



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF
THE PROSE POEM
FROM BAUDELAIRE TO ANNE CARSON

Edited by Jeremy Noel-Tod



The Penguin Book of the Prose Poem

Jeremy Noel-Tod is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. His literary criticism has been widely published and he has been the poetry critic for the *Sunday Times* since 2013. His books as an editor include the revised edition of the *Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry* (2013) and the *Complete Poems* of R. F. Langley (Carcamet, 2015).

The Penguin Book of the Prose Poem

From Baudelaire to Anne Carson

Edited and introduced by JEREMY NOEL-TOD

PENGUIN BOOKS

Copyrighted Material

PENGUIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2018

Paperback edition published 2019

001

Selection and editorial matter copyright © Jeremy Noel-Tod, 2018

The moral right of the editor has been asserted

Set in 11.13/13.96 pt Dante MT

Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN : 978-0-141-98456-8

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

Copyrighted Material

Contents

Introduction: The Expansion of the Prose Poem xix

THE PROSE POEM NOW

2017

The End of Days *Golan Haji* 3

2016

Merry Christmas from Hegel *Anne Carson* 5

Going Nowhere, Getting Somewhere *Vahni Capildeo* 7

Children are the Orgasm of the World *Hera Lindsay*

Bird 9

Antico Adagio *Peter Gizzi* 11

2015

Knife *Rod Mengham* 12

A Woman Shopping *Anne Boyer* 15

Notes Towards a Race Riot Scene *Bhanu Kapil* 17

‘There were barnacles . . .’ *Sarah Howe* 19

from Letter Against the Firmament *Sean Bonney* 20

Contents

2014

from *Citizen: An American Lyric* Claudia Rankine 22

My Funeral Peter Manson 25

Flower, Quartet, Mask John Fuller 26

Reclaiming a Beloved City Clifton Gachagua 27

Imagined Sons 9: Greek Salad Carrie Etter 29

Place Name: Flog Man Kei Miller 31

Rape Joke Patricia Lockwood 32

2013

from *Fairies* Mei-mei Berssenbrugge 38

from *Mystérieuse* Éric Suchère 40

Some Fears Emily Berry 43

from *Odes to TL61P* Keston Sutherland 44

2012

The Mysterious Arrival of an Unusual Letter

Mark Strand 47

Chicken Cathy Wagner 48

Birthweights Chris McCabe 49

Other Things Alvin Pang 51

from *Adventures in Shangdu* Cathy Park Hong 53

Cry Break Paige Ackerson-Kiely 55

Short Prayer to Sound Vivek Naryanan 57

Homeless Heart John Ashbery 59

2011

Black Sunlight D. S. Marriott 60

Nightmare Pink Elena Penga 62

Conversations About Home (at the Deportation

Centre) Warsan Shire 63

O Elegant Giant Laura Kasischke 65

2010

Via Negativa *Jane Monson* 66

The Experience *Simon Armitage* 67

2009

Folkways *Anthony Joseph* 69

from *Virtual Airport* *Matthew Welton* 70

2008

Photographs, Undeveloped *Ágnes Lehóczky* 74

from *Folklore* *Tim Atkins* 76

Edith *Sophie Robinson* 78

The Wren *Jen Hadfield* 79

from *Bird bird* *Jeff Hilson* 80

The Hornsman *Bill Griffiths* 82

2007

from *The Idylls* *Maurice Riordan* 84

Blue Dog *Luke Kennard* 86

2006

If *Sina Queyras* 88

Fiddleheads *Seamus Heaney* 89

Captain of the Lighthouse *Togara Muzanenhamo* 90

from *Angle of Yaw* *Ben Lerner* 91

2004

The Phases of the Moon in London *Amjad Nasser* 92

Corruption *Srikanth Reddy* 94

2003

from *echolocation* *Mani Rao* 95

Contents

2002

from Chapter E *Christian Bök* 97

Denigration *Harryette Mullen* 99

2001

A Hardworking Peasant from the Idyllic Countryside

Linh Dinh 100

Ted's Head *Rod Smith* 101

Hosea: A Commentary *Charles Boyle* 102

The Skull Ring *Chelsey Minnis* 103

from *The Weather* *Lisa Robertson* 104

Ode *Lisa Jarnot* 107

2000

from *Letters to Wendy's* *Joe Wenderoth* 108

The Most Sensual Room *Masayo Koike* 111

THE POSTMODERN PROSE POEM

1999

The Cough *Barbara Guest* 115

1998

Cinema-Going *Ian Hamilton Finlay* 117

from *Joan of Arc* *Nathalie Quintane* 118

Neglected Knives *Kristín Ómarsdóttir* 120

1997

Little Corona *Don Paterson* 122

Seoul's Dinner *Kim Hyesoon* 124

Christopher Robin *Czesław Miłosz* 126

Return to Harmony 3	Agha Shahid Ali	128
Thought (1)	Esther Jansma	131
1995		
The Poet	Eileen Myles	133
Prose Poem	Ron Padgett	135
from <i>Kuchh Vakya</i>	Udayan Vajpeyi	136
1994		
The Ice House	Ian McMillan	138
How Everything Has Turned Around	Pam Brown	139
Hammer and Nail	Naomi Shihab Nye	140
In the Off-Season	Andrzej Sosnowski	142
1993		
from <i>Lawn of Excluded Middle</i>	Rosmarie Waldrop	144
The Word-Gulag	Abdellatif Laâbi	147
1992		
Dustie-Fute	David Kinloch	148
dropped on the ground • the small coin	Zhou Yaping	150
from <i>Short Talks</i>	Anne Carson	152
In Love with Raymond Chandler	Margaret Atwood	154
1991		
Letters	Clark Coolidge	156
What No One Could Have Told Them	C. D. Wright	158
An Anointing	Thylias Moss	161
Man with a Mower	Jenny Bornholdt	163

