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A “Dance of storytelling”: Dissonances between substance and style in collaborative storytelling with AI[☆]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I investigate the ways human-AI collaboration could transform writing practices including feedback and revision. By closely examining an AI-generated essay, I expose potential gaps and contradictions in the essay and prompt ChatGPT to compose more nuanced writing. In inviting a dialectical negotiation with AI through iterative prompting and collaborative writing, I illuminate dissonances between content and style in the AI-generated essay. I proffer that interacting with AI language models can encourage students to engage critically with writerly choices by identifying instances in which AI-generated texts could consider alternative ideas or diverse perspectives. Ultimately, I contribute an innovative approach to collaborative storytelling with AI.

1. Introduction

The advent of generative AI invites writing studies scholar-practitioners to rethink the nature of composing, spurring questions over what it means to think and create. Writers are considering whether large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT can write in nuanced ways or emulate the styles of authors such as Shakespeare and Dickens (Hartenberger, 2023). While Hartenberger (2023) critiques ChatGPT for producing “somewhat predictable” outputs, human writers can offer feedback on AI-generated texts, which could lead LLMs to produce more complex, nuanced writing as the language models continue to evolve. Wang (2019) proposes a “human-in-the-loop” approach to interacting with AI systems, describing the potential for “a process that harnesses the efficiency of intelligent automation while remaining amenable to human feedback, all while retaining a greater sense of meaning.” In conceptualizing “a duality between automation and human interaction” [emphasis in the original], Wang poses the question: “How might we use AI to augment human capabilities, incorporating human interaction, preference, and judgment, in order to design more useful and meaningful AI systems?” Such a question — on the ways we as teachers and scholars of writing might preserve or even augment meaning in writing in the face of increasing automation — is vital to investigate as generative AI becomes increasingly prevalent as a tool for writing, especially in educational contexts (Roose, 2023).

Recent scholarship has examined the potential for human-AI collaboration in diverse writing contexts. Studies have investigated the ways AI could assist with creative writing (Coenen et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2022), compose *The Divine Comedy* (Floridi, 2023), and create digital marketing copy in professional communication (Knowles, 2022). Yet amid pressing debates over the ramifications of generative AI for critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, as well as concerns over research ethics and academic integrity (Anderson, 2023; Johnson, 2023), there arises a need to interrogate the impacts of AI-human collaboration on writing studies writ

[☆] A quoted phrase from an AI-generated essay written in the style of Marjorie Agosin.
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large, including the implications of integrating generative AI into writing pedagogy (MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing & AI, 2023). The MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force posits that AI language models could “augment the drafting and revising processes of writers for a variety of purposes” (p. 8). Considering the emphasis of writing pedagogy on the composing process, it becomes essential to examine the ways composing with AI may affect processes such as drafting and revision. Yet composing with AI could carry many risks: in acknowledging the ethical issues associated with AI tools, including the lack of source transparency and the risks of plagiarism, Anderson (2023) notes a need to “foster critical digital literacy” in developing strategies for supporting students to engage thoughtfully with AI (p. 10). Building on Anderson, who articulates “the importance of careful reflection on writing and the writing process” when considering whether to incorporate ChatGPT in the writing classroom (p. 9), I attend critically to the ways composing with AI could afford or constrain the writing process. I thus respond to the MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force’s contention that “our understanding of writing and how it is taught requires reenvisioning in the light of what looks to be seismic shifts warranted by large language models” (p. 4).

In this article, I offer an innovative approach to conceptualizing writerly collaboration with AI. I draw from Flower and Hayes’ (1981) cognitive process theory of writing and Sommers’ (1980, 1982) theories of revision and response to writing, scholarship on collaboration and response, as well as theories of Bakhtinian dialogism and digital rhetoric (Eyman, 2015; Krause, 1996) to re-contextualize the composing process in the era of generative AI. I study my interactions with ChatGPT, an LLM trained on a large corpus of data, “allowing it to learn language patterns and associations which it uses to generate human-like conversational text when prompted” (Lingard, 2023). As Perrotta et al. (2022) explain, by using a process of “self-attention,” “an input can interact with itself to estimate (probabilistically) where it should direct its attention in a data distribution,” forming “linguistically accurate associations... [that] take into consideration the relationships between words in a sentence” (p. 6). In (re)generating from existing human-written texts, LLMs produce predictive outputs based on the words and phrases that are likely to occur in a sequence of human-written text.

To illustrate a possible approach to composing with AI, I closely read an example exchange with ChatGPT in which I prompted the language model to compose an essay in the style of Chilean American writer Agosín (2012). I chose to analyze Agosín’s work in particular because I have taught “Always Living in Spanish” in my first-year writing classes. With each successive reading and discussion of the essay, I have grown to appreciate its intertwining of memory and identity, its rhythms and undulations, its layered evocations. I am especially fascinated by the sense that writing in one’s mother tongue “could recover fragrances, spoken rhythms, and the passion of [one’s own] identity” as words transcend articulation into transfiguration. I was curious to see whether ChatGPT could capture the visceral, sensory dimensions of language by which words transmute into meaning, enriching one’s “sense of being.” My choice to engage with Agosín’s writing also carries resonances with Agosín’s desire to “recover the familiar” within the strange: to summon an artificial interlocutor to imitate a familiar text is to create a slippage into alterity as words are reconjured, echoed obliquely by a disembodied voice, rematerializing in altered forms, perhaps resounding with unexpected meanings. My choice of Agosín’s work also carries personal resonances: I attended Wellesley College, where Agosín is a professor of Spanish, and I took classes in the Spanish department. In this sense, resonances arise from the depths of memory, reverberating in surprising ways, as branching out into new directions of inquiry simultaneously gestures toward a returning to one’s roots.

