

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MICROREVIEW?

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The poem “HAVE YOU SEEN THIS DOG?” by Sesshu Foster is part of a collection of poems published in Foster’s book, *City of the Future*. The Japanese-American poet’s collection includes a fusion of cultural identity and thematic commentary on the Industrial Revolution and its twenty-first century repercussions. The book is mainly composed of prose poetry, and while the form is one of the most engaging aspects, Foster does not hesitate to add layers to his composition. “HAVE YOU SEEN THIS DOG?” is an exception to the prose poetry theme, unlocking a deeper understanding of the piece and adding dimension to the book. Foster’s use of content, genre, and form in “HAVE YOU SEEN THIS DOG?” is the key to understanding Foster’s vision, theme, and precursor to the entire collection.

Foster’s use of form is critical to understanding key elements of his vision and theme. The poem is divided into two sections: prose poetry and line breaks. The first half of the poem is written in prose poetry, and every letter is capitalized. The poem’s second half is designed to look like contact slips on a ‘Lost Pet’ flyer; consequently, this section is turned on its side, creating chaos. Additionally, alternating the form creates a submersive effect, helping to portray the poem as a real advertisement. Foster also changed the contact slip format to all lowercase fonts. This detail may seem arbitrary, but Foster is trying to correct the chaos he introduced by making the prose poetry section all caps and by turning the poem on its side to convey sympathy and order. Returning to the traditional line breaks is an attempt to portray normalcy, especially since he separates both sections with “take one.”

Traditionally, ‘Lost Pet’ contact slips do not include any text, but Foster ignores tradition to convey his theme. Additionally, there is usually a picture of the lost pet. Instead, only one message suggests no urgency to find the lost dog. Choosing prose poetry form creates a sense of urgency, giving the poem momentum, but it also deviates from the traditional form of the ‘Lost Pet’ flyer. Collectively, these form choices convey emotional longing. The flyer seeks to reach out but is not concerned with the dog since the diction largely focuses on derogatory terms. Foster uses words like “WONT START”, “DIRTY”,

“DENTED”, “BAD”, “WOBBLE”, “MURKY”, “STOLEN”, “INFAMY”, and “CRASHED” to convey the deterioration of this car that could be a dog (19). In the end, he includes that “THIS DOG MIGHT STILL BE IN IT, BARKING AT PEOPLE,” but there is no picture of the dog. The quantity of the derogatory content compared to the mention of a dog contradicts the narrator’s intent to find it. This conclusion leads to another question embedded in the form. What is the narrator trying to find, and what is the urgency?

The key to this question is in the other half of the form and disclosed by some content. The most notable aspect of the line break section is the indication to take one contact slip. In traditional ‘Lost Pet’ flyers, there is no request to take a number. The number is there for people who have seen or might have seen the dog, but Foster includes the request to take it. Consequently, the narrator longs for contact. This detail may seem far-fetched, but the second half’s diction and content make the conclusion evident. In the line breaks, the narrator pleads through repetition in every line, using the phrase “call me” (Foster 19). These lines are not cohesive, but some stand out more than others. Foster writes, “call me please call me today or tomorrow” and “call me I have something to say to you” (19). Foster is trying to send a message about solitude since the poem highlights a longing for contact within the form and diction. However, the reader might wonder why the contact slips contain different numbers and how this could be a plea for contact and a break from solitude.

Foster’s use of content and genre is critical to understanding key elements of his vision and theme. The genre and content are identifiable by crucial aspects of the text, and they allude to the title and overall collection. Since the collection title is City of the Future, it should be no surprise that the poem’s genre is science fiction. The main giveaway is the description of the dog. Foster states, “GOES BY THE NAME TOYOTACOROLLA 1970”, the first indicator that the setting does not fall under realism. This detail may seem like a mistake and subverted by the final statement about the dog, but the poem conveys the opposite within its chaotic form.

Additionally, the sister is mentioned as driving the “THING.” Aside from a fragmented stream-of-consciousness narration, the poem does not use non-indicative lan-



guage, but the narrator refuses to describe the dog as an animal or the car as a car. Considering Foster's entire collection and this "City of the Future", the poem suggests that this may be a futuristic rideable dog created by Toyota. Reaching this conclusion aids in understanding that while there was a dog in the car, the two dogs are not the same, which enables the genre to convey another theme about importance. In this futuristic city, and based on the flyer, it is evident that technology is more valued than organic matter, supporting the theme of solitude. By placing more importance on technology, humanity values itself less, which would generate a need for human contact. Recall the form and how the first half is prose poetry—a non-traditional form which appeals to people who value technology over organics. Then recall how the second half is written with line breaks—a traditional (old) form—and turned on its side, appealing to people that long for human contact. The poem establishes an undeniable connection between solitude and technological advancement.

Others may argue that the poem is a joke since it conveys humor and the contact slips include different numbers but consider each number request as a different need. Foster states, "call me i am looking at you right now in a binocular... i feel soft white fur... this is not a trick or a joke" (19). These lines do not define the same person and even stipulate that it is not a joke. There is no way to argue that the narrator's number is not within those slips. Furthermore, the content conveys an epidemic of solitude within these people. One of the contact slips describes a person looking at a car on fire (Foster 19). The person looking through binoculars could be anyone the narrator may know or see from their apartment, but what they all have in common is that their activities are performed in solitude and a plea for a call.

In conclusion, Foster's use of content, genre, and form is critical to identifying the poem's thematic meaning. Foster's collection and his poems convey underlying solitude within technological advancement. Foster uses prose poetry to subvert the traditional form, depicting change. He uses genre to convey meaning and content to illustrate the theme. Altogether, this creates a symbiotic relationship between the poem and the collection.