



Reimagining The Death of the Author: AI and Literary Authorship

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Abstract:

Artificial Intelligence or AI today produces literary-like texts and these texts have raised a debate on the well-established speculations about creativity, originality and authorship in literary studies. The algorithmic system has been challenging the conventional idea of the author being a conscious and creative human agent by generating poems, critical prose and stories. This paper discusses Roland Barthes' seminal concept of "The Death of the Author" taking in consideration the present-day AI-generated writing and positions it within the posthuman theoretical frameworks. This study argues that AI has not only repeated Barthes' proclamation but also revolutionised it by separating the literary text from the lived experiences and human origin. This study based on the post humanist and poststructuralist thought explores the thought of an author being transformed from an individual subject to a process in the modern age where the AI algorithms rule over authorship distributed over algorithms, readers, programmers and datasets. This paper further aims to understand the contemporary relevance of literary studies and the cultural, ethical as well as the pedagogical connotations of posthuman authorship in the digital age.

Keywords: Authorship, Artificial Intelligence, Literary Theory, Posthumanism, Poststructuralism.

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Introduction

From time immemorial, the position of the author and his importance in the understanding of the text has been a subject of debate. In literary studies, authorship holds a central position. From the Romantic age to the modern times, the intention and authority of an author has been questioned and with the emergence of the poststructuralist thought, especially Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author*, the importance of authorial intention in textual interpretation has been challenged. Not only was the central position of the author as the supreme guarantor of meaning was challenged by Barthes' argument but it also directed literary criticism towards reader and textuality.

With the emergence of AI, this notion has gained a new perspective as AI is now capable of generating texts that resemble human-authored literature. AI is an amalgamation of multifarious texts that have existed over generations and is now capable of imitating the writing style, narrative structures and conventional techniques of writing which raises many questions over the authorship of AI generated texts. It also questions the existence of authorship without lived experience.

This paper thus explores the notion whether AI marks the final death of the author or transforms authorship to a posthuman form. This study focuses on authorship being a system-based phenomenon and help to understand it beyond the human by focusing on the poststructuralist theory, Michael

Foucault's concept of "author function" and posthumanist thought. The paper thus aims to reevaluate Barthes' notion of "death of the author" with respect to AI generated literature.

Review of Literature

During the Romantic age, the author was supreme and considered to be the creative genius whose individuality and emotional depth were reflected in his work. The biographical criticism method further strengthened this approach as it explored the connection between the text and author's life, psychological states and intentions. The conscious purpose of the author and meaning are thus connected within this framework.

The author-centric criticism was marked by a decisive break with the emergence of Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author*. Writing is "the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin," argued Barthes, and emphasized language as an autonomous system and not as the way of expressing personal opinions. Further the concept of author function, as introduced by Michael Foucault, brought in the new notion of authorship wherein Foucault argued that the author is not a universal category but a cultural construct. Thus authorship, in this light tends to both regulatory and classificatory functions of language more than the creative one. Several literary theories emerged later on out of which the posthumanist theory challenges the humanist proposition of the autonomous, rational subject. Subjectivity, as argued by thinkers like N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti, is distributed across human and non-human agents, including machines and technologies. To understand the AI generated texts, it is necessary to decentre the human author and view it from a posthuman lens.

Several contemporary authors have begun to explore the field of AI generated texts and its author function, challenging the traditional notions of authorship. Puşcaşu's (2024) recent study shows how Barthes' *Death of the Author* and Foucault's *What is an Author?* are central to understanding the

philosophical implications of the debate on authorship questioning the autonomy, intent and creativity among the text. It also explores how conceptualisations pursued in these works are related to the current perspectives on authorship when AI is involved. Colella (2025) in his study has explored how AI generated phenomenon, though novel requires a closer inspection and discusses the current scenario of authorship in the digital age of AI. AI can be seen as a tool to enhance human creativity and the recent studies have been focused on creativity, originality and ethics. But most of these do not engage with the classic literary theories for a long while. This paper aims to explore this gap by viewing AI authorship through the poststructuralist and posthuman lens.

Methodology

Based on the literary theories, this paper proposes a qualitative, conceptual and interpretative research design. The theories focus on the evolution and reconfiguration of authorship in terms of AI. Aligned with the traditional humanities research practices, the methodology entails critical interpretation of texts, and theories through which the meaning is constructed. The research is theoretical and exploratory in nature and seeks to reconceptualise already established literary concepts – particularly Roland Barthes' notion of "the death of the author" – in view of the recent changes in AI generated writing. The study thus does not test hypotheses but critically examines the theories with the aim to recontextualize the existing framework.

The theoretical framework surrounding poststructuralism and posthumanism includes the ideas articulated by theorists such as Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault who critiqued authorial intention and challenged the idea of author as the primary source of meaning along with N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti who advocated the distributed agency across human and non-human actors. These frameworks together reinforce AI as a posthuman agent and decenter the traditional models

of authorship. The paper thus employs techniques such as close reading of the seminal texts, conceptual analysis of AI-generated writing, comparative analysis of traditional human authorship and AI mediated textual production and synthesis of scholarly discourse, questioning the ideas, meanings and theoretical paradigms.

Discussion and Conclusion

AI generated texts do not have the emotional depth or lack consciousness. It generates output with the help of systemic data analyses and probabilistic patterns than creativity. Often criticised to be derivative, AI writing usually relies on existing data but if understood from a poststructuralist view, all texts are intertextual. AI generated texts thus based on recombination patterns than inspiration, challenge the traditional notion of creativity and emphasize Barthes' idea that meaning does not originate from an author's mind. Barthes metaphorically compared liberating the interpretation of text from its biographical constraints to the death of the author and AI generated texts explicitly lack human origin, thus the author is not only dead but transformed into an algorithmic process. But AI generated literature also generates ethical and cultural concerns which exposes the limitations of Barthes' theory as his theory only dismissed authorial authority but the modern texts demand accountability and responsibility. The rise of AI thus emphasizes on reconceptualising the literary theory and develops frameworks that verify posthuman authorship and algorithmic agency.

This paper thus contends that Artificial Intelligence is an extension to the shift initiated by Roland Barthes in his work *The Death of the Author*. It positions AI generated literature within the frameworks of poststructuralism and posthumanism and highlights the need for literary theory to adapt as per the new technological changes. It is necessary to embrace the change and think of this transformation as an opportunity to rethink creativity, agency and interpretation in the modern digital age.

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