Contents

1990

Deer Dancer *Joy Harjo* 165

from *The Stumbling Block Its Index* *Brian Catling* 168

Chekhov: A Sestina *Mark Strand* 170

1989

Inflation *Carol Rumens* 172

Quaker Oats *Rita Dove* 174

from *The World Doesn't End* *Charles Simic* 175

Human Wishes *Robert Hass* 176

1988

Burnt Hair *Meena Alexander* 178

The Hanoi Market *Yusef Komunyakaa* 180

reading *joanne burns* 182

1987

The First Week of Mourning *Shang Qin* 184

The Dogs *Yves Bonnefoy* 185

from *My Life* *Lyn Hejinian* 186

1986

The Souvenir *Dan Pagis* 188

A Walk Through the Museum *Ágnes Nemes Nagy* 189

1985

Hearts *Laurie Duggan* 192

The Land of Counterpane *Lee Harwood* 193

1984

from *C* *Peter Reading* 195

Many Musicians Practice Their Mysteries While I Am

Cooking *Bink Noll* 196

1983

Or Else *Christopher Middleton* 198

1982

abglanz / reflected gleam *Wulf Kirsten* 203

Honey *James Wright* 205

A Vernacular Tale *Peter Didsbury* 206

1981

The Colonel *Carolyn Forché* 207

1980

Meeting Ezra Pound *Miroslav Holub* 209

1979

Goodtime Jesus *James Tate* 211

Vanity, Wisconsin *Maxine Chernoff* 212

1976

Gay Full Story *Bernadette Mayer* 213

from *Logbook* *Tom Raworth* 216

The Colors of Night *N. Scott Momaday* 219

Portrait of A. E. (An Artful Fairy Tale) *Elke Erb* 222

Chile *Ottó Orbán* 223

1975

Scissors *Shuntarō Tanikawa* 224

A Caterpillar *Robert Bly* 226

Cloistered *Seamus Heaney* 227

1973

Ape *Russel Edson* 228

from *The Wild Rose* *Ken Smith* 230

Contents

1972

Chimes of Silence *Wole Soyinka* 233

1971

from *Mercian Hymns* *Geoffrey Hill* 236

from *Shooting Script* *Adrienne Rich* 240

1970

The Bookcase *Tomas Tranströmer* 242

1969

For John Clare *John Ashbery* 244

Milk *James Schuyler* 246

from *it* *Inger Christensen* 248

1968

A Case *Gael Turnbull* 251

1967

An Old-fashioned Traveller on the Trade Routes

Rosemary Tonks 254

Strayed Crab *Elizabeth Bishop* 256

1966

The Flag *Pablo Neruda* 258

1962

Vocabulary *Wisława Szymborska* 259

1961

Catherine of Siena *Elizabeth Jennings* 260

from *City* *Roy Fisher* 262

1960	
Borges and I	<i>Jorge Luis Borges</i> 264
1959	
from Letters to James Alexander	<i>Jack Spicer</i> 266
1957	
Hermes, Dog and Star	<i>Zbigniew Herbert</i> 268
1956	
Where the Tennis Court Was . . .	<i>Eugenio Montale</i> 270
A Supermarket in California	<i>Allen Ginsberg</i> 273
1955	
Clock	<i>Pierre Reverdy</i> 275
1954	
Meditations in an Emergency	<i>Frank O'Hara</i> 276
1953	
Love Letter to King Tutankhamun	<i>Dulce María Loynaz</i> 279
1951	
The Clerk's Vision	<i>Octavio Paz</i> 284
Around the Star's Throne	<i>Hans Arp</i> 288
1949	
The God of War	<i>Bertolt Brecht</i> 289
1948	
The Swift	<i>René Char</i> 291

Contents

1946

Phrase *Aimé Césaire* 292

THE MODERN PROSE POEM

1943

Street Cries *Luis Cernuda* 295

1942

Rain *Francis Ponge* 298

The Pleasures of the Door *Francis Ponge* 300

Crate *Francis Ponge* 301

from *Vigils* *John Lehmann* 302

1940

Nijinski *George Seferis* 306

1939

The Right Meaning *César Vallejo* 309

1937

Blue Notebook, No. 10 *Daniil Kharms* 311

Bourgeois News *Charles Madge* 312

1936

Lozanne *David Gascoyne* 317

1933

In Praise of Glass *Gabriela Mistral* 319

1932

from *The Orators* *W. H. Auden* 322

xiv

1930

My Occupations *Henri Michaux* 326

Force of Habit *André Breton and Paul Eluard* 328

1929

Sunflowers Are Already Black Gunpowder

Anzai Fuye 331

1927

The Dog's Retort *Lu Xun* 332

Snow *Lu Xun* 334

1924

Song *Saint-John Perse* 336

Hell is Graduated *Max Jacob* 337

1921

A Day *Rabindranath Tagore* 338

1920

from *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* *William Carlos*

Williams 339

1919

Tired *Fenton Johnson* 342

1918

Pulmonary Tuberculosis *Katherine Mansfield* 344

1917

Hysteria *T. S. Eliot* 345

Contents

1916

Spring Day *Amy Lowell* 346

The Moon *Juan Ramón Jiménez* 351

1915

London Notes *Jessie Dismorr* 352

Street Circus *Pierre Reverdy* 355

1914

from *Tender Buttons* *Gertrude Stein* 356

Winter Night *Georg Trakl* 365

1913

from *Scented Leaves* – from a Chinese Jar
Allen Upward 367

1911

Menagerie *Velimir Khlebnikov* 368

1900

Painting *Paul Claudel* 375

1899

Absinthia Taetra *Ernest Dowson* 376

1897

The Pipe *Stéphane Mallarmé* 378

1894

The Disciple *Oscar Wilde* 380

The Master *Oscar Wilde* 381

1887

from By the Waters of Babylon Emma Lazarus 382

1886

After the Flood Arthur Rimbaud 386

Sideshow Arthur Rimbaud 388

Genie Arthur Rimbaud 390

1883

The End of the World Ivan Turgenev 392

On the Sea Ivan Turgenev 395

1869

The Stranger Charles Baudelaire 397

Windows Charles Baudelaire 399

The Bad Glazier Charles Baudelaire 400

1842

The Madman Aloysius Bertrand 404

The Mason Aloysius Bertrand 406

Haarlem Aloysius Bertrand 408

Acknowledgements 411

Editor's Acknowledgements 423

Index of Poets 425

Index of Titles 429

Introduction: The Expansion of the Prose Poem

I

*What is poetry and if you know what poetry is
what is prose – Gertrude Stein*¹

How do you define a prose poem? I have often been asked this question since I began to put together what follows: two hundred poems from around the world which have been chosen to represent the exciting, surprising, and memorable possibilities of a form that has sometimes been regarded with suspicion but is now suddenly everywhere. Collections of prose poems – such as Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen* (2014) – win major prizes, and anyone who picks up a poetry magazine will almost certainly spot one. This book includes a range of names that might be expected to feature in any representative anthology of modern poetry in English: John Ashbery, W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Rita Dove, T. S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, Seamus Heaney, Adrienne Rich. But it also celebrates neglected poets who have written with brilliance in a form habitually overlooked by anthologists. Together, they comprise an alternative history of modern poetry and an experimental tradition that is shaping its future.

How, then, to define the prose poem? After reading so many, I can only offer the simplest common denominator: a prose

poem is a poem without line breaks. Beyond that, both its manner and its matter resist generalization. The prose poem has been called a 'genre with an oxymoron for name' (Michael Riffaterre), yet it may be doubted whether it is in fact a genre at all; another critic has positioned it on 'the boundaries of genre', between the many kinds of other writing it may mercurially resemble.² Surveying the 175 years of poetry represented here, what emerges for me is the prose poem's wayward relationship to its own form – and it is this, I believe, that makes it the defining poetic invention of modernity. In an age of mass literacy, our daily lives are enmeshed in networks of sentences and paragraphs as extensive as any urban grid. The prose poem drives the reading mind beyond the city limits.

