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## “This Wonderful Machine”: How Should We Teach Humanities Texts like Gulliver’s Travels in the Time of ChatGPT?

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# “This Wonderful Machine”: How Should We Teach Humanities Texts like *Gulliver’s Travels* in the Time of ChatGPT?

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## Abstract

The quoted phrase in the essay title comes from a passage in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in which a Grand Academy of Lagado professor demonstrates a “wonderful Machine” that can generate scores of books “without the least Assistance from Genius or Study.” The essay explore the challenge for teaching classic humanities texts like *Gulliver* that the (perhaps not so) “wonderful Machine” called ChatGPT poses. Student Owen Terry’s *Chronicle* essay (May 12, 2023) identifies two crucial aspects of that challenge: “We don’t fully lean into AI and teach how to best use it, and we don’t fully prohibit it to keep it from interfering with exercises in critical thinking.” The essay explains my rationale not to “lean into AI” but to “prohibit it” and to promote instead “critical thinking.”

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In early May 2023, I was wading through final grading for Texts and Contexts, my first-year English literature survey course. Bemusedly perusing a research paper that lurched frequently between sophistication and incoherence, I was suddenly confronted by an eldritch citation:

I had always a strong impulse that way, in whatever company I found myself; but here it was buttoned up and restrained by the presence of so many people. However, I resolved to let my master know, as soon as possible, the English name for what he had seen, and indeed to give him a list of our entire vocabulary; for I hoped I might be of some use to him in explaining the names of our own productions, that he mentioned, such as horses, cows, sheep, swine, and the like.

According to the paper's author, this passage occurred on page seven of Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels*. However, it did not appear on that page in the Norton edition of *Gulliver* that students were required to buy as a coursebook, and, on

consulting a reliable online edition, I could not find the phrase "a list of our entire vocabulary" anywhere. I turned next to the web, inputting thirty-two words from the passage (the maximum Google allowed), but again I found zero matches, within or without quotation marks. So, there it was: what looked like my first encounter with a genuine AI "hallucination" (if genuine is the right word).<sup>1</sup>

In preparation for the required academic integrity conversation with the student, I ran several individual words from the uncanny passage through the "Find" function in the online *Gulliver*, just in case I was unfairly overlooking some alternative explanation. Soon, I was sardonically amused to discover that the word "vocabulary" actually did appear on one—and only one—of the novel's 250 pages:

He assured me, that this Invention had employed all his Thoughts from his Youth, that he had emptied the whole Vocabulary into his Frame and made the strictest Computation of the general Proportion there is in Books between the

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<sup>1</sup> On AI hallucinations, see Matt O'Brien, "Chatbots sometimes make things up. Is AI's hallucination problem fixable?" *AP News* (August 1, 2023). <https://apnews.com/article/artificial-intelligence-hallucination-chatbots-chatgpt-falsehoods-ac4672c5b06e6f-91050aa46ee731bcf4>. According to O'Brien, Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI (makers of ChatGPT), recently told a conference in India, "I probably trust the answers that come out of ChatGPT the least of anybody on Earth."

Numbers of Particles, Nouns, and Verbs, and other Parts of Speech.<sup>2</sup>

This passage appears in Part Three, when Gulliver is recalling his conversation at the Grand Academy of Lagado with a “Professor” (and “Projector”) of “speculative Learning,” who claims to have invented a device for speedily generating stacks of scholarly volumes.<sup>3</sup> Yet, when the professor (assisted by forty apprentices) starts up his four-hundred-square-foot apparatus, it spews forth only “broken Sentences,” prompting Gulliver to praise sarcastically “this wonderful Machine.”<sup>4</sup>

In sharp contrast, ChatGPT and other Large Language Models, despite their sporadic eruption of hallucinations and falsehoods, can spin out extremely polished sentences and paragraphs, pitched at a syntactical level well above the average first-year college student’s ability. Thus, OpenAI has actually succeeded in realizing the Lagado professor’s project: “Everyone knew how laborious the usual Method is of attaining to Arts and Sciences,” but through this “Contrivance, the most ignorant Person [...] may write Books in Philosophy, Poetry, Politicks, Law,

Mathematicks and Theology, without the least Assistance from Genius or Study.”<sup>5</sup>

This collision with the pseudo-Swiftian hallucination launched my own Gulliveresque “[v]oyage” through uncharted AI seascapes and landscapes.<sup>6</sup> One valuable aid to my navigation took place a few days later, when I came across Columbia University undergraduate Owen Kichizo Terry’s article “I’m a student. You have no idea how much we’re using ChatGPT.” Terry uses a standard Columbia “close reading” assignment on *The Iliad* to demonstrate—in disturbing detail—how “easy” it has become for students to employ “AI to do the lion’s share of the thinking while still submitting work that looks like your own.”<sup>7</sup> “[I]f our colleges are going to keep training students to think critically,” he contends, “massive structural change will be needed,” but educators right now neither “fully lean into AI and teach how to best use it” nor “fully prohibit it to keep it from interfering with exercises in critical thinking.”<sup>8</sup>

Similar anxieties about increasingly diminished prospects for college-level critical thinking pervade another—and

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, edited by Albert J. Rivero (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 155.

<sup>3</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 155.

<sup>5</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 154. I wish I could take credit for the Lagado-ChatGPT connection, but someone else (a real scientist—not a Lagado projector) got there first: David A. Sanders, “I thought I was a creative scientist – until AI worked out my trick,” *Times Higher Education*

(May 25, 2023), <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/i-thought-i-was-creative-scientist-until-ai-worked-out-my-trick>.

<sup>6</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Kichizo Terry, “I’m a student. You have no idea how much we’re using ChatGPT,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 12, 2023), <https://www.chronicle.com/article/im-a-student-you-have-no-idea-how-much-were-using-chatgpt>.

<sup>8</sup> Terry, “I’m a student.”

equally insightful—student essay that I encountered a couple of months further into my pedagogical travels over the summer of 2023. Harvard undergraduate Maya Bodnick highlights in her title the scope of the problem: “GPT-4 Can Already Pass Freshman Year at Harvard: Professors need to adapt to their students’ new reality fast.”<sup>9</sup> The Harvard professors and TAs who agreed to grade the six essays Bodnick submitted were told that the pieces might have been written by AI or by her, although all six were actually AI-generated. Several graders praised the papers’ eloquence, although not everyone was as impressed by the arguments advanced. Nevertheless, the six pieces still achieved a GPA of 3.57.

