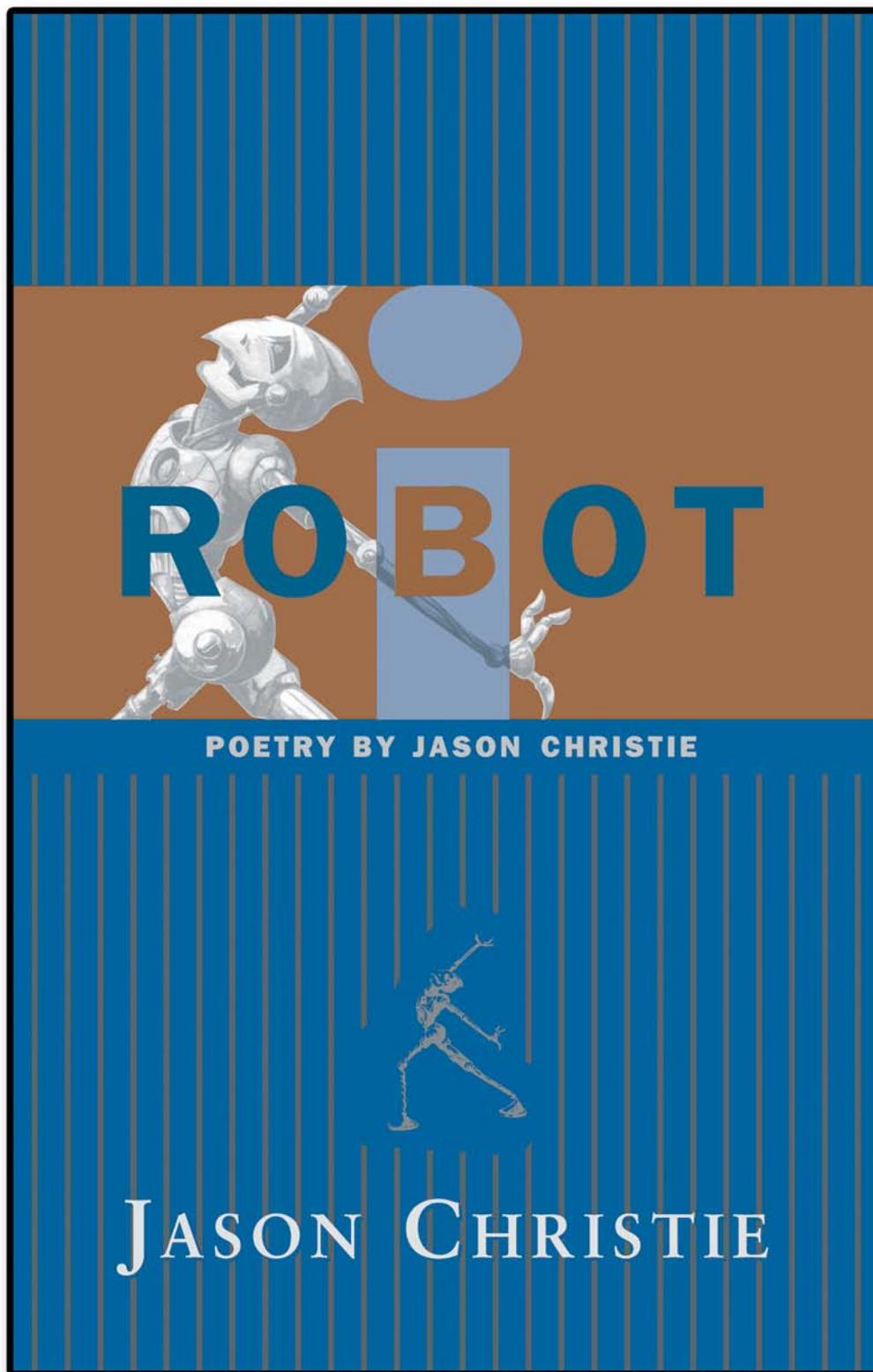


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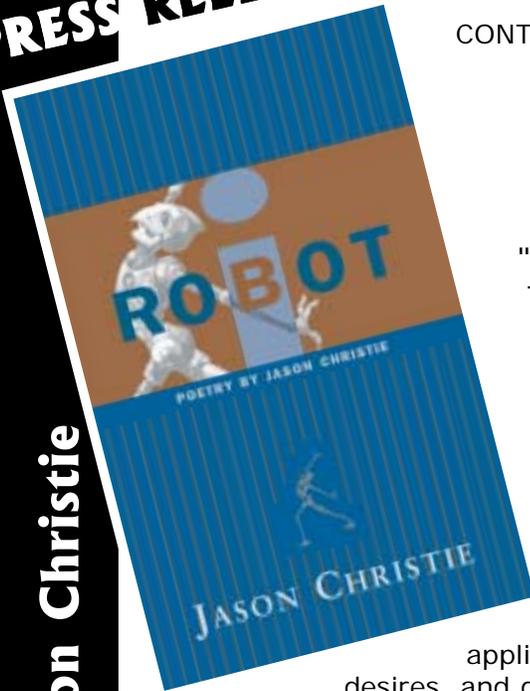
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i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie
ISBN-13: 978-1-894063-24-1 / ISBN-10: 1-894063-24-4
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SCIENCE FICTION / POETRY

PRESS RELEASE



i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

**i-ROBOT POETRY
PRESS
RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Janice Shoults, 403.254.0160
janice@hadespublications.com

You may never look at your toaster the same way again.

