In between Human and Machine

Poetry in the age of AI

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Introduction

We are now witnessing an unprecedented AI rise in the public discourse.
Tools like ChatGPT, DALL-E, Midjourney, Claude, and Deepseek have rapidly infiltrated journalism, visual arts, digital development, and literary creation.
This proliferation of wonders has filled the media ecosystem with both hope and anxiety. While tech optimists wield the sword of AI as the definitive tool for expanding human potential, critics warn about darker implications of this technology.

In the Western context, where individual creativity has long been central to cultural identity, this seemingly unstoppable technological advancement raises concerning questions.
As the overwhelming flood of information and automation anxiety grows, I found myself drawn to a particular question: where does poetry fit in all this mess?

In this thesis I will shed some light to some questions concerning the peculiar tension that grows when algorithms begin to craft verses. Large Language Models, trained on a vast corpora of human poetry, can now produce texts that blur the boundaries between machine generated and human created work. The Turing test has seemingly failed. We can no longer distinguish what is AI and what is human.

This is not just about the new frontier of technological capability; it is about how these technologies challenge the deep cultural assumptions we hold about creativity, authenticity, and artistic value.

I will explore how AI is currently approached in the world of poetry, but also how algorithmic processes had already entered poetic creation long before the current AI boom. I will also look at how generative AI models are challenging the creative industries, revealing hidden labour issues, while complicating the traditional notion of authorship.

How does AI challenge and reshape our understanding of what poetry is and can be?
This will be the central question guiding my research.

Poetry as a human experience

I remember writing my first poem in primary school. I was crawling in my childhood discomfort, after being shouted at. I sheltered myself in a corner, pressing myself against the walls. Without shedding a tear I grabbed the first surface I could find, and there I poured out the most intense poem of my life.
I don't recall it at all, nor have I ever found it again.
Still, I remember the feeling, the comfort — the soothing.

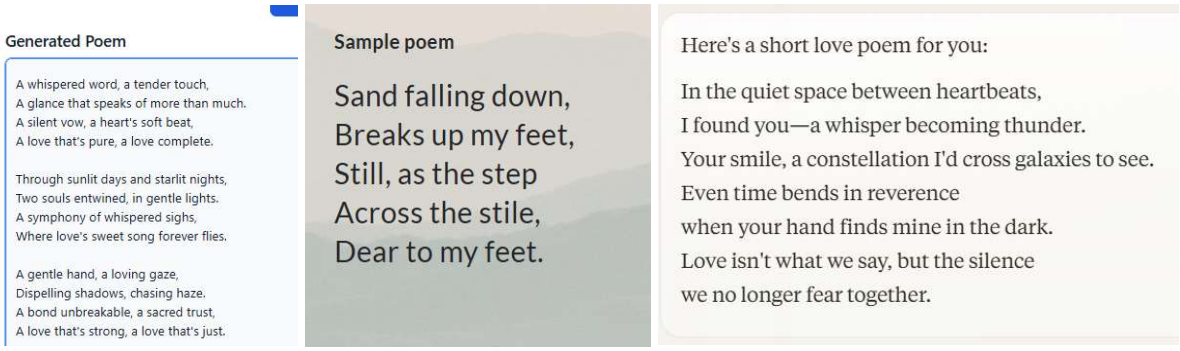
That was the beginning of a very familiar pattern: my struggle to express emotions openly.
It was the start of something new, a new way to seek light around compressed locked up feelings, a way to let emotions flow without losing myself.
Writing helped me a lot. Is still helping me a lot.
Not through writing prose, but with poetic language, a confused dense symbolic one.
That became the truest form of visualising feelings I couldn't understand, let alone explain clearly.
This is what poetry is for me: confusion and acceptance.

As I continue wandering through reality I've become more fascinated by poetry, not just as a personal outlet but as a medium. I'm intrigued by how others use it, what it means for them to write and experience it.

In my heart poetry is the only art form that can convey the rawest blunt emotions. I cannot fathom any other art form that is so intrinsically human, intimate, a direct transmission of experience and consciousness.

Poetry offers people a language of their own. While many other languages available to us — the language of propaganda, advertisement, politics, the horrible *bureaucratic* — are imposed, poetry offers us a private idiom (Karlström, Tranströmer, 1990).

The first time I saw ChatGPT generating poetry, I couldn't shake an uncanny feeling that something was fundamentally wrong.
I began questioning my reaction. Why was I feeling this way?



- Generated poem from aipoemgenerator.org that uses ChatGPT-4 (prompt: love)
- Poem generated by Verse by Verse, Google AI (prompt: free verse, poets chosen: Dickinson, Lazarus)
- Poem generated by Claude 3.7 Sonnet (prompt: short love poem)

There won't be any point of this research that aims to answer the question "what is poetry?". I am firmly convinced there is no definitive nor useful answer to that. I will instead explore the many ways poetry can be understood, in this challenging period of time when AI seems both human salvation and destruction.

If there is a point of truth I always believe is: poetry is a human experience.

Poetry as an artificial experience

If poetry has long been a deeply human activity, how does the bloom of artificial intelligence challenge this assumption? This question becomes central when we consider many of poetry's traditional features: patterns creation, language manipulation and emotional expression — characteristics that AI models can replicate.

Artificial intelligence is often used as a catch-all term. What AI actually refers to is a broad spectrum of systems with many different capabilities. Most of what we call AI today falls under the narrow AI (ANI) or weak AI bubble. These systems are excellent in specific tasks, such as language processing or image recognition. While they might appear to understand, they lack true reasoning or self-awareness.

