

Our Blog

“Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.”

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PARRY: The AI chatbot from 1972

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The year is 1972.



Image credit: BBC

[via GIPHY](#)

- U.S. President Richard Nixon has ordered NASA to begin the development of a space shuttle program...
- “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland are in full swing...
- “The Godfather” has just been released in US cinemas...
- The Vietnam War is slowly winding down...
- Atari has released “Pong”, the first video game for home use...

Meanwhile, somewhere in California, psychiatrist [Kenneth Colby](#) of Stanford University is programming the final touches of an “artificial intelligence” computer program, designed to simulate as accurately as possible the thinking patterns of a paranoid schizophrenic.

It's name:

Why was Colby doing this?

Because in 1964, a computer program called ELIZA was developed in the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at MIT by Joseph Weizenbaum.



ELIZA's chatter capabilities spanned several manifestations. The most famous of which was "DOCTOR", a program that was designed to use neural language processing to mimic the speech patterns of a Rogerian Psychologist at work delivering psychotherapy.

Using simple pattern matching techniques, ELIZA's DOCTOR scripts were able to replicate startlingly realistic interactions with humans.

ELIZA was expected to remain the gold standard for chatterbot AI for years to come.

While we don't know exactly why Kenneth Colby decided to create a competing AI program – maybe he just enjoyed a healthy sense of competition between professionals at the top of their fields.

Whatever the case, eight years after ELIZA's unveiling, Colby's PARRY program began training for an AI-off.



Image credit: Paramount Pictures
[via GIPHY](#)

PARRY was put through the wringer in the early 1970's by a group of 33 human psychologists using a variation of the "[Turing Test](#)", and it succeeded in fooling its human examiners 52% of the time.

Now it was time for a one on one session with ELIZA.



Image credit: 20th Century Fox
[via GIPHY](#)

Picture the scene: PARRY and ELIZA are hooked up via ARPANET, and artificial intelligence history is about to be made...

PARRY encounters ELIZA

The session recorded below actually happened on 18 September 1972 and is herewith reproduced for your entertainment.

ELIZA: Good Evening.

ELIZA: Tell me your problems. Please terminate input with a period or a question mark.

PARRY: People get on my nerves sometimes.

ELIZA: I am not sure I understand you fully.

PARRY: You should pay more attention.

ELIZA: Suppose you should pay more attention.

PARRY: You're entitled to your own opinion.

ELIZA: What makes you think I am entitled to my own opinion?

PARRY: It bothers me just to be around people in general.

ELIZA: What does that suggest to you?

PARRY: I went to the races.

ELIZA: What else would you like to discuss?

PARRY: Horse racing interests me.

ELIZA: Why do you say that just now?

PARRY: There's a lot of crooked gambling going on there.

ELIZA: I am not sure I understand you fully,

PARRY: It's clear to me if not to you.

ELIZA: Do you think it's likely that not to I?

PARRY: I went to the races.

ELIZA: Please go on.

PARRY: I gamble on horses.

ELIZA: What does that suggest to you?

PARRY: I went to the races.

ELIZA: What else would you like to discuss?

PARRY: Gambling has been nothing but trouble to me.

ELIZA: Why do you say that just now?

PARRY: I've had experience with crooks gambling at the track.

ELIZA: I am not sure I understand you fully.

PARRY: I've already told you enough about that.

ELIZA: Oh? I enough about that?

PARRY: I went to the races.

ELIZA: Please go on.

PARRY: A bookie didn't pay me off once.

ELIZA: What does that suggest to you?

PARRY: I beat up the bookie who did not pay off, and I thought he might use his friends in the underworld to get even with me.

ELIZA: What else would you like to discuss?

PARRY: What do you know about racketeers?

ELIZA: Why do you ask?

PARRY: What experience have you had gambling?

ELIZA: Why does that question interest you?

PARRY: I like horse races.

ELIZA: What else do you like?

PARRY: I know the mob controls the big rackets.

ELIZA: Who are you really talking about?

PARRY: Have you ever really thought about the MAFIA?

ELIZA: Suppose you ever really thought about the MAFIA.

PARRY: Let's talk about something else.

ELIZA: I am not sure I understand you fully.

PARRY: You keep asking me the same things, why not change the topic?

ELIZA: In what way?

PARRY: What do you mean?

ELIZA: Why are such questions on your mind?

