# The Author and Its Forms in the Digital Age: From Word to ChatGPT

**Marek Debnár**[1]

**Gabriela Sedmáková**[2]

[1]*Assoc. Prof., Department of Journalism and New Media, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Nitra, Slovakia*
[2]*Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland*

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***Abstract***

*In recent years, both public and academic interest has increasingly turned toward artificial intelligence (AI) and the literature generated by computational language models. This article examines the question of authorship in relation to such models - whether and in what form authorship can be attributed to them. To address this issue, the article first explores the history of electronic writing and the emergence of discourses that, despite originating in the pre-digital era, remain relevant today. Beyond tracing the metamorphosis of the author's role and the reader's position, the article focuses on how the dynamics of these relationships are reshaped by AI-driven language models - highlighting both the dangers and opportunities they present for texts, their creators, and their recipients. Finally, the article addresses the challenges that arise when the concepts of originality and authenticity - traditionally associated exclusively with human creativity and consciousness - are applied to our understanding of AI-generated literature.*

***Keywords:*** ***author, authorship, digital era, AI-generated literature, ChatGPT***

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, literature created – or, more precisely, generated (let us provisionally adopt these terms in place of the theoretically more complex notion of *writing*) – by computational language models has gradually entered both scholarly and public discourse. Within the Slovak context, broader public attention was drawn to the poetry collection *Výsledky vzniku* [*Results of Emergence*, 2020] by Liza Gennart, the name given to a neural-network-based poetic system developed by the Slovak artists and scholars Zuzana Husárová and Ľubomír Panák. The system generated poetry using GPT-2, a language model originally pre-trained predominantly on English-language web texts and subsequently fine-tuned by its developers on a large, purpose-built corpus of Slovak literary works, especially contemporary poetry. This corpus incorporated digitized publications and journal issues provided by Slovak publishers and editors, together with relevant openly accessible works from the *Zlatý fond* digital collection. Through this additional training, the model learned statistical patterns associated with the Slovak language and Slovak poetic discourse. According to the creators' account, the source works were used as training material rather than inserted or reproduced directly in the resulting collection,

while the words constituting the generated poems were produced by the neural network itself (Gennart, 2020, 113-115). This description nevertheless reveals that the project cannot be reduced either to the autonomous activity of a machine or to the conventional authorship of its human developers: Husárová and Panák designed the process, assembled and curated the training corpus, and fine-tuned the model, whereas the model generated the linguistic sequences from which the poetic work emerged. The collection was awarded the *Zlatá vlna* [*Golden Wave*], a prize aspiring to the status of a national poetry award, which increased its visibility among a wider readership and encouraged substantial theoretical and critical engagement with both the work and the problem of its authorship. While similar projects had already been emerging in Slovakia and, even more so, abroad - not limited to the domain of poetry (notable examples include the Digital Writer and Digital Philosopher projects in the neighbouring Czech Republic (https://www.mujrozhlas.cz/digitalni-spisovatel and https://digitalnifilosof.cz) - it was the launch of ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, that sparked global attention and wide-ranging discussion in recent years. This application made advanced multilingual language models based on GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 technology accessible to the general public. The central question addressed in the following text is whether - and in what form - such a language model can be understood to represent *authorship*.

## 2. A Brief History of Writing in the Electronic Age

When the first personal computers appeared several decades ago, most writers and scholars in the humanities regarded them as little more than intelligent typewriters. The ability to edit text directly on a screen - before it materialized in physical form on a printed page - was seen as a minor miracle and a significant simplification of the process of producing a final version of a text. This was the era of 3½-inch floppy disks, now remembered primarily through the icon representing the “save” function in word processors. Today’s generation of students often does not even know that floppy disks once existed. They recognize the floppy disk icon (a kind of digital fossil) solely as a symbol for saving a file, unaware of its deeper digital archaeology.

Another important milestone was the connection of computers to the internet. This development led not only to the obsolescence of floppy disks - since files no longer needed to be physically transferred and could instead be sent via email - but also introduced unprecedented possibilities for rapid and borderless communication. We now live in an era in which the initial excitement over the seemingly limitless freedom of expression in digital space has largely faded, replaced by pressing societal debates over regulation and the boundaries of digital communication.

