

The Future of Fiction: Writing with AI

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Metabolizing the Generative Turn

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One of the oldest, if not the oldest, tools at humans disposal is that of storytelling. It is one of the fundamental pieces of understanding others and cultural expectations as well as communicating and reproducing cultural values. These stories then become a means to not only reproduce cultural norms and values, but as a means to challenge them as well. How these stories are presented and stored have been primarily through the means of oral or written means. Thus the creation and resulting response to the stories were purely held in the domain of humans.

However, with the advances and proliferation of AI, the creation of stories is no longer an entirely human endeavour. Various AI models have been able to be integrated into the creative process. This can be in the role as inspiration, editor, proofreader, or even as a co-author. They have also shown the ability to work independently to create a story, either in their own way or intentionally imitating existing authors. This sudden encroachment on a sector that has previously only been thought of as a purely human-dominated domain has led to various discussions and challenges of preconceptions. These discussions, particularly in the context of fictional writing, range from the sanctity of certain human institutions, to the value and viability and necessity of human input in certain works and professions, and how to best integrate AI into these professions and institutions as well as to what extent.

One article adding to these conversations is “What AI Can Us About the Myth of Human Genius” by Elvia Wilk from 2021. Despite not being the most recent article amongst a quickly and constantly changing topic, it still contains relevant ideas and arguments. The article posits itself between AI and human artists by addressing the power and utility of AI while also the importance and place of human artists, particularly writers, in contemporary society. Thus, rather than AI as a replacement it is better as a tool and assistant to writers. This also requires writers to challenge the idea of the process being a solitary endeavor, which it never has been, and thus accept the benefits of AI without the assumption that it is encroaching in an entirely human domain. By doing so AI will not only not replace human creators but also enhance the art they create.

One of the most important aspects to attempt to further discuss is the idea that “AI’s capacity for creativity—one of those supposedly sacrosanct human attributes—is becoming more and more of an existential sticking point as humans learn to live alongside intelligent machines” (Wilk, 2021, Para 3) particularly in regards to creative writing and storytelling. This argument will be further enhanced using academic literature which did not appear in the original article. Furthermore, by examining storytelling, its functions within culture, and the assumptions with it it will hopefully strengthen the argument Wilks makes that AI can be a powerful tool for creatives rather than a threat. Taking a similar approach to the Wilk article, this paper will also look at both AI and human writers. By doing so it will attempt to further show the benefits of human and AI cooperation within the field of creative writing. This will be done by challenging the assumptions of writing as a solitary act as well as the problematic aspects of AI writing being untenable or an issue particular to AI. These elements combined will attempt to show that outright rejection of AI is only limiting ourselves rather than embracing it as a tool to enhance and show the importance of creation and how it is a holistic endeavour.

Storytelling is crucial for not only understanding culture but ourselves as individuals. One of the ways that stories have been told, stored, and reproduced is through writing. In broad terms, “any writing, from the published instructions for using a power drill to the most esoteric literary poetry, uses the raw materials of language, experience, knowledge, textual sources and the author’s own ideas and imaginings to bring something into existence that did not exist before” (McVey, 2008, p. 289). Despite the broad definition, it is important that creative writing encapsulates so much as it reflects the subjective nature of writing and thus how AI responses can be cultivated as a creative aspect rather than reflecting fact regardless of the prompt. This also gives a degree of power to authors and other contributors to the creative sector as important agents of cultural reproduction and change through a wide array of aspects rather than solely through the traditional definition of art.

While writing is predominantly seen as a solitary activity, that is an inaccurate idea since “Humans are parts of ecosystems—technological, climatic, social, and political [...] because artists have always lived in the world, collaborating with and relying on the labor of often invisibilized others” (Wilk, 2021, Para 17). This perception causes not only for writers to distinguish the act amongst themselves, but also to exclude other actors in different aspects to be

recognized for their contributions to the craft or to allow others to join whether as actors or contributors. However, this perception is becoming increasingly challenged (Long, 1992). These challenges only present themselves as far as human writers, whether they are support groups, editors, slush readers and other important parts of the writing process not to mention that in general “Creativity does not operate in a vacuum, reliant only on the ingenuity of individuals, for it emerges within discipline and taste communities and derives from processes of information gathering and technical practice” (Atkinson & Barker, 2023, p. 1055). So while the idea of writing has begun to open up to acknowledge the effect and influence of others, it is still perceived to be solely the domain of humans.

