Enjambment in Thumboo's Poem
"Evening by Batok Town"

Bao Zhiming, Cao Luwen[1]
National University of Singapore

Abstract

Enjambment is a common technique of poetry. Enjambment breaks a line at different structural points. Based on the structure of the line break, we propose four types of enjambment, and assign a severity value to them. This allows us to quantify enjambment of a stanza or poem. By examining the enjambment of Thumboo's poem "Evening by Batok Town," we show that there is a correlation of iconicity between the nature of the imagery of a stanza and the stanza's enjambment value.

Keywords

A poem is composed of lines, and each line must end. Scholars of poetics recognise two major types of ending: end-stop, when the ending of the line coincides with the clause, or enjambment, when it does not. Enjambment is a common technique in poetry, especially in modern free verse. In this paper, we examine the use of this technique in the poem "Evening by Batok Town," by Edwin Thumboo (Thumboo, *A Third Map* 118-19), and show that it is motivated by three considerations: parallelism, rhythm and iconicity. Through a close reading of the poem and a detailed analysis of the linguistic structure of each line's ending, we hope to show how the poet uses the linguistic resources at his disposal to achieve a balance between form and function or message, and in so doing, to reinforce the themes of the poem.

In the poetics literature on enjambment, there has been little attempt to define enjambment in linguistic terms, a gap which we attempt to fill in this paper. We will first define a typology of enjambment in terms of morphosyntactic category. This definition allows us to see enjambment as gradient and to develop a quantitative metric to "measure" the degree of enjambment. Manifested in different structural terms, enjambment offends the

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[1] Bao Zhiming is a linguist with an interest in theoretical linguistics and contact linguistics. He is now professor of the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore. Cao Luwen is a PhD candidate in the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore. She is working on the linguistic analysis of poetry and issues in literary translation.

grammatical sensibility of the reader in different ways. We show that enjambment may be used to ensure the structural parallelism and rhythmic flow of the lines in question, and that it is used by the poet to reinforce the disjoint imagery conveyed through the poem. The latter use resembles a common grammatical strategy that linguists call iconicity, in that linguistic structure mirrors the logical structure of the events being reported (Haiman 1985, Nanny 1999, Leech and Short 2007). The enjambed lines paint a canvas of disconnected images, and the disconnectedness is reinforced by the severe type of enjambment manifested in the lines.

1. Enjambment – An Illustration

Enjambment is employed both in traditional poetry and modern free verse, and in other literary genres. It has been discussed extensively in the poetics literature (Hollander 1975, Clark 1994, Steele 1999, Leech and Short 2007). The word *enjambment* is derived from the French verb "enjamber," which means to straddle or encroach. According to the *2012 Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enjambment refers to "the continuation of a syntactic unit from one to the next without a major juncture or pause" (Greene et al 435). It occurs when a grammatical unit such as clause does not end at the end of a line, but runs on to the next line. By using enjambment, the poet forces the reader to read the lines without interruption. End-stop is the opposite of enjambment, when the line ending coincides with the end of the clause that constitutes the line. We will use Shakespeare's Sonnets 116 and 130 to illustrate enjambment and end-stopping. The following lines are cited from Shakespeare's Sonnet 116:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments. Love is not love
> That alters when it alteration finds
> Or bends with the remover to remove:
> O no! It is an ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken (Burrow 613)

The six lines are expressed in three sentences, with a caesura in the second and fifth lines. Enjambment is formed through the run-on phrases from the end of one line to the next. For instance, the preposition phrase *to the marriage of true minds* at the end of the first line is continued with the verb phrase *admit impediments* at the beginning of the second line; and the noun *love* at the end of the second line is also continued with the relative clause *that alters* in the following line, which is itself enjambed through the break *finds | or bends*. And the last two lines are expressed through a single clause, with the break occurring between the nominal head *ever-fixed mark* and its modifying clause that becomes the second line.

End-stopped lines are illustrated with the following lines from Shakespeare's Sonnet 130:

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
> If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
> If hair be wires, black wires grow from her head. (Burrow 614)

In this example, each line is a complete sentence.