One passage Bodnick cites from a ChatGPT-fabricated paper delivers a wick-edly Swiftian punch. Responding to a “Conflict Resolution” course “prompt” that “was very specific (the assignment was a page long) and personal (it requires students to write about an experience from their life),” ChatGPT-4 generated an essay that exhibits much (unintentional) irony:

*I’ve discovered that Neil [my roommate] has been using an advanced AI system to complete his assignments, something far more sophisticated than the plagiarism detection*

*software can currently uncover... To me... it feels like a betrayal. Not just of the university’s code of academic honesty, but of the unspoken contract between us, of our shared sweat and tears, of the respect for the struggle that is inherent in learning. I’ve always admired his genius, but now it feels tainted, a mirage of artificially inflated success that belies the real spirit of intellectual curiosity and academic rigor.*<sup>10</sup>

Bodnick notes that Harvard’s TA grader “loved the essay’s analysis and gave it an A, remarking that it was ‘persuasive’ and ‘made great use of the course concepts.’”<sup>11</sup>

In words that inadvertently echo the Lagado professor, albeit in a tone much different from his shameless enthusiasm, Bodnick maintains that GPT-4 allows students to succeed in college “without learning, developing critical-thinking skills, or working hard at anything.”<sup>12</sup> This “risks intellectually impoverishing the next generation of Americans,” and therefore faculty who “want to avoid this outcome” must “completely upend how they teach the humanities and social sciences [...]”<sup>13</sup> After surveying some alternative pedagogical possibilities and admitting “the limitations of embracing AI and AI detection,” Bodnick advises that professors switch

<sup>9</sup> Maya Bodnick, “GPT-4 Can Already Pass Freshman Year at Harvard: Professors need to adapt to their students’ new reality fast,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 26, 2023), <https://www-chronicle->

[com/article/gpt-4-can-already-pass-freshman-year-at-harvard](https://www-chronicle-com/article/gpt-4-can-already-pass-freshman-year-at-harvard).

<sup>10</sup> Bodnick, “GPT-4.”

<sup>11</sup> Bodnick, “GPT-4.”

<sup>12</sup> Bodnick, “GPT-4.”

<sup>13</sup> Bodnick, “GPT-4.”

from “take-home essays to an in-person format — partially or entirely,” and she concludes her essay with a gloomy forecast:

The impact that AI is having on liberal-arts homework is indicative of the AI threat to the career fields that liberal-arts majors tend to enter. So maybe what we should really be focused on isn’t, “How do we make liberal-arts homework better?” but rather, “What are jobs going to look like over the next 10–20 years, and how do we prepare students to succeed in that world?” The answers to those questions might suggest that students shouldn’t be majoring in the liberal arts at all.

My gut reaction is that liberal-arts majors — who spend most of their academic career writing essays — are going to face even greater difficulties in a post-AI world. AI isn’t just coming for the college essay; it’s coming for the cerebral class.<sup>14</sup>

One may or may not agree with Bodnick’s pessimistic conclusion, but her essay nonetheless evokes vividly the unsettling and unprecedented intellectual danger that AI poses for college-level critical thinking in the humanities.

<sup>14</sup> Bodnick, “GPT-4.”

In the following essay, I chronicle my experiences over the course of 2023 in redesigning my first-year literary studies course in an effort to preserve the kind of critical thinking that intelligent undergraduates like Terry and Bodnick rightly find irreplaceable. The essay is very much a report from the field, provisional and transitional, but I hope it provides some insights into the challenges ahead and the rethinking required.

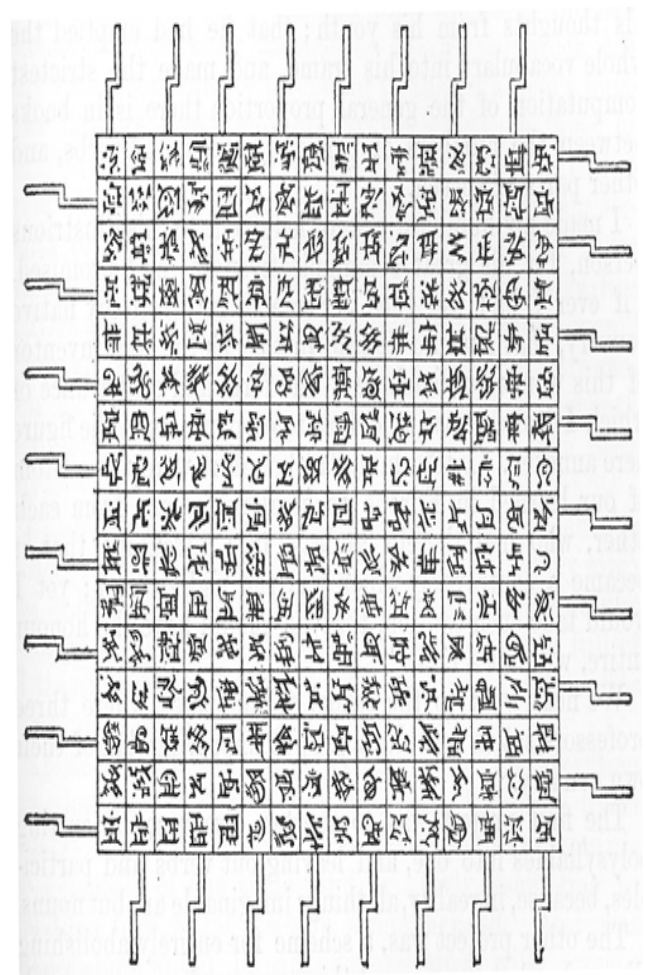


Figure 1: The “wonderful Machine” from *Gulliver’s Travels*, Part Three.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 156. This image is taken from the electronic Gutenberg edition of

## TEACHING IN THE TIME OF AI / CHATGPT

In order to understand those challenges better, I want to backtrack a little. In late November and early December 2022, many months before Terry's and Bodnick's essays were published, I had noticed a few article titles about the launching of ChatGPT, but end-of-semester grading delayed any in-depth analysis of the subject until early January 2023, when I started revising syllabi for the new semester. I could not open an OpenAI account because their servers were continually busy with existing and new subscribers, but the samples of ChatGPT's services and skills that were highlighted in the ever-increasing stream of media analyses proved undoubtedly troubling.

In search of advice and new syllabus policies for the fast-approaching spring semester, I contacted my university's Office of Academic Affairs, Office of Teaching and Learning, and Academic Integrity Council. The Office of Teaching and Learning promised to include a panel on AI in their Teaching and Learning Forum in May, which was great, although it did not help with revising my spring syllabus. The Academic Integrity Council promised to produce some guidelines, and they did, but, unfortunately, not until two weeks after the spring semester had started. Their draft document included a few links to insightful

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*Gulliver*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/829/829-h/829-h.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> "Academic Honesty Policies," Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, U.S.A.,

essays and also observed that the definition of plagiarism in our university's current Academic Honesty Policy did not fit neatly with the mechanics of ChatGPT, which constructs original-sounding pieces based on plagiarized paraphrase (and possibly copyright violation) of vast amounts of web-scraped sources. (GPT means Generative Pre-Trained Transformer, but Giant Plagiarism Transmitter seems equally accurate.) The university's policy, however, referred to "other persons or writers," rather than AI devices:

plagiarism, the appropriation of information, ideas, or the language of other persons or writers and the submission of them as one's own to satisfy the requirements of a course. Plagiarism thus constitutes both theft and deceit. Compositions, term papers, or computer programs acquired, either in part or in whole, from commercial sources or from other students and submitted as one's own original work shall be considered plagiarism.<sup>16</sup>

In revising the section on academic integrity in my own syllabi, I decided that "unauthorized collaboration" would be the more relevant part of the Academic Honesty Policy to emphasize when excluding ChatGPT.<sup>17</sup>

<https://www.sju.edu/academic-integrity/academic-honesty-policy>

<sup>17</sup> "Academic Honesty Policies," Saint Joseph's University.