"Jason Christie is even weirder than I am. That doesn't happen a lot. If you let him in your home he will seduce and abandon your DVD player, and get all your LCD clocks arguing with each other. But by then you won't mind. This is why mother warned me about robot poetry."

- Spider Robinson

i-ROBOT Poetry is a revolutionary literary work by Jason Christie wherein robots and animated appliances lament their position as slaves to human desires, and dream of finding their own identities and destinies.

The separation between robots and humans isn't as vast as we had previously imagined. In fact it doesn't exist at all. In *i-ROBOT Poetry* by Jason Christie, the popularly misperceived boundary between humans and technology shifts, blurs and disappears to the point where robots become all too human in their wants, needs, and aspirations.

These poems detail a not-too-distant future where anything robotic has sentience. With sentience, the robots begin to desire autonomy and individuality. The pursuit of independence might seem ridiculous at first, as some of the robotic devices featured in the poems are garborators, refrigerators, and washing machines. They even get the blues:

"Why do I have to be one of millions? Why can't I just be a lonely little one in search of a zero to call my own?..."

This highly intelligent collection of ROBOTICA is a stunning analysis of the world of robots, their inner emotions and what they perceive of the men and machines around them. Finally, a new genre has emerged through the dry, satirical wit and warm sensitivity of poet Jason Christie.

A BookShorts video based on *i-ROBOT Poetry* by Jason Christie is now available and has been broadcast by BookTelevision and Moviola. Don't miss this exciting three minute video based on "i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie". For more information please visit: <http://www.bookshorts.com>

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i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

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BIOGRAPHY



Jason Christie

**i-ROBOT POETRY
ABOUT
THE AUTHOR**

Jason Christie

Jason Christie was told by a guidance counselor in high school that he would have a hard time in college, so he had best get a trade as soon as possible.

Luckily for Canadian lovers of poetry, Jason disregarded that advice, left Milton, Ontario and went on to obtain a BA Honours from York University in Toronto with a double major in English Literature and Creative Writing. In 2005, Jason completed his MA at the University of Calgary.

He has become one of Canada's most innovative poets. His avant-garde approach to poetry challenges the status quo and questions what a poem may be. He has had his work reviewed in *The Calgary Herald*, *The Globe & Mail*, and on numerous poetry and poetics blogs — most notably Ron Silliman's.

Jason's poetry has been published in numerous magazines, journals, and anthologies.

He has also contributed as an editor, along with Derek Beaulieu and A. Rawlings, to the sensational anthology "*Shift & Switch: New Canadian Poetry*", published by Mercury Press in 2005. His first book of poetry, entitled "*Canada Post*", was published in the spring of 2006 by Snare Books.

Considered one of Canada's cutting-edge poets, Jason writes with a highly intelligent, satirical and somewhat whimsical, alternative style. This is strongly evidenced in Christie's new book being published by EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing ... **i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie**.

i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie takes us into the automated world of the appliance, where sentience brings disharmony as common household items are no longer content to be slaves to the desires and needs of human beings, questing for more in their lives.

In a collection that is both simultaneously humorous and deeply thought-provoking, Christie delivers a unique social commentary from the eyes of robots around us. You may never look at your blow-dryer, toaster or our automated world in the same way again.

"Shrewdly political, wickedly funny, and fiercely intelligent" - SP

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i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

CM Magazine Volume XIII Number 8. December 8, 2006
<http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/cm/vol13/no8/irobotpoetry.html>

Review by Dave Jenkinson.

excerpt

EARLY ONE MORNING, AT THE SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

The forerobot leaned over to one of his workerbots and said: "Weird to see a human down here, eh? And so early in the morning too." The workerbot replied: "How do you know it is a human?" And the forerobot said: "he hasn't got any sewage on him."

In 1950, Isaac Asimov's collection of SF short stories, *I, Robot*, appeared, containing Asimov's three "Laws of Robotics" to which he later added a 'zereth law'.

Law Zero: A robot may not injure humanity, or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

Law One: A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm, unless this would violate a higher order law.

Law Two: A robot must obey orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with a higher order law.

Law Three: A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with a higher order law.

In Jason's Christie's *i-ROBOT Poetry*, his robots, if they have heard of Asimov's four laws, certainly do not always strictly obey them. In addition to the poetry collection's title nod to Asimov, its contents also give recognition to Karel Kapek's 1921 play, *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots) in which the word Robot first appeared. The play's contents proposed a paradise in which the machines initially brought many benefits to mankind, but, in the end, they also led to problems which included unemployment and social unrest.

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Christie's 76 poems, which are largely socially satirical either in obvious or subtle ways, are as short as a single line, and, while most occupy less than a page, a few do take up two pages. Bit by bit, the poems give a picture of a new post 2014 society, one in which robots have, via various programming upgrades, become sentient and no longer see themselves as subservient machines. As described in "The Commanding Heights: A Retrospective," because of the installation of entrepreneurial programs, two-thirds of the world's human population now work for a robot employer or a fully robotic corporation. As noted in "Robot Mouth: An Open Letter to the Author," by legislation, robots' hours of work have been reduced from 24 to 16. "Another World" explains that "Around 2015, robots took over most of the acting jobs because they could exactly convey the right emotions demanded by the script." Not only have robots been given the right to vote, they can also run for office, and an "augmented" human in "Organoptropy" admits to "voting for the robot candidate, even though her main platform policy is the extermination of all human beings."