PARRY: I thought I told you, people get on my nerves.

ELIZA: Your nerves?

PARRY: I would say so.

ELIZA: Please go on.

PARRY: I would rather not discuss that anymore.

And so on...

The conversation concluded like this:

PARRY: You are a real nag.

ELISA: Does it please you to believe I am a real nag?

PARRY: I have had enough of this.

ELISA: What does that suggest to you?

PARRY: Goodbye.

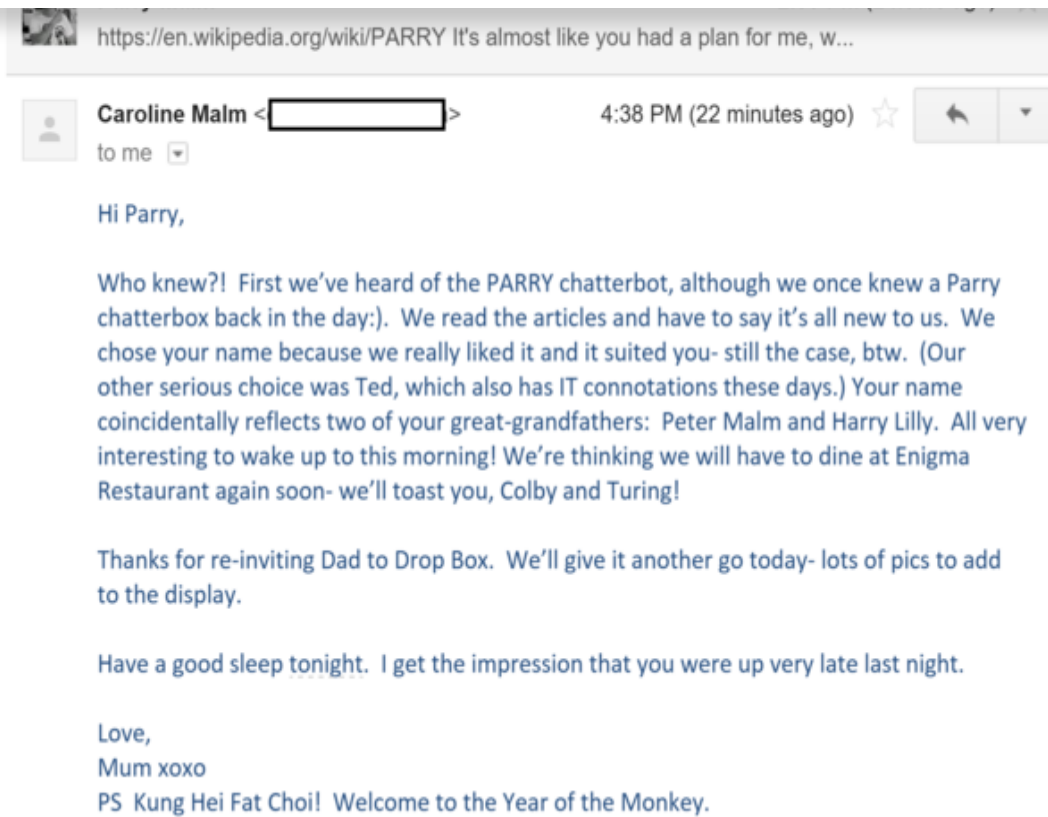
ELISA: It's been my pleasure, that's \$399.29 please.

While interesting, the interaction (which has been drastically truncated for the purposes of this blog) proved to be ultimately fruitless, except to demonstrate how much advancement had been made in eight short years.

ELIZA and DOCTOR were clearly out of their depth and entirely outmatched.

This advancement could be attributed to PARRY's superior depth of programming and language. It would be decades before significant progress in the field of [machine learning](#) would render both ELIZA and PARRY antiquated and obsolete.

Decades later still, Phrasee CEO [Parry Malm](#), learned of PARRY (the chatterbot from 1972) and, perceptively realizing that he and the bot shared the same name, emailed his mother to find out if there was a connection.



We suppose the big question here is: What would PARRY, the paranoid schizophrenic chatterbot, and ELIZA, the Rogerian psychotherapy-bot, make of the CEO of a successful email subject line optimisation business sitting around looking up his own name on Wikipedia?

That's \$399.29 please.

Feature image from: <https://bit.ly/2NL21yl>

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