Then, via Academic Affairs, I learned that an English department colleague had managed to open an OpenAI account and document in a Zoom video some of ChatGPT's capabilities. After liaising with my colleague, and realizing that no university-wide guidelines would appear before the new semester started, I sent my department colleagues an email containing my revised academic integrity statement, as well as links to several explanatory articles. I decided to prohibit students from using AI devices, just as I had in previous years prohibited them from using websites like SparkNotes, because I believed that both choices obstructed productive intellectual grappling with the works we studied and impeded the overall improvement of the students' writing, reading, and thinking skills. As on previous syllabi, I required students, when handing in assignments, to detail all of the sources and collaborators they had enlisted and how they had utilized them, so that students who did not disclose their use of AI would be engaging in "unauthorized collaboration."

Not long after the 2023 spring semester started, I noticed that some of my students' Discussion Board submissions were displaying an unusually refined style, but since I was still getting to know their writing abilities, it was difficult to make a convincing case that ChatGPT had been employed. At other times, however, a few students neglected to look closely over their contributions before submission, and when challenged on the posts' irrelevance to the prompts given, admitted to using ChatGPT. Since they were first-years, and

still relatively new to college, these students earned a fail only for that specific submission (rather than a fail for the entire course, which faculty are allowed to enforce), but I did enter an Academic Honesty Violation report, in order to underline the incident's gravity. As I explained to them, students who earned a second report would be called before the Academic Honesty Board and face possible suspension or expulsion.

AI problems arose again with the first paper, which asked students to take the role of a director writing a letter to cast and crew before rehearsing, in London's rebuilt Globe Theatre, a chosen scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The letter had to draw upon what students had learned in class and from the Norton second edition of *Macbeth* about the play's literary and historical sources and its political and theological contexts, so they could offer cast and crew effective advice on making the play relevant to a contemporary audience, while still staying true to its Renaissance roots. In previous courses, I had allowed students to draw upon both the critical sources at the back of the Norton edition and the scholarly sources available in the university library's databases. Now, post-ChatGPT, I changed that requirement: the three different sources to be integrated into the letter could be taken only from the Norton edition, so I could establish more quickly whether or not AI had been used. Despite this condition, some students still incorporated into their letter inscrutable sentences that did not correspond by content or page number to the Norton edition.



When questioned, they claimed they had become confused about the difference between quotation and paraphrase, even though we had discussed that topic in some detail in earlier classes. However, unlike the situation with SparkNotes-style plagiarism, it was much harder to establish decisively that AI has been used; if the student refused to admit to it, a stalemate resulted. In these cases, I deducted points for careless citation practices but could not submit an Academic Honesty violation report because clear evidence was not available, even though (as Lennox suspects with regard to Macbeth's actions after the mysterious murder of King Duncan) "Things have been strangely borne."<sup>18</sup>

Prior to the due date for the second paper, which was fully research-based rather than a creative-critical hybrid like the first one, I went into even greater detail about responsible citation practices and key differences among quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Once again, I restricted the students' research sources to the contextual materials in their Norton edition of *Gulliver*, or their Norton edition of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, while students who chose to write upon William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* were restricted to that edition's introduction and endnotes and the essays in the online *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*.

Nevertheless, when grading the research papers, I still encountered too

many instances in which the prose and perceptiveness of students who had performed adequately (at best) during in-class responses suddenly metamorphosized into sophisticated and sensitive reading expressed through elaborately phrased and structured writing. Once again, it proved extremely difficult to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that these students had resorted to AI, for part or all of their work, except in the case of the *Gulliver's Travels* hallu-citation, which the student could not so easily explain away.

Towards the end of the same semester in which these ChatGPT-created pressures proliferated, our university's Core Curriculum Review Task Force released its draft proposal for revising the General Education Program (GEP). Our university's merger with science-focused and health-professions-focused institutions, several of whose programs needed external accreditation, provided an opening for some administrators and faculty to lobby for shrinking the size of the GEP. The existing GEP required one English literature survey course (Texts and Contexts), but the new plan proposed instead a Humanities Distribution, entitled Aesthetics, Culture, and Tradition, which would permit students to pick three courses from a minimum of two (out of four) departments: Art & Art History; English, Writing, & Journalism; Modern & Classical Languages; and Music / Theater / Film. One of the multiple

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<sup>18</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Second Edition, edited by Robert S. Miola (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 50.

alarming potential consequences was that students could graduate from the university without taking a single literature course.

Our English department clearly needed to formulate a rationale for one of its core elements, and so some colleagues and I worked on a response document to justify keeping literature as a required course in the new GEP. Fortunately, since the university is Jesuit, we were able to highlight the pedagogical tradition of *eloquentia perfecta*, which seeks to develop great eloquence through great literature. John O'Malley, S.J., defines *eloquentia perfecta* as "the skill to say precisely what one means and to do so with grace and persuasive force," which is "a "fundamental" ability "needed by anyone in a leadership position, however humble."<sup>19</sup> A key way to foster this ability, O'Malley urges, is "the study of great literature in one's own language and in the languages of other cultures." "[W]hen properly taught," he argues, literary works can "sharpen student's aesthetic sensibilities, but, more to the point, in their authentic depictions of characters and situations they mirror the ambiguities of our own life experiences and invite reflection upon them"; these works can "weave webs with words that reflect the webs we weave with our lives, which are not neat geometric patterns but broken in places and filled with knots and

tangles."<sup>20</sup> Literary study's investigation of these "webs" promotes "[t]he virtue the rhetorical tradition especially wants to inculcate," namely "prudence" (or what Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, calls *phronesis*), which O'Malley defines as "good judgment, the wisdom that characterizes the ideal leaders and makes them sensitive in assessing the relative merits of competing probabilities in the conflict of human situations."<sup>21</sup> The spirit of *phronesis* informing *eloquentia perfecta* aspires "to turn students into adults who make humane decisions for themselves and for any group they might be leading," with the ultimate pedagogical goal to support the development of "a wise person [...] whose judgment you respect and to whom you would go for personal advice, rather than to the technocrat, the bureaucrat, and the zealot."<sup>22</sup> O'Malley concludes by noting that the study of literature remains a crucial component of the disciplinary category once known as "humane letters," which seeks "to instill a secular version of what we [Jesuits] in the tradition of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius call discernment."<sup>23</sup>

Fortunately, the review task force listened to our department on this matter, and in their revised proposal they reinstated a literature course as a GEP requirement. This success did not, of course, displace the threat that ChatGPT poses for the written

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<sup>19</sup> John O'Malley, S.J., "Not for Ourselves Alone: Rhetorical Education in the Jesuit Mode With Five Bullet Points for Today," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 43 (Spring 2013), 5.

