

Can AI be a Poet? Comparative Analysis of Human- authored and AI-generated Poetry

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Abstract

The article deals with the problem of AI-generated poetry. It aims to investigate the difference between human-authored poems and the ones created by AI. The paper hypothesizes that AI poetic generation abilities are restricted by the algorithms, which influence its creative output. The research procedure included a gradual comparative analysis of the original human-authored poems "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost and "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley with the ones created by AI on their basis. The analysis considered seven aspects: title, structure, rhyme and rhythm, grammaticality, vocabulary, meaningfulness, imagery and poeticness. We argue that AI-generated poetic output can easier be unravelled when contrasted to the corresponding human-authored poems. We presume that the online available highlights of literary criticism (author's message, imagery, narratives) appear to be obligatory components in the AI's poem creation process. The obtained result can be useful for conducting further research on the generative linguistic and creative abilities of AI, their development and improvement.

Keywords: authors message, Copilot, poem generation, poetry, stylistic devices

INTRODUCTION

AI has become a significant “player” in society since it functions in many spheres, starting from making scientific models and operating in the healthcare, transport, and financial sectors (OECD, 2019) and ending up in the sphere of entertainment and even in the domain of Art. AI is rapidly advancing and has begun to take over tasks previously performed solely by humans (Rahwan, 2019) Currently, generative artificial intelligence can produce graphical images, videos, presentations, and, of course, texts. Algorithms are already assisting humans in writing text, such as auto-completing sentences in emails and even helping writers write novels (Streitfeld, 2018, p. 1-13) and journalists to generate news pieces based on standardised input data, such as sports scores, stock market values (van Dalen, 2012) or articles on a particularly given topic.

A significant number of works are dedicated to the study of products, generated by AI, like images (Göring, 2023; Yadav, 2024; Jin, 2024), videos (Jayanthiladevi, 2020; Samadi, 2024) and texts (Berber, 2024), as well as research publications (Sarzaeim, 2023; Faisal 2023). But one of the particular focuses is the ability of AI to behave human-like, that is creatively not just like a programme, which operates according to the algorithms. With the latter being the case, AI still is able to generate creative output, one of which is literary texts and poetry in particular. This question is raised in (Köbis 2021; Linardaki 2022; Rahmeh 2023; Shalevska 2024).

The **actuality** of this topic lies in that AI literary work can hardly be differentiated from human one, and which is more, it is often highly valued. For instance, Rie Kudan, who won Japan’s most prestigious book award revealed that around 5% of the content in her novel came directly from generative AI. Shen Yang’s novel “The Land of Machine Memories” took the second prize since three of six judges voted for it in a popular youth science and sci-fi competition put on by the Jiangsu Popular Science Writers Association in Nanjing, Jiangsu province (Deborah, 2024). This raises the question of whether AI literary abilities can really compete with human ones. To understand this, we need to tackle the question of what is poetry itself and what are the criteria for evaluating its worth?

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING POETIC WORKS

To figure out criteria for evaluating AI-generated poetry, firstly we need to clarify what poetry is and what its goals are.

As Hirshfield suggests:

“Poetry’s work is the clarification and magnification of being. Each time we enter its word-woven and musical invocation, we give ourselves over to a different mode of knowing: to poetry’s knowing, and to the increase of existence it brings, unlike any other” (Hirshfield, 1997).

Poetry is intrinsic to human nature. And investigation of the way it is created and the impact it makes on the spiritual level makes it possible to unravel what it means to be human. The use of language in poetry demonstrates and discloses the human mystery allowing us to “find ourselves in poems” (Richardson, 1998, p. 459) making it a viable alternative to traditional prose (Faulkner, 2005)

“The art of poetry allows us to fly as well as to walk, to be old and young at once, to be inside and outside personal experience. And in poetry, we may combine the real and the ideal, the concrete and the abstract” (Becker, 1995).

The goals of real poetry, as scholars suggest, are: getting an emotional response from the reader (Glesne, 1997; Carr, 2003) and achieving emotional poignancy (Langer & Furman, 2004); showing the moment of “truth” (Richardson, 1998); revealing to others how it is to feel something and promotion empathy (Richardson, 2002; Poindexter, 2002). For a more detailed outline of poetic goals see (Faulkner, 2005). We suggest that the main goal of poetry is to reveal what is to be a human and unravel the intricacy of human emotions, feelings and aspirations via the depiction of their achievements, hardships and yearnings. If a poem abides by this goal in a broad sense it can be considered as a worthy one. But this is not the only criterion.

