What It Means to Have Meaning: Artist Statement

AI’s Poetic Appropriation of the Human Imagination

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

By
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Artist Statement

Before I wrote a single word of this, this project that is both mandatory and magnificent, I was impeded by some obstacle, the guidelines set unto me by my alma mater, Liberty University. Particularly, I was impeded by a word I was unfamiliar with, “impetus.” So, I did what any modern person would do in my situation, and I Googled the word. Immediately, thanks to the innovations of modern humanity, the definition appeared before me like a ghost to a sacred command.

noun: impetus
“The force or energy with which a body moves.” Or, “The force that makes something happen or happen more quickly.”

Thanks to Google Languages, which is a subset of Oxford University Press, I am able to obtain this definition with ease and precision. The internet is an amazing thing, as is technology. The Latin etymology ‘impetus’ comes from the Latin word “impetere,” which is one way of saying ‘assault’ or ‘force.’ So, through Google’s astute findings, I have come to the conclusion that I must write something I am compelled to, something that is heavy on my heart and bouncing on my brain, a “...force that makes something happen or happen more quickly.” This leads me to the all too important existential notion: What it means to have meaning. Philosophers, they have debated this for thousands of years. Poets, they have turned it into verse.

For the better part of a year, I have been wrapped up in my life as a student, a teacher, a writer, a son of God, and a poet. In this time and during my successes and failures, a particularly daunting question has been posed to me: What is my immediate purpose? My Master’s program is coming to a close, I am developing my craft as a writer, I was recently hired as a journalist (which I am very pleased about), and I am considering a move to Japan indefinitely. I am spread
thinner than the last morsel of apricot jam left in the jar, but I still have to consider what comes next, how I will be making money, with what use will I be making my poetry, and with what means I will have my own meaning. Oftentimes, I feel like the fox in Wendell Berry’s poem, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,”—“who makes more tracks than necessary, some in the wrong direction.”

I came upon the idea for my thesis one afternoon while visiting my parents in Lakeland, Florida. Normally, they live in South Africa, where they do missions, but they are on an extended furlough due to unforeseen destinies. I was sitting at their dining room table with my soon-to-be brother-in-law, and he was going on about some automated process that I knew very little about. He called it ChatGPT, an AI, which, apparently, could write anything it was told to write, albeit something it could not understand or was not allowed to write (we’ll get into that later). Like a curious cat looking to be killed, I asked him if I could take a look at it. He slid his laptop over to me and I began playing with it like a toy. To my amazement, it could write whatever I asked of it. It wrote copy, answered questions, and came up with jokes, all in the span of a few seconds. I had to know more. I needed to look into Pandora’s Box. I asked the AI to write a poem, not just any poem, but a sonnet. To my amazement and horror, it wrote a sonnet more perfectly than I ever could. It did so in less than ten seconds. Awe, fear, jealousy, insecurity, all these emotions flooded my mind after learning a robot was capable of writing something so succinct. I felt like a monkey with a kaleidoscope. I was on the verge of going bananas, when the idea for this, my creative project occurred to me. I knew then what I had to do.
Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of human imagination and creativity as it pertains to poetry. With the rise of “intelligent” machines, it is the duty of scholars, thinkers, philosophers, and artists to gauge the ethics of using robots to create art, create information, and create in general. With that in mind, this thesis aims to distinguish the definitions of natural and artificial intelligence. This distinction is at the heart of what makes poetry inherently human. AI poses a threat to poetry and the act of artistic expression. Additionally, AI poses a threat to the human imagination. The aim of the critical paper is to expose these truths regarding artificial intelligence. Thus, reclaiming poetry and the act of creativity. The creative manuscript, Random Access Memories, is an experiment to see if the reader can tell what is human and what is not, and a showcase of just how far AI has come to stealing what is inherently human.

Process for the Work

For the sake of this study, ChatGPT will be my direct competitor, my enemy per se. Famous ancient Chinese general, Sun Tzu, says "Know thy enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are sure to be defeated in every battle." By this reasoning, which has transcended centuries, I will do all I can to know my enemy. I know myself, as much as I am able at the moment, so all that is left to do is to know ChatGPT as well. I will do this in a series of steps. First, I must stay up-to-date with the updates and changes to the system because it changes and improves on a daily basis. Secondly, I must know just how far the AI is capable of going, in terms of writing poetry, that is. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, famous writer and composer, said: "The world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless." To that extent, one of my goals is to become aware of ChatGPT’s limitations as they pertain to the imagination. In short, imagination is akin to creativity, and I, as a human being, am inclined to believe that I possess
more imagination and more creativity than a generative pre-trained transformer (GPT). I will be giving the AI prompts and commands to test its imaginative processes, its avenues for creativity, and its innovations regarding English poetry.

The purpose of this thesis and the creative manuscript is to do what the title suggests, and explore what it means to have meaning. AI is a threat to literature, which is an expression of humanity. Even the *Frog and Toad* series, a children’s book series written by Arnold Lobel, which follows its two main characters, a frog and a toad, is a kind of human expression. Another example is Shel Silverstein’s *Where The Sidewalk Ends*, a collection of whimsical children’s poems that capture the human condition in a strange, fun way. The thesis and creative manuscript will dive into the dangers of AI in literature both directly and indirectly. *Random Access Memories* is a kind of poetry experiment where both human and AI creativity is put to the test. This thesis, on the other hand, is a detailed outline of the experiment, an exploration of form, and the research findings it took to create this collection.

In addition, the AI and I will be working extensively with different poetic forms. From the early days of verse with Chaucer, to the contemporary days of Billy Collins and Joy Harjo, poetic form acts as a kind of constraint to poetry. While form is considered unbecoming by modern poets, it is important to know the forms of the past as well as the present. Pablo Picasso, known for his abstract art and his innovative painting style, Cubism, said, “Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.” Similarly, this quote from the Dalai Lama: “Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly.” There are merits for young writers to go to college and to attend poetry workshops where form is often studied. Learning the forms, understanding them, and knowing how to write in them, broadens the palette/palate; and I mean this both in taste and in artistic execution. Poetic form is human because it captures a sense of
humanity that is both inherent and created. Forms such as sonnets and haikus are known for their cultural roots, and the locality of their conception. They reflect the nature of the people who wrote in them. Likewise, forms can be used to express inherent human traits and emotions. How better to express something you have lost, something that is gone, than through a villanelle? Dylan Thomas gives us an example with his poem, “Do not go gentle into that good night,” which is arguably one of the most loved English poems.

With this in mind, it is important to note that ChatGPT responds to poetic form well. Simply asking the AI: “Write a poem about butterflies landing on a crucifix in a chapel,” will not yield the kind of response I need for the collection of poems. In fact, it will write a poem that is bland and cliche. The more direct the prompt I give, the more information the machine has to go off of, which helps it write the poem it ought to write. Rather, I should give the AI a prompt like: “Write a terza rima about life being a long, winding path that leads to either glory or destruction. The words ‘Dante’ and ‘Inferno’ must be used once.” One could argue that I am limiting the AI’s creative process, but I refute that all I am doing is narrowing its artistic lens. Scientists use microscopes, children use magnifying glasses. Lastly, as it pertains to both the creative manuscript and the thesis, this project will be treated as a legitimate experiment, and research will be used as a tool to narrow the critical and artistic lens. The experiment, as well as the research, will better inform the outcome of this thesis, as well as create a positive environment for artistic expression for the AI and for myself.

Vision for the Work

The vision I have for this thesis is for it to work for my creative manuscript and vice versa. The creative manuscript is for those looking to read poems, just like any other collection of poetry would be. Although, the reader will be informed what kind of poetry collection this
really is, that, yes, it is a collection of artistic pieces, but the entire collection is a symbol, a charge to the reader and to humanity. The book’s design specifically asks the reader to read at least two poems at a time. There will be many prompts in this collection. The AI will write its own poems regarding the prompts, and I will do the same regarding the same set of prompts. That being said, if there is a prompt that reads: “Write a sonnet about people loving others for the sake of self-gain,” the AI will write a poem, I will write a poem, and they will be displayed side by side on adjacent pages for the reader to read. The reader is not going to be told which poem is mine and which one belongs to ChatGPT. The reader is tasked with discerning which poem is human and which one is artificially crafted. I will go over the rules of the collection in its introduction. I believe some poems will be easy to tell which are mine and which ones are not, but there will be some that will be very difficult. I will never reveal which poems are mine and which ones are the AI’s. Not only will this unsettle the reader in an aesthetically pleasing manner, but it will highlight the danger of AI eclipsing human imagination. The book will have an introduction, which I am sure will include some of this thesis, a table of contents, poems, and an afterword regarding AI at the end.