Poets, of course, have long known that the border between verse and prose is porous. Is the prose soliloquy in which Hamlet exclaims 'What a piece of work is man . . .' really any less a piece of Shakespearean poetry than the blank verse of 'To be or not to be . . .' ? Sir Philip Sidney informed Renaissance readers that although 'the inside and strength' of Plato's dialogues was philosophy, 'the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most of poetry'; in the Romantic era, Percy Bysshe Shelley contended that 'the distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error'; and the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé believed that 'there is no such thing as prose: there is the alphabet, and then there are verses'.³ Put letters together to make words, that is, and you are already working with the basic units of poetic rhythm.

As the critic D. W. Harding noted in his study of rhythm in literature, 'all the prose we ever read is chopped up into lines; we rightly pay no attention to them'.⁴ This is because page margins do not mark metre as line breaks do. Yet it is not uncommon for verse-like currents to eddy beneath the placid surface of a paragraph. 'Prose', wrote Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary* of

1755, is 'language not restrained to harmonick sounds or set number of syllables, discourse not metrical'. But Johnson's own eloquence as an essayist, observed William Hazlitt – who thought it a fault – was often 'a species of rhyming in prose [in which] each sentence, revolving round its centre of gravity, is contained with itself like a couplet, and each paragraph forms itself into a stanza'.⁵ There is one kind of prose poem that employs such cadences to raise its voice very close to verse, from Oscar Wilde's echoing of the parallelism of the King James Bible (sometimes known as 'thought-rhyme') in his homoerotic parables of desire 'The Disciple' (p. 380) and 'The Master' (p. 381) to Allen Ginsberg's companionable shadowing of Walt Whitman's long verse line in the paragraph-stanzas of 'A Supermarket in California' (p. 273). But our habitual expectation when we see a passage of prose is that it will explain, not sing. The information-giving sentence – logical, functional, linear – is the conveyor belt that carries the business of our lives. The rhythm of prose, believed the Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky, contributes to the 'automatizing' of perception, which the images and rhythms of poetry work to disrupt – a theory that his friend the poet Velimir Khlebnikov illustrates in 'Menagerie' (p. 368), with its startling pen-portraits of the animals of Moscow zoo, often dashed off in a single sentence.⁶ Poetry, we might say, bends the bars of the prose cage.

As Hermine Riffaterre has observed, the 'formal framework' of the individual prose poem is 'ad hoc', and often makes its home among other forms and genres.⁷ These may be recognizably literary, such as the anecdote, the aphorism, the sketch, the dialogue, the essay, the fairy tale, the fragment, the joke, the myth, or the short story.⁸ But prose poets are also attracted to the poetic possibilities of other kinds of writing, the official purpose of which is to record and inform: for instance, the cut-up journalism of Charles Madge's 'Bourgeois News' (p. 312); the

graffitied game rules of Bernadette Mayer's 'Gay Full Story' ('Change one letter in each essential vivacity missing word to spell a times taking place defunct bird's name', p. 213); or the 'intense yet eccentric research in the rhetorical structure of English meteorological description' that Lisa Robertson undertook for her book *The Weather* (p. 104) – beginning with the famously incantatory rhythms of the BBC radio shipping forecast.⁹ The prose of information, we begin to realize, comes in many forms, and all have the potential for poetry to be injected, like coloured ink, into their ostensibly transparent sentences.

With the exception, however, of the neatly 'trimmed' abattoir notice presented as a found poem by Laurie Duggan's 'Hearts' (p. 192), this anthology's definition of prose poetry does not extend to the wholesale reframing of prose as poetry by certain recent conceptual poets.¹⁰ Instead, it attempts to map a tradition of lyric writing in prose form, which begins in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the French poet Charles Baudelaire and a posthumous volume known by two titles: *Le Spleen de Paris* or *Petits Poèmes en Prose* (1869). By the end of the century, Baudelaire's innovation had exerted a wide-reaching influence: on the prose reveries of later Symbolists such as Arthur Rimbaud and Mallarmé; on the *fin-de-siècle* decadence, across the English Channel, of Oscar Wilde and Ernest Dowson; on *Poems in Prose* (1883), the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev's last book, written while living in Paris; and, in America, on Emma Lazarus's biblical evocations of the journeying of Jewish refugees, 'By the Waters of Babylon' (1887), which features the Baudelairean subtitle 'Little Poems in Prose' (p. 382). A generation later, the international literary revolution known as modernism saw prose and verse mingling in little magazines unconcerned with dividing their table of contents strictly into one or the other. In France, the dream-like strangeness of the Symbolists was redoubled under the influence of

Surrealism by young prose poets such as Pierre Reverdy ('Street Circus', p. 355) and Max Jacob ('Hell is Graduated', p. 337); in America, Gertrude Stein (*Tender Buttons*, p. 356) and William Carlos Williams (*Kora in Hell*, p. 339) made poetry from the same kind of stop-start paragraph employed to carry the stream-of-consciousness monologue in modernist fiction; and in China – which already had an ancient tradition of poetic rhyme-prose, known as *fu* – the term 'prose poem' (*sanwen shi*) was first used in 1918 by Liu Bannong, who translated poems by Turgenev. (A decade later, Lu Xun's great collection *Wild Grass* (pp. 332–5) evinced the continuing influence of Baudelaire.)¹¹

At the same time, the question persisted as to whether prose poetry was a subject to be mentioned in polite society at all. Oscar Wilde had made the term notorious in 1895 when, in court, he described a letter he had written to his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, as a 'prose sonnet' (an association that later prose poems, such as Dulce María Loynaz's 'Love Letter to King Tutankhamun' (p. 279), have continued). Its reputation was not improved a generation later, when, in 1915, Aleister Crowley, the so-called 'wickedest man in the world', published translations from *Paris Spleen* in *Vanity Fair* magazine. In the same year, one of the best-known prose poems in English, T. S. Eliot's 'Hysteria' (p. 345), made its first appearance in an anthology edited by Ezra Pound. But even Eliot had his doubts about the form as a critic, calling it 'an aberration which is only justified by absolute success'. Inside his personal copy of Stuart Merrill's *Pastels in Prose* (1890), a popular anthology of French prose poetry, he kept a clipping of a newspaper parody called 'The Latest Form of Literary Hysterics'. The title of his poem about a man made (hysterically) anxious by a laughing woman can, therefore, be read as an ironic comment on its own 'bad form' ('I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be

collected'). Later, Eliot privately dismissed 'Hysteria' as 'a kind of note for a poem, but not [. . .] a poem'.¹²

