

THE RULE OF CONTRACTION:
A MANUSCRIPT OF SEQUENTIAL PROSE POEMS WITH AN INTRODUCTION

By
Bonné A. de Blas

Earl Braggs
Professor of English
Committee Chair

James Arnett
Assistant Professor of English
Committee Member

Bryan Hampton
Associate Professor of English
Committee Member

THE RULE OF CONTRACTION:
A MANUSCRIPT OF SEQUENTIAL PROSE POEMS WITH AN INTRODUCTION

By
Bonné A. de Blas

A Thesis Submitted to The Faculty of The University of
Tennessee at Chattanooga in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Arts: English

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Chattanooga, Tennessee

March, 2016

ABSTRACT

The prose poem is a hybrid form firmly rooted in 19th century French literary tradition, and later adopted by British and American poets. Questions as to genre arise when critically assessing possible formulaic divisions demonstrated by various techniques and tropes within fiction and poetry. The creative portion of this thesis consists of the complete manuscript of sequential prose poems constituting Bonné A. de Blas's chapbook, *The Rule of Contraction*. The introductory essay discusses the history of the modern prose poem, as well as the questions of genre surrounding its form, and describes the influences of the New Prose Poem and elliptical poetics as they informed the writing of *The Rule of Contraction*.

DEDICATION

As always, for Robin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gratitude is offered to each of my professors at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in the Department of English. Special thanks to Earl Braggs, Dr. James Arnett, and Dr. Bryan Hampton for their thoughtful and engaged reading of my essay and manuscript. I am indebted to my fellow workshop participants who provided, over the course of two years, much insightful feedback throughout the writing of these poems.

I acknowledge the manuscript, *The Rule of Contraction*, has been published previously in its entirety in 2016 by Kattywompus Press.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE RULE OF CONTRACTION.....	34
REFERENCES.....	76
VITA.....	83

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The poem in prose is the form of the future—

Charles Henri Ford

What is poetry and if you know what poetry is what is prose—

Gertrude Stein

The sequence of prose poems forming my thesis manuscript *The Rule of Contraction*, patterns the processes of creation, fragmentation, reconfiguration, destruction, and recreation, taking as inspiration the origin stories of the Abrahamic traditions as interpreted by the metaphysics of emanation and withdrawal espoused by both the Kabbalists and the Faylasufs. Fascinated as I am with foundation stories, with how these stories struggle to express in language an experience of transcendence, an experience of an ultimate reality and power lying behind the transient phenomena of the mundane world, I write to explore the place where language becomes crushed and splintered upon its encounter with the numinous.

My poems are purposefully dense, their diction exacting, making use of highly allusive and elliptical language in order both to break the chains of logic and to celebrate the possibilities of intuition so as to represent the shifting mosaic pattern of loss and displacement, experiences that are in themselves part of our collective, ancestral myths. The poems present how one line of thought branches into another in unpredictable ways, working conjointly with the connective tissue of the white space both on the individual pages and between each of the poems to create places for the reader to investigate, to take pause, to breathe inside the gaps occurring when stepping outside a linear arc and into the fractures that are memory and myth. In *The Rule of Contraction*, the poems function within the image of the braided river, an image where things

come apart, spread across the field, and then come back together again. In these assemblages of destruction and creation, disruption and repurpose, the poems interact as a quantum entanglement where the interaction among the poems is as a whole rather than of discrete units. Such repetition and reconfiguration of elements, as they create fragmentary tapestries, also celebrate the hybrid, the “thing” that defies specific location in order to celebrate a new revelation, a place where each poem can stand alone as a singular expression, and at the same time offering additional possibilities within a unifying construct.

From *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to Blondie’s “Forgive and Forget” from the album *No Exit*, the question of how humanity came to be on the planet has fascinated storytellers. We Westerners acquired our sense of the narrative arc from the ancient Greek dramatists with their focus on the introduction of a problem, the heightening of that problem, and the resolution of that problem. The ancient Hebrews, however, did story-telling differently, and after the destruction of the temple by the Romans during the siege of Jerusalem, the leading rabbis developed certain “rules of reading,” stating that literally, there is no sense of linear time in the Torah, no early and no late, no beginning, no ending.

Chronological time is of no importance to the stories comprising the Hebrew scriptures. The Hebrew Bible is full of echoes that emphasize the idea that time and event are multifaceted; the creation story, as the primary example, resonates again in the Book of Isaiah, with images and phrases repeating in a new location. With an ancient text that repeats and sometimes appears to contradict itself, a willingness to consider various possibilities is essential.