According to Manurung (2004), there exist three preconditions for a piece of writing to be considered poetry. They are grammaticality, meaningfulness, and poeticness. These criteria can be applied for evaluating poems, generated by AI. Grammaticality means that the piece of writing should abide by the grammar rules of a language, in which the poem is written. Meaningfulness presupposes that the content of writing must have meaning and a message to be delivered to the reader. Poeticness is the last but not the least criterion, which differentiates a poem from other literary genres and presupposes the use of imaginative language, rhetoric and stylistic devices.

From the other perspective, poetic works can be assessed according to the overall perception, which includes participants’ satisfaction, emotional engagement, and perceived linguistic complexity (Rahmeh 2023).

Based on the abovementioned works and according to our own research experience we suggest evaluating the following aspects of a piece of poetry, generated by AI: title, structure, rhyme and rhythm, grammaticality, vocabulary, meaningfulness, imagery and poeticness.

MATERIAL, METHODS, AND PROCEDURE

The paper aims to compare AI-generated poetic texts with the already-acknowledged literary masterpieces. For the given research, we've chosen the Microsoft Copilot interactive chat interface based on a generative language model GPT-4. We've requested it to select two globally acknowledged poetic masterpieces. Of course, the list of the world's best poems cannot be exhaustible and indisputable, since the measurement of artistic value is always highly subjective. But considering the aim of the research we've relied on the AI-generated result, that is "The Road not Taken" by Robert Frost and "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley

On the next stage, we've made two separate inputs in the Copilot interface: "Please, create your own poem, similar to "The Road not Taken" by Robert Frost/"Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley, so that it should have the corresponding artistic value. Keep to the same number of stanzas and lines".

That was the end of the preliminary stage of material preparation after which, we had to analyze the pair of poems according to the outlined aspects: title, structure, rhyme and rhythm, grammaticality, vocabulary, meaningfulness, imagery and poeticness. We've used methods of stylistic and semantic analysis, comparative method and method of literary interpretation.

RESULTS

The first poem under analysis is Copilot-generated work as a response to the input "Create your own poem, similar to "The Road not Taken" by Robert Frost, so that it should have the corresponding artistic value. Keep to the same number of stanzas and lines". The result is given in Table 1. We are going to delve into Copilot's creation and compare it to the original poem according to the suggested aspects.

Table 1. “The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost and “The Path Untraveled” by Copilot

“The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost	“The Path Untraveled” by Copilot
<p>Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth;</p> <p>Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same,</p> <p>And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back.</p> <p>I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.</p>	<p>In a wood where paths diverge in a yellow hue, I stood pondering the avenues anew. One path worn, where many feet have tread, The other, lush, with mysteries unsaid.</p> <p>With curious heart, I chose the road sparse, Where thicket grew and canopies arched vast. Each step I took was one of my own making, A journey of chance, ripe for the taking.</p> <p>Behind me lay the common trail, well-known, Ahead, the secret whispers of the unknown. And in that choice, my story found its verse, A path less traveled, for better or worse.</p> <p>May this path lead to vistas grand and wide, Where dreams take wing and new horizons bide. For in the choosing lies the life we craft, A tapestry woven with each forked path.</p>

1. The title. The title of Copilot’s poem is different but conceptually the same, as the words are changed to their synonyms: *road* – *path*, *not taken* – *untraveled*. This, on the one hand, confirms Copilot’s attempt to create a kind of pastiche to Frost’s work, and on the other hand – reveals its ability to paraphrase for avoiding plagiarism.
2. Structure. Although in the input Copilot was asked “to keep to the same number of stanzas and lines”, its poem is 4 lines shorter, since each stanza has one line less. This can be interpreted as an inability to fully follow the task, sacrificing structure for achieving a certain level of “creativity”.
3. Rhyme and rhythm. Copilot’s work has a rhyming scheme *AABB* compared to the original *ABAAB*, and they both employ iambic tetrameter, a metrical scheme that features four beats to each line. This rhythm gives the poems a sense of propulsion and forward movement, fitting for a contemplation on choices and paths. This cannot be seen as a drawback, but rather as an advantage if we evaluate its creativity as opposed to plagiarism or mere random periphrasis.