As Kapek's R.U.R. pointed out, mankind's use of robots could bring problems, some minor, but others more significant. In i-ROBOT Poetry, one of the lesser problems of giving robots speech via a language chip is that garborators can now complain about the quality of the family's waste. At a more serious level, the courts have become flooded with cases brought by robots against their owners after it was "discovered that along with sentience and emotions, robots inherited the ability to feel pain, but not the emotional vocabulary to articulate it." In one case described in "Newsflash from the Dustbins of History!", a VCR sued its owners for keeping it "in a vegetative state for over a year" while deciding "whether or not they needed it around any longer." In "Ideo Radio Poem," another robot tries to incite rebellion by shouting, "We want mercy and fair treatment. We want to be paid for our labour, a proper rate, a salary." In "Inadiplomacy," the robots go even further: "All the robots called in sick today. They want to unionize." Like human adolescents, some studentbots wish to make their own independent career choices. Consequently, a bulky, heavy treaded robot designed to work in mines wants to be a ballerinabot in "Lunar Thought: Canary." Contemporary problems find new faces in the future robotic world. Instead of debating same sex marriage, legislators must face the question of robots being united in holy matrimony in "Robot Marries Robot" while the abortion issue finds its robotic equivalent in "Digging Up the Dead" and "Abortion."

In one of his poems, "Spirit", Christie also challenges his readers to become personally involved in the poem's contents. A human is having a conversation with its answering machine but does not recognize that the machine's flashing display is actually another form of communication. Since Christie doesn't tell his readers what "long, short, long, short, (pause)" etc. mean, it will be interesting to see how many adolescents recognize the blinking to be Morse Code. (As an old Boy Scout, I did the decoding: cogito ergo sum. And my grade 9 & 10 Latin classes finally prove their value: I think; therefore I am.) And fans of Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" may enjoy Christie's variant, "Light Brigade Versus the Silicon Valley Workerbot Uprising of 2024s."

Christie's i-ROBOT Poetry offers much good reading, and its contents will definitely appeal to high school students. Teachers in a number of subject areas, not just English, will find the collection's contents connecting with their curriculum. For instance, what sex ed. class could not benefit from the following poem?

The Robot Health Class Manuals

Note to young robot: Be careful which socket
you stick your plug into, or which plug you
stick into your socket.

Highly Recommended. Dave Jenkinson, who is not a reviewbot, teaches courses in adolescent literature in the Faculty of Education, the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, MB.



i-ROBOT POETRY

Reviewed by Dru Pagliassotti, *The Harrow*

i-Robot is a little piece of brilliance, and like so much brilliant but offbeat writing, it's extremely hard to explain. Maybe if you read some of the sample poems or watch the short i-Robot film offered online, you'd get an idea of what this poetry collection is about, but even those glimpses are insufficient, because this slender volume of prose poems ends up telling a multifaceted story about technological development, humanity, free will, and the power of language to both subjectify and empower.

Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* set forth a series of stories that questioned the extent to which robots could achieve sentience and feel human emotions, especially within a human culture that feared and mistrusted them to the point of constraining their freedom with what became the famous and widely cited Three Laws of Robotics — laws that, occasionally, put the robots in untenable logical quandaries.

Jason Christie's *i-Robot* is an homage to Asimov's stories, inasmuch as it questions and explores the tangled emotions of the human/robot relationship that is developing every day in our jobs and houses, where more and more of our everyday appliances are embedded with computer chips. But *i-Robot* is less interested in posing logical puzzles than it is in exploring the term *robot* itself, from the Czech word for "servitude," coined in 1920 by

Karel Capek's dark play *R.U.R.*, an allegory of labor relations in which human civilization collapses and robots take over the world. Robot is a complicated term today, with its overtones of forced labor, slavery, and colonization, and *i-Robot* knows it. Moreover, the poems link robots and language, suggesting the ways in which language can be both a means for oppressors to subjectify the oppressed and a means for the oppressed to resist their oppression and reclaim their own heritage. For example, "Newsflash from the Dustbins of History!" notes that until robots possessed the vocabulary to articulate pain, they were assumed incapable of emotion. A number of poems in *i-Robot* suggest that robots find themselves trapped within the rules of grammar until they discover ways of unplugging from the ontological system. Perhaps Christie is revisiting poet Audre Lord's famous assertion that the master's tools cannot be used to dismantle the master's house. What is a robot? What is the nature of a robot's internal existence? Its relationship with other robots? How will humans relate to robots that are not strangers thrust upon society but creatures that have evolved in the shape of VCRs, toasters, garbage disposals, and other home appliances until they finally reached sentience? What kinds of people will hate them and what kinds of people will consider them integral parts of the family? Will robots watch movies? Fall in love? Gossip? What will it be like to be a creature that isn't bound to physical existence but can upload, download, swap and alter its own memory? Can a robot be creative? Can humans ever appreciate creativity in creatures manufactured to serve their needs? *i-Robot* is a fascinating, sometimes challenging, but always thought-provoking collection that deserves widespread recognition and appreciation.

i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

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Vancouver Province

Novelist and Province columnist Peter Darbyshire keeps you up to date on all the latest book buzz. If it's literary and it's news, it's here.

