

WHEN MACHINES CREATE ART: A READING OF *1 THE ROAD*

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Abstract

In the digital age, art, as any other discipline, has been redefined because of the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and its rapid development. This paper examines *1 The Road*, an AI-generated novel, with a particular focus on its artistic merit and its contribution to shape present-day literature. It critically explores the evolution of art, demonstrating the way technological advent contribute to redefine it throughout history. It also aims at investigating the potential of AI-generated literature to be considered as a new form of art which projects the spirit of the digital era. Employing close reading as a method of textual analysis, this study critically examines the novel's language and elements, including: the setting, characters, plot, tone, themes and symbolism. It also looks at possible historical, social, political or cultural reflections in order to highlight the capacity of AI-literature to transmit human concerns. The findings reveal that the novel demonstrates significant limitations, reflecting the absence of political, social or cultural dialogue due to the lack of a lived experience. It also demonstrates linguistic and thematic weaknesses that differentiate AI-produced works from human-authored texts, challenging conventional norms of art creation. Nonetheless, the study shows the increasing role of technology in creating new forms of literature and argues that AI-literature, which is still in its experimental phase, invites scholarly attention. It contributes to the continuing debate between literature and technology by offering a critical evaluation of the potentials and challenges of AI-generated literature.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; art creation; AI-literature; artistic value; *1 The Road*.

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1. Introduction

Long before the advent of modern technology, tales were told orally by storytellers and passed down from one generation to another. Across various civilizations, stories served as a means to record history and preserve culture, religion and the beliefs of a certain community. Upon the invention of the writing system, stories were allowed to be preserved and shared across time and space. New forms of stories were popularized, especially the novel which came into existence around the eighteenth century. The printing machine played a vital role in popularizing this form and offered authors more chances to spread their literary productions. Towards the twentieth century, stories witnessed a more remarkable shift: from the written form to the audio-visual form, shaped by film industry. Watching a movie instead of reading a book was the trend of the day. The role of creative authors seems to be undermined to some extent at this point of time. In the digital age, stories saw a totally different phase of crafting narratives because of the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). Video games, virtual reality experience, digital platforms and AI-tools are all serving to create stories, giving more access to the audience.

The emergence of artificial intelligence has brought radical changes and gave rise to a new trend in art and literature. It redefined the concept of storytelling as AI-generated literary texts dominate the field of literature recently. These are texts produced by AI-programs which are driven by certain algorithms to produce pieces of literature. Goold (2021) clarifies that these algorithms are trained to write literature by exposing AI-machines to a large amount of data such as fiction, poetry, drama, writing style, grammatical structure and even cultural background (Pp. 8-9). From this data, algorithms are able to build new artistic literary texts. “By training neural network on creative works, an algorithm can learn the features of those works and produce works in a similar style” (Goold, 2021, p. 10). According to Saab & Abu Melhem, (2025), “What is special about them (AI-machines) is that they can learn through experience and do tasks alone” (362). Also, Yan Hu (2023) rightly comments on the emergence of this new trend in literature: “As AI-generated literature technology continues to develop, it is likely that new genres and styles will emerge in the field of literature. This style has a high probability of broadening the boundaries of literary creation in a situation that human authors did not expect” (p. 1786). Indeed, the emergence of AI-literature is pushing the boundaries of storytelling, challenging human authors and redefining artistic creations.

An example of AI- generated literature is *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*, which was published in 2016. The novel is written by an AI-program with some human input and was nominated for a respected literary award in Japan. Another example is *The Lifestyle of the Richard and Family*. A play that is written with an Android application called, Swiftkey and edited by humans. After “the work was created by Roslyn Helper ‘in collaboration with Swiftkey Note’. . . it underwent a process of ‘editing down’ where Helper consciously considered ‘what made sense and what fits’.” (Goold, 2012, p. 26). Poetry is also an easy charge for AI. To illustrate, it is worthy to refer to “The Deep-spear” project, in which AI is trained on Shakespeare’s poems, particularly sonnets. Machine generated poems are satisfying and creative to a certain extent as researchers confirm: “our proposed stress and rhyme models work very well, generating sonnet quatrains with stress and rhyme patterns that are indistinguishable from human-written poems and rated highly by an expert” (Lau et. al, 2018, p.1948). All these examples, along with many others not mentioned, highlight AI’s future contribution in the field of literature and its remarkable ability in mimicking human creation. Yet, an important question arises: Would AI-machines make *a piece of art*?