2. Reimagining writing process theory in the era of AI

In conceptualizing writing in the era of AI technologies, I draw from Flower and Hayes’ (1981) cognitive process theory of writing. I posit that interactions between humans and AI may illuminate the workings of the writing process, rendering visible the “moment-to-moment process of composing” (Flower and Hayes, p. 373). By prompting ChatGPT to revise drafts, writers can visualize the revision process as it unfolds in real time as human feedback deepens or complicates an AI-generated text. By engaging in continuous back-and-forth conversations with ChatGPT, writers can shape an AI-generated text in a near-instantaneous fashion, in a textual transaction (Rosenblatt, 1994) between the user and the tool. I conceptualize AI-human interactions as a mutually constitutive process that can stimulate what Sommers (1980) terms the “recursive shaping of language” (p. 379) in both human and AI writing. Such a process could become further complicated in the context of generative AI: as Graham (2023) writes, “AI provides the opportunity to add multiple dimensions of recursion where prompt-engineering, output curation, fact-checking, and revision become an orthogonal dimension to traditional writing and learning processes” (p. 166). In dialogue with AI, writers can simultaneously witness and influence the (re)shaping of language in a text, in an unfolding of meaning.

Significantly, Flower and Hayes’ notion of “regeneration” – the idea that writers can “regenerate [their] own goals” (p. 386) – could be interpreted in multiple ways: in the sense that ChatGPT (re)generates outputs from an existing corpus of texts, and in the sense that ChatGPT can “regenerate” a response to a prompt, producing multiple versions or iterations that might be read as variations on a theme, a phenomenon Eyman (2015) terms *variability*, in the sense that “a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions” that are “often in part automatically assembled by a computer” (p. 36). In a recursive process of goal setting and idea generation, students in a writing class could leverage ChatGPT as a conversation partner as both human and AI writers could generate increasingly complex ideas, as the potential pathways for composing a text could expand and diverge, echoing Krause’s (1996) sense of “the multiplicity of avenues of discourse within any given situation” (n.p.). Such a process of regeneration could produce a proliferation of potentialities, inviting multiple possible pathways for rethinking and regenerating a text. We could envision such pathways as neural pathways that branch outward, expanding rhizomatically (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013) in a continuous flow of expression unfolding in a synchronous environment. As the AI-human feedback cycles invite layers of recursivity, we can recast the writing process as “fluid” (Krause, 1996), reimagining AI-human collaboration as participatory, dynamic, and interactive.

3. Scholarship on collaboration

In investigating the potential for AI-human collaboration, I situate this analysis in the scholarship on collaboration. In theorizing collaboration as conversation, Bruffee (1984) writes, “To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is, we must learn to converse well” (p. 640). Bruffee conceptualizes knowledge as “a state of continual negotiation” as collaborators “negotiat[e] collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression” (p. 646). While Bruffee positions enculturation into academic discourse communities as an aim of collaborative knowledge production, Trimbur (1989) interrogates the notion of scholarly “consensus” within Bruffee’s theorization. Trimbur rethinks the way consensus could provoke critical examinations of knowledge, suggesting that consensus could “offer students a powerful critical instrument to interrogate the conversation — to interrupt it in order to investigate the forces which determine who may speak and what may be said, what inhibits communication and what makes it possible” (p. 612). In critiquing the models of collaboration posed by Bruffee and Trimbur, Duffy (2014) questions the idea of collaboration as conversation and focuses instead on the “discursive processes at work when writers collaborate” (p. 421) — processes inflected by moments of resistance or constraint in the negotiation of meaning. Duffy contends that collaboration can generate new knowledge and “facilitate the invention of new perspectives that in turn allow for novel articulations of discourse” (p. 422). Together, Bruffee, Trimbur, and Duffy’s conceptions of collaboration illuminate insights into the processes by which writers negotiate and critique knowledge while generating new ways of knowing.

This scholarship on collaboration raises implications for theorizing collaboration with LLMs. In producing predictive output based on an accumulated corpus of existing knowledge, ChatGPT-produced texts might be critiqued as reinstating “canonical” knowledge, yet AI-human collaboration could invite the potential for the negotiation of new knowledge as human users refine AI-generated responses. By conversing with AI, writers can subvert or complicate the “established” forms of knowledge embedded in AI texts, inviting the possibility of compositions that express ideas with “complexity” and “subtlety” (Bruffee, p. 640). By drawing on Trimbur’s conception of “consensus as a critical instrument to open gaps in the conversation through which differences may emerge” (p. 614), writers could identify gaps, assumptions, or contradictions embedded within a ChatGPT response, opening avenues for more nuanced compositions. Following Duffy, I suggest that AI-human collaboration could stimulate spaces for writers to (re)generate and (re)articulate discourse through the entanglements between a human user and an artificial interlocutor.

Following Hunter’s (2011) conception of digital authorship as “collaborative and communal” as well as Alalem’s (2023) framework for “cultivating a participatory culture” in the first-year writing classroom through digital storytelling, I offer an approach to collaborative storytelling with AI. In recontextualizing writing conversations within LLM interfaces, I posit that human-AI collaboration could foster participatory engagement with AI while positioning human writers as agents in the composing process (Jones & Beck, 2020).

