

My [initial cursory investigation](#) of the AI-based chatbot, ChatGPT, from OpenAI, got me thinking. Just how inventive is ChatGPT when it comes to literary creations? My first encounter with the chatbot produced a short story and a limerick. Could I take one of my short stories and ask ChatGPT to modify it? What would the modifications look like? Human-like or robotic-like? Here's what I found.

First, my original short story. Back in 2020, I challenged myself 'to write a short story, one that is less than a thousand words and yet establishes characters, sets a scene, has a definable beginning, middle and end that develops along an unpredictable line, and spikes the interest of the reader right from the start.' The result was ['The Man on the Bench'](#). Here it is:

The Man on the Bench

Ben Bennetts

Originally published 20 September, 2020



'Hello, Dad.'

The man sitting alone on the park bench turned his head towards the source of the sound. Nobody had ever called him Dad. Forever a bachelor he had never experienced the domesticity of home life immersed in the clutter, clatter and chaos of a family environment. He'd never held a small child in his arms, wiping away tears of pain or frustration; never experienced the wonder and joy while witnessing the unquestionable belief that Father Christmas was real; never felt pride as an offspring performed on stage to an audience of other mums and dads; never became angry because a child of his had not succumbed to a logically reasoned explanation as to why such behaviour was unacceptable. No, never had he become knowledgeable about events such as these. His life had been one of casual labour and travel with occasional dalliances which served more to satisfy his carnal desires, than those of his one-night stand partner.

'Hello, Dad,' said with slightly more volume and containing just a frisson of urgency.

She was looking at him with a steady eye, her face slightly freckled, her brunette hair closely cropped – the pixie style, he recalled – dressed in a nondescript dark-coloured hoodie whose sleeves extended beyond her fingertips, a pair of jeans with what appeared to be

designer holes around the knee areas, and sneakers festooned with logos, flashy stripes, and multi-coloured untied laces.

But it was her eyes that held his gaze. Blue in colour, they radiated confidence and poise way beyond her age which he put at around twelve but which is always difficult to judge when adolescence is due to strike. She stood absolutely still, one hand on a hip, her head slightly tilted, a hint of a smile hovering on her lips, watching and waiting for his response.

‘What did you call me?’ he said. ‘Dad?’

‘Yes. You’re my dad.’

‘I’m not following.’ He was going to add ‘young lady’ but decided that would sound patronising and even overly familiar.

‘You’re my dad. Mum told me yesterday.’

‘Oh yes, and who is Mum?’

‘Alice Cartwright.’

‘Alice Cartwright? When were you born?’

The girl answered his question giving a precise date from which he worked out she was, indeed, twelve years old plus a few months. Silently, he sat on the bench, working his way back through the wasted years until he arrived at an approximate date nine months before the girl’s birthday. Slowly, he dredged the corners of his memory cells, what was left of them, struggling to recall where he was at the time and, more importantly, who he’d met.

Then it came to him. He had been walking a long-distance trail somewhere in the north-east of the country and had stayed the night at a remote pub out on the moors. He remembered the pub was virtually empty that evening and, after a hearty meal of enormous proportions, he had spent the rest of the evening chatting to the rather plain-looking young resident barmaid who had seen to his food and found the bottle of wine he’d requested off the piece of paper masquerading as a wine list. Alice was her name and she’d sat with him, helping to finish the bottle while they swapped life histories in a matter of minutes. He had told her he was between jobs and spending his time hiking along the long-distance trails that criss-crossed the country, whereas she had described her failed attempts to complete various college courses in topics to do with the countryside – animal husbandry, woodland management, ecology and conservation – that sort of thing. It turned out that her father, a local farmer, was anxious to keep his daughter involved in countryside matters and had pushed her into the courses. Her heart lay elsewhere, however. She was a natural artist and was more attracted to painting water-coloured landscapes and pencilled portraits. She’d pointed to various head-and-shoulder sketches hanging on the walls of the pub. ‘They are some of our regulars,’ she’d explained.

‘Well, I’m not a regular,’ he’d said, ‘but would you like to sketch me?’

‘No problem. My pad and pencils are upstairs in my room. Let’s go up there. I’ll close the pub and we can take another bottle of this excellent wine, on the house, to see us through the evening.’

And that’s how it came to be that he had spent the night with her, sleeping in her bed after what comes naturally came naturally.

‘Ah yes, I remember now. You are the product of a night of love with a lonely barmaid in a remote pub on the moors,’ he murmured.

