

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone
Projects

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

5-2018

The Literature of Loss: Modernity, Poetic Prose, and the Tendency Toward Contradiction

Jared D. Fagen

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/2688

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

THE LITERATURE OF LOSS

MODERNITY, POETIC PROSE, AND THE
TENDENCY TOWARD CONTRADICTION

by

Jared Daniel Fagen

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, the City University of New York.

2018

© 2018

JARED DANIEL FAGEN

All Rights Reserved

The Literature of Loss:
Modernity, Poetic Prose, and the Tendency Toward Contradiction

by

Jared Daniel Fagen

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

Joshua Wilner

Thesis Advisor

Date

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

The Literature of Loss: Modernity, Poetic Prose, and the Tendency Toward Contradiction

by

Jared Daniel Fagen

Advisor: Joshua Wilner

This study traces the historical and formal development of poetic prose beginning in the late eighteenth century through the mid to late nineteenth century. Drawing on research in poetics, narrative theory, genre theory, philosophy, and socioeconomic analysis and ideology, this study positions poetic prose—which encompasses lyrical narrative, prose poetry, and other emergent forms of hybridization—as a textual transgression that is a result of, and directly responds to, both the subjective anxieties of, and artistic possibilities made possible by, modernity. From this perspective, the study focuses on modernization’s rapid transformation of social relationships and individual and communal identities and modernity’s correspondence with a new literary expression which stylistically and conceptually exorcises an experience of loss and the contradictory conditions that modern reality has wrought by its rate of unprecedented progress and capitalist rationality.

The first part of this study examines the emergence of poetic prose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, linking the advent and urgency of modernity with Romanticism. Taking a Marxist approach, this chapter looks at how genre reinforces the rise of class and social disparities. The thesis then looks at the aesthetic theory and practice of William Wordsworth’s

Lyrical Ballads, in which the prosification of poetry represents the descent of poetic status, democratization, universality, and a renewal of nature in an increasingly urban and divided landscape, followed by the “impassioned prose” of Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, in which the poeticization of prose further distorts class distinctions and the modern reality that supports them and disrupts the utility and linearity of narrative.

The second part of this study investigates the formal properties of Charles Baudelaire’s *Paris Spleen* and Arthur Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell* and French Symbolism’s contributions to the interaction between prose and poetry. This section calls attention to the corruption of language and its figurative use as a more appropriate self-expression of interiority and subjective world building, in which poetic prose responds to the world’s mastery over experience and moral corruption, isolation, and despair displace literary and cultural convention and the meaning which relies on those customs. Lastly, this section also looks at the surface and typography of the poetic prose text and its relationship with the economy and employment of words.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Hybrid Beginnings: Wordsworth's Narrative Poetry and De Quincey's	
Impassioned Prose.....	1
Romanticism and Modernity.....	2
Wordsworth.....	7
De Quincey.....	15
II. Symbolism and the Soul's Subjective Realities: The Poetic Prose of Baudelaire	
and Rimbaud.....	23
Symbolism.....	25
Baudelaire.....	31
Rimbaud.....	42
III. Conclusion.....	57
IV. Bibliography.....	60

I. Hybrid Beginnings:

Wordsworth's Narrative Poetry and De Quincey's Impassioned Prose

As the modernization of the world accelerated at speeds unforeseen, and solidified with it the arrival and swift ascendancy of industrialist capitalist societies that had only come to the fore during the Renaissance,¹ a significant turn in literature occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Through departures from traditional formal techniques and emphases on taboo or unconsidered objects of artistic attentions, literature found renewed expression in animosities toward the chaos of progress and its consequence: bourgeois materialism, economic disparity, the metamorphoses of social relationships, and the experience of isolation and loss of both self and humanity. Thus characterized, though not without disputes, Romantic literature—the period's various authors and voices collectivized by their criticism of the times—transmitted aesthetically portrayals of modern emotional upheaval. In England, one such textual response to modernity was demonstrated in an impulse to utilize formal elements outside the writer's usual creative arsenal and borrow from other styles previously confined by literary decorum. This disregard for conventional uses of language and blurring of genre distinctions was exemplified most prominently by the lyric poetry of William Wordsworth and the "impassioned" prose of Thomas De Quincey, and was either made explicit by the articulation of an aesthetic theory or implied in the work itself. In the case of the former, the implementation of prosaic language in the *Lyrical Ballads* undermined, or wrested, the poetic diction once reserved for Aristotle's elite citizens; the political dimension notwithstanding, the correlation between a privileged class and genre as a signifier of that entitlement is complicated by Wordsworth's fusion of prose—the literature of the masses—with poetry—the literature of the select. In De Quincey's work, in

particular *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and *Suspiria de Profundis*, the poetic meandering of the prose text accessed through dreams (or drug-induced, dream-like trances) distorted the reality of linear motion that fortified modernity, and in so doing not only called into question prose's utilitarian function and communicative necessity, but the very constitution of reality itself: was the real to be conceived by one's relative business with the external world, or was reality an inner-conscious life in which one sought shelter? The deliberate hybridization of literature, in other words, simultaneously and contradictorily responds to modernity and reinforces the modern landscape, and establishes and relies on for its artistic possibility an anguished symbiosis of opposites and their irreconcilable rupture: prose and poetry, past and present, tradition and innovation, nature and society, interior and exterior, self and other, bourgeois and antibourgeois.

Romanticism and Modernity

To gain a better understanding of the hybrid text's significance, it is useful to look at the many approaches to Romanticism and in what way they correspond with modernity. While many scholars have agreed that Romanticism is inextricably linked to modernity, the problem of unifying the term as an historical concept or finding agreements between artists, historians, philosophers, political scientists, or sociologists on Romanticism's salient traits leads to the robustness, tenor, and potential of literature being produced during this period. Indeed, on a national level and literary basis, the similarities between French, English, or German Romanticism may be cancelled out by their subtle nuances. As René Wellek has famously stated, none of "the English poets of the time [...] recognized himself as a romanticist or admitted the

relevance of the debate to his own time and country.”² Others have also endorsed Wellek’s assertion that writers of the age refrained from using “Romantic” as an adjective to describe their work, which has become a source of bewilderment for those trying to get a hold on a precise meaning. For British literary critic Marilyn Butler, “English Romanticism is impossible to define with historical precision because the term itself is historically unsound.”³

Be that as it may, the enterprise of considering relevant features of Romanticism within and outside of literary contexts is nonetheless helpful, despite the discrepancies. To typecast Romanticism as merely a contrast to or practical evolutionary step away from its predecessor, Classicism, is not only superficial and obvious, but in other ways inaccurate, and subverts the philosophical, theoretical, and historical urgency that makes it unique. Every emergence of a new trend in literature can be said to share in common a freedom from the compositional and conceptual restraints imposed by the schools that had preceded it: this is both limiting and redundant. Acknowledging the impetus for this incitement to liberation, however, widens the scope and impact of Romanticism. It is not enough to argue, for example, that Romanticism runs counter to Enlightenment ideals—such as objectivity and rationalism—as Rousseau does, or that the rejection of Enlightenment principles meant the reincarnation of the spiritual senses and organic rather than social laws, as Edmund Burke (and, later, Henri Bergson) would assert.⁴ Likewise, to say that all tumultuous political events signal key shifts in literary practice is vague, or that Romanticism is solely the result of the French and Industrial Revolutions, as Marxist Romanticists have aptly contributed to the debate, is misleading. Insufficient on their own, a philosophical counter-Enlightenment argument and socioeconomic Marxist critique, put side-by-side, fill what each on its own lacks. Whereas Wellek, M. H. Abrams, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, and other post-World War II critics attempted—in spite of Arthur Lovejoy’s

abandonment—to outline a cohesive Romantic aesthetic, reducing and essentializing literature as a preoccupation with imagination, nature, and myth,⁵ they have done so perhaps arbitrarily, and to the exclusion of other Romantic values. Lovejoy's view, expressed in 1924, is fruitful on the premise that it allows the simultaneous existence of multiple perspectives and champions the plurality of the Romantic movement as its fundamental feature.⁶ Jerome McGann, to a certain extent, follows this view, seeing Romanticism as two distinct movements that run parallel to each other: "Romanticism," which takes into account the aesthetic movement, and the "Romantic period," which encapsulates the period's "many ideological struggles [...] and sharp cultural conflict [...] the civil wars of the romantic movement itself."⁷ Butler shares similar sentiments: "'Romanticism' is inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions which Western society has experienced and continues to experience since the middle of the eighteenth century."⁸ The experience Butler intimates is, of course, that of modern culture, and taking into account not one but multiple rejoinders to modernization further illustrates Romanticism's significance.

A Marxist view of modernity, corresponding with some of the intellectual contexts leading into the Romantic period,⁹ might shine a brighter light onto how the difficulty of uniting Romanticism might be resolved and bind competing ideas closer into a Romantic *weltanschauung*. More importantly, it will give us a point of departure from which to view a remodeled expression in literature that justifies universal, human values over capital, mercantile values. To start, many Marxist analyses, with some exceptions,¹⁰ take the opposition of bourgeois, capitalist ideals as their *raison d'être*, and, thus, unify the major hubs of the Romantic movement: England, Germany, and France. For Karl Mannheim, a contemporary of György Lukács, "the romantic experience is a general European phenomenon which emerged at

approximately the same time in all European countries” and which “arose partly as a genuine reaction to identical problems presented by a rationalized capitalist world.”¹¹ In addition to Mannheim and Lukács, whose *romantischer Antikapitalismus* was the first explicit association between Romanticism and anti-capitalism, similar anti-bourgeois sentiments which link Romanticism to a critique of modernity have made their way into the Romantic utopian writings of Herbert Marcuse and Ernst Bloch. Materialist criticism, which has its roots in Marxist theory and advances a socialist outlook centered on working-class concerns, mobilizes a compelling case for the cultural forces underpinning Romantic uses of language. English socialist Raymond Williams, in *Culture and Society*, defends the poetry of Wordsworth, Blake, and Keats as a Romantic last hope to hold onto the “human values” that the “development of society towards an industrial civilization was felt to be threatening and even destroying”¹² and the “mode of human experience and activity which progress of society seemed increasingly to deny.”¹³ From this Marxist socioeconomic historical point of reference, modernity—whose ethos, discerned by Max Weber, includes, among others, *Entzauberung der Welt* (the disenchantment of the world), *Zweckrationalität* (instrumental rationality), and bureaucratic authority¹⁴—and the capital complex—industrialization, scientific and technological progress, social and economic division, private ownership, etc.—are more intimately woven and have a deadlier purpose in the Romantic environment.

On the other side of the sociological viewpoint are the philosophical and theoretical treatments that may have led significantly to the Romanticist aesthetic, known or unbeknown to the writers of the period. Of these works, Rousseau’s *Of the Social Contract* is of particular note. Published in 1762, the *Social Contract* poses that in mankind’s natural state, in which the social circumstances of private property and injustice are absent, the only laws that govern mankind are

those of nature. The theory is further fleshed out by the “noble savage” who, uncivilized in his primitive surroundings, is ignorant of society’s material desires: nature, for Rousseau, is preferred over culture, and isolation over socialization. Adam Smith, on the other hand, took the opposite position, arguing that being a part of society allowed one to empathize (though Smith calls it sympathy) “by changing places in fancy with the sufferer,”¹⁵ a positive virtue that can only be obtained through the sharing of sentiments with another. One way to achieve empathy, which has as its target the acquisition of someone else’s perspective, is through the imagination. These two ideas—Rousseau’s return to nature and Smith’s virtue of imagination (used in the venture for a morally righteous civilization)—are, as we will examine in greater detail, crucial to Romantic literature, especially poetry.

From these different approaches to Romanticism, organized by a combined social, economic, historical, and philosophical framework, an important commonality can be detected: the discomfort we encounter when trying to homogenously define Romanticism, in relation to the Pythagorean structure of dichotomies which governs our perception, lies in the inherent contradictions the very concepts of Romantic literature—situated within the advent of modernity—suggest. While positing Romanticism as an exegesis or commentary on the apprehensions assumed under the pressures of modernization provides a profitable interpretation, the movement also implies a revolt from the present and a yearning for a past innocent of capital excess. The magnitude of Romanticism, by the definition sketched above, can be felt in the unison or harmony of antitheses: past and present, emotion and rationalism, individuality and universality, internality and externality, nostalgia and progress, and so on. In the sphere of literature, the prose and poetry genres are also amalgamated, and represent textually a Hegelian-Marxist view of modernity. The synthesis of prose and poetry, which has its roots in

Romanticism, is equally hostile to traditional forms and hospitable to former, archaic literary traditions. David Duff, a scholar of modern genre theory, has investigated the genre-mixing experiments that began to take shape during the Romantic period, tying “the coexistence of [...] contradictory tendencies—towards the dissolution and transcendence of genres, and towards their consolidation and exploitation”¹⁶ to the political turbulence of the French Revolution. Furthermore, Duff’s anti-generic hypothesis maintains, following Abrams, that the Romantic aesthetic emphasis on “originality, spontaneity, and self-expression” is “incompatible with the concept of genre, which [is] grounded in notions of convention and imitation.”¹⁷ As we shall see, hybridization did more than unsettle genre hierarchies: a new literary consciousness was being formed—a consciousness aware of its unconscious contradictions—and a new style was coming into its own existence.