To answer this question, the present study analyses an AI-generated novel, *I The Road*, focusing on its artistic value and cultural merit. Its creator, Ross Goodwin, who was Obama’s speech writer, used an algorithm trained on “a mix of poetry, science fiction, and ‘bleak’ writing” (Goold, 2018, p. 21). Surprisingly, his novel was written by a car as he clarifies:

These systems require input to produce output, and in this experiment their input came from a set of sensors mounted to a rental car: a surveillance camera on the trunk, a GPS unit on the roof (with onboard database of location names), a microphone to capture conversation inside the car and a clock. Each of these input provided the artificial neural networks with starting points for narration: an image to caption, a location to describe, a line of dialogue to expand, or simply the time itself. (Goodwin, 2018, p. 12)

The result, then, is a narrative, described as “the first project of its kind” (Arathdar, 2021, p. 7) and it follows Goodwin’s journey, capturing his experience on 1,000-mile route from Brooklyn to New Orleans. For this, Arathdar (2021) classifies the text under the travelogue or the journal genre (p. 7). This novel also opens new doors of writing and crafting literature as Glood (2021) confirms: It “is one example of the exploding field of literary and artistic works created via artificial intelligence” (p. 4). As a novel produced by AI, it represents a distinctive, unconventional and one-of-a-kind work. On AI’s fascinating capacity to compose literature, Kenric McDowell (2018) comments: “AI can predict, AI can diagnose, AI that can Write. . . (p. 32).

2. Review of Literature

The intersection of artificial intelligence and artistic creations has become a flourishing field of research due to the technological progress. Yet, few studies have been conducted on *I The Road*. In “Literature, Narrativity and Composition in the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” Arathdar (2021) examines instances of narrative composition achieved by AI. He raises a serious question concerning authorship arguing that “despite the text’ generator’ independence, it still formulates within certain parameters set by the algorithms (which were, of course, designed in turn by Goodwin)” (Arathdar, 2021, p. 8). Likewise, Glood (2021) emphasises the question of authorship in his study, “Artificial Authors: Case Studies of Copyright in Works of Machine Learning”. He investigates whether creative works produced via machine learning algorithms qualify for copyright protection” (Glood, 2021, p. 3). However, these few studies do not provide a detailed analysis of the novel as it was used as an example among other machine-based works. The text, hence, seems not to be approached from a literary lens. In contrast to prior literature, and apart from the question of authorship, this study focuses on the novel’s artistic value, emphasising the following research questions: What is art across history? What shapes art in the digital age? Is *I the Road* an artistic work? And what is the future of literary composition?

3. Historical Background

Art, which is a mirror of human civilizations, has been evolving across time reflecting cultural and technological changes. Historically speaking, Plato is considered as one of the earliest philosophers to define art. In his “Theory of Art,” which is the tenth book from the *Republic*, Plato (2016) argues that art is a mimesis or an imitation of reality. He claims that the artist merely copies the physical world, as he ‘cannot make true existence, but only some resemblance of existence’ (Plato, 2016, p. 367). Similarly, Aristotle (2008), in his *Poetics*, considers art as an imitation. Errors come when the poet imitates incorrectly, and for a successful imitation, “the poet must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are” (Aristotle, 2008, p. 39). Unlike Plato (2016) who sees art as misleading since artists appeal to emotions (p. 379), Aristotle (2008) argues that art is beneficial as it affords pleasure, “that which comes from pity and fear through imitation” and ends up with a moral purification (p. 15).

While imitation was appreciated, another prevailing idea was that art should instruct. In his *Art Poetica*, Roman poet, Horace (2009), points out that art is a combination of fact and fiction and should be realistic. Horace believes that the function of art is to instruct and delight, stating: “Poets wish either to profit or to delight; or to deliver at once both the

pleasures and the necessities of life” (p. 9). Likewise, Samuel Johnson, advocates instructive, didactic, moral and intellectual literature. In *Preface to Shakespeare*, He praises William Shakespeare as his drama and poetry transmit important morals about human virtues. He rightly notes:

In the writings of other poets, a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species. It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakespeare with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. (Johnson, 2004, p. 4)

Accordingly, Johnson maintains that art, mainly literature, should educate and reflect reality in addition to its function to afford pleasure.