The girl nodded her agreement. ‘Yes, that’s what Mum said.’

Just then, a matronly figure strolled across the park shouting at the young girl.

‘Marie, it’s time to go,’ she said. ‘The orphanage bus is about to depart. Why are you staring at an empty park bench? And who were you talking to?’

The girl whispered goodbye, turned and walked back to the older woman.

‘My dad,’ she replied.

‘But there’s nobody on the bench, child. Nobody knows who your dad was. Your mother died in childbirth without saying, and your grand-parents refused to take care of you. Come on; let’s get back to the bus.’

The man on the bench watched the girl, his daughter, depart. Since his accident, from which he never recovered, he’d taken to wandering and observing but unable to participate in the world he had departed – until just now.

--ooOoo--

I spent a few happy hours asking ChatGPT to do various things with my story: produce a critical review, carry out a grammar check, rewrite it in the literary style of Edgar Allen Poe, translate it into French, come up with a comedic version, convert the story into a poem, add a what-happened-next continuation, and change it into a screenplay.

Here are the results with a few comments.

ChatGPT’s Critical Review

Ben Bennetts’ short story ‘The Man on the Bench’ is a poignant exploration of the consequences of past actions and the possibility of redemption. The story revolves around a man who is approached by a young girl who claims to be his daughter. The man, who has lived a life of casual labor and travel with occasional dalliances, had never experienced the domesticity of home life and had no idea that he had fathered a child. The story takes the reader on a journey of the man's memories, as he tries to recall the night he spent with the girl's mother, Alice Cartwright.

The story is well-written and engaging, and the characters are well-drawn, with the girl's character standing out for her poise and confidence. The story is a powerful exploration of the consequences of past actions, as the man reflects on his wasted years and missed opportunities, and the impact of his actions on the lives of others. The story also raises important questions about fatherhood, responsibility, and the importance of famil

One of the strengths of the story is its use of imagery and detail to bring the characters and the setting to life. The description of the park bench, the girl's clothing, and the matronly figure all serve to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind, and to draw the reader into the story. The use of dialogue is also effective, with the girl's words conveying both her confidence and vulnerability, and the matronly figure's words adding to the sense of mystery and intrigue.

The story's resolution is both surprising and poignant, as it is revealed that the girl is actually an orphan, and that the man's encounter with her was perhaps a figment of his imagination, a momentary glimpse into a life he never had. The ending leaves the reader with a sense of sadness and loss, but also with a sense of hope, as the man is able to connect, however fleetingly, with the world he has departed.

Overall, ‘The Man on the Bench’ is a powerful and engaging short story, exploring themes of fatherhood, responsibility, and the consequences of past actions. The story is well-written

and engaging, with strong characters and vivid imagery, and a surprising and poignant resolution.

Comment

I generated three reviews, each one different. This is the second. The first review ended with an error message but did contain the following paragraph:

‘One of the strengths of Bennetts’ story is the vividness of his descriptions, which effectively evoke the loneliness and isolation of the man's life, as well as the contrasting energy and confidence of Marie. The use of sensory details, such as the "clutter, clatter, and chaos of a family environment," the "nondescript dark-colored hoodie" and the "multi-colored untied laces" of Marie's sneakers, and the "heady smell of honeysuckle" in the park, add depth and texture to the story, making it more immersive and engaging.’

I’m not sure where “the heady smell of honeysuckle” in the park came from. There’s no mention of such in the story.

The tone of the first and second review was positive, almost congratulatory. The third review, which also ended in an error message, was more critical and included these two paragraphs:

‘The story is well-crafted, with vivid descriptions that bring the characters and settings to life. The dialogue is natural and realistic, capturing the confusion and emotion of the protagonist as he tries to make sense of the situation.’

‘However, the story could benefit from more development of the characters and their relationships. The protagonist's life before the encounter with the girl is only hinted at, and we do not learn much about the girl's background or personality. This makes it difficult to fully engage with their story and leaves the reader with more questions than answers.’

I agree with the criticism but my objective when writing the original short story was to keep the word count below 1,000. The final version weighed in at 916 words.

Overall, ChatGPT made a reasonable job of the review but I am not the best person to judge the accuracy of the comments. All I will say is that six people commented on my posting in 2016 and they all liked the story.

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ChatGPT’s grammar check

Overall, the grammar in this short story is quite good. However, there are a few minor issues that could be improved.