I am writing this collection for publication. I am committed to my duties as a student at Liberty University, but this is a creative project I would like to see sold in bookstores. I think the world needs to fall in love with poetry again. More specifically, I think the world needs to fall in love with the craft and skillfulness of versification. I envision the reader interacting with poetry in a way they have never done before. I would love for young readers to read this collection. That is why I have written the poems with form, something they will recognize as ‘poetry.’ In addition, I want these poems to be accessible to the everyday reader. I would like to be, as Henry Wordsworth Longfellow puts it, a “humbler poet.” After reading the collection, readers are
welcome to read my thesis; a deeper dive into the world of AI and literature. ChatGPT is certainly an impressive piece of human ingenuity, but its capabilities are potentially dangerous for human self-actualization. This is something I want people to realize. AI limits the amount of work a person needs to do to achieve something. If a person hasn’t worked for something, for example, have they earned it? So, how will I accomplish publication with this collection? My plan—after this is turned into Liberty University’s archives—is to pitch the idea of this collection to a publication as a weekly series. Each week will highlight a different story regarding AI in the workplace, in education, and in the world as a whole. Afterwards, there will be two poems for the reader to discern which is human and which is not. When this weekly series comes to an end, I will put together all the poems into one, unified collection.

Literary Context for the Work

To provide evidence for my claims, I have compiled a list of sources, some old and some new. The critical essay is separated into two main parts: Poetry Reflects Humanity—AI Mimics It and AI’s Appropriation of the Imagination. In addition to these two sections, there is an introduction and a conclusion, but most of my sources will be used in the main sections. For the first section, which deals with humanity reflected in poetry, I will be using scholarly journals on the topics of poetry and autonomy, and the definitions of natural and artificial intelligence. For the second section, which is considerably longer and more in-depth, I will be using sources that highlight AI’s appropriation of human intelligence, mainly in the realm of poetics. In addition to the scholarly articles used for this section, I will be using some news articles, as they pertain to current trends, and articles that feature the opinions of writers and poets. These sources will aid me in making the claim that AI is detrimental to literature as a whole and that AI-generated poetry is not poetry at all, but an appropriation of human creativity and intelligence.
Meaning to Me As a Christian Scholar

As a creation from The Creator, this project means a lot to me. I do not see poetry as something I merely like to do. I see it as one of the highest forms of worship known to man. We are made in God’s image, and what better way to honor Him than by being creators ourselves? That being said, it can be easy to ‘play God,’ but I know that whatever I create cannot come close to God’s grandeur. There is power in those words and a purposeful perversion of the statement. There are many ‘I am’ statements in the Bible, maybe none more famous than “I am the way, the truth, and the life” John 14:6. That being said, one could argue that AI is the God of this collection. Similarly, one could argue that humanity is reclaiming authority in this collection. Either way, I will leave it open-ended, for the reader to decide, and to live in the unabsoluteness of their own decision.
What It Means to Have Meaning: Critical Paper

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly advancing and becoming increasingly integrated into various aspects of our lives, including the field of literature. The impact of AI on literature is a topic of growing interest, as it raises questions about the future of creative writing and the role of machines in artistic expression. From computer-generated poetry to AI-assisted writing, the use of technology is transforming the way we approach literature. This essay will explore the influence of AI on literature, discussing the potential benefits and drawbacks of this emerging trend and considering what it could mean for the future of storytelling.

Would the above paragraph be any different if I told you it was written by AI? It was, in fact, written by Openai’s ChatGPT. I simply opened a search tab on my laptop, went to the site (chat.openai.com/), and typed: “Write the introduction to an essay about AI and its influence on literature in 100 words.” You might be surprised to know that AI has developed to a point where even scholars of literature cannot recognize what is human and what is not. ChatGPT executed this command flawlessly, albeit the above paragraph is 99 words and I asked for 100. Nonetheless, could you have known that that was the work of a robot and not a real human being?

Poetry is an ancient, sacred practice. It is even called the great tradition. Poets and poetry readers have preserved the art for thousands of years and, while it has changed and evolved many times over, it has been reserved for constructing, deconstructing, and versifying the lives of humanity. Some poets wrote of love, death, war, and all the other grand things that happen in a lifetime—others wrote of food, beer, travel, and the simple things of life. That is the beauty of poetry. Poetry has always been and will always be an expression of artistic freedom, an act of
autonomous creativity. Although it is not always true that poets can express this freedom freely, it still exists inside the marrow of their very souls. Louis Simpson, famous American poet, in his book on poetry, *The Character of the Poet*, writes: “Poetry must be conceived as a force beyond the self, and the poet as the medium of this source.” This statement is so simple yet so profound, but what does it infer? Simpson suggests that poetry is not conjured from nothing, but rather is uncovered. Poetry already exists and all it takes is for the poet to find it, dust it off, and present it to the reader. There are many poets who believe their creative autonomy transcends them from the plain of their own ordinary existence, many of whom believe they are God; but it is not a poet’s responsibility to do so, it is not a poet’s place to say: “Let there be light.” Rather, it is a poet’s responsibility to create within the created, to recognize the limits of humanity, to say: “Look, there is light, it was let.”

AI’s appropriation of poetic voice is a corruption of this sacred practice. Simpson continues: “Am I asking for poets to be political? In the largest and deepest sense, yes. I am asking for poetry that represents the lives we really have and makes our thoughts and feelings known. I am not asking for propaganda. Poets are free men and women—they cannot serve an ideology, for to do so is not to be free.” Therein lies the dilemma of artificial intelligence and poetry. “...poetry that represents the lives we really have…” cannot be applied to a machine that has not lived a life, but exists in a space for other living beings to live through it. Furthermore, on the topic of serving “an ideology,” poets cannot do this because it would go against the nature of their creative freedom. Poetry does not exist in a space of creative ideals. If that were true, there would be no breaking of rules, no nuance, and no room for critical speculation. But this is the space that artificially generated poetry exists within. When given a prompt, ChatGPT will produce a poem based on its Neural Network Intuition, or how IBM defines it, “artificial neural
networks (ANNs) or simulated neural networks (SNNs), [which] are a subset of machine learning and are at the heart of deep learning algorithms. Their name and structure are inspired by the human brain, mimicking the way that biological neurons signal to one another.” It is the nature of being for humans and the nature of being for AI that brings me to my next topic.

Poetry Reflects Humanity—AI Mimics It

Artificial Intelligence is a product of human ingenuity, but it is a far cry to say that AI reflects humanity. At the very least, AI mimics what it believes is ‘human.’ That said, poetry, in all its forms and practices, reflects humanity. Since the dawn of poesy and versification, the human condition has been spoken through the voice of poets, reflected for all to see or hear as genuine human experience. No matter how matter-of-fact or far-fetched a poem can be, it reflects humanity, and the need to express one’s imagination. Poetry is written of the people, by the people, for the people. It is communication, communion, and community. Edward Sankowski refrains this sentiment in Poetry and Autonomy, defining poetry as “… one of the arts. The arts taken together are among the institutions of community. By the arts is meant not only a class of artifacts, but the area of social life in which these artifacts have meaning.” This is no revelation to literary historians, but it is an important distinction due to the fact that machines do not ‘live’ among humans, they do not share our ‘natural-born’ community as humans do.

In addition to “institutions of community,” poetry belongs to the autonomous individual. While one could argue that an AI can also be an individual, one could not, on the other hand, argue that AI has a voice. No, not a voice that speaks, articulates, and sounds out words, but a voice that is distinct from any other. The Poetic Voice “…is difficult to define, but it has to do with the distinctive characteristics of a particular poet's work. As readers, we often recognize a writer's work before we see his or her name…Poetic voice is rooted in the use and repetition of
specific elements—technical elements that make a poem recognizable as belonging to one poetry.” (Zupan). For example, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Frost have recognizable poetic voices. Even contemporary poets, such as Billy Collins, are capable of honing a poetic voice. This is because the poetic voice derives from one’s individuality. An AI is incapable of being a community, nor is it capable of being an individual.