In casting doubt on the sanity of the prose poet, Eliot may have had in mind the infamous example of Gertrude Stein. Once much mocked for her emphatically repetitive, under-punctuated style, Stein now deserves to be recognized as the most original prose poet in the English language. With the vividly abstract domesticity of *Tender Buttons* (1914), she invented a verbal Cubism in which household objects and foodstuffs are evoked in enigmatically glancing ways ('a way of naming things that would . . . mean names without naming them'), just as the Cubist still-life broke up the solid contents of café tables into overlapping planes.¹³ The aftershock of *Tender Buttons* was not widely felt until the second half of the twentieth century, when Stein's sideways manner can be heard everywhere in the experimental canon of American prose poetry, from the wry obliquity of John Ashbery – represented here by the poems 'For John Clare' (p. 244) and 'Homeless Heart' (p. 59) – to the kaleidoscopic autobiography of Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* (p. 186) and Clark Coolidge's erotically textual 'Letters', from *The Book of During* (p. 156). In such writing, Rosmarie Waldrop (p. 144) remarks, 'the cuts, discontinuities, ruptures, cracks, fissures, holes, hitches, snags, leaps, shifts of reference, and emptiness' that we associate with modernist free verse (such as Eliot's *The Waste Land*) occur, instead, 'inside the sentence'.¹⁴

The freedom of the prose poem to follow the unmetrical pathways of thought can also take it in the opposite direction, towards a plainer style, imitative of speech. In this mode, the prose poem employs the formulas and rhythms of story-telling, with all their alluring familiarity and suspense. Among the handful of prose poems famous enough to be anthology pieces already are Joy Harjo's 'Deer Dancer' (p. 165), which draws on the Native American oral tradition to imagine a modern myth,

and Carolyn Forché's 'The Colonel' (p. 207), which was written after travelling to El Salvador during the country's civil war. 'What you have heard is true', Forché begins, before recounting an almost unbelievably horrifying encounter with a military man in simple, declarative sentences that read like an eye-witness report. This is a poem, it seems, that has been written in defiance of the colonel who mocks: 'Something for your poetry, no?'

The story-telling prose poem also lends itself to the comic anecdote, and this has been its most popular manifestation in America and Britain since the 1960s, under the influence of up-the-garden-path absurdists such as Russel Edson (p. 228), James Tate (p. 211), and Maxine Chernoff (p. 212). Prose poems in this vein often feel like jokes that overshoot their punchlines into something more serious. When Peter Didsbury titles his downbeat monologue about a divorcé, a lodger and some stray dog hairs 'A Vernacular Tale' (p. 206), he is studiously avoiding its vernacular name: a shaggy dog story. To quote Cathy Wagner's 'Chicken' (p. 48) in full:

A poem goes to the other side. It's different there, but that's not why I wrote it. There's all there is, in the chicken joke. Where are you going with this.

Another kind of fabulism in which post-war poets have excelled is the mythology of an everyday object. Foreshadowed by the elemental meditations of Gabriela Mistral ('In Praise of Glass', p. 319), the prose object-poem is pioneered in French by Francis Ponge, with his first collection, *Le parti pris des choses* (1942) – a title recently translated by Joshua Corey and Jean-Luc Garneau as *Partisan of Things*. Ponge employs a seemingly clean, scientific prose to muse upon humdrum subjects (a door, a crate, rain) as if they were the most exquisitely fascinating phenomena, with

secret lives of their own. The punchline of a Ponge poem, however, is that words themselves are elusively alive. At the end of his hyperreal description of 'Rain' (p. 298), 'the brilliant apparatus' of language evaporates into the simplest syllables: 'it has rained' ('il a plu'). Ponge's combination of simplicity and sophistication has made him the postmodern prose poet's postmodern prose poet, and the fine line he draws between mind and matter can be traced through many later poems here, including James Schuyler's 'Milk' (p. 246), Robert Bly's 'A Caterpillar' (p. 226), Shuntarō Tanikawa's 'Scissors' (p. 224), and Brian Catling's 'The Stumbling Block Its Index' (p. 168), which catalogues a shape-shifting sculpture that exists only in words ('**The Stumbling Block** is a graphite font').

The prose poem's tendency to dwell on image over narrative begins with the curious book that Baudelaire acknowledged as his model: Aloysius Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1842), a collection of historical vignettes offered to the reader as the vision of an old man who may be the Devil. Its first piece, 'Haarlem' (p. 408) – the last poem in the present anthology's reverse chronology – exemplifies the picturesque quality of Bertrand's work. Distilling scenes from seventeenth-century Flemish genre painting into sentences that suspend time by omitting a main verb, 'Haarlem' captures a little world in the amber of the ongoing moment ('And the drinkers smoking in some dark dive, and the inn-keeper's servant hanging up a dead pheasant in a tavern window'). The realism of Bertrand's prose derives from the novel, but its haunting amplification of image – its hanging-up of dead pheasants – leaves it in the realm of dream, a place the prose poem has repeatedly explored. In his first 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), André Breton cited several prose poets among the movement's influences, including Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Reverdy, and Saint-John Perse, as well as the wild prose nightmares of the Comte de Lautréamont's *Les*

Chants de Maldoror (1869). Breton sought to liberate the poetry of the unconscious mind by jotting down sentences while on the verge of sleep, a method he believed Rimbaud had also followed.¹⁵ By the 1930s, the sleeping mind was speaking in prose poems written in many countries, from David Gascoyne in England to George Seferis in Greece, Anzai Fuye in Japan, and César Vallejo in Peru. In 1941, the Martiniquais poet Aimé Césaire praised the ‘strange cities, extraordinary countrysides, twisted, crushed, dismembered worlds’ of Rimbaud’s *Illuminations* as ‘the most authentic vision of the world’.¹⁶ A century after the midnight visions of Aloysius Bertrand, the prose poem bore prophetic witness to the way that modern life itself had become violently surreal.

II

Prosaic France passed over to poetry. And everything changed.

