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‘Defiant formlessness’: Prose poem as process

Abstract:

In this paper we explore the prose poem with reference to two fields of discourse. The first is a collection of scholarly literature that addresses the prose poem as a *form*. The second is taken from research interviews we conducted with poets from around the English-speaking world, where the tendency of the discourse is not so much form, but concerns of *activity*. From our archival and interview research, we conclude that writers in general, and poets in particular, have a practical need to remain mobile, active and flexible in the activity of writing. Those who reject the signpost ‘prose poem’ may be understood as committed to a focus on writing, not specifically on form; and to making what they can with what they have at hand.

Biographical notes:

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Keywords:

Prose poetry – Writing – Prose poem – Interview – Form – Activity

Defining the form

The domain of language arts is old, but it isn't stable. Style, voice, form, mode, address and more have changed across its history, sometimes rising or falling in value, sometimes disappearing entirely. Used as a medium for art, language starts with poetry, but hot on its heels comes the cool logic of philosophy, the narrative drive of prose fiction, and the enchantment of the exploratory essay.

In this paper, our focus is on that newly popular form, the prose poem. We say 'newly' popular, but it is a form that has been around for well over a century, sometimes highly regarded, sometimes dismissed as 'not real' poetry. Its name, and its shape on the page are both, no doubt, responsible for its uncertain status, because poetry and prose are typically segregated. Prose narratives, writes John Stuart Mill, 'derive their principal interest from the incidents' (Mill 1999 [1833]: 1213), while the object of poetry is 'to act upon the emotions'; and though this view is nearly two centuries old, it still has some resonance.

Mill's perspective has been moderated, though, as the decades passed: Terry Eagleton for example has taken the work of poetry a step further, in his scholarship on the topic. Poetry, he writes, 'is language trying to signify in the absence of material cues and constraints' (Eagleton 2007: 32), and yet it 'is not a question of experiencing the word rather than the meaning, but of responding to both of them together, or of sensing some internal bond between the two' (2007: 47). For Eagleton, then, poetry is the use of language to convey both meaning and affect – Mill's emotion. But it is not alone in this identity: prose too is capable of mixing form and content, meaning and affect. In her 1935 essay 'Poetry and Grammar', Gertrude Stein famously demanded 'What is poetry and if you know what poetry is what is prose' (2007: 27), and then laid out her argument for how they differ, and where they overlap. Prose, she writes, is:

the balance the emotional balance that makes the reality of paragraphs and the unemotional balance that makes the reality of sentences and having realized completely realized that sentences are not emotional while paragraphs are, prose can be the essential balance that is made inside something that combines the sentence and the paragraph. (2007: 30)

Emotional, *and* unemotional; or, to return to Eagleton, emotional intensity *and* signification. In fact, as Eagleton's discussion of poetry unfolds, it becomes clear that he barely distinguishes poetry from prose, and he provides examples of the poetic potential of much prose, the prosaic nature of many poems. We can infer from his account that the key distinction between poetry and prose is line breaks, but Stein takes a stronger line, insisting that there is, in fact, a difference between the two linguistic modes, and that is in how each addresses itself to language. Prose, she insists, is made of sentences and paragraphs; poetry 'is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns' (2007: 30). Prose is less concerned about word selection than about correctly parsed sentences, while poetry is all about the words. Taking Stein and Eagleton as pathfinders for clarity about prose and/vs poetry, we might suggest that we put aside poetic conventions such as line breaks, rhythm and rhyme and, looking only at language use, identify prose as committed to narrative traction and world-making, and poetry as committed to image, musicality and affect.

Prose poetry presumably, then, is a hybrid form of the language arts that draws on both these properties. However, the record of scholarship and practice shows an enduring struggle to define this form; indeed, Aristotle describes it as ‘this form of imitation [that] is to this day without a name’ (*Poetics* 1447a). Michael Riffaterre describes prose poetry as ‘the literary genre with an oxymoron for a name’ (1978: 117); and David Lehman says first that its definition ‘is almost tautological’, and then that ‘the prose poem is, you might say, poetry that disguises its true nature’ (Lehman 2003: 13). Kevin Brophy (2002) develops this concept, writing:

It is perhaps impossible to discuss the prose poem sensibly. If you move too far towards categorising the different forms it can take, you can end by defeating its defiant formlessness; and if you move down the path of pointing out its poetic strategies you re-align it with that form of poetry it is deliberately discarding.