In my studies, I’ve read the Torah from books called in English the “great scriptures” or the Rabbinic Bible. These books consist of pages crammed with translated commentary surrounding the text of the Bible in different languages, scripts, and fonts. Presented in this way

are the thoughts of rabbis from all over the world, spanning twelve centuries, in discussion with one another, requiring a second, a third, a fourth reading, crossing the borders of time and language so to speak in multiple voices. The discussion is beautifully unruly, often ambiguous, multiple in meaning, and almost impossible to pin down. This reliance on the reader's judgment and ability to understand and infer places the reader within the book. How the reader reads matters when texts are written in such a format.

In addition to the format of the Rabbinic Bible is the format and structure of the Hebrew language itself. Save for transliteration, I neither read nor speak Hebrew, yet I am very aware that English and Hebrew have different rules of sentence structure and divergent means of word structure. In Biblical Hebrew, a sentence can begin with a subject, a verb, or an object; a verb often precedes a noun so that the sentence will read "and said God." Hebrew, being a Semitic language, has its words come from three-letter roots made exclusively from consonants. These roots in turn can have multiple manifestations—as verbs, nouns, and occasionally even as adjectives. These related words share kernels of meaning. It was not until the 8th century that ancient Hebrew was written with vowels. In Hebrew, vowels—dots and dashes located above, beneath, and inside letters—frequently determine the meaning of a word, a phrase, a sentence. The first of the vowels—aleph—is also the first letter of the alphabet and, according to the Kabbalists, is the singular place from which everything else in the universe is present and visible. In Hebrew, aleph functions as a glottal stop in speech, acting as that pause in the stream of language which, for a fraction of a second, any meaning is possible.

What becomes important when reading the Hebrew scriptures is how the reader reads even a single word. Using the Book of Genesis as the example, these are the words of the text: In/at the beginning; create; the skies, the heavens; the earth/land; wild emptiness, void; darkness;

water, deep water; the wind/spirit. The question becomes should the reader align with an interpretation of the verb in the first line as *bara*, in the past tense, so that it means “In the beginning God *created*” or should it be read it as *bro*, a form of the infinitive, so that it reads “in the beginning of God’s *creating*.” Many Jewish commentators believe in the reading rule of *smichut*—that the words and ideas that are neighbors are often situated near each other for a reason. Add to this the fact that ancient Hebrew has no periods, commas, semicolons, colons, exclamation marks, question marks, or quotation marks. No punctuation whatsoever. English, however, does.

The phrase “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” ends in a period in English. In Hebrew, there is the *sof-pasuk*, two dots that come at the end of each verse, whether the verse is a sentence or a phrase, a statement or a question, a description or a command. It is similar to a line-ending in poetry; all it indicates is that a line ends there, it is not a period. All these factors—the roots to words, the lack of vowels, and the lack of punctuation—create ambiguity in the text, making it multivalent and polysemic with a variety of interpretations. Is the Book of Genesis poetry? Is it prose? A prose poem?

I recall the day I met my first prose poem. I was at Arizona State University, enrolled in a poetry workshop with Norman Dubie while working on my undergraduate degree in Art History, where I was writing lineated poetry heavily influenced by T. S. Eliot and Stéphane Mallarmé, playing with all the white space on the page, captivated by symbolism and allusion. My friend Jenny and I were hanging out in her tiny studio, arranging the pieces for her upcoming MFA exhibition, when she stopped to hand me a book of poetry. “Here, take a look at this.” I read the words forming a dense block upon the white space:

Can it be that She'll have me acquitted for ambitions consistently squelched—that wealth in the end will make up for years of privation—that one day's success will wipe out the memory of my fatal lack of skill?

This is the opening stanzagraph to the poem “Anguish” as found in Arthur Rimbaud’s prose poetry collection *Illuminations*, translated from the French by Bertrand Mathieu. I had never read anything like it before. I asked to borrow the book.

A third of the way through the collection, I could see that the way Rimbaud’s poetry inhabits language was not diminished in any way by his elimination of the line break. The character of the images and the coordination of phrases remained no matter how the poem appear upon the page. The power inherent in the tension created by brevity and mastery of voice fascinated me. I struggled through writing my own poor imitations, looking to find both subject and voice.

I began to look for other prose poems. Scouring local bookstores, I discovered the poetry of Russell Edson, full of his fabulist and surreal cubes of text. Edson led me to James Tate, Tate to Charles Simic, Simic to John Ashbery, Ashbery to Charles Baudelaire, Baudelaire to Francis Ponge and Jean Follian. From there, I discovered Stuart Friedbert and David Young’s anthology *Models of the Universe*, which lead me to Gertrude Stein and Czeslaw Milosz and ... I was inundated by prose poets, each of whom added something to the genre, making the prose poem their own.