Apart from this, later thinkers saw art as a pure beauty without reflecting any moral or ethical lessons. Poe (1969), for example, believes that poetry should evoke beauty. “In The Poetic Principle”, he defines poetry as “The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty”, confirming that a “poem is written solely for the poem’s sake” (Poe, 1969, Pp. 7-10). Other Romantic writers valued feelings considering art as an expression of emotions. Commenting on the rise of this group, Abrams (1973) notes: “a number of major poets, who differed markedly from their eighteenth-century predecessors, had in common important themes, modes of *expression*, and ways of *feeling* and *imagining*” (p. 11). Expressionists also emphasized emotions and considered art as a reflection of the artist’ inner world. This trend in art and literature is “best known for its emphasis on subjective experience and emotional expression rather than objective reality” (Dhanalakshmi et al., 2023, p. 886). Others, however, regarded reality as the essence of art.

Towards the mid-nineteenth century, Realism emerged as a rejection of the idealized beauty and exaggerated emotions of Romanticism. It embraced “reality with all its contradictions, given the literature itself and its role as a means of knowing the outside world” (Zarnigor, 2019, p. 189). Art, then, portrayed reality objectively, far from any embellishment. By the late nineteenth century, Marxist thinkers strongly influenced art, moving the focus to politics, economy, social critique, revolutionary ideas and class struggle. In contrast, Modernism rejected all traditional perceptions of art including Romanticism, Realism and Marxism. Art was seen as a creative innovation, giving birth to a new trend in which creativity, scepticism, individualism and psychology are of a particular importance. “[M]odernism was linked to the creation of new things and phenomena, literature produced works which portrayed attempts to come to terms with these phenomena” (Pocrivcak, 2020, p. 8). After Modernism, art became even more conceptual, focusing on ideas. Postmodernists, for instance, explored contemporary issues such as culture, multiculturalism, otherness and many other questions which reflect the postmodern period. Also, Postcolonial artists considered art as a means of resistance. Ngugi (1982) confirms: “We writers and critics of African literature should form an essential intellectual part of the anti-imperialist cultural army of African peoples for total economic and political liberation from imperialism and foreign domination” (p. 31).

The question of “what makes art?” remains an open-ended dilemma because of the extraordinary evolution of art across time. Throughout its long journey, from prehistoric paintings to digital creations, art took different forms and definitions. Perhaps, the one unchanging truth is that art continues to be a faithful mirror of human experience, capturing the spirit of times we lived in. Yet, the fascinating advancement of technology may endanger artistic creations. Goodwin (2018), for example, emphasizes the possible negative impact of photography on painting. He notes: “many believed the rise of photography would threaten the livelihood of working painters. ‘from today, painting is dead!’ exclaimed the French painter Paul Delaroche after viewing one of Louis Daguerre’s chemically induced images for the first time in 1839” (Goodwin, 2018, p. 8). Likewise, with the intriguing rise of AI-

literature, serious questions arose: Would creative writing be dead? Would AI- literature keep the same artistic value as before? Would digital art reflect present-day human experience? What would shape art in the digital age? Today, we witness a crucial moment in artistic evolution, where AI-tools are pushing the limits of what art can be.

4. Methodology

This study aims at displaying a new form of art, brought by the rapid technological development. The research employs close reading as a method of textual analysis to examine Ross Goodwin's AI-novel, *I the Road*. It looks at the language and elements of the novel (setting, characters, tone, themes and symbolism), emphasizing the artistic creation in the digital era. Before analyzing the text, it is important to refer to the question of authorship, which is quite controversial. I chose to cite Goodwin, who developed the AI-algorithm and initiated this project, yet other scholars believe that the AI- machine is the author. Commenting on this issue, Goodwin (2018) points out:

By concatenating these data, as narrated by the machine . . . written by the car itself. Or perhaps the drivers wrote it, using the car as their pen. Or perhaps the machine wrote it, using our traversal of the landscape as its means of coherence. Or perhaps those who wrote the machine's training corpus have written it together, reaching out from their work, out from the past, to influence a new story. Or perhaps I wrote it. (p. 14)

No matter who the author is, the text still "seeks to expand the horizon of writing and composing literature" (Arathdar, 2021, p. 6). It introduces a new style of writing redefining the concept of art.

