JANE AUSTEN FAN FICTION CONVENTION · 2026

“I Am Half Agony, *Half Hope*”

AI in publishing, and why the two things that matter are telling the truth and doing the work

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YOUR SPEAKER

About me



Melissa Bowles-Terry

MA, MLIS

- *I work at the intersection of teaching, writing, research, and technology.*
- *Much of my career has focused on how people create, evaluate, share, and use information.*
- *I'm interested in what new technologies do to our assumptions about expertise and authorship.*
- *And, importantly: I am a human who writes things.*

Two things I believe, so you we can discuss and/or argue:

1 **Readers are owed the truth about how a book was made.**

2 **The human doing the writing is not a cost to be optimised away.**

Notice that neither of those requires banning anything.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

The argument, in one slide

Transparency

Every one of this year's publishing scandals is a dispute about provenance, not about tools. Nobody was ruined for using a spellchecker. People were ruined because nobody could establish how a manuscript came to exist — and because the answer had been withheld.

Human creativity

The thing a reader comes for is a particular mind making particular choices. That is not a garnish on the product — it is the product. Which is why the industry keeps discovering, expensively, that it cannot be removed.

Everything after this slide is evidence for those two claims.

THE FALADE CASE, AUGUST 2026

A debut, a bidding war, a withdrawal

$2M
reported advance for a debut crime novel

14
publishers in the auction that produced it

$300K
commission his own agents walked away from

The agents' own withdrawal notice to publishers said they were

“no longer able to authenticate how the manuscript fully evolved”

- This is not an accusation about a tool. It is an admission that provenance could not be established.
- They had asked the author about AI during submission and accepted his assurance. They now say they can't stand behind it.
- Falade denies it, has retained counsel, and has posted correspondence about the book dated years before ChatGPT existed.
- Nobody outside the process has read the manuscript. Including me. Including most people with an opinion about it online.

Source: The Substack Post roundtable, 6 August 2026 — Brammer, Schmidt, Michel & Issawi.

PATTERN

Three in a year, and no shared standard

Mia Ballard

Shy Girl

Allegations surfaced; the book was pulled from publication.

H. M. Wolfe

Daggermouth

A detector scored it around 60% AI. Her publisher stood by her and bought more titles.

Jerry Falade

untitled debut

Withdrawn by his own agents. Denied. Now lawyered.

False accusation is now a live occupational hazard.

Working writers report being asked, unprompted, whether human pitches and essays were machine-written. Debut authors are the softest target: no back catalogue, nothing to point at.

Detectors are public, and they are not verdicts.

Anyone can paste anyone's paragraph into a free tool and get a number back. A percentage is a probability from a model with its own error rate — not a fingerprint.

It falls unevenly.

These three authors publicly accused this year are Black — a point raised independently by all three professionals in the roundtable. A system with no evidentiary standard distributes suspicion along the lines it already runs on.

DIAGNOSIS

What failed was not the technology. It was the disclosure.

No fact-checking exists

There is no verification department in trade publishing. The check is an editor's ear and an author's word — the same two instruments that failed here. Memoir scandals proved this decades ago.

No uniform policy exists

Every house is improvising its own rule, or none. Insiders report imprints quietly pulling books or ordering rewrites without any of it reaching the press.

So the lie is the injury

Writers who are open about substantial gen AI use largely carry on working. The scandals cluster around concealment. Readers do not punish tools; they punish being deceived.

Which is the good news, in a way: a disclosure problem has a solution, and somebody has already written it down.

AI BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITERS

The Authors Guild has written a map

First published February 2024, substantially revised May 2026 — developed with working writers and approved by the Guild's Council. Free to everyone, member or not. Its own framing: ***“these are guidelines, not rules.”***

Your voice is the asset.

What makes you a writer is your thinking and your ear. Model outputs are recombinations of what was already ingested — which is the opposite of a voice.

The training was not consensual.

Every major commercial model was built on books taken without permission, payment, or any author control over how the work resurfaces.

Authorship is a claim about origin.

To put your name on a work is to say the words and the thoughts are yours. That is what a byline has always meant.

Trust is the actual product.