1. In the second sentence, the phrase "Forever a bachelor" should be followed by a comma.
 - o Corrected sentence: Forever a bachelor, he had never experienced the domesticity of home life immersed in the clutter, clatter and chaos of a family environment.
2. In the fourth paragraph, there is an unnecessary comma after "desires."

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- Corrected sentence: ... occasional dalliances which served more to satisfy his carnal desires than those of his one-night stand partner.
- 3. In the sixth paragraph, the phrase "whose sleeves extended beyond her fingertips" should be separated from the previous clause with a comma.
 - Corrected sentence: ... a nondescript dark-coloured hoodie, whose sleeves extended beyond her fingertips, a pair of jeans with what appeared to be designer holes around the knee areas, and sneakers festooned with logos, flashy stripes, and multi-coloured untied laces.
- 4. In the seventh paragraph, the sentence "But it was her eyes that held his gaze" would be clearer if "her" were replaced with "the girl's."
 - Corrected sentence: But it was the girl's eyes that held his gaze.
- 5. In the twelfth paragraph, the phrase "what was left of them" should be preceded by a comma.
 - Corrected sentence: ... silently, he sat on the bench, working his way back through the wasted years until he arrived at an approximate date nine months before the girl's birthday. Slowly, he dredged the corners of his memory cells, struggling to recall where he was at the time and, more importantly, who he'd met and what was left of them.
- 6. In the fifteenth paragraph, the phrase "after what comes naturally came naturally" is a bit awkward and could be rephrased.
 - Suggested corrected sentence: ... sleeping in her bed after they had made love.
- 7. In the final sentence, the phrase "he had departed" could be replaced with "he had left."
 - Suggested corrected sentence: ... unable to participate in the world he had left - until just now.

Comment

Suggestions 1, 2, 3. Agreed. My bad!

Suggestion 4. Debatable.

Suggestion 5. Disagree. Placing the 'what was left of them' at the end of the sentence makes no sense.

Suggestion 6. An interesting but more direct alternative to my 'after what comes naturally came naturally' prose. On balance, I prefer my phrase.

Suggestion 7. Left? Departed? One thing you might have noticed about ChatGPT's review is that it had failed to recognise that my story was a ghost story. Had it done so, it may not have made this particular suggestion. *Departed* relates more to those who have died; *left* does not.

Incidentally, after ChatGPT's comments, I ran my story through the popular grammar checker, [Grammarly](#). Grammarly spotted ChatGPT's punctuation errors 1, 2, 3, but none of the other four suggestions. Grammarly did, however spot several spelling errors: north-east/northeast, criss-crossed/crisscrossed, grand-parents/grandparents plus a few other issues including a tautology (absolutely still) and picked me up on the length of the third sentence in the second paragraph. I should have run the original story through Grammarly before I posted it in September 2020!

--ooOoo--

ChatGPT's re-written in the style of Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, a man sat alone on a park bench, lost in his thoughts of a life he had never known. He had never been a father, never experienced the joy and wonder of watching his offspring grow and thrive. He was a solitary soul, whose life had been one of casual labor and fleeting pleasures. But on this night, a voice called out to him, a voice that shook him to his core.

"Hello, Dad," the voice said.

The man turned to see a young girl standing before him, her eyes blazing with a confidence and poise beyond her years. She spoke of things he had never known, of a life he had never lived. She claimed that he was her father, a fact that he found hard to believe.

But as the girl spoke, memories flooded back to him, memories of a lonely night spent in a remote pub with a plain-looking barmaid named Alice. Memories of a night of passion and pleasure, of a fleeting connection that had brought forth new life.

The man sat in silence as the girl spoke, his mind racing with thoughts and emotions that he had long suppressed. But his reverie was interrupted by the arrival of an older woman, who called out to the girl and reminded her of her place on the orphanage bus.

The man watched as the girl departed, his heart heavy with the weight of a life he had missed. He had been a wanderer, a ghost haunting the edges of society, unable to connect or engage with the world he had left behind. But in that brief moment, he had been given a glimpse of something more, a connection to a daughter he had never known.

And as he watched the girl disappear into the night, he knew that he would carry her memory with him always, a reminder of the life he had missed and the possibilities that still remained. For even in the darkest of nights, there is always the chance of a new dawn, a chance to connect with the world and the people we love.

