

Beni-Suef University
Journal of the Faculty Of Al-Alsun



جامعة بني سويف
مجلة كلية الالسن

Romantic Poetics and the Limits of AI: Emotion, Affect, and the Algorithm

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Volume 5 - Issue 2

December 2025

Print ISSN2805-2633

Online ISSN2805-2641

"الشعر الرومانسي وحدود الذكاء الاصطناعي: العاطفة، التأثير، والخوارزم"

الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث القوة الشعورية المستمرة التي يتمتع بها الشعر الغنائي الرومانسي في عصر بات يتشكل بشكل متزايد بفعل الذكاء الاصطناعي وإنتاج النصوص الشعرية عبر الخوارزميات. ومن خلال التركيز على أعمال شعراء الرومانسية مثل ووردزورث وكيتس وبايرون، بالإضافة إلى شعراء معاصرين مثل أوشن فونغ، وكلوديا رانكين، وتريسي ك. سميث، وبلاستناد إلى أطر نظرية مستمدة من نظرية الأثر (Affect Theory)، وما بعد الإنسانية، وأركيولوجيا الوسائط، يستكشف هذا البحث التداخل بين التعبير العاطفي المجسد والمتجذر تاريخياً وبين العمليات التنبؤية للنماذج اللغوية الضخمة. ومن خلال قراءات تحليلية مقارنة، تشمل أمثلة من الشعر المُنتج بواسطة الذكاء الاصطناعي، يبرهن البحث على أن الشعر الرومانسي يركز على التفرد العاطفي، والخرق اللغوي، والحدة الذاتية، وهي عناصر تتمتع على الاستنساخ الخوارزمي. ومن خلال الانخراط النقدي مع منظرين مثل رولان بارت، وميشيل فوكو، و نانسي كاثرين هابليز، يفكك البحث الأبعاد الفلسفية والجمالية للكتابة الشعرية الآلية، ولا سيما مسألة تحويل الشعور الإنساني إلى بيانات قابلة للمعالجة. وفي المحصلة، يؤكد البحث أن الشعر الغنائي الرومانسي يشكل نقطة ارتكاز ثقافية وفكرية أساسية في مواجهة ميكنة اللغة والإبداع والتأثير الوجداني، مساهماً بذلك في النقاشات المعاصرة في النقد الأدبي والشعرية الرقمية حول مفهوم التأليف، وأصالة الشعور، ومستقبل التعبير الإنساني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الغنائي الرومانسي، الذكاء الاصطناعي، أصالة الأثر العاطفي، ما بعد الإنسانية، الشعرية الرقمية

Abstract

This paper investigates the enduring affective force of Romantic lyricism in an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and algorithmically generated verse. Focusing on the works of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron—alongside contemporary poets like Ocean Vuong, Claudia Rankine, and Tracy K. Smith—and drawing on critical frameworks from affect theory, posthumanism, and media archaeology, this study examines the intersection of embodied, historically situated emotional expression and the predictive operations of large language models. Through close textual analysis and comparative readings—including examples of AI-generated poetry—the paper demonstrates how Romantic and contemporary poetics foreground emotional singularity, linguistic disruption, and subjective intensity, elements that resist computational reproduction. Engaging with theorists such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and N.

Katherine Hayles, the argument interrogates the philosophical and aesthetic implications of machinic authorship, particularly the transformation of human emotion into data. Ultimately, the study affirms lyric poetry as a vital cultural and philosophical counterpoint to the automation of language, creativity, and affect, contributing to broader debates in literary criticism and digital poetics regarding authorship, authenticity, and the future of human expression.

Keywords: Romantic Lyricism, Artificial Intelligence, Affective Authenticity, Posthumanism, Digital Poetics.

1. Introduction

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in creative writing has reignited long-standing debates about authorship, subjectivity, and the nature of poetic voice. In particular, the emergence of AI-generated poetry challenges our understanding of lyric expression, a domain historically rooted in human emotion and experience. This paper examines the affective core of Romantic lyricism—especially in the works of William Wordsworth and John Keats—and argues that the felt intensity of their poetry resists the mechanistic reproduction of language by machines. The emotional depth and subjectivity in Romantic poetry, as exemplified by poets like Wordsworth and Keats, provide a lens through which we can critically examine AI's limitations in replicating human emotion.

