

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS (POSSIBLE) IMPACT IN THE LIFE OF THE POET AND THE WRITER,  
OF SOCIETY, DEMOCRATIC AND NOT

The algorithm that composes verses [www.poesiaeletteratura.it](http://www.poesiaeletteratura.it), 2 September 2020

An algorithm was recently asked by a company located in Silicon Valley (California, USA), exactly Yewno, whose platform connects the concepts it finds in its archive memorizing millions of pages every day, to compose a poem as, say, Emily Dickinson or Novalis or John Keats or Eugenio Montale would have written it. Specifically, the Italian poet Eugenio Montale was chosen for the "experiment". And the algorithm, making use of the concepts, composes it, not identical in all respects to a poem by Eugenio Montale, but in the pertinent and proper style of his poetics, astounding even the researchers who had sent him the request as the composed verses resulted "perfect" in assonance, metrics, syntax and alliteration, and even in the sentiment and pathos that they were able to recreate ... almost as if the poem had been written by the poet himself, perhaps returned, for just a few moments, from the afterlife. Here is Eugenio Montale's poem written – processed by the algorithm in question:

What remains is the faint trace of watermark

What lightness follows our steps

It's the idea of you leaving my life

And I continue my path uncertain.

And the desolate sense of winter

On the barren fields, the dim light

Which shines through the scattered rows,

The dusk of time that greets the day,

The light sleep of those who wait for the next day to come.

What to think about this? At first glance, yes, one is amazed (not to mention a little shocked), and one could, by impulse and by impact, even think that Eugenio Montale is almost "embodied", or rather, "reincarnated" in the 'algorithm but then, after the first moment of bewilderment, one would perhaps try to reflect a bit more than to understand.

The very latest developments in artificial intelligence are revealing truly amazing things! The people who matter (scientists, heads of state, army commanders, intellectuals, politicians, members of high finance, etc. etc.) do nothing but magnify, sing the praises of a rather near future that will clearly belong to artificial intelligence which will improve practically everything: from the life of people to that of animals and plants, from industry to agriculture to medicine to space research, in short, every field of application and applicability. After all, this is what we have been waiting for for decades (if not for centuries): a sort of "artificial paradise on earth". Well, it will be that everything will change for the better when artificial intelligence has reached such a development as to be able to transform itself into the main directive of a society that has now become global in all respects ... but as far as Poetry is concerned: free expression of the soul, inner listening of Being, profound perception of things, uniqueness and exclusive prerogative of man, will everything really change for the better?

At this point I ask, above all myself, first the conclusive questions: can, or will, the algorithm "feel" what the poet feels when he speaks to the moon or contemplates the beauty of the starry sky above his head? Perceive the voice of the wind, the waves of the sea or the scent of the rose in bloom that make the poet so happy? And to feel, sometimes on oneself like the poet, the grave burden of the pain of beings who, despite everything, have not stopped and will never stop suffering? Maybe yes. Maybe? And then, for humans, it will have become perhaps useless to continue inhabiting the planet as a living species ... a little different from the others.

I wanted to make this intro by reporting this article which was published by the blog [www.poesiaeletteratura.it](http://www.poesiaeletteratura.it) on September 2, 2020 signed by Francesca Rita Rombolà, that is, myself. It aroused a bit of wonder, a certain perplexity and a little dismay in almost all of the blog's readers. Why do I report it right at the beginning of this writing - reflection? Because the title and the topic it deals with are fully on topic and perhaps manage to act as an introduction to artificial intelligence and writing, freedom, democracy.

It's 2023 d. C., the technique, ontologically speaking, is starting to dominate every sector of society. There are those who applaud this, seeing it as the last great frontier of a journey that began centuries ago with the Renaissance first and the Enlightenment later, if not even with the discovery of fire in prehistoric times; there are those who instead see in this an imminent danger for the survival of humanity and of all life on planet earth. But as far as culture, art, literature, poetry are concerned, I ask myself: what can artificial intelligence bring new and better? Yes, we have read how the algorithm, using concepts, composes a poem that seems to have been written by the author himself; but when he has done this and when, in a few years or in a few months, he will come to write an entire poem similar to Homer's Iliad or Lucretius' De Rerum Natura or Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, or even a serial novel, a thriller or an essay on history or philosophy what will change for man or, perhaps better, for the artist (the poet, the writer, the essayist)? Maybe nothing yes. But maybe everything. Perhaps nothing, because the artist (in the flesh) will be able to continue, if he wishes, to pick up pen and paper like his predecessors over the centuries and millennia, and continue to write on his own what the inspiration, the study, the research, the purpose will gradually suggest to him. But perhaps everything, since the same artist will have his own "tailor-made" or "personal" algorithm, which it will be enough to program for the writing and the desired topic and he will sit comfortably in an armchair waiting for the finished work or will go to the park to run

or to the mall to go shopping, or in short, he will do something completely different without having to worry about the "terrible blank page" that has made poets and writers from every country and every historical period suffer; his essays, his poems, his novels will be beautiful, perfect, read and applauded by critics and the public, he will become famous, perhaps even win the Nobel Prize for literature, and he will never have lost an hour of sleep at night brooding over a sentence or to find a verb or a noun suitable for the context, perhaps drinking liters of drinks of all kinds and smoking packets of cigarettes with a labyrinthine bottom.

