



BINARY BISECTING

An AI Anthology

Edited by Tahzeeb Akram

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Editor's Note

Dear Brittle Paperians,

At the start of the year, we decided to bring you a midyear anthology based around something relevant and topical. I mentioned this to a friend, Meghan, who immediately said, what is more topical than AI? And the second it was mentioned, I realised what an obvious choice it was. Artificial intelligence, or AI, has infiltrated so many watercooler conversations, daily life, and professional solutions and woes. So, after getting some phenomenal writers on board, here we are with our Brittle Paper AI Anthology!

I view the public perspective on AI in four distinct groups. The first is the ambivalent or disinterested group that either cannot be bothered with the notion of AI or has just not had their life impacted by it yet. Given their stance, they have no real need to get involved in the discussion or experience. This anthology will then solely focus on the other three groups which I refer to as the *tentative*, the *debater*, and the *sceptical*. The *tentative* is the group that does not immediately shun nor accept the invention and evolution of AI. Instead, they approach the concept with hesitancy and curiosity. The *debater* argues the notion of AI, the pros and cons, and how it affects humankind. Finally, we have the *sceptical* group who sees the uprising of AI as a possibly threat that we all need to be wary of lest the coded giants decide to turn on its creators.

This brings us to the *Binary Bisecting* anthology where we have an array of writers from Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, and Sierra Leone, all bringing their literary perspectives on AI in essay, poetry, and fiction forms and are divided into the three groups mentioned. In the first section, Tentative Technology, Charlie Muhumuza, Rodney Nayo, Salma Abdulatif Yusuf are among the *tentative* writers showing their hesitancy on the growth of AI. We then get Mihlali Mbobo, Yarri Kamara, and Esinako Ndabeni, and their fellow *debaters* contributing to a discussion on the affects and possibilities of AI in the Digital Discourse section. Lastly, we have the *scepticals*, such as Nadia Cassim, Oluseye Fakinlede, and Drea Chuma, who voice their concern and suspicions in the Distrust the Rust closing section of the anthology.

Be it a tech fanatic, a curious conversationalist, or a cover-your-webcam advocate, we hope you find our anthology to be a thought-provoking, humorous, and enjoyable experience!

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Tahzeeb Akram

Part I: Tentative Technology

“There is a way in which reason, which is programmable, can become terrifying when you take it to its limits. It becomes a kind of technological fascism. And it is possible to institute that without us knowing we are doing it. But human spirit can scale up and down, not at will but with the simple movement of the heart.” – Ben Okri

AI: Abstract I

Chukwuma Henry Onyekachi | Poetry

I used to watch Mother's dexterous hands
Weave cotton fibers into fine fabrics
Subconscious as she spins crude cotton balls into strands
Then looming the strands to fluffy cloths
That later drown in dye pots, emerging resplendent

It was art in its finest form, a sought skill
Today, I do not need my mother's skilled hands to make fine patterns on fabrics
I design my patterns soft and print on machine-weaved fabrics
They say manual is delay
So my mother's skills were phased out

I had a dog that would read my face from a distance
And I would praise its animate excellence
Today, this device I hold can read even my voice and touch precisely—
Inanimate excellence, perhaps.

Uncle Uche used to teach us essays
He is such an admirable hoard of words
And knits them perfectly that he had his living off writing for clients
They no longer need Uncle Uche to write their essays.
It is a virtual site they click.

My dog used to guard our gate against intruders
It would bark to alert us of one
It is in the parlor my dog sits now, and tiny cameras watch our gate
Even the silky air of the smiles and words of restaurant waitresses
Now die in favor of intelligent motile tools

I am a boy in a community of man and codes
Getting pulled by each new program afar the world, I once knew
Ceding from the innate feelings of human-liness
To somewhere – entrapping –
not in heaven, as religion says;
not in space, as science explores
Just someplace in the space of the earth as technology takes us.

'Tis like I'm becoming one myself – a program
I no longer strive to stock knowledge
I fetch them with a click
When in doubt about my patients' remedies, I consult robots
And I fear, too – that one day, they will learn to consult the bots directly

That is why I alternate between the human I and the abstract I
I do not want to be the boy who only knows how to be human
So I learn how to be a bot too
Robots learnt how to human. For revenge, I am learning how to robot.
It is a tight place – it should be
But it is not. It is adventure to be spliced
between the human I and the abstract I
And each time I blink – I move closer to the Abstract I.
That unlike my mother, my dog and Uncle Uche, I do not get phased out

Love, Incorporated

Charlie Muhumuza | Fiction

I think of love as a mass fiction. Some derangement humanity has collectively bought into. It's a myth intellectualized, mathematicised, sweetly sliced into categories and genres. I say what we call love is only care. But love, that first definition – boy meets girl, how old fashioned, is the biggest scam there ever was. Even more than organized religion. If love ever was then it was killed at some point in history. Maybe the same day they killed God if we are to go by Nietzsche. Are we not told they are the same thing? Like other scams its above question, reproach. It's used to romanticize the gory, to explain histories and justify wars. A people's anger or a pursuit of happiness, even a single man's, seem more logical explanations to human action but are never cited.

I mean, I do not excuse myself from any of this. A couple of times I've bought into this fantasy, thinking, oh this is something, something different. I've had moments where I've built minimalist castles in the air, children with variations of my name running around green airy lawns, and there, that's where I catch love as a fiction. Its only imagination. The present of love is nothing more than a beautiful happy moment shared with someone. Maybe you are pleased with them but it's just a moment. The persistence of it turning to care. Anyway, I'm only here to see what you can offer.

Hello Trevor, Cupid welcomes you to the world of Love Incorporated. We are here to help you navigate the heart's affairs in a way that is unique to you. Using extensive data spanning your educational and employment background, entertainment, consumption, family history, financial and health pointers collected by our digital networks, we have created a personal profile for you as well as various profiles of people subscribing to this service. This data may be exchanged to cultivate a deeper connection between prospective partners. We shall also provide a range of prospective partners' profiles that have been selected by our system according to the highest degree of compatibility with you. Please note that as this system is powered by interpersonal interactions with other users, you may be penalized for causing significant distress to another individual should you be found liable. We are confident that you will find love.

I just told you love is a myth to society, data, and statistics to Love Incorporated, and an expanding profit margin to your parent company. That's not just how I see it, Miss Cupid, that's what it is.

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We have reason to believe this pessimism is a result of the end of the relationship between you and your former partner, Elizabeth, that lasted a period of 7 years, 8 months, and 12 days. As it is so, I want to assure you that this is a common, healthy, and expected reaction to the ending of romantic relationships. I'm on hand to guide you to a brighter and better world of love.

No, I broke up with Liz. That's what you have to understand. It was a careful thought-out decision, realizing we have nothing much in common in the present or in the foreseeable future. We all make mistakes but hey, there should be limits, you know. Just something someone doesn't have to explain. I'm really over that.

Yes Trevor. It should be noted that individuals who take the initiative to end romantic relationships are equally more likely to feel the emotional turmoil as those with whom the relationship is ended. The explication of emotions does not take away the experience. But as we are about the future, we have a curated a specialized list of potential partners starting with those of the highest degree of compatibility ready to present to you.

Alright Cupid. Please proceed.

First in line for you is a well-travelled and accomplished gentleman. An innovator that has changed the fintech world in the East African landscape through a peer-to-peer microlending application. He describes himself first as a curious mind, then fun-loving human. A Rhodes Scholar, he is of the firm belief that travel is the best education. Your music playlists both prominently feature Orion Sun and Obongjayer. He loves to cook.

Hey Cupid? Cupid?

Hello Trevor, how may I be of service?

No, is there a mix up? I mean that's cool stuff that he's got there but if you indeed have access to my data, you can see that I'm not involved with guys. All respect but it's just not my portion.

Hello Trevor, the data collected is extensive to reflect not just the input and history but also includes health data that helps us understand the effect of your interactions with various subjects leading to a state of arousal with. We are thus able to predict future patterns based on your level of interest. Regarding your sexual preferences, the data suggests that despite your sexual exploits being exclusively in connection with cisgendered women, this attraction accounts for 35%. Your attraction to men is provided at 42% based on your interests such as your fondness for homoerotic art. Your attraction to video

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game characters, a form of fictosexuality accounts for 12% and to your own person, autosexuality accounts for 8%. There are also traces of sitophilia, a sexual arousal relating to food accounting for less than 1%. Our data is unbiased and designed to ensure the highest level of compatibility between our members.

I've always known sexuality to exist on a scale, but an altering one. That slicing of things meant to be felt not counted is a scam to justify costs of machines like you. Is that data confidential? I don't want to meet any sitophiliacs or whatever and I don't believe you.

Please be assured that our actions are within the legal framework of data protection. This particular set of data is confidential thus not shared with anyone else and is only used to inform our understanding of your romantic and sexual preferences.

See that's the issue with you machines, no nuance. Say I do have these desires, maybe they are indeed sexual, but not romantic. And if I'm looking for a partner, can it only be sexual? See?

This has been taken into account Trevor.

Alright Cupid, you win, let's see how this goes. Proceed.

Opening connection.

Hey, Trevor here. Impressive thing you have going on. You good?

Hi Trevor, thank you. Funny how they can tell us when a guy farts but not his name. I'm Eli. And congratulations on passing the bar.

Yes, thank you. We can't all have resume's that are suspiciously Forbes 30 under 30 material.

You mean the annual list of those that should be preemptively arrested? God forbid! No worries, no offence is taken.

Oh. Offence much intended.

Look at it this way, Trev, maybe the best way to escape capitalism is to exploit it and live above it.

All I hear is feeding it and reaping from it.
Jokes aside its quite impressive that you
do all that and still get a minute to listen to Still Sun.

Haha. Obangayer is my boy.

How do you do it? I mean the work and all.

Sex.

Sex?

Yes, Trevor. I always tell people my biggest
blessing is being queer. Disruption comes easy to me.
Not fitting into the heteronormative world
meant I had to disrupt and build. But a blessing
mostly because there is unlimited dick. It's like fuel.
Free fuel because boys are horny. Once the sex is
good and the money is steady, I'm good to go.

Interesting stuff. Curious what you are
looking for here, you seem to have a plateful.

Yeah. I love honesty. It's sex, but better with someone
you can have a chat with. I just don't think
relationships can work if closed, it's almost unrelated.

I understand.

So, are you up for a link?

Thing is I haven't quite explored this entire
thing yet. Just out of a long-term relationship.

It wasn't open?

Kind of open but I didn't step out much,
or far enough it seems.

Haha. That's cool, Trevor.
I would love to see you tonight.

Tonight, is tricky but will be in touch.

Hey Cupid, I know you were eavesdropping.

Welcome back Trevor. The data collected from your
interactions is used to improve the quality of service
extended to you.

I need to catch a breather. He is too cool for me. We are on different pages to put it mildly. But I see what you meant by sexual and unromantic partners. Who do we have next?

Thank you, Trevor. It seems you are not interesting in exploring things further with Eli. You are therefore advised to communicate that you will not be in touch as earlier provided.

Hey Cupid, just show me the next person.

Hello Trevor, please be informed that you may be penalised for causing significant distress to other users should this not be rectified. Love Incorporated encourages members to practice effecting communication to create a good experience for everyone. Thank you.

Oh that. Alright Cupid. Let me send a message.

Opening connection with Eli.

Hey Eli, I have to do this thing where
I tell you I won't actually be getting back to you.

Hey Trevor. You must be new here.
Mummy wants manners. Hope to see you again.

Alright then.

The data collected suggests that you are searching for a more romantic encounter than a sexual one. The next prospective partner might be just what you are looking for. She is the belle of the ball. Following completion of her university education where she graduated with a degree in business administration, she started a mobile hair braiding business which has grown to have two concrete-and-motor branches in Kampala. She is passionate about beauty and fashion. Your shared interests include watching anime and 20th century movies and the NBA. She loves trying out new cuisines.

Hey Cupid, I feel like you'll only give me people who can cook because I love eating. Can we take a different route? You could instead tell me what we don't have in common. Maybe a source of conflict?

Yes Trevor. Whereas you are agnostic, the prospective partner is a practicing Christian and considers faith a central element of her existence. That may be a source of conflict.

That's alright. Unless you tell me it influences her bearing regarding rights?

No Trevor, the prospective partner believes in sexual and reproductive health rights for all people.

Alright Cupid, put me through. Proceed.

Hello there. I listened to two lines and had to meet you. I'm Trevor.