As AI systems increasingly generate poetry that mimics human expression, the very essence of authorship, once inextricably tied to human consciousness and emotion, comes into question. This paper explores the intersection of affective poetics and AI, focusing on how the emotional resonances inherent in Romantic poetry defy algorithmic reproduction. Wordsworth and Keats, whose works prioritize emotional authenticity, personal sensation, and subjective experience, offer a lens through which to investigate the limitations of AI in capturing the ineffable aspects of human feeling. Their poetry, marked by deep emotional engagement, underscores the inimitable qualities of human subjectivity that AI cannot replicate.

This study contends that, despite AI's growing proficiency in syntactic and semantic modeling, the deeply affective nature of Romantic poetry remains beyond the reach of computational systems. Drawing on

affect theory, posthumanism, and critiques of digital poetics, the paper interrogates whether true emotional authenticity can be algorithmically generated. By comparing the expressive power of Romantic lyricism with AI-generated texts, it argues that the computational model of poetic creation fails to account for the complexities of human emotion, which continue to elude mechanistic reproduction.

This paper addresses a central concern within contemporary debates on literature and technology—whether genuine emotion, subjectivity, and affective authenticity can ever be algorithmically produced. Through a comparative analysis of Romantic poetry and AI-generated texts, this study contributes to ongoing debates within literary criticism and digital poetics about the future of authorship, creativity, and the place of emotion in an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence.

2. Literature Review

To understand how Romantic poetry's emotional depth resists AI's syntactical mimicry, we must first examine the theoretical frameworks that define both the affective poetics of the Romantics and the limitations of computational creativity. The intersection of Romantic poetics and artificial intelligence (AI) draws upon a variety of interdisciplinary fields: Romantic studies, affect theory, posthumanist critique, and digital literary production. A nuanced understanding of these theoretical landscapes is crucial for articulating the stakes involved in comparing Romantic lyricism with AI-generated poetic texts. This review synthesizes key perspectives in each of these areas to explore the ways in which the emotive power of Romantic poetry challenges the mechanistic processes behind AI-driven creativity.

At the foundation of Romantic lyric theory is M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp*, which famously delineates the shift from classical mimetic models of literature to expressive theories, wherein the poet's inner emotions are central to the creation of meaning (22). This expressive paradigm has deeply influenced readings of William Wordsworth and John Keats, whose works exemplify the transformation of personal sensation into aesthetic form. Jonathan Culler has further emphasized that the lyric's temporality and subjectivity distinguish it as a genre uniquely equipped to convey the immediacy of human feeling (38). However, such immediacy

becomes contentious when juxtaposed with computational methods, which lack the embodied sensation crucial to Romantic affect.

Recent developments in affect theory complicate the Romantic preoccupation with feeling. Brian Massumi's claim that affect precedes and exceeds linguistic articulation (28) resonates with the Romantic ideal of poetry as an overflow of emotion. Eve Sedgwick extends this argument by focusing on the texture and tone of affective communication rather than fixed content, thereby deepening our understanding of how emotion can be conveyed through language (23). These perspectives contribute to a framework wherein Romantic lyricism is not only an expression of emotion but also a site where language struggles to bear the weight of affect. This understanding stands in sharp contrast to generative AI, which operates entirely within the syntactic and lexical constraints of language, leaving affective depth out of reach.