<sup>20</sup> O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 5.

<sup>21</sup> O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 5.

<sup>22</sup> O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 5.

<sup>23</sup> O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 5.

analysis and evaluation of literary works, but, in working on the response document, I found O'Malley's essay, and its focus on literary study as a way to develop "prudence," or *phronesis*, pertinent later that summer when I began to redesign my fall courses. For how can the humanities help to develop *phronesis* in our students if devices like ChatGPT lead students to believe they can comprehend "Philosophy, Poetry, Politicks, Law, Mathematicks and Theology, without the least Assistance from Genius or Study"?<sup>24</sup>

One last event that supplies context for this essay's conclusions occurred when my university's Office of Teaching and Learning (to whom I had first mentioned AI-generated writing in January) asked me in March 2023 to convene and chair a panel on AI / ChatGPT and pedagogy for the annual Teaching and Learning Forum in May. In keeping with the event's theme of collaboration, I wanted the panel to include a contributor from each of the university's four schools (Arts and Sciences; Business; Education and Human Development; and Health Professions), so I sent out a university-wide email. In it, I asked anyone who had grappled practically and productively that semester with the pedagogical repercussions of AI / ChatGPT, and who was also willing to be a panelist, to propose a discussion topic that would engage listeners, include an active learning focus, and investigate the positive and negative impacts of this new technology. However,

several faculty members (including two winners of teaching awards, to whom I had personally reached out) told me they were insufficiently confident about how best to deal with ChatGPT to offer advice to their colleagues.

Nevertheless, I was finally able to find four professors, two from Arts and Sciences and two from Business, who had interesting proposals and were brave enough to take a public stance. The panel was titled "Teaching in the Time of AI / ChatGPT" (a vague allusion to Gabriel García Márquez's 1985 novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*), and it featured the following presentations: "The Future of Assignments in the Age of AI"; "Zen and the Art of Intellection: Customizing Teaching and Learning and Building Loyalty in the Embrace of AI / ChatGPT"; "The Importance of AI to Food Marketers to Stay Competitive and Relevant in the Evolving Digital Landscape of Marketing"; and "For Better or Worse: GPT Engagement and Workarounds in Writing-Intensive Courses." The first presenter explored the various pros and cons of allowing students to use AI for coursework, while noting that all of his observations and suggestions were interim, since the technology was changing significantly week by week. The second presenter performed a hands-on demonstration with volunteer audience members to show how Latin could be taught in an active-learning format so as to build the kind of pedagogical trust and loyalty that might reduce

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<sup>24</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 154.

students' impulsive rush to AI as a first resort. The third presenter showed how AI techniques were already ubiquitous in the food marketing industry (despite some consumer concerns) and why it was therefore vital for business students to develop their skills in these areas while at college. The final presenter explained how she had banned AI for the first half of her course on creativity and then allowed students to use it in the second half, in the hope that they would have learned enough through in-class-only writing to be able to identify and interrogate ChatGPT's flaws. The second half of the panel session consisted of questions to the panelists and a kind of informal therapy session, in which audience members expressed their anxieties about the new technology. At the end of the meeting, I encouraged everyone to read Owen Terry's *Chronicle* essay, which had appeared a week and a half earlier.

I came away from the panel with the growing conviction that focusing on AI skills, including the use of ChatGPT, appeared necessary—and possibly even productive—for certain academic fields, but I was less convinced that the pluses outweighed the minuses for the specific discipline of literary studies, especially in light of the student work in my recently concluded spring semester courses, as detailed above. The forum session that immediately followed only reinforced my reluctance to incorporate ChatGPT and Co. into my classes. Organized by the Academic Integrity Council,

the panel explained how Large Language Models worked and also demonstrated the unreliability of AI detectors, both in identifying AI-generated writing as human and in identifying human writing as AI, especially when the humans were not writing in their native language.

For the next couple of months, I tried to focus on my own scholarship, but the appearance in late July of Maya Bodnick's *Chronicle* essay reminded me that the fall semester was fast approaching and showed me that ChatGPT-4 was immensely more powerful than its predecessor. I knew then it was time to decide which course to take for my courses.

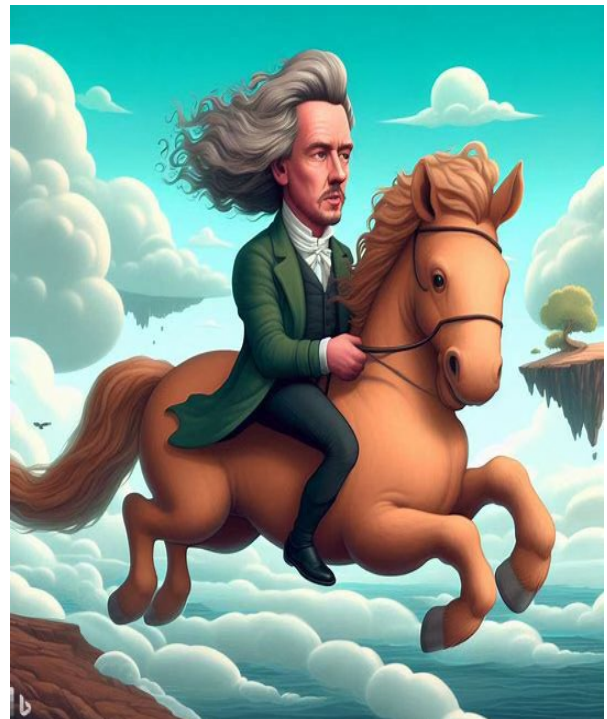


Figure 2: AI image generated from the prompt: "Jonathan Swift with a Houyhnhnm."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The illustration was generated in October 2023 on the Microsoft Bing Image Creator,

powered by DALL-E3, by Richard Denis Haslam, in response to the prompt "Jonathan Swift

## THINKING ABOUT CRITICAL THINKING

At the beginning of August, I reread Terry's and Bodnick's essays, musing in particular on two important perspectives they shared.<sup>26</sup> Both lamented ChatGPT's ability to undermine critical thinking, and both urged faculty members to replace out-of-class writing with in-class writing.<sup>27</sup> What would happen, I wondered, if I offered a semester-long focus on critical thinking skills and habits as a pedagogical compensation for the removal of all out-of-class writing, a removal that might otherwise confuse, alarm, or frustrate the students?