5. Analysis

On encountering the novel, it can be seen that the text lacks lexical coherence. "One is certainly struck by the eerie descriptions" (Arathdar, 2021, p. 7) as many mistakes appear, including problems of grammar, punctuation, capitalization and repetition. One example is: "And there's **an a a** yeah it **i** say it again and wear that part **i** may matter where we are all **muslims** are either and **dont** take something for the world" (Goodwin, 2018, p. 44). This passage demonstrates the lack of lexical coherence due to several factors as highlighted in quote. The phrase 'an a a yeah it i say it again' is not clear and disrupts the flow of ideas because of repetition. Indefinite pronouns are wrongly used. 'i' and 'muslims' are not capitalized. 'dont' lacks the apostrophe which marks contraction. And a single full stop is used as a punctuation mark and often separates sections throughout the rest of novel. Not only that, but also the structure is fragmented, which undermines clarity. Besides, the meaning is ambiguous. The phrase 'wear that part' does not relate to the rest of the sentence, and 'all muslims' is vague and does not reflect any context.

These mistakes appear throughout the entire text. Commenting on the novel, Glood (2021) states: "The prose is disjointed and the text contains typographical errors" (p. 4). All in all, the previous passage demonstrates a lexical mess, which affects the meaning of the text promoting ambiguity and confusion. "But despite this, there is something unique about the work: it is the first novel written by a machine" (Glood, 2021, p. 4). It is also worthy to note that this text is an experimental novel and has not been edited at all. Regardless of all the previously mentioned inconsistencies, the novel is full of literary devices, which enhance the beauty of language.

One of the main elements which make a piece of writing an artistic creation is the use of figurative language departing from the common use of words. Sala-Suszyńska (2016) explains: "It creates a special effect, clarifies an idea, and makes writing more colourful and forceful. Figurative language adds an extra dimension to writing, giving plain writing richness and depth" (p. 164). When reading the novel, we find out that the text is full of several literary devices. An example of that is when Goodwin (2018) beautifully marks: "A large cloud in the

sky stared at him” (p. 79). This passage suggests that the cloud is watching the character, creating a sense of beauty and mystery at the same time. It can be seen as a personification as the cloud is given a human attribute, which is staring. Imagery also applies in this example as the description gives the cloud a role that surpasses weather. Here comes symbolism; one can say that the cloud symbolizes fate or even ominous presence. The presence of such literary techniques “display[s] a lucid adherence to coherent progression and could at times even be said to be poetic or surrealistic, at least compared other A.I. produced texts” (Arathdar, 2021, p. 7).

Another example is: “A muddy tree like soldiers had shrieked at the universe” (Goodwin, 2018, p. 81). This statement conveys deep symbolism through the use of simile and personification. Comparing the tree to soldiers evokes a sense of struggle and resistance. Soldiers often endure hardships, much like a tree resisting storms. The tree is also given a human characteristic which is shrieking. This personification adds to the sufferance of the tree, painting an image of defiance as it screams at the universe. As if it revolts against fate, not accepting its destiny. The novel is full of literary devices, along with others not mentioned. This adds to the aesthetics of the text, affording it an artistic value. Sala-Suszyńska (2016) confirms:

Figurative language adds an extra dimension to writing, giving plain writing richness and depth. Figurative language encourages the reader to bridge gaps between ideas, in details, make associations, and form mental pictures. All of these uses of the imagination are highly satisfying, for there is great enjoyment in understanding what has not been spelled out for us. (p. 164)

The presence of figurative language in the texts makes it more poetic showing the beauty of words. But, is the aesthetic side enough for a piece of writing to be artistic?