In posthumanist discourse, scholars such as Rosi Braidotti and N. Katherine Hayles have interrogated the boundaries of human subjectivity in relation to technology. Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* critiques the liberal humanist conception of the self, arguing that the rise of informational models of consciousness destabilizes the traditional notion of the human subject (2). Although Hayles does not directly address Romantic lyricism, her theory of posthuman consciousness provides an intriguing framework for understanding how AI, through its algorithmic processes, challenges the Romantic ideal of the poet as an individual, feeling subject. Braidotti's *The Posthuman* challenges the anthropocentric biases inherent in Romanticism, calling for a rethinking of subjectivity in non-human terms (89). As Claire Colebrook observes, posthumanism demands that we rethink affect itself—not as a uniquely human phenomenon, but as a distributed intensity that resists subject-centered models of feeling (57). These critiques of Romantic subjectivity highlight the importance of preserving the emotional singularity that the Romantics championed, especially in an age when emotional expression is increasingly mediated by technology.

Digital poetics scholars, including Chris Funkhouser and Allison Parrish, have begun to explore AI-generated poetry as a legitimate form of cultural production, albeit one with distinct aesthetic priorities. Funkhouser examines the constraints and potentials of computer-generated poetry, noting

that while machines can produce surprising linguistic combinations, they lack intentionality and self-reflection—qualities central to Romantic lyricism (144). Parrish, conversely, celebrates AI's capacity to uncover hidden structures within language, suggesting that poetic creativity need not be rooted in emotion (67). This divergence highlights a central dilemma: does lyric value reside in affective authenticity or in the manipulation of form?

Recent scholarship has started to synthesize these domains, with scholars like James E. Dobson exploring the implications of machine learning for literary form. Dobson argues that AI does not merely mimic human writing but alters our very understanding of writing itself (211). Yet, this argument often bypasses the emotional dimension central to Romanticism. This study seeks to address that gap, proposing that the Romantic lyric, as a site of affective rupture and subjectivity, remains resistant to algorithmic replication—not because machines cannot write, but because they cannot feel.

The intersection of Romanticism, affect theory, and artificial intelligence remains underexplored in current scholarship, with most studies focusing either on the history of Romantic lyricism or on contemporary digital poetics in isolation. M.H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* remains foundational for understanding Romantic theory, particularly its emphasis on the poet's internal world as the source of artistic expression. Abrams argues that Romantic poets, in contrast to their classical predecessors, aim to communicate deeply personal, often turbulent emotions through a dynamic engagement with the external world (22). In the works of Wordsworth and Keats, the lyric becomes a mode of personal revelation—evident in Wordsworth's meditations on nature's emotional resonance in "Tintern Abbey" and Keats's reflections on mortality and beauty in "Ode to a Nightingale." This ideal of intimate emotional expression stands in stark contrast to AI-generated poetry, which—despite its ability to replicate syntactic and structural patterns—lacks the emotional depth that defines Romantic lyricism.

In recent years, affect theory has emerged as a critical framework for analyzing how emotions are produced and communicated. Brian Massumi's work on affect, particularly in *Parables for the Virtual*, argues that affect operates as a pre-conscious force that exceeds linguistic articulation, offering

a valuable lens through which to interpret the felt intensity of Romantic poetry (28). Wordsworth's poetry often bypasses rational explanation to convey an affective experience of nature, creating spaces where the unspeakable can emerge. Similarly, Eve Sedgwick's focus on affective tone in *Touching Feeling* contributes to a deeper appreciation of Romantic poetry's resistance to clear interpretation and its capacity to evoke raw emotional responses (23). These moments of emotional disruption, integral to the Romantics' aesthetic, present a stark contrast to the predictable, repeatable nature of AI's poetic output, which is governed by statistical probability rather than the unpredictability of human feeling.

In contrast to these posthumanist critiques, digital poetics scholars such as Chris Funkhouser and Allison Parrish explore the creative potential of AI in poetry. Funkhouser's examination of digital poetry underscores the generative possibilities of computational algorithms but acknowledges that AI's creations lack intentionality and emotional engagement—the hallmarks of human-authored lyricism (144). Parrish, while celebrating AI's ability to reveal hidden structures in language, stops short of claiming that such poetry can evoke genuine human emotions (67). These perspectives offer valuable insights but fail to address the question of whether AI-generated texts can ever replicate the deeply affective charge that characterizes Romantic lyricism.