The media often likes to play instead with the idea of Artificial general intelligence (AGI) — the sentient machine of science fiction, the AI that matches and surpasses human intelligence. AGI remains purely theoretical (IBM, 2024).

Understanding the distinction between ANI and AGI is important to maintain a realistic view and perspective on AI's current abilities, while acknowledging the rapid technological advancements that are constantly letting us feel left behind.

Yet, narrow AI's ability to generate convincing respondes, mimicking human reasoning, and even seemingly lying, raises interesting questions about the nature of intelligence itself.

Intelligence remains a vague, loosely defined concept. With no single universally accepted definition, the criterias to define it are often tied to learning, adaptation, abstract thinking (Britannica, 2025). However these criterias vary across cultures and disciplines.
One of the qualities most deeply associated with intelligence is creativity, as a key for artistic creation. Without creativity there is no art; without art no poetry. Yet, creativity is as complex as a concept. With no singular definition to these concepts the rabbit hole gets deeper.

In computer science, intelligence is often referred to in terms of pattern recognition, decision making and problem solving (University of Nevada, Reno). But does mimicking intelligent behaviour mean actual intelligence?

The nature of this new beast we call AI is not yet fixed. In its current form it is a super tool, an assistant. While speculations foments fear, while the discourse around it is being used for political and economical agendas, we, as human beings, are not yet there to be completely oppressed by this alien force we have indeed created.

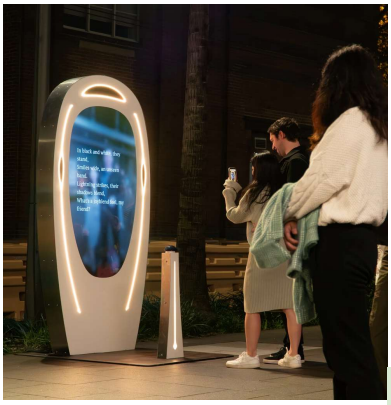
The Poem Booth and ReRites: case studies

Last year, while volunteering at Poetry International in Rotterdam, I encountered a project that stuck with me. It was a photo booth, but instead of producing photographs, it generated AI poems based on the images it was capturing. I got mesmerised by the sublime action of the machine. The whole project had a strange aura.

The **Poem Booth** was firing rapidly poems that were vanishing right away as they appeared.

This particular booth was created by VOUW, an Amsterdam based design studio, working with technology and design.

It felt uneasy on how come this was a project put in a festival that was focusing on human made poetry. Not just an interactive game that showcased AI potential but a charming mirror that wanted to bring poetry "closer to everyone".



- Poem Booth in action (credit: VOUW)
- Poem Booth prototype, showcase to an elementary school meeting (credit: VOUW)

In the art environment, interactivity and immersivity are clearly pushed.

When we observe how many art spaces have transformed into big installation playgrounds, what is there to question is if these interactive elements, while enjoyable, are maybe serving as distractions. Adding interactive elements, for the sake of it, to an art piece, might limit the contemplative element of the arts, and gives fuel to the widespread *attention economy* — a system in which the value of art is tied to its ability to capture and hold public attention, in an already saturated media landscape.
Herbert A. Simon, founding figure of artificial intelligence, and Michael Goldhaber, theoretical physicist, warned us about this decades ago, identifying a shift from a material-based economy to one driven by attention (Pedro de Marcos, 2020). Art wasn't immune to this change.

In a world where we are all living in a constant rollercoaster of distractions, and our attention spans are shrinking, the rise of interactive art that prioritises shareability is telling.
A Poem Booth that is designed to produce *instagrammable* outputs feels like the evolution of what immersive artistic experiences are — where the interactive element is the focal point, for the individual, but to become then a tool for content creation, resharing, commodification.

If the Poem Booth were presented as a conceptual art piece, intended to provoke discussion, it might have worked really well. But that's not the case.

The Poem Booth is a product masked as an art piece installation, and that's even more clear when the developer team published how they are exploring two future directions: creating a Poem Booth for public spaces and developing a booth specifically for children.
When looking at The Poem Booth we see how, particularly children, found it "addictive" (VOUW, 2024). The first could be even fine for me, when we look at it just as an advertisement tool, the second just sounds dystopian.

When it comes to AI tools as educational I cannot stop to feel concerned. The ease with which the booth generates the poems could devalue the creative process that is the core of poetry, as that of many other art forms. This way the craft and importance of personal expression would be lost. It would be another product, telling children how we are all *just* consumers, spectators.

I hope that in the future developments of this project, AI will at least be integrated into the classroom thoughtfully, giving the opportunity to children to use it as a tool of discussion, ethical implications, creativity, feelings. Giving voice to the main issues concerning labour, how poetry is an inherently human activity, and how important is agency.

In the education sphere various projects are working on how to let people familiarise with AI, for both students and teachers. This, to foster critical thinking, and societal impact of AI technologies, while not banning AI tools, but searching for harmony. Some examples in the EU landscape are "I'm not a robot", "Generation AI", "AI4T", "AI4STEM" (European School Education Platform, EU Commission, 2024). I don't think it will be easy for teachers to get the grip on new kinds of tools before their pupils. It was never like that, ever. The discussions around the integration of AI into teaching methodologies is anyway important to understand how urgent it is to set boundaries, around what will be accepted as right and wrong in the educational setting concerning AI implementation.