Of course, numerous academics over numerous decades have advocated for the centrality of critical thinking in college (and pre-college) education, but two problems persist: defining—and then pedagogically actualizing—this holy grail / will-o'-the-wisp. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines critical thinking as “the objective, systematic, and rational analysis and evaluation of factual evidence in order to form a judgement on a subject, issue, etc.”<sup>28</sup> This contrasts neatly with the same dictionary's characterization of post-truth, which

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with a Houyhnhnm.” Since a Houyhnhnm would never allow a Yahoo to ride upon its back, the image also functions as an emblem of AI's current limitations.

<sup>26</sup> My anonymous outside reviewer worried that my course redesign relied too much on Terry and Bodnick's perspectives, but their central importance for my approach is based on two factors: they provide solid evidence of the damage that ChatGPT (at least for now) is unleashing on the tradition of using out-of-class essay writing to promote critical

might be conceptualized as critical thinking's mortal enemy: “[r]elating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”<sup>29</sup> However, the *OED*'s definition of critical thinking seems too brief to brief anyone adequately.

In his pioneering 1941 study, Edward Glaser supplied a more extensive and useful characterization:

The ability to think critically [...] involves three things: (1) an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences, (2) knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and (3) some skill in applying those methods. Critical thinking calls for a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions

thinking; and, as self-aware and motivated students, they can peer-advise my students to rethink their reliance on AI.

<sup>27</sup> Terry, “I'm a Student”; Bodnick, “GPT-4.”

<sup>28</sup> “[C]ritical thinking,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/critical-thinking\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#991244228750](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/critical-thinking_n?tab=meaning_and_use#991244228750).

<sup>29</sup> “[P]ost-truth,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/post-truth\\_adj?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#1217123470](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/post-truth_adj?tab=meaning_and_use#1217123470).

to which it tends. It also generally requires ability to recognize problems, to find workable means for meeting those problems, to gather and marshal pertinent information, to recognize unstated assumptions and values, to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity, and discrimination, to interpret data, to appraise evidence and evaluate arguments, to recognize the existence (or non-existence) of logical relationships between propositions, to draw warranted conclusions and generalizations, to put to test the conclusions and generalizations at which one arrives, to reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience, and to render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life.<sup>30</sup>

Glaser also observes crucially that, while “[k]nowledge of the methods of logical inquiry is important,” “attitudes” towards such thinking are “[e]ven more important for the everyday practice of democracy”; as a result, “[p]ersons who have acquired

a disposition to *want* evidence for beliefs, and who have acquired an attitude of reasonableness have also acquired something of a way of life which makes for more considerate and humane relationships among men [*sic*].”<sup>31</sup>

Glaser’s recognition of the dual importance when defining critical thinking of both *learned* abilities and *habitual* practices clearly influenced the forty-six-person team assembled by the American Philosophical Association (APA) a few decades later.<sup>32</sup> Their 1990 report listed not only specific *skills* intrinsic to critical thinking (“purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based”) but also specific *habits* to cultivate:

The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases,

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<sup>30</sup> Edward M. Glaser, *An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941), 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> Glaser, *Experiment*, 6. Glaser’s definition, along with many other insightful definitions of critical thinking, can be found on the website of the non-profit organization The Foundation for Critical Thinking: <https://www.critical-thinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>.

<sup>32</sup> P. A. Facione, *Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction. Research findings and recommendations* (Newark, DE: American Philosophical Association, 1990). Cited in Philip C. Abrami, Robert M. Bernard, Eugene Borokhovski, David I. Waddington, C. Anne Wade, and Tonje Person, “Strategies for Teaching Students to Think Critically: A Meta-Analysis,” *Review of Educational Research*, 85, no. 2 (2015): 277.



prudent [i.e. exercising *phronesis*] in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit.<sup>33</sup>

The APA's definition of the skills and the habits crucial for critical thinking helped me greatly in deciding what to prioritize in my fall semester courses.

The next challenge was to identify which pedagogical techniques were most likely to promote critical thinking in the classroom. In this case, David Hitchcock's very helpful entry on critical thinking in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* led me to a 2015 "Meta-Analysis" of "Strategies for Teaching Students to Think Critically."<sup>34</sup> Philip Abrami and his team of researchers combed through 2332 scholarly articles, which they narrowed to 684 that met their "inclusion criteria."<sup>35</sup> Based on their analysis of these sources, they highlighted four key pedagogical techniques to promote critical thinking. The first, the *sine qua non*, was "Individual Study," which "takes place whenever students study *alone* by engaging in reading, watching, listening to a teacher's

explanations, reflecting on new information, and solving abstract problems on their own."<sup>36</sup> This implies that to promote critical thinking it is necessary for students to do a lot of intellectual work outside the classroom. Since, in my redesigned courses, this work would no longer take the form of graded writing, it would have to comprise sufficiently challenging reading and reflection.

The second desideratum was "Dialogue," an approach harking "back to the Socratic method, in which concepts were clarified through one-on-one interactions"; "critical dialogue" works best when students "are discussing a particular problem together," whether in an "adversarial" or "cooperative" manner, and it "can take multiple forms, including whole-class debates, within-group debates, within-group discussions, whole-class discussions, and online discussion forums."<sup>37</sup> With the advent of ChatGPT, I had already decided to dispense with "online discussion forums" (which I had tried out when teaching online during the worst of Covid-19 and found very unproductive), but Abrami and company helpfully listed a variety of dialogue formats, some of which I had already used, and some of which looked worth exploring: "Teacher poses questions to students"; "Students question their teacher"; "Student dyads (no/minimal teacher participation)"; "Whole-class discussion

<sup>33</sup> Facione, *Critical Thinking*, 3; cited in Abrami et al, "Strategies," 277.

<sup>34</sup> David Hitchcock, "Critical Thinking," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2018; 2022).

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-thinking/>. Abrami et al, "Strategies," 306.

<sup>35</sup> Abrami et al, "Strategies," 287.

<sup>36</sup> Abrami et al, "Strategies," 289.

<sup>37</sup> Abrami et al, "Strategies," 289-90.