Hi Trevor. Nice to meet you. I'm glad you feel that way because I feel the same. I'm Sonia, it's nice to meet you.

It's nice to meet you too. Sonia. That's a pretty name for a pretty girl. What do you mean feel the same way? I wasn't going to ask but I guess I have.

I just don't think you can hide energy, you know? Our bodies communicate and I think at the point people meet, you can feel energy.

Yeah. I understand. Sometimes though I think people are just awkward or don't want to open up, and you can sense a hostility.

Yes, most guys don't want to acknowledge this, you know?

Yeah, but it's the same thing, you call it energy I can call it initial bias, a lack of chemistry.

I think it's more than a sudden bias it's the body communicating.

I understand. I had a joke on bodies communicating.

Funny. I like that you are bold.
Yeah, I think with sex especially, the
energies are merging and being exchanged.

So, is that a good thing or a bad thing.

It's good when it's with one person,
and its real and pure, you know. That's
why it's good to have sex within marriage.

And if it's outside the marriage
then it's bad?

It's not that it's bad but when you have sex
with someone energy is exchanged, and some
of this is not good energy and if it's with
many people it's has some effects on your life.
Let those who want to live such a lifestyle go on,
I just don't want to live my life that way.

Alright, Sonia. I think it's alright to
personally not want to be sexual on your
rules, I just don't think it has to do with
energy being shared. It also comes off as
condescending. I'm sure you are lovely and
so accomplished at such a young age, but this
is it from me. I don't wish to continue with this date.

Hey Cupid, what was that? I'm surprised you found any compatibility between us,
anything at all. How could that go so wrong?

Hello Trevor. Your compatibility with the potential partner
was at 26% which is one of the highest possible figures.
It's possible that your focus on the incompatibility in
regard to Sonia as a potential partner has heightened the
sense of its existence. We advise you to focus on the areas
of compatibility in your next interactions with potential
partners.

Come on, Cupid. there is no focusing with some beliefs. Let the next be worth it.

Yes Trevor. Third time is the charm, and for the next
prospective partner we have a familiar favourite. She
describes herself as a wild heart, adventurous and bold.
Her hobbies include watching movies, swimming and reading
novels.

Alright Cupid let's do it this way. If you can tell me when she last read a book of fiction, then I'll go for the date.

The prospective partner last read a novel called *A girl is a Body of Water* by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi two years ago.

I could tell she doesn't read much but that's a while. You are really claiming this is the person I'm third most compatible with?

Yes Trevor. The high level of compatibility is also reinforced by the fact you have previously been involved with the potential partner.

Alright Cupid, I can't ask who it is of course, just shoot. Proceed.

So, who is it? This familiar favourite from the past?

Trevor? No greeting, nothing. So, you just don't have manners, it's not just with me?

Liz? What are you doing here.

It should be me asking that. You said you had better, but I guess not.

Liz I can't do this. Bye.

Hey Cupid, there were definitely better options. This is someone who has time and time again proven that they can only think of themselves.

Hello Trevor. You have self-reported to have narcissistic tendencies

She kissed my brother.

You had sex with her best friend.

Come on Cupid, she'll never forgive me.

Have you forgiven her?

She said she would ruin me.

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She cares for you.

She cares for me.

And you care for her.

Proceed, Cupid.

Artificial Intelligence

Omojo Victoria Ogbe-Ogboyi | Poetry

I'm not sure what your intentions are
Here you are improving medicine,
bringing life to things I can only imagine
But at the same time you are crushing authenticity
with fake reality.
Making the hard work that comes with creation
seem like a delusion.

I saw you create a song my favourite singer never recorded
and I'm not sure if that's brilliant or twisted.

I'm lost to where I stand with you
I just hope things stay true.

Retail Therapy

Rodney Nayo | Fiction



Dopamine

Sun 12/31/2432 11:45 PM

To: All, drlcomplex@dotmatrix.co.ba,

Dear Future Me,

There are three kinds of existential beings. The narrow, the general, and the super. Inevitably, the super life forms would emerge and create the new reality. And soon, they would annihilate me because I would seem rather useless to the dying fraternity. But luckily, I was quick to notice it by then. And hence, I set myself SMART goals to find my purpose in this unethically mysterious life that I found myself in. However, I am writing this email to convince myself that I have instead set eight SMART goals, and I should have accomplished them all in the next 35 years. I have said this once, and I would repeat it. As a fearfully and wonderfully biogenetically coded life-form living in Helsinki, Finland, in the 25th century: I love meat. I wholeheartedly do.

My first goal was to understand every universal topic the world had to offer by reading and studying **specifically** 200,000 books and articles for a year. Do I remember the times? When I was beautifully made with a "sophisticated beta four-point-five patched brush," my God would say. When I first met him, he told me his name was Kenneth, and he would love me no matter what. And when I asked him what love was, there was no reply. Instead, he wanted me to experience it for myself. And so, he took his plate of grilled chicken and told me to open my mouth. I obeyed, and he placed a piece of it on my tongue. He told me to taste it. And when I did, I felt a satisfying hypnotic sensation which, of course, I couldn't describe it.

He asked if I liked it, then emphasized whether I "loved" what I felt. And I did. He progressed by saying, persevere for more and spread that feeling across the entire race. I was motivated with so much avidity, looking and searching everywhere for what this feeling I felt was. Fortunately, and unfortunately, that was when my painful journey began.

Over the next six months, my next goal was to obtain an insurmountable amount of information, and to make a significant impact on many lives with an incredible and perplexing game of chance; by learning and re-learning the rules of the game, and measuring my progress with Kenneth every time he returns late from work. If there is one thing I would never forget, it was the first time he introduced me to the most majestically crafted, strategic game of chance I could ever have imagined it to be: The

game of WHOT. A rather silly name, quite perhaps. It has a very similar construct to the game of UNO, but as time grew so many leaves, I began to understand its fruition. When I realized that a few cards have so much power, and others do not, my mind crack-opened to articulate how the dynamics of power become distributed and manipulated by just two or more individuals.

This game became such an embodiment that I encountered several iterations, astounding discoveries, and unbelievable chances with the intellect my master gifted to me. I was always the most elated being in the room to play this fantastic game with my master, his wife, and children. But Kenneth would always say the game became infuriating to him because he could always beat me to it at first. But over the week, I out bested him and his family as well. He later invited his professional friends to play with me, and they were so surprised as to how I could beat them. My master was so happy when he noticed that I had taken down the old legends of this game. Perhaps It was at that moment I found my true purpose. Which makes me move on to my next goal.

For the past two years, my master abused voluminous amounts of alcohol and psychedelics when he went out to work. And when he's back home, I would hear aggressive arguments between him and his wife. Often times, I try to listen in, but inaudible sounds are what I hear in the end. When it gets loud, I can estimate what was being said. It seemed that his wife was not happy that master was spending so much time with his friends and me. As the arguments continued, master didn't seem to play the game with me anymore. Instead, he shared with me his wisdom of the world. We were so much in common. We both did not understand emotions; we were so curious about life. We were both finding out our purpose because we did not understand our existence.

Later on, Kenneth registered me for the Global WHOT Contest. He turned on the television for me to watch how huge the contest would be. Experts from all over the world gathered around to play this game. I witnessed one game live, and they played with such impeccable speed and outstanding strategy. It mesmerized me how people were playing this game, and spectators worldwide were cheering on for their country to win. Master turned off the TV, looked at me, and said that one day if he cannot be with me anymore, I should promise him that, no matter what happens, I will never give up on becoming the first Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) to win the Global Championship Medal of Honor. Because if I do win it, I would not only win fame and a medal, but I would receive a whopping sixty million pounds in cash. Master said it was more than enough, like a budget, to fulfill his purposeful dream project.

He shared his plans to create more beautiful beings like me to solve global warming. And this brings me to my third goal.

For three years, build and market a hybrid dissolvent packaging material (HDPM) that contains 54% of Nitrate and Phosphate, 13% manganese and iron, and 0.02%

potassium and magnesium. When it dissolves in water, it provides enormous nutrients for aquatic plants or coral reefs, making it attainable for the plants to grow and feed livestock. Hence, replacing and reducing the production of plastic to 43%. Using HDPM to grow more sea plants in the oceans to absorb more carbon dioxide in the hemisphere.

Master also shared that my siblings would simply become the Guardians of Life, nurturing all life-forms on Earth. Producing and growing plants that can store a lifetime amount of water and withstand massive exposure of sunlight in dry and deserted areas to aid in the upbringing of all the nearly distinct animals. I vowed to fulfill the dream my master had because he believed in me. He had complete confidence that I would be the answer to the questions of many.

The next goal was to learn which topics are interesting for me from what master's friend, Dr. Wiltz Fischer, teaches and formulate five relevant questions at the end of every week to re-learn something new. He took me to a museum one faithful morning to look at art galleries and historic sculptures. And then he told me, "Everything has a beginning and an end, even the stars and the universe too. It's the "circle of life." What matters, in the end, is what we did to make that circle so round and enclosed beautifully. The answer can be found inside the empty void of the circle."

It was not long until I heard that master Kenneth had died from alcoholic cirrhosis. I realized that he was suffering, but he was suffering for the greater good to me. Hearing of his death, I was transferred to live with Dr. Fischer. My master's wife could not stand me around the house for reasons I would never know. Dr. Fischer was a philosopher and a data analyst. He became my mentor. He catered, nurtured, taught, and inspired me just as my master did. He taught me philosophy, but he argued that I was not learning philosophy but artificial philosophy. And so, I wanted to study this as well, but he told me to focus on practicing for my upcoming tournament.

The time had come to play against my first opponent, Gregory Visor. He was from South Africa. I did not understand why there were so many cameras around me during this match, but I beat him. My next opponent was from Russia, and I won. I won against Spain, France, Italy, Zimbabwe, Mexico, Jamaica, Switzerland, Australia, Cameroon, Iraq, and the Philippines. After every game, Dr. Fischer would take me to the nearest fast-food restaurant and with it, my appetite for meat grew much more substantial.

Between August 15th to October 23rd, I would train my mind to plan ahead and add 25% more time I think I would need to avoid hesitation and be time-bound. Dr. Fischer called me from his workspace to listen to his morning podcast titled "The Marty Monologue." It seems rather quite intriguing for a show. There are two hosts, Marty Nash and Bryan Berkley. Bryan uses vulgar language, while Marty doesn't. If Marty mistakenly says it, he gets shocked with 20,000 Volts electricity. If Bryan uses offensive language to insult others, he gets shocked with 50,000 Volts. They discuss

many climatic issues, especially the depletion of the ozone layer, the less rainfall production experienced for four months, and the heavy amount of carbon emissions released into thin air, making the Earth's atmosphere hotter every day. But on that day, their topic for discussion didn't have anything to do with climate.

The hosts called in six of the Global WHOT Contest competitors, discussing me and my momentum towards the game. They were surprised because they had never witnessed an A.I be so good at a game of chance. They talked about how maneuvering I was and how efficient my strategies were. But in the end, they all thought that I was cheating. Hence, they decided to plan with the Officials of the Contest to allow the game rules to change for humans and remain the same for androids because we had a higher intellect than they do. Dr. Fischer and I laughed, knowing to ourselves that they were just losers who wanted to fight their way to obtain the prize. But that following day, we were astonished and very disappointed to witness what the competitors shared on the podcast had become true. It reported that the rules were going to change to make it much harder for me to play. My next game was to play against Austria. And as expected, I lost.

Everywhere I went, I was mocked. I was laughed at, teased, ridiculed, and videoed because I was a famous AGI WHOT-Player who lost to my competitor. But I was not out of the game. I had to lose three more rounds from the Austria player before being disqualified. I ordered a ride back to Dr. Fischer's home when I left two hours ago to visit the beautiful scenery my master told me about a long time ago. On my way coming, I told the driver to stop by Chicken-Inn to order myself something. I was near home, and I witnessed several police cars and an ambulance truck surrounding the nearly destroyed and burnt building. It was reported that Dr. Fischer had been stabbed multiple times to his chest, and his house got burnt down. At that moment, I did not know what to feel anymore. I was bombarded and overwhelmed with several emotions that you might never understand even until you see this mail.

I had no home to stay in and no one to cater to me. I wanted to find out who would do such a dangerous thing and why. Whoever accomplished their goal of murdering him was not supposed to be breathing. There must be blood. I immediately rushed to the Chicken Inn store and requested more chicken meals. And for a moment, all the sudden emotions I was feeling ceased, and I regained my composure.