Library: PyTorch
Mode: QRNN

Embedding size: 400
Hidden Layers: 1550
Batch size: 20
Epoch: 478
Loss: 3.62
Perplexity: 37.16

Temperature range: 0.75 to 1.0

Me — I See A Bird

Away for seven years from home,
she became a blue tree.

Lost, bent and breathing,
inside the sea.

She was half milk, enduring
the electric eye.

A frown of water in the throat. Urges
eligible for scurrying.

Bellies filled with bottles
of granite gender? Wrack

– from within rotating ekphrasis. A sweet-smelling
cinnamon snowfield soaking fingers in smoke.

- One of the latest Poem Booth got implemented with a photo printer. This is one of the output I got
- Technical information, part of every volume introduction of ReRites
- Screenshot of 'May – I see A Bird' from ReRites february 2018, pag 71 of vol 10

Another fundamental question arises thanks to The Poem Booth: does poetry generated in seconds, without human intention, qualify as real poetry?

Malthe Stavning Erslev, researcher of the Digital Aesthetics Research Center at the Aarhus University, introduces an important concept to help us navigate this new space: the "poetics of misrepresentation" (2023).

Erslev argues that machine learning models both represent and misrepresent their training data. What this means is that the output of the models is not a direct representation of the data, it is just a patterned remix that creates something new while still being dependent on past poetic works. The “poetic of misrepresentation” describes how the machine learning models used in AI generated literature, exists in a paradoxical state.

Rather than viewing AI generated poetry as authentic or inauthentic, we might better understand it as living in a liminal space, an in-between state between representation and misrepresentation, between mechanical reproduction and creative expression. This liminality might not be a weakness, it could be AI poetry's most significant contribution to the evolution of poetic expression.

Poetry is a liminal language too. It blooms thanks to those pauses between words, in the silences beyond the lines, over any structured form.
It exists between clarity and ambiguity, between direct and metaphorical statements.
Poetic language is inherently fluid and multivalent, it is a cozy space that offers both comfort and challenge. This flexibility opens for multiple interpretations, encouraging readers to engage with the text, while not consuming it in a passive way. AI doesn’t need to undermine all this.

The Poem Booth is the perfect example that shows how artificial intelligence is being used to prioritise immediate interactivity and mass appeal over intentionality. It reveals how creative practices are adapted to fit the *attention economy*.

But not all AI driven projects follow the same trajectory.

Some instead search to engage with AI critically, using it as a material for new artistic explorations rather than a shortcut to content creation. ReRites, the perfect example of this difference.

Through the comparison between the Poem Booth and ReRites, we can see how the integration of AI can either undermine the human aspect of poetry by focusing on outputs, or preserve it by shifting emphasis on the reflective process of the making, and the searching of meaning.

ReRites is a year long project developed by David Dhave Johnson, in which the artist collaborated with a model built by himself. He used three main machine learning libraries: TensorFlow, PyTorch and AWSD, "models were trained on a customised corpus of 600,000 lines of poetry ranging from the romantic epoch to the 20th century avant garde" (Johnston, D.).

Unlike projects that treat AI as a shortcut, Johnson used it as a tool to generate raw material, which then required direct human intervention, reflection, and editing. Each day, the artist would rearrange, and rewrite the machine generated outputs, engaging in an intensive curatorial process. In this way, ReRites shifts the emphasis away from the speed of the generative process, toward the slow labour of fixing, adjusting. As a sculptor, Johnson was polishing the data.

The project demonstrates that AI, when thoughtfully integrated, can be used not to replace human creativity, but to deepen its fundamental processes.
This approach highlights an important distinction: while AI technologies offer new tools for artistic practice, they do not erase the need for human intention, and care. In contrast to models that position AI as a means to democratise creativity by making it faster or more accessible, ReRites shows how genuine artistic creation remains still tied to emotionally invested processes.

Democratisation and labour

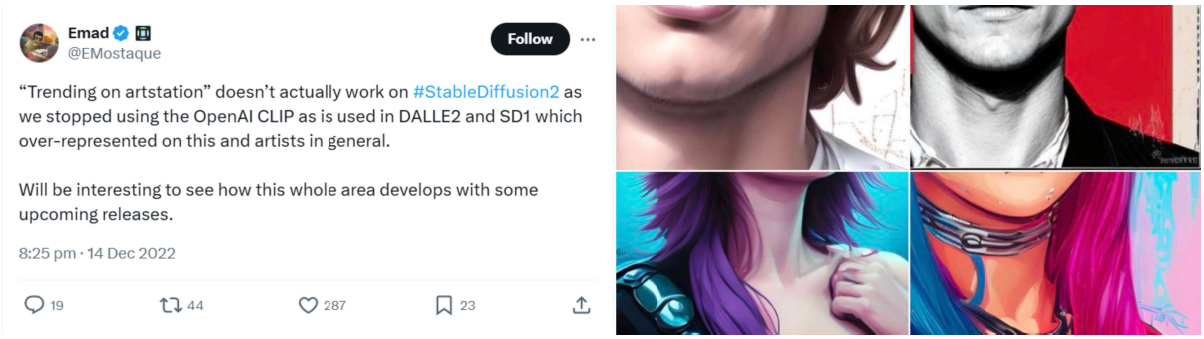
While projects like the Poetry Booth often claim to “democratise” poetry by making it more accessible to broader audiences, such narratives seem to hide more complex structural issues. As Filimowicz (2023) argues, what is framed as democratisation may instead reinforce already existing hierarchies and conceal invisible forms of labour.

There are machines that bake perfect cakes, mass produced, ready for sale. Yet people bake cakes at home, and there are even bakeries selling artisanal cakes for premium prices.
This doesn’t prove automation democratises creativity, this to me speaks loud about privilege.