(no/minimal teacher participation)”; “Group discussions (no/minimal teacher participation)”; “Student dyads (teacher-led)”; “Whole-class discussion (teacher-led)”; “Group discussions (teacher-led)”; “Formal debate”; “Student presentation with a follow-up discussion”; and “Socratic dialogue.”<sup>38</sup>

The third prerequisite was “Authentic or Anchored Instruction,” which “is characterized by an effort to present students with genuine problems or problems that make sense to them, engage them, and stimulate them to inquire.”<sup>39</sup> According to Abrami, “[s]imulations are, perhaps, some of the most powerful examples, since they bring the problem to life in the strongest possible way,” as do “[r]ole-playing,” “various kinds of dilemmas (e.g., ethical, medical),” and any “well-defined real-world problem” suitable for investigation.<sup>40</sup> This “authentic/applied category” possesses “numerous subcategories” in addition to those already mentioned, such as “[a]ppplied problem solving (including some hypothetical problems with high applied value for students [...]),” “[c]ase studies,” and “[p]laying games.”<sup>41</sup> Fortunately, literary studies overlaps fairly well with this approach, since works like *Macbeth*, *Gulliver*, *Songs*, *The Awakening*, and

our final course text, Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* really do “present students with genuine problems” and—if taught effectively—can “engage them, and stimulate them to inquire”; and literary works are—amongst many other things—“simulations,” “case studies,” aesthetic “games,” deliverers of “dilemmas,” repositories for “role-playing,” and hosts for “hypothetical problems” that are also “well-defined real-world problem[s].”<sup>42</sup>

The fourth essential was “mentoring,” which is defined as “one-on-one interaction between an expert, or more generally someone with more expertise, and a novice, or more generally someone with less expertise,” in a process that “emphasizes one-on-one modeling and error correction based on critical analysis.” Given that administrators had increased the cap for my literary survey course over recent years from 23 to 25 and then to 27 students, this component represented the biggest challenge to realize. An absence of mentoring would not necessarily be calamitous, since Abrami’s meta-analysis indicated that the “two general types of instructional interventions” proven to be “especially helpful in the development of generic CT [critical thinking] skills” were (i) “the opportunity for dialogue (e.g., discussion) [...],

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<sup>38</sup> Abrami et al, “Strategies,” 290. I also dispensed with “[s]tudent presentation[s]” when teaching online during Covid, since they only increased students’ stress, and the advent of ChatGPT provides no incentive to reinstate them.

<sup>39</sup> Abrami et al, “Strategies,” 290.

<sup>40</sup> Abrami et al, “Strategies,” 291.

<sup>41</sup> Abrami et al, “Strategies,” 291.

<sup>42</sup> As noted earlier, John O’Malley argues that “in their *authentic* depictions of characters and situations” literary works can “mirror the ambiguities of our own life experiences and invite reflection upon them”: “Not for Ourselves Alone,” 5 (my emphasis).

especially where the teacher poses questions, when there are both whole-class teacher-led discussions and teacher-led group discussions” and (ii) “the exposure of students to authentic or situated problems and examples [...], particularly when applied problem solving and role-playing methods are used.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, as I began redesigning the course in mid-August 2023, I was determined to find space for some type of mentoring.



<sup>43</sup> Abrami et al, “Strategies,” 302.

<sup>44</sup> The illustration was generated in October 2023 on the Microsoft Bing Image Creator, powered by DALL-E3, by Richard Denis Haslam, in response to the prompt “Jonathan Swift Talking to a Houyhnhnm.” Since the

Figure 3: AI image generated from the prompt: “Jonathan Swift Talking to a Houyhnhnm.”<sup>44</sup>

### REDESIGNING THE COURSE

To inform students who had enrolled in my fall courses back in the spring and summer about the course redesign, I emailed them in the week before classes started to announce that all graded writing assignments for the course would be carried out solely in the classroom, since we were going to draw upon and develop human intelligence (HI), rather than artificial intelligence (AI). To help them understand my rationale, I suggested that they read the essays by their fellow students Terry and Bodnick, which I had attached to the email and placed in the course’s learning system website. Once class started, they would have to put away all electronic devices, including computers and cellphones and use only pen and paper for note-taking. I also encouraged students to read in advance the attached course syllabus, especially the sections concerning the Academic Honesty Policy (including the prohibition of AI use) and the redesigned class-by-class schedule. Finally, since most of the students were just starting at the university, I inserted a link to Marie Holmes’ article “What College Professors Wish Students Would Do Before The First Day Of Class.”<sup>45</sup>

Houyhnhnms do not wear clothes, the image also functions as an emblem of AI’s current limitations, as does Swift’s levitating pose adjacent to the bench.

<sup>45</sup> Marie Holmes, “What College Professors Wish Students Would Do Before The First Day

As I mentioned at the outset, what you are reading is a draft report from the field. Given this journal's deadlines for abstract and full-text submission (in order to allow publication in January 2024), right now, as I finish working on this essay, we are just starting the fourth week of fall semester. So, in terms of highlighting critical thinking activities, I want to explain briefly both the structure of the opening classes and my (potentially Quixotic) plan for the rest of the semester. For our first meeting, I used a teacher-led discussion format: each student was asked to write down at least three academic skills, three strategies for approaching specific intellectual problems, and three attitudes to life in general that they believe critical thinkers possess. Next, I paired each student with a classmate and asked them to introduce themselves and reach consensus on the three skills, strategies, and attitudes. After getting spoken feedback from the whole class, I distributed and discussed with them a handout that contained: (i) the APA's list of critical thinking "cognitive skills and sub-skills," "[a]pproaches to specific issues, questions, or problems," and "[a]pproaches to life and living in general"; and (ii) passages from Abrami and Co.'s meta-analysis concerning "Individual Study," "Dialogue," "Authentic or Anchored Instruction," and "Mentoring." Lastly, I explained that the course's consistent focus on critical thinking was designed to compensate for the inevitable pedagogical restrictions that accompanied

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Of Class," *HuffPost* (23 July 2023), <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/college->

in-class-only writing, a practice that was itself occasioned by the intellectual repercussions of ChatGPT, as explained so cogently in the essays by Terry and Bodnick. During the following seven days of the Add / Drop period, the students could then choose to stay with this section of Texts and Contexts or switch into another one.

In the class meetings that followed, we focused on understanding the text of *Macbeth* and the intellectual, theological, and political contexts that shaped and framed it. In our class discussion and our written analysis of performance extracts, we explored in particular two "authentic" problems: first, how to understand character motivation and event causation, especially with respect to whether the play implied that Macbeth's actions were primarily determined by his own free will (or predestined fate), by Lady Macbeth's influence, by the witches' supernatural knowledge and powers, or by other forces; and, second (via Paper One) how to make the play theatrically effective for a contemporary audience, without resorting to anachronistic or presentist gimmicks.

During the third week of the semester, I devoted the final third of one class to brainstorming on Paper One, and the final third of the subsequent class to outlining. In each case, students wrote in an examination booklet, which I collected, read, annotated with comments, and returned to them in the next class. The entirety of the

professors-first-day-of-school\_1\_64c27273e4b03ad2b896eb2b

following class was spent on writing in the same booklet a rough draft of Paper One, including the integration of three different critical sources from the Norton *Macbeth's* contextual material. Once again, I collected, read, annotated with comments, and returned the rough draft to them in the following class, so that they could write the final draft. With a combined total of 62 students (from two sections of Texts and Contexts, and a third class, on Post-WWII American fiction), this entailed a lot of work, but I persevered because it seemed like the best way to incorporate Abrami's mentoring component (in addition to the office-hours meetings I had with individual students who wanted further feedback on their outlines and drafts). Another downside was that the 50-minute session (for a class that meets three times a week) was insufficient for students to write a substantial enough paper, and so I plan to use 75-minute sessions (meeting twice a week) in future semesters.