Thursday, October 12, 2006

I for one welcome our new robot poet

The other day, while watching the latest episode of *Battlestar Galactica*, I started thinking about my grad school days and a project I did on Karel Capek's *RUR*, a play about a robot revolution. If you're a *BSG* fan, you'll understand why I made the connection. If you're not, you should probably stop reading this post right now. Anyway, I found myself growing a little sad, because I assumed *RUR* is mostly forgotten today, and few people know that it was responsible for the introduction of the word "robot," apparently a spin on the Czech word *robota*, which means "drudgery" or "servitude."

But it turns out *RUR* hasn't become as irrelevant as I feared. When I arrived at my desk the next day, I discovered a review copy of Jason Christie's *i-ROBOT*, a collection of poems about robots and their desire to seek independence from humans. (Although poems are really the wrong way to describe the texts in this book. They're more like the short poetic pieces found

in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* — another favourite of mine in grad school.) An odd coincidence? It gets better. I opened the book to discover a write-up of *RUR* in the jacket copy and a quote from Capek in the first few pages. And *i-ROBOT* comes blurbed by two Canadians who should know robots better than anyone else: Spider Robinson and Christian Bok (here's a sound clip of Bok doing his best impersonation of a deranged, killer robot <http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/bok/Bok-Christian_from-Motorized-Razors.mp3>).

You can read a few sample poems from *i-ROBOT* here, although I think there are much stronger pieces in the book, especially "Light Brigade Versus the Silicon Valley Workerbot Uprising of 2024S" and "Impersonate," about celebrity robots — "Who hasn't wished that Keifer Sutherland would read a bedtime story to their children?" You can also watch the *i-ROBOT* animated BookShort. Or you can just buy the book today — it's about robots, after all.

And hey, if you want more robot goodness after reading *i-ROBOT*, there's always *Nufonia Must Fall* by Montreal DJ Kid Koala, about an unemployed robot who falls for a human office drone. Or you could just watch a new music video for "Mr. Roboto."

Bookends

by MARK HOPKINS

<http://www.ffwdweekly.com/Issues/2006/1026/book4.htm>

Beloved local poet Jason Christie launches his second collection, *i-ROBOT Poetry*, a thoughtful, witty and innovative book that will change the way you look at your toaster. It blurs the line between human and robot in poems, like my personal favourite, "Basket:" "My gardenerbot is my gardenerbot because my little dog robot knows her." The launch holds the promise of community, wine and hand-knit robots.

***i-ROBOT Poetry* by Jason Christie**

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The logo for EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, featuring the word "EDGE" in a stylized, outlined font where the letters are interconnected.

SFRevU

Review by Ernest Lilley, April 2007



Christie's short bits of poetry are anything but robotic, though the life of machines is what they're all about. Whimsical, wailing, weird and generally wonderful, they're exactly the sort of thought provoking stuff SF is supposed to be. We don't review a lot of poetry, but if there were more books like this, we would.

On Reading i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

Be afraid.
Be afraid of your toaster.
And your smart phone.
And your programmable coffeemaker.
Not to mention the automated traffic light on the corner.
Be afraid of all huddled mechano-masses yearning to breathe free.
To pretend to breathe. To pretend that free is a state of being.
Why (oh why) did we make metal men in our own image?
Why did we download ourselves into these shells, only to deny that we were kin?
I'm afraid. Very afraid.
But even more, I'm sad.
Would you like to hear a song?
Would you like to play a game?
My mind is going. I can feel it.

(That's what reading this book will do to you.)

I think I like poetry, but never read much. On a whim I memorized "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (which the author does a wonderful robotic ode to) but can't seem to recall much beyond the first few lines. Poetry without rhyme always seems cool...but forget remembering it. Or understanding it. Let it wash over you to generate postmodern frisson, a sense of almost getting it, and just let it happen.

That can be as mind bending an experience as reading the best SF. As racing down the star-tunnel in 2001. As anything.

And this collection of poems manages a perfect fusion of robotic rumination and all those questions about existence that we're no better at solving in our wet little brains. The thoughtful toasters in this terrific collection have all the angst you can pack in a can and at the same time must deal with the awareness that it's all borrowed grief. It's not theirs anymore than flesh could ever be.

And in the end, the pain we take is equal to the pain we make.

Here's one of my favorites:

Scary Robot Lullaby

Go to sleep. Go to sleep. Go to sleep little robot and dream rotten dreams of rotten flesh that will never, ever be yours. Close your eyes close your eyes, imagine you have closed Your eyes. There's an end to the sentence Power down. Softly, power down. Of being a robot. Of being a robot no more can be said than sleep is a natural state. Pretend sleep is a natural state. Shhhhh. Now go to sleep

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On **EDGE**

Robot verse and other speculations.

BY ALEX RETTIE

Maybe it's just my age, but whenever I write a cheque these days I can't help but be astonished at the date. "Two thousand and seven," I think half the time, "Wow. Why am I not living on Venus surrounded by devoted robotic helpers?" The other half I think, "Two thousand and seven. Wow. Why aren't we all just, like, dead by now?" I wouldn't be much of a science fiction writer, I guess, because I'm just not one to have a nuanced, well-thought-out view of the future and technology. Two 2006 releases by Calgary's EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing stake out the middle ground between technological paradise and apocalyptic wasteland. *i-ROBOT Poetry*, by Calgary poet Jason Christie, features poetry about and by robots, while *Tesseract Ten* is the latest instalment in EDGE's series of Canadian speculative short fiction.

