

Google's AI taps into the minds of the great poets

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"I need about one hundred fifty drafts of a poem to get it right, and fifty more to make it sound spontaneous." So said the 1966 U.S. Poet Laureate James Dickey.

One could only imagine how Dickey would react today if he had Google's latest AI project Verse by Verse by his side. He could whip out 150 drafts in minutes with 150 mere clicks of a key, and with those 50 additional clicks, sculpt his initial passages into the grandest styles of any of dozens of his literary peers.

For all aspiring great poets today—and for all those whose poems simply suck—there is help. Verse by Verse was fed tens of thousands of words of the world's greatest poets and was trained to write its own gems, emulating the grammar and style of the grandmasters of poetry.

The results were... interesting.

Users of the program are asked to write a first line for a poem. They then select up to three famous poets whose style they would like to incorporate into their writing. There are 22 poets to choose

from, including Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Paul Laurence Dunbar and Edgar Allan Poe.

Verse by Verse then generates additional lines of verse, with suggestions from each of the selected poets. The user may choose one line at a time from any of the poets. A poetic form must be selected: quatrain, couplet or free verse. Users then select a syllable count—nine is most common—and a rhythm pattern to determine which lines of the poem must rhyme.

With Thanksgiving around the corner, I fed the following contemplative verse into the program: "To stuff my face or not to stuff my face"

I selected Henry Wadsworth, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman as my mentors for this holiday endeavor.

The resulting poem was this:

"To stuff my face or not to stuff my face

Or stand at the table in a place. (Wadsworth)

Once a dinner light at rest nor grace, (Dickinson)

Amid a smile of warmth and grace. (Dickinson)"

I'm not sure what it means, but it sounds kind of impressive. Regrettably, Walt did not measure up to my standards so none of his lines were incorporated. As they say, YMMV—your mileage may vary.

If the generated phrases don't meet your expectations, you can tweak the wording to generate fresh ideas, or input an original line of your own.

According to Google engineer Dave Uthus, "The system was trained to have a general semantic understanding of what lines of verse would best

follow a previous line of verse. So even if you write on topics not commonly seen in classic poetry, the system will try its best to make suggestions that are relevant."

The widely varying degrees of Verse by Verse output quality show that while impressive lyrical gems may occasionally emerge, further work by the AI team remains to be done.

In the meantime, allow Verse by Verse and my fellow sonneteers to have the last words.

"How to end this glorious essay

Hath the haughtier and perfect words, (Whitman, finally)

That made the world stand until the day (Robert Frost)

Only as the dream of some white bird. (Emma Lazarus)"

Aspiring poetry writers may not want to quit their day jobs just yet.

Verse by Verse is free, simple to use and is available here: sites.research.google/versebyverse/

More information:

sites.research.google/versebyverse/

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