

Process as Poetic Provenance

ALICIA GUO, University of Washington, USA

As generative AI tools become increasingly prevalent in writing, it is harder for readers to tell how AI is involved in the writing process and how to evaluate the resulting text. Current AI disclosure statements attempt to communicate AI involvement in static forms, and process statements attempt to reveal more about the process of using AI. At the same time, there remains significant stigma surrounding AI-assisted writing, in part because assumptions fill the gaps left by minimal disclosure. We propose that creative activity traces in AI writing should not be treated solely as provenance artifacts or with a lens of forensic evidence, but as an intimately expressive creative material, designing for poetic provenance: layered, optional, and interpretable traces that feel more like marginalia and highlight the human intentions and experience.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Creativity Support, Human-AI Interaction, Creative AI, Visualization

1 Background

1.1 Writing Activity Trace Systems

There is a growing want for some semblance of “provenance” for AI-assisted text, with the goal that readers can have more information and make decisions for themselves on how they want to evaluate or value the writing they are consuming. This is especially pressing for news and scientific writing, but also applies to creative work. Increasing amounts of generative AI text are being created and shared without disclosure of AI, and even when disclosure is present, oftentimes it is difficult to tell in what capacity AI has been used or develop a meaningful understanding of that unique and personal process. There exist a wide range of systems designed specifically for writing provenance, with the aim of tracking AI involvement in writing. These include authorship dashboards and replay systems [3, 6], and revision visualizations [7]. The goals of these systems range from education services for student homework to personal reflection tools for writers.

Many of these tools log keystrokes, copy-paste events, AI insertions, or estimate percentages of “human-authored” versus “AI-generated” text through their back and forth interactions. DraftMarks [8] is an example of a system that embeds skeuomorphic visual cues directly into the text to make the writing process legible to readers without requiring them to leave the document. HaLLMark [4] takes a complementary approach, coupling a text editor directly with an LLM interface and surfacing provenance through color-coded highlighting and an interaction timeline, designed primarily to help writers track their own AI use, retain a sense of ownership, and conform to emerging publication policies. These systems respond to concerns around authorship and trust, but share a common orientation of process as something to verify, capturing discrete, observable events provided as options to the author.

1.2 Process in the Wild

Outside of dashboards and authorship reports, creative publishing spaces are also approaching process in their own way. New online magazines and journals such as Ensemble Park [1] and the AI Literary Review [9] require writers to provide their own process statements detailing the workings behind their work. Midst [5] is an online poetry press that provides each poem as an interactive timelapse of the entire writing process. Writers are already experimenting with how to share what went on behind the scenes and readers are curious to see what writing with AI means. In these

Author’s Contact Information: Alicia Guo, University of Washington, Seattle, USA, axguo@uw.edu.

contexts, process notes and artist statements go far beyond phrases such as “AI was used for editing.” Writers describe not only their prompting strategies, but also what they were trying to push against, which outputs felt wrong and why, how they stitched fragments together into something that finally felt like theirs. These statements are a part of the art itself and change how the work is read in an artist-controlled way.

2 Poetics of Provenance

Provenance itself is not neutral or a truth: the way that a process is revealed shapes how the work is read, valued, trusted, and ultimately viewed. Genette, quoting Philippe Lejeune in his Introduction to the Paratext, speaking of the material that exists around the primary text: “*the fringe of the printed text which, in reality, controls the whole reading*” [2]. Paratext conditions how a text is read, and provenance systems are paratextual by nature. The systems that exist to show provenance each frame how the process will be interpreted, and in this sense, provenance visualization is operating to convey meaning through its form, which is a matter of poetics. Provenance is already operating as a rhetorical and poetic device. Following prior work in tracing writing history, we propose moving from systems of provenance as proof to provenance as poetics, where the focus is not a retelling of who did what, but where the act of annotation and revealing of process is in itself, artistic and poetic, under the control of the creator for form, content, and arrangement. Other modes of media serve as inspiration: behind the scenes documentaries, director’s cuts, or even social media process videos are in themselves another creative production. Imagine this revealing of process rolled into the same reading experience, where the process is embedded into the writing as another form of expression that the writer chooses to craft. Poetic provenance would treat writing trace activity as not only creative, but also educational material for how similar writing might be attempted. The focus of many systems now have been on what AI has contributed, without providing equal space and opportunity for the unique intentions of the human writer to live side by side. If we are to spend so much time looking at AI, we should be highlighting just as much, if not more, the human.

2.1 Goals for Poetic Provenance

If provenance systems inevitably frame how a text is interpreted, then designing them becomes a question of what kind of artistic expression or reading experience we want to enable. We outline several goals for poetic provenance:

- **Making process visible without flattening it.** Creative work often unfolds through multiple iterations and nonlinear paths of exploration. Provenance systems should help surface these dynamics without collapsing them into metrics or percentages. The aim should not be to summarize the process, but to make its texture visible in a way that creates *more* meaning for the work, such that they become new sites for artistic expression.
- **Preserving author agency over process narratives.** Provenance should not function solely as an automated record of interaction, but writers should retain control over how their process is revealed and framed and be able to author their own unique representations, rather than having the system impose a fixed representation of what counts as AI use.
- **Supporting curiosity rather than performing an audit.** Current systems treat the blurry area between human and AI as a gap for provenance to fill, but ambiguity can be generative and should be welcomed. Instead of positioning readers as inspectors verifying authorship claims, uncertainty in provenance should invite curiosity about how the work came to be, as another layer to understand the work.

- **Motivating form through content.** The form of how the process is revealed next to or within the text should not feel separate from the content and should feel like a part of the work. The provenance of two pieces with different processes should also feel different, acting as extensions of the work.
- **Foregrounding human intention.** AI provenance systems often foreground the model's output or interactions with AI. Poetic provenance should instead foreground the human decisions that shaped the work, AI or not.

3 Conclusion

Provenance systems for writing are often seen as records of interaction. Here we propose another possibility of seeing these traces also functioning as a literary form that should not only ask what can be captured or visualized, but also how those representations influence creative meaning. Designing for poetic provenance invites new forms of creative activity trace analysis that treat process as an expressive form.

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