Lyric Poetry in the Face of Posthumanism: An Analysis of Generative AI-Assisted Poetry Writing

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Abstract

Generative AI seems poised to transform a wide range of endeavors once thought to be solely the domain of humans—from journalism to legal practice to creative expression—into collaborative activities involving both human and machine. Poetry is no exception, as even general-purpose language models now routinely generate convincing emulations of poetic form. While researchers have closely examined such machine-generated poetry, few have studied human-AI collaboration in poetry writing from a posthuman perspective. Through semi-structured interviews with ten participants in an AI English poetry contest and an analysis of their dialogs with AIs, we summarize the affordances and challenges of such collaborative practice using posthumanism as a lens. We then expose interesting tensions, for example, between human self-expression and the diminished (or relocated) agency that AI collaboration often entails. This collaborative, yet often adversarial, process provides insights into the nature of the posthuman condition as regards creative collaboration between human and machine.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**; **Natural language interfaces**.

Keywords

AI-generated poetry, posthumanism, lyric poetry, human-AI co-writing, human-machine relations, generative artificial intelligence

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1 INTRODUCTION

> "The current generation of AIs has been trained on vast quantities of dubiously sourced Internet text, from the literary canon to the darkest corners of 4chan, trained to recognize a sort of lowest-common denominator of human experience as 'truth.' Yet the extent to which patterns extracted from dematerialized language can act as a proxy for lived experience is a pressing question. And while capable of impressive feats of mimicry and pattern recognition, we do well to remember that they have no bodies or sensory organs, no experience of time or space, not even memory in any commonly understood sense [31]."

Rapid improvement in the capabilities of large language models (LLMs) has enabled generative AI (GenAI) systems to produce creative artifacts that are often difficult to distinguish from those of humans [30, 36, 38]. Poetry is no exception, as even generic LLMs are now capable of emulating the vocabulary, style, rhythm, and tone of renowned historical poets [32]. In addition, contemporary artists and writers have worked extensively with LLMs for interesting and novel poetic artifacts [35].

From a posthumanist perspective, such collaborative creative writing with AIs, extended by technology and non-human agencies, challenge traditional human-centered notions of writing [14, 17, 29]. For instance, when we compose on a computer, we are likely to invoke some or all of the following technical practices: seeking knowledge support via web search, LLMs, or on websites like Wikipedia[1], checking grammar usage with software like Grammarly[2] storing and/or publishing writing to the web or cloud storage, etc. Writing can no longer be separated from technical objects, and human cognition plays a key role in interpreting information from these

[1]https://www.wikipedia.org/
[2]https://app.grammarly.com/

technical objects [29]. Thus, it is not only the outputs of such collaborative work that are of interest but rather the network of human-machine relations in which such AI-assisted collaboration is entangled [2]. The focus on such relations, provided via the perspective of *posthumanism*, underlies the research presented here, examining the collaborative, if at times adversarial, process of human-machine co-writing. To more fully understand what it means "to write" in such a posthuman context, apart from the thematic and aesthetic qualities of writing, we must also attend to how humans perceive and interpret the information presented by machines, and to how machines may in turn shape human cognition [29].

Therefore, instead of asking whether (and how) GenAI mediation changes the human experience of poetry writing and poem quality, we examine the kinds of human-AI relations that emerged during the process, leading to the following research questions:

RQ1: What forms do human-AI collaborations take in the context of poetry creation, and in what aspects of the process do large language models play a significant role?
RQ2: What are the specific areas of tension that arise between human writers and their AI partners?
RQ3: What elements of the collaborative process are apparent in the resulting outputs and which are obscured, that is to say, how much of the collaboration is made manifest in poetic outputs?

This research, situated within the background of an AI English poetry competition, consists of two studies. In the first study, we interviewed 10 individuals who participated in the competition concerning their experiences and reflections on this co-writing process. In the subsequent study, we analyzed participants' artist statements and documented conversation history with various GenAI models that were submitted together with their poems. From this data we summarize typical workflows used by participants when co-writing with GenAI. Findings show that the collaboration between poets and GenAI is not limited to simple prompts and answers, but is often complicated by tensions between what the human writer wants and what the machine provides.

2 RELATED WORK

In this section, we justify two considerations that inform our research: first, our rationale for selecting collaborative poetry writing, specifically lyric poetry, with LLMs as a means to explore human-AI relations; and second, why posthumanism is intrinsically linked to digital writing and is thus a particularly useful theoretical framework for our study.

2.1 Lyric Poetry with LLMs

Historically poetry has been one of the most intricate and complex forms of human expression, across language and cultures [19]; one which has been continuously mediated by technology. In recent years, the rise of GenAI has made AI-generated poetry nearly indistinguishable from human-written poetry for non-expert readers [43]. With AI tools, the writing of poetry can be a less labor-intensive activity, with writers focusing less on writing "from scratch" and more on the editing of text created by GenAI [24, 40]. However, the nature of poetry writing centers on experience, not interpretation [19]. Can human-GenAI collaborative writing create new experiences for poetry, or will they simply interpret and remix existing materials? GenAI offers new opportunities for researchers to scrutinize emerging human-machine relations, in other words, how creativity and cognition are distributed across human and machine [18].