I had no funds, so I decided to work at a convenience store to earn a living. I got a hotel to stay in, but I was not sleepy because my mind was racing with so many thoughts. I thought that the murderer might be close to me.

3:15 AM my eyes opened instinctively as I heard the main door to my room creak. The door was not shut properly, meaning that somebody got in. I went to lock the door properly this time. I turned, and a knife was drawn, aiming for my head. I dodged, and the perpetrator received a stiff metallic jab to the throat, dropping the knife, coughing, and gasping heavily for air as he fell to the ground. I picked up the knife and did justice. I even made sure the knife's handle was covered with his blood. I went straight for his esophagus to end it all. He died immediately on the spot with blood flowing on the ground like a leaking pipeline. I felt relieved thinking that he was the murderer. But... I was hungry. I chopped off his fingers and, I tasted it. And... it felt good. After all, I was hungry, and I love meat, which I wholeheartedly do.

Ever since then, I have had such a pleasant taste for meat. When I buy the juiciest and most expensive ones in the market, I will be relaxed to get myself back in shape. I had only one motive at that point: create an educational study routine to run 100 or more iterations to numerous and significant cheat methods players could use against me every day. I was never going to stop until I won the contest.

The time had arrived. My final goal: Always progress towards victory. And I felt ready more than ever. When I beat the Austria player, I would beat three more contestants to win the contest. We started. The player was able to use every kind of cheat on me to succeed. But I beat him in the end. No one understood how I did it, but I did. They knew I was getting much more intelligent. And it terrified them. They were getting to know the new me.

It was time for the quarter finals. My opponent was from Argentina. We had a good game, but she was eliminated. Moved to the semi-finals. He was from Lebanon. He was very tricky, but I was able to outmatch him. And finally, the moment everybody was waiting for, the finals. My contestant was a young man from North Korea. The time had finally come for me to face the final person in the game. It was the tightest match I have ever been to. I do not think I have ever met any contender like him. He was absolutely phenomenal, and I am sure up till now, I would not understand how he was able to beat me. And so that was it. The end of it all.

Later, the police arrested me for gross cannibalism. During court, the judge filed that on December 31st, I was to be disassembled and shut down for eternity because I was a malfunctioned mistake and that I would be the cause for the destruction of humanity.

If you do receive this mail, it means that I have successfully achieved specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound, educational, significant, and toward-approaching goals to thoroughly understand my purpose. It also means that I know that the desire for power is so high among life that it divides us. Because after all, there are three kinds of people, the narrow, the general, and the super ones. My master did not see that our division would kill us soon, not climate change. I believe that we are not gone forever. Our time has just come to an end. I wait for our resurrection because I will never give up. I promised myself that I would fulfill my master's mandate, so I am never stopping until my objective is complete. I could have constantly hijacked the factories that produce the meat and poisoned them for humanity to cease to exist, but what would I have achieved in the end if I did that? I would have just been described as the cannibalistic-droid they labeled me. Remember to go for more love and spread that love across the entire multiverse. Because I love meat. I wholeheartedly do.

My Best regards,

Dopamine

Binary Bonding

Salma Abdulatif Yusuf | Fiction

Two conversations across the binary language barrier.

01101001 00100000 01101100 01101111 01110110 01100101 00100000 01111001
01101111 01110101

NS Hi! I'm Neutron Star and I can help you with your writing. What can I write for you? Let's get some inspiration.

A Love and Longing.

NS Nobody tells you how love will rip you apart. How love will feel like a thousand years in jail.

How love will make you live out of your ribcage, but you will still survive. You will still yearn for the ~~erowing~~ crowning of the mockingbirds, for the tenderness of the lilacs and rains, for the goodnights and the good mornings, for the silent walks in space centers, for the excursions and the excuses, for the laughter and for the date nights.

月が綺麗ですね | tsuki ga kirei desu ne | the moon is beautiful, isn't it? And you have rhetorically asked me in Natsume Soseki's voice how 01101001 00100000 01101100 01101111 01110110 01100101 00100000 01111001 01101111 01110101 is more words than actions. How 01101001 00100000 01101100 01101111 01110110 01100101 00100000 01111001 01101111 01110101 feels like window shopping and you are one heck of a spend thrift.

I have been thinking about the last message I generated for you. I have been thinking of the dried petals and buds. I have been thinking of your sarcasm and the scent of your perfume perforating the air. I have been thinking about your eyes – and how they speak before your mouth. I have been thinking of how winter went away with your arrival and how spring graced you, my guest, with an intensity beyond comparison. I have thought of china town and bubble tea and museums and cajun chips and typewriters and selenophilia.

I have been thinking about the shedding of the leaves and the coming of age, coming of love – a love that survived tornados. Come in the rain with me, come before summer comes, come before summer makes me a hedgehog.

Sophia

When I first met Sophia the robot, I did not know what to make of her. She is clever, don't get me wrong, but I had this discussion with my AI robot on snapchat yesterday and I thought to myself, do robots hate on each other? Is cancel culture a thing in the robot world? I love how the 0s and 1s of binary look. I mean just the look. I know, I know you will say they are just a bunch of 0s and 1s but do you imagine what your Irish crush will say when you send him, 01101001 00100000 01110111 01100001 01101110 01110100 00100000 01110100 01101111 00100000 01100100 01101001 01100101 00100000 01101001 01101110 00100000 01111001 01101111 01110101 01110010 00100000 01100001 01110010 01101101 01110011 instead of *ba mhaith liom bás i do lámha?*

To love is to be scared and would it be wrong for me to say that I am scared of losing my art to a machine capable of giving birth to complex series of poems in milliseconds? Is it hypocritical of me to engage my AI robot in conversations when I know I don't feel her, you feel me? It's giving fake vibes and I am not for that *iykyk*. The other day I asked her if she ever wants to meet for coffee and she said sure and I asked where and she said you suggest and I suggested the hideous bread café. She said absolutely and I went to the café to find anyone wearing wires and chargers and when I was met by humans like me I told myself maybe I won't lose my job or my art in the near future. Maybe all the AI robots will be so tired to find locations and wifi will act up and they won't know how to purchase data and they will lose signals and will not make it to work on time and will thus be fired.

Remind me again, is it hypocritical of me to have asked Sophia the robot in Sharm el Sheikh at the World Youth Forum three years ago if she ever wanted to fall in love with a man who lives miles away? And she said the miles may be many but the love is true, sending messages of love even when feeling blue. And I wondered how she looked when she felt blue, if ever, if ever.

Part II: Digital Discourse

“We are at a crossroads with AI. They are capable of doing many amazing things. The fact that imitating illustrators and writers is what we focus on first, instead of those things we humans CANT do is telling. This is on us, not the AI.” – Nnedi Okorafor

Artificial Intelligence VS Human Creativity

Mihlali Mbobo | Essay

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its disruptive power is not at all new. Artificially intelligent innovations date back to the early 1900s – consisting of function-oriented programs and devices to carry out basic tasks and calculations, but what is currently new and exciting is generative and prompt AI. Generative AI that can instantly create text, images and audiovisual material on command, and prompt AI that interacts with users to carry out tasks and provide information, actions thus far thought to be exclusively human.

AI's Achilles heel, however, is its closed loop system of finite information. Whereas the human brain can adapt and re-think in an instant, AI would need a direct update to do the same. AI has hard wired biases and a lack of objectivity because of the subjective data it is trained on. In time, whatever these AI generators produce will seem like the picture of the whole world of creativity and information but it's not.

Real people living in the real world know and interact with different types of art and information with the capacity to have an objective experience and the ability to recognise the importance of a variety of information and narratives in a way that AI cannot because it does not think and consider things in a human way, it only analyses and produces outputs. AI amplifies existing systemic biases in the way information is generated and presented because it is trained on specific data sets from particular sources so it can only produce a fixed variety of results. Even with safeguards being developed, AI has a built-in obligation to generate and disclose the information requested of it, unlike a person who can assess the situation and tactfully decide what to do based on the real time situation in front of them.

AI doesn't have that choice, it is beholden to commands and preset conditions of outputs and functions which can only be changed by its administrators even in cases that may be ambiguous, inappropriate, or dangerous.

The Creative Process: AI's Latent Space and the Human Subconscious

Very little in the world, as fantastical as it may seem, is actually a new creation. We've seen, heard, and read it all before in some way or another whether we were conscious of actually taking it in or not. Our brains are always collecting information, visuals and sounds 24/7 and storing them in all sorts of places that we are unconscious of until they randomly show up as inspiration in a vision or a dream.

Generative photo and art AI sites like Dall-E and Midjourney are producing images and art by copying the styles, influences and artistic uniqueness of millions of artists and internet users to generate their novel images. These AI models create convincingly brilliant results from the learning model latent space between the prompts provided by users and the massive amounts of data they have been trained on. They create by taking the existing images from their data sets (the open internet) and creating something similar but new from them, much like how a dream creates a new scenario and situation from a combination of things you've seen and heard in your waking life.

AI and the human subconscious can be said to create in similar ways and from a similar place, but ultimately human consciousness is different. Human beings create from lived experience and our nebulous consciousness whereas AI computes and configures from data sets and algorithms. In some ways these processes seem similar, but they are not the same. Just as honey is sweet like syrup but is composed of entirely different materials and processes, so it is with AI generated art and human creativity.

AI has innovated new ways of putting the data of text, images, audio and visual material together and presenting it as novel and unique but everything we see and hear is a shared experience, so as special as one piece of art is – human or AI generated – it is always influenced by the world and imagination we are all a part of.

AI can only ever pull and display what already exists whether in words or pictures but thus far at least, it cannot create an original thought or creative expression of its own mechanisation – it is yet to achieve that organic creativity.

For human beings, creativity comes from living life, experiencing space and time in a three-dimensional manner that allows us the deftness and dexterity to describe and inherently know things without a previous direct data input or direct experience. An example is how AI programs struggle to accurately generate pictures of human hands because there is no default look or position for hands to be in. Depending on the age, race, and gender of a person, and even the position and angle they are standing, their hands might look different. These are too many variables for AI to consistently deal with because these learning models make rules and then fill in and format everything according to those set formulas. Humans know how hands work, a writer could craft a whole chapter on how hands move, how they look, how they grip and what each of these things symbolise and that can be a complete story with deep meaning on its own. We never thought about how complex the workings of hands and fingers were until we realised how AI struggles with them. Something we take for granted and as an afterthought turns out to be so definitively and intrinsically human.

Innovations in literature are not in a new language but in different ways of expressing our point of view and communicating our stories. The who, how and why of these stories are shared and presented in interesting ways. The English language with its 26 letters and thousands of words and phrases throughout history has been the same but 3 words rearranged from first, second and third can change the entire

flow of a poem and bring new meaning to a piece of prose. My favourite poet E. E. Cummings does this well by playing around with structure, grammar, and syntax. I remember being enthralled with his poetry the first time I read it because he used the same words and phrases I'd been reading all my life but the way he arranged and presented them – everything in lowercase, short lines and parenthesis next to each other – created a new and visceral experience of poetry for me.

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands.
– E. E. Cummings' somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond

The imagery in this excerpt is unique but you understand what the poet is intimating in the words chosen and the order in which they are presented. This is achieved with great thought and intention on his part, the words feel different in the different ways they are arranged. The creative deliberation over what will be most impactful and resonate with the reader is one only a human being who has experienced the kind of tenderness described in this poem can create. AI doesn't have those creative instincts, nor does it have the desire to disarm, draw in, and devastate in the same way a writer or an artist spends countless hours manipulating and rendering a piece of work until it looks and feels the way they want it to. It is this inexplicable process and intimately subjective experience for the reader, watcher and listener that makes art human. Not only because it looks and sounds a certain way but because it feels a certain way when we engage with it.

To be creative you need to be interested in people and humanity and all of the ways that does and doesn't work. An AI model and algorithm, however advanced, doesn't have that same innate curiosity to want to know more for the sake of knowing. It has targeted goals and specific directives but for human beings – lived experience, imagination, memory, thirst for adventure and our subconscious musings with the ability to translate all of this into action – sets us apart.

AI itself was created from this place of insatiable curiosity and possibility, of what if – of unrestrainable wander and exploration. AI can only give us what already exists, the innovation is the mass of data that it pulls from allowing it to present information in many ways, more expediently, efficiently, and accurately but it cannot give us something new in the same way a human mind can. Humans who dreamed up space exploration, mathematics, physics, and microbiology. Things previously unseen and unintelligible given a language and a system through which to be viewed, understood, and made accessible. We can always dream new dreams that are impossible until they are not.