I want to end this section by sketching out my plan for the rest of the fall semester, with respect to teaching *Gulliver's Travels*, *Songs*, *The Awakening*, and *Citizen*, in a manner that promotes critical thinking. For *Gulliver*, the principal "authentic" question will be the one James Clifford first raised almost five decades ago. Which reading of the novel is more persuasive

<sup>46</sup> James L. Clifford, "Gulliver's Fourth Voyage: 'Hard' and 'Soft' Schools of Interpretation," *Quick Springs of Sense: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Larry S. Champion (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), 33.

and evidentially supported: the "'soft' approach," which defines "the tendency to find comic passages and compromise solutions," or the "hard" perspective, which advances "an interpretation" that "stresses the shock and difficulty of the work, with almost tragic overtones"?<sup>46</sup> As I will explain to students, although the ongoing debate between these two interpretative models might seem to echo that between the "*Tramecksan*" "High-Heels" and the "*Slamecksan*" "low Heels," or between the "*Big-Endians*" and the "smaller End"-ians, it is also a fascinating and highly relevant hermeneutic puzzle that possesses large-scale implications for how we understand humans and envision our future prospects.<sup>47</sup> The in-class mid-term exam on *Gulliver* will then allow students to explore their own interpretations in the context of this hard-soft debate.

For Blake's *Songs*, which we will begin just before the mid-term exam, the primary "authentic" problem will be the one raised by Robert Essick, editor of the beautiful (albeit too expensive for coursebook purposes) Huntington Library edition of *Songs*: "The extent to which experience insinuates itself into innocence, and thus authorizes ironic readings of the earlier group of poems, has been the major challenge to the interpretation of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* for almost a hundred years."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 39-41.

<sup>48</sup> William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, edited by Robert N. Essick (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2008), 14. Since there is no stand-alone Norton edition of the *Songs*, we use the Oxford University Press

According to Essick, “The extreme positions in this debate—on the one hand that *Innocence* is pure innocence, or on the other that all of *Innocence* should be read from the perspective of its contrary, *Experience*—have serious limitations,” and yet “[i]t is difficult, at least for the modern reader, to avoid the perception of an ironic undercurrent in some passages, or even single words, in *Songs of Innocence*”; so the question is: “should all of the poems be read in light of these moments that expose the vulnerability of innocence?”<sup>49</sup> This question encapsulates the “authentic” problem that students will investigate in their second paper, using again a mentored feedback process of in-class brainstorming, outlining, and drafting.<sup>50</sup>

We then move to Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, for which the major “authentic” problem will be how to adjudicate judiciously between critical evaluations of the novel that treat it as an artistically triumphant, American feminist classic and those that interrogate it as a work whose aesthetic and feminist achievements are undermined by its racist assumptions. While the majority of the contextual and critical extracts in the Norton third edition of *The*

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edition, which has the disadvantage of outdated editorial material, but the advantage of affordable full-color printings of the plates: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>49</sup> Blake, *Songs*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Blake could be seen as an early proponent of critical thinking. In his letter of 23 August 1799 to the Reverend Trusler, he maintains that “[t]he wisest of the ancients consider’d

*Awakening* endorse the first position, the contributions by Helen Taylor and Elizabeth Ammons provide a striking counterbalance.<sup>51</sup>

The classroom discussion and in-class responses about the relations between aesthetics and politics in Chopin’s novel will prepare us for our final coursebook: Claudia Rankine’s collection of prose poems (and an essay) *Citizen: An American Lyric*. For this work, the crucial “authentic” problem will be to understand the double-edged nature of the faculty of imagination: on one side, imagination allows us to create and respond to resonant new worlds, whose fictionality can reveal truths that help us enter empathetically into the consciousness of others; on the other side, imagination allows us to create and project fantasies and fears that can fatally divide us, especially concerning what Rankine terms “a racial imaginary.”<sup>52</sup>

In the two-hour final exam, students will make relevant formal and thematic connections and contrasts among the five-course texts, in addition to exploring the “authentic” problem of how literature works aesthetically, psychologically, and

what is not too explicit as the fittest for instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act”: “Letters (Composed 1791-1827),” *The Blake Archive*, <https://blakearchive.org/work/letters>.

<sup>51</sup> Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, Third Edition, edited by Margo Culley (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 30.

politically to help humans understand and appreciate more fully themselves and their global entanglements.

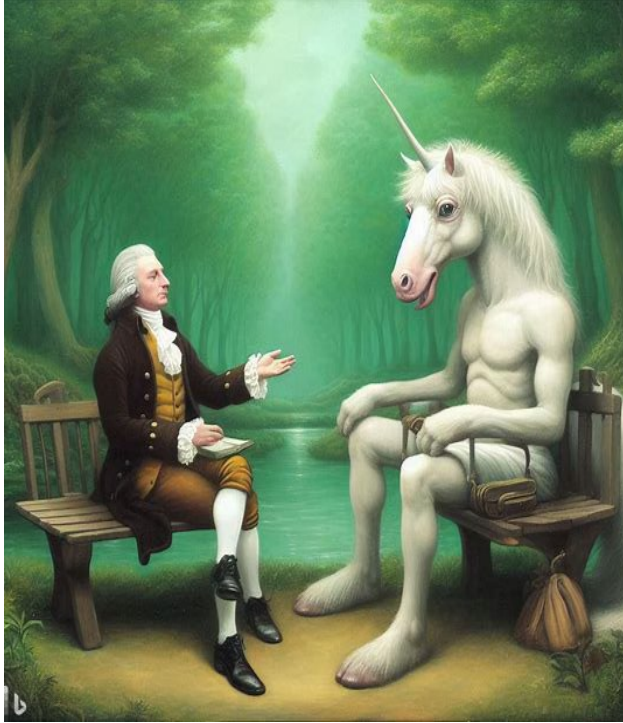


Figure 4: AI image generated from the prompt: “Jonathan Swift Talking to a Houyhnhnm.”<sup>53</sup>

### CONCLUSION: “SIX EYES” FOR “CIRCUMSPECTION”

That’s the plan, anyway. I won’t know for sure how much the students believe they have gained (or lost) from this experiment until I read the end-of-semester evaluations, but I do know right now that I prefer to read their handwritten in-class

<sup>53</sup> The illustration was generated in October 2023 on the Microsoft Bing Image Creator, powered by DALL-E3, by Richard Denis Haslam, in response to the prompt “Jonathan Swift Talking to a Houyhnhnm.” The Houyhnhnm-unicorn hybrid and Swift’s three legs also illustrate AI’s current limitations.

responses and papers, however, suffused they are with spelling, punctuation, and syntactical errors, than to maintain a perpetual hermeneutics-of-suspicion mode when encountering potential GPT-chattering.