Misrepresenting generated text as human-written damages the relationship between readers and writers, which is the only thing holding any of this up.

authorsguild.org/resource/ai-best-practices-for-authors

REMEMBER THIS

Four risks that cost real money

1

Generated text cannot be copyrighted.

It isn't human authorship, so it must be disclosed and disclaimed on a copyright registration. Knowingly hiding it can be treated as fraud on the Copyright Office and can invalidate the whole registration.

2

Your contract warrants the work is yours.

Every book contract contains a representation that the manuscript is original to you. Generated text isn't original authorship — including it can breach that warranty and let the publisher terminate.

3

Outputs can carry other people's books.

Models memorise more than their makers admit. What comes back may contain recognisable protected expression from a living author — and you are the one who published it.

4

What you paste in may train the model.

By default, drafts, outlines and interview transcripts you upload can be used for training. That can expose confidential material and collide with a publisher's exclusivity clause.

Note what unites one, two and four: the exposure comes from the concealment, not the keystroke.

THE GUILD'S MOST USEFUL IDEA

Not all use is the same use

The May revision added a framework the argument really needs: a spectrum. Background uses sit at one end, passing off generated prose as your own sits at the other, and treating them as equivalent helps nobody.

LEAST FRAUGHT

MOST FRAUGHT

Spelling & grammar check	Research & sounding board	Outlines, indices, admin	Generated prose, lightly revised	Mimicking a living writer's voice
Ubiquitous. Uniformly considered ethical and professional.	Fine — provided nothing crosses over into your text, literally or in substance.	Auxiliary work. Doesn't even disqualify a Human Authored certification.	Presented as your writing: generally considered unethical, possibly plagiarism.	Ethically out, and could expose you to unfair competition and infringement claims.

Two tests, not one: did the machine do your thinking, and was anyone misled about it?

EXAMPLES

Using AI for Research & a Sounding Board

- **AI as research assistant:** What should I investigate?
- **AI as sounding board:** What do you think of these possibilities?
- **AI can be a sounding board without being the author.**
- **Research → Questions → Possibilities → Judgment → Story**
  The first three can be assisted by AI. The judgment and the story still belong to the writer.

https://blog.bham.ac.uk/clic-dickens/2023/08/07/jane-austen-keywords/

EXAMPLES

Using AI for Outlines, Indices & Admin

- **Create an outline:** “Here's my 35-chapter outline. Turn it into a one-page story map showing the major plot arcs, character arcs, and where each arc resolves. Don't change the story.” The AI is organizing your existing creative decisions.

- **Index:** give AI your manuscript and ask: “Create a Regency-era glossary from this manuscript. Identify references to clothing, food, transportation, social customs, legal concepts, and household practices, with chapter references.”

- **Admin:**
  - create a submission schedule
  - draft a query letter from information you've supplied
  - format a bibliography
  - create social-media posts announcing the book
  - organize reader questions for an author Q&A

EXAMPLES

Generated Prose, Lightly Revised

- **You might prompt:** “Write a 700-word scene in which Elizabeth confronts Darcy after discovering that he secretly paid off a debt threatening her family's home. Set it at Pemberley. Elizabeth is angry but trying to maintain her composure; Darcy is embarrassed and defensive. Write it in a restrained, early-19th-century literary style reminiscent of Jane Austen, with witty but emotionally charged dialogue.”

- **You revise it lightly:**
  - Replace a few awkward phrases.
  - Add a joke you thought of.
  - Remove a paragraph that feels too melodramatic.
  - Change the ending.
  - Maybe rewrite 10–15% of the sentences.

- **Who wrote it???** Is that AI-assisted writing—or AI-generated writing with human editing?