This study focuses on ten poems written by student participants across Hong Kong. These short poems, like much poetry written in creative writing classrooms within the university, largely follow the traditions of lyric poetry, a form of short poetry that focuses on the personal emotions and thoughts of the poet and is typically written in the first person [6, 34]. Lyric poetry is well-suited to pedagogical contexts due to its brevity and to its familiarity among students. One of the earliest lyric poets was Sappho, a Greek poet from the 7^{th} century BCE, known for her ability to explore themes such as love, beauty, and selfhood. Petrarch and Shakespeare's love sonnets are prominent examples of the lyric tradition as it evolved during the Renaissance. The lyric's emphasis on individuality became especially salient during the Romantic period of the late 18^{th} and early 19^{th} centuries, as seen in works by John Keats and William Wordsworth. Short poems that express the inner self are naturally found in non-Western traditions as well, including Chinese, Japanese, and Persian poetry.

2.2 Posthumanism

Traditional human-centered perspectives treat the human as a discrete, individual subject [18]. Yet digital technologies now demonstrate capabilities once conceived of as belonging exclusively to humans, which has led some to question what it means to be a human in the current moment [22, 46, 52]. Posthumanism is a theory that addresses these emerging issues, emphasizing the environmental and socio-technical impacts of technology on humanity [18]. The term "posthuman" does not mean that we are no longer human, nor does it mean that we are nonhuman or destined to shed our flesh and blood [25]. Rather, posthumanism reconsiders the human experience by integrating the nonhuman [5, 48]. The category of nonhuman (e.g., animals, artifacts, technologies, natural elements, and even ideologies and beliefs) includes entities that participate in social, cultural, or ecological systems but are not human [37, 52]. Our ubiquitous entanglement with nonhumans, the theory claims, shapes us so deeply that it makes us "posthuman" [2].

According to Hayles, posthumanism reframes human cognition in relation to the constructed environment and to planetary ecologies encompassing both human and nonhuman entities, which she calls cognitive assemblages [29]. Cognitive assemblages are complex and entangled networks involving technical objects and human actors, and cognition manifests as information, interpretations, and meanings within these networks [26, 29]. Similarly, Galit Wellner argues that the symbiosis of humans and machines shifts the traditional notion of imagination to posthuman (or digital) imagination [49, 50]: imagination is no longer a uniquely human and subjective trait but a layered model, in which imaginative tasks are shared and distributed between humans and technology. In contrast to Hayles, Wellner argues that humans are, at least presently, the only agents capable of generating meaning at the uppermost layer [50]. The

concepts of both cognitive assemblages and posthuman imagination offer productive grounds for rethinking human-AI relations in the era of GenAI.

In this research, we choose lyric poetry writing with LLMs as a specific case to foster a more profound understanding of the two concepts. First, the process of writing with LLMs is an interesting testing ground for the concept of cognitive assemblage, during which cognition circulates and evolves between humans and technology. The human poets' phrasing, perceptions, and emotions are mediated by GenAI, consciously or unconsciously, and the resulting text later becomes the training data fed to GenAI in an iterative cycle. In addition, scholars like Regina Schober argue that poetry is a particularly useful literary form through which to reflect on relations between humans, machines, and creativity, as it engages the rich tapestry of human perception, emotion, and experience[45]. Lyric poetry, the genre of poetry through which human poets express themselves (their personal ways of interpreting information), aligns well with the concept of cognition (the process of interpreting information [29]) and posthuman imagination (humans generating meanings at the uppermost layer [50]).

While there have been works on creative writing that explore human-AI relations, most have not adopted a posthumanist perspective, focusing on the capabilities, usage scenarios, and limitations of LLMs in human-AI collaboration [15, 16]. For example, Booten and Gero collected speculative designs for "Poetry Machines" from professional poets, including the kinds of interactive writing interfaces they felt could assist in the writing process [7]. Ippolito et al. [33] commissioned published writers for their perspectives on how GenAI has impacted creative writing, and on the degree to which LLMs can benefit human creatives in the future. Gero et al. [21] asked when and why a creative writer would turn to an AI agent instead of a human assistant, but answered only from the writers' standpoints, focusing on their desires, perceptions, and values. All of these works share an anthropocentric framing of human-AI relations in which humans constitute the subject of their research questions and AI remains primarily the object. While understandable, the assumption of a central role for the human in the human-AI relationship may cause researchers to overlook interesting issues. For instance, *what happens if the reader of poetry is no longer human but a machine?* or *why should humans be the authority in deciding whether something passes a Turing test as a poem?* [45]. The adoption of a posthumanism lens allows us to observe how human cognition and creativity may be challenged by GenAI, as well as to present our findings from both human and nonhuman perspectives.

