
Exploring the distinction between AI-generated stories and Human-crafted narratives: A comparative study

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Abstract:

Recently, there has been significant debate about the surfacing of AI in creative domains and its impact on storytelling and narrative creation. While several studies suggest that human-authored and AI-generated stories are barely distinguishable, other studies find that AI-generated stories are poorly structured and have multiple repetitive phrases. This study narrows its scope and examines the classic twisty tale *The Necklace* (1884) by French author Maupassant, scrutinizing its main features alongside another identical story generated by AI. AI was provided with six specific prompts to produce a very similar story to the famous *The Necklace*, and it produced a story called *The Gilded Watch*. The two stories are analyzed using four criteria: narrative structure, character development, language and style, and cultural or historical understandings.

The study finds a significant disparity between AI-generated and Human-authored stories, and the former often lacks key elements required for storytelling. The study also suggests that AI's ability to capture human emotions remains limited.

Keywords: AI, Stories, The Necklace, The Gilded Watch, Impact.

Introduction

From oral traditions and legacy to modern literature, storytelling has been an essential medium for gathering, maintaining, and preserving knowledge among individuals in all societies. Stories have served humans in reflecting their various feelings and emotions as they go through diverse stages of life. Storytelling has served several purposes, such as entertaining, teaching, and criticizing the wrong actions or beliefs prevalent in society. However, with the emergence of AI technology and its multifarious facets, there is an ongoing discussion and fear that Chat-GPT, abbreviated from Generative Pre-Trained Transformer, which is a common Chabot of AI, will probably replace human voice and produce as many coherent and contextually relevant stories as that of humans, mainly, when

there are numerous stories in a specific language that are entirely generated by AI bots yet claim to be human-authored (Browne).

In 2022, ChatGPT was introduced to the public world by AI. Since its release, ChatGPT has attained extensive attention and revolutionized how people gather or maintain information about a particular subject (Amirjalili, Neysani, and Nikbakht). There have been widespread discussions and arguments about the potential damages of ChatGPT by academics, media, and educators concerned about the massive transformation ChatGPT is making in the world in general and in academic settings in particular (Schulten). The experts are worried that ChatGPT might completely substitute the human voice, which indubitably creates several questions and concerns in academic settings, particularly in storytelling and narration, which must be exclusively human as they express individuals' inner worlds. These concerns are rationally warranted as ChatGPT keeps renewing and updating itself in more appropriate ways than humans and has the potential to come up with new ideas and approaches to deal with the most currently occurring themes or concerns (Harari).

Traditionally, storytelling has been purely human-made, and stories were like a medium through which authors expressed their understandings, emotions, and intellectual thoughts. Uniqueness is one of the most outstanding features of storytelling, and for any story to be successful and gain popularity, it has to be unique and possess exclusive features that distinguish it from other narratives (Richard and Elder). Stories are different in terms of the subject, narrative voice, and the author's attitude. Moreover, reading stories that humans crave is an ample opportunity for readers to explore other lives and familiarize themselves with approaches to life as stories explore and sincerely express a way of life and/or thoughts of a specific character and/or author. The novelty is yet another feature that contributes to the importance of storytelling. When we read a story, we expect to come across different perceptions and encounters that alarm us or affect our psyche in one way or another. However, AI-generated stories lack these two primary qualities (uniqueness and novelty). When tackling a particular subject, AI tools usually utilize data and patterns from existing texts that lack lived experience. AI-generated stories usually imitate human-authored texts and inherit scripts from fiction to conceptualize their algorithms (Begos). The recent article aims to explore the main differences between human-authored stories and AI-generated texts by comparing *The Necklace* by Maupassant to *The Gilded Watch* by AI.