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

What the Guild asks of you

- **Disclose substantial generated text publicly.** Front matter, or a note at the foot of a piece. Readers have a right to know before they buy, not after they feel tricked.
- **Tell your agent and editor first.** Before delivery, not after. Approved uses belong in the contract or an amendment.
- **Ask whether your publisher has its own policy.** Many houses are writing rules that sit outside your contract. Ask your editor, in writing.
- **Paper your collaborators.** Ghostwriters, co-authors, freelance editors, book coaches, cover artists: contract for disclosure, and bar more than de minimis generated text without your written approval.
- **Fact-check and bias-check every output.** Fabrications arrive fluent and confident. So do the training data's prejudices.
- **Don't quietly replace a human.** Translators, narrators, illustrators and indexers are fighting the same fight. If you must use a tool, prefer models trained on material obtained ethically.
- **Reserve or license your AI rights on purpose.** The Guild publishes model contract clauses so a publisher can't generate your translation, cover, or audiobook without approval.

Paraphrased from the Guild's eleven recommended practices.

TRANSPARENCY, MADE CONCRETE

A mark you can put on a book: Human Authored Certification

3,000+
authors certified

5,000+
titles registered

$10
per title — free for Guild members

What it means

- The text was fully written by human beings, allowing a de minimis exception for things like spell-check and machine-built indices.
- Research, brainstorming and outlining do not disqualify a work. The mark is about who wrote the sentences.
- A numbered mark, registered with the USPTO, searchable in a public database — a verifiable chain from author to reader.

It is not a scan.

It's a certification and a promise, enforced mainly by the fact that the community is watching.

authorsguild.org/human · open to all US authors and publishers since March 2026

TRANSPARENCY

Takeaway one: say what you did

Disclosure is not a confession. It is what makes the work defensible.

A line in an author's note costs you almost nothing when it's voluntary, and costs you everything when it's extracted.

This room is already good at this.

Fandom created a disclosure culture and has run it for decades: tags, warnings, credits, 'inspired by,' remix permissions, thanks. We label provenance obsessively and it has never once ruined the reading experience.

Keep your receipts.

Drafts with a version history. Keep the outlines, the marginalia, the voice memos, the abandoned second act. Process can be evidence, and a writer with receipts is nearly unaccusable.

Extend it to everyone you work with.

Co-writers, cover artists, podficcers, exchange partners. Agree what's allowed before deadlines, not after.

And don't convict on a score.

A percentage is not proof. Real concerns should go privately to the author — not to your socials. We get to decide what kind of community we are on this, and public accusation on a detector reading is the wrong answer.

HUMAN CREATIVITY

Takeaway two: the voice is the asset

A reader has never wanted a text. They have wanted a mind.

Austen published anonymously, and readers immediately wanted to know whose mind they were in.

Outputs have no voice by construction.

A gen AI's text is a recombination of everything ingested — a competent average of other people's sentences. Your voice is your own and it’s a huge asset.

Fan fiction is the proof.

Few here are writing for an advance. Many of us write because the labour is the pleasure — the choosing of one word over another, whenever we have time to write, for whatever audience we might have. Writing was never only about producing text.

The camera did not kill painting.

It took realism off painting's hands and pushed it somewhere stranger. The honest version of that analogy: it was fine for painting and ruinous for thousands of working portraitists. Which is why the norms we set now matter.

Guiding principle one, Authors Guild: it is your original voice, thinking and creativity that make you a writer.

Two sentences to take away

Tell the truth about how the work was made.
Then go and do the work.

Everything else — the detectors, the scandals, the percentages, the timelines — is downstream of those two.

Questions? Comments? Let’s discuss!

Sources & further reading

Authors Guild — AI Best Practices for Authors

First published Feb 2024, revised May 2026. Guiding principles, risks, categories of use, eleven recommended practices. Free to all.

authorsguild.org/resource/ai-best-practices-for-authors

Authors Guild — AI Model Publishing Contract Clauses

Ready-to-use language reserving or licensing AI rights, and blocking machine-made translations, covers and narration without approval.

authorsguild.org/advocacy/artificial-intelligence/ai-model-clauses

Authors Guild — Human Authored certification

Definition, FAQ, usage guidelines and the public registry.

authorsguild.org/human

The Substack Post — 'An author's $2 million book deal was pulled over suspected AI use'

Roundtable with Kathleen Schmidt, Lincoln Michel and John Paul Brammer, ed. Danya Issawi. 6 August 2026. Primary source for the Falade case.

post.substack.com/p/an-authors-2-million-book-deal-was