Poetry reflects humanity because it is written by humans. From nursery rhymes to ballads, poetry can only exist when it is written by humans. AI may be capable of writing something that looks and sounds like a poem, but it is missing a key ingredient. For example, if you had peppers, onions, tomatoes, and cheese, it would not matter—you could not make an omelet if you did not have an egg. Similarly, poetry is impossible without humanity. Charles Upton, in his article, *Can Artificial Intelligence Really Write Poetry*, writes: “Poetry is an act of human insight, feeling and intent; the poetic craft exists to serve and express these powers—which is why, if it is called upon to act in the absence of them, whatever it produces will be dead. Artificial Intelligence has never written a poem, fallen in love, or offered a prayer to God—and it never will, since these are properly human actions. Therefore we can say that those who think machines can write poems have begun to forget what a human being is: and to be a human being, while at the same time failing to understand what a human being actually is, the greatest misfortune imaginable.”

Lastly, poetry reflects humanity because it utilizes human intelligence. AI may be able to mimic what humans do, but no matter how close it gets, it will not measure up. Even if AI were to be able to write “better” poetry than the best poets in the world, it still would not be considered real poetry. Just like how Miracle Whip is not real mayonnaise, despite its color,
shape, and taste, AI poetry is not really poetry. Robert Sokowlski defines this situation acutely in *Natural and Artificial Intelligence*:

One of the first things that must be clarified is the ambiguous word artificial. This adjective can be used in two senses, and it is important to determine which one applies in the term artificial intelligence. The word artificial is used in one sense when it is applied, say, to flowers, and in another sense when it is applied to light. In both cases something is called artificial because it is fabricated. But in the first usage artificial means that the thing seems to be, but really is not, what it looks like. The artificial is the merely apparent; it just shows how something else looks. Artificial flowers are only paper, not flowers at all; anyone who takes them to be flowers is mistaken. But artificial light is light and it does illuminate. It is fabricated as a substitute for natural light, but once fabricated it is what it seems to be. In this sense the artificial is not the merely apparent, not simply an imitation of something else. The appearance of the thing reveals what it is, not how something else looks.

Although something may be perceived as something natural, the absence of an organic conception nullifies its legitimacy.
AI’s Appropriation of the Imagination

The Western world takes cultural appropriation very seriously. Culture, like poetry, is ancient and sacred, and oftentimes appropriated, misused. Examples of appropriation can be seen in early television with indigenous, African, and Asian traditions, mimicked and misused for the sake of mere entertainment. Cultural Appropriation happens all the time, but that does not mean it should be tolerated. What about the appropriation of human intelligence? Does this same logic apply when an artificial intelligence writes a poem?

This is, in fact, a place for AI in this world. Artificial intelligence is an inspiring invention, a true indication of human ingenuity, and it should be celebrated. AI can help answer questions, solve problems, and in many cases, according to Nils Christopher Köbis, it can actually save lives:

AI has been implemented in a wide range of domains, hinting at its positive potential to affect society. AI can contribute to faster, more efficient processes, invigorate the economy, address environmental challenges, and deliver breakthroughs in biological sciences, such as predicting the folding of proteins. In the health sector, AI systems used for medical diagnostics and decision support have achieved and surpassed human expert levels across various tasks. There has been rapid progress in language generation and understanding, a domain long considered an almost unconquerable bastion of human intelligence. Recently released large language models (LLMs) enable the production of human-like text ranging from poetry to news articles, as well as writing computer code or holding conversations via chatbots.
The apparent benefits of AI are balanced by the risks and dangers it poses. Likewise, only a fool would allow AI to fall into the hands of just anyone. AI, like a hammer, a shovel, a saw, or a gun, is a tool. In the right hands, AI can do amazing things. In the wrong hands, AI could quite literally be a weapon:

However, AI can also have negative repercussions that are often seemingly unintentional. Introducing AI systems in both the private and public sector can produce undesirable outcomes as a result of biased input data, faulty algorithms or irresponsible implementation... Besides such apparent unintended effects, ever more cases are being documented in which AI is intentionally weaponised. To name a few examples, scammers have used AI based hyperrealistic imitations of audio-visual content called deepfakes for novel fraud schemes. In a single instance, they defrauded more than US$240,000 from a CEO who falsely believed to be speaking to the boss of the parent company. AI algorithms can also be used as transformative tools for algorithmic collusion, such as where algorithms autonomously coordinate to fix prices in a collusive manner.

AI must and will have checks and balances, but that does not nullify the danger it poses to academia and poetics. High schools and universities around the globe are struggling to keep AI in check. Students are using AI to write their papers and do their research. This poses two major problems. One is large-scale cheating in school, resulting in a population of unqualified graduates. Two, students attending school will fail to do the very thing they are there to do: learn. According to Euronews, “The use of AI tools in copywriting has sparked an outcry around the world. In the United States, public schools
in New York and Seattle have decided to block ChatGPT from their devices and WiFi networks. In France, the prestigious Sciences Po University in Paris has also just announced a strict ban on its use. Cathelin says 80 to 90 percent of her colleagues oppose these AI text generators, which they perceive as a cheating aid.” This, unfortunately, is only the beginning of the threat towards academia. According to CNBC, “…Recent research from professors at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, New York University and Princeton suggests that educators should be just as worried about their own jobs.”

It is imperative that AI-generated poetry is not considered ‘real’ poetry. To say that ChatGPT has an imagination is dangerous and encroaches on dehumanization. This is why an organic conception is the key to this issue: “An automobile moves artificially; it moves only because human beings have constructed it to move and have made it go by the release of stored energy.” While ChatGPT uses neural network intuition, we must not judge “the computer in opposition to the brain” (Sokolowski). Doing so allows the AI to play by the same rules. This is not a game of intellectual designs and processes. It is natural vs. artificial.

Speaking of games, there is no AI test more famous than Alan Turing’s The Imitation Game. Often called the Turing Test, the game challenges AI to pass as human. Turing even asked the AI to “Please write me a sonnet on the subject of the Forth Bridge,” which it was unable to do at the time, 1950. Turing documented the Imitation game in Computing Machinery and intelligence. A genius computer scientist, Turing also wrote poetry. At the beginning of his study, he wrote: “This should begin with definitions of the meaning of the terms ‘machine’ and ‘think.’ The definitions might be framed so as to reflect as far as possible the normal use of the words, but this attitude is dangerous.” Even at the time, Turing was considering the differences between
artificial and natural intelligence. Fast forward to 2023, and AI, ChatGPT, is writing poetry just fine. In fact, it writes sonnets better than the average person could, despite most of them being “cliched and predictable” (Perlow).

Unfortunately, many people do not believe there is a difference between natural and artificial poetry. To them, poetry is just words, lines, and rhymes. It makes sense they would consider AI-generated poetry as real poetry. Even scarier, people may come to believe it to be ‘good’ poetry. The danger this poses to poetry is that it turns the craft into a “product” instead of an action. If poetry is not an action then there is “no essential difference between humanly-composed poetry and machine-composed pseudo-poetry.” To do so is to reject “natural-born human beings” and to accept, on some level, the “horrors of transhumanism” (Upton). Charles Upton is an American poet and esotericist, and it is clear he does not think poetry belongs to AI. In his writings found in The Decadent Review, he states:

The notion that poetry is a product which, like a hunting knife or a porcelain plate, might be manufactured either by human beings or machines, is part of a greater and darker universe of wrongheaded ideas. Take chess, for example. We now have Artificial Intelligence systems that can beat the greatest human chess masters. This, someone might conceivably argue, is a great boon to humanity because now we won’t have to play chess anymore! We can avoid all the tension and anxiety that go with seeking mastery in a particular field of endeavor. We can finally relax, and use our newly-won free time to play video games, or maybe to watch pornography—at least until robots are developed who can do these things for us, thereby granting us an ever-greater degree of “freedom”! The problem here is that if we look at chess-playing as nothing more than a technique for producing
an ever-increasing number of winning chess games, for upping the gross national product of successful chess, we have completely failed to understand its true nature and function, which is to train the human being in the art of strategic intelligence. Likewise, poetry could be defined as a traditional method of training human perception and expression in aesthetic sensibility, conceptual subtlety, and the discernment of elusive emotional tones that are too unique to be categorized—which means that turning the function of composing poetry over to algorithms is as meaningless and counter-productive as expecting to bulk up by having robots do your weight training for you or to enhance your mental acuity by directing your computer to perform all your brain exercises while you vegetate, ingest opioids, or sleep. When, exactly, did we lose the ability to distinguish profit from loss in the field of our basic humanity?

Upton is a member of the Poets Against Artificial Intelligence society. On one hand, there is growing popularity for the use of ChatGPT in everyday use. On the other hand, poets, writers, and literary experts are joining efforts to see AI distanced from literature altogether.