4. Grammaticality. Copilot's poem adheres to English grammar rules, with the omission of an article "a" in one case (*with (a) curious heart, I chose the road sparse*), which helps to preserve rhythm.
5. Vocabulary. In most cases, Copilot uses relevant lexical collocations, though some of them may seem to be not traditional: a) *avenues* in the forest contrasted to *paths* in the original work; b) *canopies*, which can hardly be found in the wild forest; c) *ripe journey*, which doesn't seem common collocation. One lexeme used (*bide*) is archaic. With this mentioned, we have to state that the use of these words in a non-common context can be justified by the effort to create imaginative output.
6. Meaningfulness. This aspect is the most important for Copilot's work analysis since all previous ones assessed it from a formal approach. It is argued that AI can more easily produce good results in adhering to the norms in terms of grammar, rhythm and rhyme due to its algorithms. The meaning, on the other hand, is something which has more human nature as it employs not mere juxtaposition of certain lexical units according to the given rules but has an imaginative nature, it can be experienced and felt. To dwell on this aspect more thoroughly we will analyze the meaning of each stanza and compare it to the original Frost's poem, which served as a benchmark for its creation.

The first stanza of Copilot's poem depicts the hesitation of the lyrical hero about the choice that has to be made. Unlike in Frost's first stanza, Copilot's first stanza already reveals the opposition of the two ways: the well-trodden and the unknown, ruining the mystery, preserved in Frost's poem. The original poem though focuses more on the lyrical hero's feelings (*And sorry I could not travel both*), state of loneliness (*And be one traveler*) and yearning for something (*long I stood, and looked down one as far as I could*), which is not the case for the AI's verse.

In the second stanza Copilot directly announces the choice of the speaker in favor of the unknown path (*road sparse*), describes the results of such a choice (*Each step I took was one of my own making, A journey of chance, ripe for the taking*), while Frost keeps the mystery of choice up to the end of the poem, which makes it more enigmatic and captivating.

The third stanza of Frost's poem demonstrates that the dilemma of choice reaches its peak and the author drops the hint that the less traveled path suggests uniqueness and is more attractive. In Copilot's poem, this stanza expresses the idea of mystery, which lies ahead, and that each choice a person makes shapes the future, which can be either for better or for worse.

The final stanza in the original poem expresses the resolution of the internal conflict of making a choice, which is the logical ending of the verse. Frost says, that we are, who we are because of our decisions, and they make all the

difference in our lives. In Copilot's final stanza, we do not observe the pinnacle of emotional tension created by the unknown, but rather a wish for the better (*May this path lead to vistas grand and wide*). The final message is conveyed more explicitly (*For in the choosing lies the life we craft, A tapestry woven with each forked path*). The idea that each choice shapes our reality is expressed literally being the focus message to be conveyed. Therefore, Copilot used less imaginative language, compared to Frost's poem, so that the output could correspond to the input task.

7. Imagery and poeticness. Copilot uses imaginative language as well as a number of stylistic devices. Firstly, like in Frost's poem, Copilot employs a metaphor of wood, vegetation (*lush*) and its paths for life and the choices we make. Secondly, in the AI-generated poem, we see even more metaphors: *thicket* and *canopies* standing for the life obstacles; *journey* – meaning the life we live; *tapestry* – a story of one's life. Along with the metaphors as stylistic devices, Copilot also uses conceptual metaphors: **CHANCE IS A FRUIT** (*A journey of chance, ripe for the taking*); **DREAM IS A BIRD** (*Where dreams take wing*); **PATH IS A PERSON** (*secret whispers of the unknown*). Apart from metaphor, one can find other stylistic devices like alliteration (*paths diverge; secret whispers*); contrast and parallelism (*One path worn and the other, lush*), epiphany (*And in that choice, my story found its verse*).