Wordsworth

Prose is defined as written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure, and as a word has etymological roots in the Latin *prosa oratio*, “straightforward (discourse),” feminine of *prorsus*, “direct.”¹⁸ Prose styles in Ciceronian and Attic traditions have been widely practiced and studied,¹⁹ and up until the mid-eighteenth century the oratory and classical rhetoric qualities of prose largely remained in vogue and its forms—novels, essays, biographies, and historical narratives—kept remote from verse, pastorals, odes, elegies, idylls, and other poetic genres (exceptions exist, of course, especially in Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night* and the works of Montaigne, Laurence Sterne, Chateaubriand, and Gérard de Nerval). The classical traditions of poetry—such as rhyme and meter—had also been faithfully kept intact. The Romantic

movement, however, sought to upset the balance between prose and poetry, with their borders being crossed by James Macpherson's *Ossian* and, later, the poetic novels of Friedrich Schlegel, who vocalized in his *Athenaeum Fragments* that Romantic poetry "tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical."²⁰

By calling attention to genre distinctions, a criticism of modernity is made apparent. Genre, looked at like any other category, not only shapes our experiences, but—as Marxist theoreticians would attest—implies a structure of dominance and enforces a hierarchical order: we are defined or assigned by civilization's division of classes that order us in terms of social/economic status, and not by our humanity. In other words, genre steers our expectations of a text, but also has a practical function: to "bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which [it] belongs."²¹ Jacques Derrida's "law of the law of genre," which he calls "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy," further strengthens the bond between genre and sociocultural oppression.²² Genre, then, symbolically braces the economic and social gaps that modernity and capitalist programs have wedged. It also fixes the literary tradition that has sublimated poetry as the highest achievement of the literary arts, and relegated prose forms such as the novel to spoken language and familiar speech "borrowed from the lower spheres of life."²³ To blur the distinction between prose and poetry was both a literary travesty and a political action. We confront the Romantic collapse of genre in Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* upon our immediate encounter with the title of the collection. Like the juxtaposition of "prose" and "poem," which connote two separate forms, a similar sense of contradiction can be felt by reading "lyric" and "ballad" next to each other. The former, before the nineteenth century, referred to written accompaniments to music that often mirrored or

accentuated the sonic patterns, whereas the latter was, before the fifteenth century, a plot-driven, recited song in the folk tradition. Oxymoronic on the surface, the adjectivization of “lyric” and its proximity to “ballad” has a deeper meaning that is intertwined with Romanticism and which relates to the period’s insistence on democratization: “The *Lyrical* in the volume’s title indicates the attempt to have poetics both ways—both aestheticized and common, both practical and theoretical. By 1798, then, *lyric* was coming to mean both the abstract genre that complemented the dramatic and the epic [...] and the essential poetry of the people [...] the attempt in *Lyrical Ballads* to make both ways of understanding *lyric* work together was an index of how difficult it was to think about the lyric in both these ways at once.”²⁴

Following Schlegel, Wordsworth’s “breakdown of normative poetics”²⁵ and departure from the dominant neoclassical tradition is marked unambiguously in his 1802 “Preface” to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. He writes:

I have shewn that the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and I have previously asserted that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose. I will go further. I do not doubt that it may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. [...] They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears ‘such as Angels weep,’ but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.¹

Here, Wordsworth unites prose and poetry by their shared use of language qua language. On the other hand, he brings poetic language—traditionally ornamental and educated—down to the language of prose: the poet who employs the elite, angelic language of poetry and the prose

¹ William Wordsworth, “Preface,” in *Lyrical Ballads: 1798–1802* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 102. All further references to this work, abbreviated *LB*, will be included in the text.

writer who handles the ordinary, language of man, through their shared use of language to better communicate the emotions and passions that we all experience, now exist together on earth. Wordsworth's aesthetic project as proclaimed in the "Preface" is to reclaim the essence of poetry that it had forfeited for flowery abstraction and the "foreign splendor" (*LB*, 103) that the poet has unnecessarily brought to its work, and to restore poetry to a genuine primitivism, an innocence, an unencumbered "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (*LB*, 98) that the standards of poetic diction had rendered insincere and artificial. To rehabilitate poetry, Wordsworth turns to the "elementary feelings" of common men of rural occupation, who "being less under the influence of social vanity [...] convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions" (*LB*, 97) and whose language, therefore, is comparable to everyday speech. The insertion of prosaic language, for Wordsworth, not only brings poetry back to nature, but brings the poet closer to truth—mankind unadorned and not yet tainted by ambition—which had been lost and buried beneath metaphors and other poetic tropes.

Loss is an important, reoccurring theme in Wordsworth's poetic agenda. In England, breakthroughs in agrarian technology and methods which had arisen alongside the Industrial Revolution, transformed the demographic makeup of both rural towns and urban cities. As demands for increased, streamlined production grew, a middle class comprised of tradesmen, capitalists, manufacturers, merchants, educators, and other professions began to swell, accumulating in cities across the world and reshaping relationships among different groups of people from different walks of life into what Jürgen Habermas called the bourgeois public sphere, or "the sphere of private people coming together as a public."²⁶ For Wordsworth, the dangerous drawing power of the city—"the evil" caused by "the great national events which are daily taking place" (*LB*, 97–98)—reached even those in the country, and to counter the harmful

influence of urbanity and growing tensions between classes, he strove to invade the “dominant consensus” and “fragment it from within”²⁷ by aspiring to make his poetry available to *every* man; by bringing man back to the world of nature that modernity was so set on destroying. Wordsworth’s contribution to Romantic literature can therefore be conceived as “the literary form of a struggle taking place on many levels of society between the claims of *individualism* and the claims of *communitarianism*; that is, those claims that respond to identity as an always already existing voluntaristic self, and those that figure identity as emerging from a fabric of social narratives, with their attendant goals and expectations”²⁸ for “extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies” (*LB*, 99). In the modern world, the individual, private self loses its solitude, and humanity its essence. The Romantic poet, “a man speaking to men” (*LB*, 103) but “possessed of more than usual organic sensibility” (*LB*, 98), consequently exiles himself to better “direct [men’s] attentions” (*LB*, 106) back to their home in nature, in which the unelaborated language is appropriate and they are more naturally suited to experience the universal pleasures and pains of unmediated life. Thus, in his poem “Lines written in early Spring” (*LB*, 149), Wordsworth writes:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to mind.
To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it griev’d my heart to think
What man has made of man.

These lines express a subjective emotional moment in a prosaic language intended for accessibility. The poem, reading like a monologue, brings together a “sweet mood” and “sad

thoughts” contained within a single stanza; it also pits nature against culture while soliciting sadness for what “man has made of man,” or for what society has made of the individual.

Lukács’ appropriation of Novalis’s “homesickness”²⁹—the wish to be everywhere at home—speaks well beyond the Romanticism of disillusionment in the novel, and can be rightfully applied to Wordsworth’s ambition to prosify his poetry in order to rescue what had once been lost. Through a melancholic nostalgia for nature, the past is kept alive in the present not by “poetical subject matter or poetical language” but by “the quality of the poet’s imagination.”³⁰ In his poems, Wordsworth seeks a home for and with the everyday man in his ordinary, rural setting, which his imagination colors with emotion and passion to unify and give credence to the image-illusion. In “A Night Piece” (1798),³¹ Wordsworth describes a traveler whose journey is suddenly halted by a break in the clouds, in which the moon appears brightly. Through this figure—who is not given a description, which thus implies his representation of all men—we are party to a certain affect that is made explicit in not only the language of the poem, but from a subject who receives the affect. In other words, the poetic images—the moon, the clouds, the sky, the stars, etc.—are, in some ways, secondary to the narrative flow, the “peaceful calm,” the dénouement, the earthbound progress of the traveler. The abrupt, almost unexpected clarity of the sky provides at the same time a clarity or transition in the poem and, perhaps more importantly, a lucidity that the traveler—who, throughout the course of the “overcast” sky “treads / His lonesome path, with unobserving eye / Bent earthwards”—may not have realized without the intervention of nature. This “instantaneous gleam” from the fully visible moon not only helps the traveler to see his way better, but acts as a metaphor: the clearing of the clouds is also the clearing of the mind. It is through the traveler’s mind—his imagination, in which the moon “sails along”—that the images are felt (perhaps more than they are seen). When “the

Vision closes,” modern realities encroach on the scene, stifling the subject’s experience of emotional sincerity.

Wordsworth’s narration of the traveler in “A Night Piece” (“His lonesome path”) puts him at a distance, yet, paradoxically, the poet is intimately connected to the traveler’s emotions. Another kind of homelessness evident in Wordsworth’s prosaic poems reveals itself. The doctrine of universality that is so fundamental to Wordsworth’s aesthetic project means the poet is both nowhere (exiled) and everywhere (a moral instructor among the common order) at the same time: in exploring the “elementary feelings” (*LB*, 97) of common men, Wordsworth becomes consumed by—and loses himself in—them. “Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch” (*LB*, 82–83) begins with the distant narrative treatment of an old man who “is by nature led / To peace so perfect.” For Wordsworth, “He travels on, and in his face, his step, / His gait, is one expression.” Suddenly, five lines from the end of the poem (which is one stanza), the narrative is interrupted by an insertion of “I,” and a dialogue ensues to close out the poem:

—I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
‘Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital.’

The poet as self not only mixes textually with the object he describes, but the narration and dialogue blend to contradict or cancel poet, speaker, and representation. The lyric poem’s “quality of a break or rupture” of the “subjective being that makes itself heard in lyric poetry” is less opposed to “the collective,” as Theodor Adorno suggests,³² as he is paradoxically a part and at the margins of it. As Gérard Genette has noted, “In lyric poetry, utterances of reality—thus

authentic speech acts—do occur, but these are acts whose source remains indeterminate, for the lyric ‘I’ is inherently incapable of being positively identified either with the poet in person or with any other determined subject.”³³ Consider, also, Don Bialostosky’s argument:

Represented talking (lyric) and represented telling (narrative), though neither requires us to construct a visible objectified speaker like a dramatic character on a stage, are nonetheless represented utterances that imply a perspective from which they have been “heard” and inscribed distinct from the perspective from which they are spoken. Even when the poet sets down speeches which he owns (or does not expressly disown), his setting them down differs from his saying them and opens a space in which these different perspectives can be explored.³⁴

The dialogic and poetic tendencies of “Old Man Travelling” exemplify the contradictions characteristic to Romantic literature under the anxieties of modernity in several ways. First, the emotional element—particularly the image of the old man making his way to bid farewell to his son before he dies—is rationally composed, according to poetic surface, despite the intensity the situation of trying to see your loved one before he succumbs to his wounds (if you can make it in time) calls for. Emotion and thought are also at odds, and the latter appears to take precedence (“A man who does not move with pain, but moves / With thought” and “All effort seems forgotten”). Secondly, in terms of the form’s impurity, Wordsworth’s narrative-speech action, framed by meter, shows how tradition—the artistic control—can act as the temperance of the anarchic soul in search of a home. The insertion of prose in the poem allows the language to wander (though not too far). Moreover, the poem, visibly remaining as such to the eye, also “restrain[s]” (*LB*, 110) the “mean or ludicrous” (*LB*, 114) language poems like “The Idiot Boy,” “Poor Susan,” “The Two Thieves,” or “The Mad Mother” may use as their method of expression. The impropriety or vulgarity of speech language, when aestheticized, is safely softened: meter “divest[s] language in a certain degree of its reality” (*LB*, 110). However, Wordsworth’s coalescence of thoughts, feelings, and actions, comingled together in the text, portrays not so

much a diametrical opposition as they do a community of elements brought together by the shared experience the poem makes possible. The candid subjective emotion of the poet-speaker, quarantined from the harsh realities of class competition, becomes the humanistic emotion common to us all.