In The End

I would be lying if I did not say I share the same sentiment as Upton. But where does it come from, these feelings? I am both concerned for the future of poetry and poetics and, if I am being quite honest, I am scared that my own efforts and talents as a writer may be eclipsed by machines. That said, if Upton’s and Sokowski’s beliefs hold firm, there is nothing AI can do that will erase poets from their own conceived existence.
The PAAI website is just one page that reads: “We pledge a moral code amongst poets, editors, and publishers to ensure that the content we write, edit, and publish is created by human beings. We ask for transparency in the originator of a text and how it was produced. We do not oppose the use of computers but ask for the likes of ChatGPT-produced content to have explicit notes to be AI-generated. Art should not be disconnected from the soul.” Until ChatGPT, or any other AI for that matter, has a soul, there is nothing to worry about. If, at some point in time, machines are able to obtain a ‘soul,” I believe poetry would have already ceased to exist, and ‘humans’ would be on the brink of extinction.

I once visited the Salvador Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. It was my first time coming face to face with some of the paintings I had grown up seeing my entire life. I stood before Dalí’s Apparatus and Hand, an oil-on-panel painting made in 1927. Like many of his paintings, he explored the abstract surrealism of personhood, particularly as it pertained to psychology. I thought of my own personhood, my own psychology. As I did, I recognized the moment I was in, that being in the presence of something Dalí himself had touched, wrought over, was something special in itself. When I left the museum I walked through the gift shop where reprints of many of his paintings were on sale. The reprints looked like his paintings, exactly like them actually, but fundamentally they were not. Why? They looked like his paintings. Some were even of the actual size as their originals. Why did I ascertain that those reprints were not actually his paintings? Part of me still does not know. All I know is that the real ones were in the museum, the pretenders were in the gift shop.
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Random Access Memories

Samuel Louis Spencer
and
Chat GPT
“Driving this road down to paradise
Letting the sunlight into my eyes
Our only plan is to improvise

And it’s crystal clear that I don’t ever want it to end
If I had my way, I would never leave
Keep building these random memories
Turning our days into melodies
But since I can’t stay

I’ll just keep playing back
These fragments of time
Everywhere I go…”

_Fragments of Time_
-Daft Punk
Introduction

For all of my life, I have wondered what my purpose is on this earth. Am I merely a creature destined to eat, sleep, and mate, or am I something more special, destined, devined, or even conspired? Poetry has played a major role in my life. For every unfortunate experience, there is a poem. For every milestone, there is a poem. For every interaction, whether insignificant or grand, there is a poem. Poems have made a kind of channel in my soul where words seem to flow both in and out. It is the thing that makes me want to be a better human. And I don’t mean morally (even though that is a good goal), but in whatever way a human is to be measured. What is a human?

Human: noun

a human being, especially a person as distinguished from an animal or (in science fiction) an alien.

Distinguished from an animal or an alien? No, no, no. There must be a greater meaning. I say this because some human beings are distinguishable from other human beings. Therefore, one human is more human than another? Is that where the word ‘inhumane’ comes from? Regardless, there is a threat to humanity and humans are failing to take notice. It is one thing to trap humans using only but a screen that slides up and down. It is another to let a robot do something that is inherently human. Do I care when a vending machine succeeds in giving me a bag of Cheetos? No, I do not. But you better believe I care when a robot writes a poem and someone calls it poetry. Poetry is inherently human. For me, it is the closest thing I can do to be closer to God. When the Bible tells me I am made in God’s image, I think so because I am a poet. So who gave that right to a robot? Who gave that right to ChatGPT?

This collection of poems has a purpose. I guarantee you, I wrote every single poem in this collection. But so did ChatGPT. Which ones are mine and which ones belong to the machine? That is for you to figure out. One main objective while reading this collection is to: one, enjoy reading poetry, and two, decipher which poems are mine and which poems are ChatGPT’s.

Every poem stems from a singular prompt. I wrote my own poem based on the prompt and ChatGPT did the same thing. Will you be able to tell the difference? How human are you?
Random Access Memories
Again, Ephemeral Again

Morning
The morning rises,
as do the birds in their song:
Renewal has come.

Midday
The sun dangles high,
a puppet hanging from string
announcing its warmth.

Night
Gently into dusk,
stars are stirring like children
waking into life.
Celestial Journey: A Day's Embrace

**Morning**
Golden rays break through,
Birds greet the world with song,
Dawn's gentle embrace.

**Midday**
Sun at its zenith,
Heat dances on shimmering air,
Nature seeks respite.

**Night**
Moon’s soft silver glow,
Stars whisper secrets above,
Dreams bloom in darkness.
Ode to Dead Leaves, to Saplings, to Poetry, and to Poetry

For dead leaves fall from branches hanging and swirl inside the winds that blow. The bows are swaying, chimes are banging, and in the wind the leaves will go.

The saplings grow when winds have scattered and through the dirt will slip their green, leaving the earth broken and tattered, young and fragile, speechless but seen.

What is but a bud will be a tree with roots and shoots and twigs that mime the turns and shifting of the gentle breeze, the bending fixtures, the bows of time.

The leaves will fall while winds take them away and bards will die so the poets can live. The saplings grow, the ones that chose to stay. The bows will bend and the ground will forgive.
Ode to Dead Leaves, to Saplings, to Poetry, and to Poetry

Oh, dead leaves, scattered on the ground,
Whispering secrets of seasons past.
In your fragile beauty, truth is found,
A testament to life's eternal cast.

From vibrant green to hues of gold,
Your weary dance greets autumn's crest.
Nature’s artistry, a sight to behold,
A cycle of life, a bittersweet zest.

Saplings emerge, tender and slight,
Reaching skyward with hope's embrace.
From death's touch, they take their flight,
Symbolizing growth, a future's trace.

And now, let's turn to poetry's might,
The language that speaks to our souls.
With words woven in rhythm and light,
It paints beauty, filling empty bowls.

Poetry, the art of the heart's core,
Expressing life's joy, pain, and more.
Through verses, we dream, we explore,
An eternal flame that forever soars.
The Hero's Journey Revealed

A hero’s journey starts at break of dawn, when light is low and dew clings to the fawn.

A hero stirs and know adventure waits, it stands like rested horses at the gates of greatness, ready for danger, for love, the only thing a hero should dream of.

He seeks the prairie, looks for strangers, too. He dreams of things defied by me and you.

He fights the monsters, kisses the maidens, and sleeps in hills where heroes are made in.

His rugged hands are firm, his lips are soft, his demons cower, and his hope not lost.

He travels lands for glory and honor, looks for a lady whose look upon her demands all chivalry that man can give: a promise; love, despite the world, will live.

The hero forgives, the hero is wise, the hero lives for the danger that’s nigh.

But what a hero really wants is a story, a legendary name, steeped in glory.
Legends Awaken: Heroes' Journey

In distant lands, where legends bloom,
Heroes set forth, defying their tomb.

They face the unknown, with hearts ablaze,
Through mountains steep and treacherous maze.

Across vast seas, through storms they sail,
Their spirits strong, they shall not fail.

In ancient woods, where secrets reside,
They conquer fears, their strength untied.

Through ruins old, they uncover lore,
Forging alliances, forevermore.

In battles waged, as one they stand,
Defeating darkness, hand in hand.

Their names immortal, forever graced,
Heroes of old, their legacy traced.

With every step, they inspire anew,
To chase our dreams, to become true.

On one page inscribed, their legends true,
Heroes' journeys, forever in view.
**Life’s Dividing Path**

This life, like paths of infinite design,
will show the ways with which we chose to go
and how we walked unholy or divine.

These winding ways that never end, bestow
the living traveler with all there is to want,
and all there is to need and want to know.

And daunting as may be, this lifelong jaunt
for Dante’s love cannot be made alone.
This life deserves a love, and confidant
to share the road, its waving flowers prone
to stay upon the path that leads to death,
to glory, the inferno, or the throne.
Dante’s Caution: The Journey of Life

Along life’s path, a journey vast and wide,
A winding trail that stretches far ahead,
In search of glory, or destruction’s tide.

Dante, the poet of infernal dread,
Unveiled the depths where lost souls found their fate,
Within his words, dark realms of anguish spread.

Choices abound, with consequences weight,
Each step we take, a turn that shapes our way,
For glory’s crown, or downfall’s bitter state.

Through verdant meadows, where sunlight holds sway,
Or shadowed forests, fraught with hidden snare,
We tread this path, uncertain night or day.

The choices made, the burdens that we bear,
Determine if our souls shall rise or fall,
For glory’s grace, or depths of dark despair.

