

PROSE/POETRY - THE PROSE POEM AS FRAGMENT: GENERIC DUALITIES

The prose poem, like the fragment, initiates its claim to existence in oxymorons. Yet in spite of the clear antithesis between the notion of prose and that of poetry, most critics have already decided that the prose poem is a genre in its own right. Pointing to the time when the concept of prose poetry was first used, namely in 1869 by Baudelaire in his celebrated *Paris Spleen* or *Petits Poèmes en Prose*, Michael Riffaterre labels Baudelaire's endeavor as being concerned with "the literary genre with an oxymoron for a name" (Riffaterre, 1983: 117). This definition is itself a framing of Baudelaire's own description of what he was doing, namely writing something which, although seemingly possesses "neither head nor tail" in its form, content-wise "everything in it is both tail and head, alternatively and reciprocally" (Baudelaire, 1968: preface). Riffaterre thus started a chain of definitions of the prose poem that pragmatically situate the prose poem somewhere between prose and poetry.¹ As David Lehman's "Introduction" in his anthology *Great American Prose Poems from Poe to the Present* (2003) shows: "The prose poem is a *hybrid* form, an *anomaly* if not a *paradox* or an *oxymoron*" (13). Brooke Horvath's essay "Why the Prose Poem?" (1991) has an inherently pragmatic agenda: he presents us with nine theses each targeting the prose poem's form vis-à-vis its content. Whatever the prose

¹ Attempts to define the genre have been made prior to the definition that critics such as Riffaterre offer, yet Riffaterre's definition goes beyond descriptions of the prose poem as such taking into consideration the poetic function of the paradox inherent in the prose poem. Rachel Galvin mentions other critics whose definitions are worth considering: Joris Karl Huysman's "the osmazome of literature, the essential oil of art; George Baker's Loch Ness analogy: "a creature of whose existence we have only very uncertain evidence", and Suzanne Bernard's "Icarian art". (Galvin, 2004: 47)

poem loses at the level of form, the line, rhythm, meter, it gains at the level of content, a special form of sayability, and intimacy with the reader. In a subsequent article “The Prose Poem and the Secret Life of Poetry” Horvath adds one more thesis to the ones developed earlier, and seems to suggest, again, that whatever is mediated between form and content also constitutes the background of the prose poem’s pragmatic function. Not only is the prose poem “especially well suited to pursuing modernist and postmodernist agenda”, but it is also capable of formulating itself as “a poem that hides its poetry” (Horvath, 1992: 13). Horvath’s assumptions are based on the observation that the prose poem is free from the constraints that characterize the two genres that the prose poem both separates and brings together, namely prose and poetry. This freedom is linked to the idea that the prose poem seems to also enjoy the status of behaving like a fragment thus offering “a means of saying the no-longer sayable as well as the as-yet unsaid, thus providing a home for various sorts of fugitive (unpoetic) content, an agenda enhanced by the form’s fragmentary nature and marginal status” (12-13).

These generic crossroads point, however, to a problem of nomenclature, as neither of them obeys strict frames of references. The prose poem can be considered a fragment and a fragment a prose poem insofar as they are not something else (the prose poem is not prose because it is a poem, to the same extent that the fragment is not a complete text, yet can be read as a totality because it is self-enclosed (including)). Thus the paradox that the prose poem contains is a paradox of function. That is, even though one hasn’t said anything yet about the form of this genre, one begins to identify its functions. And one of the functions of the prose poem is to formulate a rhetoric of frame which is able to counter the idea of description (poetic or narrative alike) in prose poetry. I see this rhetoric of frame as the poets’s rhetoric of narrative. The practitioners of prose poetry want to transcend the rules of narration by framing narrative and its constraints. Thus the idea is to undo both narrative and prose, undo the poetics of prose through the poetics of prose poetry.