Comment

Would Edgar Alan Poe, author of macabre stories such as *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *Premature Burial*, and *Murders of the Rue Morgue*, have admitted authorship of this story? In ChatGPT's rewrite, the tone has darkened; the setting now a *dreary* midnight. Loneliness is all around: *sat alone*, *solitary soul*, *lonely night*, *remote pub*. Connections are *fleeting*. The man *sat in silence* after his encounter with the girl and is described as *a wanderer*, *a ghost haunting the edges of society*. Yes, there are elements of Poe's love of darkness, loneliness, supernatural beings all invoking a forbidding environment.

Marks out of ten? Around six, I'd say.

--ooOoo--

ChatGPT's French translation

L'homme sur le Banc Ben Bennetts

« Bonjour, Papa. »

L'homme assis seul sur le banc du parc tourna la tête vers la source du son. Personne ne l'avait jamais appelé papa. Toujours célibataire, il n'avait jamais connu la vie domestique plongée dans le désordre, le bruit et le chaos d'un environnement familial. Il n'avait jamais tenu un petit enfant dans ses bras, essuyant des larmes de douleur ou de frustration ; jamais il n'avait éprouvé l'émerveillement et la joie en voyant la croyance incontestable que le Père Noël était réel ; jamais il n'avait ressenti de fierté en voyant sa progéniture jouer sur scène devant un public de mamans et de papas ; jamais il n'était devenu en colère parce qu'un de ses enfants n'avait pas cédé à une explication logique et raisonnable pour expliquer pourquoi un tel comportement était inacceptable. Non, il n'avait jamais acquis de connaissances sur de tels événements. Sa vie avait été faite de travaux occasionnels et de voyages, avec des aventures occasionnelles qui servaient plus à satisfaire ses désirs charnels qu'à ceux de sa partenaire d'un soir.

« Bonjour, Papa, » dit-elle avec un peu plus de volume et contenant juste une pointe d'urgence.

Elle le regardait avec un œil fixe, son visage légèrement tacheté de rousseur, ses cheveux bruns coupés très courts - le style "pixie", se rappela-t-il - habillée d'un sweat-shirt sans prétention de couleur sombre dont les manches dépassaient ses doigts, d'un jean avec ce qui semblait être des trous de designer autour des genoux, et de baskets ornées de logos, de bandes voyantes et de lacets multicolores dénoués.

Mais ce sont ses yeux qui tenaient son regard. D'un bleu profond, ils irradiaient une confiance et une assurance bien au-delà de son âge qu'il estimait à environ douze ans mais qui est toujours difficile à juger quand l'adolescence est sur le point de frapper. Elle restait absolument immobile, une main sur la hanche, la tête légèrement inclinée, un léger sourire flottant sur ses lèvres, observant et attendant sa réponse.

« Comment m'as-tu appelé ? », dit-il. « Papa ? »

« Oui. Tu es mon papa. »

« Je ne comprends pas. » Il allait ajouter « jeune fille », mais décida que cela sonnerait condescendant et même trop familier.

« Tu es mon papa. Maman me l'a dit hier. »

« Ah oui, et qui est Maman ? »

« Alisse Charon. »

« Alisse Charon ? Quand es-tu né(e) ? »

La fille répondit à sa question en donnant une date précise à partir de laquelle il a calculé qu'elle avait effectivement douze ans et quelques mois. Silencieusement, il s'assit sur le banc en remontant le temps à travers les années perdues jusqu'à une date approximative neuf mois avant l'anniversaire de la fille. Lentement, il fouilla les recoins de sa mémoire, ce qu'il en restait, essayant de se rappeler où il était à l'époque et, plus important encore, qui il avait rencontré.

Puis il se souvint. Il marchait sur un sentier de longue distance quelque part dans le nord-est du pays et avait passé la nuit dans un pub isolé sur les landes. Il se souvint que le pub était presque vide ce soir-là et après un copieux repas de proportions énormes, il avait passé le reste de la soirée à discuter avec la jeune barmaid résidente assez ordinaire qui avait servi son repas et trouvé la bouteille de vin qu'il avait demandée sur le bout de papier qui faisait office de carte des vins. Alisse était son nom, et elle avait passé du temps avec lui, aidant à finir la bouteille tout en échangeant leurs histoires de vie en quelques minutes. Il lui avait dit qu'il était entre deux emplois et passait son temps à faire de la randonnée le long des sentiers de grande randonnée qui sillonnaient le pays, tandis qu'elle avait décrit ses tentatives infructueuses pour terminer divers cours universitaires sur des sujets liés à la campagne - l'élevage des animaux, la gestion des bois, l'écologie et la conservation - ce genre de choses. Il s'est avéré que son père, un agriculteur local, était soucieux de maintenir sa fille impliquée dans les affaires de la campagne et l'avait poussée à suivre ces cours. Cependant, son cœur était ailleurs. Elle était une artiste naturelle et était plus attirée par la peinture de paysages à l'aquarelle et de portraits au crayon. Elle avait indiqué plusieurs croquis de têtes et d'épaules accrochés aux murs du pub.