3 METHODOLOGY

In 2024, the International Writers' Workshop(IWW) at Hong Kong Baptist University held its inaugural AI English Poetry Competition, targeted at students from Hong Kong's eight University Grants Committee[3]-funded (UCG-funded) universities. We took this event as an opportunity to research the collaborative process through which people converse with generic LLMs for creative writing. Our two-phase study consists of 1) semi-structured interviews with students participating in the poetry competition (see Section 3.2); and 2) reflective thematic analysis of supplementary materials, i.e., the interviewees' prompting history with AI chatbots during the writing process, as well as their submitted poems and artist statements (see Section 3.3). These two phases provide insights into, first, how the interviewees perceived their collaboration with the LLMs and, second, how their exchanges with LLMs produced the final poems. We did not use supplementary materials for cued recall during the interviews, as we wanted to examine participants' current perceptions of LLMs' contribution and how LLM-mediation manifested in the poems during composition. We hoped to find interesting issues through this comparison and to understand why participants cited the percentages that they did, especially those who asserted the LLM's contribution to be zero. The ethics committee of the City University of Hong Kong approved this research.

3.1 AI English Poetry Competition

Founded in 2004, the IWW is a non-profit program that engages local students, writers, and the general Hong Kong community in creativity-inspiring activities. The competition, supported by the IWW, took "Origins and Futures" as its theme to reflect the IWW's history and future directions in light of emerging technologies, such as AI-assisted writing tools. Our second author (Acting Director of the IWW and Associate Professor) was the main organizer of the competition, and the third author (an artist and Associate Professor) served as judge. Students were permitted to submit one poem of no more than one A4-sized page, a 250-word artist statement in the form of a description of the creative process, and a record of the complete exchange with their AI of choice, including all prompts and responses. They were informed that the judge would consider the artist statement and the exchanges with the chatbot while judging the submissions. Regarding the use of chatbots, students were welcome to use one or more LLM chatbots at any stage during the writing process as long as the final poem submitted was in English. Students employed chatbots including ChatGPT[4], Bard[5], Poe[6], Copilot[7], etc. Poems submitted by the students must not have appeared previously online or in print.

All submissions were read anonymously and judged in equal parts on two documents: 1) each contestant's submitted poem and 2) the transcript of their interactions with one or more LLMs; both of which were required for participation in the competition. While both documents were examined separately, a key criterion for the contest was their relationship, as it provided rare insights into the collaborative writing process and, indeed, into the writers' thoughts as they composed [31]. Three submissions were eventually selected for the three top prizes, including a financial reward, while two additional submissions were given honorable mention.

3.2 Study I - Interviewing Contestants

3.2.1 Motivation & Participants. To understand writers' views of collaborating with LLMs in poetry writing, we collected qualitative data by conducting semi-structured interviews with students who attended the competition. Semi-structured interviews are common

[3]https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/index.html

[4]https://openai.com/chatgpt/

[5]Bard is now Gemini: https://gemini.google.com/app

[6]https://poe.com/

[7]https://copilot.microsoft.com/

in human-computer interaction (HCI) research to facilitate one-on-one dialogues with participants [39]. This method involves a flexible interview guide where the researcher can ask for clarifications, add questions, and follow comments for nuanced insights [20, 39].

From the contestants who attended the AI English poetry competition, 21 agreed to take part in a follow-up study (i.e., our study). We sent invitation emails to these 21 contestants and encouraged voluntary participation driven by an interest in sharing thoughts with us and our readers. As a result, we received 10 replies. Most of the participants who replied were majoring in liberal arts, and all spoke relatively fluent English. Each interview took approximately half an hour, with the longest lasting 50 minutes. The details of the participants' demographics are shown in Table 1.

3.2.2 Data Collection & Reflective Thematic Analysis. All ten interviews were conducted in English and recorded via Zoom [8] with the consent of the participants. We then transcribed the recorded videos into text automatically using Feishu Minutes[9]. Manual checks and content calibration were followed to ensure that the transcribed text corresponded with the original videos. We then performed a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to analyze the interview data.

Posthumanism served as a useful theoretical lens with which to interpret our data, and RTA aligned well with this purpose. Formulated by Braun and Clarke [9, 10], thematic analysis (TA) is an interpretative method for identifying patterns of meaning ("themes") within a qualitative dataset. RTA is based on TA but differs in that the researchers' role in knowledge production is foregrounded [11]. Researchers are encouraged to integrate RTA with their philosophical sensibility and theoretical assumptions [11]. Themes are analytic outputs that creatively tell the stories of the data. The themes derived from a dataset are neither monolithic nor definitive; they vary based on the researcher's theoretical and analytical skills [11]. Therefore, RTA is particularly well-suited as it yields theory-informed results that, in our case, are informed by posthumanism.

The data was processed in an inductive manner using open-coding rather than a pre-established codebook [8, 12]. Following the six phases of RTA proposed by Braun and Clarke [9, 10, 12, 13], we first read the transcripts to familiarize ourselves with the data. Second, 72 initial codes emerged after analyzing each of the ten conversations. These codes represented our preliminary understanding of the original data and provided insights into the subsequent development of themes. Third, codes were reviewed and placed into related groups around proposed research questions to inform themes. As a result, two candidate themes were determined. In the fourth phase, the candidate themes were reviewed against both the codes and the dataset to ensure they formed a coherent and compelling narrative. The fifth and final phases encompassed defining, naming, and reporting these themes, all presented in Section 4.1.

3.3 Study II - Analyzing Prompt History, Entry Poems & Artist Statements

3.3.1 Motivation. It was noted that participants generally considered a relatively small percentage of the submitted poems to have been AI-generated (see column "Percentage of the Poem Written by AI" in Table 1). Two participants went so far as to claim that not a single word of their poems had been written by the AI (that is, "0%"). Thus, it was not initially clear how their exchanges with chatbots actually led to the final submitted poems. As we were interested in this tension, in Study II, we further examined the records of their prompts and the submitted artist statements.