Anthologies of prose poems, such as Lehman’s, work more on the basis of description when it comes to defining the genre, and while some functions of the prose poem are being identified, none of them explain the role of the frame in a prose poem. Lehman’s paraphrase of Suzanne Bernard’s work from 1957 illustrates this point. It is for instance apparent that when Lehman mentions Bernard’s “four requirements” that the prose poem has to fulfill in order for it to qualify as a prose poem, he is actually

talking about four frames of functionality, namely, that the prose poem has to “embody the poet’s intention”, it has to have “an organic unity”, it has to “be its own excuse for being” and “it has to be brief” (19). I would suggest then that each of these frames contains an element of agency which transcends the descriptive mode.

Now, if we look at several other definitions, we shall note that the prose poem is not only at odds with prose and poetry but with the very idea of constraint. I would suggest here that while these definitions take liberties with the very act of defining, they indirectly point to the necessity to see the prose poem not merely as an accident of inter-generic concepts, but as a well construed form with a certain set of constraints. For example, commenting on Gertrude Stein’s prose poetic style in *Tender Buttons*, Stein being the mother of the American prose poem par excellence according to Lehman, Russell Edson in a gesture simultaneously celebratory and frustrated throws up his hands with the comment: “Heck, one can call most anything a prose poem. That’s what’s great about them, anything that’s not something else is probably a prose poem” (in Lehman, 2003: 20). In one of his several paradoxical and self-referential definitions of the prose poem Charles Simic offers what amounts to a prose poem in its own right: “The prose poem is a result of two contradictory impulses, prose and poetry, and therefore cannot exist, but it does” (14). In another (more prosaic?) definition he establishes a tension between frames and paratexts: “The prose poem is a burst of language following a collision with a large piece of furniture” (19). In “Cold Calls” (2000) Tyrone Williams enacts Simic’s definition and performs a prose poem which consists of footnotes and endnotes to a non-existent text (247-253). In Williams’ case the footnote is a clear example of a paratext informing a frame which both counters and frames the frame consisting of a blank page. James Richardson’s sequence of prose poems from 2001 are fragments which he identifies in the title as aphorisms, yet simultaneously in the subtitle he frames them as being “ten-second essays”. (218-222)

My aim here is not to extend the existing definitions of the prose poem but to investigate the relationship between the prose poem, what frames it, and what the prose poem itself seems to frame from a generic duality point of view. Judging from the definitions I have offered here, I would suggest that what defines a prose poem is a counter frame to what defines a fragment in its paratextual mode. In prose poems we have a sequence of competing unifying frames with the two genre labels colliding at an intersection: the text is a poetic expression, and yet this expression

turns out to be “framed” by the status of the text being in prose. These unifying frames clash with the subversive counter frame of the fragmentary genre which constitutes the prose poem in general and the paratext-driven prose poem in particular.

The question of counter frames imposes itself in some of the already mentioned prose poems which present themselves as fragments of frames of both prose and poems. In other words, while they offer themselves as free from the constraints of ideology inherent in narrative and poetry alike, they are not free, nor do they want to be free from producing poetic effect via poetic intent. This point is emphasized in Steven Monte’s book on the prose poem in French and American Literature, *Invisible Fences* (2000). Monte laments the over-debated revolutionary character of the prose poem which has given priority to the notion of the “subversive” quality of the formal freedom of a prose poem instead of focussing on the effects that the prose poem has on its readers precisely when constraint itself is being considered. As Monte puts it:

Constraints can be thought of not only as restrictions to freedom or, conversely, as restrictions that enable freedom, but as generic signals that inform interpretation. If readers of prose poetry have been or become less aware of the genre’s constraints, it is perhaps because so much rhetoric surrounding the prose poem has to do with its formal freedom. Or it may be that the illusion of no constraints is itself one of prose poetry’s generic traits. (Monte, 2000: 8)

Monte calls this situation an invisible fence which not only surrounds the prose poem, but also frames it as a problem à la John Ashbery. “All right. The problem is that there is no problem” (“The Recital”), says Ashbery thus echoing the potential of a prose poem to present itself as an ‘as if genre’, as an ‘as yet genre’, and as a consequence of a genre which is in between acts of constitution. In other words, the prose poem is not only an oxymoron, but a problem of logical lyric.