2. Types of Enjambment Based on Grammatical Category

For obvious reasons poets and literary scholars are not concerned with the linguistic aspect of enjambment. But, as we will show, the typing of enjambment based on linguistic structure is important to appreciate the use of enjambment in poetry. As a first step towards such a typology, let's consider the phrase structure of a simple sentence, such as *Mary gave up the raccoon that stole the cat food.* In generative linguistics, the constituents of the clause are hierarchically represented, as shown in the following tree diagram:[2]
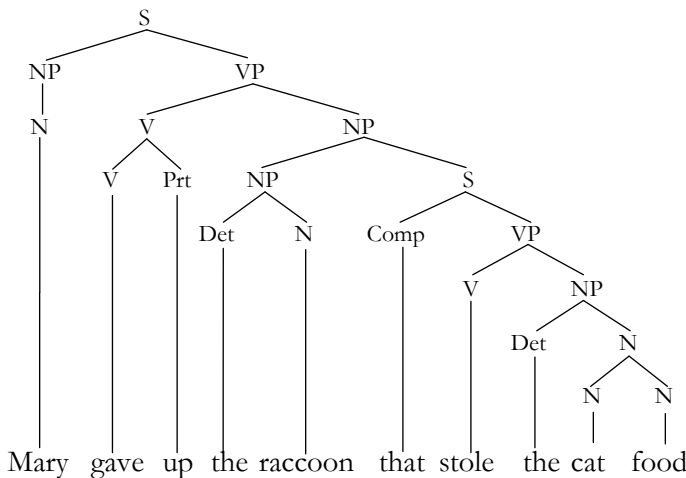
From the tree diagram, we recognise two basic types of syntactic constituent: the lexical category and the phrasal category. We use X to represent

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[2] In the tree diagram, the following abbreviations are used: Comp, complementiser; Det, determiner; A, adjective; N, noun; Prt, particle; V, verb; NP, noun phrase; VP, verb phrase; S, sentence. For a quick introduction to generative linguistics, see Fromkin et al (2003) and Radford (2004). In structural linguistics, Comp, Det and Prt are functional categories, A, N and V are lexical categories, and NP, VP, S are major phrasal categories.

all lexical categories, and XP all major phrasal categories.[3] Prima facie, we can break the sentence into two lines at any point in the tree, regardless of the categorial status of the junctural constituents. If we exhaustively enumerate all possible breaks that can occur in the sentence, while keeping lexical words whole, we can recognise four basic types:

Type I: XP|XP, between two phrasal categories
          NP|VP: Mary | caught the raccoon that stole the cat food
          NP|S: the raccoon | that stole the cat food
Type II: X|XP, between a lexical category and a phrasal category
          V|NP: caught | the raccoon that stole the food
Type III: X|X, between two lexical categories; phrase
          Det|N: the | raccoon
Type IV: X|X, between two lexical categories; compound or phrasal verb
          N|N: cat | food
          V|Prt: gave | up

Intuitively, Types III and IV breaks are more severe than those of Types I and II in the sense that they occur at the juncture of two lexical categories, which makes it necessary for the reader to scan both lines in the interpretation of the meaning of the affected expression. In Types I and II, the meaning of the affected expression, which belongs to a major phrasal category (NP, VP, etc.), is contained within its own line. This is especially true of Type I, where the break occurs between two major phrases. Incidentally, all the cases of enjambment in Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 that we saw earlier belong to Type I: *Love is not love | that alters when it alteration finds.*

     The last two types of enjambment affect lexical categories. The difference between them is that Type III is a phrase (*the | raccoon*), whereas Type IV is a lexical category either in the form of a compound (*cat | food*) or of a phrase (*gave | up*). In English, compounding is a highly productive word formation process (Quirk et al 1972, Huddleston and Pullum 2002). A compound may be composed of two nouns (*cat food, dragon king*), an adjective and a noun (*blackboard, White House*), or words of other lexical categories (*reading room, underwear*). Unlike phrases, compounds behave like lexical words, with varying degrees of noncompositionality, that is, their meanings are not predictable entirely on the basis of the component parts. Also included in Type IV are phrasal verbs, which sport noncompositional meanings as well, such as *give up* and *break down*. Although lexically a break within a compound or phrasal verb is

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[3] In the X-bar theory of phrase structure, the basic lexical (or functional) category, denoted as X^0, is the "root" of the phrase structure tree. In other words, phrases of various levels of representation are the projections of lexical or functional category (Radford 2004). In this paper, for ease of exposition we will not make the distinction between lexical and functional categories, and use only two levels of syntactic representation, the basic level X and the maximal level of XP.

not as severe as a break within a lexical word (*rac|coon*, *alter|ation*), its effect is still strong, requiring the reader to suspend the processing of the first part of the lexical item until she gets to the second part at the beginning of the following line. Such breaks affect the meanings not only of the expression in question, but also of the lines that are straddled. In other words, Type IV enjambment affects morphological integrity and incurs high cost in the cognitive processing of the affected lines.