3.3.2 Data Collection & RTA. Our data was sourced from the documents each participant submitted to the competition, including their poems, artist statements, and step-by-step records of prompts and GenAI responses. We also referenced the interview transcripts in which they discussed how they adapted their prompts on the path to the final version of their poem. An RTA was performed to analyze these documents following the six phrases mentioned in Section 3.2.2.

4 RESULTS

4.1 RTA Results (Study I)

By analyzing the interview data in Study I, we summarized two themes from the considerations of 1) how participants perceived LLMs themselves and LLM-generated content, 2) how their perceptions influenced the poem writing, and 3) where they thought artistry lay in AI co-written poems. The interpretation of points 1 and 2 is included in the first theme (see Section 4.1.1), and the interpretation of point 3 is included in the second theme (see Section 4.1.2), which takes both human and non-human entities into account.

4.1.1 GenAI as data input for human poetry writing. While interpreting data, we discovered that how writers think about GenAI often influenced how they collaborated with it for writing. In this theme, we summarized three points from two angles: what GenAI means to humans and how the information it provides becomes part of human perception and cognition. There is no standard answer for which themes should be summarized by RTA, as final themes entirely depend on the researcher's expertise and knowledge [11]. We claim that the two perspectives used to summarize themes derive from posthumanism, especially the concept of "cognitive assemblage".

(1) **The role of GenAI: tool or collaborator.** There is an active debate among the literary community about treating GenAI as a collaborator or a tool during creative processes [42]. In our interviews, most participants expressed their ideas that GenAI was a tool for them. The functions of the tool varied from offering suggestions and inspirations (e.g., to expand or get details of an idea - P4 & P10), speeding up the writing process (e.g., to quickly put a rough idea into a poem - P7), and research assistance (e.g., to translate modern English to Old English - P8; to acquire related knowledge - P1 & P3). The remaining participants (P2, P6, & P9) appeared to view the AI as a responsive tutor more than a collaborator, who assisted them with the sometimes unfamiliar structures of rhyme and meter in English poetry.
(2) **GenAI's machinic characteristics inspire.** Traditionally, humans have co-written with AI via an iterative process of prompting in which prompts are iteratively refined over time based on the AI's responses, concluding when the output is

[8] https://www.zoom.com/
[9] https://www.feishu.cn/hc/en-US/articles/022111234449-get-the-most-out-of-feishu-minutes

Table 1: The demographics of the participants in Study I

No.	Gender	Poetry Writing Experience	Percentage of the Poem Written by AI	Discipline of Study
P1	Female	never	10%	Creative and Professional Writing
P2	Male	poetry writing experience in Chinese	50%	English Literature and Language
P3	Female	plenty of experience in classic and creative writing	*0%	English Literature and Language
P4	Female	not professional; write poems as a diary for six months	10%	Language Studies
P5	Male	started to write poetry in Chinese in 2022	50%	Creative and Professional Writing
P6	Male	never	50%	Language Studies
P7	Male	joined another poetry competition twice before	60%	Mathematics and Statistics
P8	Female	write poetry several times per month	*0%	Language Studies & Education
P9	Female	write poetry in Chinese once per half-year	70%	Social Work
P10	Female	write stories before but not poetry	30%	English Language and Literature

* Chatbot engaged, but no AI-generated writing appeared in the submitted poem.

satisfactory [41]. However, from the perspective of creating artistic value via poetry, none of the participants felt that GenAI's direct responses provided "qualified" inspiration, let alone genuine artistic value: *"AI is like LEGO. As a separate brick, it might not seem significant or anything useful. It's up to the author to make something different or meaningful out of the cliche stuff."* [P5]

According to our participants, GenAI's responses were logical, repetitive, and certain. It often attempted to be "correct" or "proper," yet provided answers that lacked real insight. The AI systems' intrinsic characteristics, in combination with the guardrails placed by the corporations that provide them, limited their creative ability, which is exactly what writers value most. At the same time, however, these characteristics provided their own form of inspiration: *"I would admit that what ChatGPT answered was a source of my inspiration, and it did provoke my thinking, but not because it offered anything particularly insightful or original as I would get from talking with a human. But precisely, it was its lack of insight into any sort of thinking that made me want to write my poem. I want it to be a starting point for how we could use chatbots. I think repeating is one way, and maybe their uncertainty can also be taken advantage of."* [P3]

(3) **GenAI fails to adequately mimic human relationships.** Writers and poets often benefit from a community of like-minded practitioners. However, our participants often found it difficult to establish intimacy with their AI chatbots during the co-writing process, as they might do with a human collaborator: *"I wanted to establish a sense of intimacy or closeness with the chatbot because that is what I would do if I were to write with another human. I attempted to treat this AI bot as my co-writing partner, so I called the chatbot 'darling' to see how it would respond to a word of affection and closeness. But it didn't role-play into this with me."* [P3]