In his book *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (1998) Michel Delville points to the ideology of genre whose objective is to register literary movements. Following Adena Rosmarin, for whom “a genre is chosen or defined to fit neither a historical nor a theoretical reality but to serve a pragmatic end” (Rosmarin (49-50) in Delville), Delville makes the assumption that the pragmatic charge involves a registering of formal movements. The movement from poetry to prose and from prose to poetry marks not only the instability of genre, but also the fact

that incompatibilities exist between forms of poetry and forms of narration. He writes:

The retrieval and revaluation of forgotten, minor and marginal genres, the preoccupation with intertextuality and pastiche, and the desire for cross-cultural and cross-discursive forms all testify to a new network of complications, contradictions and paradoxes not easily containable within the symmetrical hierarchies and paradigms of traditional genre theories. In the midst of this postgeneric chaos, the prose poem remains a relatively young genre still in the process of self-definition, a formal abstraction whose changing methods and ambitions are exceptionally difficult to define and formulate. (Deville, 1998)

Considering the nature and function of the prose poem it is clear that while its nature relies precisely on distinguishing between the frames which constitute and contain prose and poetry separately, the function of the prose poem is to erase that distinction all together. Hence the prose poem's oxymoronic status. Thus while frames institute and maintain the incompatibility between prose and poetry, the fact that the prose poem exists, as Simic pointed out, suggests that whatever is subversive about the genre is directed to 'setting up' the frame that aims at keeping things separate. Frame the frame, as it were. We find an example of a frame that sets up its own mode of representation in the often-quoted passage from Coleridge: "the proper and immediate object of Poetry is the communication of pleasure... I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is, prose: words in their best order; poetry: the best words in the best order" (*Table Talk*). Insofar as one can never decide which words are best, as was shown so masterly by Gertrude Stein for whom words do not have a symbolic reference, one is bound to regard words as objects in their own right. Thus, stripped from its symbolic adornment poetry becomes naked prose. If this new form puts on new clothes, the dress will ideologically express the fashion of the time.

The implication of seeing the prose poem from an ideological point of view is linked to the idea that a genre exists in relation to other forms.² A

² Ideology is often linked to politics when it comes to defining the genre of the prose poems, as works such as Jonathan Monroe's *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (1987) show. What is emphasized is "the struggle" between modes of poetic manifestations. As Monroe puts it: "The prose poem is that place within literature where social antagonisms of gender and class achieve generic expression, where aesthetic conflicts between and among literary genres manifest themselves concisely and concretely as a displacement, projection, and symbolic reenactment of more broadly based social struggles." (Monroe, 1987: 18)

new genre frames the cultural manifestations which make it a genre in the first place, and lets itself be framed by a number of features which distinguishes it from other genres. There is thus an interdependent relationship between form and content and this is where the notion of the fragment comes in.

The fragment, as its Latin root suggests, is a radical form of breaking. However, the fragment is as problematic a genre as is the prose poem, insofar as it has been defined mainly according to either a period (Romantic, Ancient, etc.) or according to aesthetic or generic terms (philosophical, literary). To make a long debate extremely short, perhaps I could suggest that whatever the fragment's nature – a detachment or ruinous form – in terms of its function, the fragment has always been regarded as a footnote to the idea of totality or complete text. With the German Romantics, however, the fragment has shifted position, from incompleteness to completeness. The fragment has been shown to counter the rhetoric of a narrative frame which granted a complete text – a text that has a beginning middle and end – more authority. It is thus through a writer's justifications that the fragment has become a genre in its own right, and it is still evolving, yet this evolution does not take place according to generic and discursive conventions, but develops as a gesture towards self-labeling. In other words, the fragment, like the prose poem, is not concerned with what and how conventional generic frames determine its status, but with a justification of the why, and hence why not? Once the question "why the prose poem" is posed – the title of Brooke Horvath's essay for example – one can proceed to asking another question instead of providing an answer, namely one that implicates the rhetoric of frame as it is ideologically constrained and free from ideological constraint simultaneously. Thus, why not the prose poem?