– Aimé Césaire¹⁷

Versification varies from language to language and its subtleties are notoriously difficult to translate. One convention is simply to accept the loss of poetic form and render verse as prose – and one subgenre of the prose poem is to perform the translation of an absent original, as in Allen Upward’s invented classical Chinese poems, ‘Scented Leaves – from a Chinese Jar’ (p. 367); Don Paterson’s mock-scholarly recollection of a ‘scrawny Orpheus’ (p. 122); or Éric Suchère’s exacting ekphrasis of comic book panels collaged from Hergé’s Tintin adventure *The Shooting Star* (p. 40). The translation of prose into prose, however, does not so obviously require the sacrifice of formal effects, allowing the prose poem to move with relative ease between national traditions. This is its implicit role in Seamus

Heaney's 'Fiddleheads' (p. 89), a poem which offers itself to a friend from Japan as a 'basket' containing a delicacy common to both countries. As my selections have tried to show, prose poets themselves have significantly contributed to the translation of prose poems, and thereby helped to create an international tradition. Nor does it seem entirely coincidental that so many Nobel Laureates should figure in the history of a form that is uniquely cosmopolitan in its origins: Rabindranath Tagore, Gabriela Mistral, T. S. Eliot, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Saint-John Perse, Pablo Neruda, Eugenio Montale, Czesław Miłosz, Wole Soyinka, Octavio Paz, Wisława Szymborska, Tomas Tranströmer, and Heaney himself. As the American Frank O'Hara joked of one of his own poems in the 1950s: 'it is even in / prose, I am a real poet'.¹⁸

Without the visual architecture of verse, the prose poem is not immediately identifiable on the page. When read aloud, however, it is often characterized by the kind of echoic patterning that we associate with verse, arriving at its conclusion with a resonant neatness – what Amy Lowell, writing in defence of her own 'polyphonic prose', called the 'spherical effect' of poetic form.¹⁹ One marker of form in the prose poem is the drawing of a verbal circle, as in Ernest Dowson's narcotically languid 'Absinthia Taetra' (p. 376), which repeats its first line as its last, or Barbara Guest's unsettling film-making fantasy 'The Cough', which calls back to its title with its last words (p. 115). Mark Strand's 'Chekhov' (p. 170) is an especially ingenious instance of the looped monologue, repeating the same six words at the end of its sentences according to a pattern borrowed from a 'fixed' form of verse, the sestina. The thematic emphasis on word choice introduced by such a conceit suggests Samuel Taylor Coleridge's distinction between the two modes: 'prose = words in their best order; poetry = the *best* words in

the best order' (Gertrude Stein was getting at something similar when she said that 'poetry has to do with vocabulary just as prose does not').²⁰ Less traditional constraints that enforce a similar poetic economy include Christian Bök's *Eunoia* (p. 97), which is written in chapters that only allow themselves to use one of the English vowels ('Enfettered, these sentences repress speech'); Harryette Mullen's 'Denigration' (p. 99), in which every sentence turns on a word that might be cognate with the Latin for black ('*niger*'), itself only one letter away from the unspoken racial slur; and Peter Reading's *C* (p. 195), which begins with the speaker, having received a diagnosis of cancer, planning to write '100 100-word units. What do you expect me to do – break into bloody haiku?' (He then does this anyway: 'Verse is for healthy / arty-farties. The dying / and surgeons use prose.')

But if poetry is *not* synonymous with verse – as canonical anthologies such as *The Oxford Book of English Verse* assume – how do we define a poem at all? This question, at least, has been answered by many authorities. 'All good poetry', wrote William Wordsworth in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), 'is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.'²¹ Verse serves as a mould to a moment of emotion, shaping it to a rhythmic pattern. Without line breaks, the prose poem is free – like this paragraph – to extend across and down the page as far as the printer's margins will allow. And it is in this freedom that we can locate the distinctive feeling to which the prose poem gives form: expansiveness. Unchecked by metre or rhyme, prose poetry flows by soft return from margin to margin, filling the empty field of the page, like the vision of Aloysius Bertrand's 'Mason' who, on his scaffolding above the cathedral roof, sees further into the surrounding landscape with every sentence, from 'gargoyles spewing water' to 'a village set afire by troops, flaming like a comet in the deep-blue sky' (p. 406). If

the prose poem had a motto for itself as an ideal form, waiting to be realized, it might be from John Ashbery's 'For John Clare': 'There ought to be room for more things, for a spreading out, like' (p. 244).²²

As Ashbery's artfully banal sentence suggests, prose is a mode of writing that allows the stylist plenty of slack. In the critical vocabulary of everyday English we use 'poetic' as a term of high praise, 'prosaic' to express disappointment with something unimaginative. Poetry is the beautiful ideal, prose the unlovely real: 'You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose', as the New York politician Mario Cuomo is reported to have said.²³ The challenge for the prose poet is to undo the distinction: to make the prosaic poetic, so that it expands a powerful feeling without dissipating its force. Agha Shahid Ali ('Return to Harmony 3' (p. 128)) saw this as a question of bringing the same 'energy' to prose as to strict forms such as the sestina and the sonnet, 'by making the sentence (and paragraph) rather than the line (and stanza) the be-all and end-all of my emotion. I had to teach myself to discard the line completely'.²⁴

The prose poem's genius for expansiveness is not only due to its freedom from formal constraint, however. The linguist Roman Jakobson distinguished the 'poetic' and 'prosaic' uses of language as being dominated respectively by the figures of metaphor (which finds resemblance between things) and metonymy (which assumes continuity between things).²⁵ Poets are famous, of course, for 'comparing stuff to other stuff', in the words of Hera Lindsay Bird (p. 9), and for Aristotle, to have mastered the imaginative use of metaphor (which in Greek means 'to carry over') was the mark of 'great natural ability' in poetry.²⁶ But the poet's talent for noticing resemblances is a matter of the ear as well as the eye: the verbal repetitions of versification – alliteration, metre, rhyme – depend on similarities of sound,

which implicitly invite us to make connections between words. So verse itself can be considered part of poetry's tendency to stimulate the metaphorical movement of the mind. Prose, on the other hand, puts one thing after another in a logical chain, and this is why it tends to be dominated by metonymy (which means 'change of name'). If, for example, I refer back at this point to 'Jakobson', I am using the surname as a metonym for 'Jakobson's theory of poetry and prose'. Metonymy is the preferred trope of the prose writer because it is unobtrusive and efficient, a shorthand that assumes the reader's understanding of an abbreviated meaning. And because metonymy leads the mind by meaning rather than metre, it subordinates the sound of words in order to streamline the flow of sense – thus making it the ideal figure of speech for news reports, legal documents, and realist novels.

Virginia Woolf, a novelist intensely concerned with the poetry of prose, saw its continuous nature as what kept it earth-bound: 'it rises slowly off the ground; it must be connected on this side and on that.'²⁷ The expansiveness of feeling that characterizes the prose poem is often created by a moment of metaphor giving it a sudden lift, like the flare of the burner in a hot-air balloon. This is what happens in the poem 'Pulmonary Tuberculosis' by Katherine Mansfield, a writer best known for her short stories, who in 1918 experimented with poems in free verse – that is, verse with no fixed rhythm or rhyme – but decided that the results read better when printed as a form of 'special prose':²⁸

The man in the room next to mine has the same complaint as I. When I wake in the night I hear him turning. And then he coughs. And I cough. And after a silence I cough. And he coughs again. This goes on for a long time. Until I feel we are like

two roosters calling to each other at false dawn. From far-away hidden farms.