Literature review

With the advent of AI and its ubiquitous influence on all branches of science, scholars, and critics in literature have also been alarmed that storytelling, which has always been purely human, might also be affected, and ChatGPT would replace the human voice in storytelling. Therefore, in addition to employing enormous effort in examining ChatGPT and its capacities in storytelling, several studies have been conducted to explore the differences and similarities between human-authored and AI-generated texts to address that concern. Begus (2023) compares 250 human-made stories to 80 texts generated by AI and finds that human-authored stories tend to be more imaginative and profound compared to stories created by ChatGPT. With regards to gender roles and sexuality, Begus' study finds that AI-generated texts are more advanced and accepting of gender models as compared to the stories

written by humans. (Huang, Vishnubhota, and Rudzics) compare the emotional and descriptive features of storytelling in several short stories written by humans and similar stories generated by AI. They find that AI-generated stories significantly differ from human-authored stories in terms of emotional and descriptive qualities. AI-generated stories proved to be more positive, less active, and more in control than human-authored stories.

However, another study titled "The Imitation Game" presents a detailed and in-depth analysis of the similarities and differences between AI-generated and human-authored stories, and it finds that it is incredibly challenging to differentiate between them. The study reveals that AI-generated stories intensely imitate human writing style, making it extremely difficult to tell the difference. As ChatGPT depends on human feedback and on improving itself, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish a text written by AI tools from another that is produced by human voice (Hayawi, Shahriar, and Mathew). Another finding by Haoran Chu, a professor of public relations at the University of Florida, focuses on the reception of AI-generated stories by the readers. Haoran suggests that although the latest tools of AI, ChatGPT in particular, tend to produce as well-structured and consistent stories as those of humans, readers in general rate stories believed to be written by AI more negatively and as poor, which is a sign that people distrust AI-tools in creating stories (Hamilton). Additionally, a study by (Georgiou), which investigates the linguistic differences between AI-generated and Human-authored stories, discloses that AI-generated texts demonstrate multiple repetitive phrases and overuses in specific structures or patterns compared to human-authored stories. In terms of coherence, AI-generated stories exhibit a less powerful and less in-depth approach to the main themes or plots. Moreover, while AI-generated stories only rely on predictable and statistically common words, Human-authored stories tend to use a broader range of vocabulary with more complex sentence structures and phrases.

The previously referred-to studies utilized multiple approaches, examined numerous studies from various dimensions, and came up with amazing results that immensely contribute to general awareness and knowledge in that field. The present study, however, sticks to one particular story and compares specific quotes and paragraphs to another story created by AI that is meant to be very similar. This article examines the classic twisty tale *The Necklace* (1884) by French author Maupassant and scrutinizes its main features along with another identical AI-generated story called *The Gilded Watch*. AI was provided with six prompts to produce a very similar story to the famous *The Necklace*. The prompts were as follows:

1. In terms of setting and the context, we asked ChatGPT to write a short story set in the late 19th-century France that depicts the themes of class distinction, dissatisfaction with one's life and personal collapse.
2. With regards to the plot, we asked ChatGPT to develop a plot about a woman who borrows something expensive from a friend to attend a formal event, but she loses the item at the party and the aftermath is tragic.
3. In terms of character, we asked for a female protagonist who is not satisfied with her

humble lifestyle and desires fame and richness, but later this desire ruins her life.

4. For the themes of the story we asked ChatGPT to develop themes of pride, repentance and sacrifice. What are the consequences that follow a bad decision?
5. For the ending, we asked ChatGPT to conclude the tale with a twist that recontextualizes the struggles of the protagonist and reveals that the hardships that she underwent were unnecessary.
6. In terms of length and tone, we asked ChatGPT to write a story of 2500 words with a tone varying from realism to irony.

According to these prompts and patterns, ChatGPT generated a very similar story and titled it *The Gilded Watch*. This study compares and contrasts *The Necklace* by Maupassant and *The Gilded Watch* by ChatGPT.

