

Within the past month, someone whose name I cannot recall wrote online that, because of the internet, there was no more room for ambiguity in stories, or something like that. This someone who wrote that may have been a major literary figure, but I doubt it, because I'm not sure those exist anymore. Maybe they do—the likes of Stephen King, or Barbara Ehrenreich, or political figures who write books like that recent one from James Comey which might be about some mix of corruption, Donald Trump, and the FBI (I don't know), or newer Arabic writers because modernity in a literary sense has hit them a little more latently than those of us in the western world. But I don't quite believe that they're major literary figures, or even literary figures, because if they were figures wouldn't we all care just a little bit more about them? Or here's another reason, because that one isn't so great: what sort of stories would actually come from our age? Some sort of hyper-realism, maybe, in which every detail is carefully recounted to within a small confidence interval because any old moron could lookup and verify the information.

But if the great literature of our time is a compilation of verifiable information—a political database from the likes of Hillary Clinton and Bill O'Reilly—if hyper-realism is our genre, then why do we need literary figures? All I and the distant-future-me need are a collection of variously-biased articles which recount the same information iteratively, and over those iterations I can determine the ground truth. Or, the future me can have a summarizing-robot summarily digest and produce that ground truth and present it to me in an even more easily digestible format, at which point maybe I should now consider that robot the major literary figure despite a billion or trillion or so of them being present all throughout the world. Rather, the future-world.

This is all to say that there seems to have been a somewhat major shift in literary production from small groups of authors producing all of the major works, to much larger populations being responsible for contemporary literature, and so just as the problem of computing shifts from individual humans spending years devising convoluted algorithms and operating system architectures to large clusters of artificial neurons being responsible for the very same work; just as biology has shifted over millenia towards a statistical approach in which we consider populations of cells and species, not individuals, we see the same phenomenon of study once again emerge. Literature is now produced en masse and our overall approach to its production and analysis has become a statistical, iterative affair. And if literature now exists over a population, then there are trivially no literary figures, or at least it provides no insight to emphasize one specific node over any other.

Without literary figures, we have no ethos by which we can prioritize one user's, individual's, node's, commenter's feedback over any other, which likely implies a certain need to develop a framework by which we can compile just such remarks and analyze them over a population. Without this framework, I have been compelled to resort to the same classical procedure of turning something arbitrary over in my mind ever since I came across it within this past month. Bean