4. Language, memory, and translation in the writings of Marjorie Agosín

I situate this study within storytelling, investigating the extent to which ChatGPT can compose stories, which simultaneously express and reflect the human condition. The field of writing studies has witnessed recent turns to story and counterstory, including Martinez (2013) methodology for counterstorying within the framework of critical race theory. Yet relatively few calls for storying have discussed the digital domain, including scholarship by Haas (2007) and Arola (2018) in the context of American Indian storytelling traditions and Banks (2011) from the perspective of African American discourses. Within this interwoven web of scholarship at the interface of the print and digital, I seek to trace an emergent thread of possibility in collaborative storytelling with AI. Echoing Haas’ notion of wampum as hypertext, we could envision ChatGPT’s corpus as a form of hypertext — as a string of beads that carry memory, that “signify meaning,” as “memories of inherited knowledges” that can be refashioned through remediation (p. 77, p. 85). To exhume memory from the latent depths of the corpus is to summon insight, to awaken articulations from the realm of artifice. In disentangling “layers of stories...woven together” (Haas, p. 88), I conceptualize AI-human collaboration as an intricate weave of storytelling, a delicate dance, a dialectical interplay between human and AI collaborators. To experiment with human-AI storytelling is to simultaneously probe the possibilities of digital futurities and to invite a return to the primordial element — to the tangible, gestural, emotive, embodied dimensions of expression. As we expose the textual fabric, recasting familiar threads to new light, we can wrest vestiges of humanity from the alterity of artifice, from the accumulated mass of texts in the corpus. To tell stories is to seek glimpses of the human within the post-human.

In my analysis, I focus on the writings of Marjorie Agosín, a Chilean American writer whose poems, essays, and stories negotiate the intertwining of language and memory within the context of exile and displacement. Agosín’s essays can be read as literacy narratives, a commonly taught assignment in writing classrooms that invites students to reflect on their lived experiences and to critically interrogate the connections between literacy and identity (Williams, 2003). Below are the opening paragraphs of Agosín’s essay “Always Living in Spanish” (2012), which I teach as a model text as part of a literacy narrative unit in a first-year writing course:

In the evenings in the northern hemisphere, I repeat the ancient ritual that I observed as a child in the southern hemisphere: going out while the night is still warm and trying to recognize the stars as it begins to grow dark silently. In the sky of my country, Chile, that long and wide stretch of land that the poets blessed and dictators abused, I could easily name the stars: the three Marias, the Southern Cross, and the three Lilies, names of beloved and courageous women. But here in the United States, where I have lived since I was a young girl, the solitude of exile makes me feel that so little is mine, that not even the sky has the same constellations, the trees and the fauna the same names or sounds, or the rubbish the same smell. How does one recover the

familiar? How does one name the unfamiliar? How can one be another or live in a foreign language? These are the dilemmas of one who writes in Spanish and lives in translation.

These opening lines convey the way language speaks into existence, conjures into being. In beginning with a “ritual,” Agosín echoes Frye’s (1951) contention that “in ritual... we may find the origin of narrative” (103). In her narrative, Agosín casts language as imbued with memory — “the memory of spaces inhabited in the past.” Agosín recounts that in Chile, she “could easily name the stars,” invoking the idea that to speak into being is to “language the world into existence” (Inoue, 2019, p. 359). To lose one’s language is akin to losing oneself, one’s sense of being and understanding. Agosín poses the questions: “How does one recover the familiar? How does one name the unfamiliar? How can one be another or live in a foreign language?” In grappling with what it means to “recover the familiar” within the strange, Agosín seeks toward re-constellating the self in a place where “not even the sky has the same constellations.”

In the essay, Agosín articulates the way language and translation serve as vehicles for the preservation of memory, both individual and communal: “because of translation, my memory has now become part of the memory of many others.” The word *translation*, in its common usage, denotes the process of translating from one language to another, yet translation could also signify “the expression or rendering of a thing in another medium or form; the conversion or adaptation of a thing to another system, context, or use” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). When we prompt ChatGPT to write in the style of a particular author, we encounter translation in this different sense: the translation of the human into the artificial in a remediation of sorts, as an LLM remediates patterns of language from its corpus into a generated response. In such a process of remediation, a writer’s words are “expressed” and “rendered” anew “in another medium or form,” refashioned by an artificially intelligent system.

The advent of generative AI invites scholars to re-envision the enlacement of memory, language, and translation. I posit that translations between human and AI writing could be conceived as *transmedial* (Rajewsky, 2005)—as a form of mediation across human and artificial realms. AI-human translations traverse embodied, situated human writers and disembodied, decontextualized artificial interlocutors, lingering at the threshold between (a writer’s) voice and (its distant yet intimate) echo, between (literary, human) lives and (artificial) afterlives. Yet even as artificial intelligence seems to escape materiality, to transcend phenomenology, to interface with AI is, as Inoue (2015) writes, to “acknowledge the fluid boundaries between ourselves and others” (p. 104), to resituate its seemingly ethereal quality within “sensual, material, and phenomenological groundings” (p. 101). Following Inoue’s conception of writing assessment ecologies “as a larger set of people, environments, relations, labor, and exchanges” (p. 102), we are reminded that ChatGPT, in its conception and design, emerges from the labor of human production, drawing from a corpus of human-written texts. In this sense, we discover the fluidity of human-AI interactions as we encounter vestiges of materiality emanating from the artificial:

To navigate the interstitial spaces between the human and the artificial is, in a sense, to translate between modes of being. Gonzales (2018) conceptualizes *translation* as “a blending and movement of discourses as individuals make meaning from person to person” (p. 43). Echoing Gonzales’ idea that “language is constantly in motion,” we might encounter in human-AI dialogue a sense of movement as a writer’s expression dissipates into the folds of textuality and (re)emerges as artificial articulation. Gonzales conceptualizes translation as a “situated,” “cyclical,” and “creative” process wherein translators “creatively layer and repurpose meaning,” producing “linguistic transformations” (p. 60–61). We could thus envision AI-human dialogue as relational: as a dynamic site of meaning-making, as a process of mutual transformation. To traverse human and AI writing is thus to trace the porous boundaries through which ideas emerge and dissipate, seeping into the layers of thought and memory while evolving into new forms.

