The Evolving Role of Authors and Audiences: Navigating AI-Generated Content

Shreyasi Mitra

PhD Student, Department of English, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

Email address: shreyasimitra20@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the evolving roles of authors and readers in an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and machine-generated content. Through close readings of works by Roald Dahl, Georges Perec, and Italo Calvino, the paper explores how literature has long anticipated the ethical dilemmas posed by technological innovation, including the commodification of creativity and the dissolution of the author's unique voice. The analysis extends to the reader's shifting role, highlighting how AI-driven tools are transforming reading from an interpretive collaboration into a process increasingly mediated by algorithmic efficiency. Ultimately, the paper argues for a nuanced understanding of authorship and readership in the digital age, advocating for a complementary relationship between human creativity and artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Humanities,Literary Responsibility, Ethics of Technology, Italo Calvino, Roald Dahl, Georges Perec

Imagine a world where, with a few lines of instruction, you could create the video of your choice starring your favourite celebrity. Someone imagined and brought this idea to life when Tom Hanks revealed that a dental company had used AI-generated images of him for their campaign.

Hayao Miyazaki, the brains behind Studio Ghibli, protested against this proliferation of AI-generated content that imitates the distinct style of the creators in order to cater for the masses and their specific individual needs, when users across the world used ChatGPT to generate their personalised images based on the art style used by the Studio.

While these are not isolated incidents, both instances, however, raise a significant question. What even is the need for creative artists and original creative work, if we have garnered such sophisticated technology to remove the creators from the centre?

In this context, my paper investigates the role of the author and the reader in the age of artificially generated content.

The dilemma of the position of a creator in the age of machine-generated content is not new. In fact, the period after the Second World War, i.e., 1945, saw a continued dedication

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towards scientific research, which had initially begun in the late 18th Century. This research was more technological in nature, and the inventions became intrinsic products of the common household. The Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War led to the rise of consumerism, which began in America with the idea of providing mass-produced goods for all, and it eventually spread to Europe.

1950 onwards also questioned Europe's search for identity, which was tinged with consumerism, but not unanimously accepted by the intellectual sphere of Europe, which did not agree that mass access to consumer goods and consumer choice should be equated with democracy and liberty. Georges Perec captures this idea in his first novel, *Things: a story of the sixties*, where the Parisian couple is beyond the capacity of self-reflection, as they navigate through their lives, defining themselves only by the popular materialistic things.

Bertolt Brecht had earlier clearly denounced technology in his *Der Ozeanflug* (1927), having lived through the horrors of the First World War. This being a Lehrstück, a text targeted at conveying a particular discourse, his intention of warning the masses against the use of technology without reflection and moderation was clear. However, the benefits of scientific innovations enjoyed by the consumerist society at large could no longer be blatantly labelled as any technological advancement, as good or bad.

In such a context, Road Dahl's 'The Great Automatic Grammatizator' (1954), Georges Perec's *The Machine* (1968) and Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1979) become significant.

Although separated by decades, borders, and genres, all three authors were intellectually engaged with a common theme — the advancement of technology and the ethical positionality of the creator.

Roald Dahl in his short story, *The Great Automatic Grammatizator*, imagines a machine which could have the potential to replace writers, while Georges Perec's radio play, *The Machine*, and Italo Calvino's novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, focus more on how technology could aid in reading and interpretation of the text.

This paper tries to address some of the issues in the following sections

The role of an author in the age of technological innovations.

Technology has attained unprecedented leaps and bounds in recent times, ever since the proliferation of AI. It allows for bringing forth ideas that were previously only in the realm of human imagination.

The bridging of the gap between imagination and reality through AI is not restricted only to STEM. In the Humanities, particularly in literature, the effect is visible. Books such as *When the three attacks, The journey to becoming enlightened is arduous, Department of Vinh Du Stands in Front of His Parents' Tombstone, The God Tu mutters, Ma La Er snorted scornfully, Jessica's Attention* made to the bestsellers' list despite being generated by artificial intelligence and often reviewed as gibberish.

Historically, philosophers have sought to define the position and responsibility of an author (

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or any creative artist).

Plato was critical of poets and authors, especially in his work *The Republic*. He argued that poets wield significant influence over the moral development of citizens and thus should be held to high ethical standards. Plato even suggested censoring or banning poets whose works might mislead or morally corrupt the public, believing that literature should promote virtue and truth rather than mere pleasure or imitation.

Aristotle took a more nuanced view, recognising the educational and cathartic roles of poetry and drama. In his *Poetics*, he argued that authors and poets have a responsibility to represent human actions in a way that promotes understanding and moral reflection. For Aristotle, art should lead to catharsis, a purging of emotions that ultimately contributes to personal and social well-being.

Longinus, in his treatise *On the Sublime*, places the author's role at the intersection of moral greatness and imaginative power. He defines sublimity in literature as "the echo of greatness of spirit," meaning that the highest achievements in writing stem from the author's own moral and imaginative excellence.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his essay *A Defence of Poetry*, sees poets (and by extension, authors) as the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." For Shelley, authors are visionaries who perceive and articulate the underlying truths and emotions of existence. Their creations have the power to inspire empathy, moral progress, and social change. Shelley believes the poet's imagination is essential for civilisation: "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present."