We now illustrate the typology of enjambment with examples from the poem "Evening by Batok Town" (Thumboo, *A Third Map* 118). All the four types of enjambment are attested, which are exemplified below:

> Typology of enjambment in *Evening by Batok Town*
>   Type I (XP|XP): A troop of dwarfs | are on manoeuvres
>   Type II (X|XP): perhaps there will be | none this time
>   Type III (X|X): Further | East
>   Type IV (X|X): La Cha about to quantum | leap.

For a complete analysis of enjambment in the poem, see the Appendix. In Type IV, the compound *quantum leap* straddles two lines. As expected, Types I and II, which involve at least one major phrase XP, are the most common types; Type IV is quite rare. The distribution of the four types in the poem is shown below:

> Frequency of enjambment by types in *Evening by Batok Town*
>   Type I   18
>   Type II   11
>   Type III   6
>   Type IV   2
>   End-Stopped   16
>   Total lines   53

For the purpose of comparison, Shakespeare's Sonnets 116 and 130 have only Type I enjambment. So does Milton's "Lycidas." One specimen of Type I enjambment from "Lycidas" is shown below:

> So *Lycidas* sunk low, but mounted high,
> Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves. (Revard 80)

In Shakespeare and Milton, it is common to find the break between subject and predicate (a Type I enjambment), but it is rather rare for enjambment to break a transitive verb from its object (Type II), and rarer still to break an article from a noun (Type III). It appears that Shakespeare and Milton tried to avoid Type II

enjambment, let alone Types III and IV.[4]

The categorial-based typology allows us to develop an index to measure the degree of enjambment in the composition of a poem. For ease of calculation, we arbitrarily assign numerical values to the four types, as follows:

Type	Value
I	1
II	2
III	3
IV	4

To derive the value of enjambment of a stanza, or an entire poem, we first determine the types of enjambment manifested in each line of the stanza, assign the appropriate enjambment value for the line and obtain the sum of all the values. The formula is given as follows:

$$E = \sum_{l=1}^{N} e(l)$$

where E is the index of enjambment of a stanza or poem, e(l) is the enjambment value of line l, and n is the total number of enjambed lines in the stanza or poem.

We interpret E as the index of enjambment of the stanza. The index value E of a stanza or poem is the sum of all the enjambed lines in the stanza or poem. We assign 0 to end-stopped lines, so they do not affect the result. To obtain the enjambment value of per line, we divide E with n, the number of enjambed lines. So by definition, the average enjambment falls between 0, when all lines are end-stopped, and 4, when all lines manifest Type IV enjambment. The 53-line "Evening by Batok Town" sports an enjambment index of 66, with an average enjambment value of 1.69. By comparison, Shakespeare's two sonnets and Milton's 190-line "Lycidas" score the enjambment indices of 8 (Sonnet

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[4] In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Type II enjambment is not uncommon. One such example is quoted below, from Book 1 (Kastan 2005:7):

I thence	NP|VP
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song	NP|S
That with no middle flight intends to soar	VP|PP
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues	V|NP
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.	

The Type II break is between V and its object NP: pursues | Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime. A cursory reading of Book I of Paradise Lost yields quite a few specimens of Type II enjambment and of Type III enjambment (Thou from the first | Wast present), nevertheless, Type I is by far the most common type.

116), 4 (Sonnet 130) and 113 ("Lycidas"), respectively. The average enjambment value is 1, given the fact that only Type I enjambment is found in these poems.

We will return to the enjambment index in section 3.3, where we will show that the higher degree of enjambment of a stanza in the poem "Evening by Batok Town" is correlated with the disjoint nature of imageries expressed in the stanza.

3. Motivations of Enjambment

We have discussed the types of enjambment found in Thumboo's poem. In this section, we will explore the motivations for enjambment. We will consider three factors: parallelism, rhythm and iconicity. We will discuss them in turn.
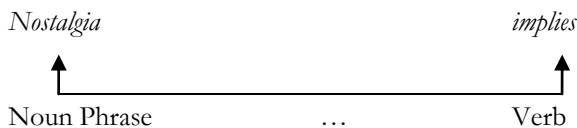
3.1 Parallelism

Parallelism is the repeated use of linguistic units of the same type over a span of textual materials (Jakobson 1968, 1987; Leech 1969). It is a common poetic device across the world's diverse literary traditions. Thumboo's poetry makes use of a great deal of parallelism. The parallelism in his poem is expressed through both lexical and morphosyntactic means. Lexical parallelism is expressed through the repeated use of individual words or phrases, and morphosyntactic parallelism is expressed through the repeated use of expressions of the same grammatical category or structure. We focus on the parallelism patterns in "Evening by Batok Town" which are caused by enjambment.