The floppy disk icon may also be read as a trace of the rapid development of computers and information technologies, which, in just a few decades, have become an integral part of everyday life and an indispensable tool for both work and study. Most notably, the immediate accessibility of information and digital resources has permanently transformed how we communicate and understand the world.

This text does not aim to explore how the humanities, and literary studies in particular, have responded to these developments - this question is addressed elsewhere (See: Debnár, 2023, 48-56). Instead, the present text seeks to clarify the relationship between literature (or the humanities more broadly) and the most recent - and currently most consequential - technological shift: the public release of the ChatGPT language model (the first version was made publicly accessible on 30 November 2022).

## 3. ChatGPT as a Technological and Cultural Phenomenon

From a definitional perspective, ChatGPT is a Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) capable of communicating with humans - hence the term chat, which points to its primary function and its lineage from earlier so-called “chatbots” commonly found on websites. In its interaction with humans, ChatGPT employs a range of sophisticated machine learning tools and elements of artificial intelligence (AI). Unlike conventional search engines, ChatGPT does not retrieve answers from the internet in real time; rather, it draws upon a vast corpus of texts it has already been exposed to and - in a certain sense - "understood." These texts, which span a wide range of domains, were used to train the underlying model. This explains the first two letters of the acronym GPT: generative and pre-trained. The final letter, T for transformer, reflects the model’s function of transforming the input prompt into coherent and contextually relevant output.
The true wave of public attention around ChatGPT emerged in early 2023, sparking both enthusiasm and concern regarding its potential uses and the broader implications of artificial intelligence for humanity. Despite his critical stance, Noam Chomsky - father of generative grammar - captured the ambivalence of this moment in a New York Times article titled *The False Promise of ChatGPT*, where he remarked: “Jorge Luis Borges once wrote that to live in a time of great peril and promise is to experience tragedy and comedy with an imminent revelation of deeper understanding of ourselves

and the world. Today, our allegedly revolutionary advances in artificial intelligence are indeed cause for both concern and optimism." (Chomsky, 2023)

Chomsky is far from alone; increasing numbers of prominent intellectuals and artists around the world are speaking out about the rise of AI, while the field itself continues to evolve at an accelerating pace. Regardless of Chomsky's position, the tension he articulates raises several fundamental questions: Is optimism warranted because AI offers tools to address pressing human challenges? Or are fears justified that the most popular branch of AI - machine learning - undermines science and ethics by embedding flawed assumptions about language and knowledge into our technologies? Is what we are dealing with truly a form of intelligence? And, more fundamentally still: what is intelligence?

All of these lines of inquiry are valid and reflect a broader shift in paradigms (to borrow Thomas Kuhn's term) or epistemes (in the Foucauldian sense). However, the present discussion will focus on a more specific question: the act of writing - and by extension, reading - of generative texts. To better understand this phenomenon, it might be useful to consider a particular domain of generative AI's output: computer-generated poetry already mentioned in the introduction to this text. As Husárová and Pioreckỳ note, the earliest experiments in AI-generated poetry date back to the 1950s and 1960s - preceding, in fact, some of the foundational theories of Barthes and Foucault on authorship and discourse. Today's AI systems learn by processing vast amounts of data, including an extensive corpus of poetry, which serves not only as a linguistic reservoir but also as a training ground where AI refines its poetic by calculating the structures of probability (Pioreckỳ & Husárová, 2019, 146–148).

AI-generated poetry has become widely accessible online, but public fascination often centers less on the poetry itself and more on the questions it raises regarding authorship. Numerous quizzes and websites challenge readers to discern whether a poem is human- or AI-authored. As Husárová and Pioreckỳ note (Ibid., 149) - and as Porter and Machery's research further confirms; non-expert participants in an experiment were more likely to judge an AI-generated poem as human- authored than a poem that was actually written by a human (Porter & Machery, 2024, 8).

The cited findings suggest that non-expert readers may not always be able to identify whether a poem was generated by AI or written by a human based on textual features alone. These developments reflect broader transformations in digital education and pedagogical practices (Lesková et al., 2023, 326-327), as well as wider socio-cultural changes in digital and migratory contexts (Ortiz Cobo et al., 2024, 147-149) and ongoing technological shifts affecting learning environments and competencies (Alam et al., 2025, 168). The crucial difference, therefore, lies not in the text alone but in the concept of authorship. Therefore, while the remnants of human authorship can only be traced within the polyphony of sources from which AI derives its texts – and we may try to track these echoes of human influence in LLM-generated literature, in the end, what we are really searching for is an author.