Analysis

1. Narrative structure

At the beginning of the story, both *The Necklace* and *The Gilded Watch* expose the background of the story and prepare the reader for a twisty tale. They both depict a female character who is dissatisfied with their recent life and yearns for a change. In *The Necklace*, readers come to know Mathilde, a beautiful young lady from the middle class who is married to a clerk in the Ministry of Education. Together, they have a modest life, which Mathilde cannot stand. Her husband, Loisel, wants to please her and secures her an invitation to an important celebration that only high-class people have the right to attend. In *The Gilded Watch*, Eleanor, a beautiful young lady from rural England, is introduced to the reader. After marrying William Hargrove, a clerk in a shipping office, she moves to London. She is not satisfied with her life and always thinks of altering her situation. Her husband is aware of this, and he works hard to delight her. One evening, he returns home with a card for a New Year's Gala at the Grand Hall, where the elites gather.

Both stories set the background of the story and establish a heroine who is discontented with their life and craves a richer life. While the AI-generated story reflects the setup and explains Eleanor's dissatisfaction with her life, it does not mirror the society and societal critique embedded in *The Necklace* and the author's meticulous description of Mathilde's frustration. In *The Gilded Watch*, there is no mention of the culture or the reason behind Eleanor's dissatisfaction.

One of the most important aspects of storytelling is to reveal some aspects of the culture and lifestyle in which the author lives. Authors almost always reveal facts about a particular period in history. Literature, in general, and stories, in particular, are considered essential parts of a nation's history, and it is through literature that social norms and traditions of a particular period are preserved and passed on to other generations. AI-generated stories lack this crucial feature and, therefore, are inferior and poor in presenting aspects of history and culture. In *The Necklace*, Mathilde is a middle-class woman who endlessly suffers from the poorness of her house, the old furniture, and the ugly curtains. "All these things that another woman of her class would not even have noticed tormented her and made her resentful" (Maupassant). Here, the readers obtain some hints about the cultural customs of that time

and inevitably realize that there were class divisions and norms, although not distinctly expressed.

2. Character development

Maupassant draws his characters with psychological depth and human understanding. Mathilde's inner world is meticulously portrayed, and the various stages she undergoes are well depicted in the story. Mathilde's desires, regrets, and adversities are vividly portrayed, which inclines the reader to relate to her and makes her a multidimensional character. Other characters are described simply but in an effective manner that is too relatable. The characterization of Loisel, Mathilde's husband, is plainly opposite to that of Mathilde, which makes it easier to grasp the flaws and complexities in her characters. The changes in Mathilde and her transformation are gradual and logical, which mirrors the realistic nature of Maupassant's style in portraying her. In the beginning, Mathilde is unhappy and suffers endlessly because of her poverty; "She dressed plainly because she had never been able to afford anything better, but she was as unhappy as if she had once been wealthy." However, when she gets an opportunity to attend a rich party and get noticed by rich people, she becomes extremely excited.

The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was prettier than all the other women, elegant, gracious, smiling, and full of joy...She danced wildly, with passion, drunk on pleasure, forgetting everything in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness, made up of all this respect, all this admiration, all these awakened desires, of that sense of triumph that is so sweet to a woman's heart.

However, at the end of the story, when Mathilde loses The Necklace, her life is entirely changed, and her character is transformed dramatically; she is no longer concerned about her beauty or class and works for long hours to pay back her debts. "Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become strong, hard, and rough like all women of impoverished households. With hair half combed, with skirts awry, and reddened hands, she talked loudly as she washed the floor with great swishes of water." However, there is a kind of contentment in her life now; her pride led to her downfall, but her years of hard labor humbled her. This arc is extremely significant in the moral of the story and leaves an enormous impact on the readers. However, in *The Gilded Watch*, there is not much psychological description of Eleanor's character. She is overly simplistic and described as a one-dimensional figure who lacks human depth. Eleanor is described as entirely pitiable, and there is nothing compelling about her character that readers can resonate with. "She was a woman of rare beauty, with auburn hair that shimmered like polished copper and sparkling eyes that distinguished her from her peers" (AI). Throughout the story, Eleanor is only described in terms of her physical appearance, and readers remain unconscious of her inner world. Eleanor feels less alive and inhuman, and therefore, her struggles are less impactful. The organic progression of Maupassant's character does not occur in *The Gilded Watch*. For instance, as the ten-year ends and Mr. and Madame Loisel pay back all the debts, Mathilde changes dramatically;

