CASLE
CENTRO DE AVALIAÇÃO DE SUFICIÊNCIA EM LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA

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TEXTO: Why So Many Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Students Are Writing Poetry

By Joshua Bennett

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A professor at the Institute discovered that his students were quietly meeting outside class to write verse. What might it mean for the future of AI?

One of the highlights of my first three years as a literature professor at MIT—and indeed, of my 15-year career as an educator—has been the recent discovery that some of my students, past and present, formed an arts collective: The People's Poetry. It began, I was told, with the first class I taught at the institute. Several students in that course, "Reading Poetry: Social Poetics," created their own group chat, and eventually started meeting outside of class to write together. Every time I taught a new course, their membership grew. These engineers and scientists in training, hailing from across the world, were gathering to compose and critique poems outside the classroom.

Many of these young people were, in other classes, studying or even actively developing forms of technology that raise a range of questions about the purpose and power of human expression: why humans write or draw; what ethics govern our inspiration and training; how the creative act brings us together and alters our thinking. In the midst of a technological revolution, while taking on a notoriously difficult courseload, why have they chosen to devote their time to the ancient art of making poems?

These kinds of questions are not unprecedented at the institute. In the early 1960s, the reading series Poetry From M.I.T. explored the relationship between a strong technical education and the pursuit of the good and the beautiful. In service of this larger inquiry, the series organizers invited renowned writers such as Robert Penn Warren, Denise Levertov, and Richard Wilbur to campus to share their work. These events were broadcast on WGBH, a Boston public-radio station, and featured timely insights on where the practice of poetry and the future of technology might intersect. My students bring some version of this exploration into the classroom with striking consistency—most vividly in their observations of how it feels to use poetry to work through our obsessions, our dreams, in times like these. And at a place like this, no less: an elite research university where they spend most of their time working on projects that feel orthogonal to that sort of labor.

The poet W. S. Merwin once said that you know you are writing a poem when a "sequence of words starts giving off what you might describe as a kind of electric charge." I've been thinking about how to place the sort of liveness Merwin describes—the sense of your body as a living circuit that the poem moves through—in a world filling up with noise, marred by misdirection and distraction. When, how, and why do we make room for the miraculous? From moment to moment. In any way we can. Because it is part of the practice of being human.

A poem is not merely a record of human activity; it is intended to preserve the complexity, richness, and granular details of our inner lives. Poems provide an occasion for us to talk with one another, creating a shared monument we can carry into the future, establishing a rolling record of our heroes, our planet, our kin. This art form keeps what we love from disappearing. In *Odes*, the Roman poet Horace writes: "Many heroes lived before Agamemnon / but they are all unweepable, overwhelmed / by the long night of oblivion / because they lacked a sacred bard." He is referring to Homer's epic *The Iliad,* a poem that survived by being passed down through live

performance long before it was committed to paper. The preservation of the poem's history, in this case, was a communal affair: from bard to bard, and audience to audience, across time and space.

In a moment marked by widespread institutional investment in the promise of artificial intelligence, we should be asking more about not only what AI can and cannot do but what drives the desire for its proliferation: what hope, what sense of longing, boredom, or emptiness. A large language model is a prediction machine. Crucially, it does not think or dream. It establishes the likeliest sequence of words based on its training data and relays it back to you. A well-crafted poem performs a nearly opposite function. It is made from original, dynamic language choices, and it lives and dies on its ability to surprise. It is a means of preserving the particular.

And yet I'm led to wonder whether the hunger for connection, understanding, and astonishment that seems to characterize much of the public interest in AI derives from the same needs that poetry fulfills. The AI market thrives in part as a result of our desire for optimization, efficiency. Brevity is among poetry's greatest advantages; a poem can be written in minutes at the bus stop, during a break at work, or in those first quiet moments after dawn. Any occasion can offer inspiration: Gwendolyn Brooks composed the classic eight-line poem "We Real Cool" after seeing a group of pool players one afternoon in Chicago; Percy Shelley wrote "Ozymandias" during a competitive exchange of sonnets with a friend. At a book-launch party years ago in downtown Manhattan, I saw Sunni Patterson write a poem on the spot, minutes before going onstage, that incorporated lines from other performers who had recited their work throughout the night. In performance, this was both a mesmerizing display of processing speed and a form of loving citation.