De Quincey

In her introduction to *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley discusses the genesis of her novel. Vacationing in Geneva, she and her company of poets are trapped inside due to a prolonged bout of inclement weather, and to pass the idle hours, they read aloud ghost stories translated from the German into French. Lord Byron, inspired by the tales, charges everyone to write their own ghost story and share what they have composed with the group. Enthusiasm for the exercise, however, quickly abates, and the poets, “annoyed by the platitude of prose, speedily relinquished their uncongenial task.”³⁵ While amusing, the introduction points to the relative status of genre (let alone gender expectations), in which poetry was “clothed in all the light” and prose was “the machinery of a story.” Metaphorically, however, Shelley’s creation of the “hideous progeny”³⁶ of *Frankenstein* was appropriate to the shifts taking place in literature during the Romantic period, in which, as Percy Shelley had written in his “Preface” to the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, “the most humble novelist, who seeks to confer or receive amusement from his labours, may, without presumption, apply to prose fiction a licence, or rather a rule, from the adoption of which so many exquisite combinations of human feeling have resulted in the highest specimens of poetry.”³⁷

De Quincey, who made a living off his journalistic prose (albeit meagerly), felt the effects of the pre-established hierarchy of genres both personally and intellectually. In this state of affairs, the poeticization of his prose was, in many ways, a reclamation of that former self who had longed to be a poet like Wordsworth; a labor of love just as it was a labor of economic necessity. As a writer of prose, De Quincey—who had been raised with upper-middle class values—was bound to societal demands and the reality of lower-class life. As a philosopher and poet, whose occupations were mutually concerned with human nature and the welfare of humanity as a whole, he transcended categories of class and distorted the reality around him, replacing it with the reality within him. The *Confessions* analogizes society with the genre of prose and individuality with the genre of poetry, and is a work which finds De Quincey in a constant struggle between rich and poor, reality and irreality. The addition of a poetic intensity to his prose disobeyed genre delineations just as it redefined, in constant flux and frenzy, his own socioeconomic identity: the transgression of genre was also a transgression of class. Whereas Wordsworth used prose to inject an everyday, ordinary realism into his poetry, De Quincey endeavored to displace the “fierce condition of eternal hurry” that was “incompatible with much elevation of thought” by turning his prose into a “machinery for dreaming,”³⁸ in which it might, via poetic means, access the true, unfettered reality that lay beneath the artificial representation that Wordsworth had removed. If Wordsworth’s hybrid tactics were an attempt to rediscover a forgotten, lost world by stepping back into nature, De Quincey’s predilection for hybridization was an effort to resurrect a vision of the world that had always existed within, though “in a dormant state,”ⁱⁱ but which a poetic prose thrusts out into the environs of modernization. It is through dreaming, it is through laudanum, that poetic visions may resurface to overcome “the

ⁱⁱ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1995), 59. All further references to this work, abbreviated *C*, will be included in the text.

multitudinous disorder of human affairs,”³⁹ to make modern reality an illusion. It is the dreaming faculty “through which man communicates with the shadowy,”⁴⁰ hidden parts of himself and humanity, and through the blurring of genre that we may recover the shape of poetic reality “lost beneath the shadow” of prose.⁴¹

De Quincey is everywhere homeless in the *Confessions*: he is *literally* “houseless” (C, 15) in London and *figuratively* destitute in prose, finding shelter only in the disorientation of poetry. Homeless, poetic prose—in which “facts move through a wilderness of natural thoughts or feelings”⁴²—allows De Quincey to move freely between the concrete and metaphoric. It also permits him to transverse class boundaries. A philosopher and poet (at heart), his educational background sets him above, though intangibly, the proletariat sphere in which he financially belongs. De Quincey’s oscillation between dependence on and independence from the “gentle blood” of his lineage (C, 14) is also enigmatic. Disappointed with the “poverty and meagerness” (C, 6) of his head-master’s understanding, De Quincey abandons his studies, metaphorically renouncing his ancestry. But, not long after this gesture, and having been living a poor, peripatetic life, he appeals to the socioeconomic class he recently rejected. He visits the Jewish money-lenders with “proof” of claim to his father’s inheritance, but is met with scrutinizing and skeptical eyes: “It was strange to me to find my own self, *materialiter* considered (so I expressed it, for I doted on logical accuracy of distinctions), accused, or at least suspected, of counterfeiting my own self, *formaliter* considered” (C, 22–23). Additionally, further confusion about De Quincey’s class loyalty results from his very confession of opium use, making him “the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that ‘decent drapery’” of “self-respecting” society (C, 1). Indeed, the admission places De Quincey in a category of those who, as history and cultural habit have deemed, are prone to make confession:

“demireps, adventurers, or swindlers” (C, 1). In other words, De Quincey positions the scholar on the same plane as the “swindler.” Opium eaters, however, are classless. Men of extreme power and influence, including deans, lords, diplomats, doctors, poets (like Coleridge), and philosophers imbibe just as well as cotton workers: “the entire population of England” (C, 3), men along all rungs of the social ladder, are united under opium. For the druggists of London, “the difficulty of distinguishing those persons, to whom habit had rendered opium necessary, from such as were purchasing it with a view to suicide, occasioned them daily trouble and disputes” (C, 3). Neither taking the position of “high” or “low,” “educated” or “uneducated,” “guilty” or “innocent,” De Quincey is all positions: a “man of the world” (of human nature) and not a man for the world (to be owned by society). As such, De Quincey—his allowance dwindling down—moves within the circle of servants like the “poor friendless child” (C, 15) and prostitutes, most feverishly Ann. However, De Quincey has “pretensions to rank or high blood” (C, 27) and still depends on their allowance. Despite this superficial connection, De Quincey takes comfort “released from some yoke of labour” (C, 41), and his release is his Saturday evenings spent mingling with the poor, who “are far more philosophic than the rich [...] they show a more ready and cheerful submission to what they consider as irremediable evils, or irreparable losses” (C, 42).

His poetic meandering and textual digressions also compromise the idea of a permanent habitation. If prose should be an expression that reveals a predisposition to gain or receive from its utterance some kind of outcome, goal, or aim, it is by “accident” that De Quincey is a poet. Intending to make his way to Westmorland after fleeing his boarding school, “Accident [...] gave a different direction to [his] wanderings” (C, 10), and De Quincey finds himself in North Wales before, again by accident, he is driven “out to wander again” (C, 11). While he does—on

spare occasion—reach where he had planned to go, it is the space between destinations that we are made colorfully aware of. For De Quincey, it is the route and not the residence, the embellishments and omissions “for want of room” (C, 14), which give his prose a richness, and which make him a “questionable *subject-in-process*.”⁴³ The quest for a home becomes a state of perpetual becoming, and if he does become something, it is never for too long. As a poet and habitual opium eater, operating in the space of dreams, De Quincey is perpetually in-between. He writes, in the first few lines in “The Pains of Opium,” that he has “not been able to compose the notes for this part of [his] narrative into any regular and connected shape” (C, 55). (It’s also relevant to point out that the textual space of the prose here is, as in other parts of the *Confessions*, interrupted by a poem; in this case the text is punctuated by an excerpt from Shelley’s “The Revolt of Islam.”) He enters into the text “*in medias res*” (C, 56), and the poetry springs from “an upheaving, from its lowest depths, of the inner spirit! what an apocalypse of the world within me!” (C, 34). Take, for example, this passage, in which De Quincey relates one of the effects of his latter opium addiction:

I was once told by a near relative of mine, that having in her childhood fallen into a river, and being on the very verge of death but for the critical assistance which reached her, she saw in a moment her whole life, in its minutest incidents, arrayed before her simultaneously as in a mirror; and she had a faculty developed as suddenly for comprehending the whole and every part. This, from some opium experiences of mine, I can believe; I have, indeed, seen the same thing asserted twice in modern books, and accompanied by a remark which I am convinced is true; viz. that the dread book of account, which the Scriptures speak of, is, in fact, the mind itself of each individual. Of this at least, I feel assured, that there is no such thing as *forgetting* possible to the mind; a thousand accidents may, and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind; accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil; but alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever; just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day, whereas, in fact, we all know that it is the light which is drawn over them as a veil—and that they are waiting to be revealed when the obscuring daylight shall be withdrawn (C, 61).

Here, meaning is in service to figurative language, which becomes secondary to the means: indeed, the poetic expression is a means to the infinite and not a means to an end. De Quincey draws up a “tumult of images, illustrative or allusive,”⁴⁴ not for the benefit of relaying a story (which he doesn’t complete), but for the coexistence of narrative and emotional resonance that reside together beneath the “veil,” the “*simultaneity* of arrangement.”⁴⁵ Like Wordsworth, who reduced the status of poetry by bringing it closer to prose, De Quincey elevates prose by letting it wander poetically.

For Nietzsche, Romanticism was “an ambiguous question, like everything modern.”⁴⁶ This obscurity is perhaps made palpable by the poet and prose writer’s escape from the world through the self-deception of their textual infringements. For Wordsworth and De Quincey, the relationship between prose and poetry was a constant gyration between theme and subject, decoration and embellishment, intelligence and imagination, the rational transmission of facts and the unjustifiable expression of emotion. As we have seen, the hybrid text has its heritage in the crisis of modernity, which continues to accelerate and shows no sign of slowing down. In the next section, we will look closely at the French Symbolist inheritance of Romanticism, the retreat inwards, the definite proclamation and formal features of a poetic prose and the prose poem, new challenges to solitude in the shrinking of textual and municipal economies, and a new beauty that arises from artistic disobedience.

Notes

¹ See Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: The Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002), 73.

² René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 110.

³ Marilyn Butler, “Romanticism in England,” in *Romanticism in National Context*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37.

⁴ See Isaiah Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” in *Against the Current* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1–32.

⁵ See Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe, eds., *Romanticism: Points of View* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1989), 8.

⁶ “The word ‘romantic’ has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing.” See Alexander Spencer, *Romantic narratives in international politics: Pirates, rebels and mercenaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 40.

⁷ Jerome McGann, “Rethinking Romanticism,” in *Byron and Romanticism*, ed. James Soderholm (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 236–237. See, also, Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁸ Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760–1830* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 184.

⁹ See Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ See Christopher Caudwell, “The Bourgeois Illusion and English Romantic Poetry,” in Gleckner and Enscoe, *Romanticism*, 108–124.

¹¹ Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*, eds. David Kettler, Volker Meja, and Nico Stehr, trans. Kettler and Meja (London: Routledge, 1986), 44.

¹² Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴ See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism and other Writings*, eds., trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002).

¹⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12. See, also, William Hazlitt, “An Essay on the Principles of Human Action” (1805).

¹⁶ David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ix.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1. See, also, M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 90.

¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “prose,” accessed December 20, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/prose>.

¹⁹ See, for example, Morris W. Croll, *Attic and Baroque Prose Style: The Anti-Ciceronian Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), and, Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose: Essays in Prosaics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 31.

²¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19.

²² See Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell, “The Law of Genre,” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 7 No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn 1980): 59. See, also, Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

²³ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 25.

²⁴ Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul Rouzer, eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Fourth Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 831.

²⁵ Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 7.

²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 27.

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London/New York: Verso Books, 2005), 36.

²⁸ Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

²⁹ György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 29.

³⁰ Robert Langbaum, "Wordsworth and the Prose Tradition in Poetry," *The Wordsworth Circle*, Vol. 27 No. 1 (1996): 48–51.

³¹ William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44.

³² Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York/London: Routledge, 1989), 158.

³³ Gérard Genette, *Fiction & Diction*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 12.

³⁴ Don Bialostosky, "Narrative Diction and the Poetics of Speech," in *Making Tales: The Poetics of Wordsworth's Narrative Experiments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 24.

³⁵ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ Percy Shelley, "Preface," in *Frankenstein*, 11.

³⁸ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 88–89.

³⁹ Virginia Woolf, "Impassioned Prose," in *Collected Essays: Volume I* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 169.

⁴⁰ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, 90.

⁴¹ M. W. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 7.

⁴² De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, 95.

⁴³ Julia Kristeva, "From One Identity to Another," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, ed., Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 135

⁴⁴ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, 149.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), 445–446.

II. Symbolism and the Soul's Subjective Realities:

The Poetic Prose of Baudelaire and Rimbaud

The realities of the modern world and how they might be articulated through literary expression, as we have just glimpsed from the Romantic aesthetics of Wordsworth and De Quincey, become one of the central motives for poetic prose. On the one hand, Wordsworth's forfeit of the poetic self—the exile of the “I” on behalf of a de-elevated, all-inclusive poetry, achieved by the instrumentation of prose diction—was a gesture that contradictorily emphasized universality in its content but conceptually displaced the individual whose subjective emotion gave rise to such togetherness, paralleling a world in which the common man, once relegated only to his private realm, was coming that much closer into contact with his bourgeois makers. On the other hand, De Quincey's disruption of narrative continuity was an effort to complicate the linear progress of modernization that prose embodied and which the poetic self—whose genuine reality was not lived in a perpetual forward motion but a constant wandering between past and present—could not abide: De Quincey's poetic prose establishes a relationship between decoration and embellishment (poetry) and theme and subject (prose) in which the themes of his prose (opium and dreaming) permit an elaborate system of poetic digressions. For *both* Wordsworth and De Quincey, “the language of poetry becomes a responsive gesture to inner motivations that correlate with outer stimuli [...] the poet's language begins to respond to the world he sees, hears, and feels, not according to some general laws of poetic decorum, but according to the poet's subjective feelings stimulated by what his senses perceive.”¹ While the world remains fixed, it is Wordsworth the poet who alters poetry towards that which he sees as the direction the world is headed—democratization and, thus, the employment of prose for the mass

dissemination of pleasurable experience. While the world becomes increasingly foreign, it is De Quincey, equally less at home, who de-familiarizes the prose language of the world through a figurative and poetic expression that satisfies an inner reality.