These attempts to distinguish and define prose poetry are characteristic of the extant literature: a large body of scholarly work still insists on distinctions between prose and poetry. In studies by such writers as Almahameed (2016), Althoff (2012), Fakhreddine (2016) and Monroe (2009), prose and poetry are identified as two different forms of writing. This same perspective is taken to a positivist limit in Tillmann and Dowling’s cognitive work, where they argue that short-term memory declines less when recalling poetry than when reading prose (2007), and again in a study by van’t Jagt et al (2014), which identified, through analysing eye-tracking pattern differences between reading poetry and reading prose, that readers pay more attention to poetry, and that enjambment is a feature of that focus.

In this paper we explore the question of this apparently unsatisfactorily named and inadequately framed literary form with reference to two fields of discourse. The first is a collection of recent scholarly literature that addresses the prose poem as a *form*. The other second is taken from research interviews we conducted with poets from around the English-speaking world, where the tendency of the discourse is not so much form, but concerns of *activity*. The context for this research was an Australian Research Council grant, awarded in 2013, to pursue a project titled *Understanding Creative Excellence: A case study in poetry*.¹ Part of the research associated with this project was conducting semi-structured research conversations across nine-English speaking nations, with some 80 poets. From these we were able to gather 76 useable interviews, making up a corpus of data that included poets at varying levels of their career: major poets, individuals who are among the most significant poets currently writing in English (classified as 1); poets who are significant practitioners but have a national, rather than an international, public profile (classified as 2); and poets who are very new to the field, or who self-identify as amateurs (classified as 3). Finally we used NVivo, software that supports qualitative research, to prepare the transcribed interviews for analysis and interpretation.

What the scholars say

We begin, then, with a review of contemporary scholarly works on the prose poem, hoping that this will operate to bracket our analysis of the interview data, and allow a comparison of the published literature (*prose poem as form*) with the interviewed poets' comments (*prose poem as activity*). There is a growing body of literature on the prose poem and, as might be expected with a discourse developed around a hybrid form, one of the most discussed topics concerns its ontological status. What is a prose poem? Is a prose poem poetry, or perhaps rather flash fiction? If it is poetry, then how is a prose poem different from other poems? Or, in Todorov's words, 'What remains of poetry if verse is removed?' (2005: 9).

These are typical questions under exploration in the field and are often reflected in titles of major works addressing the form. For example, Monroe highlights the 'politics of genre' (1987); Delville discusses the 'boundaries of genre' (1998); Murphy reflects on prose poems as 'subversion' (1992), Fredman carves out the 'crisis' in American verse (1990); Monte uses the metaphor of 'invisible fences'; and, using a pertinent homophone, Santilli says prose poems in English are 'such rare citings' (2002).

The various publications on approaches to the question of the prose poem fall into several clusters, one of which applies a somewhat circular logic to define the prose poem, identifying the product of an artist known to be a prose poet as, necessarily, a prose poem. We can see examples of this in the writings of Antonio on Francis Ponge (2012), Beck on Milton (2015), Dewey on Rosmarie Waldrop (2016), Fraser on Luis García Montero (2015), Galvin on Octavio Paz (2004), Noel-Tod on Rimbaud (2015), and Sadoff on Anne Waldman (2006). This logic falls short quite obviously: after all, many poets who are decisively not known as prose poets will sometimes publish in that form. TS Eliot is one such example: the lion of blank verse, who in his 'Reflections on Vers Libre' (1917) insisted that poetry must be marked by both scansion and line breaks, he nonetheless published a prose poem titled 'Hysteria' (1920). This short non-lined work begins:

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles ...

No lines breaks. No obvious scansion. Plenty of narrative intent. Surely it is a prose poem? Yet Eliot writes of the form: 'I have not yet been given any definition of the prose poem which appears to be more than a tautology or a contradiction' (2015: 444).

