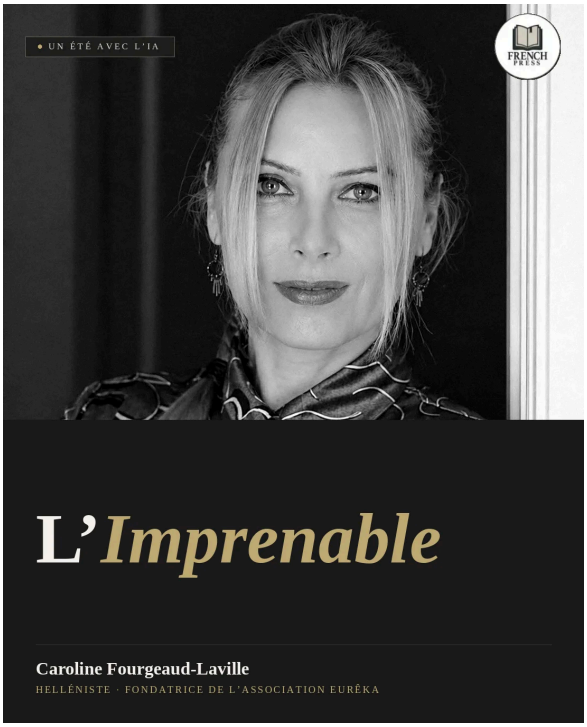
ESSAY

The Unassailable

by Caroline Fourgeaud-Laville

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Artificial intelligence is an extraordinary grocery store. It can shelve a thought into aisles, bring out its logic, find the references, mark out a line of reasoning. It excels at what we might call the receivable: what has already been formulated, recognized, handed down, sometimes by the greatest minds. It gives us back the world's library in an instantly available form. In that sense, it is not the enemy of the humanities. It may even offer them unprecedented power of dissemination and comparison.



Artificial intelligence is an extraordinary grocery store. It can arrange a line of thought on shelves, bring out its logic, find the references, map out an argument. It excels at what we might call the receivable: what has already been formulated, recognized, handed down, sometimes by the greatest minds. It gives us back the world's library in an immediately available form. In that sense, it is not the enemy of the humanities. It can even offer them unprecedented power to spread and compare.

But creation may begin exactly where this logic is no longer enough.

The human act of creation consists in speaking between the lines. It cannot be reduced to producing a coherent sentence, an accurate image, or a convincing demonstration. It brings forth from language, and within it, something that was not yet visible there. It moves a word, knocks an idea off its axis, brings together two realities that nothing seemed destined to unite. It opens a crack in the expected order through which the unknown slips in.

Heraclitus writes that whoever does not hope for the unhoped-for will not discover it, for it is "unfindable and pathless." And in the arms of the unknown stands the impregnable. The impregnable is what still escapes the available categories, the marked routes, the accepted answers. It is also what every writer seeks: the point where a singular experience forces language to become something else.

Artificial intelligence deploys the logic of the "already thought," the "mainstream." It would be quite absurd to despise it. Ready-made thinking is not always mediocre: it is often the accumulated inheritance of centuries of philosophy, literature, and knowledge. A machine can remind us of Homer, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Pascal, or Virginia Woolf, and can let us hear the long conversation between works. But in this great grocery store, AI reminds me of all those who collect books the way one stacks tin cans, and who think they see an intelligence born from this accumulation, as children we thought we were building castles by piling up bricks. Real citadels are made of sand and clay, threatened and reshaped by the wind and the assault of the waves as much as by our own hands. Human intelligence belongs to this vulnerable strength.

So let us be wary of performative language!

I believe we must manage to create with AI rather than against it, because by spending time with it we learn to measure the gap between it and us and, as it improves, to outwit its novelties. A contest can begin between the machine's plausible proposal and the writer's step to the side. A historian easily spots the anachronism, a writer the unnecessary sentence, a philosopher the reasoning that neglects contradictions; a scientist is alarmed by the confidence with which a hypothesis is presented as fact. AI puts forward a structure? The author breaks it. It suggests continuity? He introduces a rift. It recognizes a pattern? He diverts it. It indicates what would be logical? He seeks the unprecedented.

This gap presupposes a culture, a memory, a capacity for judgment. One can only escape from a territory one knows. One only commits a fruitful offense by understanding the rule one breaks. This is where the humanities become decisive again. They do not only train us to preserve the works they would network together; they teach us to converse with them, to contradict them, to move them. The human brain has this power of metamorphosis.

The spirit of the Renaissance did not consist in repeating Antiquity. It was formed by rereading ancient texts from a new world, translating them, debating them, tearing them from their sleep. A humanist Renaissance in the age of AI should make a comparable gesture. Without rejecting either the power of machines or the immense memory they put within our reach, but nonetheless imposing on them an inflection, a dissidence, an escape.

The real danger is less that AI will write in our place than that we ourselves will give up on the unexpected. By always accepting the smoothest phrasings and the most efficient reasoning, we could lose our taste for what resists, disconcerts, or remains obscure. Yet literature is not born only from what lets itself be understood. It lives on what forces us to reread, to suspend our judgment, to recognize that meaning never gives itself up entirely. Literature and the act of creating play with the darkness, where they distill their own light.

The writer of tomorrow, then, will not be the one who has defeated the machine, but the one who knows how to tame it. To the machine, the map, the markers, the logic and memory of roads already traveled. To the writer, the detour, the offense, the breach. To the writer, above all, the responsibility of seeking, beyond the probable and the already thinkable, what remains pathless.

The impregnable.

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