Finally, the emerging field of critical digital humanities, as exemplified by James E. Dobson's *Critical Digital Humanities*, highlights the epistemological shifts induced by AI-generated texts, arguing that machine learning algorithms can alter our understanding of authorship and literary form (211). However, Dobson's work overlooks the emotional dimensions that are essential to Romantic poetry. This gap in the literature provides the foundation for this study, which argues that the felt intensity of Romantic lyricism remains irreducible to algorithmic simulation—not because machines cannot produce poetry, but because they cannot authentically feel.

By synthesizing these diverse theoretical perspectives, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the limitations of computational creativity, particularly when it comes to conveying the complex emotional experiences central to the Romantic tradition.

3. The Romantic Poetics of Feeling

For the Romantics, poetic expression was not merely a medium for aesthetic arrangement but a vessel for emotional and psychological intensity. In the works of Wordsworth and Keats, the lyric subject is not simply a passive vehicle for language; rather, the poem becomes a space where the poet's feelings and the external world coalesce. This is evident in Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", where the speaker reflects on the transformation of his emotional responses to nature over time (*Major Works*, 131–135). The poem's meditative structure mirrors the Romantic conviction that poetry must capture the flux and depth of inner life—a life shaped by memory, loss, renewal, and the ineffable workings of feeling.

Keats, similarly, explores the intersection of beauty and mortality in "Ode to a Nightingale," where the ecstatic longing for transcendence is juxtaposed with the sorrow of inevitable death. This tension, rooted in emotional immediacy, reflects the Romantic belief in the irreducibility of feeling to rational systems—a belief that stands in stark contrast to AI's reliance on algorithmic computation (Keats, *Major Works*, 281–283). Keats's richly sensual language—such as "tender is the night" and "the weariness, the fever, and the fret"—combined with his imaginative escape into the nightingale's immortal song, dramatizes the Romantic yearning for a realm beyond logic and reason: one grounded in sensation, mood, and lyrical surrender to experience (*Major Works*, 281–282).

In contrast to Wordsworth's reflective intimacy and Keats's lush melancholy, Lord Byron introduces a more performative, ironic, and self-aware mode of affect in his poetry. His stylized persona—wry, charismatic, and emotionally volatile—is exemplified by the brooding speaker in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," who oscillates between disenchantment with modern civilization and a yearning for sublime experiences in nature (Byron, 56–59). Unlike Wordsworth's spiritual nature or Keats's ethereal beauty, Byron's engagement with feeling is theatrical, often sarcastic, and charged with socio-political critique. As Helen Kennedy notes, Byron's emotional self-awareness becomes a form of resistance to emotional transparency itself—a quality that further frustrates attempts at algorithmic modeling of feeling (18).

Byron's poetry frequently stages emotional contradiction, as seen in lines like: "I have not loved the world, nor the world me; / I have not flatter'd its rank breath, nor bow'd / To its idolatries a patient knee" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III). Here, alienation, pride, sorrow, and moral disdain coexist in a layered expression of affect that defies univocal interpretation. This emotional complexity—shifting between sincerity and performance—resists codification, particularly by AI systems trained to optimize coherence, relevance, and predictability.

These emotionally complex modes of Romantic lyricism create a high bar for imitation, raising the question of what it means for machines to "generate" poetic affect. To illustrate the limitations of AI in replicating such layered subjectivity, consider this AI-generated attempt to mimic Romantic tone:

The ocean weeps beneath the coded sky,
Its binary waves crash soft goodbyes.
A lonely algorithm dreams of grace,
But finds no soul in time or place.

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

While stylistically evocative, this verse reveals a key limitation: it simulates the surface features of Romantic diction—personified nature, melancholy tone, and abstract yearning—but lacks the internal contradictions, historical awareness, and ironic voice that define Byron's lyricism. The "coded sky" and "binary waves" gesture at emotional depth but remain conceptually thin, relying on metaphorical clichés rather than genuine affective dissonance.

