

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in poetry has provoked considerable debate, particularly regarding its implications for the role of the poet. This discussion gained momentum with the 2017 publication of *Sunshine Misses Windows*, the first poetry collection written by AI. Subsequently, American poet Charles Bernstein, a leading figure in the Language poetry movement, engaged with this discourse. Bernstein, who sees potential in digital poetry for reflecting the essence of humanity, later contributed to this dialogue with his AI-generated collection, *Poetry Has No Future Unless It Comes to an End: Poems of Artificial Intelligence* (2022).

“You Are Here” is one of the poems in this collection. It disrupts conventional poetic form and content, presenting a modern, fragmented structure that juxtaposes absurdity with profound human emotions. This characteristic reflects the influence of Bernstein’s experimental and avant-garde writing. The opening line, “Rental cars, washbasins, and sacks of pennies,”

presents several seemingly unrelated objects incoherently, reflecting a fragmented perception of everyday life. This subversion of linear narrative and conventional syntax mirrors the reader's experience in many of Bernstein's poems, where traditional poetic structures are challenged.

The next few lines explore the complexity of human emotions by describing the various ways people smile, clap, laugh, and cry. The constant repetition of phrases such as "the way you laugh" and "the way you cry" not only disrupts the conventional poetic flow but also reflects the cyclical nature of human experience, in which joy and sorrow often follow each other in a never-ending loop. Furthermore, the repetitive oscillation between laughing and crying captures the often contradictory nature of human experience. This is consistent with Bernstein's tendency to resist clear emotional narratives, instead presenting emotions as complex, layered, and sometimes contradictory phenomena.

In the second stanza, the phrase " 'a little more alive' than a bee" introduces an existential reflection on how human life, while more complex than bees, is still dominated by instinct and repetition. This stanza captures the tension between the desire for meaning and the mechanical nature of human existence.

The most striking aspect of the poem is the extensive repetition of the letter "a" at the end, which is a visual and auditory assault on the reader. It can be seen as an expression of the overwhelming monotony of life or a critique of the emptiness of modern communication. By reducing language to a single repeated letter, the poem questions the efficacy of language in conveying meaning, echoing Bernstein's skepticism about the transparency of language and his interest in its material properties.

As a product of an AI trained on Charles Bernstein's work, "You Are Here" embodies many of the key elements of Bernstein's poetics. Through its fragmented structure and repetitive elements, this poem not only reflects Bernstein's thematic concerns with language, perception, and the nature of existence but also pushes the boundaries of what constitutes poetic expression in the digital age.

References

Bernstein, C., & Balula, D. (2023). *Poetry Has No Future Unless It Comes to an End: Poems of Artificial Intelligence*. Nero.