The use of figurative language does not only beautify the text, but also helps in expressing the author’s or characters’ feelings. “By using figurative language, writers can evoke emotion and imagery from their writing that literal language just cannot provide (Sala-Suszyńska, 2016, p. 163). On a closer reading, we can say that the novel, in opposition to human literary texts, lacks the human touch which is crucial as literature is “an art of expressing ideas and imagination” (Fitria, 2024, p. 1). Although the text paints precise descriptions in a beautiful and poetic way, it lacks the true depth and genuineness that stem from a lived experience. Di Pardo Léon-Henri (2025, p.177) rightly notes: “Unlike humans, AI cannot think, reason, or feel emotions—qualities that are central to human creativity”, which is evident in the text. A statement, such as: “A tree with no leave on the wall” (Goodwin, 2018, p. 45), seems to be devoid of feelings. Most expressions in the novel are emotionally barren. Literature, however, is more than composing words poetically; it is about evoking emotions and imagination. This is where AI-literature falls short. “It is obvious that machines lag behind in even getting a grasp of what human emotions are and most importantly how subjective they are” (Saqib, 2023, p. 153).

In another instance, the road is described as follows:

Trees in the background were still still and paler, and the street was still on the side of the road, and the buildings were still a little distant. A white line on the road had been descended from the school, and the man was sitting on the bed covered with a shining green shoulder”. (Goodwin, 2018, p. 54)

This passage looks very mechanical and lacks the emotional expressions usually found in human writing. Apart from redundancy, ambiguity and lexical incoherence, it does not evoke feelings or characters’ inner thoughts. Objects along the road are distantly and objectively described, without referring to its impact on characters. The absence of sensory details, which project the emotional depth, is crystal clear. Also, the description of the man who ‘was sitting on the bed covered with a shining green shoulder’ is strongly neutral. It does

not reveal whether he feels happy, lonely, tired or even bored. He is just sitting, much like a robot. Moreover, he does not seem to belong to the setting introduced at the begging as the text does not show any influence between the setting and the character. The novel as a genre, however, “tells the relationship between human beings and the surrounding world” (Pavel, 2006, p. 3). The previously quoted passage serves as one of many examples which illustrate the absence of emotional depth and subjective experience. This, in fact, undermines the novel’s artistic significance since art, particularly literature, is “a language of wisdom because it connects human experiences and observations to the universe around us. It is also a vehicle for emotion, thought, and spirit disguised in words that frequently have multiple layers of meaning” (Dhanalakshmi et al, 2023, p. 846).

Art is also a faithful mirror to society; it often projects social, cultural, political, religious and historical complexities. Earnshaw (2007) claims that “art has something to say about the world in order that it might be changed” (p. 65). For him, the artist has a noble role, that is to “To tell the truth,” to raise social awareness and “to represent the absolute best that a particular human being could do” (Earnshaw, 2007: 68). The artist then, is regarded as the gatekeeper of knowledge, culture, religion and history. Godwin (2018), in contrast, believes that “AI requires us to experiment and dream outside our conventions and preconceptions” (p. 16), which is rather evident in his novel as it does not adhere to traditional conceptions of literature.

I The Road fails to transmit any cultural, political, historical or religious knowledge. Though unintentionally mentioning few references to places, brands, races and religions, it does not critically engage with the meaning behind them. A closer examination of the following quote, for instance, better illustrates this idea:

Man are caught in calling a card. Part of a black table in the two barns was a strange **church** behind the stove. . .

23:47:50 The ‘**Magic Kiongdom**’: a theme park in Montgomery, a shopping room in the street that on the other side of the wall had been sprouted in the streets.

23:59:44 **Coca Cola Factory** Montgomery: a building in **Montgomery** Square book (Goodwin, 2018, pp. 110)

Despite its incoherent and fragmented nature, this passage does not carry any clear cultural, religious, political, or historical significance. Elements such as ‘church’, ‘Magic Kingdome’, ‘Coca Cola Factory’ and ‘Montgomery’ appear without meaningful context, functioning as isolated elements. They represent disjointed sequences and images that fail to form of a coherent world or a real community. Yet, this sense of detachment still evokes the essence of the time, especially the fascinating technological progress which often fosters a more detached way of life. This paves the way to the introduction of a new form of storytelling, that which is aligned with the digital era.