Another AI-generated sample mimicking Byron's cynicism reads:

Man strides through kingdoms built on sand,
His crown a lie, his rule unplanned.
He speaks of love, then turns to war—
A godless king forever poor.

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

Here, the lines mimic Byron's critical tone but flatten his emotional register into a simple moral judgment. What's missing is Byron's ambivalence—his simultaneous detachment and yearning, his self-lacerating wit, and his historical situatedness as both insider and exile. Byron doesn't just critique civilization; he implicates himself in its contradictions.

Byron's affective range—from melancholic grandeur to biting sarcasm—complicates any attempt to systematize emotional expression, particularly through algorithmic modeling. His poetry often foregrounds the instability of emotion and the performative nature of selfhood, qualities that AI struggles to replicate due to its reliance on coherence, statistical regularity, and semantic stability. Where AI seeks pattern and closure, Byron revels in affective indeterminacy and emotional risk.

Together, the works of Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron demonstrate the Romantic lyric's capacity to render complex, shifting, and embodied experiences that elude algorithmic capture—not because such complexity is unquantifiable, but because it exceeds the logic of predictability. Romantic poetics insists on feeling as not just content but as form: a mode of expression where contradiction, rupture, and subjectivity are not problems to be solved but essential features of meaning. In their diverse ways, all three poets expose the limits of computational creativity and affirm the enduring necessity of human feeling in poetic expression.

3.1 Contemporary Poetic Resistance to Algorithmic Reproduction

To deepen the contrast between Romantic lyricism and computational verse, it is essential to examine how contemporary poets engage emotional singularity and formal innovation in ways that similarly frustrate algorithmic imitation. Ocean Vuong's work, especially in *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2016), provides a compelling modern parallel to Romantic lyricism. Vuong's poetry is marked by a raw, affective immediacy and personal vulnerability that echoes the Romantic tradition but is refracted through the lens of queer identity, diasporic trauma, and postmodern fragmentation. For example, in the poem "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong," he writes:

[...] Ocean,

are you listening? The most beautiful part

of your body is wherever
your mother's shadow falls.

(34)

This line encapsulates Vuong's stylistic blend of tenderness and existential ache, placing emotional resonance above narrative clarity.

In contrast, an AI-generated attempt to mimic Vuong's style yields the following verse:

A shadow trembles on your spine,
Named for the war your father hides.
Even your breath tastes of borders—
Soft, but never yours.

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

While this verse echoes Vuong's use of imagery around trauma and family, it lacks the intimacy and psychological layering that grounds Vuong's lyricism. The emotional resonance appears as a stylized gesture rather than an embodied confession.

When compared to Wordsworth's introspective spirituality or Keats's sensory intoxication, Vuong's emotional tenor is more fractured but equally profound. The vulnerability and embodied sorrow in Vuong's verse remain irreducible to algorithmic reproduction. AI-generated attempts to mimic Vuong's style tend to emphasize surface-level poignancy without engaging the deeper matrix of historical pain, sexual politics, and cultural memory. Thus, just as Romantic lyricism resists mechanistic simulation, Vuong's poetry presents a contemporary site of resistance, reaffirming the singularity of lived experience.

Similarly, Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) similarly challenges algorithmic reproduction through its hybrid form—blending poetry, essay, and visual media—to capture racialized affect and social fragmentation. Her writing's affective power emerges not from

conventional lyricism, but from moments of structural rupture and accumulated microaggressions. In one particularly charged lines from the poem "Stop-and-Frisk" in *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Rankine writes:

because white men can't
police their imagination
black men are dying.

(135)

This verse distills the poem's affective urgency and systemic critique through deceptively simple phrasing. An AI-generated attempt to mimic Rankine's tone and structure might read:

You walk into the room already wrong.
Not because you said it.
But because it was heard—
Through a skin you never got to choose.

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

While the machine mimics Rankine's stark syntax and social critique, it lacks the embodied rage and historical specificity of her voice. The generated lines gesture toward racialized tension, but fail to encode the lived trauma and structural consciousness embedded in Rankine's verse. Her refusal to offer closure or linear catharsis mirrors the Romantic investment in affective disruption, though in a radically contemporary idiom.