However, with the proliferation of AI, they have now begun to broach the creative sector not only as a means of inspiration but as creators too “due to their increasing ability to autonomously incorporate information from many disciplines and sources” (Atkinson & Barker, 2023, p 1055). By being able to scrape and hold more information than a person while also being able to formulate and produce results based on the information as well, AI is proving to be a valuable asset. These abilities also mean that it poses a threat to human workers as it can be more productive in less time. Within the creative sector, Atkinson and Barker found “a continuous interest in using AI technologies to create stories” (2023, p. 14382). Furthermore, as far as “Regarding pedagogies of using AI technologies for story-writing, most studies adopted human-AI collaborative writing, while others used technology-mediated story creation” (Atkinson & Barker, 2023, p. 14383) show that even the institutionalization of writing is adapting to utilizing the AI within their already non-solitary frameworks due to its abilities. Thus, regardless of interest, practice, or prowess of writing, AI has begun to become either interwoven or being figured out how to.

With the increase of AI’s abilities and capacities, our expectations for their output have increased as well. But in regards to the ability to create they have been pushed from even the early stages. In fact, AI has already been used, at least to some significant extent, to write novels. Two examples of this are *Pharmako-AI* and *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*. While neither have been written in the last couple years, *Pharmak-AI* being the more recent of the two having been written in 2020, they remain two of the biggest and most successful AI integrated novels.

These two examples show effective ways that AI and human authors can successfully work together for a common goal in the creative sector.

Pharmako-AI by K Allado-McDowell was written as a collaboration between K Allado-McDowell and ChatGPT. It is “The first book to be co-created with the emergent AI” (Ignato, na, para. 1) in which McDowell “initiates an experimental conversation with the AI language model GPT-3 [about] selfhood, ecology and intelligence via cyberpunk, ancestry and biosemiotics. Through a writing process akin to musical improvisation, Allado-McDowell and GPT-3 together offer a fractal poetics of AI and a glimpse into the future of literature” (Ignota, na, para. 2). This utilizes AI both as a co-writer and inspiration. By incorporating a non-human actor explicitly in the writing process, it provides a perspective that would otherwise be unrepresented. Despite being made from and trained on human products, AI still can provide insights and perspectives that may be otherwise overlooked by human writers.

The older of the two examples, *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*, was submitted in the 2016 Hoshi Shinichi Literary Awards which made it through the first round of four of judging (Lewis, 2016). However, the process of which it is written was mainly human-authored as its designers wrote their own and distilled it into its basic components: words, sentences, and basic structure. Based on these parameters, the computer used an algorithm to essentially remix a new novella out of the original piece (Lewis, 2016, para 8). By limiting the output to what the authors intended, it also was attempting to maximise the output due to the limitations of AI at the time. However, it also circumvents some of the contemporary issues regarding AI writing such as harmful and stereotypical output by controlling the input and thus what the AI can produce from.

Both products, despite a substantial part being done by AI, were not possible without direct human action and contribution. While both are older examples and AI’s capabilities have increased, especially since *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*, there is always some extent of human interaction required. This can take the form of prompting, the stories it scrapes from, or the stories that it is directly fed and trained on amongst others. However, as AI becomes more prevalent and thus pulls from more AI due to the ease and quantity at which they can produce the degree of human interaction needed may become less which could affect the quality of the stories.

Despite the quantity of writing that AI can produce, quality is important as well. However, as Fang et al notes “ stories created by AI may be difficult to build emotional

connections with readers” (2023, p. 14363). As the two examples show, with the help of human direction and input, AI, while maybe not being able to achieve the highs of purely human writing at the moment, can still be well regarded.

One of the ways to effectively communicate and utilize AI is by learning how to properly prompt it. As Bsharat et al found with AI “The more precise the task or directive provided, the more effectively the model performs [...] This suggests that LLMs do not merely memorize training data but are capable of adapting this information to suit varying prompts, even when the core inquiries remain constant” (2023, p. 2). They found 26 different ways to enhance the response LLMs give when prompted, some of which are particularly applicable to creative writing involving clearly establishing the frameworks and requirements, use specific words or phrases, and providing a sample or sentence for the AI to build off of (Bsharat et al, 2023). Utilizing these methods, Bsharat et al conclude that their “empirical results demonstrate that this strategy can effectively reformulate contexts that might otherwise compromise the quality of the output, thereby enhancing the relevance, brevity, and objectivity of the responses” (2023, p. 11).

This can help with the output of AI, especially as more AI works become prevalent for which the AI will scrape from. By effectively prompting, as well as actively guiding and working with AI, the stories can be more focussed may may make them more impactful as well as easier to comprehend for the human readers and thus also make it easier for them to make changes that can enhance the emotional factor and mitigate the stereotypes or other harmful output from AI.

