

DREW MILNE
NAT RAHA

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CAMBRIDGE
READING SERIES

DREW MILNE

from AND THEN SOME

copy cough inc uses bot to comb on web
pine of dulness infinite in a line note scud
decision of who courts a daftly v deft
just the if clause in need of spawning mist

sandwich care or the unreal grammar cop
saying nothing about the substantive in term
deference to dark question of assaults
previous thence spoken of as non-profit dune

workers who suffer the neuter a website with
grass roots forum scarcely in sympathy
to injured parts among an exclusion bot teas
culture click here to listen if victims

so remember to shine light on blind lid then
stood as one contra bad spam harvesting
not least among the bestseller in dream ruts
cleaver a cloning outage set but to dirt

there is no period ditto grammar punk
burning authoritarian in a self-styled puce
vigilante against typos some defacing
a more than sixty year old moral fibre peel

removing an apostrophe in Grand Canyon
as in oh no the damage story continues left
the even slightly awry taken to spanner
next stop burning zip disk field fills down

feel the noise jump cut non-sequiturs pair
well well they know who the fine grain
hatches though some of these users may plus
be small pets or babies with access to

solids copy such canned boys bitching cart
basta the bland width dues while there
is something to suffix to a verb shown zoom
as in helping to run over the language

ON DREW MILNE

Drew Milne's poem 'city of dogs' can be found in print in the *Cambridge Literary Review* 1.2 (Lent 2010) and online at *Blackbox Manifold* 2 (Jan. 2009). The poem consists of twenty one short six line stanzas laid out in a grid pattern, as seen below. The graphical presence of words, the spaces their letters occupy, is in this work a component of measure. No line exceeds seven syllables or is fewer than two words in length. The parameters



of the poem's prosody are set by a visual criterion with complex implications as to how the text might be read. The poem considers Mayan civilization and touristic encounters with its remains: 'they came by foot/and left in camera' (st. 13). Its striking layout is an important component of how these thematic contents are negotiated. In relation to the Mayan world, the grid represents a number of loosely mimetic possibilities. These square blocks of text might be the 'stelae' or inscribed slabs to which the poem refers (st. 5). They could be buildings arranged along streets or internal rooms divided by load-bearing white space. They could form the foundation pillars of a temple; the 'sunken square' footings of a 'cone pyramid' (st. 1).

The way in which their regular array opens these stanza up to different patterns of readerly hypothesis and construction extends inevitably to the order in which individual blocks of text, and indeed individual lines, may be traversed by the reading eye, which is encouraged to move experimentally over this territory by the offer of an apparent plan view. One might for instance attempt to read the poem as if it deployed a long line in three even units, moving all the way from left to right across the page before continuing down. The existence of prominent enjambements within several stanzas ought not merely to rule out such speculative options as reading left to right, but rather to encourage other reading strategies to go alongside any such attempt. A sense of the basic polyvalence of Milne's short line is enhanced by maintaining a degree of accident in any line's encounter with adjacent materials on all sides.

The *Cambridge Literary Review* printing of the poem is an illustration of this mobility. To accommodate its division over two pages, the text is has been reformatted, in cooperation with the author, so that the nine stanzas on the initial recto contain what *Blackbox Manifold* presents as the whole first column of text and the first two stanzas of the second. The knock-on effect of this displacement takes until the last four stanzas of the final column to return to the order of the *Blackbox Manifold* text. Even if the text were not thus redistributed the page break involved would naturally lead to attempts at reading other than in columns. Appropriately enough, the determination to read the text in columns depends for its validation on the formatting changes in the *CLR*. Had the *CLR* merely printed the *Blackbox* text broken into two parts, there would have been no case for an intrinsic preference for reading down rather than across, or across one and then down in a double column as did the Mayans. A variant reading of the text is not just an opportunity to establish its most plausible ordering. It also has the potential to enrich the text in itself qua variant and not just in terms of what may be learned from its being superseded.

The question 'What's the Mayan/for quick property...' (st. 6) flags up a voice of occasional prominence and consistent importance in the poem; a voice to which the forms of organisation of all the poem's other materials might be answerable, or for the purposes of which they might have been arranged as the unfixed corollary of allegorical constellations in parallel with some prognostic thoughts about the world today. Other potential loci of an evaluative persona, such as phrase like 'so called acropolis' (st. 5) might only be recycling what remnants are known of Mayan culture from learned sources. The voice of the question in stanza six seems more satirically piquant precisely because of its professed ignorance. The likelihood that we are not expected to seek beyond the English of this question to the vernacular Mayan is strong. The question doesn't ask for the Mayan phrase itself so much as in pretending to it presumes access to all things Mayan as a context for pointed allusion.

As the tourist to whom this satirist might implicitly be compared presumably fails adequately to see, the terrain is too uneven and overgrown and the Mayan pieces lodged in it too questionable and shuffled for this landscape to leap now into poignant currency from its default as backdrop. The poem's form and the licence it lends the individual line is an obdurate reminder of this and an effective satire on performances of optimistic restitution, be they unequivocal accounts of the poem's mimetic affinities, its sequential order, or the solicitations of occluded satiric voice. Attention to layout suggests that there is no reliable map of this past for the present to map onto.