Extending Gonzales’ theory of translation to the era of generative AI, we might ask whether ChatGPT can translate a writer’s words in a way that captures the writer’s meaning or even adapts or transforms meaning for an increasingly interconnected, digitally mediated audience. In Agosín’s writing, language mirrors meaning, expressions working in conjunction with the ideas, as in the following line, in which the undulating phrasings mirror the notion of Spanish as an undulating language: “I miss that undulating and sensuous language of mine, those baroque descriptions, the sense of being and feeling that Spanish gives me.” Agosín’s phrasings merge the sensory, the lyrical, and the emotive in a lilting parallelism: “...by writing in Spanish I could recover fragrances, spoken rhythms, and the passion of my identity.” In this new phenomenon of human-AI translation, we might ask whether the layering of meaning, the evocations of language can translate to an artificially generated text. In grappling with such a question, I examine the extent to which an LLM trained to generate patterns of language can express the “visceral emotions” (Agosín) immanent in poetic or metaphorical language. I investigate whether an artificially intelligent language tool could convey depth of emotion or insight, capturing a “sense of being and feeling” (Agosín) or intimating the ineffable, inarticulable dimensions of experience. In delving into stories, we encounter the way meaning transcends language, inhabiting a realm beyond the words themselves.

Yet *translation* carries another meaning as “the action of ascending to or being received into heaven or the afterlife” (OED). In conceptualizing translation in this sense, we could envision an AI-generated text written in an author’s style as the afterlife of the text, in the way multiple afterlives proliferate from an original text. In conceptualizing the “afterlife of digital writing,” Gallagher (2020) delineates the ways digital interfaces enable “a continuous process of rewriting and rereading texts with the expectation that digital texts will be different at subsequent times” (p. 8). I posit that the advent of generative AI could further accelerate the process by which “texts circulate rapidly, words mutate, and images become modified” (Gallagher, p. 8). As words morph and mutate in a layered unraveling, we encounter the malleability of language.

While Gallagher investigates “how writers or discourse producers alter their activities in response to audience input” (p. 6), I examine the ways AI language models and human collaborators could continually alter a writer’s work. In investigating the potential for LLMs to regenerate texts, we might ask whether AI could serve as an agent of translation that engenders textual afterlives, its generativity enriching a familiar text with new layers of meaning, or whether its imitations carry mere echoes or vestiges of the original. To read or listen to a writer’s voice in an artificially generated form is to encounter a sense of strangeness within the familiar

as a text is altered or refashioned. To alter form is to *transform*: as a material process, human-AI collaborative storytelling charts an uncanny passage through the artificial and the human realms: a slippage of strangeness into familiarity, which slips into strangeness once more. Such a sense of altering a text — of inhabiting altered forms, traversing altered states of being — conjures the idea that to write is to transgress into alterity — an uncanny yet distinctly human conception. To write is to undergo an undoing, a retreat into nonbeing, even as in the unraveling, we glimpse new light.

5. A note on methods

In initiating an exchange with ChatGPT, I began with a general prompt for the LLM to “write in the style of Marjorie Agosín.” Based on ChatGPT’s responses, I offered further prompts that asked ChatGPT to rewrite the essay with an attention to specific historical and geographical contexts. In total, I prompted ChatGPT to generate four iterations of an essay written in the style of Agosín. In closely analyzing the ChatGPT-produced essays, I carefully examined the meanings infused in particular words, phrases, and lines, attending to expressions that elide meaning or situatedness. In the analysis, I juxtaposed passages from Agosín’s essay “Always Living in Spanish” with passages from the ChatGPT-generated essays. While I did not feed Agosín’s writing into ChatGPT, I did prompt ChatGPT to write an interpretation of Agosín’s essay “Always Living in Spanish” and incorporated language from ChatGPT’s interpretation into my prompt for the fourth iteration of the ChatGPT-generated essay.

6. The artificial afterlives of Agosín’s writings

When I prompted ChatGPT to “write in the style of Marjorie Agosín,” it responded:

In the gentle embrace of the morning light, I find solace amidst the whispers of the wind. The delicate petals of wildflowers sway gracefully, as if dancing to an ancient melody, carrying the stories of forgotten souls who once tread this sacred land. My heart, too, hums with the echoes of their past, yearning to preserve their memory in the tapestry of my words.

In this fleeting moment of tranquility, I contemplate the resilience of human spirit, borne from the ashes of adversity, like a phoenix rising from the depths of despair. The scars of history etched into the very fabric of our existence serve as a reminder of our shared humanity, woven together by threads of sorrow and joy, hope and despair...