The groundwork for a hybrid literature laid by both Wordsworth and De Quincey is given new seeds from which poetic prose will blossom in middle to late nineteenth century France with the first stirrings of Symbolism, in which, as Michael Riffaterre has pointed out, “such themes as the corruption of values and world-weary cynicism”² continue to be harbored but with a new, intensified despair. From the continued onslaught of modernization and the anxieties of modernity, the logic of late capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, and cultural decadence, literature is renewed by a conceptual approach that Richard Ellmann characterizes as “impersonal where the romantics had been personal, reticent where the romantics had been indiscreet, esoteric where the romantics had been popular.”³ If Wordsworth and De Quincey’s responses to modernity—their traversing of generic limitations—can be seen as an attempt to link appearances between artistic and actual worlds, the hybridization found in Symbolism attempts to distort those appearances. Whereas “in Romantic poetry the world of objects, the phenomenal world, usually remains constant, and the poet-subject masters the world he perceives insofar as this world serves to awaken, change, and stir his sensibilities,” the Symbolists found themselves mastered by the world, and sought to create “a subjective reality of their own.”⁴ Charles Baudelaire, whom Ellmann considers the father of Symbolism, gives the prose poem form a (albeit somewhat nuanced) definition for the first time in his *Paris Spleen*, simultaneously attacking traditional verse structure and transforming the desperation of urbanity into a subjective aesthetic experience. Following Baudelaire’s *petite poèmes en prose* is the poetic prose of Arthur Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell*, a text in which the self/world relationship grows

ever more violent as the continued amalgamation of poetry/prose reaches new heights of transgression that makes not only the borders of genre obsolete, but the syntactical order of language itself.

Symbolism

For the Symbolist poet, a new contradiction and sense of loss emerges: “[the poet] seems forever alienated from an ideal world and also forever acutely conscious not only of this separation but also of the sordid reality from whose perspective he is obliged to seek the azure of the ideal world. In short, the poet is trapped between his impulse to recover the transcendent world and his awareness of the utter impossibility of ever doing so.”⁵ In the landscape of urban decay, the “ideal world”—the world of nature and an innocent, unencumbered nature of mankind—becomes unreachable, and something that can only be captured through “impressions” rather than realistic depictions.⁶ Symbolist literature, therefore, is the expression of an interiority: the tumult of the soul becomes the distorted lens one looks through, in which the world is remade in the soul’s distorted image. The sudden desire to cease writing descriptions of “outward things” for William Butler Yeats, revealed in his 1898 essay “The Autumn of the Flesh,” was what Arthur Symons described more systematically, under the influence of Yeats, just a year later. Whereas Wordsworth sought to express the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” Yeats identified a new poetry that sought to reflect “a spontaneous expression of an interior life.”⁷ For Symons, it is the “symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible”⁸—the symbol, according to Comte Goblet d’Alviella in *The Migration of Symbols*, as a “representation which

does not aim at being a reproduction” of the external world, as “mere compromises, mere indications,”⁹ as a perspective rather than a definitive answer.

Before Alain Robbe-Grillet defended kitsch for its divorce from signification, Walter Pater revived Theophile Gautier’s adoption of the term *l’art pour l’art* (“art for art’s sake,” later amended to “art for its own sake”). When Matthew Arnold claimed that the critic’s main effort should be “to see the object as in itself it really is,”¹⁰ Pater added, in his preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), that “in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly.”¹¹ Furthermore, his controversial “conclusion” to the book—which was removed from the second edition, renamed *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, to stave off accusations of hedonism and ahistoricism—posits artistic expression as another kind of annulment (or disassociation), as a sort of respite from the world of external objects which encroach upon it. He writes:

But when reflection begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—color, odor, texture—in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind.¹²

This exposition on impression reveals two important keys. On the one hand, it relates artistic expression not as a reflection of the world of objects, but charges it with the task of “expanding the interval”¹³ of the impressed moment before it can be, inevitably, “extinguished” by external temporal conditions and lived realities. Secondly, Pater draws attention to the force of language as a system of embedded meaning on which the world relies but the symbol, by its inherent

ambiguity, renders useless. Here, again, the inner processes, the “inward world of thought and feeling”—the “perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” put on full display—might be called on faithfully to lessen the harm of “what is real in our life.”¹⁴ Pater will call this performance of interiority (in the same year Symons’ *The Symbolist Movement* is published) “soul in style,”¹⁵ in which expression is no longer in service to the communication or reinforcement of facts, but the presentation of one’s *relative sense* of facts similar to De Quincey: sense being one’s ability to either embellish or manipulate facts that cannot be absolutely omitted but only alleviated. Sense, also, being the opposite of what is implied by the order of language: unreliable, subjective, unjustified. In other words, the “soul in style,” unimpeded by poetic or narrative convention, is therefore not only an attempt to remake the world, as previously mentioned, but also an attempt to displace it as the subject of art and literature.

Arthur Schopenhauer’s essay “On Authorship and Style,” originally published in German in 1851, can be read as a precursor to (or shared sentiment with) the Symbolist poets who trained their attention on the stylization, or artistic rendering, of the world through individual aesthetic impressions rather than faithful reproductions. If for Schopenhauer style “is the mere silhouette of the thought,”¹⁶ style stems from and belongs to an “inner perception.”¹⁷ Given this illustration of style as a manifestation of interior experience, emerging upon the ruins it finds itself among, there may be no wonder, then, why Schopenhauer and his followers (more directly Nietzsche, then Theodor Adorno) also shared a fondness for music, which they considered the pinnacle and aspiration of art. In the sphere of literature, on a linguistic level, the symbolic significance of music is that its expression is self-referential, thus free from the realm of concepts or external representation. Schopenhauer’s influence on Édouard Dujardin’s prose, especially on the novel

Les Lauriers sont coupés (1887), is precisely a response to a language overcrowded by conceptual meaning, in which no artistic merit can be found. A melodic style, orchestrated from the inside, releases language from the governing body of ideas into “the life of the soul expressed through the incessant eruption of musical motifs, coming up to speak, one after the other, undefined and in succession, the states of thought, in no logical order, in the form of bursts of thought rising from the depths of the self.”¹⁸ Paul Valéry makes a similar case for poetry when he writes “[w]hat was baptized *Symbolism* can be very simply described as the common intention of several groups of poets (otherwise mutually inimical) to ‘reclaim their own from Music.’”¹⁹ Moreover, the “sustained musical feeling” in Symbolist poetry has a Schopenhauerian effect, in which “language is no longer a transitive act, an expedient,” but, on the contrary, “has its own value, which must remain intact in spite of the operations of the intellect on the given propositions. Poetic language must preserve itself, through itself, and remain the same, not to be altered by the act of intelligence that finds or gives it a meaning.”²⁰ The poetic language of the symbol, in this regard, operates within the interval that, though only briefly, separates lived realities (the world of ideas and language being just one of many) from aesthetic realities. Style, as Susan Sontag writes (echoing Valéry), places the accent less on what is being said than on the manner by which it is said.²¹ Adorno’s “will to style,” in which “the concept of form marks out art’s sharp antithesis to an empirical world in which art’s right to exist is uncertain,”²² also means, according to José Ortega y Gasset, a will “to deform reality, to derealize; style involves dehumanization.”²³

The nineteenth-century “sense of an ending,” in addition to the fear of social collapse, imperial decline, and the capitalist agenda, created a backdrop for a paradigm of style—of psychic and spiritual distress as aesthetic outlook—as literary subject that fundamentally

disobeys the referentiality of language and traditional literary forms—such as the isolation of lines in verse and the dramatic structure of fictional narratives—which limit artistic expression to taxonomic allegiance and generic representations of reality that genres support. A style of significant importance that developed from this Symbolist suspicion of meanings was the prose poem, which came to prominence in 1869 with the posthumous publication of Baudelaire’s *Paris Spleen*. While the stylistic connection between prose and poetry—as well as the leap from formal verse (and *vers libre*) to the prose poem, its formal characteristics, and its motivation—is difficult to trace because of the inherent contradiction “prose” as an adjective of “poem” posits (much like Wordsworth and Coleridge’s juxtaposition of “lyrical” and “ballads”), LeRoy Breunig offers an important insight into the historical and artistic appeal of obscuring generic boundaries:

This blurring of the distinction between prose and poetry and the insistence upon new forms (“demandons aux *poètes du nouveau*”) combine with the notion of poetry as “voyance” (“les inventions d’inconnu réclament des formes nouvelles” [inventions of the unknown require new forms]) to produce a style that is completely liberated from the shackles of meter and rhyme. In the remark “si ce que [le poète] rapporte de *là-bas* a forme, il donne forme; si c’est informe il donne de l’informe” (“if what [the poet] brings back from *beyond* has form, he gives form; if it is formless he gives the formlessness”), if “forme” denotes verse, “informe” can mean only the prose poem.²⁴

The hybridization of prose and poetry in the prose poem, therefore, is an artistic act of transgression created within the tensions of the old and new, past and present, which first came to light in the Romantic works of Wordsworth and De Quincey; poetry, as Roman Jakobson famously stated, “as organized violence committed on everyday speech” (speech being analogous to prose). In addition to problematizing the prose/poetry dichotomy, the prose poem, as a unified style, immediately corrupts the surface of each individual genre—hybridized, poetry and prose become no longer wholly recognizable as separate entities; genre loses the quality (and

assuredness) of appearance. The transgression of the prose poem, however, is performed not by taking action, but by retreat, by exile, by not participating. The broken line of a poem, the syntax of fiction, stay hidden within the cadence of the prose poem itself, and in which, as Stéphane Mallarmé suggests, “the prose of any luxurious writer—liberated from the carefree style usually affected—a prose that’s ornamental, is worth as much as a broken line of poetry, playing in its timbres and indeed with hidden rhymes.”²⁵ (Indeed, for Mallarmé there was no distinction between poetry and prose where both were composed for artistic ends.) Stylistically, this breakdown of recognizable boundaries lies at the heart of Symbolist poetics and its prioritization of aesthetic contemplation over abstract meaning that language enforces, its flight from an ordered, structured reality into the imagination, from which the soul surfaces (appears) once the world deteriorates.

As the interval of an impression, an inner perception of the soul made manifest, a sense of the world rather than the fact of it or its truth—as the expression of many meanings, emotional experiences, and reactions rather than only one—the prose poem is a departure; insubordinate, unruly, and wayward, and the uneasiness the form stirs is the anxiety we encounter when the preconceived is no longer conceivable. As Joseph de Maistre put it in *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, published in 1821, “every individual or national degradation is immediately heralded by a rigorously proportional degradation in language.”²⁶ For Emil Cioran: “Words have the same destiny as empires. [. . .] the writer wants his own style, to individualize himself by expression; he succeeds only by destroying his language, violating its rules, undermining its structure, its magnificent monotony.”²⁷ If the answer to Schopenhauer’s pessimism is the foregrounding of aestheticism, the inner disorder of the prose poem corresponds to the dissatisfaction with outer order.