Furthermore, since “these programs can still produce incredibly novel content due to the variability of human input in the text prompts, and the process of translation across two modalities, text and image. Texts can combine elements in ways that are not usually apposite to image production – which was the basis of many of the creative ideas in art movements such as Dada and Surrealism “ (Atkinson & Barker, 2023, p. 1065). That there is a basis for this already in the creative sector, it may make the shift smoother within creative writing. This may also help create “a new creative paradigm [...] mainly on the intrinsic motives of creation, and less on the process conducted to express the desired intent. This assumption is grounded on the fact that advances in AI will reach extreme accuracy, ease of use and availability” (Tigre et al, 2023, p. 337) especially once the ability to effectively prompt is optimized both by humans and AI to better work in tandem.

If AI storytelling does indeed become more prevalent, how would it fit into the current understanding of human literature? Specifically, would it become its own genre or be able to fit within one of the currently established genres? AI has already proven to be able to write novels with human help in the previous examples and can be prompted to effectively create short fiction of its own. But it also still requires human input to prompt. Regardless of how much has been created so far by AI, it is still too early to tell if AI generated stories will become an established norm since “Clearly, genre is shaped by social forces and by the expectations of different readers during different historical periods” (Bishop & Starkey, 2006, p. 98). Furthermore, AI still scrapes its data from existing stories, which means that it takes and writes based on the existing and popular genre norms.

Regardless of the genre, another important aspect in regards to storytelling is its function. While there are various perspectives and arguments in regards to the function of writing by human authors, is it fair or even reasonable to apply the same expectation to AI writing? For example, in some of the oldest forms of storytelling, folklore and fairy tales, “the interpretation of symbols lodged within folkloric performances were a result of folklore serving the function of a socially sanctioned outlet for suppressed wishes and anxieties” (Bronner & Dundes, 2007, p. 54). However, if stories written by AI cannot connect with human readers on an emotional level then these important effects are muted. Thus if these stories flood the pre-existing genres due to AI’s ability to produce at a higher than human level, that could have a watering-down effect on the existing stories and of future stories. Furthermore, it could also change the genre norms and expectations or reinforce others that may prove problematic for the cultural change and reproductive elements that are typically reserved for human interference.

Despite how advanced AI becomes, it is still tethered to humanity. Whether it be due to requiring human interaction to prompt it or that it is, at least currently, scraping from motley human made stories, it cannot escape its ties to humans as of yet. However, at least as far as the latter point, as more AI stories are generated then it will start to scrape from its own sources. This not only taints the source but also further disconnects it from human emotions. Furthermore, as it continues to draw from and reproduce genre norms and stereotypes those become more ingrained into the storytelling process which may hinder counterculture attempts or potentially reinforce stereotypes which may be present in those genres. These “Biases can be encoded in ways that form a continuum from subtle patterns” (Bender et al, 2021, p. 617) which can further lead to “risk of

substantial harms, including stereotyping, denigration, increases in extremist ideology, and wrongful arrest, should humans encounter seemingly coherent LM output and take it for the words of some person or organization who has accountability for what is said” (Bender et al, 2021, p. 619). Furthermore, these pose a problem to not only the plurality of stories and the cultures, perspectives and experiences they represent but denigrate them. If left without intervention, these stories may then continue until either the acceptance of stories is lowered due to the damaging nature or the allowance of AI interaction with stories becomes limited or removed.

The idea of genre is complicated due it being an abstract and arbitrary rule utilized so humanity has a basis to comprehend the vast potential of literature. It is also an example of one of the aspects that complicates the expectations of AI is the human habit to see everything in the context of humans and force non-human entities into the same categories and comprehension that we utilize. While this can be seen in the previous paragraph regarding genre, it extends through the whole process of creation stemming from the belief it is a human domain. Specifically though, as Wilk asks, “why do we obsessively measure AI’s ability to write like a person” (2021, Para 7). This problematic approach is not new nor does it only pertain to AI as Wilk mentions:

“dolphin communications from the 1960s, in which researchers spent years trying to teach dolphins to speak English by contorting their blowholes to approximate human speech. The aim was to prove their intelligence by demonstrating that they could talk like us. Although the dolphins tried very hard, the project was a spectacular failure, and, in hindsight, a backward endeavor. Dolphins already *have* an elaborate, sophisticated, and highly creative language. It’s just not the same as ours” (Wilk, 2021, Para 19).