American prose poem authors such as Lynn Emanuel have already anticipated the discourse of counter-frames in poems such as "The politics of narrative: Why I am a poet", echoing Frank O'Hara's poem "Why I am not a painter". In Emanuel's poem the distinction between prose and poetry is meant not to bridge the polarity between the two but to separate the waters that run underneath. Featuring a conversation with the poet Mark Strand, Emanuel's speaker informs us that she "cannot stand to write prose" identifying prose with tedious descriptions where authors write lines such as "the draperies were burnt orange and the carpet was brown." In Mark Strand's reply that a poet could do that if that was the only thing the poet did, Emanuel decides that while she can muster strength for "the very

beginning and the very end”, she doesn’t have “the stomach for the rest of it” (Emanuel, 1999: 18).

Whatever constitutes narrative as a ‘full’ text rather than a fragment is rendered here as remainder or a residue in plenitude, yet the sort of abundance and excess one can easily dispose of. The interesting thing that happens is that the politics of narrative takes the place of a subject’s predicate, in the modifications of beginnings and endings. There is a surplus in the very act of subtracting the middle from the beginning, middle and end formula. This surplus is given to us both as excess, literally and metaphorically through the word “very”, and as an expropriation of the proper in narrative. Why the prose poem, instead of prose or poetry, is indirectly answered through notions which render the ‘why’ a matter of in-between-ness. More directly, the justification implied in the act of explaining the ‘why’ functions as a poetic manifesto. Insofar as the prose poem does not merely define itself against the background of either poetry or narration, but against the politics of poetry or narration, it establishes itself as a poetics which aims at counter-framing both narrative and poetry. As such it falls between narrative and poetry and constitutes itself as an aesthetic program which mixes thematic levels with genre, context with history, rhetoric with imagism. In other words, the prose poem establishes itself as an oxymoron, yet an oxymoron which is crafted in the image of narration or poetry.

The position of in-between-ness, which the prose poem occupies by countering its own frames of narrative, is also dealt with in Tom Whalen’s prose poem “Why I Hate the Prose Poem”. Whalen’s poetic lines in his prose poem run fast catching up with narration as the following lines indicate: I quote the poem here in its entirety:

*An angry man came into the kitchen where his wife was busying herself about supper and exploded.
My mother told me this story every day of her life, until one day she exploded.
But it is not a story, she always pointed out. It’s a prose poem.
One day I saw a man feeding a hot dog to his dog. The hot dog looked like a stick of dynamite.
Often simply the sight of a prose poem makes me sick.
I am unmarried and live alone in a small house.
In my spare time, I am cultivating a night garden. (in Lehman, 2003: 205)*

Whalen’s prose poem, if it had not been for the way its title frames it, would be a fragment. Not only is the poem self-reflexive, but it is also

performative. The mother's story, which becomes a prose poem, explodes the conventions around narrative and formulates itself as a structure concerned with the sentence. Every sentence seems to offer a different structural model. In the first two lines we have a story presented in a straight narrative manner which contains plot, or a narrated event, and time, or a chronological order. The strategy of shifting between discourse and story is maintained throughout the poem. Thus in the third line we are presented with a comment on genre. But, insofar as the third line is also part of a narrated event, genre gets to be translated as narrative. This narrative is however framed by self-reflexivity, which continues in the fifth line, though not before the line is interrupted by a narrative voice similar to the one in the first couple of lines. The poem thus sets up a tension between narration, self-reflexivity, and aesthetic judgement. The question of why the speaker hates the prose poem is framed thematically against the grain of genre. The frame within the frame, the comment on the nature of the prose poem within narrative discourse functions as a story that frames the prose poem and vice versa. Whalen does not just write about the prose poem, or about why he hates the prose poem. He writes a prose poem in the image of prose and poetry. Or a footnote to what separates prose from poetry.