« Ce sont quelques-uns de nos habitués », avait-elle expliqué.

« Eh bien, je ne suis pas un habitué, avait-il dit, mais voulez-vous me dessiner ? »

« Pas de problème. Mon carnet et mes crayons sont en haut dans ma chambre. Allons-y. Je fermerai le pub et nous pourrons prendre une autre bouteille de ce vin excellent, offerte par la maison, pour passer la soirée. »

Et c'est ainsi qu'il avait passé la nuit avec elle, dormant dans son lit après que ce qui vient naturellement soit venu naturellement.

« Ah oui, je me souviens maintenant. Tu es le produit d'une nuit d'amour avec une barmaid solitaire dans un pub isolé sur les landes », murmura-t-il.

La jeune fille hochait la tête. « Oui, c'est ce que Maman a dit. »

Juste à ce moment-là, une figure matrone se promenait dans le parc en criant à la jeune fille.

« Marie, il est temps de partir », dit-elle. « Le bus de l'orphelinat va partir. Pourquoi regardes-tu un banc de parc vide ? Et avec qui parlais-tu ? »

La fille murmura au revoir, se retourna et marcha vers la femme plus âgée.

« Mon papa », répondit-elle.

« Mais il n'y a personne sur le banc, mon enfant. Personne ne sait qui était ton père. Ta mère est morte en couches sans rien dire et tes grands-parents ont refusé de prendre soin de toi. Allez, retournons au bus. »

L'homme sur le banc observa la fille, sa fille, partir. Depuis son accident, dont il ne s'est jamais remis, il avait pris l'habitude de se promener et d'observer, mais incapable de participer au monde qu'il avait quitté - jusqu'à maintenant.

Comment

I am not qualified to judge the accuracy of the French translation but memories of my schoolboy French say it looks good. I am seeking a more professional opinion. One thing I noticed is that ChatGPT replaced the English-language speech marks, "...", with the French

language *les guillemets (m)*, «...», speech marks. That was neat. Also, you will notice a name change from Alice Cartwright to the French equivalent, Alisse Charron. (A *charron* is a wheelwright.). I did that, not ChatGPT!

--ooOoo--

ChatGPT's comedic version

A man is sitting alone on a park bench when a young girl approaches him and calls him "Dad". The man, who has never had children and lives a bachelor's life, is confused and surprised. The girl tells him that her mother, Alice Cartwright, had informed her that he is her father. After some reflection, the man remembers Alice from a chance meeting at a pub in the north-east of the country, where they spent the night together. The man is shocked and pleased to learn that he has a daughter.

Just then, a matronly figure arrives and calls out to the girl, Marie, telling her that it's time to go back to the orphanage. The man watches as Marie tells the woman that she was talking to her dad on the bench, but the woman can't see him. She explains that Marie's mother died in childbirth, and her grandparents refused to take care of her. The man is touched by Marie's recognition of him as her father and is grateful for the unexpected connection.

As Marie leaves, the man tries to get up from the bench to follow her, but his old age and accident prevent him from doing so. He falls back onto the bench and mutters to himself, "Well, that was unexpected. I guess I'm a dad now." Just then, a pigeon flies overhead and poops on his head, leaving him to exclaim, "Well, isn't this just the icing on the cake?"

Comment

There are no comedic elements in the original story and I was interested to see how ChatGPT would introduce humour into my story. I note that ChatGPT summarised the main story somewhat succinctly and then introduced the humour at the end. That's one way to do it but a bigger challenge would be to build humour into the existing dialogue. Maybe ChatGPT-5 will be able to do this?

--ooOoo--

ChatGPT's conversion into a poem

A fatherless man, lonely and old,
Sat on a bench, in the park's threshold,
When a young girl appeared out of the blue,
And called him "Dad," he didn't know what to do.