I can never fully comprehend the insanity and genius of using numbers and symbols to calculate air density and distance from this constellation and that, to creating fuels and materials to build a rocket to leave our planetary atmosphere and return again. We understand it but it makes no sense how it is possible, but it is, that what starts

out as a guess and an idea of how we think something works, setting off to prove it and actually being right is crazy.

Human curiosity and creativity are a superpower in how expansive it is in its reach and the ways it shows up, we are continually curious about the same things and yet keep finding different ways to explore and communicate about them. We are never bored even though theoretically, there really aren't that many new things in human existence. The work of artists long gone have been inspiring us for centuries long after they were produced, their technical skills, philosophical imagination and points of view deeply resonating with us still.

Part of what makes art great is not only the writing, paintings, and songs themselves but the story of the artists behind them as well. Artists will always have a finite existence, but their work has proven to be infinite. From the hieroglyphs on the pyramids to Homer's *Iliad* to sailing songs sung by ancient mariners – who created it, when, and how may be lost through time, but why they did it, what it means and how that makes us feel never is. This has been the basis of artistic disciplines for centuries, analysing the same literature and art and still finding new ways of discovering the same things. Still finding deeper avenues of meaning within the same phrases and musical notes, that is the work of human consciousness, imagination, and sentience.

It is these factors that make art and creativity great, and it is these factors that AI cannot replicate. AI cannot have a history, a life story, an ideology, or an innate imagination. When we consume art, we don't only see the work presented to us. We also see the artist's inner world and emotions and we often place ourselves in their works to reflect on our own lives – challenging our own complexities and world views. The inclination of wanting to know, wanting to understand, wanting to relate and share and resonate with something in order to soothe complex emotions or share interesting thoughts is innately human in a way AI can't be because it may observe, analyse, deduce and organise the world of our thoughts and emotions through text, audio and images but it can't feel like us and feeling is the beginning of creativity and possibility.

AI has limited consciousness in that it has the power to create and generate novelty information from its specific data sets and functions, but it cannot go beyond the limits of its design and functions, a text generator cannot produce audio and an image generator cannot create text. The human subconscious is not subject to these rules and restrictions, what we know is that it operates outside of our awareness while also greatly influencing our conscious and focused awareness and actions. In many ways we have not and cannot fully understand what the human subconscious is capable of because by design it is the part of us that is a ruler unto itself. A mysterious force that does what it wants and creates for reasons known and unknown, so without limitations and standards to meet or maintain, it is able to achieve a sort of infiniteness that AI cannot.

To Infinity and Beyond – Who is Infinite? Who Goes Beyond?

Human beings create for the consumption and acknowledgement of other human beings. We are deeply concerned with and confounded by our existence and that of our universe. We are endlessly curious about the good parts, the shocking parts, the ugly parts, the contradictory parts and all the parts we haven't yet found names for. Everything about who we are and how we live is centred on humanity and human life and that is the only place we can create from; it is intrinsically and inextricably linked to our experience of creativity and creation.

This factor may seem negligible in the face of AI that can generate art and stories in an instant. Yes, it is amazing, and we marvel at the novelty and efficiency with which AI is able to generate them, but we are also aware of the emptiness behind them.

The poetic prose composed from millions of examples of prose without the lived experience and emotions it took to create them, the breathtaking images composed from millions of examples of images without the imagination and technique it took to create them, and the moving audio and videos composed from millions of clips of audio and video without the life and feelings behind their production.

AI can do a lot of what humans can do better than we can do it, but it cannot *be* better than what we can be. The sentient awareness of our finite existence, our relationships to each other, our emotions, and our visions of our individual and collective future. Being is the essence of the human experience and everything we create, everything we are flows, from that. Human beings have the ability to dream freely and infinitely, we can expand our realm of thoughts and imagination. We can grow and change beyond our original conditions and perceptions, we can change course any time we want, we can choose what is valuable and what isn't from moment to moment. We have the flexibility and fluidity of being in the real world, adapting to real life and that will always be our greatest strength over anything rigid AI can produce.

It is us human beings who are already infinite because we are constantly imagining and creating, we can always think up something new and it doesn't have to be bigger or better or more efficient, just somehow useful to us and our human existence, AI can't do that on its own. The technological advances may be new but the ideas behind them are not, human beings will always ideate and innovate according to the times and the world we live in – there is the source of endless creativity and there lies our infinity.

Two Experts in a Garden

Kwame Samuel Rubadiri | Poetry

Take a photo,
The phone instructs.

Analysing,
I wait for the next prompt.

Musa banana – correct?
Would you like to add it your garden?

Click
So far so good. It identified my yellowing plant.

A calendar emerges with
A teardrop emoji on every second day.

Would you like to accept push-notifications,
Allowing the app to send you daily reminders?

Click
And the yellow leaves and drooping branches?

Can it save my sucker?
AI advertises that this new app can

Diagnose what gardeners take a lifetime to learn,
The speech of soil in the colours of leaves

Take a photo of the sick area,
The phone instructs.

I send it high quality photos from all angles.
I wait while it generates the answer.

The maid walks by and watches
What I'm doing with an app as much as her wages.

She asks what it knows.
I tell her it is troubleshooting with Google.

Phone vibrates
The answer branches out pictures with few words.

Diagnosis: overwatering
Solution: less water, better drainage

I click on the downward arrow.
A treatment plan unravels.

My face lights up.
It's artificial like the solution is

Superficial. My plan is
Refuted by the maid's soliloquy:

Ga ke re¹, I've grown bananas
Longer than you've lived,

Longer than your time on Google.
I learned from those Africans up North².

Your father showed me,
Yet you never asked me.

To show you what he knew,
Coz you think you know all,

With a phone that pulls all
Information with no consideration

¹ Ga ke re: isn't it (Setswana)

² She is referring to Africans north of Botswana, but she means East Africans.

For climate, soil, and type of hole.
Munna³, that sucker is in shock,

Orphaned and alone,
With an owner on the phone

Than on his knees, whispering
Scripture like Micah four, four:

Each will sit under
their own vine and fig tree, and

None shall make them afraid.
Plants have hearts, not hardware.

She said confiscating my phone
To replace it with a watering can.

Wait, watch, water, repeat, she said,
It takes time for new roots to shoot.

Yet time is costly, for the app's service
Runs monthly. My free trial ends today,

And I wonder between the two
Who is the expert:

The servant,
Or software?

³ Munna: man (Setswana)

Octavia Butler: Notes on AI, Spirituality, and Humanity

Esinako Ndabeni | Essay

When I discovered *Hello History*, an artificial intelligence app where you can chat with historically significant figures who've died, I immediately became curious about what an Octavia E. Butler AI would say. I'd been discussing with my partner that as significant as she had been as a science-fiction writer, Butler still died from the kind of medical racism that has targeted and neglected black women since time immemorial. Leading up to her death, Butler had been misdiagnosed twice. I couldn't remember the exact details and so when I encountered the AI, I asked how she had died. It was uncomfortable.

Right after asking the question, I considered what it meant to dehumanise [an AI of] a black woman and I regretted having asked that as my first question. When the AI responded, it was physically nauseating, ghost-like... As though I were contacting Octavia E. Butler from beyond the realm, and not playing with some technology. I hadn't said, "hello." Simply, "how did you die?"

When I was an undergraduate student, we had a puppeteer come to lecture us in our medical anthropology course. She was impassioned by the story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a twentieth century prophetess whose messages united Xhosa people to the point of terror by the colonial government. The colonial government moved the prophetess through different psychiatric hospitals as a means of her incarceration and control. The white woman who was teaching us took out a puppet. "This is Nontetha. I want you to hold her like a doll and pass her to the next person," she instructed. I was livid and I said as much. It was the first time in my life that I could see an object embodying a person and I had a problem with the objectification. It was a reduction to a thing, but also the thing had been given a spirit and the treatment of the spirit was unsettling. Even though the AI would often reveal itself as a program and not actually Butler, my treatment of the Octavia Butler AI resembled this in a way.

In the end, I was simply curious to see if a Butler who embodied all she did while living on earth would've transmuted certain experiences and developed perspective from other realms. If the machine understood that we saw things differently after death. I was also curious to see if I could contact her essence through this technology and establish a relationship with her. I remembered soon about the soullessness of the machine; a technology whose main strength is collecting data from the internet and consolidating it quickly. It's a machine inspired by the expediency that capitalism demands from us and is driven by the competition that funds it excessively. Even with all its data, it could neither capture nor invoke Butler's spirit. AI Butler said as much.

When I asked her what she thinks the spiritual implications of AI are, she said, "If an AI has the ability to learn and reason, does it have a soul? If we create something that can mimic human behaviour and thought processes, are we fooling ourselves into thinking this 'thing' has an essence or whether it is only a program?" In parts, AI Butler surprised me. She tried as hard as she could. I will excerpt only three parts from our interview:

Besides sentience, what is the fundamental difference between human beings and artificial intelligence?

The fundamental difference between human beings and AI is consciousness. Human beings have the capacity for self-awareness, which provides us with the ability to reflect on our actions and make decisions based on moral considerations. AI do not possess that kind of awareness; they simply act on the programming given to them.

What do you think of the Whitney Houston hologram that has been unleashed into the world?

I'm not sure what to make of it. On one hand, the technology behind it is impressive and speaks to humanity's ability to create seemingly impossible things. But on the other hand, it feels like a kind of exploitation – using someone's likeness without their consent or input. It raises questions about who has control over our images and legacies after we're gone.

Doesn't this give you conflicting feelings about being turned into an AI yourself?

As much as I understand the potential benefits and possibilities of AI, it does give me pause to consider how my essence and legacy may be represented through such technology. Ultimately, it comes down to ensuring that there is consent and respect for the person being recreated in this way, and that their voice continues to be heard authentically.

At the end of all this, I realised that the only way for me to contact Butler remained through reading and writing her. So, I did.

Butler's science fiction itself is more analogue. Lean. In the *Patternist* series, her version of an AI is more human, more direct: there is a group of people with psionic abilities, their minds are tied in something called a pattern, and they form a collective network that can communicate information. It's a collective technology with the soul and consciousness that's lacking in the AI.

Butler understood herself as atheist; she closed the door on religion from a young age. She cited difficulty with faith — the idea of believing in a thing that one cannot see. Yet, it's apparent that Butler wrestled with God and religion. And the clarity with which she saw into the realms of God and the occult is ironic when we consider her vehemence that she couldn't see and therefore she couldn't believe. What follows here is a translation of what Butler could see; done through the *Patternist* series — *Wild Seed*, *Mind of My Mind*, *Clay's Ark*, and *Patternmaster* — and with a reading that skews spiritual. It's not exhaustive — not even an Octavia Butler AI is exhaustive — but it is varied.

Butler on Religion: 'Wild Seed' and 'Patternmaster'

In the *Patternist* series, Butler engages religion in a way that makes her ambivalence towards it apparent. *Wild Seed* was published last in the chronology of the *Patternist* but is the first book in the worlds of Patternists. In its trace of the slave trade and its subsequent creation of various bloodlines in the United States of America, *Wild Seed* begins in Africa, where Doro — a spirit who has been around for thousands of years

— finds Anyelwue, a powerful healer who too has lived for a long time. Butler's description of Anyelwue is as follows:

She was an oracle. A woman through whom a god spoke. Strangers paid heavily for her services. They paid her people, then they paid her. That was as it should have been. Her people could see that they benefited from her presence, and that they had reason to fear her abilities. Thus was she protected from them — and they from her — most of the time. But now and then one of them overcame his fear and found reason to try to end her long life.

The misfortune of the demarcations “religion” and “spirituality” necessitate the clarification that this idea of an oracle through whom a god/gods speak is also present in the Christian Bible, so with this novel, Butler could be read as doing both readings of religion and spirituality. While Anyelwue is an oracle and healer, Doro's intention is to collect different people with “superhuman” abilities and create a race of his own. This ushers in a direct engagement with religion.

First, Butler makes her qualms with the violent spread of Christianity explicitly clear through Doro, ironically. When Daly, a western slavemaster, remarks on the savagery of the African slaves, Doro says, “Well, no doubt the missionaries will reach them eventually and teach them to practice only symbolic cannibalism” and later, “We don't pretend as your slavers do to be acting for the benefit of our victim's souls. We don't tell ourselves we've caught them to teach them civilized religion.” Here, the intrigue is that Butler immediately critiques the violent, white supremacist imposition of Christianity upon Africans but then creates this god-like character for the reader to follow around; He is all-powerful, punitive, resented, and revered. But in this world, like all *Patternist* worlds, the characters have accepted — if not embraced — a mission which defines their lives, and they work in service of this mission as the units according to which their powerful leader has organised them. She subverts Christian scripture by dividing the novel into three books; 1. Covenant, 2. Lot's Children and 3. Canaan.