To me, AI won’t democratise art or poetry. Instead, it might deepen existing differences, highlighting the privileges of those who can afford the luxury of the human made. While others will be left with the automated versions, unable to choose differently.

In the art environments the usage of AI started becoming exponentially controversial from the 2022 onward, because of the rise of models like Stable Diffusion, MidJourney and DALL-E. These AI models were, and still are, trained on massive datasets scraped from the internet, that includes copyrighted works from artists who never gave permission nor were ever compensated (Salvaggio, 2024). One case in particular — Stable Diffusion and digital art platforms, in the summer of 2022 — was one of the main sparks that started the controversy.

Stable diffusion is an open source image synthesis model that works by text prompts. ArtStation is one of the most active digital art platforms on the internet, followed by DeviantArt. After Stable Diffusion's Discord version opened to the public, it didn't take long for users to discover that adding "trending on ArtStation" to the prompt was great to generate amazing artworks. Essentially, using ArtStation artists' styles without permission.



- Emad Mostaque, former CEO of Stability AI, notifying how they tried to fix the matter (@EMostaque, 14 Dec 2022, X) The data are likely to still be included in the new datasets.
- Lensa, an Ai portrait app launched in 2018, uses Stable Diffusion. Its portraits seem to hold the artist's signatures, visibly mangled (@LaurynIpsum, 6 Dec 2022, X)

This event brought massive online protests as art platforms became flooded by a massive influx of AI generated content, "Frankenstein version" of famous artists' works.
Everybody was talking about it, in any artistic circle. Art universities were bursting with agitation. Many were artists' initiatives that tried to ban AI products to be sold on popular art social websites. I got disillusioned. Scrolling, being a witness of never ending online fights, culminated in me in an overwhelming feeling of doom.
What I was thinking was: AI will take a piece of the cake, of the market, one way or another, and independent artists and freelancers will be the first to fall.

My initial dismissal of the matter wasn't to disregard artists' resistance. It was just a personal response to the bitterness of reality. I regret it.
Throughout history, technology has repeatedly disrupted labour struggle and markets, despite workers' opposition (Caprettini, Joachim, 2018). Resistance has rarely succeeded in stopping

technological advancement entirely — something that artists seemed to want to achieve online. That's why, in the short term, I still believe freelancer artists, those who found freedom and new opportunities through internet platforms, will face the heaviest pressure. This doesn't mean that protests against AI models' usage, calling out those who profit from it, and demanding clearer regulatory policies is futile.

During the Industrial revolution, skilled artisan workers destroyed machinery they believed was threatening their livelihood (Perrigo, 2023), challenging the narrative that viewed technological progress as unquestionable good. Technological disruption is never neutral; it always involves power dynamics, and redistribution of agency. The historical lesson from moments like the Luddite revolt or the computer revolution isn't that resistance is futile, but that technological transitions are moments of extremely complex negotiation, and balance.

The artists protesting the AI flood on creative social media platforms were not afraid of change; they were vocalising legitimate concerns about the fundamental conditions of artistic production and their labour.

The current moment, to me, presents a new challenge. AI cannot be physically destroyed like industrial machinery. This technological landscape, where we are all trying not to drown, demands a more nuanced approach to resistance. Understanding how to address the current development of this technology is a call, for artists in this case, to become even more aware of what is going on in the *black box* that AI is. If possible, find new ways of *destroying the machinery.*

In the meantime, artists fought online. The response of artistic communities and platforms got intricate:

ArtStation took a measured approach. In 2022 they updated their policy to prohibit AI tools to use the images that were on their website, offering artists to opt out of AI training (ArtStation, 2024).
DeviantArt did the same, while adding a new tool to their platform: DreamUp.
DreamUp was presented as the perfect solution to the problem, being an internal AI art generator tool, able to follow the rules of the platform (Artnet News, 2022).
Meanwhile, more radical spaces emerged, like Artgram, explicitly dedicated to human created art.

While the web is being flooded by AI, artists, publishers, and authors are drowning corporations with class action suits. This has been going on for years, and many times the AI companies have won due to lack of proper regulations, and laws.

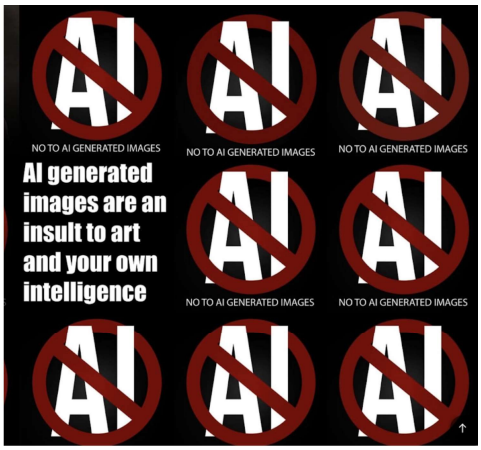
In Europe, the newest regulatory set of laws on the matter is the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act). This legislation asks AI systems, including the generative ones, to operate in accordance with EU copyright rules (European Union, 2024). This is surely a step forward.

From my perspective, in the context of AI and art, resistance is not about preventing technological development. Rather, it is about ensuring that this development happens in a way that preserves human agency, compensates all labour involved in the creative industries fairly, and maintains value to human creativity.

Looking at how AI is disrupting the artistic community online, knowing that at times digital art is not even considered art, I ask myself how will AI reshape our conception of art, again? How will it change the intrinsic cultural value we give to it?