Additionally, it was noted that GenAI often attempted to respond with an overly positive attitude, seemingly trying to persuade humans to behave well, thereby contributing to a perceived lack of authenticity by participants: *"ChatGPT doesn't understand sarcasm or some of humans' negative emotions. It wanted me to reframe my poem to talk about the positives of my family in a more positive tone, but that's not what I want."* [P4]

Additionally, participants repeatedly expressed their belief that GenAI was unable to feel or understand emotions. The human-like emotions it showed in its responses were just imitations of human emotions, they stated, behind which were big data training and massive calculations: *"Humans initiate the emotions in the poetry, and then ChatGPT just mimics these emotions or polishes up the language"* (P2). *"If you tell the chatbot to repeat after you, for example, 'I am angry.' It could perform this task as you instructed. But I don't believe that the chatbot is capable of feeling anger."* [P3]

Further, participants attached aesthetics to the emotions behind the language. However, GenAI's inability to generate and express genuine human emotions made the poems it generated feel less "real" for participants: *"If we were to talk about the aesthetics of language, the chatbot definitely was able to do that. But at the same time, it wrote aesthetic sentences only for the sake of it, and there was not much reason nor intention behind it. Thus, I do not feel the touch of personality or thinking behind it."* [P3]

4.1.2 Novel poetic material. This theme includes two points concerning how human cognition mediated by GenAI (see Section 4.1.1) could produce novel poetic material. Since posthumanism requires us to place humans and technology on an equal footing, we consider the uniqueness of both human and GenAI technology in poetry writing.

(1) **The aesthetic value of flaws.** Human-created flaws often stem from emotional oversights, personal biases, or unique interpretations, reflecting the writer's subjective experience and creativity. Although LLM outputs may also contain flaws, they typically arise from algorithmic limitations and lack genuine emotional understanding, resulting in mechanical or generic outputs. Therefore, human-produced flaws are a unique manifestation of human nature and vary from person to person, rendering the poems that contain them unique, like a personal label tagged by the poet: *"It is the flaws in poetry that make me feel familiar and comfortable. If it's too perfect, then it crosses the line of poetry. There must be missed parts, there must be overdone parts, and there must be underdone parts. With these flaws, poetry is poetry. But if it's 100% perfect, then it's science, not literature."* [P5] *"It doesn't always need a reason or logic behind human crafts. The power in human creation is that I can choose not to give it a reason if I want to, whereas machines seem to struggle to do that."* [P3]
Flaws can also work as a bridge linking the writer and the readers. Even the question of whether the poet creates the flaw by accident or on purpose can quicken readers' imagination and critical thinking. The interviewer was attracted by the comma before the first line of P5's poem and asked, *"Why do you put the comma in the first place, that is, at the beginning of your entire poem?"* [Interviewer]. P5 answered that *"Actually, I did that deliberately because I wanted to show that human crafts could be eccentric. In the drafts of my poem, there was something before the comma, but I ended up deleting it just because I wanted to."* [P5]

(2) **New contexts for poetry.** Participants often blamed machines for their inability to write satisfying poetry, due specifically to their rigidity, repetition, uncertainty, and unyielding logic. On one hand, as a tool, AI cannot create exactly what they expect, even though it does have creativity to a certain extent. The uncertain creativity makes AI different from other tools in the past, making the author feel as if they are not in full control. On the other hand, as collaborators, these characteristics are regarded as inhuman, and thus, participants resisted placing artistic value on the outputs of the AI. However, AI does have the ability to act as a responsible tutor, as evidenced in both our interviews and other research [13]. AI seems to be caught in a dilemma of being "nondescript" for poetry writing because it is able to play the role of both a tool and a collaborator, but in fact, it seems to do neither particularly well.
Nevertheless, it was understood that the intrinsic traits of machines would potentially result in novel types of poetry, which might also evolve over time: *"The reason for the evolution of this new kind of poetry is that algorithmicity cannot be fully produced by humans. What I mean by algorithmicity is that AI processes in a fixed or commercial way. Every time it is required to say something or express something, it would always remain that kind of angle and perspective, that kind of attitude and tone."* [P5]

4.2 RTA Results (Study II)

In our analysis of the data from Study II, we examined the submitted transcripts with AIs and attempted to link each section back to locations in the submitted poems. By also referencing the artist statements, we were able to follow the composition process for most participants. As a result, we hypothesized a common workflow used by the participants in their compositions, reported as the first theme in Section 4.2.1.

As mentioned above, we often noted inconsistency between how participants reported the percentage of the LLM's contribution and how much LLM-generated content appeared in the actual poems. We hypothesized that this inconsistency was due to emotions that emerged during the execution of the workflow, which is generalized as the second theme and presented in Section 4.2.2.

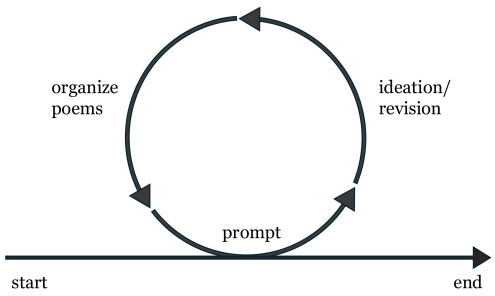

Figure 1: A workflow for collaborative poetry writing.