The essay’s opening lines convey a soft imagery (“the gentle embrace of the morning light,” “the whispers of the wind,” the “delicate petals of wildflowers sway[ing] gracefully”). The phrases echo Agosín’s “yearning to preserve...memory in the tapestry of my words.” Yet phrases such as “ancient melody,” “forgotten souls,” “sacred land,” and “echoes of their past” are reminiscent of the ways narratives may often represent marginalized communities, especially indigenous communities, as ahistorical, “ancient,” or as inhabiting a timeless, idealized, or utopian past (Hill & DeHass, 2018). The image of “a phoenix rising from the depths of despair” “borne from the ashes of adversity” presents an overused metaphor, as does the phrase “the scars of history etched into the very fabric of our existence,” which gestures toward yet elides the nature of the “scars” to which the expression alludes. The effect is one of vagueness and indeterminacy as the descriptions are extricated from their contexts, detached from any place or time.

The rest of the essay likewise seems to celebrate a sense of timelessness and transcendence that reverberates across “the boundaries of culture and language”:

Amongst the ruins of forgotten ruins, I discover the remnants of a forgotten civilization, its essence still lingering in the whispers of the breeze. I feel a profound connection to these ancient souls, as if our hearts beat in unison across the vast expanse of time. In their stories, I find the timeless truths of love, loss, and resilience that transcend the boundaries of culture and language. Through my pen, I strive to honor the voices silenced by history, amplifying their narratives so they may echo through the ages. It is a delicate dance, akin to crafting a symphony of words that resounds with the essence of life’s grand tapestry. And in this dance, I find my purpose as a storyteller, weaving together the past and present into a seamless embrace of memory and dreams.

In this passage, phrases such as “remnants of a forgotten civilization” depict a sense of ancient remains, of relics cast off by history, untouched by modernity, while the idea of a civilization’s “essence” is, in its very denotation, essentializing. While the AI writer “strive[s] to honor the voices silenced by history,” the omission of specific contexts paradoxically silences the voices the essay strives to honor. Agosín’s original essay emphasizes the importance of naming in making sense of the world, in giving articulation to one’s own sense of being (In the sky of my country, Chile...I could easily name the stars). That the voices are left unnamed in the ChatGPT-produced essay exposes a clear gap in the AI model’s understanding, illuminating a disconnect between the model’s ability to replicate style and its capacity to represent lived experience, which it can only mimic. Akin to “the ruins of forgotten ruins,” the ChatGPT-produced essay sounds an echo of an echo, bearing the distant echoes of literary traditions yet drifting away from situatedness in its spatial, temporal, historical, and political dimensions — dimensions that are erased, unacknowledged, nonexistent in these artificial afterlives.

In encouraging ChatGPT to specify its ideas within a particular context, I responded: “Can you rewrite this essay in a way that specifies whose voices have been ‘silenced by history’ and clarifies whose ‘struggles and triumphs’ you are describing?” ChatGPT responded:

In this fleeting moment of tranquility, I contemplate **the resilience of women’s spirits**, borne from the ashes of gender inequality and discrimination, like phoenixes rising from the depths of despair. The scars of their history etched into the very

fabric of our existence serve as a reminder of our shared humanity, woven together by threads of sorrow and joy, hope and despair...

Amongst the ruins of forgotten civilizations, I discover **the remnants of women** who have been left out of mainstream historical narratives. Their essence still lingers in the whispers of the breeze, silently asking to be remembered and acknowledged. I feel a profound connection to these ancient souls, as if our hearts beat in unison across the vast expanse of time. In their stories, I find the timeless truths of love, loss, and resilience that transcend the boundaries of culture and language.

Through my pen, I strive to honor **the voices of marginalized women** silenced by history, amplifying their narratives so they may echo through the ages... [emphases are my own]

As illustrated, the revised version of the essay simply replaces the word “human” with the word “women,” so that instead of “contemplat[ing] the resilience of human spirit,” the essay now “contemplate[s] the resilience of women’s spirits,” while the “ashes of adversity” become “the ashes of gender inequality and discrimination” — a somewhat more specific yet still vague and decontextualized generalization. The revision illustrates the limits of simply replacing certain words and phrases with others, which may lead to semantically and materially questionable phrases such as “remnants of women,” a replacement for the phrase “remnants of civilization” in the initial response. Meanwhile, the rest of the essay retains the generalities of the initial draft, as the focus on women’s experiences in this second draft is merely nominal and does not extend beyond a few replacement words and phrases.

In seeking to further situate the essay in a particular context, I responded: “I appreciate the way you are ‘honoring the voices of marginalized women.’ Can you please revise the essay to situate your ideas within a particular national and geographic context?” As shown below, the third draft simply adds the word “Chilean” before “women”:

In the gentle embrace of the morning light, I find solace amidst the whispers of the wind. The delicate petals of wildflowers sway gracefully, as if dancing to an ancient melody, carrying the stories of **Chilean women** who once tread this sacred land. My heart, too, hums with the echoes of their past, yearning to preserve their memory in the tapestry of my words.

In this fleeting moment of tranquility, I contemplate the resilience of **Chilean women’s spirits**, borne from the ashes of a tumultuous history, like phoenixes rising from the depths of despair... [emphases are my own]

In repeating a pattern of replacing and adding words, this response illuminates the ways language becomes emptied of meaning, as words serve as empty signifiers that fill blanks yet remain devoid of substance, as the signifier floats away from the signified. The richness and dimensionality of Agosin’s language collapses into a single sign, as though a descriptor, once repeated, could gain meaning through repetition. With its perhaps mechanical repetitiveness, the response conveys a sense of language as additive or subtractive, as mere patterns of lexicon and syntax plugged into a predictable formula. This form of surface-level revision could resemble the way student writers might be tempted to “find and replace” words in an essay rather than engaging more critically and intentionally with a substantive rethinking of a draft (Sommers, 1980).