In the first sentence, Mansfield sets the scene with a diary-like frankness. We are in the prosaic world of one thing next to another: ‘the man in the room next to mine’ serves as a metonym for the whole sanatorium of TB patients. The second sentence introduces the real-time narration of night waking, with four short sentences that imitate the lonely, arrhythmic volleying of coughs, which – like the most tedious prose – ‘goes on for a long time’. The poetic only enters with the penultimate sentence, which employs metaphor to imagine a deeper affinity between the suffering human beings: they are transformed into ‘roosters’, fulfilling their animal instinct of crowing for sunrise. The final, verbless sentence expands the landscape from the roosters to the farms they metonymically imply, while at the same time deepening the metaphor as a fantasy of escape: to live on ‘far-away hidden farms’ would be the opposite of life in the sterile and crowded sanatorium.

Of course, powerful feelings of expansiveness are not in themselves exclusive to the prose poem. Wordsworth’s sonnet ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802’ evokes the whole of London in a single line of metonymic compression – ‘Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples’ – then rapturously expands this landscape with a metaphorical double exposure of city and countryside:

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne’er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!²⁹

If Wordsworth had been moved to compose his sonnet in prose, the period covered by this anthology would itself have to expand by almost half a century. It's not an impossible alternative history: in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, published the same year, Wordsworth argued that there was no essential distinction between the language of poetry and the language of prose, and that the 'more philosophical distinction' would be between 'Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science'.³⁰ The idea of the prose poem, and even the term itself, crops up in various places before Baudelaire, including as the subtitle of one of Edgar Allen Poe's last published works, *Eureka: A Prose Poem* (1848) – an extraordinary, unclassifiable essay, both mystical and scientific, in which Poe seems to anticipate modern cosmology with his vision of an expanding universe.

The form did not come to fruition as a lyric poem, however, until the 1850s, when Baudelaire began to write and publish, over the course of a decade, the fifty short prose texts that would be gathered in *Paris Spleen*. In the private letter to his publisher that serves as the book's preface, the poet asks:

Which of us has not, in his ambitious days, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and choppy enough to fit the soul's lyrical movements, the jolts of consciousness?

This obsessive ideal came to life above all by frequenting enormous cities, in the intersection of their countless relationships.³¹

Thus the prose poem, at the moment of its birth, is associated with two kinds of expansiveness, one private and one public, one old and one new: the 'lyrical impulses' of the sensitive soul, and the rapidly enlarging modern world, in whose cities that soul is jostled by thousands of others every day. When Wordsworth stood on Westminster Bridge, the population of

London was just over one million; by 1840, it had doubled. The same exponential growth happened in Paris over the same period, where it was made even more visible in the 1850s by Baron Haussmann's sweeping programme of urban reconstruction, which accelerated the public 'confluence' of Parisian life with a web of wide new boulevards that routed the busy lives of the affluent through the traditional neighbourhoods of the poor, to the disturbance of both: in the bright, wide-open spaces of Haussmann's Paris, in Marshall Berman's words, 'there is no way to look away'.³²

The Baudelairean prose poem, and all its 'jolts of consciousness', is a record of this historical moment: a private journal made public, as it were, with all the violent ambivalence towards art and humanity that Parisian life provoked in the poet (see 'The Bad Glazier' (p. 400)). But even as lyric poetry, in Baudelaire's prose, expands to map the public spaces of this new world, it is at the same time retreating into 'the ebbs and flows of reverie', and the private depths of feeling to be found there. In doing so, Baudelaire combined the historical word-painting he discovered in *Gaspard de la Nuit* with the influence of two contemporary writers of hallucinatory English prose, Edgar Allen Poe and Thomas de Quincey, both of whom he had translated into French. Like Bertrand in his gothic poems, such as 'The Madman' (p. 404), de Quincey and Poe are masters of what might be called visions of lucid darkness, a paradox upon which Baudelaire's 'Windows' meditates (p. 399):

He who looks in through an open window never sees so many things as he who looks at a shut window. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more gloomy, or more dazzling, than a window lighted by a candle. What we can see in the sunlight is always less interesting than what goes

on behind the panes of a window. In that dark or luminous hollow, life lives, life dreams, life suffers.

For Baudelaire, the shut window is a symbol of the 'dark or luminous' mystery of modern life itself, as relished by the flâneur of a metropolis such as Paris, who drifts among the nameless masses of the street seeking a gleam of insight.

Walter Benjamin characterized Baudelaire as a poet haunted by 'the phantom crowd of the words', and the restless cacophony of urban life returns again and again as the raw material of the prose poem, from the 'blurring of horses and motors' in Amy Lowell's 'Spring Day' (p. 346) to Cathy Park Hong's stories of a sleepless Chinese mega-city viewed from 'an apartment without its last wall' (p. 53), and Clifton Gachagua's urgent enquiry into the unspoken secrets of Nairobi ('In the old streets I besiege a man to translate the poems on the walls', p. 27).³³ In a crowded world, the prose poem clears an imagined space for mind-expanding revelations, whether 'a tiny incident [. . .] hidden like a rare jewel in the casket of Time', as in Rabindranath Tagore's 'A Day' (p. 338); a moment of ramifying horror, as in Ottó Orbán's 'Chile' (p. 223); or an overwhelming feeling of love, as in Lisa Jarnot's 'Ode' ('the rest of the balance continuing huge', p. 107).

'The prose poem', Rod Mengham has recently suggested, 'is modernity's response [...] to our fear of the receding horizon [. . .] it is the circle we draw around our interactions with the world.'³⁴ However much the apocalyptic landscape of a prose poem reveals, more remains out of sight. As the critic Nikki Santilli has written, prose poetry resonates with 'the absences that it accommodates'.³⁵ 'I alone know the plan of this savage sideshow', teases Rimbaud in the final, standalone sentence of 'Sideshow' (p. 388). Prose poems love to hint that they are themselves metaphorical unveilings of their own elusive

nature: 'I am dapper and elegant; I move with great precision, cleverly managing all my smaller yellow claws. I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach', reflects Elizabeth Bishop's 'Strayed Crab' (p. 256), slyly punning on the prose poet's own means of sideways travel: the clause. As David Lehman observes in his anthology of *Great American Prose Poems* (2003), certain ideas inevitably recur whenever a critic attempts to pin down the paradoxical nature of the form: 'it will be noted approvingly,' for example, 'that the prose poem *blurs boundaries*'.³⁶ The prose poem, however, is the wittiest theorist of its own liminality, inviting us to see the ambivalence of identity as the way of the world: 'Me and Molly, that's M and M, melt in your mouth', writes Thylia Moss in her poem about physically inseparable teenage girls who eventually give birth to each other (p. 161); 'the material of her actual body is loosely knit as steam or a colored gas [. . .] and is very close to emotion', muses Mei-mei Berssenbrugge of one of her happily freeform 'Fairies' (p. 38); 'Reason is Spirit', claims Hegel, but according to Anne Carson this is not so much a statement of fact as a sentence in which two words 'tenderly mingle in speculation' (p. 5).