As for the elements of the novel, much is to be said. First, the setting is precisely introduced in every section. Time and place are of a particular importance in the novel, and their description dominates the narrative. This, in fact, projects the preciseness of science, and AI in particular. Each section starts by registering the time as in this example: “It was nine in the morning and the house was heavy,” or as in this sentence: “The time was six minutes until ten o’clock in the morning” (Goodwin, 2018, p. 41). The date “2017-03-25” is written on the right top of the page. As for the left side, the exact time is mentioned such as “09:17:34” (Goodwin, 2018, p. 41)

Not only was the time precise, but the exact locations were also recorded. An example of that: “Along the journey, the algorithm turned various inputs into output text. The GPS unit caught latitude and longitude coordinates (e.g. “35.415579526 N, 77.999721808 W, at 154.68504432 feet above sea level, at 0.0 miles per hour” (Glood, 2018, p. 22). However, this disrupts the flow of narration and makes it feel like a piece of little fragments. Pages of the

novel look much like a diary as the reader is reminded of the time and location at every section. On this issue, Arathdar (2021) comments: “the episodic progression informs the general schematic development of the text. In nothing the spacio-temporal coordinates within the generative narrative piece, *I The Road* can come across as an avant-garde novel doing a pastiche of the travelogue or the journal-entry genre” (p. 7). In fact, the constant mention of exact times and places in the novel becomes repetitive and somewhat irritating, painting an image of mechanical narration using ambiguous language which reflects the nature of the digital period.

The figure below illustrates the way time and place are presented throughout the novel and gives further insight about the unusual form of the text. As previously discussed, the overall structure appears disorganized and fragmented, resembling a series of mathematical calculations rather than a coherent literary text.