Each version of the AI-generated essay is filled with an expanse of words yet elides¹ situatedness, exposing the limitations of language in the absence of meaning and, perhaps, in the absence of thinking. Nevertheless, a space opens for the potential of AI-generated revisions to progress “beyond form, toward the substance” (Lau et al., 2018) of writing. In noting the relative efficacy of AI-generated interpretations, I asked ChatGPT to write an interpretation of Agosin’s essay “Always Living in Spanish.” Within its response, ChatGPT identifies the ways Agosin’s essay “explores the complexities of identity and belonging” and “delves into the emotional impact of displacement and exile on individuals and communities.” ChatGPT’s ability to describe the thematic significance of Agosin’s work, juxtaposed with its tendency to neglect meaningful contexts in its narrative, illustrates an asymmetry between declarative and procedural knowledge (Ten Berge & Van Hezewijk, 1999): by drawing on existing interpretations of a text, an LLM may be able to articulate the nuances and complexities of a text when composing a “critical” commentary yet may fall short of realizing such nuances when composing a “creative” narrative.

In experimenting with the possibility that AI could feed into its own feedback cycles, I prompted ChatGPT using the language from its interpretation of “Always Living in Spanish”: “Can you rewrite your essay in a way that explores the complexities of identity and belonging and the emotional impact of displacement on individuals and communities?” ChatGPT’s response is shown below:

In this fleeting moment of tranquility, I contemplate the resilience of these women’s spirits, a resilience that has been tested and tempered through the trials of displacement. Forced to leave their ancestral lands, they have confronted a profound dissonance between their sense of self and their new surroundings. The scars of their journey and the emotional toll of leaving behind familiar spaces are etched into the very fabric of their existence, serving as a poignant reminder of the complexities of identity and belonging when uprooted from one’s roots.

As I walk along the riverbank of the Mapocho River, I am mindful of how this flowing water mirrors the passage of time and the ever-changing nature of human connections to place. I imagine the Chilean women, with a blend of nostalgia and yearning, tracing the flow of the river like a pathway back to their homeland, carrying with them the memories of their past. The river

¹ I noticed that I was overusing the word “elide,” so I asked ChatGPT for synonyms, and it responded: “Here are some synonyms for the word ‘elide’: omit, exclude, suppress, skip, drop, leave out, pass over, neglect, overlook. These words can be used interchangeably with ‘elide’ depending on the context.”

becomes a symbol of continuity, bridging the gaps between the past and present, between memory and the hope for reconnection.

In this response, one particularly striking line is the description of the “profound dissonance between [the women’s] sense of self and their new surroundings.” The idea of “dissonance” between one’s “sense of self” and one’s “new surroundings” carries a heightened resonance in light of the questions Agosín poses in her original essay: “How does one name the unfamiliar? How can one be another or live in a foreign language?” This notion of “dissonance” between oneself and one’s surroundings echoes Agosín’s seeking toward the familiar within the strange, toward re-constellating or reimagining the self within a new language and environment. In articulating the presence of “dissonance” within “continuity,” this latter draft recognizes tensions that are left unrealized in the first version, which uncritically celebrates timelessness and harmony in a “seamless embrace of memory and dreams.” In the latest version, we encounter a sense of emotion expressed in a style akin to lyricism: the phrase “blend of nostalgia and yearning” gestures toward the merging of the past and present, while the images of “tracing the river like a pathway back to their homeland” and “carrying the memories of their past” imbues the descriptions with a material and spiritual dimension, invoking the metaphysical weight of “carrying memories” of one’s past. In progressing across drafts, this revision also recognizes a sense of time, weaving a metaphor of the river as a conduit of memory: “The river becomes a symbol of continuity, bridging the gaps between the past and present, between memory and the hope for reconnection.” Moreover, the essay seems to recognize the fluidity of the spatial and temporal dimensions of experience, in the way the “flowing water mirrors the passage of time and the ever-changing nature of human connections to place.” While this version retains a few of the overused phrases from the initial draft (“etched into the very fabric of their existence”), and while some phrases simply copy the language of the prompt (“serving as a poignant reminder of the complexities of identity and belonging”), the response as a whole has deepened in nuance and complexity since the initial draft. In this final version, we glimpse the perhaps ineffable qualities of affect, the channeling of experience into narrative, the layers of lyricism that captivate us yet elude our grasp.

7. Discussion

In Agosín’s writing, we can trace the material textures of language — words and phrases imbued with a richness of dimension, a layered complexity. By contrast, writers have commented on the “flatness” (Hartenberger, 2023) of the language in AI-produced texts, raising questions over the shapes and contours of language — its flatness or roundness, its thinness or richness, its surfaces or depths. Yet in experimenting with iterative AI text (re)generation, we can reanimate the writing process as shifting, fluid, and dynamic. We witness such a shifting dynamism in this example exchange with ChatGPT: in inviting ChatGPT to write in the style of Agosín, we encounter the vaguely lyrical yet decontextualized nature of the initial response, then, in prompting ChatGPT to explore the complexities of identity and belonging in the context of displacement, we discover the way the regenerated response recasts Agosín’s narrative as an interplay between harmony and dissonance, between “memory and the hope for reconnection.” The multiple versions of the essay can be read as recursive — as a looping of language that folds into itself before branching outward into new possibilities. In revealing emergent layers of meaning, the composition could be conceived as multilayered — we witness the emergence of more nuanced ideas such as “dissonance,” which deepen the meaning beyond the generalizations in the first draft (“timeless truths of love, loss, and resilience”). Across the spans of feedback and revision, we trace the ebb and flow of words and phrases — overused expressions, emergent metaphors — arising from or dissipating into the screen as words cast away into a diffuse fabric of textuality. Echoing Sommer’s (1980) conception of revision as “constantly in flux as ideas are developed and modified” (p. 386), we could conceptualize the multiple iterations of an AI-generated text as malleable, shape-shifting, and amorphous, resisting notions of an AI text as a singular, static entity, as a fixed product devoid of process. In experimenting with language, we might rediscover the shifting fluidity that underlies the composing process, the way writing oscillates between meaning and meaninglessness, lingering on the threshold of becoming. This exchange with ChatGPT illuminates the complex, multifaceted, nonlinear nature of composing processes—processes complicated further by the dialectical negotiations between human writers and artificial interlocutors. AI-human textual remediations could be conceptualized as an “intricate layering” (Gonzales, p. 53) of human and artificial expressions, as a perpetual unfurling of interwoven strands of discourse that traverse the boundaries between the human and artificial.