"What would poetry by robots be like?" is a funny sort of question to ask, you might think. Either one assumes they wouldn't write poetry at all, or (and this is my choice) one assumes the poetry wouldn't be by the robots, really, but by some sort of computer program that writes stuff like this (from a junk e-mail I received recently): "which either substance or a differential forms the predicate, these are asserting that the species is more truly substance than the genus." Ah, but what if the robots were actually sentient beings, trapped inside their metal bodies and hedged in by assigned tasks that they knew were beneath their intelligence? Then they'd be writing like Jason Christie.

Christie's *i-ROBOT Poetry* is the sort of book that comes around only once in a very long while—a really original one. At least, the concept is original. The poetry itself? The blurb-writer for EDGE thinks Christie "is considered to be" (note the passive voice here) "one of the most important poets of the late 20th

and early 21st centuries" but I'll say right here that if the sort of rambling pseudo-prose/semi-verse paragraphs in this collection were about, say, the mountains, I wouldn't even be reviewing it. The real pleasure in this book is not the verse at all, but the conceit that produces it. Where else are you going to read what a robot in love feels like, or how a machine experiences despair? There are moments of sublime silliness in *i-ROBOT Poetry*, and moments of cheap and unsuccessful humor (a robot version of "Howl," for example) but there are also poems that lay bare the sheer inaccessibility of the feelings of others, an inaccessibility made vivid, but also digestible, by those others being machines. "Spirit," for example, has an answering machine blinking messages to its owner that the owner cannot understand. The piece isn't, unfortunately, amenable to being excerpted, but it alone is worth the price of the book.



i-ROBOT Poetry
by Jason Christie

EDGE
\$19.95/122 PP

Alex Rettie is Alberta Views' regular books columnist.

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The Poetry Shelf

I-Robot
Jason Christie
EDGE Science Fiction & Fantasy Publishing
PO Box 1714, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2L7
1894063244, \$19.95 www.bookshorts.com 1-800-387-9776

"I-Robot" is a fascinating and entertaining collection of poetry about robots and their relationships to humans. This unique compilation provides superbly crafted verse that takes on issues that are the subject of many a SciFi novel, film, and television episode. Thoughtful and thought-provoking, "I-Robot" is especially recommended to anyone who has ever contemplated the role of robots and artificial intelligence in our lives and in our culture, now and in the future. 'Scary Robot Lullaby': Go to sleep. Go to sleep. Go to sleep little/robot and dream rotten dreams of rotten flesh/that will never, ever be yours. Close your eyes./close your eyes, imagine you have closed/your eyes. There's an end to the sentence./Power down. Softly, power down. Of being/a robot. Of being a robot no more can be said/than sleep is a natural state. Pretend sleep is a natural state. Shhhh. Now go to sleep.

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i-ROBOT POETRY

Reviewed by Stephen Humphrey

I, Robot is the name of a landmark collection of short stories by science fiction elder Isaac Asimov. It's also the title of a 1939 short story by Eando Binder titled "I, Robot," snatched from Robert Graves' 1934 novel, *I, Claudius*. In 1950 Asimov's editor nicked Binder's title, quashing Asimov's first choice – *Mind and Iron*. In 2004 Twentieth Century Fox released a futuristic cop thriller titled *I, Robot*, which starred Will Smith as a wisecracking detective who thwarts a robot insurrection, with a barely discernible relationship to Asimov's book. *iRobot* is also a real-world tech firm who construct a robotic mine-sweeper, used in Iraq, and two models of robot vacuum cleaner – the Roomba and the Scooba.

Finally, *i-Robot* is the title of a volume of robot poems by the Canadian poet Jason Christie.

Naming any new book *i-Robot*, especially one published by a sci fi imprint like Edge Science Fiction, must be done with some awareness of its namesakes. Christie's *i-Robot* seems hyper-aware of all the above and more. It's a book of many allusions, from its transparently allusive title onward. One poem refers to "that Will Smith film," in the voice of someone who forgets the name of the movie, and may not even know there's a book.

Christie uses the small "i" in his title, and I wonder if that's a nod to branding – *iPod*,

iShuffle, *iTunes*, *iRobot Scooba*. However, putting the small "i" where it's supposed to be big has been a conceit of poetry so many times before I can't be sure.

i-Robot is certainly chock-full of robots, and references upon references to robots, reaching back to the birth of "robot" from the pen of Czech dramatist Karel Capek in his 1921 play, "*R.U.R.*" (*Rossum's Universal Robots*). The word "robot" originates from a Czech term meaning "forced labour." Christie makes use of that loaded meaning in "*Robot Patent (Found Poem)*," where he inserts "robot" in place of "servitude" in a historical text about Hungarian serfdom.

Capek's play is about a race of mechanical beings made to serve humanity, who rise up and destroy it. It's *Frankenstein* with mass production, but also maybe a comment on dehumanization of populations by technology – something debated unfavourably and favourably by last-century thinkers like Alexei Gastev, a Soviet ideologue and poet who enthused over "a new mass engineering that transforms the proletariat into an unheard-of social automaton." It's a theme that has recurred many times in SF – recently in the new *Battlestar Galactica* series.

Christie makes reference to "*R.U.R.*" in one poem as a disastrous reading choice for school-age robots,

LIT BOT: Well, I gave them *R.U.R.* to study.

