

In the fourth instalment of a six-part series on the disruption within the creative industries occasioned by Artificial Intelligence (AI), **Bamuturaki Musin-guzi** delves into how the book publishing industry is adapting to the changing times.

**A**vid readers of fictional books were shocked last month when it emerged that Hachette Book Group (HBG), one of the largest publishers in the United States, pulled a forthcoming, formerly self-published horror novel, *Shy Girl*, over suspected Artificial Intelligence (AI) use.

The publisher cancelled the US release of *Shy Girl* by Mia Ballard and withdrew the UK edition after weeks of online speculation about the novel's origins. The decision was first reported by the *New York Times* and came after weeks of online speculation about the novel's origins, during which readers on platforms such as Goodreads and Reddit had questioned whether sections of the text bore hallmarks of AI-generated prose.

The book had sold approximately 1,800 print copies in the UK, according to NielsenIQ BookData.

In a statement to the *New York Times*, the publisher said: "Hachette remains committed to protecting original creative expression and storytelling."

Ballard has denied personally using AI to write the novel. In comments to the *New York Times*, she said an acquaintance she had hired to work on an earlier self-published version incorporated AI tools.

"This controversy has changed my life in many ways and my mental health is at an all time low and my name is ruined for something I didn't even personally do," she wrote in an email to the newspaper.

#### Human authors vs AI-generated books

Originally self-published in February 2025, *Shy Girl* has almost 5,000 ratings on Goodreads with an average score of 3.51 stars. However, questions began to be raised in early this year as social media users dissected passages from the novel.

"There are countless AI-generated books which are self-published without disclosure by the authors that they're entirely AI products," the Ugandan author and founder of Fountain Publishers, James Tumusiime, told *Weekend Monitor*.

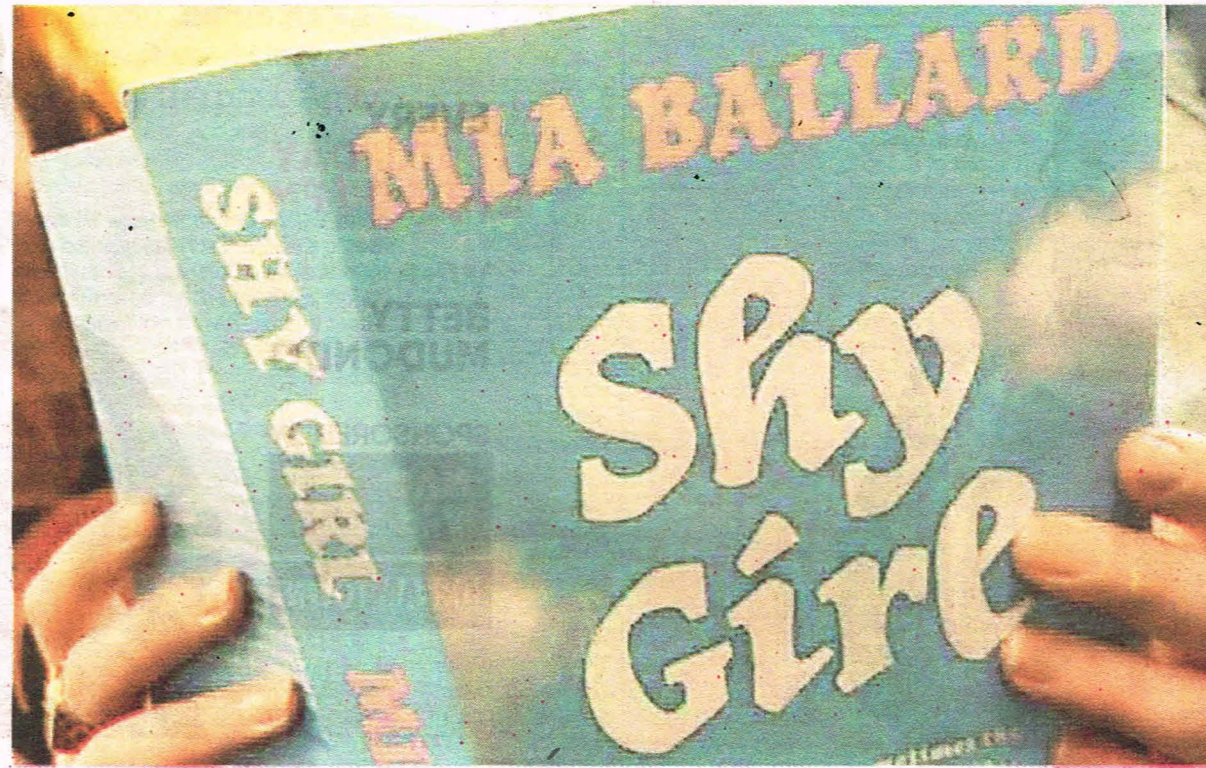
Telling what is AI-generated and what isn't is not cut and dry, though.

"A few things have sounded like AI, but I would not have proof," Hilda Twongyeirwe, the Executive Director of Femrite (Uganda Women Writers Association), said. "A few weeks ago, I discovered that some AI detection tools will detect everything to be AI, maybe because every word has been written before and so AI gathers it as its own."

The ethics are, however, clear-cut. At least in the book of Beatrice Lamwaka, a Ugandan writer.

"Ethically," she says, "writers who use AI to create their books should acknowledge the use of AI in creating their work but writing is such a lonely and personal task that people may not easily admit to that."

# How AI-generated books risk creating a wild west



There are allegations that the author of *Shy Girl* used AI to write it. PHOTO/BBC

Lamwaka has made it a habit to run the work of anyone that contacts her "for plagiarism and if its AI generated content as I don't want to waste my time editing AI content."

