ESSAY

On What Terms Can One Still Call Oneself a Writer?

by Laure Gouraige

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While reflecting on the ethical use of artificial intelligence, another question kept coming back to me, obsessively. Allow me this step aside: on what terms can one still call oneself a writer?



While thinking about the question of an ethical use of artificial intelligence, another question kept coming back obsessively. Allow me this step to the side: under what conditions can one still call oneself a writer?

For eight years, I wrote NATO's press review alongside colleagues working for other international institutions. In 2024, I was laid off along with more than two hundred other employees, to be replaced by artificial intelligence.

I had naively thought our company would end up regretting that choice. But above all, I believed there was something irreducible in writing. Then I heard writers publicly defend the use of AI, explaining that it saved them time and helped them produce more. The word *produce* strikes me as telling.

Of course, writing produces words, and those words produce a text. But literature is not production in the industrial sense of the term. It is born precisely from what resists efficiency. Here a sentence by Mallarmé comes back to me: “Do we know what it is to write? An ancient and very vague but jealous practice, whose meaning lies in the mystery of the heart. Whoever accomplishes it fully cuts himself off.”

Writing is not only producing a text. It is performing an act in which the subject is cut off. The work, then, is not only the result; it is the inner experience that made it possible.

When AI replaced my former job, we were demoted to the rank of proofreaders. Our role was no longer to think or to formulate a text, but to monitor a machine and correct its mistakes. We had become the proofreaders of writing that was no longer ours.

I see the same shift appearing in the literary world. Perhaps we simply need the honesty to acknowledge it. Whoever writes with AI practices a different profession. For if writing means fully accomplishing the cutting-off Mallarmé speaks of, then whoever delegates an essential part of that act to a machine can no longer be called a writer. Let us agree to give them another name.

— Laure Gouraige

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