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his essay "What is Literature?", articulates a profound vision of the author's role as fundamentally ethical and engaged with the world. For Sartre, the writer is not merely a creator of aesthetic objects but a committed individual who uses literature to reveal the world and provoke responsibility in the reader.

Sartre argues that the writer's main task is "to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about". Writing, for Sartre, is an appeal, a call to the reader's freedom and responsibility. He insists that "all literary work is an appeal. To write is to make an appeal to the reader…The writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work". (Sartre) This means literature is a dialogue between the writer and the reader, both of whom are free and situated beings. The writer must trust the reader's freedom and write in a way that acknowledges and challenges it.

Sartre also emphasises the power and responsibility of the author: words are "loaded pistols," and the writer must be aware of the impact his or her words can have on the world. The writer should not write merely for escapism or personal pleasure, but with the awareness that literature can change the world. Sartre calls on writers to recognise the potential of their words and to use them purposefully, aiming to influence society and history rather than writing at random or in isolation.

Through the discourses of the above-mentioned philosophers across different periods, it is apparent that creative writers are generally regarded as influential to society, and hence, the inherent implication lies in them taking responsibility for their work.

Roald Dahl challenges this idea in his short story, where the protagonist, Adolf Knipe,

develops a machine for generating bestsellers and eventually renders the existing writers irrelevant.

The premise that language has a structure and how any sentence could be composed based on the fixed structure formed the basis for Dahl's conception of the machine, the Grammatizator. This approach to understanding language is almost mathematical, as the main character Adolf Knipe, realises that,

"... an engine built along the lines of the electric computer could be adjusted to arrange words (instead of numbers) in their right order according to the rules of grammar. Give it the verbs, the nouns, the adjectives, the pronouns, store them in the memory section as a vocabulary, and arrange for them to be extracted as required. Then feed it with plots and leave it to write the sentences" (Dahl)

Once the machine became a grand economic success by producing bestselling novels with the push of a few buttons, Knipe obtained a monopoly by offering monetary incentives to contemporary authors, since the machine-produced novels were better than their own. Thus, the generated novels became commodified and no longer remained an outcome of the 'creative urge' that originally inspired Knipe to build this machine.

The ending reveals that the narrator of the story, although in dire financial constraints, had not yet surrendered to this invention that was slowly replacing the author figure in the society and prays,

"Give us strength, Oh Lord, to let our children starve." (Dahl)

Martin Paul Eve reads this short story from a Marxist angle and argues for considering 'authorship' as a 'labour function' in order to prevent such an outcome at the present, where AI is capable of the same functions as the Grammatizator. (Eve)

The short story underlines the anxiety of the author against the backdrop of capitalism and the helplessness that grips the author in slowly losing out on agency.

While Dahl's short story raises the question of the necessity of the creative writer, Perec's radio play, *Die Maschine/The Machine,* focuses entirely on the various combinations that could be generated from a single poem, which would aid in interpreting the meaning. With the help of three processors, Goethe's *Wanderers Nachtlied* undergoes various permutations and combinations, according to the instructions given through the system control.

Interestingly, 1968 marks the seminal year of Barthes' publication of the essay, *The Death of the Author*, where he asserts,

"linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable, analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors." (Barthes)

Perec's text works along similar ideas, where the computer program retrieves data on Goethe from the data bank which has no apparent link to the poem. In fact, at one point, the original poem becomes entirely unrecognisable at one point through substitutions of synonyms and rearrangement of words, so that the programme fails to distinguish Goethe's name from

Hoelderin or Neruda. The author figure thus gets lost in the references, as the commands allow the machine to play with the words and structure of the poem. The influence of OuLiPo is apparent here.

The extract below from *The Machine* exemplifies this aspect.

```
rambler's lullaby
                                          date of origin
            september 6, 1780
                                          author of the poem
                        goethe, johann wolf-
                        gang von, 1749–1832
                                          original language of
                                          the poem
            german
                                          words of the poem
            over all hilltops
            is rest,
            in all treetops
            you feel
            hardly a breath;
            the birds are silent in the forest.
            only wait, soon
            you too shall rest.

                                          SOUND
                                          protocol no. 0
                                                            (Perec)
```

Marc Kohlbry argues that *Die Maschine* shows the limitations of an attempt to analyse a poem in such a controlled environment and how after a point the system goes beyond the scope of the text, in so far as to associate the German connection of Goethe to the Nazi salute. (Kohlbry)

```
                                    inversion
    you feel
            you don't feel
                                    stop
                                    back to processor 1
    you feel no
                                    recapitulation
    over all hilltops
            is rest
                        in all treetops
    you feel
            h
            ha
            hai
            hai
            heil hi
                                                    (Perec)
```

This is problematic because it demonstrates how machine-generated writing, being impartial, has the possibility of creating and spreading messages with need not necessarily contribute to

the enrichment and positive growth of society. The author has neither agency nor responsibility here.

