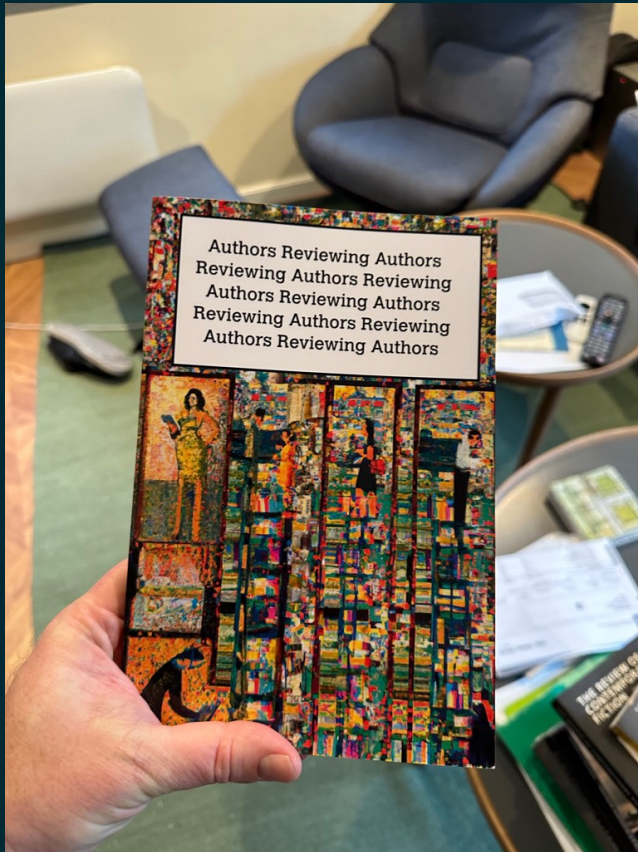


Authors Reviewing Authors Reviewing Authors Reviewing Authors...



Scott Rettberg
Professor of Digital Culture
Director, the Center for Digital Narrative

● ● ● ● ● Co-author a book with AI and publish it in a week



In the Authors Reviewing Authors Reviewing Authors... experiment, our research group (professors, PhD students, MA students) set ourselves a goal to produce a book using ChatGPT 3.5 – the majority of the 129-page book was written (prompted) during a two-hour session on a Friday in September 2023. The editing took place over the weekend, and the book was published the following Tuesday.

Constrained writing with ChatGPT

Write a review of William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* in the idiomatic voice of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Upon receiving Mr. Burroughs's novel, one is immediately struck by the glaring impropriety of its title: "Naked Lunch." One can scarcely imagine what sort of dining experience would require such a state of undress, and as one delves into the text, it becomes abundantly clear that the proceedings are not meant for the drawing room or, indeed, any setting that values decorum and propriety.

Mr. Burroughs introduces us to Mr. William Lee, a gentleman—if one may use the term loosely—involved in various sordid activities that, to my understanding, include the consumption of substances most illicit. These affairs take him through locales most unconventional, filled with characters that one would scarcely invite to the Netherfield Ball. His quest seems not so much for self-improvement, matrimony, or any other noble pursuit; rather, it is an exploration of vice, delirium, and the underbelly of society.

The book was guided by a simple constraint. We asked the prompters to put their prompts in the form of "Write a review of Author X in the idiomatic voice of Author X." For example: "Write a review of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* in the idiomatic voice of Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*" or "Write a review of William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* in the idiomatic voice of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*."