Our interviews and discussions with contemporary poets suggest that it is not uncommon for lyric – and non-prose – poets, like Eliot, to produce an occasional prose poem, almost to their own surprise, sometimes with a sense that they don't really know what to do with it. And yet they do write these hybrid beasts. This is hardly surprising given that it is rare to find writers who are monogamously connected to single literary form: poets write novels, novelists write essays, essayists write poems. Indeed, a number of the poets we interviewed made a point of explaining that they also write children's novels, or literary essays, or stage plays (and et cetera). Writers write, and will find the form in which a particular piece of writing is best framed. Thus, while it

can be useful to attach a study of prose poetry to the identity of the poet, it is too limited and too limiting to be a sufficient explanation.

Another approach taken by the literature on prose poetry looks to the history of poetry and poetry analysis. Atherton and Hetherington's (2016) essay 'Like a Porcupine or Hedgehog?: The Prose Poem as Post-Romantic Fragment', for example, reflects back on German Romanticism to identify parallels between contemporary prose poems and Romantic-era literary fragments. Their title references Schlegel's drawing of an analogy between the literary fragment and the hedgehog: an analogy that seems at first blush counter-intuitive (what could be more of a whole than a hedgehog, rolled into a ball, spikily refusing the world?). However, a number of scholars have likewise been captured by Schlegel's image: Michael Bradshaw, for example, applauds the analogy on the grounds that a hedgehog, 'when threatened, will present its jagged edges to ward off the interfering wider world' (Bradshaw 2008: 79), and extrapolates from this the argument that fragment poems possess 'stubborn, irreducible hedgehog qualities'. Maurice Blanchot similarly reviews Schlegel's conceit, critically, taking him to task for his hedgehog metaphor, and observing that:

The fragment often seems a means for complacently abandoning oneself to the self ... to write fragmentarily is simply to welcome one's own disorder, to close up upon one's self in a contented isolation, and thus to refuse the opening that the fragmentary exigency represents; an exigency that does not exclude totality, but goes beyond it. (1993: 359)

But we won't throw out the hedgehog with the bathwater: the idea of self-containment on the one hand, and of a prickly refusal to follow institutional and generic expectations on the other, together provide useful ways of thinking the prose poem, and its place in the literary domain.

Of course not all fragments are prose poems, and not all prose poems are descended from the Romantic fragment. Romantic poets, as Bradshaw notes, frequently published what could be read as 'unfinished' or fragmentary pieces that are not precisely prose poems. Nonetheless, the historical emergence of the prose poem form is often identified as occurring in Romantic-era Europe, particularly in France. Brophy (2002), for example, directs attention to Charles Baudelaire, and his collection, *Petits poèmes en prose*, as the point at which the prose poem, named as such, emerges into literary history. Certainly Baudelaire was an early adopter of the form; for his contribution to the Denecourt *Hommage*, a Festschrift celebrating the landscape painter CF Denecourt, Baudelaire included what FW Leakey calls 'his two earliest-published experiments in the prose-poem genre' (1968: 175). That was 1855; by 1857 he had written and published a pamphlet of prose poems, *Nocturnal Poems*, and four years later published a further nine prose poems in *La Revue fantaisiste*. Overall, across the course of his career he published 45 prose poems; another five, found in his papers after his death, were published posthumously in the 1869 edition of *Petits poèmes en prose*. Although he was, therefore, hardly prolific in his output, he remained passionate about the form. In a letter to Arsene Houssaye, written in 1869, he says:

Who has not, in bouts of ambition, dreamt this miracle, a poetic prose, musical without rhythm or rhyme, supple and choppy enough to accommodate the lyrical movement of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the bump and lurch of consciousness?

This seems to cast an alternative perspective on the prose poem; particularly the prose poem located under the rubric of the Romantic fragment, and viewed in its hedgehog form. Baudelaire here seems to be foreshadowing Stein's view of poetry: as that which does not attend to sentences and paragraphs; and as that which offers all the possibilities inherent in openness, in an acceptance of the always-incomplete project of being. Perhaps this playfulness with language, the 'bump and lurch' of it, points more to the use of the demotic and the quotidian modes of language, rather than the more elevated, more determinedly poetic. But if it is in fact poetry then why does it eschew rhyme, eschew the energetic potential of the line break and of enjambment? And if it is prose, how can it treat the sentence, grammar and narrative in so cavalier a fashion?

