TYPOGLYCEMIC ANAPHORIC VERSE

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Anaphoric verse – a term taken from the word ‘Anaphora’ – is poetry that involves the “repetition of a word at the beginning of successive utterances,” Motte 2007 pp. 209. Inspired by the power that such technique lends a text, each repetition potentially a reiteration, I sought to employ it with a further constraint that I believed would serve to even better illustrate the anaphora’s potential for stern, powerful imagery through accretion.

In 1976 Dr Graham Rawlinson completed a PhD that three decades later – largely in thanks to the internet and subsequent trend of chain emails – would grant him some infamy. The paper, titled The significance of letter position in word recognition (Rawlinson, 1967), eventually spawned this chain email:

Arodcnig to rsceeeach at Cmabrigde Umervtisy, it deosn’t mttaer in wnh otredr the lteers in a wrod are, the oly imroantt tihng ts taht the frist and lsat lteer are in the rght pcale. Ths rset can be a toatl msse and you cn stll read it woutht poblem. Ths is busease the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteer by istlef, btt the wrod as a wlohe.

No such research was conducted at Cambridge University, as is pointed out in a discussion of the meme by Matt Davis (Davis, N.D). The sentence led to the neologism ‘typoglycemia’, or as Dr Rawlinson explained years later in a letter to New Scientist, “My PhD at Nottingham University (1976), showed that randomising letters in the middle of words had little or no effect on the ability of skilled readers to understand the text.” (Rawlinson 1999, pp. 55).

Dr Rawlinson originally undertook the PhD in order “To aid understanding of the reading process through examination of one part – namely word recognition,” (Rawlinson, N.D). He completed 16 experiments for the research and applied them to reading groups across all ages. While some of the formulas included worked on order reversal, others included the substitution of X for letters, as in the formulas 2/X/2 and 4/X/0 where numerical symbols represent which letters of the word remain in their original position and form (Rawlinson N.D). For example to apply the 2/X/2 formula to its own definition as given above: where nsxxxal sxxcxl sxxxent whxch lxxcxrs of the wrod rxxxn in thxir oxaxxtl pxxxxon and form.

For my purposes, I wish to apply the 1/R/1, 2/R/2, 2/R/0 formulas used the in the PhD – where once again numerical symbols represent how many letters at the edge of a word remain in place and R represents random – with further development to incorporate a 3/R/3 and 1/R/0 formulas.

Through an iterative application of the typoglycemic formula to an anaphoric verse I feel the text will eventually begin to mirror the experience of its protagonist. To this end the formulas will be applied in the following order: 3/R/3, 2/R/2, 1/R/1, 1/R/0, allowing for a gradually increasing disruption of the text. Rawlinson adds, “Passages were used in some experiments, in others the words were displayed as a whole, in sequence left to right,” (Rawlinson, N.D) and I will be applying this method the 1/R/0 stanza in order to emphasise the chaotic effect the successive application of the preceding formulas will have.
Beyond comfort he finds inelegance.
Beyond breath he heaves and wretches.
Beyond exhaustion he fails to find solace.
Beyond presence what remains is aimless.
Beyond skin he is blood and little more.
Beyond hope he is granted new residence.
Beyond death his heart is tenantless.

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Reference List

Davis, M. (N.D), Psycholinguistic ‘Research’ From The Internet, retrieved 27 June, 2011, from the Medical Research Council Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit website, <http://www.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/people/matt.davis/Cmabrigde/>


THIS RUGGED WORLD

SIR JEREMY MORSE
London, England

Though dogged by fate, I make my dogged way,
And keep rugged up against this rugged world.
I learned that lesson from a learned man
Who helped an aged crone aged eighty-two
When children ragged her for her ragged clothes.
She crooked her crooked fingers round his arm,
And jagged his jacket with her jagged nails.
She blessed her blessed rescuer, but he
Silently cursed his cursed courtesy.