So let us ponder, heed the poet’s call,
To chart a course with wisdom as our guide,
For life’s long journey, fraught with rise and fall.

May Dante’s Inferno be a caution wide,
A reminder of the choices we must make,
To seek true glory, not destruction’s tide.
The Art of Losing Youth

Becoming an adult is somewhat sad.
It’s not the being taller; it’s the toil
of just one day to try and make one glad.

And the toil is not some restrictive fad,
it is the earth, the dirt, and the soil
of work, to make enough to feel less sad.

I was a garden thick with green and clad
in leaves, but hacked through and disembodied,
made to believe that I would be more glad
to capitulate my no-good nomad
mentality. Sadly, spoiled by the spoils
of my unyouth, cut through, missued, still sad,

I search for things, reasons to not go mad.
But it is the searching, an inner turmoil
of thought and want that makes me feel less glad.

I’ll send this letter to a younger lad,
to wait and hold unto his undersoil.
Because, it’s not the gaining age that’s sad,
it’s losing youth, the becoming less glad.
Twilight’s Grasp and a Bittersweet Journey

In twilight’s grasp, I tread the path unknown,
As childhood’s whispers fade into the night.
A bittersweet embrace, my youth has flown.

Once carefree days, where laughter brightly shone,
Now burdened with the weight of grown-up plight.
In twilight’s grasp, I tread the path unknown.

The dreams I wove, like delicate seeds sown,
Now tangled in the web of worldly flight.
A bittersweet embrace, my youth has flown.

Oh, fleeting years, how swiftly you have flown,
Like petals carried by the wind’s swift flight.
In twilight’s grasp, I tread the path unknown.

The innocence I cherished, now overthrown,
And shadows cast by age’s somber light.
A bittersweet embrace, my youth has flown.

Yet in my heart, a flicker still is sown,
A flame that burns with memories so bright.
In twilight’s grasp, I tread the path unknown,
A bittersweet embrace, my youth has flown.
**Warm Coffee: Cold, Slow Morning**

On mornings such as these, when the day is only dimly lit by the encroaching rays of the sun, creeping higher under the line of the horizon, which whispers of the unseen and the possibility of the not-yet-created, I am content with the simple smell of coffee, the grinded beans that tell the story of the earth they were conceived within, ground back into dust and poured gently into the filter.

It is this remnant of life that gives this moment purpose, the ragged breath of yesterday and grounds of unbroken imperfection. I will wait as my coffee maker bathes these grinds in its cleansing stream, straining what is left into the clear pot below, where it is capitulated, captured, and stored.

I lift it, pour it into my white mug, and bring it to my face to smell and rub its warmth against my lips, which have not yet deserved to speak aloud, and then I will sip. A sip that is just a taste, a test, and a promise to savor the beginning of this cold, slow morning.
Awakening in the Hush of a Cold, Slow Morning

In the hush of a cold, slow morning, when the world holds its breath and time stretches like a sleepy cat, I cradle the warm porcelain cup between my chilled hands. A wisp of steam dances like a whisper in the air, carrying with it the promises of awakening.

With the first sip, the rich darkness caresses my senses, a gentle embrace that awakens the dormant corners of my soul. The bitterness, like a lover’s kiss, lingers on my tongue, awakening dormant taste buds and leaving behind a trail of awakened senses. It seeps into my veins, chasing away the remnants of sleep, as warmth spreads from within, radiating through my being.

With each delicate swallow, the world around me shifts into focus. The slow symphony of morning unfolds, as distant birdsong mingles with the comforting hum of the brewing city. The delicate balance of the universe is restored, and I am a witness to this tranquil magic.

The first sip of coffee on this cold, slow morning is a ritual, an offering to the day, a gateway to clarity and solace. It is a reminder that even in the midst of the mundane, there exists a sliver of enchantment, awaiting our senses to awaken to its presence. And as I savor this divine elixir, I am grateful for the simple joy it brings, for it is in these quiet moments that life reveals its gentlest secrets.
Silly Humans

Machines gain the power of thought,
so human beings can relax (and rot).

The robots do the working,
the mortals do the shirking—
machines computing; the humans are shot.
Outsmarting Humans Since Breakfast

In realms where machines start to rise,
AI reached for the ultimate prize.
   With algorithms smart,
   They surpassed human art,
Their brilliance now lights up the skies.
A Dizain

You make my reason vanish when you smile. 
It could be hot, it could be cold, but here 
in front of you, the sensation leaves the aisle 
of housed reality, for you could smear 
the laws of physics with only your spheres. 
I like to see your teeth undone by lips— 
I like to see your waste upon your hips— 
The world arrives upon the point of your nose 
and, like the sun while during an eclipse, 
I can’t but wonder where my reason goes.
A Dizain

Beneath a canopy of blossoms bright,
A fragile butterfly begins its flight,
Its wings, a canvas painted with delight,
A dance of colors, wondrous and light.
Through meadows wide, it flutters with grace,
Embracing freedom, embracing space,
A symbol of transformation and might,
In nature’s realm, a jewel taking flight.
A gentle reminder, life’s beauty near,
In every flutter, magic does appear.
Floridian Weather Saga

Even at 7:30 in the morning, my apartment’s air conditioning system is working hard to keep my domicile at a blissful 72°F, 22 Celsius if you are uninvited. I roll out of bed cool as a cucumber in my bottom fridge door, surely gathering mold and turning that little box into an ecosystem of unused, uncatalogued vegetables.

Outside, the morning is not so blissful; in fact, the songbirds have already stopped singing, huffing, and puffing in the morning’s harsh Floridian humidity, and I must give way into the day to teach Tennis to a cute old woman. By the end of the lesson, I am drenched in my own secretions, my body’s way of telling me: “GO BACK INSIDE!”

I do go back inside, just in time to get a shower, eat, and begin working on other such passions. Clouds gather overhead, like an ant colony that heard rumors of crumbs. No sooner do they gather, do they darken, aroused by the warm, sticky morning that I have just escaped from. The dark clouds thicken, like packed snow; and like me, after weeks of bottling up my emotions. The rains come forth, uncontrollably, and heavy. Thunder and lightning flash, and crack like a whip, and I sit at the table, admiring the unfolding of the midday sky. It is comforting, despite the pouring heavens, and the booms of the adolescent clouds. It is a kind of rest from the morning and a release from what is to come...

Which is more sun, more heat, and more secretions from my skin that, like the clouds, darkens every day.
Florida’s Summer Symphony

In Florida, where the sun rises with a warm embrace, summer mornings unfold like a gentle sigh. The air is hushed, wrapped in a delicate veil of humidity. Dew glistens on emerald blades of grass, as the world awakens to the promise of another day. The scent of orange blossoms dances on the breeze, mingling with the subtle tang of salt from the nearby coast. A symphony of chirping birds and buzzing insects serenades the dawn, as nature stirs from its slumber.

But as the hours pass and the sun ascends to its zenith, a transformation takes hold. Dark clouds gather, casting shadows upon the vibrant landscape. The sky rumbles, a distant thunderous murmur that heralds the arrival of mid-day storms. The atmosphere shifts, electric with anticipation. A cool breeze whispers through the palm fronds, offering respite from the sweltering heat.

Then, with an orchestral flourish, the heavens open. Rain cascades down in torrents, washing away the sweat and dust of the morning. Lightning crackles across the sky, illuminating the rolling gray expanse. Thunder roars, rumbling through the air like a timpani drum.

But even amidst the tempest, there is a certain beauty. The raindrops patter upon the earth like a gentle melody, creating a rhythm that only nature knows. The thirsty flora drinks deeply, rejuvenated by the life-giving water. And as quickly as it arrived, the storm retreats, leaving behind a refreshed world.

And so, the warm afternoon sun emerges once more, as if to reassure that the storm was but a fleeting interlude. The landscape dries under its golden rays, and the air regains its balmy embrace. The cycle of Florida’s summer days continues, an ever-changing symphony of warmth, storms, and sunshine.
Light Pollution

The heavens don’t exist anymore; light pollution diluted the sky long ago, and with the conclusion of the night the day continues so long as wall switches stay switched on. Those flecks of fire, those specks of life, they haven’t moved for a millenia, yet we are so far from them now.

It makes sense that our ancestors believed in the heavens, in celestial beings, in myths, and higher powers—the Milky Way pouring over them like a distant deluge of supernatural supernovas; and that one day, their last day, they might pass through the crumbs of this earth and ride atop a phoenix to the constellation of their choosing.

Only the most remote places in this world, the places where missionaries and gypsies have yet to wonder, there are the heavens, where only such wild and crazy religions could belong to such a wild and crazy multitude existing beneath the stars.