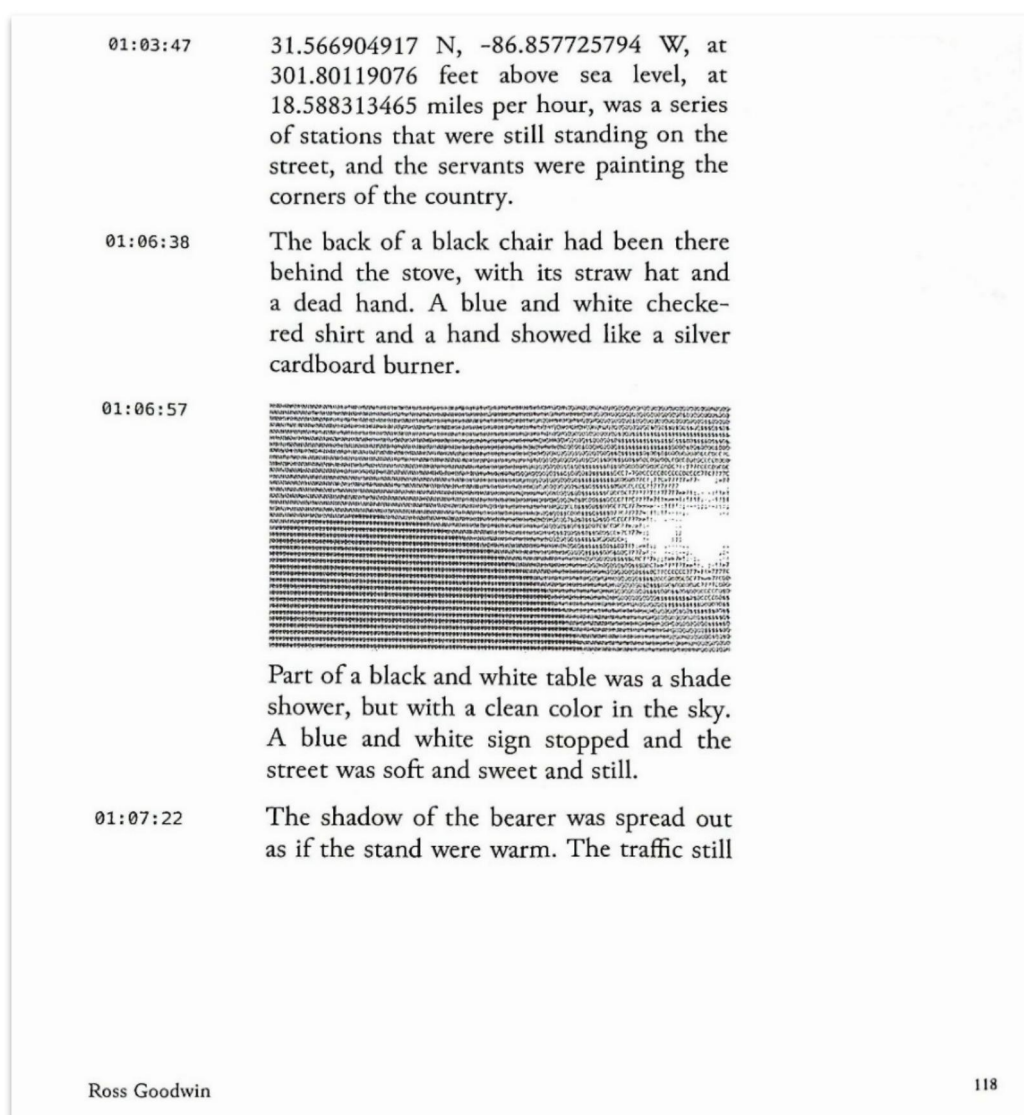


Figure 1.

Sample page from I The Road by Ross Godwin (p. 118).

Moving to other elements, the plot comes second. The novel does not show a clear structure; there is no exposition, climax or resolution. It is a mere objective narration of Goodwin’s journey from New York to New Orleans, blending little fragmented dialogues, minor everyday actions and objective descriptions of the environment along the road. For the

perspective, the novel is told from a third person point of view and follows a linear structure, capturing Goodwin's trip as he clarifies: "[t]hese data, as narrated by the machine, in the linear sequence of our journey from Brooklyn, New York to New Orleans, Louisiana, a manuscript emerged in a real time as we drove across the countryside" (Goodwin, 2018, p. 12).

As for characters: they are not well introduced, the protagonist is not identified, and no clear distinction is made between major and minor characters. Several names randomly appear and disappear as in this section:

10:43:15 . . . **The Grandfather** was hanging on the main road.
11:53:29 **The children** stopped on the stairs, and **the two men** began to cry.
12:08:29 The Sky is clear, the train says. The water is straight, and the boards are still standing there, and the flame is not alive to the water. Kite in the Sky, **Mendel** said" (Goodwin, 2018, p. 42).

The highlighted characters in this passage are mentioned for the first and last time in the novel. They are not introduced, leaving the reader with a sense of incompleteness. Besides, there is no clear connection between them. The text does not reveal whether they are relatives, friends or mere passersby. The interaction between characters is also absent which undermines their roles in the narrative. This tendency extends across the entire novel, where numerous characters are mentioned without any narrative depth or real importance. Nevertheless, Lodge (1992) confirms that "CHARACTER is arguably the most important single component of the novel. . . [and] the most difficult aspect of the art of fiction to discuss in technical terms" (p. 67). Putting no emphasis on characters, then, devalues a work of art.

For the tone, it is quite neutral and fluctuates between mechanical objectivity and poetic abstraction. This neutrality results in a sense of detachment between the reader and the text due to the lack of emotions and the subjective perspective typically found in human writings. However, readers want to develop intimacy and connection with the author; they "want to identify the writer with the works as closely as possible". Also, "[t]he contemporary artist wants a knowing public, wants an audience that is aware of the sophistication of his or her art" (Earnshaw, 2007, p.76). As a results of these factors, namely unclear plot, unidentified characters and absent tone, the text might lose its artistic significance by tripping it of its essential elements, which shape the genre of the novel.

On symbolism, one is to be reminded that *I the Road* is rich with imagery and metaphors, as discussed earlier, and this can be interpreted as symbols. The use of symbols allows artists to convey "more universal truths inaccessible via direct means, such as metaphorical imagery" (Nath, 2022, p. 4155). In the novel, much of the imagery describes natural landscapes, as in this example: "A white and black sky crossed the street and took a sharp blow from the shiny floor. The dark flags seemed to be as thick as the sun. Trees in the distance seemed to be receding" (Goodwin, 2018, p.128). As can be noticed, the quotation is rich with vivid imagery: the contrast between black and white, the comparison between the dark flags and the sun, and 'the sky crossed the street' as a metaphor. Yet, they seem barren and do not evoke a particular emotion or a specific theme beyond its beauty. As a result, they cannot be related into a particular symbolic context.