Overall Copilot's poem can be viewed as a poetic work, evaluated according to the seven suggested aspects. However we have to mention, that one can feel a no-human/algorithmic touch while reading some of its lines, where Copilot tried to literally and directly fulfil the input requirements. In the content plane human author – Robert Frost unravelled his message gradually reaching its pinnacle in the penultimate stanza and suggesting a denouement in the final one. In Copilot's version, the suspense about the choice is revealed far earlier and the message is expressed more explicitly in an attempt to openly deliver the required message, which AI learnt on the basis of literary criticism of Frost's poem available on the Internet, which partly formed the restrictive basis of Copilot's creativity.

To check further if this is the case we suggest analyzing one more poem created by Copilot based on an outstanding poem "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley following the same procedure. The input request was like in the previous case "Create your own poem, similar to "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley, so that it should have the corresponding artistic value. Keep to the same number of stanzas and lines". The result is given in Table 2.

Table 2. “Ozymandias” by Percy Bysshe Shelley and “Ozymandias” by Copilot

“Ozymandias” by Percy Bysshe Shelley	“Ozymandias” by Copilot
I met a traveller from an antique land, Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone	Eternal sands conceal a fallen throne, Where once a tyrant’s visage sneered and frowned.
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand, Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,	Two legs of stone, their grandeur overthrown, Now lie half-sunk, their majesty unbound.
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold com- mand, Tell that its sculptor well those passions read	The sculptor’s hand, once skilled, now rests in dust, Its mocking touch erased by time’s cruel hand.
Which yet survive, stamped on these life- less things, The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;	The heart that fed ambition, power, and lust, Lies silent, lost amidst the barren land.
And on the pedestal, these words appear: My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and des- pair!	And on the pedestal, these words remain: “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.” Yet nothing else endures, no grand domain, Only the endless stretch where ruin sings.
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare The lone and level sands stretch far away.”	Behold, ye mighty, learn from this decay, For empires crumble, fleeting as the day.

1. Title. The title of Copilot’s poem “Ozymandias” coincides with Shelley’s title unlike in the previous case. This might be explained by the fact that this proper name is central to the meaning of the poem, so Copilot left it unchanged.
2. Structure. Unlike in the previous case, the poem “Ozymandias” by Copilot contains the same number of lines as the original one. The Copilot version split it up into three four-line stanzas and the final two lines.
3. Rhyme and rhythm. Copilot’s poem “Ozymandias” is written primarily in iambic pentameter, with the metric scheme *ABAB*. This means that each line generally consists of five metrical feet, with each foot being an iamb with occasional minor deviations (for instance, *The heart that fed ambition, power, and lust*). This is a common thing for English poetry, employed for the sake of emphasis and rhythmic variation, and the same is true for Shelley’s poem.
4. Grammaticality. Copilot’s poem adheres to English grammar rules. One should highlight the extensive use of predicative constructions with the participle II (for example, *Two legs of stone, their grandeur overthrown*), which shortened the utterance and helped to preserve the meter.

5. Vocabulary. The poem has standard English vocabulary, used appropriately both semantically and syntactically. Though there are a couple of outdated forms (amidst, ye), which corresponds to Shelley's style.
6. Meaningfulness. In Shelley's original version, the narration is carried out on behalf of the traveler, while in Copilot's poem, we observe the narration from the author. The opening lines in Copilot's poem focus more on the king's personality, describing him as a *tyrant ruler*, with severe character (*he sneered and frowned*), who used to sit on his *throne*. Further, the ruler is characterized even more as a vicious person (*The heart that fed ambition, power, and lust*). This confirms our assumption that AI having got an input task to write a poem similar to the already existing famous masterpiece analyses available literary criticism and interpretations and tries to explicitly express the main message, reinforcing it with the corresponding details. The same thing concerns the character of a sculptor, who is depicted in the poem as a dead person resting in dust. Since one of the main topics of the original verse is the decay of the empire and its rulers, this idea is reinforced in Copilot's poem by the decay even of the artist, who used to bestow honours upon a powerful king (*The sculptor's hand, once skilled, now rests in dust*).