Eventually, I found the way into my own prose poems. I opened myself to what Baudelaire calls “the lyric movements of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jolts of consciousness.” Now, after several years, my writing inhabits the prose poem, exploiting its form through a commitment to the lyrical and textual possibilities of language through sound, repetition, and sentence structure, put askew against common expectations. I appreciate that the

prose poem's form is able to amplify that feeling of disjointedness and disconnection. What I love most about the prose poem is the power of the sentence when stands on its own as a unit of rhythm. Being able to put long, complex sentences next to short ones, placing them next to fragments and questions and one-word sentences creates pattern and music that is not possible with the interruption of line breaks. I like to use repetition of words, phrases, and sentence structure to create music in my prose poems.

Repeatedly, I am asked to define, and then to defend, the prose poem as poetry to readers and to fellow poets.

A prose poem is a poem written in prose.

A prose poem, however, is not simply poetry without line breaks. I prefer to think of it more as poetry that can make use of any and all poetic devices found within verse poems with the exception of line breaks. On the page, the prose poem, by definition, looks like like prose; single columns whose lines go out to the edge of the page, and where no aural or visual significance should be attributed to the line-breaks. The prose poem is an opportunity for writers and readers to engage differently with the shape and texture of language, to encounter phrasing with new eyes, and to experience how expectations are undermined and exploited by extending the horizontal momentum of language while suspending the vertical. It is possible to write a narratively conventional prose poem or to write one that disrupts narrative or representation. It is possible to write one with conservative or radical or ambiguous social information.

Of course, there are others who express a different reaction to the prose poem. For example, as noted by Nikki Santilli in her book *Such Rare Citings*, in a 1985 essay, British poet George Baker writes that the prose poem is a “mythical beast” similar to the Loch Ness monster

only a few poets and critics believe they have seen, but for which there is only uncertain evidence (16). Baker continues, writing that, much like Voltaire's God, "the prose poem got itself invented simply because it did not exist (16). It is clear Baker either has not seen, or willfully ignores, the thousands and thousands of prose poems as published in journals, anthologies, and collections around the world since the middle of the the 19th century.

While in *Field Guide to Prose Poetry* Gary McDowell and F. Daniel Rzicznek suggest that the earliest tradition of prose poetry can be found in in the writings of Han Dynasty poets who practiced a lengthy poem in rhymed verse called *fu* which is both descriptive and narrative (XV), the consensus among scholars and critics is that the Western tradition of the prose poem has its roots in the writings of the French poets Aloysius Bertrand and Charles Baudelaire. Thanks to this tradition, in France today, according to Marguerite Murphy writing in *A Tradition of Subversion*, a poem is just as likely to be written in prose as in verse (2).

The French *poeme en prose* appeared, and then quickly blossomed, in the mid-19th century, when Aloysius Bertrand wrote *Gaspard de la nuit*, a series of picturesque prose sketches and vignettes set in several Dutch cities and in Paris, described by Robert Alexander in *Family Portrait* as poetic prose written as an adaptation to a modern, fast-paced, and more abstract life (235). For these oneric, prose-driven scenes, shaped more as moods and impressions than prose narratives, Bertrand drew on the form of the medieval ballad. This new poetry became a way for writers to reevaluate the expressive possibilities, and the social functionality, of prose itself.

Charles Baudelaire credited Bertrand as his model for what Baudelaire called his *petites poems en prose*. Baudelaire sought to write musically but without poetry's traditional rhythm and rhyme. For Baudelaire, the prose poem's brevity and condensation established a point of resemblance and contact with lyric, lineated verse in order to underscore and highlight its

deficiencies and weaknesses in meeting the requirements of modernity. Baudelaire's dedication in *Paris Spleen*, as translated by Robert Alexander in *Family Portrait*, asks, "Which one of us has not dreamed, in his ambitious days, of the miracle of a poetic prose... supple enough and jarring enough to be adapted to the soul's lyrical movements, to the undulations of reverie, to the sudden starts that consciousness takes (235).

Written in 1862, *Paris Spleen* allows for multiple entrances and egresses, combinations and recombinations throughout the text. In this collection, prose poetry acquires its modern sensibility, and with the relative stability of the term achieved within Baudelaire's life, prose poetry establishes itself as a genre. Alexander notes that the observations about which Baudelaire writes help to link the prose poem to the urban environment (23). Baudelaire's collection consists of prose poems offering detailed meditations on the idea of the city as presented through Paris—its corners and passages, its narratives of fleeting and random experience on its sidewalks and streets—the descriptions of activities peculiar to urban life. Charles Bernstein, writing in *The Attack of the Difficult Poems*, declares Baudelaire to be a crucial poet in terms of what he calls the modern history of the representation of the everyday. Baudelaire, he says, takes French poetry down from the lofty subject matter traditionally thought of as appropriate for poetry: the beautiful, the expensive, the royal, the mythological, the important, and crucially, the uplifting, instead identifying with the ordinariness around him—the people on the street and in the café (176).

