

AI-Crafted? Nein Danke!

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1 Extended Abstract

Debate on the role of generative AI in narrative and authorship explores the potential for exploitation, empowerment, and harms. I position this abstract as a provocation, approaching the debate from an end-reader perspective. From this perspective, a problem is evident: that Generative AI writing has an audience problem.

In Roald Dahl's 1954 short story 'The Great Automatic Grammatizator', he describes the invention of a fantastic machine which, in a process we would recognise as human-in-the-loop generation, churns out entire novels in a matter of minutes. A given author need simply sit in the pilot's seat, select from a number of options regarding genre, audience, etc., pull the starter switch, and engage in an operation "rather like flying a plane and driving a car and playing an organ all at the same time" [5]. The inventor, Adolph Knipe, is a struggling writer who immediately recognizes the opportunity for franchise. He demonstrates the titular Grammatizator to published authors who, at first outraged, rapidly sign on to lifetime contracts when they recognise the quality and rapid production of the generated works. The story ends with a vision of a writer in poverty, resolutely resisting the draw of "that golden contract" [5] as their children starve.

Much of the conversation surrounding LLM-generative literature has addressed the points of quality and production: the possibilities of human-AI symposium; whether readers can tell the difference between human and generative writing [1, 6]; and how to engineer longer, coherent narratives from short-memory stochastic dialogues. We have learned that Gen-AI stories have a 'particular shape'—that Claude struggles with plot tension, that "GPT over-indexes on dream sequences, and Gemini defaults to external character description" [8], and we discuss prompt engineering and framework harnessing to combat these issues [3].

But Dahl's Knipe immediately recognises what many of these conversations ignore: that *audiences do not want to read machine-written prose, if they know that it is machine written* (this latter distinction is important—research by e.g. Köbis and Mossink [6] suggests that people are not as good at distinguishing AI content as they think they are). Knipe first submits the generated works under pseudonyms, and then brings established authors on board to put their signatures to generated works.¹ He understands that subterfuge is necessary for an audience to comfortably swallow

¹In contrast to e.g. Anthropic, who skipped this step and have since reached a \$1.5 billion settlement with authors whose works they pirated to train their large language models [4].

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machine-made stories. Emerging evidence toward audience discomfort with AI-generated content is born out across multiform narrative media including games [2], news media [9], and books [7].

On behalf of these uncomfortable audiences and struggling writers I therefore put forward these provocations for discussion:

- (1) Is subterfuge the only path to success for those intending to commercialise generative-AI prose?
- (2) Must writers accept the rapid and homogenised reproduction of their work in order to remain competitive, or else starve?
- (3) Is it reasonable to expect audiences to give their attention and read a narrative that no one cared enough to write?

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