Baudelaire

In *Paris Spleen*'s dedication to Arsène Houssaye, Baudelaire provides his definition of the prose poem: "Which one of us, in his moments of ambition, has not dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience?"ⁱ From these remarks it is clear that, for Baudelaire, "the miracle of a poetic prose" is the poet's liberation from the traditional constraints of formal verse, in particular the constrictions of the alexandrine line. In a spirit reminiscent of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, the hierarchy of genre is undermined: the instrumentation of prose is in service to the de-elevation of poetry and poetic language's loss of privilege. But unlike Wordsworth, who maintained a poetic surface to both raise the prose element and temper the prosaic subjects of his work, Baudelaire is less concerned with poetic decorum—and equally indifferent to the project of raising the impoverished subject in the sympathetic eyes of the educated bourgeois, as was Wordsworth's wont—and lets his text extend from margin to margin, with interruptions or turns of thought indicated not by the isolation of lines, but indentations of cascading sentences. Baudelaire's typographical transgression has symbolic significance. Solitude for Wordsworth was a separation from modernization and a retreat from "lonely rooms" and "the din / Of towns and cities"²⁸ into nature, where he and the common man can seek respite from class-consciousness and reach a romantic "ideal of organic unity."²⁹ It is not only the content and subject matter of Wordsworth's poems that demonstrate this withdrawal, but also his remaining faithful to the poetic form, in

ⁱ Charles Baudelaire, "To Arsène Houssaye," in *Paris Spleen*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1970), ix–x. All further references to this work, abbreviated *PS*, will be included in the text.

which his use of line breaks can be interpreted to signify isolation and disconnectedness from the progress of modernization textually just as, contradictorily, common man comes together in prosaic language and nature. Baudelaire's foray into prose, in appearance and his use of narrative language, signifies both his exile from nature and his being thrust into the masses of the city: the text of his prose poems crowds the page. There is, however, a kind of displacement that takes place in the text which links Baudelaire and Wordsworth: the poet-individual, in their plan to include all, becomes lost in their emotional reverie which depends so essentially on the very interaction with the objects of their poems. But while this loss of self in a sacrifice on behalf of the objects depicted is a Romantic consequence, Baudelaire remains indifferent ("To Every Man His Chimera") and, in "The Eyes of the Poor" (*PS*, 52–53), even cruel ("Those people are insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can't you tell the proprietor to send them away?") to his fellow city dwellers where Wordsworth is sympathetic: Baudelaire is in place and apart. His entrance into the crowd—where he must be searched for through poetic markers within a congested textual space—is not without ulterior motivations which only serve the poet's aesthetic purposes: that of "enjoy[ing] the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or some one else, as he chooses." Whereas Wordsworth's solitude could only be found in his own self-isolation, "multitude" and "solitude" for Baudelaire are "identical terms, and interchangeable by the active and fertile poet." The prose poem, for Baudelaire, represents "the soul giving itself entire [...] to the unexpected as it comes along, to the stranger as he passes" ("Crowds," *PS*, 20). In Baudelaire's Parisian reality, nature is itself sequestered, at a cruel distance, and cannot be realized: in place of the perceived natural beauty of the world that was at Wordsworth's disposal, from which his poems had sprung forth symbiotically, are the "terror of horses and vehicles" ("Loss of a Halo," *PS*, 94). In the city it is the grotesque, derelict, and filthy

that must be poeticized, and all that was beautiful and inspiring in Wordsworth's natural environment, still an ideal yet less reachable, must be made anew, though never intact, through both the distortion and invention of reality by an inner perception. For Baudelaire, the prose poem is a space in which to express "an anarchic disorganization of the universe, from out of which he can call up another universe, recreate a world."³⁰ In other words, beauty must be discovered again in the grotesque side of life.

Baudelaire's prose poem "Windows" (*PS*, 77) is exemplary for its loss of nature and subsequent reinvention of the external world's function in poetry and the role of poetic imagination in this new aestheticized environment. The prose poem begins with the poet no longer looking out toward nature from the window of his garret as in the poem "A Landscape"—in which "high bells," "babbling human bands," "clock-towers like spars against the sky," and "The threads of smoke that rise above the town" mix with the speaker's "dream of blue horizons deep, / Of gardens where the marble fountains weep," and "of ever-singing birds"³¹—but, rather, contemplating the inside of a room from the street outside, where society has ultimately transformed nature and, therefore, the poet's reliance on it for poetic stimulation. For Baudelaire, "Looking from outside into an open window" reveals less than "when one looks through a closed window." In other words, the poet that describes what already exists, or which is already knowable, dismisses the poetic potential of discovery. Here, again, we have the kind of Symbolist literature "in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream."³² It is the poet's expression of interior experience that the reader is invited to penetrate ("What one can see out in the sunlight is always less interesting than what goes on behind a window pane"). Likewise, the "more mysterious" and "more dazzling" allure of "a single candle" does more to illuminate the closed window than does the blinding sun: the

artificial replaces the natural. It is the window of the soul, housed within “that black or luminous square,” where “life lives, life dreams, and life suffers,” and not the world where the body is thrown out and spurred into action.

Without any transition that the prosaic form can traditionally be relied on to facilitate, the poet suddenly makes apparent the possibilities of this inward reality in the prose poem’s next stanza, or paragraph. Nature, expressed by Wordsworth in the prose language of ordinary men, is immediately defamiliarized by Baudelaire’s use of metaphor to paint a picture of the journey his vision takes from the inside: “Across the ocean of roofs.” The interior perspective obstructs what it observes just as the tops of buildings impede one’s view of nature, and this inward interference is contradictorily a relief from and commonality with the world. Baudelaire then reveals that in his sight is a “middle-aged woman,” and the reader is led to believe that this is an image that reoccurs every time the poet looks across the city from his window (“her face already lined, who is forever bending over something and who never goes out”). For Baudelaire, the prose-poem form itself is a space of unmitigated unraveling that displays a kind of fragile reliability of generic expectations. The action (or inaction) of the prose poem and middle-aged woman— isolated in civilization and not nature—is just a “story” that the poet has invented from his imagination, “out of practically nothing at all.” The narrative here is used to portray something which occurs only for the poet, just as the metaphor of the window is a symbol of the poet’s subjective reality shared without an authoritative purpose. Consider the poem’s conclusion, which ends in a question: “But what does it matter what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?”

Wordsworth’s prosaic operation within the appearance of a poem—rhyme, meter, etc.— qualifies the prose qualities he utilizes as poetic. This, again, is not the case for Baudelaire’s

poems in prose, which dismantle the poetic form. How, then, does Baudelaire issue a criticism of the restrictions of traditional verse while dismantling the semblance, or disposition, of a poem? This is achieved by contradictorily deconstructing the illusions of the lyric and applying what's left to express the predicament of the self in its new modern environment, an experience of the "inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism."³³ One formal similarity the prose poem shares with its verse counterpart is brevity, its short lyrical outburst. As Michel Beaujour observes: "a prose piece must be short in order to achieve some verisimilitude for its claims to poeticalness. Shortness presents at least a presumption of lyrical energy at work, a presumption which may be confirmed by the presence of specifically lyrical features such as broken rhythm and imagery."³⁴ Baudelaire's "experience" is the short-lived poetic inspiration that is always competing with the realities that encroach upon it. In the prose poem "The Soup and the Clouds" (*PS*, 91), poetic compulsion and lived reality are intertwined in a sort of tensed transformative process. In and around one hundred words in total, "The Soup and the Clouds" returns the poet of "A Landscape"—in the first two lines—back to looking out an open window, this time while his "dear little mad beloved" serves him a bowl of soup. Here, Pater's "impressions," the writer's internal, subjective sense of something external, is akin to Baudelaire's "correspondences," or the intangible yet felt link between "external reality and the mind."³⁵ The description "dear little mad beloved" conjoins opposites that correlate with the poet's situation of play between the inner ("dear" and "beloved," which are endearing terms for love) and outer world (which incites the soul to madness). The contradiction lies in Baudelaire's description of the world which the soul seeks refuge from; this world, however, is a stylized one: the world impressed on the poet as the poet sees it. The following four-and-a-half lines, however, are entirely given up to a poetic temptation: the poet's contemplation of the clouds. But for Baudelaire there is nothing securely

serene to be found in them, as might be Wordsworth's disposition, as they do not last. Instead, they are "architectural marvels that God constructs out of mist, edifices of the impalpable." The poet's muse, however, suddenly shifts from the clouds to his dear little beloved: "And as I looked I was saying to myself: 'All those phantasmagoria are almost as beautiful as my beloved's beautiful eyes, as the green eyes of my mad monstrous little beloved.'" Baudelaire goes from—all within a single, isolated poetic reverie—giving clouds the outline of some barely tangible structure ("architectural marvels") to the intangible "God" and "mist" until, lastly, the tangible materializes again into "edifices" and his beloved. Here, too, beauty—in this case embodied by a woman—once again is not a traditional poetic trope which inspires "desire" or "pleasure" but, rather, something like a wish "to die slowly" ("The Desire to Paint," *PS*, 78): an inversion of poetic expectations. The poet is brought suddenly back to the ugliness of reality by violence, "a terrible blow of a fist" on his back, and his beloved's "husky and charming voice, an hysterical voice, a hoarse brandy voice" which is itself like a downpour, a *condensation* of language. Like the clouds, which complete a vaporous poetic landscape, the soup is what everything is being condensed into. Baudelaire, a "damned bastard of a cloud-monger," must abandon his poetic inspiration and return to the world in which he physically belongs. This world, the poem's object of soup suggests, is one of poverty.

However, the gruesome realities of urban Paris life do not always consume Baudelaire. Indeed, there are several prose poems in *Paris Spleen* in which Paris completely disappears within the collection. Though momentarily absent, the city's presence always remains felt and continues to guide the poet's pen towards *varying degrees of his escape* through artistic expression: it is the *idea of Paris* on which this escape—manifested in the prose poem form—paradoxically relies: the city becomes an aesthetic exercise of impossible transcendence. These

prose poems that disrupt the continuity of Parisian despair are not, as in “The Soup and the Clouds,” portraits of reality interfering with the soul’s poetic working through an impression, but, rather, compositionally intact, flowing passages in which the poetic soul temporarily subdues reality with the expression of an aestheticized memory. Like De Quincey’s poetic prose, the passionate utterances³⁶ of memory in Baudelaire’s “A Hemisphere In Your Hair” (*PS*, 31) and “The Desire to Paint” (*PS*, 78) take on a dream-like, drug-induced expression, in which love is the intoxicant and the physical world of nature—where love resides and is equally idealized—loses its harmonizing affect and tranquility to the wild, sensualized senses of the poet. In “A Hemisphere,” it is “the fragrance of tobacco tinged with opium and sugar” and “all that I see! all that I feel! all that I hear in your hair!” for Baudelaire, “drunk with the smell of musk,” that “stir memories in the air.” Love—like Baudelaire’s reversal of the beautiful—is symbolized by the lover’s “black and heavy tresses” that contain “seas whose monsoons waft [him] toward lovely climes.” Like the beauty of “monsoons,” love, also, is commandeered by untraditional or unlikely associations: it is “melancholic” and “lusty,” a “dream of masts and sails” that propel the poet forward through the water. Baudelaire, in other words, is compelled by a love symbolized by a head of hair that symbolizes a destructive force of nature that is necessary to love’s creative possibilities and expressions (“In the caresses of your hair I know again the languors of long hours lying on a couch in a fair ship’s cabin, cradled by the harbor’s imperceptible swell”). The memory of love is finally annihilated by the poet himself: “When I gnaw your elastic and rebellious hair I seem to be eating memories.” Indeed, what Walter Benjamin says about Baudelaire’s “A une passante” may also apply to his prose poetry: “the delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight. It is a farewell forever which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment.”³⁷ Love and memory are consumed by

Baudelaire's poetic interpretation of them—just as they are equally swallowed by the prose text—and not by the world in which lyric poetry does not have an audience to consume it. “The Desire to Paint” (*PS*, 78) operates in a similar way to “A Hemisphere.” As in the latter, in which the linearity of the text helps to steer the reader, once past the “monsoons” of the initial poetic encounter, calmly along the sea, the prose poem technique in the former is intended to navigate the reader with a fluid motion through the tempestuousness of the poetic imagery, in which “the woman who appeared to me so rarely and who so quickly fled” is compared to a “black sun” that is represented as a symbol by an “intoxicating moon that hangs deep in a stormy night, hurtled by the driven clouds; not the discreet and peaceful moon that visits pure men while they sleep, but the moon torn from the sky.” The lyrical beauty of the prose narrative is its juxtaposition of desire and destruction, intoxication and the infinite, love and beauty and regret. If in “A Hemisphere” love is consumed and all consuming, love in “The Desire to Paint” is the “miracle of a superb flower blooming on volcanic soil.”

