

Nordic AI Meet 2026

O5. AI in Culture & Creativity (Thu 11:15-12:15)

2. Experience Required? Generative AI, lived experience and the Unwritten Rules of Literary Production

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Abstract: Generative AI can produce coherent texts in literary forms that appear to address a reader without a human authorial sender in the traditional sense. A recurring question in research and public debate on AI and literature is whether language models can really “write” literature and whether this could render the human author obsolete. I approach the question differently. I take a step back and ask: What does responses to AI-generated literature reveal about the assumptions through which literature is read and valued? The paper starts from the premise that AI’s place in the literary field will be shaped not by technical capability alone, but by how its use is culturally interpreted.

The paper takes as its starting point a June 2026 panel at the Norwegian Literature Festival in Lillehammer, where three literary professionals assessed two texts generated by language models. Using contemporaneous notes and event materials, I trace how the panel first identified textual features it associated with AI-generated writing, such as recurrent phrasing, clichés, inconsistencies, and implausible premises, before shifting to claims that AI “has not lived,” “has no reality,” and “does not want anything.” At this point, the terms of evaluation had shifted from what the texts achieved to what kind of process stood behind them.

From a literary-sociological perspective, I read this shift as making visible assumptions that usually remain implicit. Literature is not valued only as textual output; it is also understood as situated communication: as words coming from someone who has experienced a world and invested time and effort in saying something about it. Generative AI destabilizes this assumption as similar textual effects may emerge from a very different production process. Although actual AI-assisted writing exists on a continuum of assistive technologies and literary institutions, the public responses often reproduce a sharper opposition between “human” and “AI” writing. I treat this binary not as an accurate description, but as evidence of cultural norms that shape which forms of production are considered legitimate and valuable.

These norms have consequences for both reading and literary legitimacy. The possibility of AI involvement can create a new mode of suspicious reading beyond AI-generated texts, altering how literature is read and evaluated in general. It can also make the production process itself value-laden. Human labour and embodied experience may acquire renewed aesthetic and institutional significance, while undisclosed AI use may be framed as a breach of trust or even as a form of cheating. Rather than making the human author less relevant, generative AI may therefore make human authorship more consequential, transforming it from an unspoken premise into an explicit source of trust, legitimacy, and literary value and thereby reshaping the criteria by which texts and authors are recognized within the literary field and society.