He'd never been married, had no child of his own,
His life was a journey, aimless and lone,
But the girl's eyes were bright, blue and clear,
Filled with a confidence, beyond her years.

She stood before him, with a steady gaze,
In a hoodie, jeans, and sneakers, in a daze,
He asked her name, she said it was Marie,
And that he was her father, with no guarantee.

He tried to recall, when and where they met,
His memory cells scrambled, a little upset,
But then it came to him, a night long ago,
In a remote pub, up north, amid the snow.

He had stayed for the night, the pub was deserted,
He met a barmaid, Alice, they conversed and flirted,
He asked her to draw him, they talked and drank,
And when the night was over, he walked out, not to thank.

Marie's face brought back, the memories of old,
He was a father now, his heart filled with gold,
But then reality struck, Marie had to go,
To an orphanage, she was heading, and it was time to show.

A woman appeared, called out to Marie,
It was time to leave, for the bus was ready,
She asked who she spoke to, the girl said, "my dad,"
But the bench was empty, the woman felt sad.

The man watched them go, his daughter and kin,
His accident had left him, wandering without a win,
But today was different, his heart felt light,
He had a daughter, and his life felt right.

Comment

A noble effort! I didn't specify the size of each stanza. ChatGPT chose the quatrain size. In some instances, scanning leaves something to be desired - *When a young girl appeared out of the blue,/And called him "Dad," he didn't know what to do* would read better as *When a young girl appeared out of the blue,/And called him "Dad," he knew not what to do* – but rhyming couplets are mostly good.

The poem captures the essence of the story however.
Marks out of ten? Seven.

--ooOoo--

ChatGPT's continuation, first version

The man sat on the bench, stunned. He had a daughter. For years, he had been a drifter, never staying in one place for too long. But now, something had shifted. He felt a sense of responsibility and a desire to know his daughter. He stood up and walked towards the matronly figure and the girl.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'I believe I am the girl's father.'

The woman looked him up and down, skeptical.

‘Do you have any proof?’ she asked.

He searched his pockets, hoping for something, anything, that would confirm his story. All he found was a crumpled receipt from a gas station he had stopped at earlier that day.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, feeling defeated. ‘I don’t have anything on me. But I do remember Alice. I remember spending the night with her.’

The woman looked at him with pity.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘But we can’t just take your word for it. We need more than that.’

The man hung his head and watched as the woman ushered the girl onto the bus. He felt a sense of loss and regret. For the first time in his life, he felt like he had a purpose, a reason to stay in one place. But it was slipping away from him.

As the bus pulled away, the man sat back down on the bench, his mind racing. He needed to find a way to prove he was the girl's father. He needed to track down Alice.

He spent the rest of the day wandering around the city, asking anyone he could if they knew Alice Cartwright. But no one had heard of her. It was as if she had disappeared off the face of the earth.

He was about to give up when he stumbled upon an art gallery. Something drew him inside, and he found himself staring at a collection of watercolours and sketches. And there, in the corner, was a painting of a remote pub on the moors.

He approached the gallery owner and asked about the artist.

‘Oh, Alice Cartwright,’ the owner said. ‘She’s a local artist. Does some lovely work, don’t you think?’

The man nodded, his heart racing.

‘Do you know where I could find her?’ he asked.

The owner shrugged. ‘She’s a bit of a recluse, I’m afraid. Doesn’t do many shows or exhibitions. But she does have a studio out in the countryside somewhere. Sorry, I can’t be more help.’

The man thanked the owner and left the gallery, determined to find Alice.

It took him several days to track down the studio. It was a small cottage nestled in the woods, surrounded by trees and overgrown shrubs. He knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He tried the handle, and to his surprise, it was unlocked.

He stepped inside and found himself in a cluttered room filled with paintings and sketches. And there, in the corner, was Alice Cartwright.

She looked up at him with surprise.

‘Who are you?’ she asked.

He explained who he was and why he was there. She listened in silence, her face unreadable.

‘I never told anyone about that night,’ she said finally. ‘Not even my parents. I was ashamed, I guess.’

‘I understand,’ he said. ‘But I have a daughter now. And I want to be a part of her life.’

Alice studied him for a moment, then nodded.

‘Alright,’ she said. ‘But I need some time to think about it.’

He left her studio feeling hopeful. He had taken the first step towards building a relationship with his daughter.

Comment

This is the first of two efforts by ChatGPT to add to my story. The second version was more about how the man followed the girl back to the orphanage and steals her away – a

simple narrative. I preferred the first version simply because it built on the history of the girl's conception and the fact that the man was initially unaware that he had a daughter.