In turn, Baudelaire influenced the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud. Rimbaud, like Baudelaire, wrote lineated poetry before turning to prose poetry. Rimbaud uses the prose poem structure throughout *Illuminations* to create a disjunctive appropriation of both verse and prose. Through prose poetry, Rimbaud's poetry speaks in the language of the seer and the shaman, able to alter

the very nature of reality through an induced dissociation of his personality as poet, by practicing what he called a “reasoned derangement of the senses.” As John Ashbery writes in the introduction to his translation of *Illuminations*, Rimbaud finds modernity in the prose poem with its acknowledgment of the simultaneity of all life, “the condition that nourishes poetry at every second” (16). The prose poetry of Rimbaud, Paul Valéry, and Stéphane Mallarmé serves as inspiration to that of Max Jacob, Henri Michaux, and Francis Ponge. Their poetry explores the early 20th century’s pursuit of the imperatives of the unconscious, the awareness found in Cubist painting and the twelve-tone scale. Rimbaud brings Modernity to poetry.

As the French have been so successful with the development of the *poème en prose*, many critics have argued that the form is a uniquely French genre. Though not an accurate argument, it can’t be denied that the French prose poetry tradition remains of crucial importance for any serious attempt to come to terms with the genre. Yet, it is not the only country with a strong and influential role in the creation of the prose poem.

In their book, *An Introduction to the Prose Poem*, Brian Clements and Jamey Dunham give evidence that prose poetry has existed in Great Britain since 1831 (1). Furthering the argument, Alexander sees scattered throughout William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* what Blake himself called “memorable fancies,” (235), and finding in the work of Leigh Hunt, the mid 19th century poet, slice-of-life sketches published as what which Hunt called a “now” (235), both of which can be read as prose poetry. In the 1890s, British poets, well acquainted with French symbolism, were composing prose poems. The greater British literary community, however, viewed the prose poem, according to Murphy, as hopelessly French (48). Prose poetry in Britain quickly became associated with the works of Oscar Wilde, who wrote *Salomé* in French, and Ernest Dowson, who translated Paul Verlaine’s *Decorations in Verse*.

Wilde's prose poems, brought in evidence during his trial, became proof of the form's decadence, and applied a stigma of effeminacy to the genre. That stigma was hard to remove from the mind of British poets as they approached the prose poem.

For T.S. Eliot, the prose poem is an oxymoronic attempt to revive the stylistic preciousness and technical "charlatanism" of those British poets favoring artifice over nature, the relationship between decay and desire, passion and fading beauty. However, as Clements and Dunham state, Eliot does praise the prose poems of Baudelaire and what he calls the "pure prose" of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*; it wasn't the form that presents the problem for Eliot but rather the *naming* of the form itself (8).

Throughout the mid-20th century, the prose poem was embraced throughout Europe and Latin America. Poets such as Czeslaw Milosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Pablo Neruda, and Gabriela Mistral each incorporated both narrative and free-form verse meditation into the poem without sacrificing lyricism.

According to Michael Benedikt in his seminal work, *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology*, the characteristics of the prose poem in the 20th century are an intense use of poetic devices without the stricture of line breaks or meter; mundane diction; ironic wit, skepticism and tough mindedness; focus on the workings of the unconscious and the inward imagination (12). These characteristics appear in the language experiments of Gertrude Stein demonstrated in *Tender Buttons*, in Ernest Hemingway's narrative pieces throughout *In Our Time*, in William Carlos Williams's *Kora in Hell*, in Kay Boyle's image-sequences, and in Charles Henri Ford's surrealism.

Stein is perhaps the Modernist poet most associated with prose poetry. Jonathan Moore writes in *A Poverty of Objects* that Stein saw the prose poem's potential for dismantling

“dominating narrative” along lyric modes. As prose poetry struggled to become a genre, it became engaged in what Stein called the “politics of gender,” something important to her as *Tender Buttons* explores the porous boundary between male/female though the porous boundary of prose/poetry (11). Stein, through her extremely eccentric syntax and unexpected juxtapositions in composing many passages of virtually impenetrable density, the fundamental elements, or words, of her text cannot entirely detach themselves from the social-historical context and uses in which they are embedded. Moore states that in the “Objects” section of *Tender Buttons* Stein’s approach to the concrete takes the form of violent verbal abstraction, so that what “hasn’t yet been” can appear only as the dazzling negative image of everyday uses of language (207). By means of its object-like appearance on the page—a distinct block of text—the prose poems constituting *Tender Buttons* suggest that passing through the condition of reification, or being treated as though an object, first requires taking on the form of the object.