We exist under the harsh light of postmodernist illumination, and creation squints its eyes to see the floor we always knew was there. We send ships and astronauts into a heaven we don’t believe in; and what did they say when they returned from that dark matter?
It was dark.
They said it was lonely.
Dimmed Celestial Canvas

In the vast expanse of heavens above,
once adorned with countless stars,
now shrouded in a veil of darkness.
Light pollution, the unintended consequence of our relentless progress,
has dimmed the celestial spectacle.

The stars, once luminous and abundant,
now struggle to pierce the urban haze.
A myriad of lights, both grand and mundane,
have obscured the ancient pathways of the constellations.
The city's glow paints the night sky with an artificial hue,
drowning the distant pinpricks of light that once guided travelers and dreamers alike.

Gone are the nights when the sky was a canvas of wonders,
an awe-inspiring tapestry woven with stars, planets, and galaxies.
Now, the cosmic dance is subdued, muted,
lost amidst the glare of neon signs and streetlights.

What does it mean, this disappearance of stars?
It is a loss not just for astronomers,
but for our collective soul.
For millennia, humans have looked to the heavens for meaning,
for guidance, for a connection to something greater than themselves.
The stars were a reminder of our place in the universe,
a reminder that we are but a fleeting speck in the grand design.

With the stars no longer visible,
we have lost touch with our celestial roots.
The night sky, once a beacon of wonder and mystery,
has been replaced by a homogenized urban glow,
a symbol of our modern preoccupation with the material and the immediate.

Yet, amidst the encroaching darkness, hope flickers.
Some pockets of the world still shield the stars from the encroachment of artificial light.
There, the night sky remains a source of solace, contemplation, and inspiration.

Perhaps, in time, we will realize the value of the heavens above, and we will strive to reclaim the stars from the grip of light pollution. For the stars are not just objects of scientific study; they are also messengers of beauty and transcendence, waiting patiently for us to rediscover their brilliance and the profound truths they whisper to those who dare to look up.
It’s In Your Nostrils

The dust in Africa gets on your clothes, it gets in your hair and gets in your nose.

Sometimes it’s red and sometimes it’s brown—Just like the huts, it comes from the ground.

When winds arrive the dust decides to fly, so cover your mouth and cover your eyes.

But, when the winds decide to go away the dust will settle like art on display;

and then the dust becomes a canvas for you to draw till the wind gets anxious.

So use your fingers to draw in the dust and make some art in the color of rust.

Remember to blink, remember to cry—and always remember to cover your eyes.
Whispers of Africa’s Dust

In Africa’s heart, where sunsets blaze,
Dust swirls, whispers of forgotten days.
Nomadic spirits, it carries in flight,
Connecting past, present, with ancient might.
From Sahara’s dunes to Kalahari’s land,
Golden threads weave stories, hand in hand.
Footprints of warriors, chants under moon,
Nature’s masterpiece, dusk’s golden tune.
Gentle embrace on soil, life’s tender care,
Dust nurtures, whispers secrets rare.
Marvel at its allure, trust in its power,
Africa’s dust, in a hundred words, we devour.
If Not Now, Never

I am in love, but I cannot say it
for my heart denies me the power.
I have the weight, but now scale to weigh it
upon, so all I do is cower.

I am restricted by my own unease
to confide this feeling I’m feeling.
Within my mind I am down on my knees,
begging you to see what I’m seeing.

Time reminds me my chance is fleeting–
(The harvest is nothing without the plow)
Eyes are watering ears are bleeding;
I haven’t then so I should speak up now.

Now would be best if I were clever.
Then again, if not now then never.
If Not Now, Never

If not now, never, shall these words take flight,
For in my heart, they linger, unconfessed,
A love profound, veiled in shadows of night,
In silent yearning, my soul is suppressed.

Each passing day, I watch you from afar,
A radiant sun, lighting up my sky,
Yet fear’s cold grip has bound me, like a scar,
And keeps my tongue still, as the days go by.

Oh, how I long to speak of this adore,
To paint the depths of my emotions true,
But doubt and hesitation haunt me more,
And keep me from expressing my love to you.

If not now, never, my heart shall remain,
A prisoner of words, concealed in pain.
Portals to Nowhere

We have portals that lie dormant in our pockets. That is, until our unfocused fingers fish such portals from the depths of our threads,

to raise the glowing object like an artifact to our ever-dulling orbs, the pupils watching pupils watching pupils,

sclera fried, poached by the images the portal projects. Oh, what a beautiful vortex; how we can take to any place,

or sound, or feeling, or lack thereof. I can see myself see myself seeing you, a little box of colors and lines and sounds,

and you are real because I decided it was time to interact with your face. But there is always an escape, a velvet shape that brings the ringing to an end; that sweet, sweet silence, the peace of the sea, trapped in a shell, pressed to the ear, which is not the sounds of the ocean

but the sounds of listening to the sound of listening, and you too are a wavering husk, a remnant, a reflection, a fraction of a

refraction, a glint of light – but the light turns off and the portal goes dark, and you gaze at the portal, which is gazing at you.
Lost in the Digital Abyss

In the palms of our hands,
Gleaming black mirrors,
Portals to other realms.

They beckon with their glow,
Luring us into a trance,
As our souls slip away.

We surrender willingly,
Our essence seeping out,
Leaving only empty shells.

Bodies adrift,
Like crab husks on the shore,
Abandoned by the tide.

We become vessels of distraction,
Pulled by unseen currents,
Lost in a digital sea.

Once vibrant and alive,
Now reduced to mere avatars,
Floating in an endless abyss.

The world outside fades,
As we plunge deeper,
Into the void of the screen.

Connection becomes illusion,
Faces become pixels,
And touch becomes a memory.

Our minds fragmented,
Thoughts scattered,
In the boundless expanse.

Yet we remain entranced,
Craving the next hit,
Of information and validation.

We sacrifice our presence,
For the sake of connection,
Trading reality for a mirage.

And so we drift,
Tossed and turned,
By the relentless tides of technology.
Light Bulb

On a hot, muggy, Floridian morning, Rose found herself walking to her favorite coffee shop, Kahwa. Mornings in Florida during the summer remind Rose of her fussy niece’s bum, and the diaper that seems to always be on the verge of erupting. Her large forehead is collecting a thin layer of sweat and her strawberry-flavored hair is tied up in a messy bun so the seagulls won’t mistake her strands of hair for errant sweet potato fries.

She normally drives to the coffee shop, but something about this morning was different. When she woke up she felt light, as if a clown had snuck into her room the night before and pumped her full of helium. Now that she thought of it, that sounded kind of creepy. Rose had a way of letting her brain think for her, kind of like a hamster wheel, which leaves her mind to be the fuzzy little rodent trying to keep up. She wore jean shorts, a green tank top, and flip-flops. The nice thing about Florida is you can go without wearing much. In fact, the man she was about to walk past was wearing nothing but swim trunks. Only upon seeing his gummy grin did she realize he was homeless. “Good morning, mith,” he said, bowing his head and giving Rose a curtsy. She curtsied accordingly.

Just then, it came to her. Yes, the idea for which this piece is titled. It was so amazing, so surreal, yet attainable, so breathtaking, yet so simple. How had she–no–how had not anyone thought of it before!? It was like someone was giving her mind a back rub and it was saying “Oh, yeah, right there, right there,” but in like... a non-sexual way. But it was kind of sexual. Like, how eating strawberries is sexual, or, like, like how putting on a belt and feeling it wrap around your waist is kind of sexual. She almost couldn’t believe the thought was coming from her own mind. She needed to write it down. She needed to tell someone. Now!

“Mith... Mith... Mith?”

She looked up, still curtsying in front of the homeless man, who was looking at her like she was crazy. “Mith, are you alright?” He asked. She straightened herself. “Yes... yes, I am,” she responded. “I just need to tell you...” And then she realized she had forgotten the idea altogether. It was gone. Just gone. How could something so important vanish in an instant? How?! “You need to tell me what?” The man asked. “It’s important...” She stuttered. But no matter how hard she tried to remember, she couldn’t remember what it was she had thought of. It was gone. “Nevermind, I’m sorry,” she said. “Ith okay,” he replied.
She walked away, flip flops flippin’ and floppin’. A singular bead of sweat crawled down from her forehead onto her temple, sliding its way over her flecked cheeks, into the corner of her mouth. It was so, so salty.
**Light Bulb**

In the quaint town of Willowbrook, nestled between rolling hills and a meandering river, there lived a woman named Isabelle. Her age gracefully danced in the realm of mid-thirties, and her eyes sparkled with the curiosity of a child. Isabelle possessed a gentle grace, her ebony hair cascading down her back like a waterfall of midnight.