She came to know the drudgery of housework, the odious labors of the kitchen. She

washed the dishes, staining her rosy nails on greasy pots and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts, and the dishcloths, which she hung to dry on a line. Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become strong, hard, and rough like all women of impoverished households. With hair half combed, with skirts awry, and reddened hands, she talked loudly as she washed the floor with great swishes of water.

On the contrary, Eleanor's transformation is formulaic and mechanical, and the passing of the years merely adds up to her age without any noticeable change in her character; "Years passed, and their lives became a relentless cycle of toil and sacrifice. Eleanor's beauty faded, her once-bright eyes dulled by exhaustion. She no longer dreamed of grandeur; her only wish was to repay their debts and find some measure of peace". Secondary characters in *The Gilded Watch* and AI-generated stories, in general, only serve functional roles without any significant depth. For example, Eleanor's husband, William, is dehumanized and is only there to fulfill his wife's wishes and provide for her needs. Readers would have appreciated and valued a fair description and an in-depth analysis of William's character as there are many examples of him in the real world, but his inner feelings and emotional aspects are completely overlooked.

3. Style and language

Human-made stories often possess exclusive writing styles, certain metaphors, a set of vocabulary, and wordplay that are unique to humans. Further, human writers always develop diverse voices that reflect their personalities, various cultural impacts, and creative ideas. When we read two stories by the same author, we instantaneously crack certain language features and codes that are unique to this specific writer, or even in the same story; there are certain features or expressions that are repeated more than once as this is the natural tendency of the humans that they like and use certain words, phrases or ideas more than others. Human writers inevitably repeat their own styles, and when expressing certain emotions, the same vocabulary always appears in their writings. AI-generated stories, on the other hand, depend on learned patterns, and whereas there might be fluency in the produced prose, they are almost always generic and lack specific emotional features. AI can imitate style, but it can not bring about innovative ideas and narrations as it always relies on repetition and feels formulaic.

In terms of natural flow and rhythm, in human-made stories, there are various sentence structures and deliberate pauses or irregularities that create the intended impact on the readers that AI-crafted stories often lack. The latter strictly follows learned grammatical structures and pays attention to proper beginnings and endings of the sentences that lose the natural flow and seem mechanic instead. AI-generated stories often lack the suspense and unpredictable rhythm of human expression, and as they overuse certain structures and formulas, there are unavoidable repetitions. Another feature that is exclusive to human writers and does not occur in the AI-crafted stories is the rhetorical questions and pauses that are put at the end of certain events and/or epiphanies. For example, when Madame Loisel realizes that she has lost *The Necklace*, she is puzzled, stammers, and does not know how to give this news to her husband:

"What is the matter?" asked her husband, already half undressed.

She turned towards him, panic-stricken.

"I have ... I have ... I no longer have Madame Forestier's necklace."

This expression, along with many others, differentiates *The Necklace* from *The Gilded Watch*. As humans, when we are in shock, we cannot express ourselves directly and appropriately, just like Madame Loisel. However, in *The Gilded Watch*, Eleanor coldheartedly informs her husband about this incident:

Eleanor clutched William's arm. "The watch, it's missing!"

"What do you mean, missing?" he asked, alarmed.

"I don't know! It was here, and now it's gone!"

There is another instance when the differences between the two stories, in terms of natural flow and rhythm, are exhibited effortlessly. After many years and after all the debts have been paid back, Madame Loisel meets her old friend, who had previously lent her *The Necklace*. After some hesitation, she approaches her, but Madame Frostier could not recognize her at first glance;

"But - madame - I don't know. You must have made a mistake."