While the grid of 'city of dogs' is unique among Milne's published work an exacting right hand margin is a feature of many of his other poems. The Courier typeface used in the original edition of *familiars* (Equipage, 1999) signals a detailed attention to relative line lengths within each quatrain unit. Of the twenty one poems in this collection (cf. the twenty one stanzas of 'city of dogs') just three depart from a regular structure in which at least two lines in each block of four are of equal length. Poems vi and vii stand out as significant deviations from this otherwise consistent rule. The extracts from *And Then Some* printed here exhibit an even greater degree of Courier-tight regularity. '[C]hurning over the merest em' (*Go Figure*, Salt, 2003) as such observations may be, they nevertheless take their cue from unmistakable features of verse design and lead into a sense of the architecture of Milne's poems; how the contents of his work might be formed. Few poets collaborate as closely as Milne with the conditions of limitation, and hence possibility, represented by a line in which letters are a conspicuously finite resource.

to have imbued directions of
dust lunar is placate / delay, the
notion to hear you is a drive
soaked safe in a landscaped thrill

& here we can map our shifts in iris—
we can grip our limbs let lucid
in a lack of gravitation we
can long for arbours w/
the knowledge of their skew
about our periphery:

the very safety the
dismissal to settle for homotopic photogenes
we have distinction typeset in smiles in
pulse sprung from soil.

the material
entirely living
& all required is our gaze.

sonnet

I only know how to bat . if
this coil tensile recovery strays—
pattern noir definition, an skein
(*in situ*) drawn index, clue accented
around southern sip / percept/décor;
having gauge trace evident
the prong dined by you occupies, ease
in the grape reducing me garrulous.

temporal slippage: October,
london here threadneedles aesthetic
tremble through to marrow, nauseate
the wastage /sq ft or shield invite / glare:
keep your polished hands in dismount—
to need to trust air / percentage scape

ON NAT RAHA

‘THOUGH IN ROLLING GREENERY YOUR DUALITY TREADS’

a seasonal meander turns back the russet/ egyptian wax moults into warm
tarmac/ the process breeze pavements a statue with backing/ through
delicate fingers last seen on a balcony// (Cast over/ yo)// Picking ye up
all over the every/ low note sophisticate ent’ring the small-lit/ figure of
eight on the slow-moving apperture/ ivy foregrounding cut hip to hip/
care for allusion clearly ‘round Clapham/ snips nervous elapses to cool
in the trim/ chalk lining layers/ commitment shakes hangers/ and caught
this reflect accidental on fences// The draw-string deturn that dress
is not supra/ tilting a poke I find here, I float//// Shake out centrality/
scaffold and calendar/ these theoretical locks// instinct for guilt/ ranges
past backwash/(NB I discover the trees// So went to town for the image
or any thing else in a bright light walking across a square// Fief notes/
how the sensitive (proxy) and the beautiful (proxy that) / balk at your
queenfish/ long beyond earshot/ the bells of church walk// Feld notes/
how the radial word turns down the corners of / [this street] [this street]
[this street] [this street]/lipstick smitten velour for so-parasol Sappho/
OH sun-sisters revere those radio days-- and nods across to Lee Miller/
spell the spectacular neatness of back stitch / back in the placketed home-
postered golden z-own / the first stitch set a tent afloat for an adjective or
a pearl// This cirque’s alive and seamless/ so ring out your gin-tink glass
to skate/ two blocks acute of these sartoreal georgics.

— LK

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DREW MILNE'S books of poetry include *Sheet Mettle* (1994), *Bench Marks* (1998), *The Damage: new and selected poems* (2001), *Mars Disarmed* (2002) and *Go Figure* (2003). He edits the occasional journal *Parataxis: modernism and modern writing* and the occasional imprint Parataxis Editions. A new issue of *Parataxis* and new Parataxis Editions books are set to appear in 2011. He edited *Marxist Literary Theory: an anthology* (1996) with Terry Eagleton, and the anthology *Modern Critical Thought* (2003). He has published numerous essays on poetics, drama, performance and critical theory, and has books forthcoming on Marxism, performance and poetics. Extracts from a novel in progress entitled *The Prada Meinhof Gang* have appeared in various journals. As well as writing a number of performance texts, his work in progress also includes the development of performance personae for a rockumentary entitled *Glamfuzz: the wilderness years*. As part of his CRS reading, Milne read from Gertrude Stein, Mayakovsky, and played a sound text composed of the voices of C20 architects.

NAT RAHA lives in London. Her poetry includes *Octet* (Veer Books 2010), *Notes on Tauheed* (The Arthur Shilling Press 2009) and *Sporangiophores* (yt communication 2009), and has appeared in *Klatch*, *Cleaves*, *Department*, *Blart* and *Freak Lung*. She helps out with ninerrors press and is studying at the University of Sussex. As part of her CRS reading, Raha read from Alice Notley.

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