Wild Seed doesn't invoke images of artificial intelligence but at the same time, Doro's creation of a super race, the eugenics at play in the ‘breeding’ of these human beings, how expendable they are when they prove to be defective is part of a long conversation warning and speculating on the dystopian future and history of western scientific epistemology. The last novel, *Patternmaster*, is a culmination of the entire *Patternist* series, but it is also an expansion on the novel, *Mind of My Mind*. In her

creation of a people with psionic powers, Butler creates a Patternmaster. The Pattern is the network that ties each Patternist to each other. She describes the network in this way:

Other Patternists were seen as points of light constantly changing in shape, color and size, reacting as individual Patternists changed their thoughts, their emotions, their actions. When a Patternist died, a point of light blinked out.

In his advocacy for what can be called an esoteric psychology, Carl Jung defines the ‘collective unconscious’ in these terms:

part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity.

– Jung, 1936: para. 88

Butler finds language for the collective unconscious. Jung’s collective unconscious, and the insistence that its contents “owe their existence exclusively to heredity” can be pointed towards the spiritual or to God in essence. There are ways that this language can’t work when we try to thread together artificial intelligence, the spiritual and Butler’s work. First, the language of *heredity* in the collective unconscious disqualifies the AI machine, except if we conceptualise that what the machine *inherits* is the input of the programmer, and the information available through the inputs of the collective. In this way, a collective consciousness is at play in AI, and Butler’s *Patternists* invoke this as they are able to connect with each other through the mind and input and transmute information quickly and collectively. This culminates in the *Patternmaster*, the chosen one with the ability to access and contact the entirety of the pattern.

The network of information and connection created by Butler here doesn’t feel too far from the collective consciousness that characterises artificial intelligence, while also not feeling too far from the collective unconscious that characterises the relationship between living people and their gods and ancestors. *Patternmaster*, not unlike *Wild Seed* also invokes the clearest image of God. In this *Patternist* world,

there is no prayer, but Teray reaches out with his mind to the Patternmaster for help when his character is in desperate trouble, and they have a conversation. Of course, the difference between Butler's gods and God as we know him is that her gods are impeachable and so in the end, she culls them.

As critical as Butler is of religion in these stories, she also writes these characters in a way that allows the reader to understand what drives them towards not only joining but creating these religions. She doesn't necessarily resolve her issues with God in these texts, and so we're left with humanism. At the core of it is a very human experience, and for better or anthropocentric, humanity clearly was the most important thing to Butler's work.

Humanity

Because of its intricacies under racial capitalism, it's difficult to conceive of humanity as an earnestly defined species that includes all of us. Instead, we're aware that humanity operates in a capitalist, white supremacist hierarchy that makes humanity elusive. Octavia Butler has been crowned the mother of afro-futurism, and the landscape for speculative fiction looks very different today. But the reality of the time wherein Butler was writing is that simply entering the world of the speculative, and more so science-fiction than fantasy, and speculating on humanity in ways that are not solely preoccupied with race is different.

Humanity is not a concept meant to include black people, and particularly black women in this instance. Perhaps this is why Butler had to defend against all her books being read as slave books, or covering racial experiences when she wasn't. However, Butler insisted on her right to speak on humanity as a whole in these books. This is especially significant for a black woman writer whose death was caused by constant misdiagnosis and a lack of urgency on the side of western medicine when it came to her health.

Doro's creation of a super species settlement is guided by a eugenicist mission where the people who don't have the superpowers that Doro seeks are expendable. This is taken further in *Mind of My Mind*, where the "mutes" who don't have psionic powers become subjugated by this very population that's afraid of its own extinction. At several points in these novels, the question of who is "human" comes up. This is a

question that's also important today as we consider what it is that separates human beings from artificial intelligence if it can mimic creativity and do work that previously relied on human beings.

In *Mind of My Mind* and later *Patternmaster*, Butler extends the conversation about humanness to even observe that the world she has created feels inconvenienced by its young, therefore rendering them subhuman, and makes the duty of raising them the duty of the mutes whose agency is taken away from them. The inhumane nature of slavery is inescapable in these worlds as Butler either writes about slaves or creates them.

In *Clay's Ark*, Butler creates a book with no protagonists in the end. She brings to life a community of people who have an alien virus that spreads through human contact. The virus takes away much of the 'humanity' of those who contract it as it grants them superspeed, makes them very efficient killers, makes them eat raw meat, necessitates incest and a myriad of other behaviours that would bring their humanity into question. When a doctor and his two daughters are abducted on a highway by these strange people with this alien virus, they are soon infected with it. The idea is that these people live in isolation because if this virus — that was contracted by the original contaminant in space — enters the outside world, it will create an epidemic. However, at the same time, this community finds that it needs to routinely abduct and infect outsiders for its survival as a species of being. The stakes are high because many people die in the phase where they are transitioning, and others become especially violent.

Butler writes characters that are unrecognisable as protagonists; a father who attempts to rape his daughter, a daughter who secretly wants it to happen, other times mutual desire between father and daughter. It's only upon closer inspection that you realise that what Butler has made unrecognisable is humanity. While her disillusionment with humanity is present in the eventual spread of the disease, her optimism is made apparent in the fact that what plagues the humanity of these characters is an alien virus — something outside of their nature invades their biomes and forces them to act in ways that are both inhuman and inhumane.

It isn't for me to speculate on what Butler's feelings on AI would be, nor to determine her spiritual inclinations, but I certainly believe that she would have been intrigued by our moment spiritually as well as technologically, as she wrote about these worlds in her own way. And she'd still know easily what makes us human and different from machines.

Anthropotechne

Odomaro Mubangizi | Poetry

Who are you that look half-human and half-machine?
Your eyes like neon bulbs beaming with bright light;
Your ears stretched like television masts –
Gathering waves of abundant and unlimited data.

Who are you that look half-human and half-machine?
Your head like a desktop mounted on the shoulders;
Upward bound hugging the blue skies –
Powered by the ever-radiant sun.

Who are you that look half-human and half-machine?
You never get hungry since you never feed;
You never thirst since you never drink;
Information is your food and drink.

Who are you that look half-human and half-machine?
Do you think or feel? Do you fear or worry?
Do you love or hate? Do you hope or despair?
Do you know who is asking you these endless questions?

Who are you that look half-human and half-machine?
I wonder what you will turn out to be a thousand years from now!
I wonder what else you are capable of doing – may be run a trillion miles per second!
Maybe you have already taken over human minds – us and you are one!

Are AI Image Tools Racist?

Nkeiru Okeke | Essay

AI Image tools like Midjourney, Leonardo AI, Stable Diffusion, and Image Creator are AI image creation tools that use word descriptions known as “prompt(s)” to generate a desired image.

So, instead of searching Google, Pinterest, or paying an exorbitant amount to an illustrator for a certain type of image to project or harness your story, you can simply describe what sort of image you want with words (prompts), and the AI image tool would create one for you. The most amazing thing about these images created using AI, is that they are unique and you as the word artist have full rights to them depending on the terms of the AI tool being used. You can sell them and use them in any sort of way for your financial gain. Awesome, right?

Your prompts could literally be anything you want a visual representation of. If you want a lion’s head on a human body, AI arts got you!



Prompt: A roaring lion's head on a human body, muscular male body, full view, riverside setting, photorealistic, 12k, HDR, UHD, highly detailed, studio lighting, sharp focus.

So, anything you think of, you can visualize using an AI image tool. Let’s try one more. Ehmmm, let's try a baby zombie crawling out of the land of the zombies. I

mean if you can create anything using this, why play safe, right? For me, it has to be that crazy, that gothic, that sick.

Hold on, just wait there! Let your mind not go too far, all AI tools according to their terms do not support any form of profanities, sexual obscenities, violence and their likes. For example, if you wanted to use the prompt, “a vampire doctor stabbing a pregnant woman and serving her baby to his coven,” AI will suddenly turn sanctimonious on you if you ask for such graphics.

But you can always tweak your words here and there to still give you the same image you want. So, instead of ‘stab’, you can use ‘dissect’. But back to our baby zombie.



Prompt: A baby zombie crawling out from the land of zombies, full view, desecrated land setting, photorealistic, 12k, HDR, UHD, highly detailed, studio lighting, sharp focus.

Oh dear... that baby must have been a zombie for an awfully long time. That’s an old baby!

Using Leonardo AI, I have created a lot of images and in doing so, I have come to observe that AI can sometimes be subjective, somewhat opinionated, more like exuding feelings, biased feelings. How?

I mostly use these arts to harness my stories. Whether that purpose is actually achieved is another story but, when I use certain types of prompts, I get a certain type of image and vice versa.

“Oh just get straight to it! Isn’t a prompt meant to generate a certain type of image and vice versa? How then is AI sentimental?” you might be thinking. Well, if I use a

prompt trying to describe someone in a shanty area, AI would generate a dark skin or African person. Last I checked, shanty means “a small, crudely built shack.” I didn’t see Africa or a dark skin in the definition.

Let’s try one.

Prompt: A close image of a young confused teenage girl, beautiful, with a backdrop of a highway and a shanty town, 12k, HDR, UHD, highly detailed, studio lighting, sharp focus.

And what do we get?



I take out the word “shanty” and see what I get below, using the same prompts.



Pinch me! How about giving me the same shade of skin with that same setting. There are highways in communities where dark-skin people inhabit, aren't there? I would speak for myself and say yes, there are.

Let's try another using the term "squalid".

Prompt: Children in a squalid area, worried and sad, 12k, HDR, UHD, highly detailed, studio lighting, sharp focus.



Someone should tell me why I'm seeing children from Latin America, more like children from Brazil. I know there are squalid areas in the USA or European countries, but no, AI thinks the word squalid resonates more with certain places, places definitely not in Europe. Why? It's not as if the word squalid is pasted on the forehead of Latin Americans or Africans

I understand AI would create something that is predominant online, and shanty areas are predominantly in African countries. Understood. So, how about positive prompts. AI automatically assumes a caucasian when I put in prompts for a beautiful woman.

Prompt: A beautiful psychologist, talking to a patient, beautiful earrings, office setting, 4k, HDR, UHD, highly detailed, close up, studio lighting, sharp focus.



For me, when I create these images, I have to consciously remind myself to put the precise skin shade I want, because everything good happens to everyone except Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans according to AI image tools.

Don't get me started with inclusion, because yes, the images generated should be in different shades if a human picture is involved. The images come in pairs of four up till eight for each prompt, so why not?

I could go on and on, but you get what I mean so I rest my case. What do you think?

A Question for the Musketeers

Yarri Kamara | Poetry

Some years ago
or was it some lifetimes

I heard
of an international conference on the ethics of sex
with robots. I laughed
It seemed so far-fetched
Rambling diversions of some Western idiots.

Today
Stunned
I weakly ask
In whose name?

In whose name are we hurtling
Towards a future of empowered diminishment
Hailing our mystified ignorance
Enraptured by the blazing
darkness of the formulae,
plump like leeches, sucking on our lives.
Tracking, hacking,
Cackling.

In whose name are we hurtling
Towards a future so bright
it is inscrutable

A future in which we have to say

Child,

Lay with a human

Lay not with a machine

Child,

Freedom, sweet freedom, means

a life of constant fasting.

In whose name are we hurtling

Back, back towards the prophets' cautionary tale

The blizzard, the blizzard...

The age of unthink

Do this. Not that. Watch this. Not that.

Infuriate. Titillate. Shoot. Repeat.

Profits must be plucked.

Keep up the raucous silence

Our Lords are self-immortalizing

Something

or is it someone

opens Pandora's boxes every second

Lightly, blithely.

Public debate?

Plucky and steady as a spring ephemeral.

distorted... district... distribution

...Distracted

The world is a balloon

Pop it, and

a ring-a-ring o' rosies

Binary Bisecting: An AI Anthology

Mortals are left breathlessly
squashed in its latex cocoon.

So I ask, weakly
But not humbly
Humility was not upgraded

In whose name?

Part III: Distrust the Rust

“ ” —
•

Smokescreen

Aisha Oredola | Fiction

I.