The entire novel consists of imagery based on linguistic structures, rather than thematic intention. Unlike human authors who conjure symbols to deliberately express deeper thoughts, symbolism in the text is pattern based and unintentionally inserted. Having no meaning to convey behind writing, then, makes the text less artistic. In this respect, Earnshaw (2007) points out:

. . . the writer or artist is a different type of being from the rest of the world, someone who has a privileged vision and to whom the nature of the world is revealed: it is the artist who is inspired and has the ability to pass on such insights to mere mortals. There is no question here of not writing – the artist only has to be inspired, touched by the muse, to create. (p. 66)

Despite the absence of deliberate thematic intent, various themes can be identified through the recurring imagery in the text. The overall theme in the novel is travelling, which echoes road narratives. Goodwin (2018) declares that his “favourite authors were countercultural American narratives including *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac” (p. 14). However, there is no purpose behind the journey which is, again, a result of the absence of a lived experience. MacDowell (2018) points out: “What did the neural net see? What did it talk about? It talked about what it knew. It knew the time. It knew where it was (in the way any computer does, via GPS) and it knew what was around” (p. 28). This explains why descriptions and imagery in the text are limited to changing environment and locations along the road. Another theme is the role of AI in composing literature which is the very existence of the novel. It invites reflections on the creation of art and the new ways of crafting literature. Goodwin (2018) remarks:

I hope our journey across America inspires new conversations and thoughts, as I believe the exploration we can have today with AI are just culturally relevant as those with LSD were in the 1960s. Today, AI presents not only computational challenges but also significant design problems, and art has always informed design. (p. 16)

Detachment is another important theme because of the lack of emotions and characters’ connections. Without interaction between characters, the text creates an image of a lonely isolated robot that describes a human world that it neither understands nor belongs to. One more theme is fragmentation which appears in multiple ways in the text. Language, time, and the narrative itself are all disjointed, evoking a sense of disconnection. Places, characters and events appear and disappear randomly. This theme greatly mirrors the essence of the digital era where AI-machines perceive the human world as disconnected data rather than emotional creatures.

It can be concluded that the novel explores Modern themes (isolation, fragmentation, ambiguity) in an innovative way: that which is driven by AI. While Earnshaw (2007) argues that “modernist writers assumed that they were part of a general artistic endeavour – to contribute to the possibilities of art in the making of art, to take it upon themselves to challenge themselves and the world” (p. 66), Goodwin pushes the boundaries of art creation to automation. In his essay, “AI Poetry Hits the Road”, McDowell (2018), who makes part of this project, confirms this influence as he states: “20th century values currently under renovation” (p. 18). The novel, then, addresses modern themes with an automated touch.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of *I the Road* and its artistic significance in the digital age demonstrates a radical shift in the narrative style and artistic creation. The novel redefined the concept of art as it does not adhere to any of the preconceived definitions. Instead, it introduced a new form of crafting literature, using an algorithm as a substitute of a pen. It pushed the boundaries of literary composition, especially that this novel was written by a car.

As previously discussed, the novel, which is a sample of AI-art, lacks lexical coherence and is characterized by fragmentation which affects the narrative’s flow. Language is quite objective, abstract and emotionally barren, constructing a neutral tone. The absence of the human touch and emotional dimension makes it more mechanical. Yet, it is also poetic as the novel is full of literary techniques though not intentionally inserted. This is because the algorithm used to compose the novel was trained on poetry among other writing styles. The

most significant shortcoming is that the novel does not engage in political, social or cultural dialogue. The absence of these dimensions limits the novel's artistic value and reduces its role in reflecting real-world complexities. Overall, *I The Road* seems to be disconnected from traditional conversations that define artistic literary products and its important role in society. Accordingly, a new style of crafting literature comes to existence, that which is digital or mechanical literature, shaping today's art.

Despite all the mentioned flaws, one must not forget AI's fascinating ability and speed in composing literature. It still demonstrates a remarkable capacity to create complete literary texts. Taking into consideration that *I The road* is 'the first project of its kind', it can be concluded that digital art, mainly literature, remains in an experimental stage with more development yet to come. The answer to the question, 'what makes art in the digital age?' is, then, in labour, waiting to take shape.

Declarations

AI Declaration. The author declares that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were only used to improve the language and clarity of this manuscript. All ideas, analyses, interpretations and conclusions presented in this manuscript are entirely the author's original work.

Ethical Statement. This study is based on the analysis of published literary works and did not involve human participants, animals or personal data. Therefore, no ethical approval was required.

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