The prose poem proves to be adaptive beyond Modernism. Alexander, in his dissertation *The American Prose Poem*, notes that in America after 1964, small literary magazines and presses began publishing prose poetry written by Americans in greater numbers than in previous decades (8). The anti-authoritarianism and yearning for personal creative freedom of the 1960s and 1970s provided fertile ground for the prose poem in America. Poets who hoped to abandon bankrupt tropes and liberate themselves from tired traditions turned to the prose poem in sufficient numbers to prompt Benedikt to comment in his introduction that in America, the prose poem was no longer an “underground affair” (10).

Robert Bly, John Ashbery, James Tate, and W.S. Merwin wrote and translated prose poetry during this renaissance. These Deep Imagist poets created prose poems that embraced and expanded the qualities of their European ancestors. Bly approaches prose poetry by focusing on

the the object and how observation serves as a gateway into lyric perception. Merwin's prose poems offer short bursts of narrative riddled with rich imagery and moments of lyric intensity. Add to these poets Russell Edson, whose surrealistic prose poems are rooted in the ancient patterns of parables and fables. By the end of the 1970s, the prose poem had become, in Donald Hall's words, "a dominant American literary form" as quoted by Alexander in *Family Portrait* (232). Clements and Dunham state that within the last 15 years in America the prose poem has become common in mainstream literary journals and anthologies (1).

Benedikt's *The Prose Poem* was published in 1976 and was one of the first significant attempts at popularizing the genre in the United States. Benedikt's book also created a standard by which to discuss the modern prose poem, though some have argued that this standard has ironically limited what began as a rebellion against the restraints of definition. Holly Inglesias, in *Boxing Inside the Box*, writes that in the process of following Benedikt's lead, subsequent editors and critics have overlooked prose poems that are lyrical, embodied, or relational and do not fit the template of characteristics Benedikt helped to forge (10). Inglesias, and many others, believes adherence to this mold has served to ossify the genre as well as exclude a great deal of work by women.

In the decades since *The Prose Poem* created its standards, prose poetry has embraced many many forms and ideologies. Feminist poets, such as Nin Andrews, Nickole Brown, and Kathleen McGooley, attracted by the mutability and expansiveness of the prose poem, refocused upon the lyric possibilities. Lyn Hejinian writes prose poems that are personal and dialogic which read as mini-autobiographical stories told in fabulist detail, capturing her readers by their moments of poetic clarity and mystery. Poets best known as experimentalists such as Alice Notley, C.D. Wright, and Rosmarie Waldrop write prose poems stemming from the tradition of

Gertrude Stein's poetics. Their use of words and images garner meaning through association and sound rather than through dictionary definition, and their prose poems depend on the sonic qualities of language to provide meaning. David Keplinger considers the prose poem a form of jazz. In his essay "No Easy Way Out" found in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry*, Keplinger calls prose poetry a "revolt against traditional music, the way the avant-garde departed from traditional patterns of jazz in the early 60s" (58). The prose poem is a jazz solo, its melody in the white space. For Keplinger, no rhythm is as complicated as the rhythm of the poem written without line breaks.

What grows in that place is possessed of a beauty all its own, ramshackle and unexpected.
Campbell McGrath

McGrath paints the prose poem as a ragged but welcoming gully between a field of wheat and a field of corn, a liminal place of wildflowers, weeds, frogs, and birds. It is a place between poetry and fiction; however, not everyone believes in this divide within literature. As noted by Murphy, William Wordsworth, in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," argues against an existential distinction between the language of prose and language of poetry in defending the use of prosaic diction in poetry (9). Literature has, however, a presupposition of a stability of genres—a static standardization of form against which the prose poem will always be recognized as "other."

Due to its marginality, however, the prose poem must continually subvert prosaic conventions in order to establish itself as an authentic "other." It must not subvert only the conventions of verse, but it also must subvert those of prose as a basic distinguishing feature of the genre, which has few, if any conventions of its own. This requires that every prose poem

must suggest a traditional prose genre to some extent in order to subvert that tradition. Murphy labels this subversion a “battlefield” where conventional prose appears and is “defeated” by the text’s drive to innovate and to differentiate itself to “construct a self-defining ‘poeticity,’” a term in itself made problematic by the prose poem (3). The suggestion of a traditional genre of discourse can lend authority to the “new” prose, despite the eventual subversion through defeat of convention.