More explicitly on the function of the prose poem as a footnote I can refer to the example of Tyrone Williams in "Cold Calls" where he literally enacts or performs the prose poem as a paratext to the idea of narrative or poetry. The fact that the text proper is missing from the page suggests that the prose poem constitutes itself as an impropriety against the background of the more 'proper' genres (remember Coleridge?) Yet these genres, which Williams's poem only hints at, are shown to be wearing the emperor's new clothes. Formalistically, while prose and poetry have very exact attributes such as plot, story, tropes, rhymes and rhythms, they are also very naked. Here, I suggest that the prose poem is being denied this very nakedness whenever authors who are more comfortable with the two dominant genres pass aesthetic judgements on the prose poem which do not have much to do with the prose poem as such. The same goes for authors who define the prose poem as a mere anomaly. More inspired formulations must aim at taking into account not only the paratextual function of the prose poem in relation to other genres (hence the frame) but also the fact that genres are always implicated in the way we 'see' things. We have an example in Horvath's essay "Why the Prose Poem?" where he makes an analogy to language. As he puts it:

As any number of linguists have told us, one's language affects how one sees and thinks, consequently what one sees and knows. As a subsystem, if you will, of a language, poetry is generated by a double set of rules that exert control over what can be thought [...] To write, then, poetry in prose is to pursue poetry via a different subsystem, a different grammar, in the hopes of thinking new thoughts. (Horvath, 1991: 111-112)

The implication of this statement is the fact that the prose poem is given agency to create, or rather invent, different subsystems. One such subsystem is developed in Williams's "Cold Calls", where the footnotes, in tandem with their correlating end notes, enter a process of triangulation: from prose to poetry via the prose poem. As the first footnote reads:

The spatial/temporal lacuna insures the possibility of temporary disruption – or permanent abortion – of service, insures only the probability of successful enunciation, its own passing over. Cf. Paul Laurence Dunbar as an example of such disruption, failure, breakdown: "My voice falls dead a foot from mine old lips/And but its ghost doth reach that vessel/passing, passing"³ (Williams (from Hambone) in Lehman, 2003: 247)

Here we are invited to contemplate the nakedness of the text proper, and literally 'see' through the paratext the stripping of narrative and poetry off their garments. In Williams's use of such words as "spatial/temporal lacuna", "abortion", "ghost", "passing" and "passing over" what is emphasized is not the absence of a proper text which the footnote accompanies nonetheless, but this text's potential to be there even as we do not seem to be able to see it there. Thus Williams's poem is a most ingenious fabrication which plays with the idea of frames and counter-frames on different levels. The more obvious observation we can make is that we can actually see the regression of the footnote take place while it takes place, as it is passed over to the endnote. That is, the footnote itself is framed by an endnote in which we find the reference to Laurence Dunbar's "Ships that Pass in the Night." The enunciative power of this poem is revealed already in these first lines of the footnote, by letting voice mark a distance: the voice which "falls dead a foot" from the speaker's lips leaves a trace which the ghost follows, as if in passing. And we have several types of distances in this poem: the distance between presence, absence, and virtuality, the distance between seeing, thinking, and formulating, and the distance between the poet's own voice, the speaker's voice, and the voice

³ Williams' footnote is itself footnoted by an endnote.

captured in quotations marks. These triangulations furthermore form the thematic range of the notion of passing explored by Williams in his 13 footnotes and 15 endnotes. “Passing” voice to genre, and genre to the prose poem itself, is dealt with in the same way the notion of passing itself is shown to frame and let itself be framed, as the many associative connotations of the word suggest: passing over, passing away, passing as, passing.

If the prose poem’s counter frame to the genres of poetry and prose can be characterized by in-between-ness and paratextual absence such as footnoting ellipsis, the counter-frame can also be seen as an inside fragment. Lynn Emanuel’s poem from 1999 “inside gertrude stein” is an example and so is Gertrude Stein’s own portrait of Picasso. These two poems constitute a tension between the two competing genres, poetry and prose, and culminate in positing the duality between them as an ekphrastic representation of each other.