Tumusiime concurs. AI, he reckons, is a tool; not a co-author. "The lasting ownership of the work is for the human who used AI and his effort to develop it. Therefore, he owns copyright. But where the work is entirely AI that becomes a public domain."

Yet, per Twongyeirwe's observation, Uganda's book industry is not for AI. Everyone, she notes, is groping in the dark. "The publishers do not have the correct tools to detect AI and so impostors will use AI to write and the publisher will fall prey."

#### Advantages of AI

Yet it's not all doom and gloom. In its article titled *The Impact of AI on the Publishing Industry*, Capitol Technology University notes that AI is reshaping the publishing industry. AI is introducing innovative tools and processes that are revolutionising how books and other content are created, marketed, and consumed. This transformative technology offers writers, publishers, and readers new opportunities to enhance creativity, streamline workflows, and connect with audiences.

Capital Technology University, however, adds a caveat, noting that "these same tools also bring threats to artistic integrity, ethical dilemmas, and potential risks to diversity in creative expression." So, "to fully realise AI's potential while mitigating its risks, the industry must adopt thoughtful strategies and safeguards that uphold the core values of creativity, equity, and trust."

According to Capitol Technology University, objectively, AI has the power to provide writers with a host of tools that can enhance their craft and productivity. AI-powered applications can assist at every stage of the creative process, from

#### BEYOND WRITING

AI's influence extends beyond writing and publishing into areas like distribution and intellectual property management. Automated translation tools make it easier to bring works to global audiences by breaking down linguistic barriers; and AI-powered systems can help detect copyright infringement and protect intellectual property. Innovations in formats, such as audiobooks and interactive e-books, are also being powered by AI, making content more accessible and engaging, the university further adds.

drafting to editing and beyond.

Predictive text generators and grammar checkers streamline writing and revision, while platforms that analyse tone, style, and readability help refine an author's voice to better resonate with specific audiences. These tools also provide valuable insights into reader preferences, allowing authors to tailor their work to meet evolving market trends and commercial viability.

Publishing companies can also benefit from AI's ability to automate and optimise the more tedious operations like autoreplies and sifting through thousands of manuscript submissions. Additionally, advanced algorithms can screen manuscripts more efficiently than traditional methods, identifying submissions based on market trends and reader data. This reduces the time and cost associated with this complex industry.

AI also aids in marketing and distribution, offering tools to analyse consumer behaviour and predict which books are likely to succeed. Personalised recommendations driven by AI can boost

sales and also enhance the reader's marketing experience, the university notes.

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"There is improved efficiency, reduced human error in editorial, good illustrated images, among others," Tumusiime told *Weekend Monitor* when asked how the book industry is benefiting from AI.

Lamwaka added thus: "AI is beneficial in providing data on who is reading, which books and where they are located and what kind of books people love to read. This can be done by publishers. As a writer, I can use AI for research but again we must look at how Africa is presented in western media and this stereotype is also present in AI, unfortunately. This is an opportunity for Africans to correct information about Africa, maybe using AI."

Twongyeirwe disclosed that Femrite has not yet deployed AI in its publishing business. It has "instead disqualified entries which have been found to be AI-generated." This is a step in the right direction in Lamwaka's assessment. The Ugandan writer believes that "AI can't replace my point of view, my voice and gain my experiences."

She adds: "I am sure AI can't write a Lawino [from Song of Lawino] or Okonkwo [from Things Fall Apart]. Of course, AI creators are improving AI day and night, but it may take a while because AI is just patches of different people's thoughts. It can work very well for

writing an academic paper, but maybe not a novel or short story."

Tumusiime argues that AI will not destroy human creativity. "AI won't kill human creativity, instead it will perfect it. Creativity will be for the framework of the initiator rather than the actual content."

#### Threats of AI

Capitol Technology University says the rise of AI in publishing is not without its significant downsides. One concern is the potential homogenisation of creative output. Algorithms trained on existing works often prioritise popular trends and styles, which can discourage originality and innovation, as is already being seen with an influx of "fake" books being self-published on Amazon.

For writers, AI-generated content poses a direct threat to job security and artistic value. As AI tools become increasingly sophisticated, publishers may be tempted to rely on AI-produced works that are faster and cheaper to generate than human-authored pieces. This shift could devalue the craft of writing and reduce opportunities for emerging authors. Furthermore, the over-reliance on AI for editing and feedback may stifle the mentorship traditionally provided by experienced editors.

According to the International Authors Forum (IAF), sophisticated AI systems are challenging the value chain for creators, who provide the foundation upon which many AI technologies exist. Existing copyright-protected works are being used to train AI systems (input), which are subsequently used to produce works "in the style of" those copied works (output).

"With a lack of international regulations and fair compensation for authors, AI seriously undermines the work of creators, leading to job losses and an existential threat to human creativity," IAF says.

Human creativity provides the basis for the creative industries. IAF believes that it is crucial to address the potential impact of AI on the irreplaceable value that creators bring to society. Creators' moral and economic interests must be protected and promoted to ensure that the creative industries will continue to thrive.

"I take AI as a source of information like any other search engine but it should not be let to create for the creative. [...] One cannot be a creative writer unless they are creating, and so if AI is the creator, it is dishonest of a writer to put their name on AI work. That becomes a case of plagiarism against AI. But also, AI seems to gather everything that people publish on [the] Internet. So, it becomes a chain of plagiarism. So, if we are not careful about how to use AI, AI will use us," Twongyeirwe told *Weekend Monitor*.

On her part Lamwaka rhetorically asks: "If a writer can't write his or her writing, then what are they doing?" The question encapsulates the quagmire that has left the book publishing industry at a crossroads.

Next weekend, the series will explore the impact of generative AI on the film industry.