The prose poem form is, paradoxically, the most appropriate representation of Baudelaire's exile from nature: appropriate in formal, combinatorial construction, paradoxical in the Symbolist desire to resist representation. However, herein lies the inherent despair of Symbolist poetics that gives the style of poetic prose its potency, historical importance, and literary significance. Like nature, the separation of lived and aesthetic realities becomes an unreachable ideal pursued in futility, despite the temporary relief—spanning the prose poem text—offered by symbolic language and the momentary respite within the interval wrought by the poet's pursuit of the poet's impression. To find the idyllic of nature in the city, then, the poet must look up to the clouds or moon or sun as he moves forward and navigates the streets, following the grid topography of the urban cityscape while, as in “The Soup and the Clouds,”

trying to hold onto the dream of being elsewhere, and only achieving that retreat for the length of the prose in which that dream gives the text its poeticity. The actual impossibility of a separation becomes an aesthetics of temptation, then failure, in which the trial and error—for its aesthetic merit—must be demonstrated in the text itself. This failed separation, in other words, is witnessed instead as a *fusion* or combustion only made possible by the hybridization of poetic and prosaic (disparate) sensibilities. “To Arsène Houssaye” (*PS*, ix–x) provides the most explicit evidence of what Baudelaire wished to accomplish with the prose poem, which he calls a “tortuous fantasy” and a “haunting ideal” conceived “out of [his] exploration of huge cities, out of the medley of their innumerable interrelations.” Baudelaire’s prose poems take shape from the dynamic interplay between horizontal and vertical trajectories, with prose relating to the former, poetry the latter, and the poet operating each pole within a given text. Here, another meeting of opposites occurs: “the prose poem also is the locus where rhetoric reasserts its rights and challenges all claims to sacred separateness. [...] the prose poem allows one to catch a glimpse of all the contradictions which tear modern esthetics asunder.”³⁸ Robert Greer Cohn sees the prose poem as “a tetrapolar Becoming: a ‘founding’ poetry-prose unity [that] passes through a poetry *and* prose polarity to a poetry-prose (poetic prose or prose poem) ‘final’ unity”³⁹ in the shape of a cross. Baudelaire, going the direction of the horizontal axis, uses narrative to “move out into the city street, amidst the bustle in the square.”⁴⁰ Traveling the vertical axis, he goes in whatever metaphysical, metaphorical direction of irreality the poet-self dictates, which, as we have seen, is often a different place (nature) and a distant memory (time). Similarly Jakobson, in his essay on *aphasia*, discusses two aspects of language: the metaphoric pole and the metonymic pole. Poetry, for Jakobson, functions along the vertical axis of selection or substitution. Prose, on the other hand, functions along the horizontal axis of contiguity or association. “In manipulating

these two kinds of connection (similarity and contiguity) in both their aspects (positional and semantic)—selecting, combining, and ranking them—an individual exhibits his personal style, his verbal predilections and preferences.”⁴¹

While alike in their turn to the prosaic for economic necessity, another commonality between De Quincey and Baudelaire surfaces in light of this fusion of poetic and prosaic poles, aesthetic and lived realities. De Quincey’s “Introductory Notice” to *Suspiria de Profundis* concludes with an allusion to the caduceus⁴²—the wand of Hermes—in which he describes a (fabricated) tourist “not searching for any recreant indorser of a bill, but simply in search of the picturesque” (vertical). This tourist, however, is looking for a particular road that will lead him quickly to Keswick (horizontal). “Finally,” De Quincey writes, “he descries my unworthy self upon the road,” and the tourist asks the author for a shortcut. De Quincey replies:

“Most excellent stranger, as you come to the lakes simply to see their loveliness, might it not be as well to ask after the most beautiful road, rather than the shortest? Because, if abstract shortness, if *to brevity* is your object, then the shortest of all possible tours would seem, with submission—never to have left London.” (Italics mine.)

In terms of a poeticized prose, this allusion reinforces De Quincey’s predisposition toward poetic traversing: the “course of this narrative resembles, and was meant to resemble, a *caduceus* wreathed about with meandering ornaments, or the shaft of a tree’s stem hung round and surmounted with some vagrant parasitical plant.” In terms of the fusion between aesthetic and actual realities, the two axes are inverted together in a snake-like coil (recalling Baudelaire’s serpent in “To Arsène Houssaye”) that squeezes out prose to reclaim the purely poetic. The pole, in this instance a symbol of man’s intervention of nature, is poeticized—the pole is being overcome and encroached by “the plant and its tendrils” shooting up and over it just as “those cursed bricks came to imprison the streets.” The pole and the bricks exist merely as “support”

systems for the poetic, the natural. De Quincey concludes: “The true object in my ‘Opium Confessions’ is not the naked physiological theme—on the contrary, *that* is the ugly pole, the murderous spear, the halbert—but those wandering musical variations upon the theme—those parasitical thoughts, feelings, digressions, which climb up with bells and blossoms round about the arid stock.”

Baudelaire’s “Thyrsus” (*PS*, 72–73) is analogous to De Quincey’s caduceus. First, it is not by accident that the poem is dedicated to Romantic Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, the inventor of the symphonic poem, who like his early nineteenth-century literary peers sought to disrupt traditional patterns of form, relate his artistic expression to the external world that informed it, and unify a multiplicity of artistic arrangements into one principle piece of work.⁴³ Baudelaire’s prose poem begins with a simple horizontal narrative that explains, quite literally and somewhat analytically, the definition of a thyrsus in both its poetic/religious usage (“the sacerdotal emblem of priests and priestesses”) and practical usage (“it is just a simple stick”). Not long after, however, a vertical inquisitiveness within the same unpenetrated square of text follows, and it is figurative, musical, and amorous language that reports the flowers “hanging like bells, or like goblets up-side-down” around the thyrsus in harmony rather than De Quincey’s “parasitical” violence: “And an amazing resplendence surges from this complexity of lines and of delicate or brilliant colors. Does it not seem as though the curvilinear and the spiral lines were courting the straight line, and were dancing around it in mute admiration?” The prose poem then shifts—again within the same prose text and without any poetic or narrative indication of transition—to the second-person pronoun “your” referring to Liszt, whose musical “will” is imposed on the narrative in a profusion of poetic phrases symbolized by the profusion of flowers around the thyrsus which, for Baudelaire, becomes a conductor’s wand being waved to direct the

musical score in a Bacchanalian frenzy. The verticality of the Roman custom suddenly inserted, in juxtaposition with the horizontal narrative, becomes a vibrant interaction manifested in the figure of Liszt who both renders the nature insufficient (“Never did a nymph [...] shake her thyrsus over the heads of her maddened companions with such energy and wantonness”) and, contradictorily, plays the part of “dear Bacchante.” The marriage of past and present stands for the connection of both axes or poles that keeps the prose poem intact: “Straight line and arabesque, intention and expression, inflexibility of the will, sinuosity of the word, unity of the goal, variety of means,” etc. The prose poem then ends in a brief hybrid epistle-poem to the pianist and composer, who is both everywhere (“through the mists and beyond the rivers, in distant cities”) and nowhere (“wherever you may be, whether surrounded by the splendors of the eternal city, or in the mists of those dreamy countries”); Liszt, with his instrument which allows him to create a subjective reality of his own, is “venerated Master” of “mysterious and passionate Beauty,” the “singer of Pleasure and of eternal Anguish.” Whereas De Quincey hopes for the purely poetic seizure of prose in the synthesis of the two combined modes of literary language, Baudelaire remains doubtful: “But what imprudent mortal would dare to say whether the flower and the vines have been made for the stick, or whether the stick is not a pretext for displaying the beauty of the vines and flowers?” If Baudelaire is an “analyst,” he is a failed analyst, a poet without “the detestable courage to divide and separate.”

Rimbaud

One might surmise that when Henry James writes in 1899 that the novel “is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life,” and that a good novel should “possess the

sense of reality,” an “illusion of life,”⁴⁴ he is talking about the writer’s enhancement of prose by a poetic vision. One might surmise, too, that Virginia Woolf’s essay “Modern Fiction”—where she writes that the modern novel’s point of interest “lies very likely in the dark places of psychology”—supports a poetic fiction when she stresses the value of the private aesthetic experience that emerges from a poetic impulse described in terms reminiscent of Pater, Yeats, and Symonds: “‘The proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss.”⁴⁵ Similarly, readers of prose might be further enriched by approaching a work with “sensibilities trained on poetry,” as T. S. Eliot counsels how one should engage Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*.⁴⁶ Indeed, the aesthetics of a poetic prose—its inherent dialogical, contradictory nature—begin to feel more urgent in, and essential to, literary expressions that had risen out of pre-established traditions but which found themselves, toward the end of the nineteenth century, confronting an intensified modernization and, with it, anxieties and uncertainties. Before the stream of consciousness novels of James and Woolf could become possible, however, the Symbolist poetic self-consciousness of style as an endeavor to ward off realistic representations and their meanings had to reach a certain doomed culmination and new dissention: to undermine the order and function of language and to purify it by its own destruction.

If Baudelaire’s *petite poèmes en prose* was an attack on conventional verse through the rejection of rhyme and meter, the inclusion of dire social topics into poetic consciousness, and the subordination, or “disfiguration,” of poetic language, as Barbara Johnson has described it,⁴⁷ Rimbaud’s poetic prose calls attention to the restrictions of both verse *and* prose: the poet is neither safe in nor saved by either form. Whereas the characteristics and order of French prose—

syntactical unity, faithfulness to grammar, dialogue, etc.—largely remain intact in Baudelaire, the figurative language of Rimbaud’s poetic prose renders prose language deficient by an operation of negation. In order for the deficiency to take hold, prose must *appear* as itself but *not actually be* itself linguistically: it is no longer the reliance on an external meaning or ordered system towards meaning that guides the use of language, but an internal hallucination, or vision, that reorganizes or recodifies language to suit the poet’s inner experience of the loss of hope. Language’s relationship to prose meaning, in other words, is severed and fragmented. To undermine poetry, Rimbaud relinquishes the metaphoric to give the metonymic a poetic function. The metaphoric act of substitution is replaced by an attempt toward annihilation: poetic language’s likeness to or “correspondence” with the known world through the expression of the senses and sensations—strengthened by Wordsworth and De Quincey but which began to be diluted in Baudelaire—no longer applies in Rimbaud, in whose world poetic representation flourishes but is still uncertain and, at times, made impossible by the prose form which troubles it. Instead, Rimbaud seeks, through poetic prose, to “arrive at the unknown through the disorder of *all the senses*”⁴⁸ and the “cultivation” of the soul. As Tzvetan Todorov suggests, “One well-known stylistic characteristic of Rimbaud’s text can also be related to the metonymic movement: the poet’s tendency to describe optical illusions as if they were realities.”⁴⁹ For Baudelaire, metaphor was a poetically organized representation of the ephemeral—a dream, a memory, the soul, or a lost ideal—or the physical, with both prosaic and poetic language anchoring a theme. For Rimbaud, however, language refers only to abstractions, to words devoid of any meaning that even a metaphor might arouse. In this peril of meaninglessness, words are in service to the poet searching only for a way to make sense of itself. One such example of this subjective world building can be found in “Beauteous Being,”⁵⁰ in which Rimbaud gives only glimpses of

externality. The narrative begins with an introduction of “a Being of high-statured Beauty.” What follows, however, is not a description of the object’s beautiful qualities—how the object’s beauty is represented, how the object appears—but the expression of the speaking subject resisting a prose convention that struggles to give the “Being” any external shape whatsoever: made of “[w]histlings of death and circles of secret music,” the “Being” is “like a specter” whose reality, like the poet, is internal—“wounds of black and scarlet burst *in the superb flesh*” (italics mine). The representation of the object itself is replaced by what the object represents only to the speaker, and this is conveyed in a figurative language that produces “the delirious savor of these effects” which are disconnected from the world. Furthermore, we are never told what or who the “Being” is. The prose narrative concludes without any satisfactory answers in regards to the “Being,” only clues through obscured features and a poetic reverie revealing only the speaker’s emotions: “O the ashy face, the crined escutcheon, the crystal arms! The cannon on which I am to fall in the melee of trees and of light air!” Meaning is forfeited because it is never arrived at and is of no importance. The words, which leave “the world, far behind us” and lead only to the inner feelings of the speaker, describe a process in which reality disappears and the poet emerges to consume the narrative: “Life’s own colors darken, dance, and drift around the Vision in the making.” The prose poem is a process which only ends in mystery; there is no narrative dénouement.