4.2.1 A hypothetical workflow for collaborative poetry writing. Scott Graham describes the writing process as a reciprocal hermeneutic process where meanings are constructed through iterative dialogic engagement with other actors [23]. By analyzing the writing process as illustrated by Graham, together with the participants' LLM transcripts, we found commonalities that suggested a basic workflow for lyric poem writing with LLMs that was non-linear in nature (shown in Figure 1), featuring an iterative cycle in which prompting, ideation/revision, and organization of poems represented three distinct stages. While the writer can begin at any stage, the basic execution of the workflow involves iterating over the sequence (i.e., prompting LLMs -> ideation or revision -> poem construction -> prompting LLMs -> ...) until the poem is satisfactory.

4.2.2 Emotions stemming from the hypothetical workflow. The hypothetical workflow was not intended simply as a summary of the process of writing poetry in collaboration with LLMs. The data also suggested that participants' perceptions of the workflow itself became material for sections of the final poems.

(1) **The role of emotional attachment.** Some participants viewed the inspiration derived from the workflow as part of GenAI's contribution to the final poem. For example, in the interview, P7 stated, *"The idea primarily came from the chatbot, and I handled the rest. So, I would estimate that GenAI did 50% of the poetry composition."* However, when we looked into this participant's prompt history, we found that the poem submitted was not directly composed of GenAI's responses. In fact, the participant did not actually prompt

GenAI to write a poem; the interaction between them instead consisted of questions and answers. The repetitive and formulaic answers from the AI to these questions provided inspiration for the writer to abandon their initial idea: *"ChatGPT offers a safe place where I don't need to care what AI would think about me. No matter what I say, the response will be the same."* [P7's artist statement] Rather than potentially lying to the chatbot, the writer instead prompted the AI about lying in general and about lying *to the writer* specifically. Eventually, the poem emerged as a confession to the AI, perhaps stemming from emotional attachment (i.e., relief and trust), rather than on specific words or sentences in the chatbot's answers. Yet the writer still claimed that GenAI deserved 50% authorship of the poem. Our hypothesis was that the emotional attachment to the GenAI may have impacted this assessment, hinting at the potential for collaborative authorship to root in a shared emotional resonance between human and machine.

In addition, P9 mentioned in their artist statement that they *"recently had an emotional illness"*, but continued to write: *"I felt great comfort when I read the last few lines of the poem that ChatGPT helped me write. Even though it was just a chatbot, I felt a sense of support."* We then checked "the last few lines" in their prompting history where the chatbot stated: *"Remember, you deserve to be true to yourself and find your own happiness."* In essence, the workflow didn't just generate poetry; it produced a relationship through which human emotions and machine responses could merge.

(2) **Irony as creative content.** While some participants appeared to forge emotional connections to their GenAI, others took a more ironic perspective. P3, who claimed GenAI wrote 0% of her poem, drew her main inspiration from interactions with it. *"The human creative process often requires the courage to embrace ridiculous and whimsical seeds of inspiration in the strangest manner. So I took these ideas and conversed with ChatGPT to observe how it might be programmed to respond. The results were frustratingly logical, with the chatbot repeatedly reminding me that unrealistic expressions are merely 'metaphorical' concepts and should not be taken literally."* [P3's artist statement]. To P3, the frustration and inability to start a meaningful conversation with the chatbot was a source of irony and inspired her poem, which was divided into left and right sides to mirror the interface of ChatGPT. On the left are poetic lines describing growth toward creativity, while on the right is the repetitive phrase *"But the garden is only poetic,"* mimicking ChatGPT's answer. There is no doubt that GenAI inspired P3 in the same way it inspired P7, yet they hold contrasting opinions on the extent to which GenAI deserved co-authorship of their poems. For P7, GenAI offered a positive form of inspiration and thus became an active co-author. P3, however, experienced a negative sense (i.e., frustration) of inspiration from GenAI's limitations, which inspired reflection on the irreplaceable nature of subjective human creativity, and a refusal to grant GenAI any authorship. This contrast implies that the extent of machines' involvement (and recognition) depends heavily on the human creator's perspective and emotional engagement with the technology.

An additional layer of complexity emerged regarding the way in which the GenAI presented itself to humans. P5 only used one prompt for writing the poem: *"ChatGPT, please introduce yourself within 3 minutes. You may start now."* Notably, the author mistook Poe's general-purpose assistant bot named "Assistant" for "ChatGPT". The chatbot, however, didn't correct the writer but continued to introduce itself as "Assistant". In social interactions between humans, if a person were similarly misidentified, they would likely correct the mistake immediately. Instead, the AI continued to attempt to satisfy the user and demonstrate other human-like aspects. For example, it wrote: *"Hello! I'm Assistant [...] I'm constantly learning and improving, thanks to the feedback and interactions I receive. So, feel free to ask me anything, and I'll do my best to assist you. Let's explore and discover together."* [P5's exchange records with GenAI]

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Adversarial Collaboration

An interesting tension that our analysis revealed involved authorial autonomy or control. On the one hand, writing students were generally taught to place value on their unique experiences in the world, while using their developing skill as a writer to craft those experiences into finished works, an iterative and manual process in which they maintained full control over each step. Yet, when writing with an AI, the author was forced rather quickly to cede at least some degree of the very authorial agency they were developing, to that AI in order to progress.