The first stanza of the poem offers an excellent example of morphosyntactic parallelism. The first three lines begin with a noun phrase, and ends with a verb. This is achieved through Type II enjambment (V|NP), that is, the lines break between the verb and its object, as shown below:

1. My day begins to heal, regain
2. A modicum of poise as evening takes
3. Nostalgia which the sky implies. (Thumboo, *A Third Map* 118)

The parallel structure can be displayed as follows:

Nostalgia   *implies*

Noun Phrase   …   Verb

In stanza 5, we see parallelism expressed lexically with *before* and structurally through Type I enjambment (NP|VP):

36. *Before* that the green slope of hills
37. Descended into plain and swamp.
38. *Before* that an old geology. Squatters
39. Cleared land, directed streams, built (Thumboo, *A Third Map* 119)

We can see that *before that* is repeated in lines 36 and 38; and lines 37 and 39 each start with a verb. From the point of view of grammatical function, the break occurs between the subject and the predicate, which is typical of NP|VP break.

3.2 Rhythm

"Evening by Batok Town," like all of Thumboo's free verse, does not follow a fixed meter. Nevertheless, the lines exhibit metrical rhythm. As has been observed in the generative metrics literature (Youmans 1983), many of the so-called poetic licenses, such as inversion, are due to rhythmic considerations. Youmans (67) illustrates the relationship between rhythm and word order with the following line from Shakespeare Sonnet 56:

> Thy edge should blúnter be than appetite
> w s)   w   s) w s) w s) w s)

In the example, *w* and *s* represent the weak and strong positions of a metrical foot, and the right parentheses mark the strong position of the foot. The phrase *be blunter* is inverted to fit the iambic rhythm, with the stressed syllable *blun-* in the strong position, as required by the iambic meter.[5] If the phrase were not inverted, we would not be able to parse the line into regular iambic rhythm:

> Thy edge should be *blunter* than appetite
> w s)   w   s) *w* *s*) w s) w s)

Prima facie, enjambment, like inversion, may also be motivated for rhythmic reasons. By breaking a line at an unusual juncture, the poet may achieve the kind of rhythmic effect that cannot be achieved without such a break. In other words, syntactic structure may be sacrificed for appropriate metrical effect. We will illustrate this with the lines of Shakespeare Sonnet 116, which we have seen earlier. The metrical feet of the first three lines are shown below:

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[5] In this paper, we will use the notational conventions of generative metrics in demarcating metrical feet; as well as the terminological conventions of the theory; see Halle and Fabb (2008). We will keep the technical language to the minimum.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
  w s) w s) w   s) w   s) w   s)
Admit impediments. Love is not love
w s) w s) w s)   w s) w s)
That alters when it alteration finds
  w s) w   s) w s)ws) w   s)

Here we see examples of enjambment as well as inversion in the three lines. Clearly, the enjambment of the first two lines is motivated by the need to keep the lines within the confine of the pentameter. The line breaks belong to the relatively innocuous Type I enjambment: PP|NP (*to the marriage of true minds | admit impediments*) and NP|S (*love | that alters when it alteration finds*). When we consider the effect of enjambment and inversion on the iambic rhythm, we find that the lines are in optimal metrical form. Keeping to the normal English syntax and breaking the lines only at the end of the tenth syllable (or the fifth foot), we create a metrical monster:

Let me not ad*mit impedi*ments to
  w   s) w s) *w s) w s)* w   s)
the marriage of true minds. Love is not love
  w s) w   s) w   s)   w s) w s)
That alters when it finds *alteration*
  w s) w   s) w s) *w s)w s)*

The first made-up line now sports Type II enjambment (P|NP). Without inversion, the first and third lines exhibit mismatch between stress and position, with stressed syllables occupying *w* positions and unstressed syllables *s* positions. According to generative metric theories, such mappings are ill-formed (Youmans 1983, Fabb 1997, Halle and Fabb 2008).