The sheer velocity of this kind of language bears a trace of the supernatural. The words can appear to arrive from elsewhere, produced by an elevated consciousness outside our own. A mode of technology that conceals a lack of vetting, understanding, or humanity might bear a resemblance to such a consciousness in moments, but the source of its speed is not—as with Brooks, Shelley, or Patterson—a life spent working toward competence. It does not emerge from centuries of inherited language, or a bond forged for the first time in a room full of strangers and friends. It's worth asking where the warmth of poetry, its connective power across millennia, meets the advances and demands of our technological age.

From the invention of writing to the advent of the typewriter to the rise of the personal computer as collaborator, authors have attempted to address this quandary. Twentieth-century poets across a wide aesthetic range—Robert Frost, Sun Ra, X. J. Kennedy, Nikki Giovanni—asked us to consider "our place among the infinities," as Frost once put it, the link between our timeless yearning for the stars and the scientific leaps that brought them closer to us. More contemporary writers, including Lillian-Yvonne Bertram and Keith S. Wilson (both of whom are also programmers), have designed works that combine the human voice and the music of machines. Once you know where to look, the overlap is astonishing.

One of poetry's greatest gifts is patience—not only with the difficulties of language but with ourselves as its vessels or makers, working to bring a new vision into the world. I see this dynamic firsthand in the form of an assignment I have been offering students for almost a decade now: the end-of-semester adaptation. Therein, I ask them to take a text we've studied over the course of the term and transform it using the tools of a different genre. Essays, short stories, and poems metamorphose into works of choreography, short films, and, on several occasions now, projects that pull from both the digital world and the living environment.

Matt, for instance, adapted a Lorraine Hansberry play, *What Use Are Flowers?*, into a device of his own invention called Melia, which uses a field microphone, an old physics-lab computer, and a neural-net algorithm to meld the human voice with the sounds of the natural world. To truly experience Melia, you have to go outside. You have to find a place by a river, or a grove where the cardinals are talking, or a spot where the breeze is blowing through a tupelo tree, and begin to sing. Suddenly, the voice you have always known is expanded, made new. Yasmeen, in another project, transformed Nikki Giovanni's "Winter Poem" into a series of digital collages in which people have become flowers while remaining in familiar settings and dress (imagine a bouquet of

hydrangeas dressed in overalls, standing in front of a farmhouse, or a rush of rhododendrons in a blue suit walking down a crowded street, and you might be close).

Elizabeth took a third approach. Inspired by a class session on art-making, AI, and human imagination, she proposed a community program: Songbirds. Since her freshman year, Elizabeth has been visiting a local hospice—playing piano for elders, going on walks with them, and learning about their lives. With Songbirds, she wanted to add another element to the visits: the collaborative adaptation of memories into works of art. For this work, she initially thought of employing various AI tools as a primary means of approach. But she eventually decided to also call upon a range of older, more familiar technologies: her trusted piano, notebooks for poems, production software to engineer instrumentals. For anyone at the hospice who might be losing pieces of the past—the story of the moment he met his first great love; the last time he saw his mother alive; the day his daughter was born, said her first word, or first ran across the living room into his arms—a memory could now be preserved, with a bit of assistance, in the form of a song or poem.

In work like this, musicians, writers, and engineers all share space. They collaborate in service of human life and the preservation of all we adore. They remind us that poetry has always been a technology of memory and human connection: a way to remind ourselves of who and what we are to one another. Which is something infinitely more than we can say with words, although we must try—and in that striving, be made more lovely, and alive.

Joshua Bennett is the Distinguished Chair of the Humanities and a literature professor at MIT. He is the author of five books, including *Spoken Word: A Cultural History* and several collections of poetry.

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QUESTÃO 01 (1,0)

Quais das seguintes afirmações sobre os primeiros anos de ensino do autor no MIT são apoiadas pelo parágrafo, “One of the highlights...”? Escolha a opção **incorreta**.

(A) Alguns alunos formaram um coletivo artístico chamado “A Poesia do Povo”.
(B) O coletivo surgiu após um grupo de bate-papo criado por alunos da primeira disciplina.
(C) O número de membros do coletivo diminuiu a cada nova disciplina do professor.
(D) Engenheiros e cientistas do mundo todo se reuniam para escrever e analisar poemas.