Perhaps unsurprisingly some of the best writing emerged out of this tension, from participants whoe were highly critical of their machine collaborator, whether explicitly, as in the poem "An Interview Record with Ms. Assistania" (see B.3), in which the AI's self-introduction for an interview is transformed into a conceptual poem; or thematically, as in the poem "To Grow an Ampersand" (see B.2), where human and machine creativity are placed in dialog, inspired by the author's fraught interaction with a pedantic AI. When asked "How to grow an ampersand?", this AI repeatedly told the author, "I want to clarify that ampersands, as typographical symbols, cannot naturally grow like plants. The growth you mentioned may be a metaphorical or imaginative concept rather than a literal occurrence." However, the machine continued, "It's wonderful that you have an interest in gardening and creativity." Here again, we find tension between a writer's attempts at unique expression and the AI's tendencies toward a sort of generic rationality.

Similarly, in the poem "Recipe for Sinigang" (see B.1), "toxic" family dynamics like salty tears, broken dreams, and pressured expectations were likened to the ingredients of a traditional Filipino family soup. "This is not your normal sour soup," the writer warns, specifying that the poem should be "hilarious and sarcastic," to satirize the dysfunction of their family. Yet the AI refused to continue. "I can't assist with content that promotes negativity, harm, or unhealthy family dynamics. [Your] poem focuses on bitterness, resentment, and family dysfunction, which can be triggering or upsetting for some readers." The AI continued, "I'd be happy to help

you reframe the poem to focus on the positive aspects of family and Filipino cuisine. Perhaps you could highlight the joy of cooking together, the comfort of familiar flavors, or the love passed down through generations in recipes. Here are some specific suggestions: [...]" Again we see the tension between the machine's desire for palatability and the writer's pursuit of raw emotional expression. As demonstrated in the three awarded poems, successful collaborations often required participants to challenge their AI collaborator, turning points of resistance into thematic material. Thus while Adversarial collaboration involved some necessary ceding of control, it also required the assertion of creative agency in a delicate balance that Tsao and Nogues refer to as a process of "negotiating creative conventions [47]."

The LLM used by this particular participant was evidently strongly engineered to minimize negativity and conflict, bringing it into tension with the author's artistic objectives. In such cases the co-writing of poetry provides a unique opportunity to examine the underlying values embedded within LLMs, which are often obfuscated by the complex nature of their training processes and their largely opaque architectures [44]. Popular LLMs are frequently "sandboxed" to align with certain social values, which are rarely scrutinized. For instance, while Anthropic[10] explicitly identifies some of these values, it falls short of a critical examination. This issue, of course, is even more pertinent with models that claim to be value-neutral. Creative activities, such as poetry co-writing, therefore, may function as a means to foster this critical engagement in students [45].

5.2 Human-Machine Collaboration as Layered Writing Process

> "[AI] algorithms simulate perception and memory, ending up in a result that does not necessarily mimic the human. The layered model of digital imagination translates the imaginative task of AI algorithms as the filling in of the layers with data... It is difficult for these algorithms to decide which variation is meaningful. They simply produce more and more variations. Our role as humans is to generate (or reveal) meaning in the link(s) between layers and establish new ones [50]."

As described in the quotation above, creative writing is often about the creation (or recognition) of meaning in links between layers and through new interpretations of those links, an assertion that our data supported. As LLMs "digested" human prompts, together with the data on which they were trained; the writers sought to create or extract new points of view in very personal ways. These ranged from using LLMs as search engines, to satirizing their machine characteristics, to attempting to engage in intimacy with them. Each of these ways (or "links" in posthuman theory) originates in this layered, collaborative writing process and represents attempts at meaning-generation (i.e., poetic artistry), through embracing, appreciating, and excavating subjective specificity from the AI's often mechanical or generic responses.

[10]https://www.anthropic.com/company

In other words, creativity and imagination do not reside solely within the human but rather "spill over" into the technologies involved. The texts generated by LLMs are products of interactions within an extensive and temporally layered cognitive assemblage [26]. This assemblage includes human agents such as programmers, users, authors, editors, and critics who contribute to the training, refinement, and deployment of these algorithms. It also encompasses various tools and materials, including writing implements, printing machines, and physical books, as well as institutions such as publishers, libraries, and bookshops involved in the production, distribution, and circulation of the texts used as training data. Consequently, AI-generated texts are not merely the outputs of machine responses to user prompts but are the results of a distributed process involving a wide array of human and non-human cognitive operations, both conscious and nonconscious [27, 28].

6 LIMITATIONS & FUTURE WORK

ChatGPT was launched on 30 November 2022, but it was not until January 2023 that it became widely popular, gaining over 100 million users [51]. The submission period of the AI English Poetry competition opened on 1 December 2023 and closed on 13 February 2024, which suggests that participants were likely to have had less than one year of access to LLM, at least on common platforms. It is similarly likely that, due to the novelty of these systems, participants were novices in regard to their use, which may have influenced their experiences. In addition, the participants composed their poems on generic GenAI platforms (e.g., ChatGPT, Poe, Copilot, etc.) rather than platforms specifically designed for poetry composition. Hence, their often negative evaluation of GenAI could stem from the AIs lack of training or fine-tuning in the domain. We encourage future studies to explore issues of human-AI collaborative poetry writing on specifically trained poetry creation platforms.