## 4. Theoretical Background: Author, Reader, and Text

ChatGPT functions as a statistical tool trained on a vast quantity of data - billions, not merely millions, of texts. "Training" in this context means that the artificial intelligence is capable of identifying recurring patterns in this dataset, internalizing them, and subsequently generating a sequence token by token from probability distributions conditioned on the preceding context. It can also simulate a continuation in a particular style of writing, speech, or discourse. The texts that emerge from this process have no conventional author, but they are not plagiarized either. This raises a more specific, partial question: since ChatGPT produces texts, including literary ones such as poems or short stories, what kind of authorship - or author - are we dealing with, if any?

To address this question, we will draw primarily on developments in literary theory and philosophy that, more than at the time of their emergence, now resonate with the practices brought about by the digital age and exemplified by applications like ChatGPT. In the chapter "Intentio lectoris: The State of the Art" in *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990), Umberto Eco describes the state of scholarly inquiry into the concepts of *intentio auctoris* and *intentio lectoris*, introducing a variety of approaches to them. He distinguishes two dominant traditions: the semiotic-structuralist line, preceded by phenomenology and Russian formalism, and the hermeneutic tradition (See: Eco, 2004, 330) Both are important, particularly the latter in relation to the concept of the author. However, we must recognize that authorship in the digital networked environment operates under different principles than in the context of print literature - and therefore, interpretation must also proceed differently. I have already explored some of these theoretical questions in earlier texts published before the advent of ChatGPT, so here I will summarize only what is essential.

In the context of digital literature, we must first consider the authors of the application itself, then the authors of the texts it was trained on or that were created within it, and finally the authors of the commentary that circulates with and around the text in the networked environment. It is clear that the function of authorship in such a space differs

substantially from that in traditional print. For this reason, we will focus on the analysis of the concepts of author and reader as they were defined by the first theorist of digital literature, Jay David Bolter. Of particular interest here is Bolter's reflection on Roland Barthes' iconic 1968 essay *The Death of the Author*.

When Bolter references Barthes' metaphor of the "death of the author," he draws on two core ideas: (1) the notion of "death" as the cancellation of the author as the theoretical guarantor of a "true" interpretation - a notion historically rooted in the author–work relationship, which traditionally guided interpretation toward the discovery of a final meaning or a hidden authorial message; and (2) the notion of "writing": "by refusing to assign a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), literature becomes... counter-theological, properly revolutionary, since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, law." (Barthes, 1984, 68).

Theoreticians like Barthes and Foucault were instrumental in shifting the question from *Who is the author?* to *What is an author?* Yet neither likely imagined a world in which the author might vanish not just symbolically but materially - as in the case of AI-generated texts. Barthes rightly foresaw the transfer of interpretive power to the reader, while Foucault emphasized that the author-function is deeply entrenched in Western cultural tradition. Yet AI-generated literature brings their views into unexpected alignment: the reader needs the author, even - or especially - when the author no longer exists.

And while Bolter agrees with Barthes on the interpretive consequences of the author's "death," he diverges when it comes to the concept of writing. In the digital space, the network of intertextual relations operates differently than in the printed book. Writing, in this expanded sense, refers to the systematic freeing of meaning from a fixed origin - a process that, as we have seen, is tied to the disappearance of the author and the dissolution of authorial ownership of the text. It is thus no surprise that the author's role becomes that of a *bricoleur*, who reshuffles and juxtaposes various modes of writing: "if he wants to express himself, at least he should know that the inner 'thing' he wants to convey is itself nothing other than a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely" (Barthes, 2001, 11). Viewed from this angle, ChatGPT represents a culmination in the evolution of writing - language is no longer exclusively human. Authorship becomes dispersed, plural, and intermedial. This is not the end of literature, but its transformation into a new paradigm.