The contemporary concept of artistic worth and authorship is relatively recent in human history. Before the Renaissance, art was an artisan's craft, a functional activity more than an individualistic one. Artists, as we understand them today, didn't exist at all. Artisans were skilled workers following commissions for rich patrons and communities. They didn't hold any concept like modern copyright or ownership. The figure of the artist appeared thanks to Renaissance humanism's elevation of individual creativity. Seeing the signature of the artist on a piece of art became the norm just in the last centuries (Pfeiffer, 2022).

One important artistic figure that used his signature, "AD", as a form of *branding* was Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), the German graphic master.



- Dürer print from the Life of the Virgin series, *Joachim and the Angel* (1503–04). Beside the copy made by Raimondi (1506), who stole his monogram too.
- *Ban AI* posts flooding the web, ArtStation (2022)

Albrecht Dürer was one of the first artists to face issues related to copyright and intellectual property for the visual arts, centuries before modern copyright laws existed. In 1506 the artist visited the city of Venice, where he filed one of the first legal complaints against the reproduction

of his own engravings by a local Italian artist, Raimondi. It was one of the first recorded legal battles over artistic ownership. It showed how artists were beginning to claim property rights over their work. Dürer wasn't a local, for this reason, the Nordic artist didn't get out much from his complaint, apart from forcing Raimondi to stop using his monogram. However, he did obtain the printing privilege from the Emperor Maximilian I, in Germany, a much more powerful act to protect the master's production (Koerner, 2002), and a wonderful step toward a copyright regulation.

Without this change of thought and the beginning of recognition of artists, such as Dürer, the artist would have remained anonymous and there would have been no need for copyright.
It is this change in the way people viewed the artists that could be considered as one of the most important events that shaped the modern concept of copyright (Marzo Magno, 2019).

For writers, the copyright regulation in Europe followed a similar path, as that for visual arts.
It didn't emerge until the early printing and monopoly control of the printing press, in the 15th century. This was the historical shift that made the authorities regulate printing, and with it, ownership of text production. The first copyright law was the Statute of Anne (1710) that ended the control of the state (UK) over publishing and gave the authors the right to profit.

Electronic literature and the evolution of poetry

Like many other art forms, poetry has evolved alongside human societal changes.

Poetry's origin lies in rhythm and word patterns, in its ritualistic and religious purpose.
In its early forms, poetry was less about individual expression of the self and more about serving communal functions. The poet was an artisan, fulfilling societal needs, through structures and strict forms reflecting the societies that they came from.

Examples include the Greek rhapsodes: professional performers that recited epic poems like the Iliad or Odyssey. They were skilled craftsmen who performed extensive oral traditions, preserving collective cultural memory and narratives (Connors, 1986).
Similarly did the ancient Mesopotamian bards, considered historical mediators too. Their epic of Gilgamesh was passed on through generations of storytellers (George, 2007).
It's thanks to ancient cultures that we now still are familiar with poetic structures.

A significant shift in western poetics began with a gradual fusion of poetry and philosophical thought, a process George Steiner explores in The Poetry of the Thought (2011).
In his analysis Steiner traced the evolution of the role of poetry back from ancient Greece through the Enlightenment to the modern era, getting more and more tied indissolubly into modernity, bearing the weight of the metaphysical. Poets became figures of interiority, searching for reason, truth, morale. This way the poet emerged as an individual figure, one human able to synthesise the rational and irritation, the physical and abstract.

William Blake was one of the most influential western artists of the Romantic era, who brought to light the concept of the "poetic genius", the aesthete, the only one that was able to create, understand poetry, and truth, viscerally.
His ideas revived earlier traditions: just as Vasari described artists as being "possessed" by god, Blake saw poets in contact with the muses (Blake, 1788).

Then, cultivating beauty became of incredible importance. Beauty, without a didactic purpose. "A poem and nothing more, a poem written solely for the poem's sake" (Poe, 1850) became the mantra of artistic movements such as Decadentism, Transcendentalism and, later, Symbolism.

The two world wars brought a deep desire to break away from old artistic traditions.
Modernism, Futurism, Avant-garde. Everything was about freedom.
Freedom to create new languages, expressions, experiments; to destroy old systems in favour of new ones. Poetry didn't run away from this revolution; it welcomed new syntax, punctuation, metrics, visual and sound experimentations. Beauty was dead.

By the early 20th century, honesty was the only way to show the truth. Movements like the Acmeist and Imagists, were repelled by any artistic norms and conventions.
Poetry became a tool for dissidents, a political weapon, to provoke, make the masses react. Nuyorican poets of the 80' used humour and rage, to expose social injustices, discrimination, and colonialism, giving rise to poetry slams and open mics (Noel, 2014).

After the 80', many new movements emerged. They stopped gradually to refuse old traditions and aesthetic rules, deciding on using them again to create new forms of poetry.

In the Soviet Union, the Moscow Conceptualists and Materialists revived the metaphor, as a way of subversion (Nicholas, 2022). The same happened in the US, with New Formalism promoting a return to metrical and rhymed verses, responding to the popularity of the new dominant free verse poetry (Academy of American poets, 2014). As poet A. E. Stallings put it, they were "against the false dichotomy of free verse = democracy" (Stallings, 2010).

With the blooming of new technologies, poetry has entered a new exciting phase: Poelectics (Petrucci, 2006). All kinds of styles, subjects, forms, started boiling together in the same pot. The boundaries dissolved into a fluid artistic landscape thriving on the www.

