BOOK REVIEW

NANOPOEMS? A REVIEW OF 100 POEMS

SS Prasad

Bangalore: STD Pathasala, 2008, 60 pp, $10 (pbk)

SS Prasad's *100 Poems* is a collection of some fifty-nine "nanopoems" which have previously been "published" on microchips buried in millions of machines around the world. How many of these poems will ever be discovered or read, much less understood or appreciated, remains to be seen, as they will only be found should one ever examine these chips under a microscope. For those of us who are unlikely to ever take such action, the "nanopoems" (so named by the author) have now been published in this small soft-cover book, allowing them to be read in a slightly more comfortable manner. And what one reads are very short poems, written largely in binary code, but also in symbols and alphabetical characters.

While inscribing minute poems on unexpected but everyday artefacts may offer the author some personal satisfaction,[1] and may say something about one's technical capabilities, embedding snippets of binary code claimed to have some or another meaning hints more at "inside joke" than artistic *avant garde* or social commentary. Having said that, there are at least two obvious ways in which the work might instigate some personal reflection. First, in its use of shape and pattern which goes beyond the code and thereby represents a form of visual poetry that marks space in order to communicate, the work prompts the creative human to form potentially complex imaginative pictures out of the patterned black and white text. So while a computer might simply translate the information into commands, we can appreciate the visual beauty created by this simple information. Second, in representing living things such as ants, butterflies, and sparrows, and indeed people (presumably) "at the hotel", the work joins a list of others which engage in questioning the relationship between the biological and the technological, and the impact that the latter may have on the identity of the former as it reduces complex beings to numbers (e. g. binary code) or letters in double helix (e. g. DNA).

For most of us, the titles will be much easier to comprehend (and appreciate?) than the actual poems which are far too abstract or removed from typical views of beauty or poetry. But they do arguably hold a certain charm in the way they try to bring art and technology together. The thought of millions of poems being integrated into technologies which are transported around the world, most likely never to be found, certainly stimulates the brain, and cannot help but make one wonder about hidden messages in other places (and everywhere). In this way, the effort harkens back to another project reported in the "pages" of *SCRIPTed*, namely the Xenotext

---

[1] Another example is inscribing poems on grains of rice, an ancient Chinese practice.

Experiment,[2] which arguably had more profound foundations and ambitious objectives than Prasad's.

Shawn HE Harmon,

InnoGen, ESRC Centre for Social and Economic Research on Innovation in Genomics, SCRIPT, AHRC Centre for Research in Intellectual Property and Technology Law, University of Edinburgh

Yolande W Stolte,

SCRIPT, AHRC Centre for Research in Intellectual Property and Technology Law, University of Edinburgh

---

[2] For more on this, see C Bök, "The Xenotext Experiment" (2008) 5:2 *SCRIPTed* 227-231, and the associated cover of the same issue which features "Word Protein" by Eveline Kolijn, an artistic piece that has much more to offer the casual viewer.