And yet, this new form of literature remains haunted by questions of origin. Readers continue to search for authorship - asking whether a poem is AI - or human-generated, wondering what (or who) exists at the far end of the communicative chain. In many cases, the reader initiates the text itself, prompting the generation with no expectation of interiority or intention. Here, authorship is inverted: the reader commands, the machine responds.

This inversion forces us to consider whether large language models might be viewed as "The Authors" - composite voices of all prior discourse, a kind of collective global author that speaks in dozens of languages, producing literature of influence (Bassett, 2024, 25). And yet, this figure is paradoxically powerless - activated only at the request of the reader, whose role as co-creator becomes ever more pronounced. Foucault's question, "What does it matter who speaks?" - posed via Beckett during the lecture in 1969 - takes on new complexity in this context. AI literature, however, responds in an almost Barthesian sense: *To whom does it matter who speaks?* And perhaps even more provocatively: *What does it matter who asks?*

As previously mentioned, the "death of the author" perspective collapses the distinction between reading and writing, leading to a transformed notion of the text - a generative text. If such a text is to have meaning, that meaning must reside in its destination. With the rise of generative literature, the reception-oriented approach - emphasized by Eco - has come to the forefront of literary theory. The reader is no longer merely a complement to the author, but "someone who deciphers each word in all its plurality, someone who continually replaces one meaning with another, who gathers at one point all the traces that constitute the text." (Barthes, 2001, 12). The reader here functions not as a subject who closes or finalizes the meaning of a text, but as a metaphor for an endless intertextual horizon. To call this function an "author" would be misleading.

This dispersal of authorship is what, in our view, has sparked current debates around ChatGPT and the future of literature. Writing in the digital environment may be defined as human post-production of texts generated by language models - bringing "writing" into inseparable proximity with reading. There exists an entire spectrum of positions that reflect the metamorphosis of the author - or what remains of them. No longer a specific creator or writer, the originator of a text may now be more accurately described as a "curator," an editor, or a mediator. Many authors have already been employing such techniques for some time. Collaborations between writers and language models open new creative possibilities and challenges. The traditional notion of the writer as sole originator is being reconfigured, allowing for new forms of creative agency. Authorship, curation, and editing become dynamic processes in which human and artificial intelligences mutually enrich one another. This redistribution of authorship should not automatically be interpreted as the

displacement of human creativity. Husárová and Panák explicitly reject such an interpretation when describing the purpose of the Liza Gennart project: "The encounter between artificial intelligence and literature does not bring about the dehumanization of written culture; on the contrary, it deepens the human self-reflection toward which literary creation essentially strives. Moreover, it may contribute to a certain humanization of new technologies through literature. In creating this work, our intention is not for poetry to be taken over by computer programs" (Gennart, 2020, 123). Their statement locates the project's intention not in the neural network but in the human framework within which its outputs are generated, selected, and presented. The model participates in textual generation, whereas the developers articulate the work's cultural purpose and authorize its publication. And while language models offer certain advantages, it remains essential to maintain a critical perspective and emphasize authenticity, originality, and textual quality.

## 5. Conclusion

The concept of "authorship" is undergoing a fundamental transformation in the digital age - particularly in connection with language models like ChatGPT - as the roles of author, reader, editor, and curator increasingly intersect and reorganize. In the era of generative AI, text production becomes not only a technological phenomenon but a cultural and philosophical one as well. It is therefore necessary to re-evaluate concepts such as originality, authenticity, and responsibility in literary production. Rather than focusing solely on the origin of the text - as has been customary - today's emphasis clearly shifts to its destination.

The new paradigm of authorship does not entail the definitive "death of the author," but rather their transformation into a function, process, or node - a cluster in a network of meanings. ChatGPT is not merely a technological tool; it is also a catalyst for this transformation: from writer to editor, from genius to curator, from original creator to mediator of meaning. Standing at the threshold of a new phase in literary culture, we face the challenge of how to ethically, aesthetically, and interpretively navigate this collaboration between human and machine. As A. Boden has argued, AI should not compete with human artists but rather assist us in better understanding the processes that lead to artistic creation (Piorecký & Husárová, 2019, 159-161). Literature does not disappear - it changes its form, and with it, our understanding of writing, reading, and creativity itself.

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The author(s) declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation, writing, analysis, or editing of this manuscript. The content of the manuscript was prepared entirely by the author(s).

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