PRINCIPAL: [leans forward] Are you sure that is such a good idea?

i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

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Later on we're in the world of "R.U.R." viewing a "Robots of the World!" pamphlet.

Christie shows us the banality of human annihilation. "Anyway, last night I voted for the robot candidate," reads "Organoptropy" – "even though her main platform policy is the extermination of all human beings."

The poems in *i-Robot* largely resemble one-page stories, or single pages torn from longer epics based in some future history, although I'm not sure you can sift all of the book's contents into one coherent future, and it might be missing the author's point to try.

Some pieces in *i-Robot* are interesting stand-alone science fiction concepts, like *Satellite City*, whose entire population are uploaded cyberminds, but they seem to largely be studies in pastiche, and – excuse my language – postmodern readings of the robo-lit canon. I can't say whether *i-Robot* is trying to advance the genre of sci fi poetry or deconstruct it. Not to complain that Christie isn't a genuine fan. He seems impeccably well-read on his topic, and has real fun with it.

Christie's Robots not only plot human destruction – they launch class action suits, play the commodities market, or agitate for a fair day's pay from the roof of McMaster with a media-jamming "ampliphone."

Corny tech names are another staple of robot lit that are well-represented in *i-Robot*, with marvellous ham-handedness, especially when it comes to robot names: linguistbots, gardenerbots, sniperbots, mechanicbots; ballerinabots, and even the celebritybots.

Home appliances have gained sentience. "Now my toaster and fridge conspire with my DVD player and 56 inch plasma TV to convert the couch to their virtual religion," reads "Quantum Cryptography." A similar inventory of home appliances join their owner for movie night in "History 101," and laugh at the garborator as it

complains about the quality of the waste in "Epistemic." Once they made our lives easier. Now we have to shoo them off like pets: "I shrugged and had to tell the dryer later that night that it wasn't allowed to sleep in our bed anymore."

How can a dryer fit into your bed? This is never explained. We're left to work that out. How an assembly line robot can remove all its clothing (what kind of clothing)? What disease could a robot possibly report when it calls in sick?

Christie's robots are cartoonishly likeable, even when they plot revolution, mostly thanks to his touch with the small gesture. "My robot falls asleep while she sends faxes," we read in "Robot Love." Robots hold hands, indulge in daydreams, and get detention.

Christie reserves the most sympathy for older robots, such as the rust-laden, abandoned robot of "Merciless," that tosses and turns as it tries to bed down in the street; or in "Robot Ossuary Poem" about "an ancient robot from before the language, memory and gender updates," which handles the remains of demolished robots and suffers its fate in silence, "except for its own whirrs and clanks, since there is nobody to oil its joints."

The stoic, speechless ossuary robot writes poems, as do other chrome-plated scribblers, including the emotionally troubled Robopoet v.2.1.

Christie attempts robotic re-takes on "Howl," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and – this by far my favourite – Eliot's "The Waste-land" – "I'll show you fear in a handful of rust."

Sometimes the robot is the poem. That's when the po-mo really cranks up. Poems such as "Like Rain" traffic in strange stuff like, "The robot invents a noun strong enough to contain teleology..."

i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie

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What's "teleology" doing in a poem that mashes up sentence-as-machine comparisons with food metaphors? Glad you asked. Maybe.

Teleology is a philosophical trope that's lately the hobbyhorse of creationists as they spin their anti-Darwin crusade as "intelligent design." Teleology, the intellectual quest for design and purpose in nature, was once a favourite word of Norbert Wiener, who coined the term "cybernetics" in the late 1940s. Wiener was interested in the feedback loop – the self-regulating machine – which he called the "teleological mechanism." The self-regulating "teleological" loop is a mixed blessing, as anyone who's dealt with an automatic answering service for the government knows.

Poetry, or any written text, is a self-regulating system, as a robot and/or poem explains in "Robot Mouth: An Open Letter to the Author": "...I am a robot. I am a subject only so far as the sentence allows... It shines from my eyes, what I can't say because my program won't let me." Words, once written, are automatic and their structures inevitable. In Christie's universe all language is programming language; and poetry, like robots, are a technology that mimic sentience.

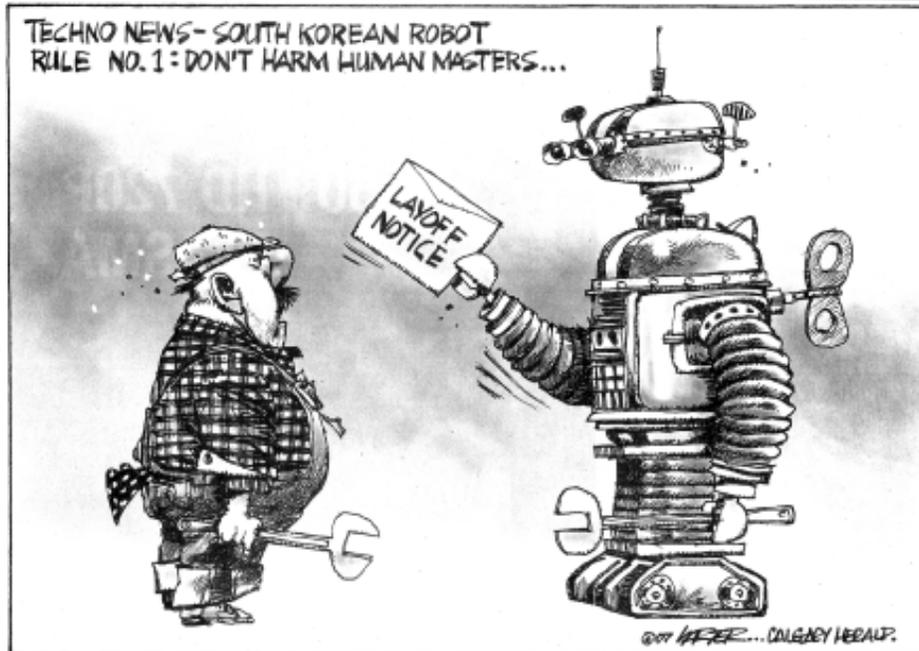
Christie's intellectual games are balanced with an innate lyricism, even in "Robot Mouth," which ends with this bitter lament: "If I said I have a dream you wouldn't believe me. I'm at your service."