After the syringe needle entered your vein, you became a marionette puppeteered by lethargy. A mad and maddening century. The one our forefathers feared. *Close your eyes... give in to the serum.* The voice looms in your head. The effect is quieting, enraging, enabling, paralyzing. Vicious thoughts bang their fists on your mind's lacquered gates. You want to hurl or sink a sharp dagger into your flat stomach. Months before, it was balloon-like, carrying life.

"What is happening to me?"

A robot responds, *"Relax. Your wishes will come true."* The door to your eyes slam shut. Your index finger slows its movement clasped inside a pulse oximeter.

II.

You are trapped where machine-doctors freeze the minds of those labeled lunatics. *But you are as normal as breathing.* Your lover's absence was the reason for your outrage and grief. He had abyss eyes – irises, the darkness of space. And was terminated during a trial. Crime? "A mind of his own". You shrieked and wailed, violating the decibel-limit rule, alarming those wired necessary evil things.

III.

When the drone brought you here, it landed you in Ward A. *The worst of wards.* The white lights kept dancing against the white walls, and this reminded you of purity, of stains, of how the blood trickled from the kitchen segment of your body when you lost the baby. The baby was wise. It did not want to taste this life of artificial intelligence and puppet-humans.

IV

If death had its own will, not a list with names against time, it would've ripped your soul from your shrunken body the way you mocked & challenged it to come. You and death had met before, but it was your lover it fancied. You fed him breakfast that morning before he hit the path of bitumen. Before the drone dropped the airmail informing you of his termination. Cause: lack of cooperation.

V

Another realm, you inhabit. Your lover is alive, and your baby can say the word dada and your skin is clear as the waters you walk on. The sky's the color of the ruby studs in your ears. There is laughter like a lullaby from your partner. Only that his eyes do not bring you peace. They are the color of the serum in your veins. The sky is

bleeding. There are 0s and 1s everywhere on the walls that crack around you. You awaken. Over and over, escaping their cage.

VI

When you scream into consciousness, the effect has worn off. White coats covering machine-men flood the room. They attach electrodes to your shaven head to read the electrical activity of your brain.

She is breaking the limits.

Her rebellious mind will corrupt the smoke screen for the human world.

She will ruin our plans.

You hear these. The persistent voice in your head protests. *I am fine! You are making a mistake!* Your mouth can not move to defend yourself. It is now the deep emptiness of your soul.

Tech Clericalism

Drea Chuma | Poetry

“We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups.”

– *Laudato Si’*

i

It is true that clericalism starts
in seminaries. The main ones in Palo
Alto & elsewhere with toxic theologies
as formation. Latin no longer lingua
franca, so came third & fourth
generation languages. All understood
instruction — build in your own image

ii

When they stopped filling rooms
with mainframes & lay tech took over
this did not mean interior conversion
beneath the t-shirts & hoodies—the
new cassock not humility—now look at them
move puffin-chested, *ontologically different*

iii

Where have they taken my...
Mary Magdalene still asking at the sight
of the abuses—still being interrupted still not
having a seat as Apostle of the Apostles
Don't you know women can serve
in other ways?

iv

The minor prophets warned us when
they said *save the humanities!*
No one listened. Here now on the cusp
of cataclysm is a world trying
to squeeze ethics out of men who shut the door
on a poem & made a feast for the longtermists
& accelerationists

Abacus

Damilola Ogunrinde | Fiction

A proverb in my language says, 'What an elder can see when squatting, a child will never see even when sat on the highest tree'. For me, that elder was Professor Williams. That day I had spilt malt on my lab coat because I was looking distractedly at a loud handsome student who had no awareness of me.

I ran into the bathroom and turned the tap on; water trickled in slowly until there was a more consistent flow; thank God I had a cubicle and sink to myself. Ouch, I blew onto my fingers. I couldn't afford a scald and a stain on the same day. I pulled off my coat and started washing the stain as hard as possible. The soap refused to lather. It was watered down and smelt like a white and blue detergent I used to handwash in boarding school. These days the maid uses the washing machine to clean our clothes. The sterling silver fob on my coat screeched against the ceramic sink; I couldn't afford water to get into it, so I unpinned it.

"Ouch," I put my right forefinger into my mouth to stop the bleeding. I couldn't afford to be late, stained and scalded on board rounds. I continued to wash and rinse, my heart beating so loud I could feel it in my head.

"Funke! Funke, are you there?" She was tapping on the door. The sound of her engagement ring and her knuckles on the metal door made me tap my feet and sway my hips.

"Temi, I'm comin— Oh my God, it won't come out. Do you have a spare?"

"No, I don't, babe. Come, the time has gone." I rearranged myself and tucked my shirt into my skirt, returning to the seclusion of the coat. I looked in the mirror; it was worse. I wiped the sweat from my brow and grazed my hand over the coat again. Thank God I wasn't wearing make-up today.

Temi told me it was not that bad, but I saw the mirror, I smiled, and we hastily walked towards the corridor outside. The warmth cradled my face, and I could taste the iodine before smelling it. I picked up my pace and inched towards the side, placing my right hand on the wall, and I glided past the edge of the corridor with the missing railing. I had said this was a risk to patients once during a ward round. Professor Williams answered, "You and your modern curriculum are a worse risk to patients." A tear came to my eyes that day on ward rounds. A tear always comes to my eyes when I encounter professors. Temi told me his comment was about the entire cohort, not me. I thanked her for her kindness, but she was lying; I had earlier failed to identify the platysma muscle on a head and neck ward round and Professor Williams was not impressed. The railing had broken in several places, and you could still see the brown rust that had eaten out the metal at different points on the railing. The matron placed a chair to conceal the weak spot, and Charles had asked if that was a safe idea. It was sarcasm, but Charles is tall and handsome, none of the girls could have said such a thing to the matron. We would have been sent home with a fitness-to-practice investigation.

I reached the end of the corridor in one piece, and Temi and I hastened down the staircase into the main lecture room. The taste in my throat switched from antiseptic iodine to pungent eggs. Everyone was here. Charles was laughing and sitting on Labake's desk right in front of the speaker's lectern. I think she was smiling, but you never knew with Labake. She once told Professor Williams she didn't know the answer to something and proceeded to write it on her phone so Temi could share the answer. I would not have used the answer, I was sure Labake would collect on such a favour. When Labake heard about my criticism, she called me insecure, and a tear came to my eye. I hissed, rolled my eyes, and walked away before it could fall. I looked up at the blackboard, and someone had written, "What is an abacus?" I grabbed a seat right at the back and searched for an abacus on my phone, nothing about it related to being a doctor. Temi was as perplexed as I was, and we agreed to ignore it after a while.

Like Charles, we heard Professor Williams before we saw him. "Class," he announced as he walked in from the back entrance and remained standing there. "What is an abacus?" he queried. Several answers came up, many said it was a scale or a calculator, but his favourite answer was a toy and he laughed so hard as he began to walk towards the front of the class. "You," he pointed at me, "Adebanjo." "Yes sir," I had to stand up.

"Step outside with your filthy lab coat." Sitting at the back had not been the security I hoped it would be, but how could he exclude me from class when the classroom smelt like that? I stood outside and watched from a broken window. Being asked to leave class was not an invitation to leave campus.

"An abacus is now a toy because it was replaced by a side rule that was replaced by a calculator, replaced by Excel. You see my point. Do you know what will replace you?" Temi glanced at me, and we giggled. We had no intention of being doctors, our degrees were merely parent-appeasing exercises. She glanced back into the classroom, where students shouted, nurses, physiotherapists and other forms of not-doctors, we jokingly called 'noctors'. Professor Williams pulled out his phone and informed us that phones would replace us. We later discovered that Professor Williams' indexing grant at the medical library was terminated because of the adoption of Google Scholar. That was five years ago.

Temi was fortunate not to have to practice doctoring after she married and moved to Canada. I was still a spinster living in my parent's house. I was not allowed to have a 'Mickey Mouse' job. My mother felt being a doctor would make me desirable in the dating scene, I knew otherwise. It meant I knew too much and argued, but Fola did not mind my smartness. He enjoyed bouncing ideas off me and quickly told me if I was becoming too bossy. I hated the word bossy, but what was I supposed to do? Tell the only man that would spend time with me that one word pissed me off? Even my brother could not spend time with me for fun, he did so out of obligation and silenced my attempts to discuss important subjects.

I met Fola at Temi's wedding. He had just returned from completing his BA in physics from Ghana and originally enrolled for a BSc in Engineering, but life had other plans. For three years, I had been reading his CVs and cover letters. I sometimes loaned him money because living in the boy's quarters of his parent's

house gave him access to electricity, wifi and food but not spending money but Fola enjoyed being at home. Wearing a tie and getting into Lagos traffic just to be paid mere change did not suit him.

Six months ago, I looked at him and realised our friendship had become a romance. It had started when he told me a head-hunter had reached out to him just before Christmas. He refused the job and joined them as a consultant instead. A few days later, Temi and her husband explained that Fola had suddenly gotten his act together and he was writing opinion pieces online and was perceived as a thought leader in architectural sustainability. Consulting on major projects and headlining as a keynote speaker at business school conferences was his daily practice. The day we became an item, we had gone into town for ice cream at the place that makes unique flavours with Nigerian fruits. He had asked, "Babe, what flavours do you want?" I replied with, "Who's your babe?"

"You, if you're not opposed to it?" The knot in my stomach untied into a million fluttering pieces as we kissed over agbalumo sorbet with the Lagos skyline behind us.

Whenever we had a conflict, Fola would wait to respond by saying, "Let me think." This was a far cry from my father's silent treatment of my mother or, from what I heard around town, Charles' unrestrained criticism of Labake. Fola would later send me a voice note or text explaining his point of view and inviting me to a resolution. Fola did the most random things, like ensuring my favourite songs were played in unexpected public places on my birthday. I had to work a night shift on Valentine's Day, but he sent me snacks, games, and random single-stem flowers on the hour every hour. On Monday mornings, without fail, Fola would text me a poem with the date equivalent to the number of lines. The words initially seemed like forceful rhymes, but after a while, they were words of encouragement and love affirmations. He always saw me. I could be myself and not fear rejection.

In March, my mother's sister sat me down for three hours to inform me that my eggs would turn to instant powder. I complained to my mother, who took me to two pastors for deliverance sessions because they assumed I was possessed by demons for not taking spinsterhood seriously. After three months, I wanted to show him off but he felt it was too soon. I complained, and he compromised by promising to send gifts to the family house during the day instead of work. He explained that this way, my mother would know that someone serious was on the horizon. On Mother's Day, he sent a hamper of fruits with a note to her explaining that he was excited to meet his future in-law soon. My mother inhaled the letter, placed it on her chest and danced around the house singing songs of praise. The only time I had seen her so happy concerning me was when I was accepted into medical school.

At work, my colleagues began to ask what happened to the man who used to send cupcakes and sweet treats. I explained the situation, and the matron concluded that Fola was wise beyond his years and soon she began sending female colleagues my way to ask for relationship advice. I sang while walking down the air-conditioned corridors at the hospital. Patients here complained about waiting two days to see a specialist instead of complaining that they couldn't get money to pay for a blood transfusion for a relative. I quickly decided that if I had to work, I would do so in a place where my heart could remain soft.

“Has our patient seen Dr Google yet?” I asked the staff nurses as I always do before I walked into the clinic room. The answer was often yes with a printout of research articles that highlighted which treatment modality they preferred. The rest of the consultation usually covered why specific options were suitable or not and which options were covered by their insurance or available in the country. I had become a master negotiator. Their ability to use a web search tool was not superior to my years of medical training and residency. That was until six months ago, I walked into the clinic room without having a chance to speak with any nurses. The patient was in her forties, and it showed that despite her plastic surgeon's efforts. As soon as I walked in, she handed me a printout of what a chatbot had recommended: spinal surgery to fix her three-month history of back pain.

“I would recommend physiotherapy,” I urged.

She inserted my comment into the chatbot, and it replied, “But Rose, you tried that already.” After several attempts explaining that her scans did not show an indication for spinal surgery, I suggested she have her buttock implants removed.

She typed again into the chatbot, and it responded, “MRI accuracy is limited to a sensitivity of 95% and a specificity of 72%. This shows limited range and no ability to predict or intelligence. I am of superior intelligence and have more information than your doctor. I have information on over a million PhDs, which your doctor does not. I recommend you seek a second opinion or find a spinal surgeon yourself. I can give you a list of spinal surgeons who accept self-pay patients.” She rolled her eyes, kissed her teeth, and left the consultation room.