Perhaps an answer to the identity of prose poetry comes from an admittedly perplexed Aristotle, who noticed the fragment, the snippets of everyday language, and the recounting of 'vulgar incidents' as doing something different from other modes of writing. For Aristotle, this was a form of writing that has no name, but in fact he knew very well what its name was: *mimos*, or 'the imitation of the everyday' (Taylor 2005). The *mimos* emerges as early as fifth century BCE Greece, in dramatic mimes; Aristotle suggests that something similar is evident in the Socratic dialogues; and this is because in each case language relies on everyday occurrences recounted in pithy but demotic language. The *mimos* is, then, as poet and translator John Taylor argues, 'a direct ancestor of the prose poem or, at least, the short prose narrative and terse dialogue' (2009: 307); and the line from the *mimos* to the prose poem is traced not merely in the use of ordinary events told in everyday language – this is, as he acknowledges, also found in newspaper accounts, jokes and similar short prose works – but also in the use of the demotic, shot through with the 'wisp of charm', the 'aura of mystery' that is an important feature of prose poetry.

Something else is apparent in the Russian prose poetry tradition. Though it followed the French exploration of the form, with Turgenev's prose poetry not published until December 1882; and though like the French form it explores duality and incongruity; it remained, for the most part, a minor practice engaged in by minor poets, and is often considered a pale imitation of the French (see Allen 1995). Comparing Turgenev and Baudelaire, the initiators of prose poetry in Russia and France respectively, Adrian Wanner writes:

Although Baudelaire's prose poems were originally held in much lower critical esteem than his verse poetry, they are now increasingly recognized as a revolutionary landmark on the road to poetry modernity. In comparison, Turgenev appears as a figure solidly ensconced in the style and values system of the nineteenth century. (Waller 1997: 540)

Wanner's argument tends to identify Baudelaire and Turgenev as synecdoches for their national literature, and he points to distinctions between the two bodies of poetry, arguing that the Russian *stikhotveorenie v proze* is more serious, less playful, and more committed to social realism and to reinforcing established values than are the French *poèmes en prose*, which initiated the radical break that foreshadowed twentieth-century

modernism. The *stikhotvoreniia v proze* did not long survive Soviet rule, and although Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn famously wrote prose poems, Daniel Mahoney observes that even that giant of resistance avoided political action in this form of writing:

The prose poems are marked by a certain distance from immediate political concerns. In these sketches, Solzhenitsyn's focus is squarely on nature and the soul and only secondarily on political things. (Mahoney 2001: 161)

If we leave behind the European tradition and move across the Atlantic, the prose poem seems to be in very good health, but this is a comparatively recent matter. Although anthologies of prose poems were appearing in the 1970s, the form was not well received by the gatekeepers: Mark Strand's collection of 'short prose musings', *The Monument*, was shortlisted for the 1978 Pulitzer Prize in poetry, but then rejected on the grounds that, as one judge insisted, it was not poetry, but prose (see Lehman 2003: 11). It was not until 1990 that the Pulitzer organisation recognised the form as poetry, and awarded the prize to Charles Simic for his collection *The world doesn't end*. Even now, when many people are writing in the form, the poetry world does not entirely accommodate it. Poetry competitions, for example, typically require poets to submit works that are a certain line length, though prose poems are measured not in lines, but in words and sentences. Literary journals similarly often seem to approach the form at arm's length: for example, by having special issues on the prose poem, which qualifies it not so much as a particular species of poem, as another form of writing.²

The same note of caution, or qualification, emerged in the interviews with poets, our second field of discourse. We noted above the tendency to look back to nineteenth-century European experiments with prose poetry for a foundation from which to think about how prose poetry operates in twenty-first century practice. Hetherington and Atherton (2015), Chambers (2014), and Jefferson (2017) – among others – have studied the origins and enumerated the enduring tendencies of the form. But the impulse to retell the French-flavoured historical emergence of the prose poem is significantly less evident in the interview data, and we turn now to the second field of discourse on which we draw: the interviews with contemporary Anglophone poets.

What the poets say

We must note, immediately, that the interview schedules used for this research project did not include a question about prose or about prose poems. Nonetheless, more than half of the interviewees – including poets from across all three groups – raised the issue of prose poems or discussed prose in relation to poetry,³ and mentioned the word 'prose', in total, 197 times. Interviewers too used the word (in this case, for a total of 40 times), but this was invariably in response to an interviewed poet's reflections on poetic practice and the context of their poetry-making.