Despite being sixty years ago, this mindset is still applied to non-human actors that share some sort of semblance to human aspects. With AI, this comes to its speech, writing, and recognition functions. However, unlike the case with dolphins where there was an active measure to achieve this and a positive correlation to it, with AI it is also seen as both an achievement and a threat. This can also be why “We are, seemingly, anxious for it to remain in an intermediary zone: impressively competent but not threateningly virtuosic. We marvel when it manufactures a lovely sonnet and then chuckle when it makes a computer-y mistake” (Wilk, 2021, Para 6). This could be because “many programs do not sufficiently take into account how audiences might receive a joke, story, or piece of music. They operate procedurally rather than socially, unlike a

human creator who is always embedded within a social system” (Atkinson & Barker, 2023, p. 1056). Thus, having a human element, while perhaps not necessary from a quantity perspective, is necessary to ensure a higher quality of writing while working in tandem with AI even in the situation where an AI is producing the bulk of the work.

Reconciling with AI capabilities will be an important aspect to progress forward. This has been shown in the aforementioned novels that have been written to some extent by AI. Furthermore, AI technology is consistently being enhanced and updated by various companies and actors in the sector in competition to be on the cutting edge of the technology. One of the most influential models is GPT-3. Due to its size and capabilities it has been used to create but also been the basis for other AI models, the biggest and one that drew the most attention being ChatGPT. ChatGPT initially drew attention and acclaim for being a chatbot and being able to have to some extent a fully functional conversation. However, other applications for it began to be realized, such as asking it about coding and to write things such as academic papers and screenplays, short stories and other creative works as well as editing and proofreading.

But there are other models and bots for creative writing such as Shooketh, Sudowrite, and Longshot amongst many others. Shooketh is a Shakespeare-themed prompt-based bot trained on Shakespeare’s works to answer and write in that style (Shooketh, na). Similarly, Sudowrite is designed for creative writing, however rather than emulating a style it is used to write in different forms, such as poetry and or novels, as well as in different genre settings (Sudowrite, na). While not explicitly for creative writing, Longshot generates journalistic-style material (Longshot, na). These show the plurality of how AI tools can assist writers in their craft. Furthermore, these are also only ones for generating content, which is not including the use of AI and technology that has already been accepted in regards to proof-reading and editing such as spell checker and services like Grammarly.

While AI can serve as inspiration and as a co-author, it can also be led to create on its own. However, even when left to create on its own it is still being guided by us. Whether it is through being prompted by humans or in some cases also programmed to emulate certain existing styles and genres. However, with AI even as an inspiration let alone an author there are problems regardless of how safe we try to be with prompting or programming them. But these

issues are not just because of AI, its programming or data training sets. These issues are also not just contemporary nor are they only applicable to AI as Zipes cautions:

Do we tell fictional stories and maintain illusory traditions that foster intolerance, ignorance, racism, sexism, and wars? Why should we respect and maintain traditional storytelling, if traditions based on different religions and nationalisms are responsible for much of the misunderstanding and conflict in our world today? Why should we be concerned whether traditional storytelling can survive or whether we are using the appropriate means to transmit customs, mores, and language when they may be anachronistic and deadly for our children and ourselves? Aren't the religious narratives of every living religion today, intended to be taken as the gospel truth, somewhat responsible in their literalistic and fundamentalist interpretations for crimes against children and humanity? (Zipes, 2005, p. 3)

Thus, if even we as human authors struggle with these issues, is it reasonable to expect AI to not have those same issues when its training data can scrape these biases from our stories at their most primitive states. While mentioned above that AI stories may struggle to connect on an emotional level and how that can damage the effect they have, they also can strengthen these problematic aspects of writing and storytelling that is inherent in any cultural exchange. But just because of these problematic aspects does not mean they are inherent only to AI creations but are evident in human creations too so it should not be a surprise they reappear in AI stories.

The common perception is that creativity has seemingly always been the domain of humanity. However, that is discrediting all the other actors and factors that play a role in not only human survival but creativity. This has been exposed through the introduction of AI into the creative sector. Not only has AI revealed this, but it has also made the biases more relevant and obvious in existing texts that the AI data has scraped from. Both those can be beneficial revelations though as it can allow for the domain of human creativity to not only open up as far as contributors but also the awareness of the repercussions of what we create. So, by embracing AI as a tool and ally rather than competitor and replacement of human writers it can help both the writers with creating stories and also accepting the other actors that are a part of writing. Furthermore, the stories that AI provides can then have the problematic aspects scraped from existing stories moderated and edited out by human authors. Similar to Wilk's argument that "The death of the author has been proclaimed too many times, and AI does not signal a final

straw any more than photography heralded the death of the painter” (2021, Para 24), just like with photography that requires human to aim and moderate to create new art that may otherwise be unattainable, AI writing can coexist with human authors to the benefit of both.

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