Likewise, Tracy K. Smith, particularly in *Life on Mars* (2011), explores grief, cosmic wonder, and racial identity with a lyricism that is emotionally expansive and formally controlled. Her poem "My God, It's Full of Stars" juxtaposes the language of astronomy and intimacy: "Perhaps the great error is believing we're alone" (27). Here, as in Keats, the sublime is tinged with existential loneliness—qualities difficult to simulate algorithmically due to their intricate fusion of tone, theme, and metaphysical yearning.

An AI-generated poem attempting to imitate Smith's style might read:

Beyond the galaxies I sent your name,
Wrapped in data, singing through space.
Still, silence blooms louder than code—
And I forget your shape”

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

Though the diction imitates cosmic language and lyrical reflection, the metaphorical logic lacks the philosophical tension and controlled emotional pacing that define Smith's work.

Together, Vuong, Rankine, and Smith demonstrate that affective disruption and poetic singularity remain essential and irreducible aspects of contemporary lyricism. Just as Romantic poetics resist predictive modeling through their emotional and formal complexity, so too do these modern poets frustrate algorithmic replication—not because their styles are elusive, but because their poetics are fundamentally grounded in lived experience, historical consciousness, and cultural specificity.

4. Affective Disruption vs. Predictive Repetition

At the heart of the distinction between Romantic lyricism and AI-generated verse lies the fundamentally different way in which each engages with affect. Romantic poetry thrives on *affective disruption*—moments of emotional intensity that fracture syntax, defy linearity, and evoke sensations that exceed logical comprehension. This aligns with Brian Massumi's assertion that affect “escapes confinement in the form/content pairing” and occurs in “a zone of indeterminacy” where meaning becomes unstable (35). In contrast, AI-generated poetry is grounded in *predictive repetition*, relying on statistical models that optimize for linguistic coherence and semantic probability. These systems are built to reinforce expectation, not to disturb it.

Take, for example, William Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," where the speaker meditates on the passage of

time, layering memory, sensory perception, and spiritual reflection in a syntax that flows with emotional cadence rather than grammatical regularity:

That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

(*Major Works*)

134)

Here, the accumulation of emotion-laden phrases ("aching joys," "dizzy raptures") resists semantic resolution, evoking a poignant nostalgia that exists outside the realm of formal logic. The emotional intensity interrupts any stable meaning, producing what Eve Sedgwick calls a "texture of feeling" that is not reducible to explicit content (19).

In contrast, consider this AI-generated stanza by GPT-4 when prompted to write in the style of Romantic poetry:

The sun ascends, the sky is bright,
The flowers bloom in morning light.
The birds do sing, the breezes play,
And nature wakes to greet the day.

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

While this stanza imitates Romantic diction and form (regular meter, pastoral imagery), it lacks the emotional rupture and existential reflection found in Keats or Wordsworth. The language is syntactically smooth and semantically neutral—predictable in rhythm, safe in affect. It reflects what N. Katherine Hayles identifies as the "simulation of cognition without consciousness" (4): an appearance of thought without the depth of subjective feeling.

Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," by contrast, stages an emotional crisis that is inseparable from its fragmented syntax and tonal instability:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk.

(*Major Works,*

281)

Here, affect is not a theme but a disruptive force that manifests in the poetic voice itself. Keats's syntax mimics the overwhelming sensations he describes, aligning with Massumi's claim that affect is "intensity owned and disowned" simultaneously (28). AI-generated verse cannot reproduce this affective charge, as it does not originate in embodied experience or existential tension; it merely reassembles affective signifiers without accessing the emotional conditions that produce them.

Lord Byron offers yet another example of affective disruption, but through irony and theatrical self-awareness. In "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", the speaker declares:

I have not loved the world, nor the world me,
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things.