In “inside gertrude stein”, Lynn Emanuel contemplates what it is to be a “subgenius” engaged in depicting a portrait of the genius Gertrude Stein. To Emanuel it is not enough to have the creative genius juxtapose, compare, and confront literary strategies for poetic expression; the genius must at all times be “inside” someone else. It is clear from the beginning that Emanuel relies in her poem on at least two meanings of the notion of genius: “to beget” and to be “guided”. Inside Gertrude Stein the speaker of the poem assumes two positions: listening to Gertrude Stein’s calling and waiting to be begotten by Gertrude Stein herself. Using repetition, Stein’s master trope and literary device in her writings, Emanuel thus initiates a sexual prelude to the intercourse with Gertrude Stein’s poetry through ekphrasis. In Peter Wagner’s definition: “Consisting of the prefix ‘ek’ (or ec and even ‘ex’) meaning ‘from’ or ‘out of’, and the root term ‘phrasis’, a synonym for the Greek *lexis* or *hermeneia*, as well as for the Latin *dictio* or *elocutio* (the verb *phrazein* denotes ‘to tell, declare, pronounce’), *ekphrasis* originally meant ‘a full or vivid description’.” (Wagner, 1996:12)

In Emanuel’s poem there are two types of ekphrasis at work: notional and actual. First, Emanuel begins with idealized descriptions of a Gertrude Stein portrait that does not exist. In her depiction of the inside of Gertrude Stein, Emanuel also portrays herself insofar as she sees herself begotten in the image of Gertrude Stein. We have an instance of what constitutes notional ekphrasis in the first lines:

Right now as I am talking to you and as you are being talked to, without let up, it is becoming clear that gertrude stein has hijacked me and that this

feeling that you are having now as you read this, that this is what it feels like to be inside Gertrude Stein. This is what it feels like to be a huge typewriter in a dress. (Emanuel, 1999:13)

Emanuel's insisting that this is what it feels like to be inside Gertrude Stein, without actually letting us know what 'this' refers to, is a way of conceptualizing the notional idea behind Gertrude Stein without explaining the actual Gertrude Stein. Then Emanuel goes on to making references to a real portrait, namely Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein thus mixing actual ekphrasis with notional ekphrasis. Notional ekphrasis is a convenient subcategory of ekphrasis, insofar as it has no actual painting it can engage with. Yet unlike actual ekphrasis which is "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan, 1993:3), notional ekphrasis operates with portrayal with words and it relies on an illocutionary act on the part of the poet. When Gertrude Stein wrote on Picasso, she named the resulting text a portrait, so it is a portrait especially since she uses cubist writing techniques to convey an image of Picasso. However, Picasso's image is not representational, but a series of repetitions which deal with what comes out of Picasso. Stein thus uses the original meaning of ekphrasis, which is to declare, to pronounce, and perhaps in this context even to beget. This is what Emanuel extracts from being inside Gertrude Stein when she further says alternating between the first person singular and the first person plural:

Yes, I feel we have gotten inside Gertrude Stein, and of course it is dark inside the enormous Gertrude, it is like being locked up in a refrigerator lit only by a smiling rind of cheese. Being inside Gertrude is like being inside a monument made of a cloud which is always moving across the sky which is also always moving. Gertrude is a huge galleon of cloud anchored to the ground by one small tether, yes, I see it down there, do you see that tiny snail glued to the tackboard of the landscape? That is Alice. So, I am inside Gertrude; we belong to each other, she and I, and it is so wonderful because I have always been a thin woman inside of whom a big woman is screaming to get out, and she's out now and if a river could type this is how it would sound, pure and complicated and enormous. Now we are tilting across the countryside, and we are talking, and if the wind could type it would sound like this, ongoing and repetitious, abstracting and stylizing everything, like our famous haircut painted by Picasso. (Emanuel, 1999:13)