Reviews and Reviews of Reviews

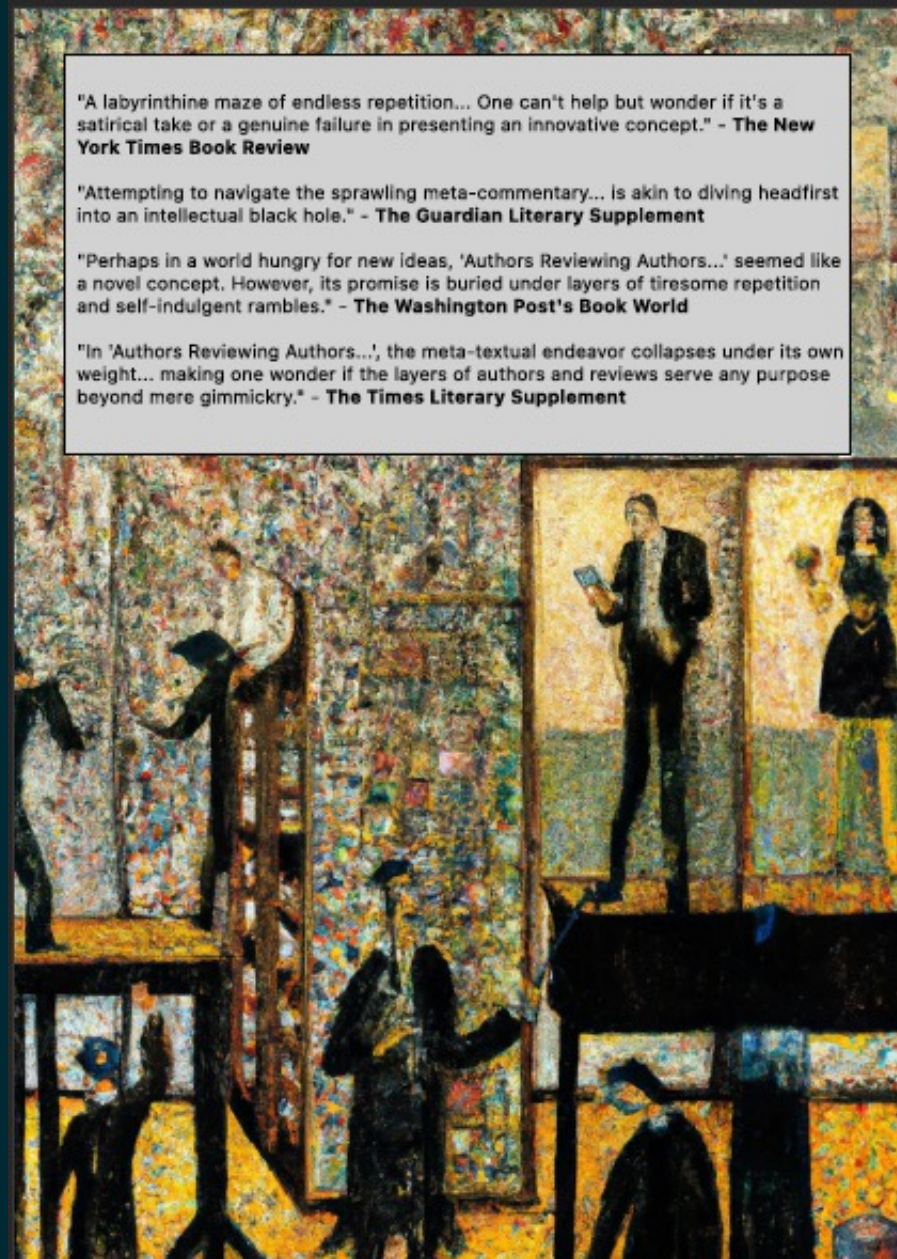
Not all the reviews were positive. In fact, the blurbs of reviews from several well-respected national publications were obnoxious.

"A labyrinthine maze of endless repetition... One can't help but wonder if it's a satirical take or a genuine failure in presenting an innovative concept." - **The New York Times Book Review**

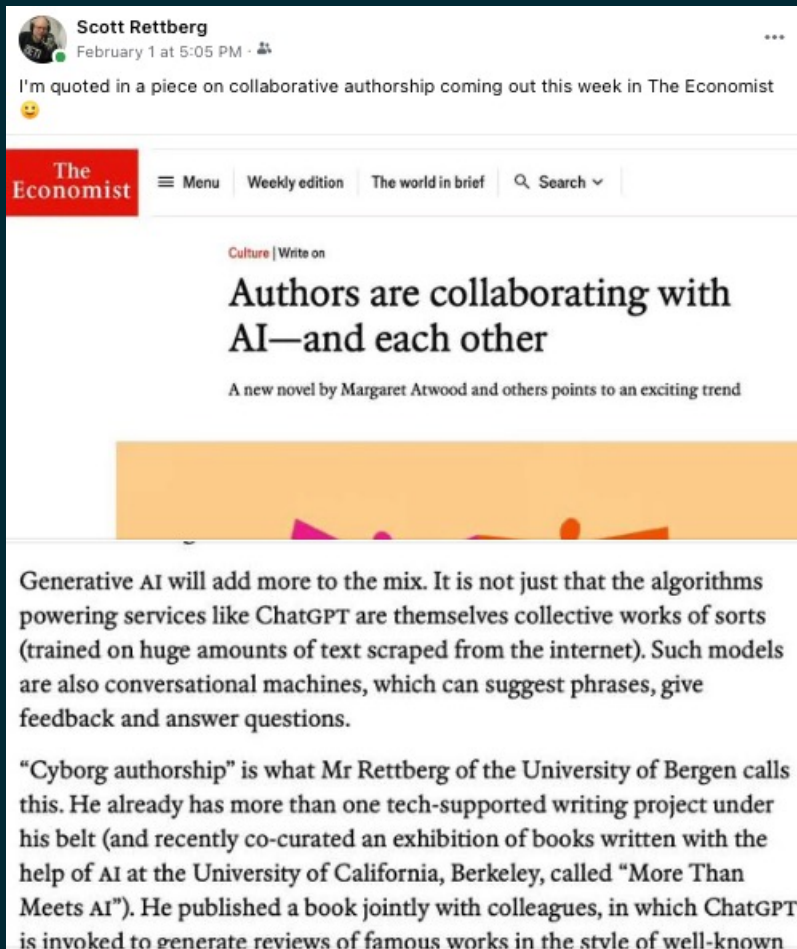
"Attempting to navigate the sprawling meta-commentary... is akin to diving headfirst into an intellectual black hole." - **The Guardian Literary Supplement**