Perhaps at this point I have to contradict myself, in the sense that I stated earlier that artificial intelligence will not bring anything new or better for the writer, because from a perspective, let's say technical and production, novelty and improvement they will be large and obvious. But as regards the perception of oneself and of the world, the feelings of joy, of pain, of hate, of anger that are transferred onto paper, the meaning of life and of death, the always impending mystery of what is from afar or from an inexpressible Elsewhere? If they are not stimulated, lived, cultivated they will atrophy, they will fail and slowly disappear completely from the psyche, from the spirit, from the mind of man; and then we are no longer poets, writers, artists but we have become people who simply live a predictable and banal life, prone and flat as beings who only satisfy primary and voluptuous needs.

But perhaps the artist will be free after all. The whole society will be free. In fact, artificial intelligence will have the task of "taking upon itself" all the work done by man. Every task will now be up to artificial intelligence.

From the production of goods and services to primary care to the promulgation of laws to lifestyle and customs to the way of governing and managing public affairs, everything will have its own specific algorithm that will perform the job (or its task) in the best possible way. . Maybe this won't be bad as far as the social order is concerned, because finally humanity will have freed itself from the slavery of work, often truly humiliating and alienating for human dignity; basically it has always been the "real and ideal dream" of great philosophers such as Marx and Hengels, Tommaso Campanella, Thomas More, Francesco Bacon up to Plato in ancient Greece. There will then, finally, be the freedom so desired by idealists, artists, thinkers of half the world for centuries now ... but once again the problem, or rather, the enigma that arises again is man (the same enigma that the sphinx proposes to Oedipus and on whose resolution an entire world will depend and whose stakes are very high), in the sense that man will really be able to better manage artificial intelligence and its applications? Will it be able to give its usability and its actual implementation rules and laws that are the same for everyone, respectful of citizens and their essence, in a word, will they be the backbone of democracy?

These questions are quite difficult to answer. Different scenarios could be hypothesized, plausible but perhaps never feasible or feasible in part or perhaps, due to the usual margin of unpredictability always inherent in actions and reactions, feasible entirely. The important thing is that we respond to this epochal challenge of the twenty-first century and beyond by maintaining the values, principles, social and human structure typical of democracy, a form of government that was born and developed in the West and is so dear to the West , because even if democracy is an imperfect form of government, with its flaws and its doubts, its disasters sometimes, and its many shortcomings, and it can never be completely discounted and consolidated not even in those nations, such as the States United States of America, which for centuries has included it in its legislative and governmental DNA, is still the one and only form of government, so that it always leaves, to the individual and to the community, the widest margin of freedom and expression and thought and criticism and movement.

Try to imagine if artificial intelligence were to dominate in a society that is not, or no longer, democratic. In a global dictatorship, for example, in a dictatorial/despotic and deadly political regime such as there were in the past in Europe, as there are many in the world today. What scenarios would open up? What if artificial intelligence were to be used to imprison and torture, or even kill, political opponents (primarily poets, writers, intellectuals irreducible singers of a priceless freedom and bluer than the spring sky)? Or to oppress and suppress fragile, weak, innocent people for the sole taste and pleasure of doing it, taste and pleasure that arise from the sudden, unprepared and dystopian exercise of power?

In any case, it is not important to give an answer immediately to the questions that we ask ourselves as civilized, cultured and free beings, the important thing is to ask ourselves the questions in order to be able to reflect, to think and possibly to solve the problem, said the philosopher Martin Heidegger, because asking, wondering and asking, investigating is part of man's own nature.

Artificial intelligence and non-democracy could therefore possibly trigger a dark and obscurantist, deadly, deleterious and, why not?, even criminal process in the government structures of nations and in the way of relating to peoples, their needs and their priorities ; what the ancient Greeks called hubris, and of which they had a great fear, since hubris is the manifestation of disequilibrium, of the loss of harmony, of the Beautiful, of the Good, of Civilization. And this is what men of the calculating age of technology and profit, of the dominion of sound money should avoid at all costs, as wise civilizations of the past have warned (often unheeded) since almost immemorial times.

And if to the great Roman emperor Vespasian who claims with a certain arrogance. "Pecunia non olet – Money doesn't smell and/or it doesn't matter where it comes from", the poet Horace (still and always a poet) replies. "Est modus in rebus – There is a measure in things" and he deliberately adds: "Sunt certi denique fines. Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum - There are certain boundaries beyond and on this side of which there cannot be what is right", then we really need to reconsider with all seriousness, honesty, strength, tenacity, the possible urgencies the founding paradigm man - technology - machine to fully understand what can be right and wrong beyond and on this side of certain borders.

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