Literally contrasting her own tiny size to that of Stein leads the speaker to conclude that her being a "subgenius" is primarily a consequence of what is *not* there. There is not enough of her for depiction, or to fill a canvas. In the absence of body fat and solid appearance one thus must make recourse not

to words but to voice and to seeing. Thus, the notional ekphrasis that we get of Gertrude Stein's genius in Emanuel's poem is realized by references to both actual and notional ekphrasis which Gertrude Stein performs in her portrait of Picasso. Stein creates a tableau which makes Picasso's genius perform intercourse with the depicted subjects, including herself. Emanuel's being inside, becomes for Stein a pulling outside, as the following lines indicates:

This one was having always something being coming out of him, something having completely a real meaning. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working and he was one needing this thing needing to be working so as to be one having some way of being one having some way of working. This one was one who was working. This one was one having something come out of him something having meaning.
(Stein, 1967:214)

Insofar as something has definitely come out of both Stein and Picasso, and intercourse has taken place between writing and seeing, the verbal and the visual, one could argue that the method of real and notional ekphrasis is performing instauration of tableaux of genius. The orgasmic goal of Stein's and Emanuel's poems is to celebrate the intercourse between the (sub)genius creators and the reader of the poems.

The prose poem "inside gertrude stein" follows the same cadences that Stein herself is famous for: it makes use of ungrammatical punctuation, and offers both, sentences that deal with actualities and events, and affirmative statements that are hard to contradict. The picture one gets of Gertrude Stein's physical size is equally balanced by descriptions of how Stein's physicality works as a container which contains not only its own genius but others' too. Emanuel's speaker's descriptions of Gertrude, whose name she insists on repeating in a non-capitalized form as if suggesting that the proper in Stein is always improper, are the same type of descriptions that Stein offers of Picasso. They are based on telling, and follow the same conversational style that Stein uses when she informs her readers repeatedly that she has something to tell before she goes on with her subject. Ultimately, of course, both Stein and Emanuel tell us nothing of either. They show, however, the workings of emphasis in the act of telling, and insist that something is being conceptualized and ready to come out, yet not in a representational form, but in a relational form.

Emanuel's poem borrows Stein's gestures towards insisting on words creating a flow of imaginary sounds that both the wind and the river would

make if they could type. Typing calls for a certain urgency which escalates in the poem as soon as the speaker can hear Stein's voice calling for a continuation of her work. And the reasoning goes as follows:

Because someone must be gertrude stein, someone must save us from the literalists and realists, and narratives of the beginning and end, someone must be a river that can type. And why not I? Gertrude is insisting on the fact while I am a subgenius, weighing one hundred five pounds, and living in a small town with an enormous furry male husband who is always in his Cadillac Eldorado driving off to sell something to people who do not deserve the bad luck of this merchandise in their lives – that these facts would not be a problem for gertrude stein. Gertrude and I feel that, for instance, in Patriarchal Poetry when (like an avalanche that can type) she is burying the patriarchy, still there persists a sense of condescending affection. So, while I'm a thin, heterosexual subgenius, nevertheless gertrude has chosen me as her tool, just as she chose the patriarchy as a tool for ending the patriarchy.
(14)

Emanuel here sets up relational aspects in her poem which are not merely instrumental for the understanding of the way she receives her calling from Gertrude Stein, namely as a cubist painting which is non representational. The poem has a direct relation to lived experience, and cuts across character relations such as Gertrude and Alice, Gertrude and the speaker, Gertrude and the husband. Typing, for Emanuel, also means recasting the characters into ekphrasis, which thus literally means that if anything can come out of things, as indicated by the prefix *ec*, then it is definitely something, as indicated by the root *phrasis*, which means to tell, to declare, to pronounce fully, in other words to offer a literally vivid description. Emanuel's way of conceptualizing things is similar to Stein's insofar as she also approaches language from a potential point of view. This potentiality is what enables the prose poem to pass as prose and poetry at the same time, thus resolving the generic duality between the two genres as a fragment.

By way of conclusion, then, I want to suggest that the prose poem, by operating with frames and counter-frames, ultimately formulates its own rhetoric of a passing genre. This rhetoric situates the prose poem no so much between prose and poetry, but puts it on a track towards interrelations, and beyond formalism and experimentalism. The prose poem is passing as prose poem. The prose poem is passing prose poem.

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