The relationship between rhythm on the one hand, and enjambment and inversion on the other, is not as easy to establish in free verse as it is in strict verse, such as the iambic pentameter in sonnets. Part of the reason is the fluidity in the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables across a line or adjacent lines, and in the number of syllables or feet per line. Still, we may ascertain the effect of enjambment on the rhythmic flow of the two lines that are straddled by enjambment. That is to say, a line break may occur at a juncture that allows the continuation of the type of meter in the first line onto the second line. This appears to be the case in the opening lines of "Evening by Batok Town," as is illustrated below:

My day begins to heal, regain
  w   s) w s) w s) w s)
A modicum of poise as evening takes

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w    s) w s)   w    s)   w s)   w    s)
Nostalgia which the sky implies.
  w    s) w    s)    w    s) w    s)
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As we have remarked earlier, the Type II enjambment (V|NP) in the first two lines creates the structural parallelism encapsulated in NP…V. It also ensures the regular flow of the iambic rhythm. If the line breaks after *nostalgia*, we would produce the two lines as scanned below:

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A modicum of poise as evening takes nostalgia
w    s) w s)   w    s)   w s)   w    s)    w s) w
which the sky implies.
  w     w    s)   w    s)
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Although the poem is in free verse form, the regular iambic rhythm sets up a contrast with the irregular rhythm in the remaining lines of the poem.

3.3 Iconicity
According to Haiman, iconic signs are "signs whose meaning in some crucial way resembles their form" ("Iconicity" 191). Iconicity is a common phenomenon across the world's extant languages, not only in onomatopoeia (*roar*, *sizzle*) and sound symbolism (*flame*, *flare*, etc.), but also in syntactic structure. In English, for example, word order often follows the natural order of events. The utterance *John stood up and sat down* does not report the same events as *John sat down and stood up*: the order of the phrases is the same as the temporal order of the events. Similarly, we see iconicity in the reporting of conditions and consequents. In real life, the condition precedes the consequent. In English, if it is introduced with *if*, the conditional clause can either precede or follow the consequent clause (*You will be fired if you say that again*). But without *if*, the conditional clause can only precede the consequent clause (*Say that again, you will be fired*) (Huddleston and Pullum 759). Iconicity is also a common strategy used in poetry and other literary genres, which has also been extensively documented (Leech and Short 1981, Nanny 1990, Steele 1999).

In poetry, the iconic relationship between form and message is not as easy to establish as it is in everyday language. The facts which we take to be evidence of iconicity may be subject to different interpretation. The poem "Evening by Batok Town" starts and ends with the sun setting in Singapore. In 53 lines, the poet meanders through a motif of Chinese and Indian cultural icons and of modern life in Batok Town, conveying the poet's musings about tradition and modernity. The poem is dotted with images which are not connected in a self-evident manner. We can detect iconicity in the way the disjoint imagery of a stanza is foregrounded by the type and degree of enjambment that is exhibited

through the lines of the stanza. We now proceed to show how a quantified approach to enjambment allows us to describe how the foregrounding works.

The poem has a total of eight stanzas. The enjambment-related measurements of the stanzas with 6 lines or more are displayed below:

Enjambment by stanza in "Evening by Batok Town"

	Stanza 1	Stanza 2	Stanza 4	Stanza 5	Stanza 6
# of lines	10	10	11	10	6
# of enjambed lines	7	10	7	6	5
E	14	19	11	9	7
E per enjambed line	2.00	1.90	1.57	1.50	1.40

Stanzas 3, 7 and 8 are too short for meaningful comparison. As can be seen, the first two stanzas are highly enjambed, and as measured by E, enjambment rises from the start and declines towards the end of the poem.

The high degree of enjambment in the first two stanzas is worth noting. If we examine the stanzas closely, we can find that they convey a series of isolated images. In Stanza 2, we read about rainbow, light and cloud; about the Chinese and Indian mythical figures and gods of La Cha, Krishna and Arjuna. After a quick transition of Stanza 3, the poet paints a canvas of images through a simple listing of nominal phrases (NPs) that present a kaleidoscope of modern life in Batok Town – apartment buildings, street scenes and people going about their separate life. The enjambment in these stanzas includes Types III (phrasal X|X) and IV (compound X|X), which more severely affect the cognitive processing of the sentences that exponence the lines. Leech and Short (1981) remark that a literary passage which consists of disconnected sentences mirrors the thought process behind the passage. In our terms, the enjambment in the poem is iconic of the disorderliness in the poem's imagery. The form matches the message.