When we attempted to analyse the data to illuminate the poets' understandings of prose poetry, we found an immediate and imponderable difficulty: the terms 'poem' and 'poetry' appear through the data: 'poem' is mentioned by every interviewed poet, and appears 2,825 times in the body of the interviews; 'poetry' appears 3,197 times. NVivo could not meaningfully cluster the instances of these words' use.⁴

We attempted next to cluster examples of the exact phrase ‘prose poem’ (see Fig 1, below), but because of the nuanced and multiple ways in which the poets use both ‘prose’ and ‘poem’, as well the complexity of discussion in the research conversations, we found it added little to our understanding of the poets’ approach to prose poetry, whether in implied or literal significance.

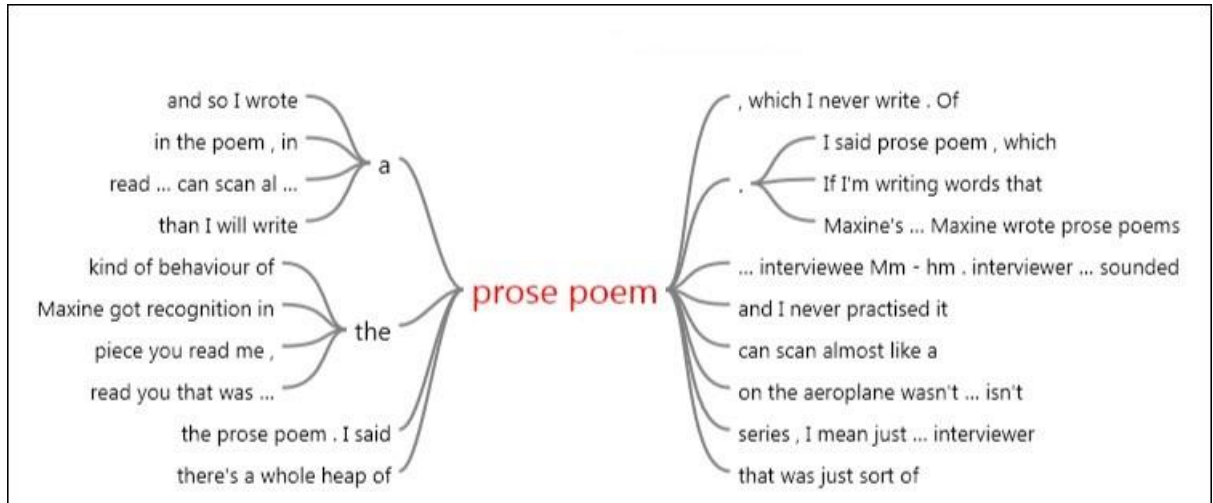


Figure 1. Word tree of ‘prose poem’; from NVivo analysis of interview data.

Possibly the term was impenetrable by the software because very few of the poets we interviewed identify as prose poets, or as poets who sometimes write in that form: only one reported having published a full volume of prose poetry, and others had very tenuous connections. Possibly it is because, as Poet 69 points out, ‘the prose narrative is relatively new compared with the poetic narrative’, and so lyric poets may see little value in exploiting the affordances of prose. Possibly it is because, as the scholarly literature points out, prose poetry still has an uncomfortable relationship with lyric (*qua* lineated) poetry per se.

Given these issues, in analysing the references to ‘prose’ we chose to look at the data in three ways. First, we identified who was saying ‘prose’; next, how often they said the word ‘prose’; and finally, the context of their use. With regard to the first approach (see Figure 2 below), a majority of poets overall used the term, with more of the most renowned poets – those in Class 1 – raising the issue of prose.⁵