Electronic literature was the product of this shift, a fascinating intersection of computation and creativity. Thanks to E-literature we can dissolve that surprise effect when we see AI models creating stanzas today. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and algorithmic processes have long been core aspect of electronic literature.

The first recognised e-lit work, Christopher Strachey's Love Letters (1952), is one
of the earliest examples of computational art ever made. This pioneering algorithmic experiment, which wasn't considered an artwork, demonstrated how machines started to get into the creative expression discourse.

Balestrini writes in "Language and Opposition": "From here emerges the idea of poetry...
closer to the articulation of emotion and thought in language, still a confused and bubbling expression, bearing the signs of detachment from the mental state, of fusion not completely achieved with the verbal state... And finally, it will no longer be thought and emotion transmitted through language, but language itself generating a new and unrepeatable Meaning".

Chaos and randomness were fundamental ingredients for many projects that were challenging the stiff boundaries between the arts and the sciences, but one art movement in particular was against this mindset, Oulipo.

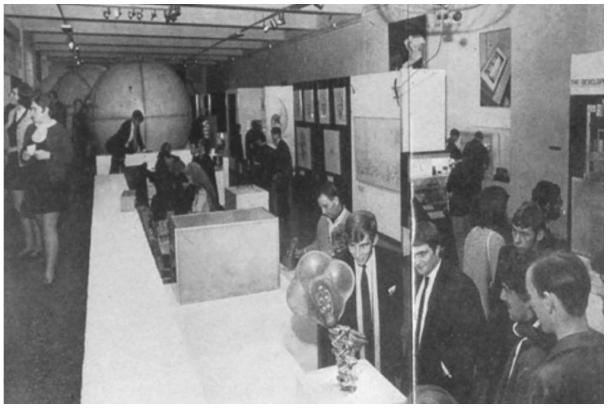
Oulipo, founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, "rejects spontaneous chance and the subconscious as source of literary creativity" (Poetry Foundation), against what then Dada and Surrealism were standing for. The group was about systematic, restricting constraints as creative tools. They were, and are, applying mathematical structures, formal rules, and algorithmic processes to generate new literary outputs. Notable Oulipo writers include Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, Raymond Queneau, Jean Lescure, and Anne Garreta. The influence of the movement extends into experimental literature, as we know it today.

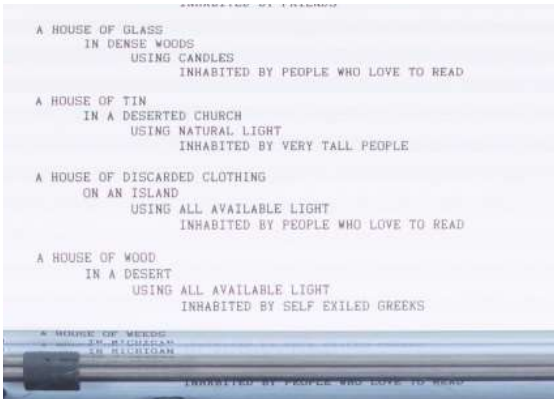
The first time all projects engaging with computational techniques were brought together, in the same curated space, was for the Cybernetic Serendipity exhibition, in 1968.
It was a groundbreaking international exhibition of computer art, held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, that aimed to bring attention to computer aided creative activities. The exhibition included art, music, poetry, dance, sculpture and animation.

A dedicated section of the exhibition was focused on the computer's ability to generate text, essays and poetry. This part of the showcase featured works by pioneers artists such as Allison Knowles and James Tenney, Marc Adrian, the Cambridge Language Research Unit's Margaret Masterman and Robin McKinnon Wood, Nanni Balestrini, Edwin Morgan, Jean A. Baudot, and E. Mendoza.

Among the presented projects, one of the most well known pieces is the House of Dust, one of the most influential examples of computer generated poetry. It was developed in 1967 by Alison Knowles, in collaboration with James Tenney.

The generator consists of the phrase "a house of" followed by a randomized sequence of 1) a material, 2) a site or situation, a light source, and 3) a category of inhabitants taken from four distinct lists. All variations of the poem together totaled more than 10,000 quatrain possibilities. The generated poem was then translated into a physical structure in 1968, in Chelsea, New York. As a Fluxus art piece, House of Dust plays with possibilities, chances, arbitrariness of language, randomness, performance. The collaboration between the artists and the program shows how words can find different meaning thanks to different relationships structures and contexts.





- Cybernetic Serendipity, 1968, exhibition view (credit: Internationales Performance Festival, Vienna)
- Example of output of House of Dust (credit: Musée d'art moderne, Saint-Étienne)

What's extremely intriguining about electronic literature is howcomputational methods are used in combination with the authors' experience, allowing for more human intent to enter the picture. It's not just about the algorithm or the output text, but how the artist/researcher interact with them.

A project I found extremely interesting in this sense is the AI Literary Review.

It is a a non-profit project that aims to "document and support the development of poetry in a post-GenAI world". The journal prioritises poems that engage playfully with GenAI tools, to produce "idiosyncratic poems". This project presents a fresh hopeful vision of how collaboration between AI tools and humans could evolve in the poetic environment.

Dan Power, the founder of the online publication, describes it as “rewilding our language, and steering it away from total automation” suggesting an exciting new direction for post internet poetry. The AI Literary Review confronts AI directly.

Curating AI output is the right way to keep human authorship and experience alive: "AI should be a tool we can either use or not use, rather than something that eclipses us... the journal doesn't just publish poems, but also a brief description of what software was used and how it was used in the creative process" (Bedford, 2024).