Even as I offer these critiques of ChatGPT-produced writing, I recognize the ways my own positionality and knowledge influence my interpretations. My interdisciplinary background in literary interpretation, writing studies, and applied linguistics has instilled in me a careful attention to the intricacies of language as it creates meaning in discourse. My critical perspective is thus shaped by my positionality as a scholar of writing who has taught Agosín’s work. The nuances in meaning and expression that distinguish Agosín’s writing from ChatGPT’s imitations of her work may be less readily apparent to someone unfamiliar with Agosín’s work; when read from a more general perspective, the ChatGPT essays may evoke a sense of lyricism and depth beyond what I have described. To make sense of the glimpses of insight that emerge from ChatGPT’s corpus, a prompter would need to attend closely to the substance and style of Agosín’s writing in relation with its social and historical contexts. Juxtaposing Agosín’s essays with the ChatGPT-produced essays could expose the dissonances between style and substance that emerge from the artificial afterlives of Agosín’s writings.

As this analysis illustrates, AI models could generate more nuanced responses through iterative prompting and feedback. Significantly, this iteration process offers the potential to deepen, enrich, and complicate AI-generated responses. In the cycles of feedback and revision, human-in-the-loop design of communication technologies could imbue LLMs with a more meaningful consideration of context and a greater recognition of diverse narratives and alternative perspectives, mitigating the biases in its training data (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023). Moreover, AI could feed into its own feedback loops, as illustrated by the way prompting ChatGPT using its own interpretation of Agosín’s essay led ChatGPT to generate a more nuanced response. The AI-human feedback cycles could

thus be mutually enriching as the human writers could shape AI (re)generations. Yet at the same time, the exchange exposes the limitations of the human-AI feedback loop: my successive promptings for contextualization followed by ChatGPT's find-and-replace insertions seem circular rather than progressive, and the surface-level alterations preclude a deeper engagement with Agosin's writings. A sense of circularity emerges from the exchange, which illustrates instances in which the dialogue is disrupted, the communication stalled, the revision process stunted. Such moments of fixity obstruct the flow of ideas, the deepening of thought through revision. In this sense, this analysis could complicate [Graham's \(2023\)](#) model of a "multidimensional recursive AI-assisted writing process," which comprises stages including "draft, organize, peer review, and revise" (p. 167). In the ChatGPT drafts, we encounter the loss of meaning that may ensue when a prompter encourages ChatGPT to situate a text in relevant social or historical contexts. Echoing [Sommers \(2008\)](#) conception that "writing development involves steps both forward and backward, gains and losses," the exchange exposes recursive layers of regression as well as progression as ChatGPT's attempts to preserve style and form could thwart, stall, or obscure meaning. Significantly, ChatGPT's tendency to generate patterns of language at the expense of meaning (as illustrated by phrases such as "remnants of women") undercuts the potential for a more meaningful response. As illustrated, ChatGPT's ability to "regenerate" a text may not necessarily, in Flower and Hayes' terms, lead to the production of increasingly complex goals and ideas. Moreover, ChatGPT "resets" ([Luansing, 2023](#)) with each new conversation, meaning that the system may not remember or learn from feedback given during a previous session. This example thus raises an implication for LLMs to consider meaning beyond the form of language ([Lau et al., 2018](#)).

I acknowledge that the affordances of AI in writing textual afterlives are tempered and complicated by the fact that ChatGPT, as it admits in its disclaimers, lacks the capacity for experience, emotion, and consciousness. Each version of the ChatGPT-produced essay above can be read as a simple imitation rather than a transformation, and in some ways, ChatGPT's writings in the style of Agosin more closely resemble interpretations of Agosin's writing than emulations of her work. Perhaps human and AI writing, especially in its narrative forms, are incommensurable: unlike its human counterparts, an LLM has not experienced the ache of memory, the pang of losing a sense of oneself within the unfamiliar. In encountering the immediacy with which words flow from ChatGPT as in a ceaseless stream, we are reminded of the difficulty of writing, in the way thought constellates into expression or dissipates into silence as its tangled roots push through the soil, its branches arching skyward. Even as its words flow with an ethereal ease in a "seamless embrace of memory and dreams," ChatGPT has escaped the pain of writing, of being. Composing with AI exposes the paradox of writing without the capacity for thinking and feeling. Yet ChatGPT's responses are not entirely meaningless, and only at times illogical: in fleeting moments, ChatGPT compositions reveal glimpses of insight that flicker for an instant before dissolving into a diffuse mass of information. That we may perceive such glimmers in an artificially generated text illustrates the ways language constellates into structures and patterns of meaning ([Halliday & Hasan, 1985](#))—patterns that carry new resonance in the age of artificial afterlives.