It’s true that every text may to some extent alter its own genre. The prose poem draws in and alters other genres or modes of discourse as part of its own peculiar self-definition, and it is the most basic example of mixed-genre writing; it is a genre whose very possibility was created the moment when the genre was born, inscribed *in* it even though it is the genre that wants *out* of genre. It is a genre which marks the problem of genre even as its own history of genre markers develops. As quoted by Jonathan Moore in *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre*, theorist Tzvetan Todorov states the prose poem is a genre “based on the union of opposites” and is “the appropriate form for a thematic of duality, contrast, and opposition” (18).

Benedikt believes the best working definition for a prose poem is to say that it is “a genre of poetry, self-consciously written in prose” (12). Understanding prose poetry as a genre necessitates exploring the interpretive consequences of reading what has been called the *poeme en prose*, or prose poem as if it is a genre. The very tradition of affronts to tradition—what is prose, what is poetry—gives this genre its vitality and power to continue to revise the boundaries of what is poetry, or indeed, what is literature.

The simple definition of prose poetry—“poetry written in prose”—is uncomfortably tautological, forcing the question as to what is prose and what is poetry. The prose poem resists

definition, requiring readers to rethink theories of genre and their use in interpreting literature. Genre is often thought of as a formal category—Aristotelian definitions, Renaissance hierarchies, and Northrup Frye’s anatomies all contribute to this perception. Jacques Derrida writes in “The Law of Genre,” “as soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind” (204). In literature, genre can be considered to function similar to the way grammar functions in language; according to Murphy, it is a set of interpretive guidelines to provide coherence (124).

By being a category, the prose poem has to be understood as constituting itself against or in relation to other literary kinds. Such an understanding not only implies a relationship to a prior “kind”—poetry in general—but also hints at its own historical and cultural situation. The prose poem must arise in a milieu in which poetry and prose exist in opposition to one another. Eliot is concerned with this opposition; it is his contention that the distinction between “verse” and “prose” is clear while the the distinction between “poetry” and “prose” is very obscure. In his prose poetry anthology *Family Portrait*, Alexander presents Eliot’s concerns in his own words, “I object to the term ‘prose poetry’ because it seems to imply a sharp distinction between ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’ which I do not admit, and if it does not imply this distinction the term is meaningless, as there can be no combination of what is not distinguished” (245). The reader is led back to consider what Wordsworth contended several centuries earlier.

In *Family Portrait*, Alexander discusses Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of literary interpretation, meaning that a poem can be seen as an “event” constructed by the relationship, or transaction, between the reader and the text (246). A reader responds to the words of the poem or the story in the context of her or his knowledge of the span of literary

tradition. A text can be a poem only because certain possibilities exist within the tradition; it is a text is written in relation to other poems. Most readers expect a poem to have rhyme, meter, heightened diction, and either difficulty or clarity of language. Lineation traditionally serves as a visual cue by which a text reveals itself as poetry. In a lineated poem, the frame surrounding it consists of both the white space on the rest of the page and, more abstractly, the entire tradition of poetic art. Once something has become a convention of poetry, violating this convention, and thereby upsetting the reader's expectations, it leads to a certain foregrounding of the text. As a new genre, and one aligned with the tendency toward dissolution of genre, the prose poem seems to introduce a new, blank slate, a *tabula rasa* in its rejection of lineation, which, until the appearance of the prose poem, was the *sine qua non* of poetry.

So what is poetry? It is important to remember that no one has created a definition of "poetry" that fits all cases and excludes all other genres. Mary Kinzie, in *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*, presents the idea that poetry makes use of line, syntax, diction, trope, rhetoric, and rhythm (45). The line break is an important distinction between poetry as prose for Stephen Dobyns as he states in *Next Word, Better Word* (75). Glyn Maxwell writes in *On Poetry* that a poem arises from the human urge to break the silence and to fill emptiness, stating that this idea suggests so much by giving so many dimensions in so few words (22). In *Why Poetry Matters*, Jay Parini states that "poetry extends the boundaries of thought by extending the boundaries of expression itself" (8). Parini continues by offering Percy Bysshe Shelley's observations about poetry as found in his "A Defense of Poetry" in which he argues that poetry both creates "new materials of knowledge" and "engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good" (16).

Stephen Burt, in *Close Calls with Nonsense*, suggests that readers should approach poetry looking for a persona and a world, not for an argument or a plot (11).