"No, I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh! ... my poor Mathilde, how you've changed! ..."

The author captures the surprise and shock of Madame Frostier so well that the readers can easily resonate with it. However, in *The Gilded Watch*, the same instance is expressed unsympathetically and with little to no enthusiasm: "Eleanor!" Mrs. Penrose exclaimed. "It's been ages. How are you?"

4. Cultural and contextual understandings

AI-generated stories lack cultural or historical references in their content, and they only narrate a set of events as required by their developers. Although AI-generated stories rarely incorporate cultural references from their training data, these allusions and mentions are almost always misinterpreted or misused, which leads to narratives that are obsolete and inauthentic (Mary). One of the most valued purposes of literature is informing people about a particular culture or an important event that occurred in history. However, the AI-generated stories do not meet this criterion, and this fact is evidently present in *The Gilded Watch*. The story, in its entirety, does not offer any insight into the given culture or the historical background and overall setting of the story. Although it illustrates that the events of the story happened in Victorian England, it does not describe this particular era even indirectly and fails to offer a hint of the cultural customs of that time. On the other hand, human-crafted stories are full of cultural insights and historical information that readers can easily resonate with. *The Necklace* in particular is packed with sufficient events that effortlessly allow its readers to obtain knowledge about the culture and lifestyle of that period. Further, it indirectly criticizes the norms and traditions of that age through unfolding the events that occur to Mathilde.

There are many instances in the story where readers are accustomed to the traditions of that age; beginning with the invitation, Mr. Loisel has difficulty obtaining an invitation as

the party is designed only for the rich and upper-class people, and the working class has no chance of attending such parties, which indicates that there was a class distinction at that particular period. Another example is when Mathilde tells her husband that she does not have any jewels to wear for that event and says it is very shameful to look poor among the rich women and that she will be humiliated, which shows the social stigma attached to poverty at that age. "There is nothing more humiliating than looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women." Human authors have the ability to create stories that resonate with people, and readers sympathize with the characters of the story on various levels. In addition to the heroine, readers can also sympathize and pity her husband Mr. Loisel when he realizes that he has to give his wife the amount of money that he had been collecting to buy a gun for hunting with friends. When Loisel asks his wife about the price of a simple dress, he is puzzled that he has to sacrifice his own dream for the sake of his wife's appearance.

"Let's see, Mathilde. How much would a suitable dress cost, one which you could use again on other occasions, something very simple?"

She thought for a moment, computing the cost, and also wondering what amount she could ask for without an immediate refusal and an alarmed exclamation from the thrifty clerk.

At last, she answered hesitantly:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could do it with four hundred francs."

He turned a little pale because he had been saving that exact amount to buy a gun and treat himself to a hunting trip the following summer in the country near Nanterre with a few friends who went lark-shooting there on Sundays.

Discussion

The analyses of the two types of stories highlight distinct differences between them. While AI-crafted stories excel in efficiency, consistency, and accuracy, they cannot meet the standard criteria for literal writings in terms of emotional, resonance, cultural, and psychological insights. Instead of being a substitute for human writing, AI-generated stories are best understood as an addition to it. AI may be used by writers to get over barriers in their creativity, investigate other storylines, and expedite the writing process. At the same time, maintaining the range and depth of literary traditions depends on keeping the genuineness and intentionality of stories that are created by humans.

Conclusion

AI-generated stories are significant advancements in technology and have the potential to write stories as consistent and readable as those of human beings. However, there are several areas and aspects of storytelling where AI's ability remains limited and cannot replace the natural capability of humans. AI-crafted stories underscore the enduring value of human writing in terms of cultural insights, human creativity, and emotional depth. As AI advances, future studies should look into its collaborative potential with human authors, as well as the consequences for education, publishing, and the arts. Understanding the benefits and limitations of AI in storytelling can help us better manage the junction of technology and creativity in the twenty-first century.

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