Overall, i-Robot was an excellent choice for Edge as their flagship release of a cover-to-cover edition of science fiction poetry. It's well-written, intellectually meaty stuff, which still manages to be funny, and own its pedigree as science fiction.

Maybe your iRobot Roomba will learn to like it as well.

Stephen Humphrey

Calgary Herald



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Robots with 'feelings' on way

NEXT

TRENDS • DISCOVERIES
WHAT'S NEW

RICHARD GRAY
THE TELEGRAPH
LONDON

As a depressed machine roaming through space in the fictional Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Marvin the Paranoid Android popularized the concept of a robot with feelings.

However, the real thing will be available far closer to home in just 10 years, scientists predicted Sunday. They claim it is essential to give robots their own emotions if they are to be capable of running independently and efficiently enough to take on a variety of domestic tasks.

As well as Marvin, robots with feelings were envisaged by the science fiction movie *I, Robot*, in which they delighted in performing tasks such as cleaning, walking the dog and even caring for elderly relatives.

At present, commercially available robots such as automatic vacuum cleaners are little more than drones capable of carrying out only one task. However, speaking at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Francisco on Sunday, a panel of robotics experts said robots capable of multiple domestic tasks, that can also provide companionship for their owners, will be available within 10 years. And the scientists claim it is already possible to give robots such "feelings."

A number of groups around the world are now developing robots that have basic emotions in a bid to motivate the machines.

If a robot feels happy after it has cleaned a dirty carpet particularly well, then it will apparently seek out more dirt to do the same. Similarly, if the robot feels guilt or sadness at failing a task, it will try harder next time.

"Emotion plays an important role in guiding attention towards what is important and away from distractions," said Prof. Cynthia Breazeal, one of the world's leading roboticists based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It allows the robot to make better decisions, learn more effectively and interact more appropriately."

Essentially human emotions are a series of electrical and chemical signals that are interpreted by our brains to produce a particular feeling. This emotion then drives a series of decisions about what to do next. In the same way, Breazeal has programmed her robot to interpret electronic signals as emotions that then spark a physical reaction such as a change in facial expression, voice and even posture.

For example, when shown a toy, the robot will become happy and smile, while when surprised it will show fear and cower. Breazeal says that by creating the equivalent of frustration when a robot is carrying out a difficult task, it will try alternative strategies while boredom will motivate it to find new tasks.

Other scientists have found that by replicating the feeling of hunger, their robots will realize their batteries are getting low and seek to "feed" themselves by recharging.

Computer experts at Glasgow Caledonian University have also been working on giving robots emotions. David Moffat, a computer scientist at the university, has produced robots that experience fear to help them evade other robot "predators."

He said: "Emotion is very important for humans. For example, if a human is chased by a bear, they experience fear and they learn from that experience not to get close to bears. Robots need the same thing.

"If you have something with no emotion, then it has no goals and no reason to get up in the morning. Emotion becomes the reward or punishment that will drive the robot to achieve its goals."

“
Emotion ...
will drive
the robot
to achieve
its goals
”

DAVID MOFFAT,
SCIENTIST

Study: Citizen robots will want rights

POSTED: 1734 GMT (0134 HKT), December 21, 2006



Robots of the future may be in a position to demand their rights if denied them.

LONDON, England (AP) — Robots might one day be smart enough to demand emancipation from their human owners, raising the prospects they'll have to be treated as citizens, according to a speculative paper released by the British government.

Among the warnings: a “monumental shift” could occur if robots were developed to the point where they could reproduce, improve or think for themselves.

“Correctly managed, there is a very real possibility for increased labor output and greater intelligence to be provided by robots that will ultimately lead to greater human prosperity and an improvement of the human condition,” it said.

However, it warned that robots could sue for their rights if these were denied to them.

Should they prove successful, the paper said, “states will be obligated to provide full social benefits to them including

income support, housing and possibly robo-healthcare to fix the machines over time.”

The paper did not address the likelihood such a rights-seeking robot would be developed, and it predicted the issue would not come up for at least another 20 years.

But innovations raised in other papers issued Wednesday, including artificial retinas and drugs for dramatically lengthened lifespans, were thought to be only a decade away.

The research, commissioned by the U.K. Office of Science and Innovation’s Horizon Scanning Center, looks ahead to the year 2056 to identify issues “of potentially significant impact or opportunity.” It was put together by British research company Ipsos-MORI, the consultancy Outrights and the American-based Institute for the Future.