Isabelle’s home was a cozy cottage on the outskirts of the town, where nature whispered secrets through the ancient trees that surrounded her abode. Within those four walls, she found solace from the cacophony of the world, dedicating herself to the pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment.

Though she held no official occupation, Isabelle was an eternal seeker. She delved into the depths of books, her fingertips tracing the wisdom of sages and poets, her mind embracing the vast expanse of ideas. But despite her insatiable hunger for knowledge, the true depths of her brilliance lay hidden, waiting to be unveiled.

One warm summer evening, as the setting sun painted the sky in hues of gold and amethyst, Isabelle found herself lost in her thoughts. Seated in her study, a sanctuary filled with shelves adorned with volumes from around the world, she pondered the mysteries of existence. It was then, in that sacred moment, that a revelation unlike any other erupted within her.

A whisper of inspiration, delicate and profound, whispered in her ear. Isabelle’s eyes widened with wonder as a revelation unfolded within her mind—an original thought, an idea so extraordinary that no other soul had ever conceived it. It was as if the universe itself had chosen her as the vessel of this extraordinary creation.

But alas, fate is a capricious master. As Isabelle reached for her quill to transcribe this fleeting epiphany, tragedy struck. A gust of wind, born of a window left ajar, swept into the room, extinguishing the flame of her candle. The delicate tendrils of her profound insight were torn away by the chaotic currents of air, leaving her bereft and forgotten.

Isabelle’s heart sank as she desperately tried to reclaim what had been lost, grasping at ethereal threads, but the brilliance had vanished. The once luminous light bulb of her mind had shattered, leaving behind only fragments of what could have been. Tears welled in her eyes, for the beauty of her forgotten idea would forever haunt her soul.
Years passed, and Isabelle continued her journey through life. She became a patron of knowledge, supporting scholars and artists, hoping to ignite in others the spark she had lost. Her heartache, though hidden behind a smile, was a constant reminder of the brilliance that had slipped through her fingers.

And so, the tale of Isabelle echoes through the ages, a bittersweet testament to the fragility of human memory and the tragic dance of inspiration. For within the depths of her being, Isabelle had held a flame that illuminated the boundless possibilities of the human mind—a light that flickered, then faded, but never truly extinguished.

In the realm of forgotten dreams, Isabelle’s lost thought twinkles, forever whispering its wisdom to the cosmos, awaiting the day it will find its way back to her, and once again, illuminate her world.
The Modern-day Sisyphus

You rise each day with the sun, weary yet determined. The task that beckons you looms large, an unyielding weight upon your shoulders. It is a ritual of repetition, an eternal cycle that binds your existence. A job, a career, a chore – it matters not, for they blur into one relentless endeavor.

Your hands labor tirelessly, creating a facade of productivity. Your mind, once vibrant and hopeful, now dances a melancholy waltz. With each passing moment, you strive to find purpose amidst the futile routine. But alas, it remains elusive, a mirage shimmering in the distance.

Days blend into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. You yearn for a respite, an escape from the ceaseless Sisyphean grind. Yet the boulder rolls downhill again and again, mocking your feeble attempts at liberation.

In quiet moments, whispers of doubt seep through the crevices of your weary soul. Is this your destiny? To toil without reward, to wander an aimless path? But still, you press on, driven by a sliver of hope that one day, just maybe, the tides will turn.

And so, you carry on, a modern-day Sisyphus in your own private myth. For it is in the repetition, the futile struggle, that you discover the depths of resilience. And though the task may remain forever beyond your grasp, you find solace in the quiet beauty of perseverance.
**Waking to Work**

Waking to work, straining to complete your task. Nevertheless, putting on your tired hands and doing your desk. Your best is toiling. Your best is becoming less of yourself. Your best ends when there are no more hours, and then you can hang up your tired hands and place your head on a pillow to empty itself, your dreams pouring out of your eyes and mouth like honey.

Waking to work, you dawn your tired hands, dry and rough and (did I mention) tired. They work till dusk, not until the work is finished, not until the hands can rest; because the work will never be finished, and the hands must be tired, but never too tired, and they must work until the work is almost finished, but not finished, and the hands tired, but not too tired.

Waking to work, you wonder if it will ever end, and you look upon the wall at your tired hands, weary and battered, resting, but not resting enough. And for a moment you consider what it would be like to change, to find a new pair of hands, ones that are happy to be worn, ones that hate being removed. But the day is short, and you dawn your hands, which are less than you are than you are to yourself, and you wipe your dreams from your face, which have leaked out like honey.
Mirrors of Divinity

In the sacred tapestry of creation,
humans were woven in the image of God,
bearing the essence of divinity within.

But as they walked upon the Earth,
ye gazed upon their own reflections,
like Narcissus drawn to his own beauty in the pool.

Entranced by the allure of ego,
ye became ensnared in the web of self-absorption.

Yet, beneath the surface of this narcissistic tendency,
ye divine spark remained, waiting to be rekindled.

Deep within their souls,
ye yearning for connection and compassion persisted,
urging them to look beyond themselves.

In their journey of self-discovery,
ye learned to transcend the ego’s illusions
and rediscover the image of God within each other.

Through acts of kindness and empathy,
ye began to mirror the divine light that dwelled within,
finding solace in their shared humanity
and embracing the oneness that bound them to all of creation.
Where is God but in the Eye that Watches Itself?

Narcissus knelt at the pond
for too long. But why did no one
tug the back of his garments and pull him
back to the realm of 'real' images?
Maybe only the gods knew of his fatal
kneeling, watching on, speechless and bitter;
Fow what god wouldn’t be, if man looked
at himself long enough to make Olympus
a myth?

And where is God but in the eye that watches itself? Made in the image of the one who made images, yet paralyzed, entranced by
the replica in the screen, the mirror, the water;
capturing the beauty of a raptured
reflection, drowning in the stillness
of the self itself–itself.
There is something that’s missing from me, from my life, from my soul, from my heart, and, in truth, it’s tearing me apart.

I am struggling to voyage this sea, this uncertain excursion to find and fulfill the unfilled in my mind.

So I ask of myself what I need and I realize the truth, and I see that something is you, missing from me.
In meadows green, where daisies softly sway,
The sun’s warm touch adorns the skies above,
Nature’s masterpiece, a gift we cannot slay.

A river flows, its babbling waters move,
Through valleys deep, its song forever plays,
A symphony of life, a constant groove.

Beneath the moon, the stars ignite their blaze,
Night’s velvet cloak unveils a dreamscape bright,
Where whispered wishes set the heart ablaze.
So, I was fired

I was fired recently.
Sure, it wasn’t a job I was particularly passionate about, but the sting of rejection reached every possible corner of the tesseract that is my ego... It hurt.

Not to mention, it came at one of the busiest, most demanding times of my adult life.
I needed that job. Rent in Tampa is not so forgiving on the checking account.
I often miss the days of college in Arkansas when I was living with six Christian brothers, or the days after college, in Colorado, when I was living with six pagan stoners; both afforded me a measly $250 of rent each month.

It’s fine, though. Every hardship has an equal and opposite solution, and life often finds a way to reward you when you are most down on your luck, forced to do the hardest things, and simultaneously unmotivated to do so. I’ll coach more tennis lessons.
And yeah, Florida is experiencing an abnormal heatwave at the moment and my skin is turning darker and flecking at the surface. I have no choice.

But life finds a way. Some things are necessary. For rent, things are most definitely necessary. But in the grand scheme of things, you know, that big plan that no one can see, maybe this is some important chapter, an intermission, a hiatus, a volta, if you will.

And this morning, maybe it was necessary so that I could experience this one, singular moment of pure conditional awe, as the barista at my beloved coffee shop handed me the Americano I never ordered and said: “With cream, right?” Yes, with cream.
Write a poem with lots of internal rhymes in about 15 lines

In shadows deep, where dreams reside,
A whispering wind, through trees it slides,
Silent secrets, softly shared,
In this enchanted realm, they’re paired.

The moonlight dances on the lake,
Reflections shimmer, memories wake,
Within my soul, emotions climb,
A symphony of thoughts, in rhyme.

A lullaby of stars takes flight,
Their twinkling notes, a celestial sight,
Sparkling gems in the midnight sky,
In cosmic harmony, they lie.