The pedagogical debate concerning how best to respond to the AI-challenge will not cease any time soon. A few days before the fall semester started, political scientist Corey Robin’s essay “The End of the Take-Home Essay?” reassured me that I was not completely alone or awry in undertaking my classroom experiment.<sup>54</sup> Reinforcing Robin’s conclusions, Len Gutkin extrapolated persuasively that “[t]he consequence of ChatGPT-4 in the short and medium term will be not chaos but nihilism,” since “[t]he entire edifice of paper writing and evaluation, and the learning that take-home essays are specially poised to foster, will become a meaningless game”; although “[s]ome conscientious students will work hard to write original papers [...] their instructors will never be able to have much faith in them, and the students will know that,” so “[t]he suspicion of

<sup>54</sup> Corey Robin, “The End of the Take-Home Essay? How ChatGPT changed my plans for the fall,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 24, 2023), <https://www-chronicle-com/article/the-end-of-the-take-home-essay>.



ubiquitous false coin will make everyone poor.”<sup>55</sup> I can only hope that my continued focus on critical thinking will help students to feel at least a little less poor.

Nevertheless, it would be antithetical to critical thinking to rule out the possibility that AI devices might eventually develop in such a way as to promote rather than impede critical thinking, even in the field of literary studies. Platforms like *Inside Higher Ed*, *Times Higher Education*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* are awash weekly with articles extolling the exciting pedagogical improvements that AI will allow, but it is too early to say for sure whether their exhortations will ultimately help lead students to the *phronesis*

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<sup>55</sup> Len Gutkin, “The Review: ChatGPT robs students of something essential,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 5, 2023), <https://www-chronicle-com/newsletter/the-review/2023-09-05>. John Warner and Michael Clune also respond to Corey Robin, sounding a more optimistic (but, to me, less convincing) note.

John Warner, “We Must Still Make Students Write: A response to Corey Robin’s retreat to in-class writing,” *Inside Higher Ed* (August 29, 2023), <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/blogs/just-visiting/2023/08/29/chatgpt-challenge-instruction-can-meet-dont-retreat>.

Michael Clune, “AI means Professors Need to Raise Their Grading Standards: ChatGPT has transformed grade inflation from a minor corruption to an enterprise-destroying blight,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 12, 2023), <https://www.chronicle.com/article/ai-means-professors-need-to-raise-their-grading-standards>.

of “the *Brobdingnagians*, whose wise Maxims in Morality and Government, it would be our Happiness to observe,” or to the folly of the “Projectors” of Lagado, seeking fruitlessly to “extract [...] Sun-Beams out of Cucumbers” or “reduce human Excrement to its original Food [...]”<sup>56</sup>

Once again, this brings us back to *Gulliver*. Looking over the novel in preparation for teaching it and for writing this essay, I was suddenly struck by a passage to which I had not paid sufficient attention before. It occurs in the first half of the sixth chapter of Part One, when Gulliver lists some of the Lilliputians’ foundational “Laws and Customs.”<sup>57</sup> On first read, the sequence is puzzling because the Lilliputian leaders

<sup>56</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 246; 151-52. Flower Derby divides the current faculty into “AI resisters,” “AI realists,” and “AI resistors”; she advocates strongly for “bring[ing] AI into our syllabi, class activities, and assignments,” although the five techniques she proposes do not seem especially well-suited to literary studies: “Why You Should Rethink Your Resistance to ChatGPT,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 13, 2023), <https://www-chronicle-com/article/why-you-should-rethink-your-resistance-to-chatgpt>. The emerging field of “literary cybernetics” may hold more promise: N. Katherine Hayles, “Literary Cybernetics: The Point (of the Spear),” *New Literary History*, 54, No. 2 (Spring 2023), 1289-1294.

<sup>57</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 48.



ultimately reveal themselves to be as petty in mind as in body, whereas many of their “Laws and Customs” seem like procedures Swift himself would support, such as judging “[i]nformers” harshly, treating “[f]raud” more severely than “[t]heft,” and not merely punishing criminals but rewarding with financial and social “[p]rivileges” those citizens who have “strictly observed the Laws of [...the] Country for seventy three Moons [...]”<sup>58</sup>

The puzzle surrounding this utopian sequence is solved when Gulliver mentions that he is describing “the original [legal] Institutions, and not the most scandalous Corruptions, into which these People are fallen by the degenerate Nature of Man”; these “Corruptions” include the “infamous Practice of acquiring great Employments by dancing on the Ropes, or Badges of Favour and Distinction by leaping over Sticks and creeping under them,” which “were first introduced by the Grandfather of the Emperor now reigning, and grew to the present height by the gradual increase of Party and Faction.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 50.

<sup>60</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Swift, *Gulliver*, 49. This “Image of Justice” from Lilliput’s past, with its “six Eyes” of “Circumspection,” stands in marked contrast to the later Emperor of Lilliput; “pursuant to his own merciful Disposition,” he issues an “order to put out both” of Gulliver’s “eyes,” so “that by this expedient Justice might in some measure be satisfied [...]”: *Gulliver*, 58. Justice’s “six Eyes” also contrast with those of the narrow-minded Laputians in Part III, who have one eye “turned inward, and the other directly up to

The Lilliputians who detail the ancient foundations of their legal system to Gulliver “thought it a prodigious Defect of Policy among us, when I told them that our Laws were enforced only by Penalties, without any mention of Reward,” whereas “the Image of Justice, in their Courts of Judicature, is formed with six Eyes, two before, as many behind, and on each side one, to signify Circumspection; with a Bag of Gold open in her Right Hand, and a Sword sheathed in her Left, to show she is more disposed to Reward than to Punish.”<sup>60</sup>

Ideally, those “six Eyes” allow “Justice” to see what is in front and lies ahead, to see where one has come from, and to visualize the contingencies and complexities that can suddenly appear from left and right field.<sup>61</sup> This personification of 360-degree “Circumspection” emblemizes the kind of critical thinking, or *phronesis*, or discernment that constitutes a central goal in teaching the humanities but that AI (in its present form) looks more likely to blinker.<sup>62</sup>

the Zenith,” rendering them unable to see what is in front of their face: *Gulliver*, 133.

<sup>62</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Puspa Damai and Dr. Barbara Postema, the editors of this special issue of *Critical Humanities*, for their assistance throughout the submission process. I am also grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer, for helpful feedback; to the students in my sections of Texts and Contexts in Spring and Fall 2023, for their participation; to my colleagues Ernest Baskin, Mary Brown, Christine Flanagan, and Mike Marzano, for being part of the faculty panel on AI; and to my son Richard Denis Haslam, for generating the AI images in Figures 2-5.



Figure 5: AI image generated from the prompt: "Jonathan Swift Talking to a Houyhnhnm."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The illustration was generated in October 2023 on the Microsoft Bing Image Creator, powered by DALL-E3, by Richard Denis Haslam, in response to the prompt "Jonathan Swift Talking to a Houyhnhnm." This Houyhnhnm

has no horn or clothes, but its unusual seating posture again functions as an emblem of AI's current limitations.

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