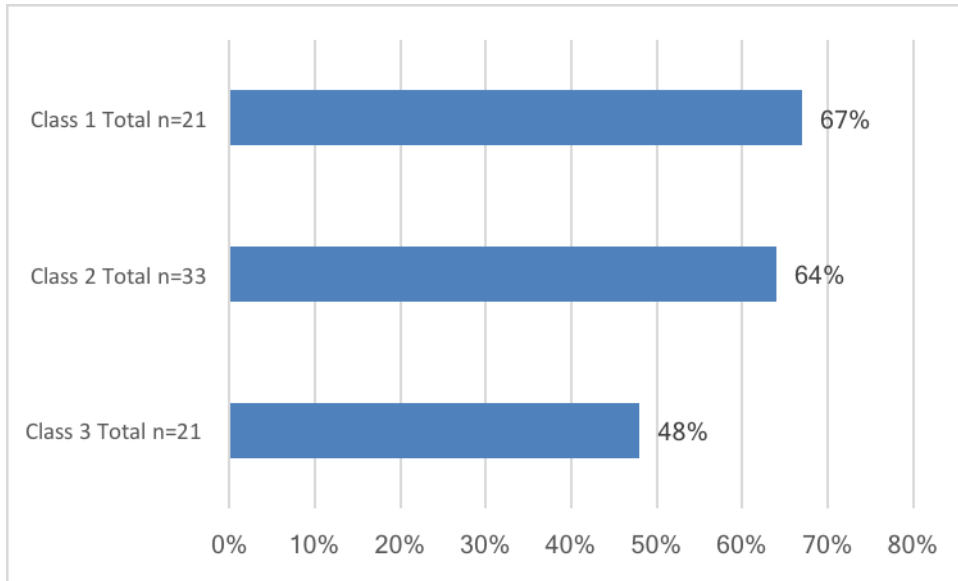


Figure 2. Proportion of poets referencing 'prose', by career category.

The second point is the frequency of reference and, interestingly, though a slightly higher percentage of Class 1 poets (those with a significant international reputation) mention 'prose', overall these poets do not make more references to 'prose' more do the other two classes (see Fig 3 below). Class 1 poets tend to say 'prose' less often, per interview, than do poets in Class 2 (those with a significant national reputation) and Class 3 (emerging poets or those with a local reputation), with the most references, by far, offered by poets in Class 2.

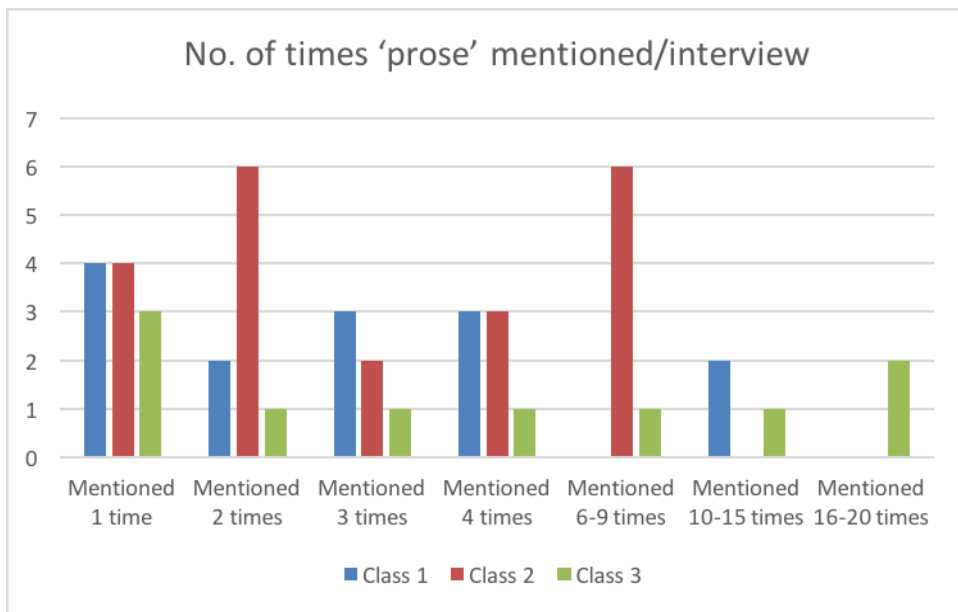


Figure 3. Frequency of references to 'prose', by career category.

We turn then to the context of the use of the term, and observe that not all mentions of ‘prose’ were relevant to the topic of prose poetry. A number of mentions were filtered out from the total 197 references, and these were those instances not related to a poetry context or to the practice of poetry. Examples include reference to a prose poem book written by another poet; the discussion of sentence construction in German prose; the phrase ‘purple prose’; poets who paraphrased famous quotes from prose works; one who discussed a former teacher’s love of landscape prose; references to ‘prose writers’ in general; and repetition in the same statement, such as ‘Yeah prose. Prose.’