But, in both cases, I realised that ChatGPT had failed to grasp that the man was a ghost so I asked the question one more time, this time pointing out in the request that he was. Here's what came back.

ChatGPT's continuation, second version

As the bus drove away, the man on the bench felt a sense of sadness wash over him. He had never known he had a daughter until that moment, and now he would never have the chance to get to know her. He wondered what kind of life she would have, growing up in an orphanage without a father. He wished he could have been there to guide her, to protect her, to be her dad.

But he was just a ghost, an ethereal presence that couldn't interact with the physical world. He had been killed in a car accident years ago, and since then, he had been wandering the earth, watching but unable to touch. He had seen so many things, so many lives, but he had never felt as lonely as he did in that moment.

He decided to follow the bus, to see where it would take his daughter. He floated above the traffic, keeping an eye on the vehicle as it wound its way through the city. Finally, it pulled up outside a large, imposing building, and the children began to disembark. The man watched as his daughter was led inside, wondering what kind of place it was.

He decided to investigate, floating through the walls of the building until he found himself in a large room filled with cots and cribs. There were dozens of babies and toddlers, all sleeping or playing quietly. He saw his daughter, Marie, in a crib near the back of the room, clutching a teddy bear and looking around with wide, curious eyes.

The man watched her for a while, feeling a sense of longing and sadness. He wished he could hold her, comfort her, tell her that he loved her. But he was just a ghost, a shadow, a memory. He had no physical form, no voice, no way to communicate.

Suddenly, a young woman entered the room, pushing a cart filled with bottles and diapers. She looked up and saw the man, staring at his daughter in the crib. She gasped and backed away, clearly frightened.

The man tried to speak, to tell her that he meant no harm, but his voice was silent. He tried to reach out, to touch her arm, but his hand passed right through her. She screamed and ran out of the room, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

He knew he couldn't stay there, that he had no place in that world. He floated back through the walls, back out into the city, feeling more lost and alone than ever before. He wondered if he would ever find a way to connect with the living, to be a part of the world again.

As he floated away, he looked back at the building where his daughter was sleeping, and he made a promise to himself. He would watch over her, protect her, guide her as best he could. He might be a ghost, but he was still a father, and he would always love his little girl.

Comment

Finally, an acknowledgement that the story is a ghost story. The continuation is not up to Stephen King standard but inventive in that he encounters and frightens the nurse who enters the room who, clearly, can see him whereas the matronly person at the end of the original story could not. Further expansion of the story could build on this mystery.

--ooOoo--

ChatGPT's conversion into a screenplay.

FADE IN:

EXT. PARK - DAY

A man sits alone on a park bench. He looks up as he hears a voice.

GIRL (off-screen)
Hello, Dad.

The man turns his head to see a young girl, around twelve years old, standing in front of him.

MAN
(confused)
What did you call me?

GIRL
You're my dad.

MAN
(puzzled)
I'm not following.

GIRL
You're my dad. Mum told me yesterday.

The man is taken aback.

MAN
(surprised)
Oh yes, and who is Mum?

GIRL
Alice Cartwright.

The man is silent for a moment, deep in thought.

MAN
(to himself)

Alice...

The girl watches him, waiting for his response.

MAN
(realizing)

Ah yes, I remember now. You are the product of a night of love with a lonely barmaid in a remote pub on the moors.

The girl nods.

GIRL
That's what Mum said.

Just then, a woman approaches.

WOMAN
Matronly figure
Marie, it's time to go. The orphanage bus is about to depart. Why are you staring at an empty park bench? And who were you talking to?

Marie whispers goodbye to the man and walks back to the woman.

GIRL
(to woman)
My dad.

WOMAN
(skeptical)
But there's nobody on the bench, child. Nobody knows who your dad was. Your mother died in childbirth without saying, and your grandparents refused to take care of you. Come on; let's get back to the bus.

The woman leads Marie away, and the man on the bench watches them go. As they disappear from view, the man stands up and fades away, revealing himself to be a ghost.