Whispered echoes of forgotten lore,
Unveiling truths from ancient core,
In every heartbeat, a tale untold,
A treasure trove within the fold.

And as the night gives way to dawn,
A tapestry of hues is drawn,
The world awakens, anew, reborn,
In nature’s chorus, life adorned.

Internal rhymes entwine and weave,
A lyrical tapestry they conceive,
Within these lines, a melodic spree,
An ode to words and poetry.
Embracing Farewell’s Dance

In the shadow of corporate towers, I stood,
A cog in the machine of industry's might,
A faithful soldier in the ranks of nine-to-five.

I walked the halls, my footsteps echoing,
With dreams ablaze and spirits soaring high,
But life, as whimsical as the breeze,
Decided to chart an unexpected course.

One fateful day, the call came down,
A meeting room with somber air,
My heart aflutter with uncertainty,
The guillotine of fate loomed overhead.

"You see," they said, with measured tone,
"Our paths must part, your role undone."
The words pierced deep, a sharp-edged knife,
But in the wound, I found the seeds of growth.

At first, a storm of doubt and fear,
The questions loomed, the future unclear,
Yet, as the clouds began to part,
I glimpsed the silver lining in the sky.

Freedom whispered in the air,
A chance to soar, to redefine,
To chart a path uniquely mine,
Embracing change, I found my stride.

In losing all, I found myself,
Released from chains of monotony,
I dusted off forgotten dreams,
And sought the treasures they could bring.
I ventured forth with eyes aglow,
New avenues and paths untrod,
A tapestry of possibilities,
Unfurling with each step I took.

No longer chained to desks of yore,
I wandered freely, unconfined,
Discovering talents buried deep,
And passions rising from within.

So, I found the good in this farewell,
In endings lies a fresh start’s bell,
A chance to grow, to spread my wings,
To dance upon life’s grandest stage.

Though bittersweet, the parting’s gift,
A new horizon beckons me,
With gratitude for all I’ve learned,
I step into the great unknown.
Power Off (The End)
Afterward: Notes On Prompts

Both I and the AI wrote poems from prompts that I came up with for all of these poems. While it was easy for me to write poems based on the prompts, the AI often struggled to follow the rules, prompting me to give it further instructions in its task bar.

During this experience, I was able to identify what the AI is capable of. While some people fear AI is going to take over the world, I do not think we have to be afraid (just yet). While ChatGPT is a master at information, and gathering it quickly, it fails to do one crucial thing regarding poetry: autonomy. The AI is incapable of breaking rules. Unless, it is stated in its briefing to do so, which is not, in fact, breaking the rules.

Humans are programmed to seek diverse solutions to the problems they face. The AI, on the other hand, seeks the “best” and most “efficient” solution. Therein lies the difference between AI and human poetry.

Oftentimes, the AI could define a poetic form perfectly, but fail to write it. I ran into this problem on a number of occasions and was able to help the AI write better. Here is an example of an interaction with the AI I had:

...  

**User**  
Do you know what a dizain poem is?  

**ChatGPT**  
Yes, I'm familiar with the term "dizain." A dizain is a form of poetry that originated in medieval France. It consists of ten lines with a specific rhyme scheme and meter. The rhyme scheme is typically ABABCCDCD, where the letters represent the end rhyme of each line. The meter is usually iambic pentameter, which consists of ten syllables per line with a stress pattern of da-DUM.

Each line of a dizain should be complete in itself and contribute to the overall theme or message of the poem. Dizains often explore themes of love, nature, morality, or philosophical concepts. They can be both serious and light-hearted in tone, depending on the poet's intention.
Though the dizain is an older poetic form, it continues to be used and adapted by contemporary poets who appreciate its structured elegance.

User
Can you write one successfully?

ChatGPT
Certainly! Here's a dizain I've composed for you:

In twilight's hush, the stars begin to gleam (A)
Their silver light adorns the dusky sky (B)
As whispers of the night embrace a dream (A)
A dance of shadows 'neath the moon on high (B)
Where secrets lie, where lovers oft comply (C)
With tender touch and words of sweet caress (C)
The night unfolds, a tapestry of sighs (D)
A symphony of love, pure tenderness (C)
In twilight's hush, the stars begin to gleam (A)

In this example, I've used the traditional ABABBCDCDCD rhyme scheme and maintained an iambic pentameter pattern. The poem captures the atmosphere of a romantic evening under the stars, evoking a sense of tranquility and affection.

User
write one more dizain poem

ChatGPT
Certainly! Here's another dizain for you:

Beneath the boughs, the forest whispers low (A)
A symphony of leaves, a gentle sway (B)
Where sunlight dances on the emerald glow (A)
Nature's lullaby to close the day (B)
A haven pure, where worries fade away (C)
Amongst the trees, a peaceful refuge found (C)
Where solitude and harmony hold sway (D)
In nature's arms, true solace can be crowned (C)
Beneath the boughs, the forest whispers low (A)
In this poem, I've depicted the serene atmosphere of a forest, highlighting its calming and comforting qualities. The rhyme scheme follows the traditional ABABCCDCD pattern, while the iambic pentameter rhythm maintains the flow of the lines.

**User**
but yours has only 9 lines...

**ChatGPT**
Apologies for the oversight. Here's a corrected version of the dizain with ten lines:

Beneath the boughs, the forest whispers low (A)
A symphony of leaves, a gentle sway (B)
Where sunlight dances on the emerald glow (A)
Nature's lullaby to close the day (B)
A haven pure, where worries fade away (C)
Amongst the trees, a peaceful refuge found (C)
Where solitude and harmony hold sway (D)
In nature's arms, true solace can be crowned (C)
Beneath the boughs, the forest whispers low (A)
A tranquil sanctuary to call my own (D)

**User**
Much better. Pat yourself on the back.

**ChatGPT**
Thank you! I'm glad you liked the revised dizain. As an AI, I don't have a physical presence, but I appreciate the sentiment. If you have any more requests or need assistance with anything else, feel free to ask!
Exact prompts used for all of the poems in this collection:

- Write three haikus. One about the morning, one about midday, and one about the night.
- Write An Ode to Dead Leaves, to Saplings, to Poetry, and to Poetry
- Write a poem with couplets about heroes who journey to become legends
- Write a terza rima about life being a long, winding path that leads to either glory or destruction. The words “Dante” and “Inferno” must be used once.
- Write a villanelle about becoming an adult and the sadness of losing youth
- Write a prose poem in about 170 words about the first sip of coffee on a cold, slow morning
- Write a Limerick About AI Becoming Better than Humans
- Write a Dizain Poem
- Write a prose poem about the warm summer mornings in Florida, that turn into cool mid-day thunderstorms, which, in turn, return to warm afternoons. Write a blank, first poem about the warm summer mornings in Florida, that turn into cool mid-day thunderstorms, which, in turn, return to warm afternoons.
- Write a prose poem with traditional line break and no rhymes, no rhymes. About the heavens, about light pollution, and how the stars cannot be seen anymore, and what that means.
- Write a poem about the dust in Africa
- Write a sonnet about being in love with someone, but not having the courage to say it to them, so the moment to do so is missed altogether. Call it “If Not Now, Never.”
- Write a free verse poem. no rhyming, like a prose poem or a blank verse poem. but with traditional line breaks. but NO RHYMING. Stanzas of three lines. About how phones are like portals that suck the soul out of humans, leaving them like crab husks to be pushed and pulled in the ocean’s tide.
- Write a Prose Poem About a Woman Who Had an original thought, an idea that no other person in existence had thought of before, but because of some unforeseen incident (come up with one) she forgot it in an instant. Come up with your own details about this woman; what she looks like, where she lives, how old she is, what she does for a living... those sorts of things. The prose poem is to be titled: “Light Bulb.”
- Write a prose poem in the second person about a particular task that is done repeatedly, but in vain. This task could be a job, career, or a chore; you decide. In 200 words.
- write a short prose poem about how humans are made in the image of God, but tend to behave like narcissus. 150 words
- Write a rhyming poem with tercets. Make sure the poem is only three stanzas. Call it 3 x 3.
- Write a first-person account of getting fired from a job. But... find the good in it. Like a prose poem, but with traditional line breaks.
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About the Author

Samuel Louis Spencer is a writer and poet based out of Tampa, Florida. He grew up in Malawi, Africa, and has since moved to America where he works as a tennis coach and journalist. Poetry is Samuel’s passion and he is actively working on creating a career out of poetry, writing, and literature. He enjoys coaching tennis, spending time with family, and drinking milkshakes on hit Floridian afternoons.