Baudelaire's belief that poetic prose might articulate the modern experience of 'the intersection' of different lives continues to inform its contemporary ambitions. One of the most original exponents of the prose poem currently at work in Britain, Vahni Capildeo (p. 7), has reflected on how her Trinidadian childhood experience of religious ritual informs her openness to the possibilities of mixed form. At Deepavali, the family garage and part of the house would be transformed into a ritual space, with lamps lit and Sanskrit chanted, leading to 'other mixings: of space, and of language':

I see no problem, I take delight, within the space of the page, in crossing from mundane to heightened, elaborated, even opaque

codes, registers, allusions. [. . .] To this experience I can trace my instinctive revolt against such terms as ‘line break’, ‘white space’ or ‘margins of silence’. Without meaning to, I developed a poetics of reverberation and minor noise.

This attitude and practice, Capildeo reflects, ‘may indeed have a politics, as well as a poetics, belonging to a modernity rooted in ways of life still not considered safe, polite or relevant to admit to the canon’.³⁷ As Marguerite S. Murphy puts it in her study of the form from Wilde to Ashbery, the prose poem embodies, among other paradoxes, a ‘tradition of subversion’.³⁸ Over time it has attained sufficient respectability to be studied, prized, anthologized. But ever since Baudelaire’s dream of a form ‘musical without rhythm or rhyme’ rejected the strict conventions of classical French verse, the prose poem’s freedom to expand on any subject, and in any style, has attracted poets wanting to challenge restrictions imposed upon them – powerfully so, in the case of Wole Soyinka’s ‘Chimes of Silence’ (p. 233), which was mentally composed while he was a political prisoner in solitary confinement.³⁹ If the prose poem’s form is ad hoc, then so is its politics. The spirit of lyrical dissent that informs *Paris Spleen* returns, for example, in Fenton Johnson’s monologue ‘Tired’ (p. 342), which is spoken by an African-American who is ‘tired of building up somebody else’s civilisation’; in Kim Hyesoon’s ‘Seoul’s Dinner’ (p. 124), which liberates the descriptive appetite of prose in defiance of the decorum expected of the South Korean *yōryu siin*, or female poet (‘I let the snow collect, then shove it into my mouth’);⁴⁰ and in Sean Bonney’s ‘Letter Against the Firmament’ (p. 20), a gnostic invective against the rhetoric of the British politician Iain Duncan Smith (‘that talking claw’).

‘If prose is a house, poetry is a man on fire running quite fast through it’ (Anne Carson).⁴¹ Far from becoming a literary party

trick, the twenty-first-century prose poem seems full of energy to discover what emergencies it can cause next. Some contemporary poets continue to employ fragmentary prose as a prism through which to refract the ‘crystalline jumble’ of modernity (to use John Ashbery’s exquisite phrase from the preface to his translation of Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*).⁴² Others, however, are drawn to prose for the poetry of plain statement; what Vivek Naryanan calls, in his ‘Ode to Prose’, ‘the only heart we can trust if only because it beat so firmly’.⁴³ The precise, documentary prose of a poet such as Claudia Rankine, for example – whose most recent books, *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* (2004) and *Citizen* (2014), are both subtitled ‘An American Lyric’ – evinces an ambition to rewrite literary tradition that recalls the radical claim made two centuries ago by Wordsworth, when, in *Lyrical Ballads*, he presented ‘incidents and situations drawn from common life’ in ‘language really used by men’.⁴⁴ This anthology aims to capture something of the same moment of change and renewal in contemporary writing, as the prose poem dissolves and reforms along the same horizon that enraptured Baudelaire’s ‘stranger’ on the first page of his *Little Poems in Prose*: ‘the clouds that pass . . . over there . . . the marvellous clouds!’ (p. 397)

On the Selection and Organization

Brevity has been associated with the prose poem ever since Baudelaire modestly acknowledged his own inventions as ‘petit’. In my selection, I have also tried to represent the prose poem in its lengthier manifestations as an extended sequence, but I have refrained from excerpting longer works that have not obviously been composed in readily separable units (such as the book-length ‘lyric essay’, which is increasingly being

recognized as a contemporary form in its own right). I have also not tried to represent related traditions of mixed form, such as the *haibun* and the *prosimetrum*, which juxtapose prose and verse in order to make poetry from the tension between the two. My main rule of thumb has been only to include things that have already been published as poetry; to quote Michael Benedikt, editor of an earlier anthology of the form, these are poems 'self-consciously written in prose'.⁴⁵ This does, I realize, beg the question of definition, and raises the possible answer that – as Jorge Luis Borges suggested – poetry is in the eye of the reader ('a passage read as though addressed to the reason is prose; read as though addressed to the imagination, it might be poetry').⁴⁶ It is also, I realize, unsatisfactory from the point of view of literary history: what comprehensive critical account of the poetic resources of modern prose could leave out, for example, the work of Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, or Virginia Woolf? But that way an infinite anthology lies. The secret poetry of prose can be uncovered even in popular fiction, as Margaret Atwood's 'In Love with Raymond Chandler' (p. 154) demonstrates, wittily rewriting *noir* realism as erotic languor. The published-as-poetry principle has also kept me away, with regret, from the neighbouring fields of short and flash fiction, despite the evident family resemblances here. I have also on the whole chosen poems over poets, with only a few notable figures represented by more than one selection.

My reading has been concentrated on Anglophone poetry published in the United Kingdom and the United States, which has inevitably placed a limit on its internationalism. But one guiding principle was also to find prose poems in which it seemed as though something new was being presented to readers in different times and places, and I have tried, where translations were available – from Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Czech, Danish,

Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish – to give at least a glimpse of the global variety of prose poetry over the last century. Once these various histories began to flow together in one channel, there seemed to be little meaningful way to part them, which led me to adopt a simple tripartite division of chronology. Everything from Bertrand and Baudelaire to 1945 I have gathered under the heading ‘modern’, on the grounds that the prose poem originates and develops at the same time as many of the other founding inventions of modernity: the railway, photography, the daily news (a number of Baudelaire’s prose poems first appeared as ‘*feuilletons*’, short literary items for newspaper readers). My next broad umbrella, ‘postmodern’, is a term which, like ‘prose poetry’, has been employed as often as it has been found unsatisfactorily capacious. For practical purposes, I have taken it to cover the second half of the twentieth century, a period when all the arts were in self-conscious conversation with the modernists who invented so many new forms of artistic expression between the 1910s and the 1930s. By cutting off the postmodern at 1999, I don’t mean to imply that a new literary period neatly began at the start of the new century. But there was undoubtedly a surge of interest in the prose poem around this time, which can be partly attributed to the rise of the defining invention of our own era – the internet – as a forum for literary experiment and exchange, and the evolution of new daily forms of prose such as the email, the blog, and the tweet.