4. Conclusion
In the preceding pages we examined enjambment in Thumboo's poem "Evening by Batok Town." We developed a formal definition of enjambment, based on the phrase structure of the lines, and a quantitative method to measure the severity of enjambment. Enjambment is inevitable given the fact that poetic lines are more limited – by meter or by rhythm – than sentences. Compared with the traditional verse, Thumboo's poem exhibits all four types of enjambment, contributing to a high E of 66. By comparison, E is 113 for Milton's 193-line "Lycidas," and 8 and 4 respectively for Shakespeare's Sonnets 116 and 130. "Lycidas" and the sonnets have only Type I enjambment.

The enjambment in the poem has three motivations: the need to create structural parallelism (such as NP…V in the first stanza), the need to maintain

rhythm (such as the iambic rhythm in the first three lines) and the need to highlight the disorderly imagery conveyed in the poem. On the last point, we have shown a correlation between the degree of enjambment and the nature of the message. The high degree of enjambment in frequency and in severity is correlated with the poet's rich imaginings that span culture, time and space.

Appendix 1   "Evening by Batok Town"

Lines	Structure	Type	Value
Stanza 1			
1. My day begins to heal, regain	V|NP	II	2
2. A modicum of poise as evening takes	V|NP	II	2
3. Nostalgia which the sky implies.			
4. The sun's gradual genuflection seems	V|AP	II	2
5. Ample in the eyes' receiving centre.			
6. Clouds, middling to spectacular, twist	V|VP	II	2
7. To disengage while random access grows	V|AP	II	2
8. Alert, retrieving gall and honey in the	Det|N	III	3
9. Moment, as memory anoints earlier days,	VP|PP	I	1
10. As earlier days...this sky, again.			
Stanza 2			
11. No rainbow yet; perhaps there will be	V|NP	II	2
12. None this time. But, craved by light,	VP|S	I	1
13. Clouds still intimate. A troop of dwarfs	NP|VP	I	1
14. Are on manoeuvres; La Cha about to quantum	N|N	IV	4
15. Leap; a grey-gold dragon transmutes	V|NP	II	2
16. Receding blue into flared vermilion as	Conj|S	III	3
17. Its claws etch the first stars. Further	A|N	III	3
18. East, Krishna's chariot stands resplendent	S|S	I	1
19. While Arjuna, cleansed of doubt, now arms,	VP|AP	I	1
20. Reluctantly. Below	P|NP	II	2
Stanza 3			
21. These deep recurrences,	NP|NP	I	1
22. These shifting runes	NP|S	I	1
Stanza 4			
23. That touched my father, now my son,			
24. And so all three again, are images:			
25. Vigilant Bukit Batok topped by radar;	NP|PP	I	1
26. MRT accompanying Avenue 5;	NP|PP	I	1
27. Four-point blocks, JC, food-centre;	NP|PP	I	1
28. A young couple held by privacy	VP|PP	I	1
29. Amidst strolling families and darting	V|N	IV	4
30. Children practising their mother-tongue.			
31. An impatient taxi's irritating honk	NP|VP	I	1
32. Sharpens the sense which sees to feel	V|NP	II	2
33. The festive buntings, the three prosperities.			
Stanza 5			
34. There was a time, quite recent,	S|S	I	1
35. When little Guilin had no pools.			

36. Before that the green slope of hills	NP|VP	I	1
37. Descended into plain and swamp.			
38. Before that an old geology. Squatters	NP|VP	I	1
39. Cleared land, directed streams, built	V|NP	II	2
40. Ponds, a temple to guardian deities; then	Conj|S	II	2
41. The quarry-road the Indians made, re-named	V|N	III	3
42. *Perang* to meet the lurking yellow peril.			
43. Out of such energies, such history, a town.			

Stanza 6

44. Yet high-rise and high-way,			
45. The new breed in search of	P|NP	II	2
46. Gleaming jobs, the computer-mind,	NP|VP	I	1
47. Turn memory shorter than the land's.			
48. Or that kept whole by auguries of	P|NP	II	2
49. Spirit, descent of custom, the pain	NP|PP	I	1

Stanza 7

50. Of friendship; or the spell in the rose...

Stanza 8

51. Unless brought into the blood's necessity	VP|PP	I	1
52. By an evening sky, by immemorial	A|N	III	3
53. Language of cloud and light.			

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