For Rimbaud, “Inventions of the unknown demand new forms.”⁵¹ In *A Season in Hell*,ⁱⁱ the individual and the collective, past and present, religious and secular, and narrative and verse distinctions are further problematized, and are unified only by their mystification and Rimbaud’s suffering to formulate a genuine experience of reality. Poetic prose, for Rimbaud, becomes a site

ⁱⁱ Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell and The Drunken Boat*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1961). All further references to this work, abbreviated *ASIH*, will be included in the text.

of privatizing language for the working out of a displaced self, which is striven for, first, by giving into the despair and suffering the poet has fashioned for himself from his ruinous relationship to lived experience and its contradictions—"I contrived to purge my mind of all human hope"—then by the abandonment of artistic salvation by making absent in the work "the instructive or descriptive faculty in a writer" (*ASIH*, 3, 5). We witness this in the text's opening pages, as the speaker shifts from the contemplation of an almost heavenly ideal ("Once, if I remember well, my life was a feast where all hearts opened and all wines flowed") to the terrestrial and mortal disappointment ("I laid myself down in the mud") and then to hell where the speaker purges itself ("Ah! I'm fed up:—But, dear Satan, a less fiery eye I beg you! [...] for you let me tear out these few, hideous pages from my notebook"). What is left, then, are mere instances that thread together and relate to Rimbaud's anguish, renunciation, and madness, which, again, keep the cooperation of opposites intact. The private, individual self, too, is nonetheless kept in despair by the very worlds and realities it attempts to renounce. Just as Francis Ponge famously claimed "there is no getting away from trees by way of trees,"⁵² for Rimbaud "I is some one else."⁵³

The complexity and complications of the self's situation/dislocation in the world are manifested in the second section of *A Season in Hell*, "Bad Blood" (*ASIH*, 7–25), in which individual-self and collective-other identities are conflated by Rimbaud's temporal disruption of past and present. Here a sort of helplessness and unreliability positions the speaker paradoxically at odds and aligned with both his pagan ancestors and the barbarous past from which he came and the modern present, where the world, filled with "base peasants all" (7) and "the new nobility" alike, "marches on" to the beat of "Science" and "Progress" (11). Additionally, the speaker's inheritance of Gallic "vices" (7) is not only an attempt to call attention to his "inferior

race” (9), but to himself as well: “The hand that guides the pen is worth the hand that guides the plough” (7). In addition to this shared baseness with the Gallic bloodline, the speaker also shares a connection to France (“I have lived everywhere”), in particular a Christian France, “eldest daughter of the Church” (9), where “[t]he cult of Mary, compassion for the crucified Christ awake in me among a thousand profane phantasmagoria” (9). Christianity, which abhors the sins of “anger,” “lust,” “lying,” and “sloth” (7) characteristic of the Gauls, incites inescapability: “I shall never have done seeing myself in that past.” Rimbaud’s speaker, then, is hereditarily alienated from Christianity—“I dance the witches’ sabbath”—yet denied any distance from it—“I can remember no farther back than this very land and Christianity”—because the religious/sacred discourse that the Pagan and Christian faith have in common is restored by, and resurrected in, modernity, two distinct kinds of assimilation but with similar consequences: “The inferior race has over-run everything—the people, as we say, the nation, reason, science. [...] Everything has been revised. For the body and for the soul [...] It is the vision of numbers. We are going toward the *Spirit*. There’s no doubt about it, an oracle, I tell you” (11). All these oscillating shifts in time, place, and language—occurring within a proximate and even a single narrative sequence—are significant to Rimbaud’s vision of being that involves a ventured rupture from the ordained order of external reality imposed on the individual and collective but from which it is impossible for being to escape. As in Baudelaire, the hybridization of prose and poetry is the most appropriate form in which to demonstrate this rift and hopeless struggle to destabilize the forces that govern bodily and lived experience. Jonathan Monroe, for example, sees Rimbaud’s textual transgression—which simultaneously corrupts poetic and narrative language and demonstrates the limits of their function or expressions—in terms similar to Jakobson:

The great chain of being which, according to Christian theology, links all things in a vertical set of relations to God, corresponds on a syntactical level to the hierarchical, logical ordering of words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into extended narratives. In Rimbaud's prose poetry, by contrast, it is as if the links in this great chain of being, and with them the logical transitions we associate with coherent narration, have been severed, so that horizontal relations of mere contiguity exist where there was once a single vertical thread of hierarchically ordered parts.⁵⁴

Rimbaud's renunciation of (and rejection by) the dominant modes of discourse—the Christian and sociopolitical—is demonstrated in the text via his hybridization of prose and poetry, of narrative and metaphor. This departure from organizational and thematic literary conventions, even from those as close to Rimbaud as Baudelaire's prose poems, is a system of disordering that stems from one's loss of self, history, and other and makes Rimbaud's speaker "an outcast" (13): "Do I know nature yet? Do I know myself?—*No more words*" (19). A Romantic feeling of homelessness pervades the text within its vacillation between past and present, religious and political history, the individual and the crowd. "In cities," without "even a companion," Rimbaud's speaker sees itself "before an infuriated mob, facing the firing-squad," and professes to "[p]riests," "professors," and "masters" alike that "I have never belonged to this people; I have never been a Christian; I am of the race that sang under torture" (17). However, as a pagan savage, "a beast," Rimbaud's speaker is fit for Christian salvation, and is as much a part of nature as it is a part of the culture that has appropriated or usurped Christian values into mercantilism and economic exploitation: "Sleep in wealth is impossible. Wealth has always been public property. The keys of knowledge are the gifts of the divine love alone. I see that nature is but the display of goodness. Farewell chimeras, ideals, errors!" (21). Here, again, modern Enlightenment ideals fuse with Christian discourse ("Reason is born to me. The world is good"). Salvation, then, comes at the cost of forfeiture in "Bad Blood," and the despair that started the

section also marks its end. For Rimbaud's speaker, the re-realization that "[l]ife is the farce we all have to lead" is reinforced in the last section of "Bad Blood," in which "[f]orward, march!" is "the punishment" (23) of time: "Or I surrender.—Cowards! / —I'll kill myself! I'll throw myself under the horses' hoofs! / Ah! . . . / —I shall get used to it. / It would be the French way of life, the path of honor!" (25).

The section immediately proceeding "Bad Blood" begins with a continuation of this acquiescence to secular, material discourse and the discourse of (and desire for) Christian salvation. In the first two pages of "Night of Hell" (*ASIH*, 27–33), hell is a world in which all hope is lost ("And still this is life!—Suppose damnation were eternal!") while the poet still has to live in it (27). Almost immediately, however, hell is appropriated by Rimbaud's speaker, and transforms into the inner reality of its soul—"My entrails are on fire. [...] It is hell, eternal punishment!" Whereas in "Bad Blood" the threading of personal and collective history, past and present, and narrative and poetic language created a dispossession of Rimbaud's speaker—"I shall never have my hand" (7) and "who gave me so perfidious a tongue that it has guided and guarded my indolence till now?" (9)—the "I am thought" confessed in Rimbaud's letter to George Izambard⁵⁵ shifts in "Night of Hell" to a kind of recovery and retrieval marked by Cartesian inversion: "I think I am in hell, therefore I am in hell" (27–29). Rimbaud's speaker's subjective reality becomes more pronounced—"no more faith in history, principles forgotten. [...] The clock of life stopped a while ago. I am no longer in the world" (29–31)—but the reclamation of the self is only a salvage, and reduced merely to a respite at the end of the section: "Ah! to rise again into life! to cast our eyes on our deformities. [...] My weakness, the cruelty of the world! My God, pity, hide me, I behave too badly!—I am hidden and I am not" (33).

Rimbaud's aesthetic theory of a poetic prose is prominently demonstrated in "Delirium II: Alchemy of the Word" (*ASIH*, 49–67), in which the disjointed experiences of a modern dialogic world and the conflict between contradictions—such as the accumulation of histories in contrast to unfathomable progress; pastoral idleness and urban toil—is synonymous with the annihilation of poetic and prosaic convention. As in "Bad Blood," the ideas of unattainable Christian salvation and the conquering of secular ideals persist. However, this section stands apart in its response to and foreground of formal limitations and possibilities, shifting from verse to narrative and revealing new dimensions of the speaker's struggles in experience and expression. "Alchemy of the Word" begins in narrative prose with "[t]he story of one of [the speaker's] follies." This foolishness is an ironic parody of artistic ideals and poetic sentimentality expressed in a fondness for the past and religious, social, and cultural harmony:

I loved maudlin pictures, the painted panels over doors, stage sets, the back-drops of mountebanks, old inn signs, popular prints; antiquated literature, church Latin, erotic books innocent of all spelling, the novels of our grandfathers, fairytales, children's storybooks, old operas, inane refrains and artless rhythms.

I dreamed crusades, unrecorded voyages of discovery, untroubled republics, religious wars stifled, revolutions of customs, the displacements of races and continents: I believed in all marvels (49–51).

What's formally significant in the two paragraphs is the way the taxonomic list is grouped horizontally and not vertically. This verbal display places on the same level different objects of artistry (pictures, stage sets, signs, etc.) and artistic essences or values (discovery, peace, etc.) and unifies them by their historicity and existence in the past tense. In other words, the prosaic grouping reconfigures the act of looking back and the longing to recapture an ideal in a modern reality in which archetypes are always changing and in constant flux: the ideal is not what it *should* look like and, thusly, loses its idyllic qualities and appeal. Rimbaud then returns to the isolation of verse to better interrogate poetry's traditional demotion of the prosaic. "Far from

birds and flocks and village girls” and “my cabin,” Rimbaud’s speaker establishes a distance from nature in the poem even when situated in it: “A tender hazel copse around me” and “Voiceless the trees, flowerless the grass, sky over-cast!” (51). The poem then shifts from the pastoral to the urban, in which vertical poetic, spiritual, and religious imagery both express the grind of labor and the loosening of nature’s grasp as it is being handled intimately:

Down in their vast woodyards,
Under an Hesperian sun,
The Carpenters—in shirt sleeves—
Toil already;

Calm in their Deserts of moss,
Precious canopies preparing,
Where the city will paint
Skies fabulous and false.

O, for those charming Workers,
Subjects of a Babylonian king,
Venus! a moment leave the Lovers
Whose souls are wreathed!

O queen of Shepherds,
Bring to the workers wine,
That their powers be appeased
Awaiting the noon swim in the sea (53–55).

In the “woodyards,” the “workers” manipulate nature to construct something else out of it (“Where the city will paint / Skies fabulous and false”). The poem, as well, is “false” in its contradictory betrayal of the pastoral elements and the once-stable relationship, at least for Rimbaud, between poetic expression and religious discourse. The prose narrative immediately following this sacrilegious poetry demonstrates the prose narrative’s appropriateness, suitability, and efficiency in “phantasmagoria” both formally and with thematic integrity. Here, prose is a “simple hallucination” of poetry: “in place of a factory I really saw a mosque, a school of

drummers led by angels, carriages on the highways of the sky.” The “magic sophisms” are expressed “with the hallucination of words.” Again, it is a *sense* of something—an awareness of poetry yet not a complete surrender of it—that makes Rimbaud’s prose poetic: “In *kinds* of ballads I said farewell to the world” (55; italics mine). In other words, rhyme and meter are unnecessary to the expression of something poetic. What Rimbaud is suggesting is that traditional poetic conventions are insufficient and unsuitable for the expression of modern experience; rhyme and meter are not only incompatible with modern dialogic relationships, but are misleading in a reality where Romantic ideals have shifted from nature to the city and harmony exists in a state of crisis. In this light, the next poem in the “Alchemy of the Word” section, “Song of the Highest Tower” (57), can be seen as a parody of a poem in a world in which the individual’s disconnectedness has obliterated the loving assonance and congruence of rhyme and the pastoral landscape has decayed. Here, “the time of love / The time we’d be enamoured of” arrives too late or, rather, never arrives at all:

I’ve been patient too long,
memory is dead,
All fears and all wrongs
To the heavens have fled.
[...]
Like the meadow that is dreaming
Forgetful of cares,
[...]
Where fierce buzzings rise
Of filthy flies.

This hope, however hopeless, continues in the next lined poem in the section, “Hunger” (59–61). Here, the decayed pastoral setting coexists with the vestiges of Christian salvation (“Churches’ old stones”)—a promise that never comes for the speaker who, like in “Song of the Highest Tower,” is still “consumed” by it: the obverse of “the time of love, / The time we’d be

enamoured of” and salvation is a despairing self-hatred and damnation. Thus in the penultimate poem (63), Rimbaud’s speaker finds “Eternity” recovered in the present dialogical scientific and religious discourses (“Science and patience, / Retribution is sure”) and hope abandoned (“Hope never more”).

The last part of *A Season in Hell*, “Farewell” (*ASIH*, 85–89), is in many ways a revelation: it is a return to the present, the “enormous city with fire-and-mud-stained sky,” and a modern world crowded with “putrid rags, the rain-soaked bread, drunkenness.” But unlike “Bad Blood,” in which Rimbaud’s speaker makes a gesture toward poetic/Christian elevation before realizing “the hand that guides the pen is worth the hand that guides the plough,” the kinship between the artist and the lower classes of urban life is not disparaged but, rather, embraced: “I see myself again, skin rotten with mud and pest, worms in my armpits and in my hair, and in my heart much bigger worms, lying among strangers without age, without feeling...” (85). The redemptive power of poetry found in Romantics such as Novalis and De Quincey, for example, is at last relinquished in a final effort to construct a subjective reality in which the apprehensions of modernization and its prosified world indirectly inform or correspond with the soul’s sense and stylization of the world through poetic impressions that express a reality as Rimbaud lives and sees it. To accomplish this, Rimbaud’s speaker gives himself over to death in the city, to “that ghoul queen of a million dead souls and dead bodies” (85). Rimbaud’s speaker must also give himself over to the death of nature and the destructive consequences of society: “Sometimes in the sky I see endless beaches covered with white nations full of joy” (87). Whereas in “Alchemy of the Word” Rimbaud’s speaker “saw the comforting cross arise” (65) on the horizon, now it sees “multi-colored pennants in the breezes of the morning” (87); whereas it once despairingly

proclaimed “[n]o more tomorrows” (63), now it sees a new promise not fulfilled by God but by the godlessness of its new revelation:

I tried to invent new flowers, new stars, new flesh, new tongues. I thought I was acquiring supernatural powers. Well! I must bury my imagination and my memories! An artist’s and story-teller’s precious fame flung away!