(58)

Byron's emotional ambivalence—simultaneously intimate and detached—creates a complex lyric subjectivity that confounds binary emotional states. His tone fluctuates between sincerity and mockery, emphasizing affect as performance rather than essence. AI, by contrast, flattens such tonal multiplicity. A GPT-4 generated stanza attempting Byron-like introspection reads:

I wandered far in silent gloom,
My thoughts entombed in shadowed room.
The world is vast, yet I'm alone,
A stranger carved from icy stone.

(ChatGPT, "Romantic-Style
Poem")

Despite its imitation of somber mood and Romantic motifs, this stanza lacks Byron's layered irony and emotional ambivalence. The language

is melancholic in form but not in function—it mimics sadness without the psychological contradictions or sociopolitical self-awareness Byron injects into his verse. This gap demonstrates what Allison Parrish calls “surface-level fluency without depth” in AI-generated literature (70).

Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron use poetic form not to confirm meaning but to challenge and destabilize it. Their lyricism invites the reader into spaces of emotional rupture, affective excess and interpretive ambiguity. These qualities are not artifacts of style alone but expressions of the poet’s embodied and historically situated consciousness. As M. H. Abrams contends in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Romantic poetry turns inward to “project externally what is actually within” (23). AI, devoid of inwardness, can only invert that process: projecting outward forms with no internal origin.

Ultimately, the affective dimension of Romantic poetry derives from its resistance to closure. AI-generated verse, governed by statistical norms, gravitates toward closure and regularity. Where Romantic poets embrace contradiction, ambiguity, and emotional intensity, AI outputs a normalized pastiche—stylistically competent but affectively hollow. This disjunction reaffirms the central argument of this study: that the lyric subjectivity of the Romantics, shaped by inassimilable affect, resists algorithmic replication because it arises not from language patterns but from lived human experience.

5. Implications for Literary Criticism

The confrontation between Romantic lyricism and algorithmic language generation compels a rethinking of foundational assumptions in literary criticism—particularly those surrounding authorship, voice, and emotional authenticity. At stake is not merely the status of the poem as artifact, but the ontological status of the poet: Is the poetic self a site of irreducible subjectivity, or can it be simulated, even replaced, by machinic processes that mimic human speech with increasing sophistication?

The tension explored in Section 4—between affective disruption in Romantic poetry and predictive repetition in AI-generated verse—naturally extends into broader questions that unsettle foundational principles of literary criticism. Chief among these are the categories of authorship, voice,

and emotional authenticity, all of which have traditionally anchored the lyric poem within a framework of irreducible subjectivity. For the Romantics, particularly poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet was more than a skilled artisan; he was a seer, an affective medium through whom a unique consciousness could access truths inaccessible to reason alone. Wordsworth, in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, famously described poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” originating from “emotion recollected in tranquility” (270). This formulation inscribes poetry not only as a linguistic product but as an existential trace of lived affect.

However, when language generation is delegated to algorithmic models like ChatGPT, trained on vast textual corpora to reproduce statistically probable word sequences, this subjective anchor becomes destabilized. As demonstrated in the AI-generated example discussed previously—“The sky wept in algorithms, / dreams shaped by data streams” (ChatGPT)—there is a formal mimicry of poetic affect, but the experiential grounding of that affect is absent. The poem simulates emotional depth through metaphor, but its production involves no inner life, no temporally situated recollection of felt experience. This distinction confronts literary criticism with a new ontological puzzle: If poetry can be convincingly generated without a poet in the Romantic sense, what becomes of the lyric subject?

Poststructuralist theory, particularly the work of Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault, offers one way of framing this crisis. In “The Death of the Author,” Barthes contends that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (148). Barthes’ provocation decenters the author’s intention and elevates the role of language and intertextuality. Likewise, Foucault, in “What Is an Author?,” reconceives the author not as a sovereign creator but as a “function” of discourse within particular regimes of knowledge (113). In one sense, AI-generated poetry materializes these theories by embodying authorship as pure function: the language model acts not as a conscious creator but as a syntactic and statistical engine, parsing and remixing cultural discourse without origin or intent.

