

ChatGPT Cooked Me Up a Paella!

Yes, you read that right. The other day, that blasted ChatGPT everyone talks about, that artificial intelligence bot capable of writing a book or planning a nuclear winter, made me a paella. In the cookbot version of course. The result was a yellowish hodgepodge with mostly overcooked rice, that carried the aroma of mass-produced seasonings. At the bottom of the paella – actually the name of the pan, (a name that has gradually come to refer instead to its authentic Valencian contents) – oozed a kerosene-like liquid, the consequence of not having properly calculated the amount of extra virgin olive oil needed for the *sofrito*, the traditional tomato sauce base of this universally embraced Mediterranean miracle. The signature dish of Spanish gastronomy can be attempted by anyone, but very few manage to execute it with finesse. In a nutshell, the AI cookbot made me a cold paella like the ones sold every day at the stalls in London's Borough Market: a mound of chewy rice with things in it.

The fact is, making a real paella requires much more than simply following internet tutorials, or even a master recipe. As with almost every human activity, it involves simmering feelings, improvised handfuls of salt and judgements made 'by eye', sips of wine as all the flavours intermingle, and a large dose of intuition – a finishing touch with which no artificial intelligence is familiar. A good paella starts with the memories of those who knew how to gather the best orange tree wood, a task that requires a sharp sense of smell. It starts with a longing for those who are no longer with us, who taught us the ideal moment to dissolve the strands of saffron that, like a precious elixir, fill every grain perfumed by those fruity embers with flavour and colour. Not to mention the thrill of passing the secrets inherited from our parents and grandparents on to our children. An AI should bear all this in mind if it ever makes me paella.

Let me be clear, I am no Luddite. Of course artificial intelligence will benefit us greatly. But like ultra- processed food, it provides immediate, automatic gratification that satisfies the body but not the soul.

Indeed, that darn ChatGPT has no idea how it feels when a single sensation drives you to simultaneously laugh with joy and weep tears of nostalgia. It will never know the petrichor of earth left sodden by a summer storm. This AI never learned to ride a bicycle. It never fell off and scraped its knees, then decided against all reason to carry on, as stubborn as a mule. It has never spent a sleepless night for the simple fact that it does not know what it is to love. It knows nothing because it loves nothing.

With this final flourish, let it be made clear that these words have been strung together, not by an artificial intelligence, but by a very human one. With all its delicious imperfections.

By Humberto Montero, *El Colombiano*, 16 February 2023