I! I who called myself angel or seer, exempt from all morality, I am returned to the soil with a duty to seek and rough reality to embrace! Peasant! (87).

In order to create a new reality, the speaker’s self (“I”) must turn to anonymity (“precious fame flung away!”) instead of notoriety, work (“duty”) instead of privilege: it must “be absolutely modern” (89). *A Season in Hell* ends, however, with one last contradiction. After proclaiming its renunciation of the vertical plane—“No hymns!”—and allegiance to the horizontal plane—“Hold the ground gained”—Rimbaud’s speaker brings the two axes together: “Spiritual combat is as brutal as the battle of men: but the vision of justice is the pleasure of God alone” (89). For Rimbaud it’s not solely about one for the other, or a resolution of contradictions. The conflicts themselves, the ambiguities, the march into “magnificent cities,” are, indeed, “the vigil” (89) itself. And it is within these unsettled paradoxes that poetic prose provides the freedom to “possess truth in one soul and one body” (89): to possess a subjective reality (“truth”) and to not be mastered by the world, with the hybridization of poetry (“soul”) and prose (“body”) in one textual space.

Notes

¹ Edward Engelberg, *The Symbolist Poem: The Development of the English Tradition* (New York: Dutton & Co., 1967), 25–26.

² Michael Riffaterre, “Decadent Paradoxes,” trans. Liz Constable and Matthew Potolsky, in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, eds. Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 65.

³ See Richard Ellmann’s “Introduction” to Arthur Symons’ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958), viii.

-
- ⁴ Engelberg, *The Symbolist Poem*, 26–27.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁶ Asti Hustvedt, “The Art of Death: French Fiction at the Fin de Siècle,” in *The Decadent Reader: Fiction, Fantasy, and Perversion from Fin-de-Siècle France* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 13.
- ⁷ William Butler Yeats, “The Autumn of the Body,” in *Essays and Introductions* (New York/London: Macmillan, 1961), 191–194.
- ⁸ Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 9.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 2–3.
- ¹⁰ Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” in *Culture and Anarchy and other writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29.
- ¹¹ Vincent B. Leitch, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 836.
- ¹² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (New York/Toronto: Mentor, 1959), 157.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 156–157.
- ¹⁵ Walter Pater, *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (New York/London: Macmillan, 1889), 23.
- ¹⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays, Volume 2*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 519.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ¹⁸ Édouard Dujardin, *The Bays are Sere and Interior Monologue*, trans. Anthony Suter (London: Libris, 1991), 135.
- ¹⁹ Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, trans. Denise Folliot (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 43.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ²¹ Susan Sontag, “On Style,” in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Picador, 1966), 19.
- ²² Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 194.
- ²³ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 25.
- ²⁴ LeRoy C. Breunig, “Why France?,” in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, eds. Mary Ann Caws and Hermine Riffaterre (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 10.
- ²⁵ Stéphane Mallarmé, “Music and Letters,” in *Mallarmé in Prose*, ed. Mary Anne Caws, trans. Jill Anderson, Malcolm Bowie, Mary Ann Caws, Rosemary Lloyd, Richard Sieburth, Patricia Terry (New York: New Directions, 2001), 32.
- ²⁶ Joseph de Maistre, *St. Petersburg Dialogues: Or Conversations on the Temporal Government of Providence*, trans. Richard A. Lebrun (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 34.
- ²⁷ E. M. Cioran, “Style as Risk,” in *The Temptation to Exist*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade, 2012), 131.
- ²⁸ William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” in *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, eds. Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 264.
- ²⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, “Poetry Without Verse,” in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, 62.
- ³⁰ Suzanne Bernard, *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Nizet, 1959), 444.
- ³¹ Charles Baudelaire, “A Landscape,” in *The Flowers of Evil*, eds. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews, trans. F. P. Sturm (New York: New Directions, 1989), 105.
- ³² Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 4.
- ³³ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 157.

-
- ³⁴ Michel Beaujour, "Two Contextual Approaches," in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, 42.
- ³⁵ Roger Shattuck, "Vibratory Organism: *crise de prose*," in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, 32.
- ³⁶ "A passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire." See Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 19.
- ³⁷ Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 169.
- ³⁸ Beaujour, "Two Contextual Approaches," 57.
- ³⁹ Robert Greer Cohn, "A Poetry-Prose Cross," in *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*, 138. See, also, Cohn, *Modes of Art* (Saratoga, California: Anma Libri, 1975), 118.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Roman Jakobson and Moris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 91.
- ⁴² De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, 93–94.
- ⁴³ See Nicholas Temperley, Gerald Abraham, Humphrey Searle, John Warrack, Hugh Macdonald, and Karl-Heinz Köhler, *The New Grove Early Romantic Masters* (New York: Norton, 1985).
- ⁴⁴ See Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *Partial Portraits* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 384–390.
- ⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Volume 4: 1925 to 1928*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), 162–164.
- ⁴⁶ See T. S. Eliot's "Preface" to Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 2006), xviii.
- ⁴⁷ See Barbara Johnson, *Défigurations du langage poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).
- ⁴⁸ Arthur Rimbaud, "Letter to George Izambard," in *Illuminations*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1957), xxvii.
- ⁴⁹ Todorov, "Poetry Without Verse," 71.
- ⁵⁰ Rimbaud, "Beauteous Being," in *Illuminations*, 27.
- ⁵¹ Rimbaud, "Letter to Paul Demeny," in *Illuminations*, xxxv.
- ⁵² Francis Ponge, *The Nature of Things*, trans. Lee Fahnestock (New York: Red Dust Books, 1995), 39.
- ⁵³ Rimbaud, "Letter to George Izambard," xxvii.
- ⁵⁴ Jonathan Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1987), 129–130.
- ⁵⁵ Rimbaud, "Letter to George Izambard," xxvii.

III. Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate how the hybridization of prose and poetry can be interpreted as both a direct response to and immediate consequence of modernization, beginning with Romanticism in the early nineteenth century, a period in which universal human values were constantly threatened by the ambitions and harsh realities of industrial civilization. Emerging from this struggle was a momentous sense of loss—of the natural on behalf of the cultural, the past on behalf of progress—wrought by the coexistence of antitheses. Wordsworth’s application of prosaic language within traditional poetic forms called attention to generic hierarchies that corresponded to growing class disparities felt by the advent of urban industrial centers—rationalized and favored by capitalist production values—in which the poor and their bourgeois counterparts cohabitated. In Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, the fusion of prose language—the speech of common men—with poetry—the pinnacle of literature and privileged genre—can be seen as an effort to collectivize or bring together opposite worlds, restore nature and a universality that society has wrested us from, and represent democratization, in which the loss of poetic privilege and the individual becomes a consequence. De Quincey’s “impassioned prose” of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and aesthetic theory formulated in *Suspiria de Profundis*—his use of figurative language within narrative text—impaired the realities of linear progression the prosaic form emulated and supported and, like Wordsworth, employed hybridization to undermine class consciousness with a poetic consciousness incompatible with and corrupted by modern conditions and the spiritual anxieties they create.

Following Wordsworth and De Quincey, the poetic prose which grew out of the continued escalation of modernity and its mastery over both subjective and collective experience

and literary expression evolved in mid nineteenth-century France with the arrival of Symbolist poetics. Whereas the hybridization of prose and poetry in Wordsworth and De Quincey linked artistic and actual worlds in form and content (though reluctantly in De Quincey), the poetic prose of Symbolism attempted to manifest the internal realities of the soul unique to the poet's stylistic proclivities and own subjective way of recuperating the self and experiencing the upheavals of modernity. For the Symbolist poet, however, contradiction and loss are the necessary circumstances that make such expression possible yet, paradoxically, unattainable, and poetic prose becomes the form that most appropriately demonstrates the failure to separate oneself from the external world that gives the feeling of alienation, withdrawal, and isolation their impetus. In the prose poems of Charles Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*, the attack on the limitations of traditional verse meant an appropriation of the prosaic, the desperation of achieving the ideal world in urban landscapes, and the aestheticization of poverty. *A Season in Hell* implements poetic prose not just as an assault on poetry, but on the prosaic as well. For Arthur Rimbaud, hybridization symbolized a conflict between individual and collective histories, the usurpation of poetic Christian language by secular narrative language, and the subjective visions that stir from within but which must arise disordered in a world where the self has lost all hope.

Hybrid literature emerged as an innovative literary form to express new experiences of the human condition that to this day continue to intensify as modernization accelerates. It is a site not only of struggle, loss, despair, and displacement but of transgression, and in a world of competing discourses and ideologies, remains unique in its inclusion of all. As the world constantly transforms yet still tries to hold onto some kind of rational order, the appeal of poetic prose is its resilience against generic convention. It is for these reasons that hybridization plays

such a crucial role in our understanding of modern experience, and why the syntactical violence of Gertrude Stein, fragmented works of James Joyce, the stream of consciousness of Woolf, the hyper-descriptive rhetoric of Francis Ponge's prose poetry, and the lyrics of fiction in Samuel Beckett's later work can be appreciated for their authenticity, resistance, and revolutionary spirit.

IV. Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- . *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*. Edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner. New York/London: Routledge, 1989.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Edited by Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *The Flowers of Evil*. Translated by F. P. Sturm. Edited by Marthiel and Jackson Mathews. New York: New Directions, 1989.
- . *Paris Spleen*. Translated by Louise Varèse. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." In *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Bernard, Suzanne. *Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours*. Paris: Nizet, 1959.
- Bialostosky, Don. *Making Tales: The Poetics of Wordsworth's Narrative Experiments*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Butler, Marilyn. *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760–1830*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Caws, Mary Ann, and Hermine Riffaterre, eds. *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Cioran, E. M. "Style as Risk." In *The Temptation to Exist*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Arcade, 2012.
- De Quincey, Thomas. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Mineola: Dover, 1995.
- . *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Duff, David. *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Engelberg, Edward. *The Symbolist Poem: The Development of the English Tradition*. New York: Dutton & Co., 1967.
- Frye, Northrop. *A Study of English Romanticism*. New York: Random House, 1968.

- Genette, Gérard. *Fiction & Diction*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Jakobson, Roman and Moris Halle. *Fundamentals of Language*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002.
- James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction." In *Partial Portraits*. New York: Macmillan, 1899.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- Kristeva, Julia. "From One Identity to Another." In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. Edited by Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Löwy, Michael, and Robert Sayre. *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Lukács, György. *The Theory of the Novel*. Translated by Anna Bostock. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. "Music and Letters." In *Mallarmé in Prose*. Translated by Jill Anderson, Malcolm Bowie, Mary Ann Caws, Rosemary Lloyd, Richard Sieburth, Patricia Terry. Edited by Caws. New York: New Directions, 2001.
- Mannheim, Karl. *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Translated by David Kettler and Volker Meja. Edited by Kettler, Meja, and Nico Stehr. London: Routledge, 1986.
- Monroe, Jonathan. *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Pater, Walter. *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style*. New York/London: Macmillan, 1889.
- . *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. New York/Toronto: Mentor, 1959.
- Ponge, Francis. *The Nature of Things*. Translated by Lee Fahnestock. New York: Red Dust Books, 1995.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *A Season in Hell and The Drunken Boat*. Translated by Louise Varèse. New York: New Directions, 1961.

- . *Illuminations*. Translated by Louise Varèse. New York: New Directions, 1957.
- Schlegel, Friedrich. *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays, Volume 2*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Edited by Knud Haakonssen. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Sontag, Susan. "On Style." In *Against Interpretation*. New York: Picador, 1966.
- Symons, Arthur. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Genres in Discourse*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Valéry, Paul. *The Art of Poetry*. Translated by Denise Folliot. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and other Writings*. Translated and edited by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells. New York: Penguin, 2002.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society: 1780–1950*. New York: Harper & Row, 1958.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Impassioned Prose." In *Collected Essays: Volume I*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.
- . "Modern Fiction." In *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Volume 4: 1925 to 1928*. Edited by Andrew McNeillie. London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.
- Wordsworth, William, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Wordsworth, William. *The Major Works*. Edited by Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . "Tintern Abbey." In *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*. Edited by Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth. London: Penguin Books, 2005.
- Yeats, William Butler. "The Autumn of the Body." In *Essays and Introductions*. New York/London: Macmillan, 1961.