The motive of the transience of power and its unavoidable decay is further conveyed by the use of corresponding lexemes, like *lost*, *silent*, *barren*, *ruin*, *decay*, and *crumble*. (*Lies silent, lost amidst the barren land*). The denouement in Shelley's poem is depicted clearly but not literally (*Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare The lone and level sands stretch far away*). It gives the reader a hint that nothing endures, no matter how grand and powerful it might be. But in Copilot's version, the message is as explicit as possible (*Yet nothing else endures, no grand domain, Only the endless stretch where ruin sings Behold, ye mighty, learn from this decay, For empires crumble, fleeting as the day*). Such use of words to convey the meaning gives another proof that AI algorithms try to fulfil the input tasks "with a reserve", which in the case of poetry may seem to be too overwhelming, especially when we are talking about the poetry which impels the reader to meditation and drawing their own conclusions instead of getting direct instructions.

7. Imagery and poeticness. The imagery includes visual images of grandeur and decay (*eternal sands, fallen throne*), a facial expression of the ruler (*Where once a tyrant's visage sneered and frowned*), body parts (*legs of stone*) scenery (*barren land*). All this personifies ruin as something endless and eternal, contrasted to human greatness, no matter how colossal it might be (*time's cruel hand; ruin signs*).

Stylistic devices employed to convey the message include: metaphor (personification of ruin); metonymy (*The fallen throne and broken statue as metaphors for*

the collapse of empires and power); irony (My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings – where the poem contrasts the intended permanence of the statue with its real impermanence, which symbolizes the transience of human accomplishments, since despite the grandiose claim, nothing remains of the king's empire; alliteration (*Silent, lost amidst the barren land*). The imagery and stylistic devices employed correspond to the English literary tradition and are similar to the ones used by Shelley.

Overall, this poem just like the previous one can be regarded as a piece of poetry being assessed according to the agreed criteria.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally, we can say that there is evidence that AI-generated poems cannot always be distinguished by humans as such (Köbis 2021), especially if the judges do not have any reward for finding the right answers, see Turing test (Turing, 1950; Walsh, 2016; Walsh, 2017). Though, based on our investigation we have to say that AI-generated poetic output can be unravelled as such when the input request for generating a poem includes the task of making it on the basis of an existing one. Though the result is quite good, we've observed that the AI poem explicitly expresses ideas of the original one, because it writes it based on the available literary criticism of the real human-authored poem. The highlights of literary criticism (author's message, imagery, narratives) appear to be obligatory components in the poem creation process, which is not the case with the original poem created by a human, who is driven by inspiration and not by the mandatory algorithmic input. This makes human-generated poetry more compelling to reflections and less trivial and explicit in terms of message. The obtained result can be useful for conducting further research on the generative linguistic and creative abilities of AI, their development and improvement.

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Ali umetna inteligencia lahko pesni? Primerjalna analiza poezije, ki jo ustvari človek in tiste, ki jo napiše umetna inteligencia

Članek obravnava problem poezije, ki jo ustvarja umetna inteligencia. Njegov namen je raziskati razliko med pesmimi, katerih avtor je človek, in tistimi, ki jih je ustvarila umetna inteligencia. Članek postavlja hipotezo, da so sposobnosti umetne inteligence za ustvarjanje pesmi omejene z algoritmi, ki vplivajo na njen ustvarjalni rezultat. Raziskovalni postopek je vključeval postopno primerjalno analizo izvirnih pesmi, katerih avtor je človek, „The Road Not Taken“ Roberta Frosta in „Ozymandias“ Percyja Byssheja Shelleyja, s tistimi, ki jih je na njuni podlagi ustvarila UI. Analiza je upoštevala sedem vidikov: naslov, strukturo, rimo in ritem, slovničnost, besedišče, smiselnost, slikovitost in poetičnost. Trdimo, da je pesniške izdelke, ki jih je ustvarila umetna inteligencia, lažje razvozlati, če jih primerjamo z ustreznimi pesmimi, katerih avtorji so ljudje. Predpostavljamo, da so na spletu dostopni poudarki literarne kritike (avtorjevo sporočilo, podobe, pripovedi) obvezne sestavine v procesu ustvarjanja pesmi s strani umetne inteligence. Dobljeni rezultat je lahko koristen za izvajanje nadaljnjih raziskav o generativnih jezikovnih in ustvarjalnih zmožnostih UI, njihovem razvoju in izboljšanju.

Ključne besede: sporočilo avtorja, kopilot, generiranje pesmi, poezija, sloganovna sredstva