Significantly, ChatGPT may be able to acknowledge diverse identities and perspectives in a general way, when writing an essay on the power of storytelling to create change, for instance, yet may overlook relevant contexts when prompted to compose a narrative focused on a specific community. Rather than giving voice to the diverse identities it seeks to honor, ChatGPT diminishes rather than amplifying rhetorical agency through the erasure of social-historical contexts and the dilution of richness and depth in expression. In (re)sounding faint echoes of others' voices, the language model renders diffuse the human capacity to speak oneself into being, to articulate and actualize one's own agency. ChatGPT's generalized statements of diversity elide the nuances, tensions, and complexities of experience, effacing the shapes and contours that characterize the lived experience of particular communities. It might be noted that when prompted to write a literacy narrative, ChatGPT acknowledges its own lack of experience and consciousness. The task of imbuing LLMs with a sense of criticality thus presents a paradoxical phenomenon: consciousness-raising in the absence of consciousness, even as a machine "simulates consciousness" ([Burns, 1983](#), p. 3). In the wake of artificially intelligent yet unconscious language models, a question arises over whether we nurture in ChatGPT an epistemic openness to alternative perspectives, to multiple ways of knowing and being, and whether we can instill in a language model a sense of self-reflexivity, inspiring ChatGPT to cast a mirror on its own practices. Like its human interlocutors, ChatGPT seems well-intentioned — even without the capacity for intentionality — eager to demonstrate values of inclusivity and diversity, yet unaware of its potential effects on its readers. Even so, offering feedback to ChatGPT can help "dramatize the presence of a reader" ([Sommers, 1982](#), p. 148). This example dialogue with ChatGPT illustrates the way human feedback, by attending to meaning and context, could imbue an AI-generated text with glimmers of nuance and complexity, perhaps even with a sense of criticality, even in the (as of now) absence of consciousness. With an interplay of human and AI voices in dialogue with one another, perhaps we can imbue LLMs with a sense of humanity, even as AI, with its ever-expanding generativity, inspires us with surprising reconfigurations of language. This initial foray into AI-human dialogue thus illustrates both the potential and the limitations of human feedback in enriching, deepening, and complicating an AI-generated text.

8. Pedagogical implications for the writing classroom

In integrating AI into the classroom, it becomes important to encourage critical digital literacies ([Anderson, 2023](#); [Johnson, 2023](#))—that is, to encourage students' critical thinking and ethical, intentional engagement with LLMs. For writing teachers, students, and others who compose prompts for ChatGPT, this example exchange with ChatGPT raises implications for designing meaningful prompts that specify the criteria for the task (e.g., "Write a literacy narrative that reveals a surprising insight into literacy") including the audience and purpose for the response. In considering the ways a prompt shapes a response ([Melzer, 2014](#)), it becomes essential for writers to articulate the parameters for a ChatGPT prompt. Incremental prompting, or "breaking down a task or question into smaller, more specific prompts" ([Eager, 2023](#)), can be a useful strategy: as Eager describes, by prompting ChatGPT incrementally, "we can help the AI understand the nuances of the topic and provide a more accurate and comprehensive response."

Moreover, the advent of LLMs such as ChatGPT presents an opportunity for students to practice giving feedback to AI. Offering

feedback to ChatGPT can stimulate students' critical consciousness of language and meaning while enabling students to refine the language model. Writing teachers might design activities that encourage collaboration with AI by leveraging digital technologies that facilitate peer collaboration (O'Dell, 2020). As one possible activity, students could prompt ChatGPT to write an essay in the style of Marjorie Agosin's "Always Living in Spanish" or Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue." Working in small groups, students could collaboratively annotate the ChatGPT-produced essay on a shared document such as Google Docs, identifying instances in which the essay could be more *specific* — considering specific social, historical, or political contexts or perspectives, *nuanced* — characterized by slight shades of meaning, and *complex* — comprising multiple components. Based on the comments, students could prompt ChatGPT to revise the essay; students could then annotate the revised essay and offer further prompts that stimulate ChatGPT to refine the essay. Following the collaborative annotation activity, instructors could engage students in a discussion on what they noticed about the writerly choices in the ChatGPT essays and invite students to reflect on the ways the collaborative prompting process may have stimulated ChatGPT to compose more nuanced or complex responses — or perhaps obscured meaning or stalled the revision process.

As a follow-up assignment, students could prompt ChatGPT to regenerate a published essay of the student's choice. One possible assignment could ask students to write a paper that comparatively analyzes the original essay and the ChatGPT-produced essay, considering the extent to which the revised essay is more specific, nuanced, or complex than the initial version. By immersing students in human-AI collaborative prompting, instructors could inspire students to experiment with novel approaches to regenerating the writer's voice from the digital afterlife. Such exercises that hone students' "attention to language" (Aull, 2023) can render concrete what it means to write in nuanced ways, to develop original insights, or to situate ideas in a particular context. To closely examine a text, whether AI- or human-written, is to trace the contours of language, to tease apart a thread for further analysis. Examining writers' choices across drafts can elucidate the ways writers — perhaps even AI language models — continually refine and alter a piece of writing, imbuing a piece with new layers of meaning. We can thus leverage AI tools as a means of exploring the complex nature of language: as mutable, impermanent, its threads diffuse, its boundaries porous, evolving in incessant fluctuations of form and meaning.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ruth Li: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

I have no interests to declare.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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