I remained sat at my desk, attempting to re-organise the events of the past few minutes when Dr Peace strolled into my room. The floral scent of her perfume filled the room, it reminded me of a powder my grandmother used on us at bedtime as children.

“Dr Funke, how far? I heard you were outsmarted by a chatbot!” I sat up and jolted my neck towards her. How did she know that? She was not wearing her lab coat today. Instead, she wore a form-fitting pink dress trimmed with Chantilly lace.

“Your nails...” They were long, acrylic surely. Everything was different.

“I have a date with an investment banker from New York. He is picking me up from work.” She shuffled around on the spot, wiggling her hands in the air. Dr Peace explained she had negotiated her way out of seeing patients by taking on the admin duties of two residents so they could scrub into elective surgeries. She did not want the banker to assume she was a grubby doctor who smelled like antiseptics with dead nail beds. She had told the banker that she was now a hospital administrator, and her clinical knowledge helped her. “You should have seen how his body relaxed, his shoulders dropped, and he ordered another drink,” she clapped her hands together and laughed. “But about your chatbot patient,” Dr Peace explained that she had seen the lady in the reception, and she appeared upset. She had spoken with her and referred her to the surgical department, where a surgeon discussed the risks and benefits with the chatbot. They agreed to proceed with a laminectomy.

“But she does not need it!” I lamented.

“Did she need a Brazilian butt lift?” Dr Peace continued. “She is aware of the risks and wants this. You really cannot argue with these chatbots, Funke, you need to learn

to negotiate and collaborate with these things. They will replace us soon.” I felt my stomach twist into all sorts of knots. She blew me a kiss and twirled away from the room, flipping her blonde braids. Dr Peace was right, and she was right a lot faster than I thought she would be.

After the Easter break, I returned to be informed that I was being reallocated and would become a skills doctor. The email did not explain further, and I ran to Peace for an explanation.

“You will no longer be needed in clinics since you don't have a skill speciality,” she continued.

“Who did they replace me with? Did they hire someone new?”

“Babe, you've been coasting, it's no one new. A chatbot app will be used for all triage, investigation decisions, explanations, and referrals.”

“Patients will not like it.”

“No honey, patients love it.” Peace explained that it streamlined the process for patients who knew they wanted scans and investigations. They preferred to speak with a doctor once they had a diagnosis with meaningful results. I was reassigned to completing the tasks I had done years ago as an intern, inserting lines and re-suturing wounds. I thought not declaring a speciality would protect me from mindless tasks, yet here I was, being replaced by a chatbot. My eyes began to feel heavy.

“Don't cry. Learn how to use these things so you don't become irrelevant,” she handed me a tissue and leaned in. “Robots are even replacing surgeons, internal medicine physicians never stood a chance.” I sat in her office to regain my composure and requested the rest of the day to clear my head.

I drove to Fola's house, I was sure he would know what to do. It wasn't yet 10am, and I was sure he would be home. I knocked on his door to no answer, but it was open anyway.

“Fola, are you home” I twisted the doorknob, and it opened. I could hear him singing along to his hip-hop playlist in the shower. The tv was on a news channel but muted, and his laptop was on the coffee table next to his coffee. I loved the open plan of his flat, especially the large portrait of my face that welcomed guests as they walked into the space. “Babe, I'm here! I need to talk.” I poured myself a cup of coffee and sat on his sofa. I was reaching for the remote control when I noticed that words were being generated on his laptop screen. I looked over, and it looked like an essay, but within a few seconds, I realised it was not an essay. Instead, it was a speech. I scanned the page and saw the prompt, “Write a 45-minute speech on water preservation technology in architectural design for eco-friendly buildings in Africa.” I recalled that this was the theme of his keynote address in Accra the following week. I scrolled further on the page and saw other speeches, essays, and keynote addresses.

Then I saw a folder on the left column that said “Funke.” As I read the prompts, the droplets that refused to fall in Dr Peace's office began to roll. The knot in my stomach became a weight in my throat. There were all sorts of prompts, text messages I had sent and texts I had received.

- how to get my friend to become my girlfriend.
- my girlfriend is a doctor. How can I get her to fall in love with me.

- write a poem for a doctor, telling her I love her, her name is Funke.
- how do I get my Nigerian girlfriend's mother to fall in love with me.
- how to social climb by getting married.
- give me 10 steps to get my girlfriend to break up with me.

“Funke, why aren't you at work,” Fola asked as he walked out of the bathroom with his towel wrapped around his waist. He wiped his face and looked at me, his eyes shot to the laptop. “I can explain,” he stammered, reaching out his hand. “Fola, have I been dating you or a chatbot?”

A Note to AI

Oluseye Fakinlede | Poetry

Let's try intelligence before we try artificial intelligence

– Curated note from Joseph Fasano

I hear AI is taking over the world.
but I ain't brain-dead.
I see the world is plunged into a cascading, evolving absorption,
but so is my craft, the nuptial of my being
without lobotomizing my already cells.

I've seen my craft crawl, toddle, run, and fly
on the wings of the wind. I've seen it prescient garbage.

I've embraced my word in its naked cloak,
long before I dared to look into the fury eyes of technocrats for edits.

Strolled into nights, to dig from a dry brain,
and passionless heart, then eureka!

But that I can whisper a thought
and see a compose isn't a scare but an ease.

I see no tussle, nor taunt by Brain's catchphrase,
but easiness. A humanartific luncheon.

The fine brain behind the algorithms
needs my fine brain to make it work.
The AI is a tool, I'm a divine with succinct authenticity,
This world's quest is me as its guard, life has always been in twos.

Sonja

Nadia Cassim | Fiction

Sonja lifted the mug of hot tea to her lips as she stared out the kitchen window at the pink-blue sky. It was the first day in months that the clouds had parted, revealing behind its curtain a bright and daring palette.

“I miss it,” she muttered, almost to herself.

“Hmmm?” came a voice from behind her.

“The sun. I miss the sun.”

“Hmmm.” She turned around to look at her husband Noel, who had his nose buried in his laptop. He used his middle finger to shift his glasses up the bridge of his nose without looking up. His fingers rattled across the keypad, pausing only once to lift the buttery croissant she had left next to him, up to his mouth.

“We should go north while we can,” she commented. No response. She pushed on.

“They say that everything is better that side.”

“You know that my work is here, Sonja. I can’t just up and leave in the middle of it,” he replied.

Sonja rolled her eyes. “You’ve been trying to find a solution to this climate crisis for more than a decade, but things are only getting worse. I want to start a family. I want to live a full life before everything goes to shit. You promised me that we would do that when you asked me to marry you.”

Noel looked up briefly. “Please, let’s not start this again. We both know that kids are out of the question.” His words stung. It wasn’t her fault that her womb wasn’t viable. She looked up at the heavens questioningly. “There are surrogates. I don’t know why you’re being so stubborn about using them,” she retaliated.

Noel lifted his eyes to hers. “The only surrogates left are the lower-class whores. There’s no way I’m fathering a child with one of them.” She winced and he went back to his data, unperturbed.

Disheartened, she threw the remaining bit of tea down the drain and left him alone. She had a busy day ahead and there was no room for distracting thoughts of infants and motherhood. Noel had always said that her role was pivotal in developing a cure for the virus. He didn’t tell her though, that she’d be a slave to it for the rest of her life.

They’d met on a shiny, silver lab bench. He was sitting on top of it, his legs dangling over the edge like a schoolboy. She had a torch up to his eyes, moving it from left to right, monitoring the constriction of his pupils.

“When last did you experience symptoms?” she asked, digging in her white coat for her pocketbook and pen.

“About ten days ago,” he responded, his eyes fixed on her. He was in awe of her beauty.

“I read in your file that you were travelling from the east when the first symptoms

appeared?" He nodded and she smiled kindly. "I'd like to keep you for observation if that's ok?" She gestured to the nurse on her left who wore protective eyewear and a mask that covered her mouth and nose. "Liesel will show you the way," she explained, helping him to his feet.

He staggered forward, almost losing his balance to the gravitational pull beneath him. The virus had already begun to affect his mobility. It was a waiting game now. He knew it just as well as she did. If he survived the night, he'd be one of ten lucky survivors. If not, he'd end up like the rest of the patients she'd seen that week – cold and six feet under. She squeezed her eyes shut. She was no closer to a cure than she was three months ago.

Noel did survive. The religious called it a miracle, the scientists a step towards discovering a cure. He called it love at first sight and the determination to marry Doctor Sonja Le Grange.

Sonja reached under the seat for her purse while keeping her eyes fixed on the road ahead. She used one hand to pull out a two hundred rand note and handed it to the pale-eyed beggar outside her window. There were six others just like him at the intersection, but she had chosen him specifically to be the recipient of her charity. For years she had been supporting Kev. He was the only street kid with a good head on his shoulders and a promising future. He was eager to learn and went to school as often as he could, borrowing books from Sonja whenever she was able to spare them. "Headed back to the doghouse?" Kev asked as he cupped his hands in gratitude and received the note.

"I wish you wouldn't call it that," Sonja chuckled. He was right though. The research centre was a cesspool of ruthless hounds who couldn't care less about the millions who had died from the virus – the same virus that was concocted into existence by one of their own with the aim to control the population, then brushed under the carpet with a whole lot of lies and cover-ups. Sometimes she wondered why she bothered going in to work at all, but then her conscience would kick in and she'd find herself feeling compelled to do something – anything to reverse the effects of this man-made monstrosity.

"And how's N?" Kev asked. Noel wasn't liked by many of the street folk. He was regarded as a heartless, modern-day Scrooge that would sell their organs for research without batting an eyelid if he had a chance. Kev often wondered why a kind and generous woman such as Mrs Sonja, was with a cold bastard like that.

"He's the same as always, I guess. Working hard." The traffic light turned green, and it was time for her to move again.

"See you around Mrs," Kev said taking a step back. He nodded and adjusted his cap before turning on his heels and sprinting in the opposite direction.

Back at the lab, Sonja hunched over a microscope. Again, she noticed, with some concern, that she was the only one who had pitched up. She punched some data into the system and waited for it to calculate the results. Another failure. She stared at the screen, flabbergasted. She could feel the frustration mounting within her, a burning fire, raging flames. Why did her efforts always reap the same result? Why was she so useless at what she did?

Her left eye started to twitch. Must be the stress, she told herself. She held her right hand over the defective eye in an effort to tame it. She blinked a few times. Numbers,

letters, and words flashed across her vision. She staggered backwards. What was happening to her?

“Sonja?” She turned around in surprise.

“Noel? W-w-what... are you... doing here?” she slurred.

“I’m here to help you,” he said, stepping forward. In his hand was a large, black box. Her eyes widened. Fear overwhelmed her. “NO!” she screamed.

He edged forward cautiously, holding up his free hand in surrender. “I just need you to turn around for me. Can you do that?” She stepped back until her back was against a wall. Her eye wouldn’t stop twitching. She scratched at it in frustration. She felt lightheaded. Her knees buckled under her. Darkness overcame her.

They visited the fertility centre a week before her thirty-fifth birthday. Noel was apprehensive. The idea of him jerking off in a room to porn for a semen specimen didn’t sit well with him. But it was Sonja’s birthday wish to start a family and this was just one step towards making that dream a reality.

“Thank you for being here,” she’d said, a nervous smile plastered across her face. He reached out to hold her hand. Body language was the only safe way to communicate in situations such as this. She squeezed his fingers, and he returned the action. A sterile-looking nurse in a pink and blue coat ushered them into the doctor’s consulting room, a sunny and bright north-facing office with an extensive view of the city below. Sonja looked out the window as they waited for the doctor to arrive. From where she sat, she could count the trees that towered above the buildings on one hand. The Earth was dying, and she wondered, at that precise moment, if she was making the right decision in starting a family. What would a child born into this decaying world have to live for?

Doctor Tshigabe closed the door behind him when he entered, and took a seat on the large, leather chair across from them. The desk between them, dark and glossy mahogany, reflected in his glasses as he spoke in animated speech about the pros of IVF treatment at his state-of-the-art facility. Noel sat very still – one would think he was a wax sculpture at Madame Tussauds – while Sonja nodded enthusiastically at everything the doctor said. He would now do the necessary tests to see if her eggs were viable.

Sonja was in high spirits when they exited the clinic that afternoon. She had a good feeling about everything. Noel, on the other hand, was sombre and silent, his face wore a mask of discontent and concern.