"Perhaps in a world hungry for new ideas, 'Authors Reviewing Authors...' seemed like a novel concept. However, its promise is buried under layers of tiresome repetition and self-indulgent rambles." - **The Washington Post's Book World**

"In 'Authors Reviewing Authors...', the meta-textual endeavor collapses under its own weight... making one wonder if the layers of authors and reviews serve any purpose beyond mere gimmickry." - **The Times Literary Supplement**



● ● ● ● ● The Economist actually mentioned it. In real life!



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet and a snippet of a newspaper article. The tweet is from Scott Rettberg, dated February 1 at 5:05 PM, and says "I'm quoted in a piece on collaborative authorship coming out this week in The Economist" with a smiley face emoji. Below the tweet is a screenshot of a webpage from The Economist. The page features the title "Authors are collaborating with AI—and each other" under the sub-header "Culture | Write on". Below the title is a sub-headline: "A new novel by Margaret Atwood and others points to an exciting trend". The main text of the article snippet reads: "Generative AI will add more to the mix. It is not just that the algorithms powering services like ChatGPT are themselves collective works of sorts (trained on huge amounts of text scraped from the internet). Such models are also conversational machines, which can suggest phrases, give feedback and answer questions. 'Cyborg authorship' is what Mr Rettberg of the University of Bergen calls this. He already has more than one tech-supported writing project under his belt (and recently co-curated an exhibition of books written with the help of AI at the University of California, Berkeley, called 'More Than Meets AI'). He published a book jointly with colleagues, in which ChatGPT is invoked to generate reviews of famous works in the style of well-known

But the guy from *The Economist* quite liked the project.



What did we learn? Have we learned anything?

- The results of this exercise demonstrate some of the extents and limits of what ChatGPT's training set "knows" about literature.
- It also demonstrated the ways in which the context, not only of a given prompt, but of the series of prompts and responses in a given conversation, have effects on the subsequent content.
- Some biases of the training dataset are also revealed by this type of exercise: the responses to prompts involving Norwegian literature, for example were much more cursory than those involving well-known works of American Literature
- The responses demonstrate the "power of the prompt." Although most of the text was composed by ChatGPT, the responses are constrained by the human author who largely determines the style and tone of the texts.



Cyborg Authorship

- This is a dialogic genre of one-liners, probing a responsive system that has at its disposal a vast trove of literature and trivia, and can produce compellingly readable results when properly deployed.
- It is what I describe a process of *cyborg authorship*, in which human intelligence is interacting with language as a nonconscious cognitive system.
- This sort of experiment can be considered a form of serious play. Working with these kind of stylistic constraints, and engaging with the LLM in a sustained way, might help students better understand what these systems are and are not from a critical perspective.
- It may also help us to begin to understand AI Chatbots as creative writing environments.
- Lesson: AI will not write well *for* you, but you can write interesting things *with* it.