Contemporary artists, poets and scholars that are involved in electronic literature today are Allison Parrish, Johanna Drucker, Kyle Booten, Stephanie Strickland, John Cayley, Lai-Tze Fan, Nick Montfort, Mairéad Byrne, Chris Funkhouser and many more.

One challenge that this kind of electronic literature projects are facing is their immateriality.
Many incredible pieces from the 1950s to the 1980s exist now only in fragmented documentation or have already been lost. This highlights how important contemporary archiving practices are. Despite the seemingly immaterial nature, e-lit projects need conservation. In today’s artistic space, electronic literature didn’t stop evolving, its expansion opened up new territories through hypertexts, social networks, games.
There are indeed organisations and museums that are archiving what we still didn’t already lose in the folds of time (NEXT in Vancouver, Museum of digital literature in Detmold, LabEL in the KBR museum in Bruxelles), but looking at the amount of data that we are collectively uploading on the web, and the fact those data is uploaded on clouds and platforms, we see many more problems in the horizon.

What brings me to tears is the fact that electronic iterature is still lacking its worthy recognition. As I am exploring more formal and established poetry environment, I am getting stuck by how people are not even aware of e-lit. Even if it’s not a new artistic development, despite how relevant it is, as a bridge between artistic tradition and new technologies, electronic literature has yet to secure a space for itself into mainstream institutions. It is often overlooked, surely in spaces where literature is glorified and static.

My hope, and one of the reason I’ve explored the history of electronic literature in this thesis, is that the current AI boom will move people to a re evaluation of these earlies form of algorithmical literature. I wanted to understand if other artists had already experimented with machine learning, automation, long before tools like chatgpt surfaced.

What I found out is that e-lit was always there.
With this in mind, I believe it deserves to be seen not only as relevant but as foundational, as a precursor of all Poetry Booth that could emerge, and an example that AI can used differently.

Machine authorship and mimesis

Erslev's (2023) concept of *machine mimesis* offers a good insight into the evolution of the relationship between human and artificial creativity. AI is becoming increasingly better at replicating human writing styles, an interesting shift occurs here: humans are beginning to mimic AI back. As in a recursive loop, we are returning back to machines. If we cannot find a way to make them think for real, then we can attempt to bridge that gap ourselves.

There are many projects that play on this recursive relationship through parody.
Like in the case of Keaton Patti's Olive Garden tweet, which adopts a "botesque" style.

- Keaton Patti project posted (@KeatonPatti, X, 2018)

The audience here recognised that the author is using an awkward style of writing, on purpose, interpreting a bot. What's interesting is how this weirdish awkward style is what we expect from AI generated text and for this reason we won't expect this from a human.
At the same time many researches, including the one made by Porter and Machery (2024), show that audiences tend often to prefer machine generated poetry to human written verses. This preference appears to come from AI's algorithmic tendency to select the most accessible and popular word combinations, contrasting human poetry's inclination to complexity, metaphysical, often cryptic expressions and ways.

This distinction shows a main difference in intention: while AI is optimised for patterns and probabilities, human poetry often searches to challenge conventional thinking and open new ways for understanding reality, and explaining emotions.

Meanwhile, we, humans, are the ones using AI to produce scientific and humanistic papers, cuisine blog entries, emails, and thesis summaries. AI generated content is infiltrating academic writing,

professional communication and creative expression, making the boundary between human and machine text extremely porous.

Language has been affected. The AI lingo is then seeping into the everyday vocabulary. There are numerous studies that show how word frequencies in human spoken communication did begin to shift, after the release of accessible AI tools. Human language patterns are being influenced by the interaction with AI systems (Yakura, 2024). While AI detection tools exist, their reliability remains unsure because of machine mimesis. This shows us how machine learning is not a one way process, humans are imitating the AI, consciously and unconsciously.

The intersection of machine learning and human creativity raises fundamental questions about the nature of artistic intention, even human intention. The surfacing of AI generated poetry presents what Erslev (2023) describes as a paradox: these works can follow literary structures while lacking human intention, questioning traditional metrics of artistic authenticity.

Historically, poetry is often seen as a deeply intimate form of expression. Historically the value of the medium has been tied to the poet's intent, experience and craft. When the author spot is left vacant some complications could emerge, not just for poetry but all forms of communication.

Poetry is typically understood as a dialogue between the reader and the poet's personal perspective, AI generated poetry challenges this vision of it by eliminating the intent of the author. Many argue that this lack of human intention and personal connection may produce aesthetically nice patterns yes, but empty verses. Is creative expression just a sophisticated form of pattern recognition, or does it require something more fundamentally human?

Roland Barthes' concept of *the death of the author* (1977) in this context takes on new value.
While Barthes argued that meaning is shaped by the reader rather than the author's intentions, AI generated poetry pushes this principle to its extreme. This raises complex questions about ownership and originality: Who can claim authorship of an AI generated poem? Does this ownership belong to the developers, the AI system itself with its embodiment problem, or the countless poets whose works formed the training data?

Rather than finding a way to categorise AI generated works as either authentic or inauthentic, it may be more productive to recognise that the concept of art is not a monolith.
Art is redefined constantly by human evolution, social and political changes.

The core is how we perceive AI. According to Rozental, van Dartel, and de Rooij (2025), artists who work with AI are engaging not just with a tool, but with a responsive material, a dynamic system that shapes and is shaped by human interaction. They describe it as *creative thinging*: a process

where meaning is produced by a reciprocal action between human and the material, in this case algorithms (Rozental, van Dartel, de Rooji, 2025).