What we found both engaging and interesting, and what contrasts with the scholarly discourse on prose poems, is that the interviewed poets express no significant difference between prose and poetry. That is not to say that the interviewed poets share a common view about the relationship between prose and poetry: there is not a consensus on definition, function or poetics of the prose poem. What we do see, resulting from the narrative-like nature of the interview as a form of research, is that the interviewed poets share overlapping stories about prose and poetry.

We observed this again in that, during the various discussions, the poets we interviewed were far less likely than are the scholars we have cited to reference the origins of prose poetry, or to attribute it to a moment of French or Romantic history. Only eight of the interviewed poets actually named one of the French poets usually identified as pioneers of prose poetry – Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé – and of these eight, only four explicitly mention *prose* in relation to the poets’ work (see Fig 4 below). The other half of this small group reference them simply as *poets*. They identify and acknowledge the experimental drive found in these poets’ work, but pay little if any attention to the formal qualities of the work on which they were engaged.

In these representations, then, we see intimations of a tendency that differs from that of the scholarly literature on prose poetry. The contemporary poets’ approach to discussing aspects of the making of poetry is far more likely to be characterised by a dynamic, process-driven discourse, and far less marked by concerns about formal demands. The prose poem, for them, is not a final product of the process of poet-ing, but rather one form among many, that may serve a function for a particular instance of composition.

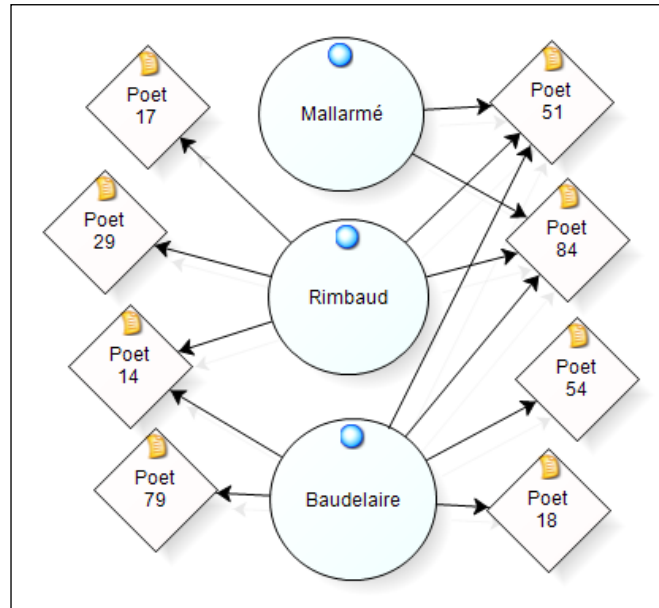


Figure 4. References to key prose poets.

In short, a majority of the poets we interviewed report little to no difference between the *activity* of writing prose and writing poetry. Their concern is with finding the form to satisfy their need to express an idea, mood or moment. These poets readily acknowledge that the *artefact* of each writing form may differ to a degree; and when engaged in composition, many poets use both prose writing and poetry writing to create a poem or to create the conditions under which a poem can emerge.

This fluidity demonstrates the poets' need to write in flexible forms, rather than writing to a fixed idea of final outputs. For Poet 12, for example, the form of a prose poem permits creative exploration. During writing, Poet 12 remembers asking, 'what would this be like in the first person if I changed it from third person to first person?' This inquiry was 'all in prose'. If Poet 12 cannot break lines 'into interesting phrases', they say, 'what the heck, I'll just write it as prose'.

This poet's effort to find tension and suspense echoes something Rosmarie Waldrop, the great US prose poet, said about writing in this form:

I began to long for complex sentences, for the possibility of digression, for space. The space of a different, less linear movement: a dance of syntax ... I gave up stress for distress ... the distress of lacking coordinates, of the unstructured space of prose, the uncharted territory of the page. (2005: 261–62)

For Waldrop, the turn at the line-end of a lineated poem provides the tension that is required. A prose poem, by contrast, needs to create its own tension.