Calvino's writings provide a more balanced position of a creative writer in terms of technology. In "Cybernetics and Ghosts", he defines literature as a 'combinatorial game' which is in congruence with both Dahl's and Perec's idea. Extending on Barthes, Calvino acknowledges that,

> "The 'I' of the author is dissolved in the writing. The so-called personality of the writer exists within the very act of writing: it is the product and the instrument of the writing process. A writing machine that has been fed an instruction appropriate to the case could also devise an exact and unmistakable "personality" of an author, or else it could be adjusted in such a way as to evolve or change "personality" with each work it composes. Writers, as they have always been up to now, are already writing machines; or at least they are when things are going well. What Romantic terminology called genius or talent or inspiration or intuition is nothing other than finding the right road empirically, following one's nose, taking short cuts, whereas the machine would follow a systematic and conscientious route while being extremely rapid and multiple at the same time" (Calvino)

He expands this idea in *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1978), where the translator, Ermes Marana, produces books and passes them off as written by authors who do not exist, to keep up with the demand of the consumers. In contrast, the other author figure Silas Flannery, prefers to know and to be known by his readers. Ironically, the readers never get to meet him or seem to recognise him through his books. In fact, throughout the novel, the reader goes in search of finding the original book written by a particular author, and is eluded every time, until he realises that the figure of the author and the original story is not a singular entity but a continuation of different stories altogether.

The position of the reader in the age of technological innovations

Does the reader have any responsibility in reading? The Poststructuralists, particularly Barthes and Foucault, hinted at the reader also playing a role in the process of reading and meaning-making. The Reader response criticism looks at reading as a collaboration between the author and the reader, where meaning entirely depends on the successful establishment of the hermeneutic circle. Sartre in *What is Literature?* also emphasises the idea of freedom that

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a reader should have in collaborating with the writer in understanding a work of art.

Calvino articulates his position of the importance of the reader in his novel by presenting two kinds of readers.

Ludmila and Lotaria are the two types of readers in the text. Ludmila conforms to those kinds of readers who enjoy constructing the meaning out of the text, which might not align with the author's intention. For Ludmila, every text is thus a creation.

Her sister, Lotaria, is an academic but does not conform to the conventional modes of reading, but rather focuses on efficiency. Hence, she uses machine to sort out the most commonly used words to get the central idea of the work and then chooses to discuss the work with others without actually having read the work.

With AI, Lotaria's approach is increasingly becoming a practice.

Deny Yadav (2024) offers a literature review and original research on AI's integration into literary analysis, focusing on Shakespeare's "Hamlet." It highlights how AI excels at identifying patterns, themes, and stylistic markers, but often lacks the depth and contextual understanding of traditional human critique. The study advocates for a complementary approach, where AI augments human expertise to provide richer literary insights.

The research paper, AI-Driven Literary Analysis: Exploring the Role of ChatGPT in Understanding and Interpreting Literary Texts (2024), investigates the application of AI models, especially ChatGPT, in literary analysis. It compares AI's analytical processes with human approaches, discussing how AI can reveal patterns and themes while also considering the ongoing debate about the impact of AI on literary scholarship. The study underscores the potential for AI to expand critical perspectives and generate novel interpretations, while also noting its current limitations.

Reimagining Storytelling: The Role of AI in Literary Analysis(2024) synthesises research on AI's involvement in both the creation and study of literary works. It highlights AI's ability to automate labour-intensive analysis, discover patterns, and provide new perspectives on classic and underexplored texts. The study also discusses ethical and philosophical questions related to authorship, originality, and the evolving relationship between human creativity and machine intelligence.

The Impact of AI on Literary Analysis: Opportunities and Challenges (2024) explores the intersection of AI and literature, questioning whether machine-generated interpretations demonstrate true creativity or simply reflect existing biases. It argues that AI should play a supportive role, enhancing human creativity and learning rather than replacing or overshadowing human interpretation. The article also addresses concerns about originality

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and the risk of over-reliance on AI-driven interpretations.

Artificial intelligence is certainly a great aid when it comes to identifying patterns in the language and segregating ideas. It will only get better with time, as more and more data is being fed and feedback is given for it to improve.

Where do I stand as a reader and writer: The end and the beginning

Calvino in his 'Cybernetics and Ghosts' says,

> Literature can work in a critical vein or to confirm things as they are and as we know them to be. The boundary is not always clearly marked, and I would say that on this score the spirit in which one reads is decisive: *it is up to the reader to see to it that literature exerts its critical force, and this can occur independently of the author's intentions.* (Cybernetics and Ghosts, Part VI, P 23)

This focuses on two aspects: the creativity of the writer and the agency of the reader in interpreting the text. Here, both have a responsibility in aligning with the values that contribute to the betterment of society. Because AI lacks the human qualities of ethical judgement and empathy, the process of creation and consumption should always go through a lens of critique.

AI is here to stay, and the only way creators and the audiences can negotiate is by remembering,

> The literature machine can perform all the permutations possible on a given material, but the poetic result will be the particular effect of one of these permutations on a man endowed with a consciousness and an unconscious, that is, an empirical and historical man
>
> (Cybernetics and Ghosts, Part IV, P 20)

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