In his essay “The Hut of Poetry,” found in his book, *Wonderful Investigations*, Dan Beachy-Quick believes poetry to be “an audacious experiment in form, with the form as the means of the experiment (6). Language, he continues, can often obstruct the fundamental work a poem tries to realize, because language can overpower the space of the of the poem with words that can be captured by intelligence, depriving the space of its power. If a poem is read only for the meaning and value of its words enforces a strict economy on poetry, which is a value system poetry works to question and refuse. If the work of poetry is the work of making meaning through language, Beachy-Quick wonders if it is possible for the reader to refuse to make assumptions, leaving behind expectations and instead come to a poem thinking of it not as a poem but as a cavern (7). Reading is a method of entering the space of the poem; entering that space is to experience initiation.

Becoming more than simply a location or a destination written on the page, the poem is a liminal place, a threshold in which the reader must learn to remain patiently. Beachy-Quick concludes that the difficulty of reading a poem isn’t in trying to decipher its meaning, but rather is in learning to read so as to encounter and enter the environment opened by the poem (8). The reader enters this new environment to call into question the knowledge held prior to the reading of the poem, to “ask ourselves a question we otherwise would not ask, a question that begins at the point of our certainty,” writes Beachy-Quick (8).

Lyn Hejinian writes in the introduction of *The Language of Inquiry* that the language of poetry is a language of inquiry, not the language of a genre, so that poetry takes as its premise that language is “a medium for experiencing experience” (3). It is her contention that the

emphasis in poetry is on the moving among metaphors, metonyms, irrationalities, and ironies rather than on the arriving to a place of meaning or coherence.

In *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*, Steven Monte contends publication context and readership may signal genre as much as the work's formal features, or authorial intent. The suggestion is for the reader to abandon the attempt to define prose poetry according to its most typical features, and instead look at it more abstractly as a paradox, as an irreconcilable contradiction in terms that puts its own integrity as a separate genre question. Monte suggests that perhaps it is of more significance to ask what it means to read a work as a prose poem than to ask if it is a prose poem (24). Inglesias quotes poet Wayne Dodd as also being concerned with what *happens* in a prose poem, as opposed to what *is* a prose poem—"it's where the mind can feel itself, thinking" (7).

The question becomes what does a prose poem do with language, what is its linguistic performance. Murphy suggests the prose poem exposes the extent to which our understanding of language is driven by our recognition of types of discourse (13). The prose poem functions as a self-reflexively inclusive but highly charged, intensely concentrated hybrid literary form. Moore states that to study the prose poem is to attend to the desire for a resolution of existing contradictions and antagonistic relations in a reappropriation, neutralization, and cooption of the space known as poetry (20).

Lyricism and a strong sense of closure provide the most common explanation of the prose poem's brevity. Yet prose poems often appear to resist closure by the very irreconcilable differences on which they are based. As Moore writes, prose is predominately referential in its construction and cannot simply stand in autonomous lines as can versified language (75). Prose relies on context to achieve the representation of its objects. A trick of the eye, the brevity of the

prose poem is effected by a process that eliminates its context in an attempt to isolate the object poetically. Santilli takes brevity to mean that the prose poem can be identified as a discrete unit like a critical fragment (99). The text is fragmentary, and the context required for its interpretation is missing. Due to these elements, the text contains an implied context. Different from expressed context by not being present on the page, implied context is created through the surrounding white space which is the active element.

For me, the prose poem is capacious and interior. It holds as much as the world it reflects.

Michel Delville, in *The American Prose Poem* states there can be as many types of prose poems as there are practitioners of the prose poem (21). There is no intrinsic type or form of the prose poem; it typically seeds other traditional or conventional forms from within to elaborate upon the structure. A convenient way to discuss structure in regards to prose poetry is to talk about their individual strategies for meaning. There are several possibilities for the structure of the prose poem, none of which excludes the others.

A prose poem can offer a seamlessness, a flow which makes it a successful literary genre. The range of prose styles found in prose poetry is potentially as broad as that found in prose in general. A prose poem can be a text that begins as a narrative, but subverts narrative convention at one or more levels, or can be a text that looks like a description, but likewise fails to meet the conventional referential aims of description—to make the reader into a viewer. Murphy describes the prose poem as a Cubist technique whereby poet and reader can break the habits of perception, discrediting the finality of a thing (108).

Cubism is not the only influence on the prose poem. In 1924, Andre Breton published his “Manifesto of Surrealism,” formalizing not only the Surrealist movement, but contributing to the

movement becoming one of the central influences not only on the general culture in the 20th century. Surrealists wanted to experience or to create the experience in an audience of what Breton called “the marvelous;” they sought to find it in “psychic automatism in its purest state,” in collisions of the dream world and waking life (23). The prose poem was the perfect vessel for the dark, philosophical subtext of Surrealism. Some of the most celebrated contemporary prose poems have their roots in the school of Surrealism.