All poems have been presented in fully justified paragraphs divided by a single line break, with other distinctive aspects of formatting (such as the hanging indent) preserved where found in the original printing of the text. Where possible, I have used the first book publication for the dating of poems, and the

chronology of the book has been ordered in reverse so as to foreground the importance of the present moment in the history of the form.

Notes

1. Gertrude Stein, 'Poetry and Grammar', in *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Selected Works 1911–1945*, ed. by Patricia Meyerowitz (London: Peter Owen, 1967), pp. 123–45 (p. 123).
2. Michael Riffaterre, 'On the Prose Poem's Formal Features', in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Hermine Riffaterre (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 117–32 (p. 117); Michel Delville, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).
3. Sir Philip Sidney, 'The Defence of Poesy', in *Sidney's 'Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 3–54 (p. 5); Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 674–701 (p. 679); Stéphane Mallarmé, 'The Evolution of Literature', in *Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters*, ed. by Bradford Cook (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), pp. 18–24 (p. 19).
4. D. W. Harding, *Words into Rhythm: English Speech Rhythm in Verse and Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 71.
5. William Hazlitt, 'On the Periodical Essayists', in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1819), pp. 195–201 (p. 200).
6. Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' (1917), in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, pp. 3–24.
7. Hermine Riffaterre, 'Reading Constants: The Practice of the Prose Poem', in *The Prose Poem in France*, pp. 98–115 (p. 115).
8. For a recent anthology which locates the prose poem among a number of these other forms, see *Short: An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short-Short Stories, Prose Poems, Brief Essays, and Other Short Prose Forms*, ed. Alan Ziegler (New York: Persea Books, 2014).

9. Lisa Robertson, *The Weather* (London: Reality Street Editions, 2001), p. 80.
10. For example, Vanessa Place's *Tragodia 1: Statement of Facts* (2010), which is made up of redacted documents from her work as a criminal defence attorney specializing in sex offences.
11. See Nick Admussen, 'Trading Metaphors: Chinese Prose Poetry and the Reperiodization of the Twentieth Century', *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 22.2 (2010), 88–129.
12. See *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber, 2015), pp. 444–6.
13. Stein, 'Poetry and Grammar', p. 139.
14. Rosmarie Waldrop, 'Why Do I Write Prose Poems/When My True Love is Verse' (2005), reprinted in *Atlantic Drift: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by James Byrne and Robert Sheppard (Todmorden: Arc/Edge Hill University Press), pp. 315–18 (p. 316).
15. André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), trans. by R. Seaver and H. R. Lane, reprinted with corrections in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 718–41 (p. 726).
16. Aimé Césaire, 'Poetry and Knowledge', trans. by Jon Cook, in *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900–2000*, ed. by Jon Cook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 276–87 (p. 285).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
18. Frank O'Hara, 'Why I am Not a Painter', in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Donald Allen (Manchester: Carcanet, 1991), p. 112.
19. Amy Lowell, *Can Grande's Castle* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), p. xv.
20. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk* (London: John Murray, 1835), I, p. 84; Stein, p. 136.
21. William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 598.
22. In *Other Traditions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), Ashbery notes that his poem was inspired by Clare's prose fragment musing on the neglected subject of 'House or Window Flies' (pp. 18–19).
23. *The New Republic*, 8 April 1985, p. 18.
24. Quoted in *The Best American Poetry 1997*, ed. by James Tate and David Lehman (New York: Scribner, 1997), p. 200.

25. Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *Selected Writings* (The Hague: Mouton), II (1956), pp. 239–59.
26. Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. by Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 88.
27. Virginia Woolf, 'Impassioned Prose', in *Collected Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press), I (1966), pp. 165–72 (p. 168).
28. See Keiko Mizuta, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Prose Poem', *The Review of English Studies*, 39.153 (1988), 75–83.
29. Wordsworth, p. 285.
30. Ibid., pp. 601–2.
31. Charles Baudelaire, 'Preface to *La Presse*, 1862', in *The Parisian Prowler*, 2nd edn, trans. by Edward K. Kaplan (Athens: The University of Georgia, 1997), pp. 129–30 (p. 129).
32. Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 153.
33. Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 152–90 (p. 162).
34. Rod Mengham, 'A Genealogy of the Prose Poem', *Countertext* 3.2 (2017), 176–86 (p. 186).
35. Nikki Santilli, *Such Rare Citings: The Prose Poem in English Literature* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 22.
36. David Lehman, 'Introduction', in *Great American Prose Poems* (New York: Scribner, 2006), pp. 11–26 (p. 13).
37. Vahni Capildeo, 'Letter Not from Trinidad', *PN Review* 221 (January–February 2015), 6.
38. Marguerite S. Murphy, *A Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).
39. Wole Soyinka, *A Shuttle from the Crypt* (London: Rex Collings/Eyre, Methuen, 1972), p. vii.
40. See Ruth Williams, 'Kim Hyesoon: The Female Grotesque', *Guer-nica*, 1 January 2012, online.
41. Kate Kellaway, 'Anne Carson: "I do not believe in therapy"' [interview], *The Observer*, 30 October 2016, online.

- 42. Arthur Rimbaud, *Illuminations*, trans. by John Ashbery (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), p. 14.
- 43. Vivek Naryanan, *Universal Beach* (Mumbai: Harbour Line, 2006), p. 65.
- 44. Wordsworth, pp. 596–7.
- 45. Michael Benedikt, ed., *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology* (New York: Dell, 1976), p. 47.
- 46. Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Poems 1923–1967* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), trans. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, p. xv.

The Prose Poem Now

The End of Days

after Anselm Kiefer & for Elena Lydia Scipioni

A snake with honey-coloured eyes survived and told what had happened:

In our burning fields, Yesterday drew me with the spittle of its mouth on a charred wall, like a blackboard in front of frightened pupils. Thus you saw in me the image of my father, throwing my last pennies into the fountain of death, then sewing the buttons of his oil-green coat in the furrows of mud where you had planted seeds, arranged in the form of words, and they grew and blossomed when light rained down, warm as remorse, and again blood was made to flow on the palms of the earth. Canes grew high as poplars and we broke them to roof our refuge, and we jumped over our vein-streams to swim in our first sky. We fertilised our language with our debris. Mountains had become ripe heads for the fists of the sky and the slopes cheeks we ran down like melted ice, and at every point where the disappeared had fallen an unattainable flower sprang up, or a burning matchstick flickered before a school-boy could close his mouth over it to put out the flame – as he hurries to do his homework on forgetting fear.

We will remember for a long time how we were before this harvest. Each of us will visit his own grave, carrying a whip on