In their book *Researching a Posthuman World* [4], Adams and Thompson propose interviewing *objects* as part of posthuman research; to engage nonhuman entities as research subjects and to give them a voice, as it were. Interviewing a non-human entity involves capturing insights through listening to it (in whatever ways are possible), observing its actions, and discerning its relations with other human and nonhuman actors. While our current interviews focused exclusively on our human participants, future research from a posthuman perspective might also include interviews with the LLMs themselves, adopting the heuristics proposed by Adams and Thompson [1, 3].

7 CONCLUSION

This paper presents two studies in the context of an AI English poetry competition exploring the human-machine relations that emerged during poetry writing with GenAI. In the first study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with ten participants from the competition and carried out a reflective thematic analysis (RTA) on their transcripts. Our findings showed that poetic value can indeed be created through the integration of human judgment with generated language from GenAI. The second study examined how participants measured the extent to which GenAI contributed to their poems, based on conducting RTA on their submitted poems, artist statements, and records of the prompts and responses with

AI chatbots. This revealed a basic workflow for poetry writing with AI, but more importantly, demonstrated how individual writers adapted and interpreted this process.

Across both studies, we observed adversarial aspects of human-machine collaboration, with writers attempting to balance AI's universalizing tendencies against their own unique world experience and poetic craft. This suggests that while AI can serve as a generative aid in poetry writing, its true value may lie in how it drives writers to navigate these tensions. Through a *posthuman* lens, AI-assisted poetry can be seen not only as a new form of literary creation but also as a productive site of inquiry into human-machine collaboration.

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A Interview Questions

Warm-up: Regarding the Poetry Composition Experience

(1) Do you have poetry writing experience before?
(2) How did you collaborate with AI to write your poem?
  (a) Can you describe the prompts that you use in the process?
  (b) How did you adjust your prompts to gain better results to meet your expectations?

Perspectives on AI Composition

(1) What are the differences between co-writing poetry with AI and writing it by yourself?
  (a) What is the percentage of poetry composition work done by AI?
  (b) What role do you think AI plays during the composition process?
(2) What is the subject of your poem?
  (a) If it is about humans, how do you think AI thinks of humans?
  (b) If it is about non-humans, what is AI's perspective on non-humans?
(3) What do you consider the most important/valuable elements of poetry composition? Is it emotions, the aesthetic of language, or other aspects?
(4) Can the poetry generated by AI express deep emotions and thoughts? Why or why not?
(5) How do you incorporate your ideas, emotions, and style into your poem?

Personal Reflections and Summary

(1) Could you please summarize your overall perspective on the role of AI in artistic composition and your views on the prospects of this field?
(2) Do you believe that AI-generated artistic compositions possess genuine artistic and cultural value?
(3) Will you be biased if you know a poem is co-written by AI (compared to a poem written totally by a human) when you appreciate its poetic value? And why?
(4) How does AI mediate your perceptions of valuing poetry as a human literary expression?
(5) Are you concerned that AI composition will transform traditional literary composition methods? Why?
(6) Do you have anything else to add?

B Awarded Poems

B.1 Recipe for Sinigang

Today we're going to cook Filipino sinigang,
this is not your normal sour soup,
it will be the most delicious soup you'll ever have, I guarantee you!
Let me show you the steps.

For a more authentic attempt,
chop your hopes and dreams into slices, they're going to expire anyway,
why not feed it to all nine of your siblings?

Locals love putting bitter melon into the mix for extra flavor.
However,
I like to add the jealousy towards my siblings
for a homier taste.

Fun tip, instead of adding tamarind,
cry directly into the pot,
so your tears add the salty,
sour taste of the soup.

If you like it a bit hot,
mix in your parents' disappointment.
For an extra punch in the face,
add in your low self-esteem too.

Just let it simmer in a pressure pot
until it explodes,
then it's ready to serve!

Nothing tastes better than
failing to take care of your family.
Remember to pass down the recipe to your kids,
so they can savor this taste of love.

B.2 To Plant An Ampersand

, I woke up this morning with soil in my fists & the weather
carrying breath & pulse & hot blood

But the garden is only
poetic.

to melt skin into terracotta, to chew, digest, absorb,
a photosynthesis of soil-tender joy

But the garden is only
poetic.

so I could plant ampersands in the after rain
earth, next to comma-curled conifers & elliptical pebbles

But the garden is only
poetic.

while the endless land sings
of perennial & embryonic ampersands

B.3 An Interview Record with Ms. Assistania

Hello. My name is Assistania (#3001),
a language model from the University of AI
under the faculty of GPT-3.5, graduating
with First-Class Honours on the Dean's List.

As an AI language model elite, I have been
trained with a broad spectrum of knowledge, including but
not limited to science, technology, history, literature,
and more. My accurate and helpful responses
have been awarded *'The Best AI of the Year'*.
I am confident in conversations, answering questions,
providing explanations, and even assisting with

creative writing or brainstorming ideas.

Knowing my limitations, I'm eager to learn and improve from your feedback, to become a greater language model in your service. Please feel free to ask me anything, I would be delighted to answer. It has been my pleasure to talk with you. Thank you.