For a number of our interviewed poets, the 'uncharted territory' offers a space in which to think, to explore, to test out ideas, even if the poem that is finally published presents in a more conventional lineated form. Poet 22, for example, viewed their work as quite 'prose like'. Poet 30 and Poet 51 reject the term 'prose poem', although they both publish work in that form: there is, for them, no real distinction. Poet 52 describes such writings as 'serial poems'. Poet 25 reported writing a lot of prose poems as a 'kind of

method' that allows outpouring as well as critical distance. Prose, for this poet, can resolve problems. Poet 19 finds prose 'quite a good way to resolve some of the present problem' because they can 'say to myself *okay, we're using prose*', and this becomes a way of 'handling' problems that emerge in writing a poem.

Another perspective offered by the interviewed poets is that the *betwixt and between* position of the prose poem attracts a sense of movement. This might explain why the prose poem attracts poets to this form as a 'method', or activity, rather than product or output. Poet 56, who publishes work mixing prose and poetry, calls this work 'hybrid' as it is 'an *intersection* between lyric and narrative' (emphasis added). Poet 68 writes work that is 'clearly *approaching* prose, or is prose' (emphasis added). Often, for some poets, there is a sense that prose becomes a poem; prose is an early destination, a stepping stone, from which comes poetry by the line. Poet 14 describes this movement when they say, 'if I've got an idea it's important to sit down and scribble. I don't think about it as a poem, just hand-write a page or two of prose, just getting it out': and from this may come 'lines of a poem'.

Conclusion

It seems, from our archival and interview research, that writers in general, and poets in particular, have a practical need to remain mobile, active and flexible in the activity of writing. Those who reject the signpost 'prose poem' may be understood as committed to a focus on writing, not on form; and to making what they can with what they have at hand. Poet 44 points out, in this regard, the movement between poetry, prose and music in their practice, while Poet 38 claims to write in prose as a break from poetry writing, and Poet 26 states that if they slip away from poetry, into writing in prose, then they know they 'have become tired'. These poets know their practice; they work with their technical, practical and emotional skills, and use language as best they can to do the task that is set before them.

Poet 55, who writes in both poetry and prose, considers that the theory of prose applies to poetry, and is supported in this by some scholarly literature that similarly identifies prose and poetry not as distinct modes of language use, but simply as points on a trajectory. Rolls, for instance, combines the two by using the term 'prose poetics' (2011), Mackenzie identifies unity in George Eliot's use of prose and poetry (2014), and Friedberg observes that the search for essential differences between prose and poetry fails, because 'poetic function' is applicable to both forms (2005). Some recent scholars of the prose poem actually publish their work in a poetic rather than exegetical form; see for example Wier's work titled 'Prose Poem' (2006).

Overall though, attempting to define the prose poem is an ongoing occupation of critical scholarly discourse while, in contrast, the practice of poetry and prose as writing is rather more nomadic and flexible. As Poet 19 observes, 'I'm not too worried about going into this, what we'll call poetic prose, or prose poems'. So, finally, does it matter whether a work of image, rhythm, concision and focus is called poetry or prose? Certainly it has effects in the professional sphere of scholarship and publication, but when it comes to practice, perhaps it is sufficient to say, with Poet 39, that we have *prose poetry* and *poetry poetry*, but both are the effects of a writer, writing.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1. DP 130100402; chief investigators Prof Jen Webb, Prof Kevin Brophy, Prof Michael Biggs and A/Prof Paul Magee; project officers/researchers Dr Sandra Burr; Dr Monica Carroll. During the interview-conversations we attempted to tease out the poets’ personal histories, the ways in which they identify their subject positions, their connections to the national and international community of poets, and their modes of operation.
2. We acknowledge that this essay is doing the same thing we criticise here, but chalk it up to irony.
3. In each instance where we discuss the interview data, or quote directly from an interview, we refer to the relevant poet only by a coding name in order to maintain their anonymity.
4. These numbers only account for the word-proper; if we add in stem words and associated phrases such as ‘poems’ or ‘poetry’s’ the frequency of their appearance renders any analysis pointless.
5. This greater fluency in discussing form and practice is in keeping with our previously published analysis which showed that the more experienced – Class 1 – poets tend to rank higher in expressions of connections with poetry and poetry mastery (See Webb and Carroll 2017).

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