demanded to be written. The tiger burning in the forests of the night was not an image he invented so much as one he received.

Shelley placed the poet even higher. In *A Defence of Poetry*, he declared that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley 54). He meant that poets do not merely describe reality. They shape it. They see what others cannot yet see and give it form. The author in this tradition was not just a writer but a prophet, a visionary, a conduit for truths that had not yet been named. Coleridge took this idea to its most literal extreme. He claimed that "Kubla Khan" came to him entirely in a dream, that he composed several hundred lines in his sleep and woke to write them down before an interruption caused the rest to vanish forever (Coleridge xii). Whether or not the story is entirely true, what matters is that Coleridge wanted it to be believed. He wanted his poem understood as something that passed through him rather than something he constructed. The author as receiver, not maker.

Yeats sits at the edge of this tradition, already beginning to feel its strain. "Sailing to Byzantium" is a poem about the ageing artist seeking permanence through art, trying to step outside the mortal, biological self and into something that endures. It is a Romantic impulse pressed to its limit. The desire for the author's inner world to outlast the author's body. What the Romantics established across all these different voices was a single foundational claim: writing is inseparable from the person who wrote it. A poem carries its author inside it. You cannot read "The Tyger" without Blake's vision behind it. You cannot read Wordsworth without the particular hillsides and losses that shaped him. The author was not just present in the text. The author was the reason the text existed at all.

It is this assumption that the twentieth century would challenge, systematically and from multiple directions. But before it could be challenged, it had to be believed. And for the Romantics, it was believed completely.

The Author Under Attack: Eliot, Barthes, Foucault

If the Romantics built the author up into something sacred, the twentieth century spent the better part of fifty years taking that figure apart. Three thinkers did this most decisively, and it is worth understanding what each of them actually argued, because all three shape how we think about authorship today, and all three have a blind spot that AI has now exposed.

T.S. Eliot was the first to challenge the Romantic model directly. In his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he argued that poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from it. The poet's mind, he suggested, is not a reservoir of personal feeling waiting to overflow. It is a medium, something closer to a catalyst, that combines experiences and transforms them into art (Eliot 40). What matters is not who the poet is but what the poem does. Eliot was reacting against the cult of the Romantic genius, the idea that a poem's value came from the intensity of the poet's inner life. He wanted to return attention to the work itself, to tradition, to craft. The author, in Eliot's framework, should disappear into the poem. But notice what Eliot did not say. He did not say there was no author. He said the author's personality should not dominate. A person still sat down and wrote. A consciousness still shaped the work, even if that consciousness was trying to suppress itself.

Barthes pushed the argument further. In "The Death of the Author," published in 1967, he declared that a text's meaning should not be constrained by the author's intentions, biography, or identity. To give a text an author, he argued, is to impose a limit on it, to close it down, to fix its meaning in a way that shuts out the reader (Barthes 147). Barthes wanted to open the text up. He wanted meaning to be made in the act of reading, not handed down from the author like a decree. The author dies so the reader can be born. This was a liberating argument in many ways. It said that a poem belongs to everyone who reads it, not just to the person who wrote it. But again, notice the assumption beneath it. Barthes was talking about interpretation, about how we read. He was not talking about production, about how texts come to exist. Even in his framework, someone still wrote. A human being still put words on a page. The author's death was a critical and readerly event, not a literal one.

Foucault completed the dismantling. In "What is an Author?", delivered as a lecture in 1969, he argued that the author is not a natural or inevitable idea but a constructed one. Societies invented authorship for specific practical reasons: to assign credit, to establish legal ownership, to decide who is responsible for subversive or dangerous ideas (Foucault 148). He called this the author-function, meaning that the name on a book cover performs a role in how knowledge is organised and circulated. The author is less a person than a position that a name is made to occupy. This was perhaps the most radical of the three arguments because it suggested that authorship could in principle be reorganised, performed differently, or attached to something other than an individual human being. But even Foucault, writing in 1969, could not quite imagine what that something else might be.

Each of these thinkers weakened the author in a different way. Eliot said personality should not matter. Barthes said intention should not control meaning. Foucault said authorship was a social construction rather than a natural fact. But all three shared a single assumption they never thought to question: that the person producing the text was a person. That behind every essay, every poem, every

act of writing, there was a human consciousness that had lived, experienced, and made choices. They were arguing about what kind of claim a human author could make over their work. Not one of them asked whether the author needed to be human in the first place.

That question was left for us. We are the first generation to face it seriously. A machine is now producing text that passes for human writing, text that gets mistaken for the real thing not just by readers but by the very software designed to detect the difference. The frameworks Eliot, Barthes and Foucault gave us are powerful. But they were never built for this. They told us the author was unnecessary, impersonal, or merely functional. They did not tell us what to do when something that has never lived begins to write.

The Author Disappears Completely: AI, Identity, and What We Actually Lose

The honest answer to what AI cannot do is this: it cannot feel the emotional weight of a story, a sentence, or a word. It can simulate feeling by analysing sentiment patterns in the text it has absorbed. But it does not possess the lived experience required to understand why a particular phrase resonates or why a specific detail is vital. That difference is not small. It is the whole thing.

Javed has argued that authorship is becoming a hybrid process, a collaboration between human and machine where technology increasingly controls the terms. She suggests that AI writing still needs human-created context around it to make sense to readers, because readers sense something unfamiliar in it even when they cannot name what it is (Javed 559). That feeling of unfamiliarity is worth taking seriously. It points to something real. Readers feel it because AI writing, however fluent, has no origin in experience. It has patterns derived from experience. And patterns are not the same as the thing itself.