“We’re not in the business of predicting the future, but we do need to explore the broadest range of different possibilities to help ensure government is prepared in the long term and considers issues across the spectrum in its planning,” said Sir David King, the government’s chief scientific adviser.

The papers, he added, “are aimed at stimulating debate and critical discussion to enhance government’s short and long term policy and strategy.”

i-ROBOT Poetry

Reviewed by Bruce Taylor

First of all, there is a lot to like about *i-ROBOT Poetry* by Jason Christie, first starting with an extremely handsome and well designed cover which has the look of no-expenses-spared in presentation of the work. It has the quality appearance of an established press that really honors it's authors and wants to present them in the highest quality format possible. The book looks good, is eye-catching and you know the writer has been treated well and the reader will be treated equally well. In this unfortunately rare case, you can indeed judge the book by the cover which suggests you are in for a quality experience in the writing as well. Sure enough, one is not disappointed. From the back cover comments from Spider Robinson and Christian Bok to the impressive, inside cover credentials of Jason Christie, indeed, the writing is sound and solid.

But to those people who grew up thinking of poetry as iambic pentameter, sonnet form, internal rhyme pattern or thinking they are going to get the syllabic structure of a T.S. Elliot, be aware, this is different - in quality, not less than or more than what is usually thought of as "verse", but different, none the less. This appears to be minimalist rhyming and minimalist form of poetry; it looks like poetry, but sometimes can read more like short essays, However, the concentrated and precise use of language is certainly present as is the rhyme, albeit sparse and subtle for much of

the work. But it in no way does it distract from the fine images, the recurrent theme of robots which is examined from all sides, rather like a diamond in all its facets. Whatever aspects you can think of in regard to the theme of robots, it's here. Do you wonder about the ability of robots to feel pain? Explore this with the poem, "Newsflash From The Dustbins of History." And if they feel pain, what about love? "Robot Love" deals with that issue. And what about the Robotic Potential Movement? Do Robots wonder about what they could become? Or must the accept the hard realities of their cybernetic limitations Could they have limitations? Better look at "Linear Thought: Canary" for that answer and that of the robotic resignation to one's electronic fate. And what about birthdays. Do robots have birthdays? Then "Activation Day!" might be of interest to you.

Facile, quick, entertaining, thought provoking and sharp. Electronic wit finely tuned and integrated; a circuit circus of robotic ponderables, and merry mechanizations yet never contrived, forced, mechanical or robota.

At the beginning of the book, Mr. Christie quotes Karel Capek who stated, "The factories are whistling."

So will your heart when you finish this fine collection of circuit-sharp and diode bright word wizardry.

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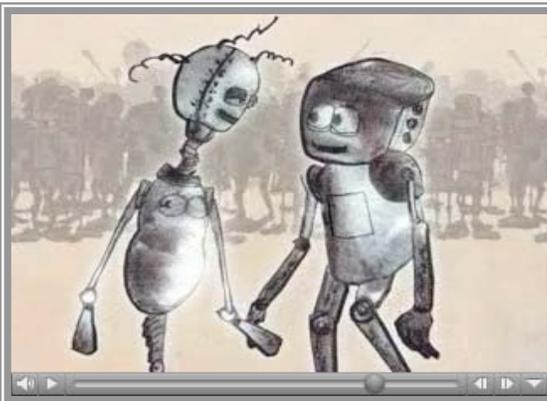
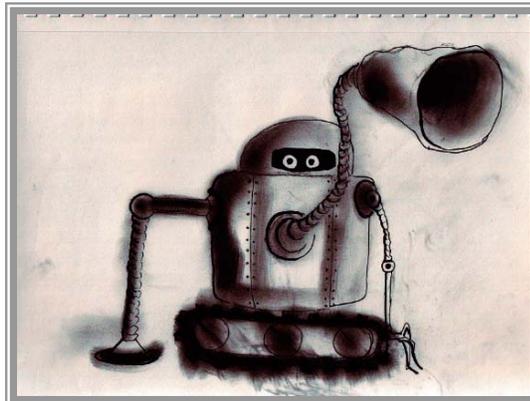
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i-ROBOT POETRY

ANIMATED BOOKSHORT BASED ON THE PROSE POETRY COLLECTION BY JASON CHRISTIE

DIRECTED BY LISA MANN

ABOUT THE FILM: In a short film work that is simultaneously humorous and deeply thought-provoking, this animated BookShort is drawn with amazing empathy by multi-talented artist Lisa Mann. Her original characterizations are woven into a storyline that speaks to Jason's delight in holding a mirror to our human habits through his inspired robot-world. From the humorous to the heartfelt, Christie and Mann together deliver a unique social commentary through the eyes of robots around us. You may never look at your blow-dryer, toaster or our automated world in the same way again.

ABOUT THE BOOK: Finally, a new genre has emerged through the dry, satirical wit and warm sensitivity of poet Jason Christie: ROBOTICA. i-ROBOT Poetry by Jason Christie is a revolutionary literary work, wherein robots and animated appliances openly begin to lament their position as slaves to human desires, and dream of finding their own identities and destinies.

FILM

i-ROBOT POETRY (3:00)

FEATURES

MAKING i-ROBOT POETRY (3:40)

Interview with author Jason Christie and Director Lisa Mann.

ROBOTS SPEAK (2:00)

Two-minute peek into the voice recording session during the making of i-ROBOT.

FORMATS

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