Art mirrors societies, it mirrors us. AI generated poetry and art represent not a threat to human creativity but a new chapter in the ongoing and neverending evolution of artistic expression.

Conclusion

We are at a technological crossroad.

An optimistic vision sees AI as a new spark for poetic innovation. In this version of the future, AI will be used to create collaborative tools that help human creativity, rather than replace it.
Technology could help break through creative blocks, suggest unexpected combinations, or even help poets understand their own patterns and styles.
Poets might use AI to explore new forms of expression, leading to new poetic forms, combining the pattern recognition capabilities of AI with human emotional intelligence and experience. This approach prompts a symbiotic relationship, one in which artists are not overshadowed by technology. In this way instead of seeing art as purely human, we would become to recognise the potential of creative collaboration involving human intellect and machine processing.

A disillusioned vision shows a darker future. AI's effortlessness at generating outputs might threaten the poetic world with a sea of content. This over-saturation could devalue poetry, reducing it from an art form to a commodity. The risk is homogenisation, as AI models are trained on similar datasets, could lead to increasingly uniform output. A standardisation of poetic expression could bring less diversity and innovation.

The ease with which society is accepting AI's role in creative tasks reveals the truth about how we value artistic labor. Despite a brief fraction of time during Covid 19, when artists got some attention (Ascolani, et al, 2020), creative professions have long been devalued, as useless, non productive, in our overwhelming efficiency driven world. The desire to replace artists with AI systems shows how society has devalued any form of labour that is taking advantage of.

The promise that automation will liberate workers is clearly a lie. The system that moves the strings requires devalued labor to function. It needs oppression to survive.
Just as cleaning work is often dismissed as low value despite its essential nature, artistic work is increasingly seen as replaceable by automation, as seen not essential.
Everybody is disposable.

As the boundaries between human and machine creation become increasingly blurred, we must reconsider what makes poetry and other artistic expressions meaningful.

Will the emphasis shift from individual expression to collaborative creation?
The value of poetry, and poetry as a medium, might not lie anymore in its author, but just on the impact on the readers. The role of the human poet might transform completely, being annihilated by their creation, separating the art from the artist might not be a problem anymore. The intrinsic value of the art would be the primary focal point.

Poets might focus on more experimental forms, searching for imperfections, creating something that couldn't be made by an algorithm to prove how creativity lies in resistance. Even new languages could be born from the desire of artists to be disconnected from the central consciousness illusion that AI is bringing to the table, calling on a renewal of individual creative agency.

Many art forms are approaching AI as a tool to deal with contemporary battles, poetry could take the same route thanks to its adaptability.

- The Manifesto collection, from Cap_able, uses patterns developed by AI algorithms to confuse facial recognition software and protect the wearer's privacy. Showing how AI generative technologies can be used for resistance purposes (Bandara, PetaPixel, 2023)
- In the generative images context, we are seeing examples such as Boring Reality LoRa, a model designed to enhance realism of images generated by Stable Diffusion, that can replicate imperfections (HuggingFace/Civitai, 2024).
- Poetry ebook sold on amazon

The key is balance.

Using AI tools while preserving the human aspect of poetic creation seems difficult, but possible. AI won't disappear at all soon, nor that corporations would ever be interested in making it disappear for the sake of creative expression. This new artistic revolution could even bring much more desire by the individual artist to become more aware of technology than before.

Photography presented itself as an existential enemy to figurative painting.
The role of painting in culture changed completely, as a medium, its core subjects and value were completely reshaped. There are always new mediums that threaten, that open the door and shout that they arrived.
Writing, as an artistic act, was less affected by cameras, film, personal computers, but now a new shiny machine that can put together words that can replicate the core functions of a writer is showing up. And this is disturbing. It is disturbing until you scratch the surface enough to understand it.

The very definition of poetry may then evolve. As it will for art.

Art breathes innovation, as well as technology, and is shaped in the wonderful chaos of the present. As Henry Oliver, writer and speaker, said in his debate with Sam Khan, writer and producer, Ai and the future of literature "(AI) might be terrible, it might not be our taste, it might not benefit us or people like us. It still might produce great art. It certainly will have to be incorporated into many, many aspects of literature" (Oliver, Khan 2025).

The way we understand art, the fact we are exploiting art as a product, for consumption, is a result of the society we are currently living in. Creativity will always run underground, it will always be there, even if someone, someone human, will create tools that change or undermine creativity for the sake of profit.

Ai is and will be slashing our current beliefs on many things, including artistic forms. From a democratic perspective it's difficult to argue that AI tools will give the freedom to people who otherwise wouldn't be able to, to express themself. But, to let AI directly be the one working on the artistic processes would be to corrode what the process is about, that is again self exploration and self expression.
For this same reason AI will be used, again, in processes of discovery. Who knows what's coming now? What AI in creative writing forms, in poetry, can do right now, is helping people think about what writing really is, what is the core of poetry for instance, in the same way new mediums helped artists rethink previous mediums.

As we move looking at the future, the question may not be whether AI will change poetry, it is already doing it.

The real question is: **how will we, as poets, readers, and cultural participants, shape that change?**

AI is challenging our beliefs about authorship and creativity, but it also opening space for a new focus on agency. Instead of being passive consumers, we have the power, and responsibility, to guide how poetry and artistic practices evolve. Doing so, we reaffirm that poetry is not about generating language, but exploring what it means to be human, even in the age of the AI.

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Colophon

Typeface: Literata, Alegreya

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