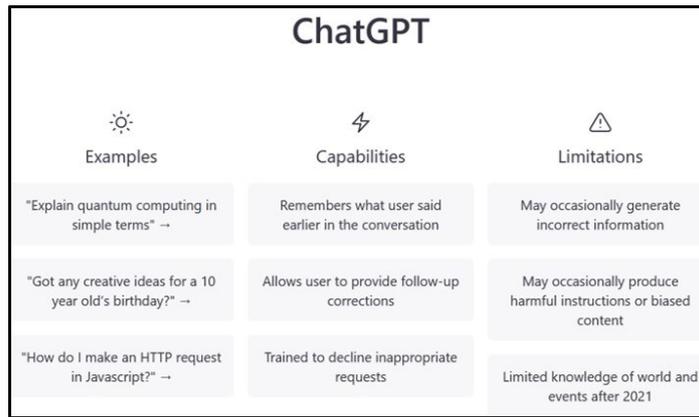
FADE OUT.

Comment

It's a start. The bones of the story are there: main characters, story progression via dialogue, stage settings, actions and reactions. Well done, ChatGPT.

--ooOoo--

Closing Remarks



ChatGPT		
☀️ Examples	⚡️ Capabilities	⚠️ Limitations
"Explain quantum computing in simple terms" →	Remembers what user said earlier in the conversation	May occasionally generate incorrect information
"Got any creative ideas for a 10 year old's birthday?" →	Allows user to provide follow-up corrections	May occasionally produce harmful instructions or biased content
"How do I make an HTTP request in Javascript?" →	Trained to decline inappropriate requests	Limited knowledge of world and events after 2021

Opening banner on OpenAI's ChatGPT's chat page

Playing with ChatGPT is highly addictive, entrancing, educational and a little bit frightening. But, above all, it's fun. I've enjoyed discovering what it thought of and what it could do with my simple story. Two general comments I would make are:

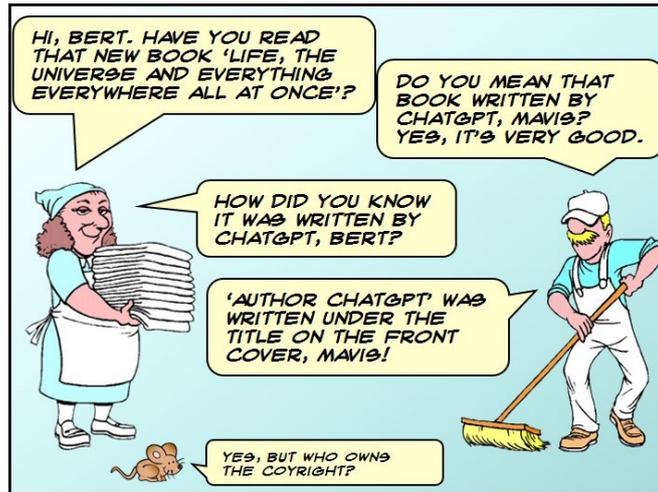
First, it's fast. Most of the responses to my requests were answered in less than a minute. The exception was the French translation. The response kept stopping with an error message – error in body stream – and, in the end, I resorted to translating a few paragraphs at a time rather than submitting the complete text.

Second, it remembers and learns from what you tell it or what it has already generated. For example, once I had pointed out that the man was a ghost, all subsequent responses acknowledged this and built the fact into its replies: the second continuation and the screenplay. There was no repetition. If you request an answer to the same question using the regenerate option, you will get different answers, always. This is pointed out in the opening banner displayed on the chat window.

For me, ChatGPT's real breakthrough is on the literary creative side rather than on the factual side. As an author, I appreciate and understand the difficulty of coming up with an original story. My [earlier request](#) to write a story about a giraffe, a penguin and a football illustrated ChatGPT's ability to craft an entertaining story with virtually no direction other than the animate and inanimate protagonists. The result impressed me. The continuations, poem, comedic and screenplay versions of my *Man on the Bench* story further illustrate this ability and I wonder what will happen in the future. Will ChatGPT and its competitors churn out fiction to rival the novels written by popular authors and currently on sale in airport bookshops? How will we distinguish a ChatGPT-generated novel from a novel written by a *New York Times* best seller author? If ChatGPT-generated novels satisfy the general public's demand for common genres such as romance, thrillers, detective/mystery and historical fiction, where does that leave the current high-profile human authors of such books?

I will leave you to contemplate on the answers to my questions. I'm off to ask ChatGPT further penetrating questions such as where did I put the house keys when I returned from walking the dog this morning, and when the butcher said, 'Have a nice day' as I walked out of his shop having bought a Cornish pasty, did he mean it?

ChatGPT: Further Investigation of its Literary Creativity



(^ _ ^)