This is where the legal argument and the personal argument meet. Copyright law assumes a human author because only a human can be held responsible, can own something, can stand behind what they made. The United States Copyright Office confirmed in its 2025 report that purely AI-generated content cannot hold copyright precisely because there is no human author behind it (United States Copyright Office 3). AI has nothing at stake. It does not care whether the essay succeeds or fails, whether the reader is moved or unmoved, whether the words were true or false. It produced them because it was asked to. That is a fundamental difference from why a human writes.

This is where the concept I want to call writerly selfhood becomes necessary. Not style, not vocabulary, not tone, though all of these are part of it. Writerly selfhood is the accumulation of lived experience that shapes what a writer notices, what they return to, what they cannot help but say. It is built from specific places, specific losses, specific moments of recognition that no training data can

manufacture. A language model trained on a writer's essays might reproduce their surface patterns. It cannot reproduce their origins. And origins are where writing actually comes from.

The crisis becomes clearest in what happened when I submitted my own article to an agency. I had written it entirely myself. Their software flagged it as 75% AI generated. A machine looked at my words and decided they did not sound human enough. That moment is not just ironic. It is the clearest possible evidence of what this paper is arguing. When human writing becomes indistinguishable from machine output, the loss is not only practical. It is existential. It is the loss of the assurance that what you made came from somewhere real, from a life that was actually lived, from a childhood you actually had.

There is a second irony folded inside the first. The agency used an AI tool to verify whether my article was AI-written. A machine checked my work on behalf of humans who trusted the machine more than they trusted me. This is the world we are writing in now. The gatekeepers are algorithms. The editors are automated. And the human writer, with all her hesitation and memory and feeling, stands at the door being assessed by the very kind of system she is trying to distinguish herself from.

Barthes said the author dies so the reader can live. But he was talking about interpretation, about how meaning is made after the writing is done. He was not talking about the writing itself, about the act of making something from the inside of a particular life. AI has not killed the author in Barthes' sense. It has done something quieter and more unsettling. It has made the author invisible. It has made it impossible to tell, from the outside, whether there was ever a human being involved at all. And that invisibility is where the real danger lives.

Recent studies support this concern. Research has shown that readers cannot reliably differentiate between AI-generated poems and those written by celebrated human authors (Porter and Machery 2024). If trained readers cannot tell the difference, then the author's presence in the text has been erased in a way neither Barthes nor Foucault intended. The question is no longer whether the author matters. The question is whether the author exists at all, and whether anyone can tell.

Conclusion

Eliot asked the author to disappear into the work. Barthes declared the author dead. Foucault reduced authorship to a social function. Each argument was necessary in its own time, a response to real problems in how literature was being read and how power was being organised around the figure of the writer. But none of them anticipated where their logic would eventually lead. None of them imagined a morning where a writer would sit down, finish something real, and be told by a machine that it did not sound human enough.

We are at that morning now. And the frameworks we inherited are not sufficient for it. They told us the author was unnecessary. They did not tell us what to do when the author's absence becomes literal, when the text has no life behind it at all, only patterns borrowed from lives that others lived. Barthes wanted to free the reader. Foucault wanted to demystify power. Neither of them wanted to make the human writer disposable. But disposability is what the logic of their arguments, taken to its technological conclusion, has helped produce.

This paper has argued that what AI cannot replicate is not style or vocabulary or even emotional tone. Those can be approximated. What cannot be approximated is writerly selfhood, the accumulation of lived experience that shapes what a writer notices, what they return to, what they find halfway through a sentence they did not expect to find. These are not abstract qualities. They are earned through living, through loss and memory and the particular way a specific person moves through the world. Data cannot produce them. Prompts cannot summon them. They belong to the human mind and to no one else.

No matter how far technology advances, machines cannot take up the chores of human thought and expression. The level of thinking, feeling, and articulation that a person brings to the page when writing from inside their own life is not a skill that can be inherited through data. It is built through experience that is irreducibly personal.

To every writer who has been told by a machine that their words did not sound human enough: one rejection cannot prove your worth, especially when it comes from something that has never felt anything. Your voice is not a pattern. It is a life. And no algorithm, however sophisticated, has yet figured out how to live one.

Works Cited

Authors Guild. "Human Authored Certification." *Authors Guild*, 2025, authorsguild.org/advocacy/artificial-intelligence/.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 142-148.

Blake, William. "The Tyger." *Songs of Experience*, 1794.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Kubla Khan*. Christabel: Kubla Khan, a Vision; The Pains of Sleep, William Bulmer, 1816.

Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, Methuen, 1920, pp. 47-59.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, edited by Josue V. Harari, Cornell University Press, 1979, pp. 141-160.

Hugo, Victor. *William Shakespeare*, translated by Melville B. Anderson, McClurg, 1887.

Javed, Uzma. "Artificial Intelligence as Co-Author: Rethinking Authorship and Creativity in Contemporary Literature." *International Journal of Research and Technology*, vol. 14, no. S1, 2026, pp. 558-561.

Porter, Ethan, and Eugen Machery. "AI-Generated Poetry Is Indistinguishable from Human-Written Poetry and Is Rated More Favorably." *Scientific Reports*, 2024.

Rosoff, Meg. "What Is a Writer's Voice?" *The Guardian*, 2013.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry*, 1821. Published in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, edited by Mary Shelley, Moxon, 1840.

United States Copyright Office. *Copyright and Artificial Intelligence, Part 2: Copyrightability*. U.S. Copyright Office, 2025.

Wordsworth, William. "Preface." *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd ed., Longman, 1800, pp. 241-272.

Xie, Yu, and Yueqi Xie. "Generative AI and the Future of Human Creativity." Princeton University Study, March 2026.

Yeats, W.B. "Sailing to Byzantium." *The Tower*, Macmillan, 1928.