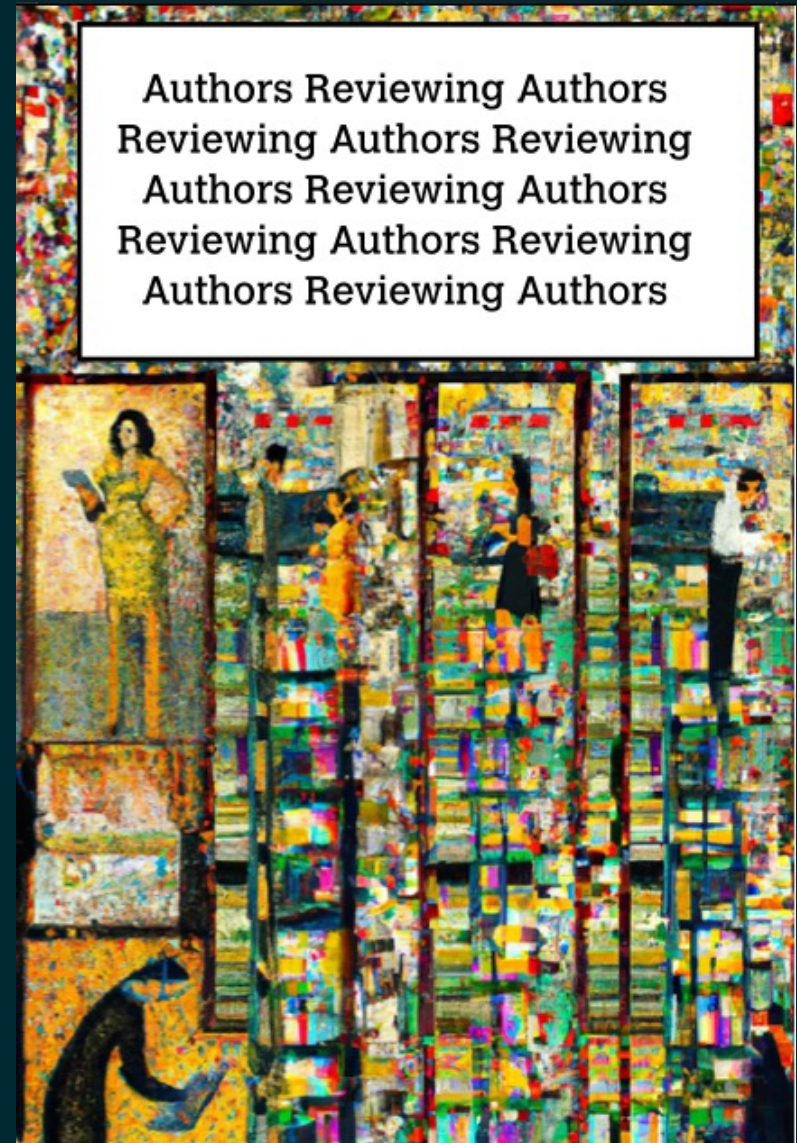
How to approach AI chatbots in writing and literature classrooms

- Fun produces engagement. Engagement provides opportunities for criticality.
- There is a great deal to learn about literary style from engaging with AI chatbots.
- These are great environments for collaborative writing of various kinds. Learn about digital media by engaging with it together.
- AI is bad at many things that humans are good at. Contrasting generated writing with student writing might even be empowering.
- Maybe instead of being consumed by paranoia about our students turning in writing produced by AI, we should encourage them to understand AI chatbots as writing environments in which they have agency.
- When I give lectures on AI, I always point out that although LLMS are driven by math and computer programming, the application of these tools is driven by language. Industry now needs writers. If you want to get a good job in technology, study English or Comparative Literature.

Get your free copy today!



SCAN ME



Bonus Tracks: More on AI Writing

- [The Center for Digital Narrative](#)

Norwegian Center of Research Excellence focused on algorithmic narrativity.

- [Cyborg Authorship: Writing with AI – Part 1: The Trouble\(s\) with Chat GPT](#)

An essay published in the *Electronic Book Review* on ethical and systemic problems with ChatGPT in the context of cyborg authorship.

- [Republicans in Love](#) ([slideshow](#)) ([book](#))

A text-to-image generation project primarily during the month following the November 2022 United States Congressional that explores the extent to which platforms such as DALL•E 2 can be used for satirical literary purposes.

- [Cyborg Authorship Lecture](#) ([video](#)) ([slides](#))

Talk exploring the relationship between humans and AI in the realm of authorship. While AI might not possess human-like consciousness, they can still be creative. Large language models can serve as platforms for cyborg authorship.

- [Off Center](#) ([podcast](#))

Interviews with leading experts on digital narratives of all sorts.