QUESTÃO 02 (1,0)

Qual a questão principal levantada pelo parágrafo, “Many of these young people...”? Escolha a opção **correta**.

(A) Os benefícios da poesia para o financiamento universitário.
(B) O desenvolvimento de formas variadas de tecnologia.
(C) A criação da revolução tecnológica no mundo atual.
(D) O propósito e o poder da expressão criativa humana.

QUESTÃO 03 (1,0)

Que ligação é estabelecida entre a prática da poesia e uma formação técnica no parágrafo, “These kind of questions...”? Escolha a opção **incorreta**.

(A) A tecnologia se torna uma forma de aperfeiçoar a criação poética por parte dos estudantes.
(B) Há o espaço para refletir sobre onde a prática da poesia e o futuro da tecnologia podem se cruzar.
(C) Os estudantes do MIT usam a exploração poética como forma de lidar com sonhos e obsessões.
(D) Há a intersecção entre uma sólida formação técnica e a busca pelo bem e pela beleza.

QUESTÃO 04 (1,0)

Qual a tradução correta em português padrão da frase nominal, “the complexity, richness, and granular details of our inner lives” e da frase nominal,”a rolling record of our heroes, our planet, our kin” (parágrafo – “A poem is not merely…”?

(A) “A complexidade, a riqueza e os detalhes granulares do nosso interior”; “um registro rolante dos nosso heróis, nosso planeta, nossos parentes”.
(B) “A complexidade, a riqueza e os detalhes minuciosos das nossas vidas interiores”; “um registro contínuo de nossos heróis, nosso planeta e nossa família”.
(C) “A complexidade, a riqueza e granular detalhes das vidas internas”; “um recorde de nossos heróis, planeta e parentes”.
(D) “Complexidade, riqueza de detalhes das nossas vidas interiores”; “um rolante recorde dos heróis, nosso planeta, nossa família”.

QUESTÃO 05 (1,0)

Qual a pergunta que devemos fazer em relação à IA (parágrafo, “In a moment...”)?

(A) De que maneira a IA é criativa e original nas produções geradas nas diversas plataformas?
(B) Como a IA usa linguagem e como é semelhante à capacidade humana ao usar linguagem?
(C) O que a IA pode fazer por nós ou o que não pode fazer por nós no momento atual da história humana?
(D) O que motiva o desejo por sua proliferação: que esperança, que sentimento de saudade, tédio ou vazio.

QUESTÃO 06 (1,0)

Qual a origem da rapidez dos poetas Brooks, Shelley e Patterson em criar poemas (parágrafo, “The sheer velocity...”)? Escolha a opção **incorreta**.

(A) Uma vida dedicada a alcançar a competência.
(B) Surge do sobrenatural e causa espanto.
(C) A capacidade de formar laços afetivos.
(D) Emerge de séculos de linguagem herdada.

QUESTÃO 07 (1,0)

Qual os significados dos substantivos “quandary”, “yearning” e “overlap” (parágrafo, “From the invention ...”)?

(A) Dilema, anseio, sobreposição
(B) Questão, esperança, sobreposição.
(C) Confusão, anseio, junção.
(D) Dilema, esperança, junção. .

QUESTÃO 08 (1,0)

Qual é a tarefa que o autor/professor atribui ao final do semestre?

(A) Apresentar os diferentes textos estudados ao longo do semestre em forma de arte.
(B) Escrever um ensaio sobre um texto estudado ao longo do semestre.
(C) Transformar um texto estudado ao longo do semestre usando ferramentas de outro gênero.
(D) Usar a tecnologia para criar novos textos a partir dos textos estudados no semestre.

QUESTÃO 09 (1,0)

Onde é preciso ir e o que deve ser feito para vivenciar plenamente Melia?

(A) Você deve assistir Melia e relaxar.
(B) Você deve ir para a natureza e relaxar.
(C) Você deve ouvir Melia e cantar.
(D) Você deve ir para a natureza e cantar.

QUESTÃO 10 (1,0)

Traduza a última frase do texto, “and in that striving, be made more lovely, and alive”.

(A) E esforçar para se tornar mais amado e vivo.
(B) E nesse esforço, tornar-se mais belo e vibrante.
(C) E naquela força, tornar mais lindo e vivo.
(D) E se esforçar para se tornar amado e com vida.

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