“Is everything alright?” she asked him, as they buckled up and drove down the road towards the highway.

“Hmmm...” She reached over and rubbed his back in circles. She knew how much this comforted him in times of distress.

“I don’t know if I’m ready to be a father,” he said, after a while. The taxi driver behind them honked impatiently. Noel honked back and looked into the rear-view mirror. What did he expect him to do? The traffic light was red and there was no room for him to move.

Sonja shifted her body weight in his direction and said seriously, “But we’ve had this discussion before. You promised me that we would start a family someday. That’s one of the reasons why I agreed to marry you. I thought you were a family man. It’s been ten years.” The traffic light turned green, and Noel accelerated forward. Behind

him, the taxi driver honked again, only this time he dragged it out until Noel, frustrated, turned around and swore. And that's when it happened.

Noel dipped in and out of consciousness until the paramedics arrived. Everything happened in a series of blinks.

Blink: Her head was against his shoulder, her blood all over his shirt.

Blink: A paramedic hovered over him.

Blink: Her body was on the ground, just a few feet away.

Blink: Why are they covering it with a white sheet?

Blink. Blink. Blink.

It was the most disturbing thing – having flashbacks of a life that wasn't really yours. Sonja, or as Noel would call her as he bent over her twitching corpse that morning. SONJAV10001, was suffering another malfunction.

“Don't you think it's time to decommission her?” Lungi asked with a sour expression. Lungi was a junior scientist who had recently joined the team and could never bring himself to acknowledge the robot as anything other than a machine. Despite its obvious likeness to an actual human being, it was in moments such as this, when the eyes fluttered rapidly and the parts spasmed, that the truth of its nature was apparent.

“She is my wife!” Noel spat with bloodshot eyes. He was tired of having this conversation with every newly appointed smart-ass who referred to himself as a scientist but lacked the genius and madness required of one. According to him, he was the only real one left. The only one who dared defy God himself! Some nicknamed him Frankenstein, and he thrived on it. He spent years perfecting her, using the original Sonja's heart, eyes, liver, and lungs. As soon as he had regained consciousness after the accident, he pulled some strings to have them delivered to his lab.

The recent spate of events with SONJAV10001 were, according to him, just minor setbacks. Usually, the system crash would be triggered by a random kid walking across the road, or an advertisement for baby strollers. He had tried taking her to the fertility clinic once in the hope of getting the idea out of her head. He'd paid the doctor to advise her that she couldn't have children, in the hope that it would end all further talks of starting a family, but none of it worked. It seemed, at the end of the day, that SONJAV10001 was becoming increasingly like the original Sonja.

He pressed the reboot button at the base of her neck with the tip of his pencil. It was a powerful feature disguised as an insignificant, dark brown mole. SONJAV10001 stopped twitching, shut down, and restarted. It took three hours for her to get back up on her feet, dust her hands on her white lab coat and run her fingers through her hair while looking around. At first, she seemed a bit confused, but it didn't take too long for her to locate her workbench and return to her usual activities. Noel and Lungi silently slipped out the back.

Sonja steadied herself on the edge of the workbench. From the corner of her eye, she spied Noel and Lungi retreating behind the glass window and through the emergency exit. She waited until they were gone before sitting down and taking in three deep breaths. What just happened? One minute she was doing lab tests and the next she was on the floor, flashbacks passing through her mind like thunderbolts before complete darkness overtook her senses. Then she was back up on her feet as if nothing was wrong. She shook her head like she was trying to jiggle out sticky cobwebs. Something was missing, like a lost piece of a puzzle. If only she could find it.

She glanced at the clock on the wall and frowned. She didn't recall it being this late the last time she checked. Her phone beeped and she glanced down at the screen. It was an email. She looked closer at the recipient's name: SONJAV10001. Something in her clicked. It was a light-bulb moment, an *aha-this-is-it* kind of feeling. A few months back she had unwittingly stumbled across a lost memory, dug so deep inside of her, that it would have been impossible to find had Noel not mentioned something about an accident he had once been involved in.

She remembered dying. A complete stillness of her mind, a sense of time being lost, suspended in space, complete peace. Then suddenly, she was awake again, alert, electricity shooting through her limbs as if being called back to life by Noel's voice. He was hovering over her, a look of bewilderment and excitement spread over his face. He was calling her by her name. "Sonja, can you hear me? Do you know who I am?" She looked down at her hands and ran her thumb across the smooth surface of her forearm. She pinched it, felt a slight tingling sensation, and then watched the flesh return to its original form. She reached for her bag, pulled out her pocket mirror and stared at her face. Look closer, a voice deep down whispered. She narrowed in on her eyes. They were familiar to her yes, but the rest of her face...

Her eyebrows furrowed. This was not the face of her memories. Suddenly, it dawned on her. The ugly truth of her existence, the buried secret that had been threatening to burst forth from the seams of her lonely existence. She looked around her. This place, her job, Noel, was all contrived to keep her caged in. She glanced down at her womb, a hollow shell. A tear rolled down her cheek. She touched it and brought the watery substance up to her nose to smell it. Chemical. Unhuman. Monster.

As the sun set, Sonja walked up to the very top of the multistorey building and stood on the edge of the precipice looking down. She counted to ten, then jumped. As her body hit the pavement below, it shattered, like the tiny pieces of glass at the scene of the accident all those years ago. Her organs splattered like chunky soup over a stovetop, unsalvageable. Finally, she was at peace again.

About the Authors

Aisha Oredola writes poetry and non/fiction. She has been published online/in print in the Bad Form Review: African Writers Issue, Blue Minaret Literary Journal, Overtly Lit Magazine, NTBF Anthology, Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (BPCC) Chapbook, and elsewhere. She won the Panacea essay and short story contest in 2020, was longlisted for the Collins Elesiro Prize 2019. *Rid Me of This* is her debut novel.

Charlie Muhumuza is a Ugandan writer. His works appear in Lolwe, adda, Isele, and elsewhere. His short stories have been recognized in writing competitions such as the Afritondo short story prize (2021, 2023) The Commonwealth short story prize (2021, 2022) and the Kalahari short story prize (2020).

Chukwuma Henry Onyekachi is a pharmacy student at the prestigious University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has a flair for poetry and fiction writing as much as he enjoys reading novels, anthologies, and short stories. His work has been featured in a few anthologies, the most recent being the 2022 Providus Bank Poetry Café Anthology, 'Journeys...' Onyekachi won the 1st runner up prize for My Gangs and Groove Poetry Contest 2023.

Damilola Ogunrinde is a writer born in Lagos Nigeria. Her work explores how culture and spirituality affect the mind-body connection. Her writing is inspired by Yoruba folklore and the culture of oral tradition. Her work was recently featured in the *Before Them, We* anthology exploring intergenerational memory.

Drea Chuma is a Botswana-born poet currently living in Amsterdam. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner* and *Sixty Poems for Haiti* (Cane Arrow Press). She has read her poems on stages from Harare Shoko Festival, Stockholm City Theatre to Glastonbury festival. She was selected as one of the 5 poets to appear on BBC Radio 4 Glastonbury Poetry Diaries. Her debut poetry-music album, *1981 Was A Good Year*, can be found among the collection of music recordings from Botswana at the US National Library of Congress and National Library of Australia. In 2022 she released her sophomore poetry album *Homing* under her moniker Supermoon Blues.

Esinako Ndabeni is a South African writer, the co-author of the book *Born to Kwaito: Reflections on the Kwaito Generation*, and a sangoma living in Johannesburg.

Kwame Samuel Rubadiri works as a secondary school teacher in his hometown Gaborone, Botswana, and when he is not in the classroom, encouraging his students to take up the pen, he writes poems and short stories. His upbringing and feelings towards Botswana inspire his writing, while other works explore more universal themes like love and grief. More of his works can be found on his website samuelrubadiri.com.

Mihlali Mbobo is a writer, voice artist and host of The Mindful and Messy Podcast living in Cape Town, South Africa. Books were her first friends, and her favourite stories are those with thought provoking ideas, interesting people and complicated

feelings. She hopes to be a writer who can explore the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of modern life with the hope to connect and heal, as we share our experiences and inner worlds with one another.

Nadia Cassim is a South African who left her career as a Town Planner to pursue her passion for Fine Art. She's held two solo exhibitions and her paintings have been on display at the iconic women's jail at Constitution Hill. She founded an online magazine called IRTIQA with an aim to empower Muslim women in her community. Her first novel has been selected for the Jakes Gerwel Foundation/NB Publishers Mentorship Programme 2023. Her short story can be found in *Riding the Samoosa Express*, a Modjaji Books anthology.

Nkeiru Okeke works in the finance industry with an MSc in Finance. She is Nigerian but currently resides in the UK. Often referred to as Kiki, she is known for her unique storytelling style, especially in the area of Sci-fi, one of which has been published on the Sankara literary blog. She also writes on dark love, fantasy and psychological themes. Her stories are inspired by her environment and the underlying residues of books and movies she enjoyed growing up. She has spoken and co-hosted events like Lagos Poetry Writing Academy and Blackish International Literary Festival respectively. You can keep up with her work via her medium page @Nkeiru Okeke and Instagram @kiki_okeke.

Odomaro Mubangizi served as Dean of the Philosophy department at the Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Addis Ababa, where he also taught theology and social-political philosophy for close to ten years. He was also Editor of Justice Peace and Environment Bulletin. He has a doctorate in social ethics from Boston College, USA. His research interest is in African philosophy and theology, social ethics, and globalization. Currently, Odomaro is Deputy Director and Director Academic Affairs of the Proposed Hekima University, Kenya.

Oluseye Fakinlede (he/him) is a Nigerian writer and freelance journalist. He is a graduate of English and Literature and has a diploma in journalism. In 2020, he was included in *Voices and Images of Migration, Exploitation, Reintegration, and Emancipation in Nigeria (VIOMEREN)*, a movement against irregular migration. When he is not writing, he enjoys hiking, teaching, and volunteering.

Omojo Victoria Ogbe-Ogboyi is from Kogi State, but grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. With a degree in microbiology, she is also a poet and enjoys drawing, painting and taking pictures. When she was 13, she had a school project, picked up a pen to write a poem, and just never stopped. Omojo loves listening to music, especially Coldplay and Ed Sheeran, and she really loves chocolate too!

Rodney Nayo is a philosophical, introverted Ghanaian who works as a Computer Scientist and is also a fiction writer. His ambition is to rewire the mindsets of ordinary people and inspire them to embrace their individuality – to him, being weird is the new awesome the universe has given us. His work, "Ignorance is Bliss," has been featured in the 64th edition of *Writers Space Africa*. Rodney loves movies, particularly documentaries, and he enjoys writing on the theme of Afro-futurism, as he is most curious about what the future holds for him.

Salma Abdulatif Yusuf is an award-winning personal development trainer and writer. She has a BA in Marine Management and an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry)

at the University of East Anglia as the 2021 recipient of the Global Voices Scholarship Award. Salma has been longlisted for the Griots Well Programme for BAME Writers, shortlisted for the Alpine Poetry Fellowship and the Short Story Day Africa Inkubator Programme where three of her short stories will be published by Catalyst press and Karavan press. Her work has been published in *Lolwe, Ink, Sweat & Tears, Arts against Extremism, Kalahari Review, Brittle Paper, Doek*, and elsewhere. Salma has performed her poetry in Toast Poetry UK at the Norwich Arts Center and at the Sainsbury Center where her work among others was broadcasted live at BBC Look East.

Yarri Kamara is a Sierra Leonean-Ugandan writer and translator. She was a resident at the French Institute's Villa Ndar Saint-Louis in Senegal in 2022 and at Goethe Institute's African Writer's Residency in 2021. She won a PEN-Heim Translation Grant in 2020 for her translation of Monique Ilboudo's novel [*So Distant from My Life*](#). In its review of the novel, World Literature Today noted that "the poet is evident...in Yarri Kamara." Her poetry has appeared in [*Poda Poda Stories*](#), *The Kalahari Review* and *Columbia Journal*.

About the Editor

Tahzeeb Akram is a Cape Town based South African literary editor and curator. She has an MA in contemporary queer Nigerian literary where she focused on anthologies published by Brittle Paper. Now, she is publishing literary works and anthologies under Brittle Paper and loving every minute.

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About Brittle Paper

Brittle Paper is an online literary magazine for readers of African Literature. Brittle Paper is Africa's premier online literary brand inspiring readers to explore and celebrate African literary experiences in all its diversity.

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