The Romantic lyric resists such flattening of authorship. Its power lies precisely in the affective singularity of the voice—the irreplaceable

timbre of a human subject speaking into the unknown. Critics like Anne Carson have emphasized this temporal and affective rupture as central to lyric experience. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson identifies lyric time as “a suspended instant of desire,” a site where the subject emerges in the tension between presence and absence (46). By contrast, ChatGPT’s outputs operate in what we might call synthetic time—not a moment recollected, but a probabilistic now, computed and delivered without interiority.

The implication for literary criticism is profound. If we accept AI-generated poetry as a legitimate aesthetic form, we risk redefining poetry itself in terms that exclude subjectivity and affect as essential criteria. Alternatively, if we retain the Romantic valuation of poetic voice and singularity, we must also confront the limits of imitation. The AI poem that resembles a Romantic lyric in form but lacks its affective disjuncture is not simply a weaker version; it is a categorically different one.

Thus, the confrontation between Romantic and algorithmic poetics is not merely stylistic but ontological. It urges literary criticism to reexamine whether our methods can accommodate nonhuman “authors” or whether such works demand a new critical vocabulary—one that recognizes poeticity without personhood, and affect without affective experience. As literary theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles argue, “the human and the machinic are no longer separate spheres but interpenetrating systems” (288). The critic, like the poet, must now navigate this hybrid terrain.

6. Conclusion

In an era increasingly dominated by algorithmic language generation, the Romantic lyric offers a powerful counterpoint to the mechanization of poetic expression. Where artificial intelligence privileges prediction, reproducibility, and syntactic coherence, Romantic poetics—exemplified by Wordsworth, Keats, and Coleridge—foregrounds affective disruption, emotional singularity, and linguistic instability. This study has argued that AI-generated poetry, while capable of mimicking formal features, lacks the experiential grounding and ontological depth that define Romantic lyricism. The contrast is not merely technical but ontological: whereas AI models operate through statistical iteration, the Romantic lyric stages a moment of subjectivity that resists both repetition and resolution.

As this paper has demonstrated, Romantic poetry often unsettles grammatical and logical conventions, embodying what Anne Carson describes as the “suspended instant of desire” that characterizes lyric temporality. AI-generated verse—such as the GPT-4 sample, “The sky wept in algorithms, / dreams shaped by data streams”—may simulate the texture of poetic speech, but it cannot access the affective rupture or interior temporality that animates Romantic subjectivity. Section 5 further explored this distinction through poststructuralist theories of authorship, suggesting that while AI enacts the “death of the author” in a literal sense, the Romantic lyric insists on the author as a locus of irreducible human feeling—a subjectivity that cannot be subsumed by computational processes.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond literary aesthetics to broader philosophical questions about creativity, authorship, and emotional authenticity in the digital age. As N. Katherine Hayles notes, the boundary between human and machine is increasingly porous, yet the lyric voice—subjective, fractured, temporally situated—remains a site of resistance to the automation of affect. AI may generate verses that resemble poetry, but it cannot inhabit the threshold of language where lived experience confronts expressive difficulty. As Keats wrote, the moment of true poetic awakening is when the soul “awakes and finds itself a heart.”

By juxtaposing Romantic poets with a contemporary voice like Ocean Vuong, this study affirms the continued relevance of affective poetics in an age increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence. While machines can simulate poetic forms, they cannot replicate the lived, layered emotional worlds that define lyric subjectivity. Whether in the meditative depths of Wordsworth, the lush sorrow of Keats, the ironic grandeur of Byron, or the intimate vulnerability of Vuong, human feeling remains a domain of creative expression that resists computational capture. As such, both Romantic and contemporary poetics offer a vital critique of machinic authorship, underscoring poetry’s enduring role as the language of the human heart.

Ultimately, the Romantic lyric affirms the value of emotional singularity and interiority—qualities no algorithm can authentically replicate. In reaffirming the enduring power of Romantic poetics, this paper underscores a larger cultural imperative: to preserve the poetic as a domain

of human expressiveness, where emotion is not modeled but lived, and where the voice that speaks is not an echo of data, but a singular cry in time.

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