Max Jacob uses surreal imagery effectively to convey the leap from observation to the subconscious. Jacob’s poem “Hell Has Gradations” follows the descent of the speaker from the literal world to the figurative as he is chased down a staircase to Hell. Russell Edson’s poems frolic between the many possible worlds interchangeably, managing to avoid the trap of absurdity for its own sake. Charles Simic’s *The World Doesn’t End* was the first collection of prose poems to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize. These brief, semi-autobiographical prose poems employ dark, surreal images to capture the strange duality of an immigrant existing in two cultures, if not two worlds, simultaneously.

Set in historically recognizable contexts or based upon personal experiences, the structure of anecdote used in prose poetry is the most narrative. It differs from the fable primarily in its factual time and circumstance. In *An Introduction to the Prose Poem*, Clements and Dunham believe the central purpose of the anecdote is less to do with outlining a moral than with stating a truth or insight brought to light by the events of the poem (9). These prose poems transcend the individual event in which the poem is premised to arrive, if not at an epiphany, then at least at a powerful portrait that resonates beyond the significance of the initial experience itself. Pablo Neruda’s “Ceremony,” Carolyn Forché’s “The Colonel,” and James Wright’s “Honey” are all examples of the anecdote structure.

The object structure used in prose poetry first appears in the “thing poems” by Rainer Marie Rilke. This structure is one in which the poet strives to be invisible so that the description and the language are at the forefront in order to discover an essential observation about the object itself. The language of the object poem tends to be objective and concrete. Francis Ponge is a master of the object structure, creating descriptions that rise to the level of mediations. The object structure supports the prose poems of Morton Marcus. The same holds true in the prose poetry of Nin Andrews and Brenda Hillman.

Often using an extended or controlling metaphor, the structure of the meditative prose poem revolves around a central idea, a memory, or a subject that is observed and upon which the poet ruminates. It may use elements of the anecdote to create a freshness in the contemplation of its subject. Clements and Dunham suggest the metaphor structure is a more intimate strategy as this form of prose poetry frequently purports to be the private thoughts of the poet (53). In the prose poem “Goodness Knows,” David Lazar ruminates over several boyhood recollections concerning the speaker’s religious education as a way of accessing how he got to the point where he finds himself in the present. Brian Johnson’s “Self-Portrait (Kneeling),” one the prose poems in his “Self-Portrait” sequence, takes the nature of the self as its central subject and explores it, considering many things that would appear to not be the self as a way of ultimately discovering that the pantheistic self is all of these things.

An aphorism is a statement, often laconic or clever, that attempts to reveal a personal or universal truth, an accurate observation, or a moral commentary. Stuart Friebert and David Young in *Models of the Universe: An Anthology of the Prose Poem*, the term was first applied in relation to the aphorisms of Hippocrates, and was later distinguished by writers such as Erasmus of Rotterdam and Friedrich Nietzsche (65). Used as a structure in prose poetry, the aphorism

generally takes the form of a brief observation that reveals an obscure revelation. While many aphoristic prose poems read as though sage fragments espousing grains of wisdom, others seem to spring from the initial observation with intuitive leaps of imagination. Milton Kessler's prose poem "Selected Random Sayings by Kosho Shimizu, Chief Abbot, Todaj" weaves apparently unrelated and isolated lines together into a suggestive portrait. Much like Kessler's prose poems, Jaime Sabine's long prose poetry sequence, "Lost Birds," connects disparate observations and reflections into a collection that moves toward a common objective so that these pieces, with their apparent contradictions to arrive at subjective truths. These individual elements are strung together, working together not so much for a meaning found through their collection but as individual truths held only for the moment.

The recurrence of a word, a phrase, or a sound in a poem adds to it emphasis while establishing, as in music, a pattern that the reader comes to anticipate. This anticipation can be further reinforced with recurrences or can be frustrated by the sudden absence of the word or sound. The prose poems of David Ignatow and Charles Kesler take a narrative approach within this structure; their repeated phrases intersperse throughout their work. The repetitions constructing G. C. Waldrep's prose poem "Who Is Josquin des Prez?" become a kind of linguistic dance, not unlike the musical steps of Gertrude Stein in their associative leaps, but perhaps with a more readily recognizable narrative reference point. The musical effect of the repetitions within this prose poem is similar to the effect of the rondeau, a form of verse derived from a medieval dance.

Another strategy found in prose poetry is to focus as much on the sounds of words, phrases, and sentences as on their meanings—they are concerned with the ways that sound produces meaning, whether in conjunction with logical syntax or outside it. Gertrude Stein and

ee cummings are two of the most famous practitioners of poetry that revels in its own sound, in the sounds of words, in the sounds of language in the mouth, in the ear, and in the mind. Stein's poetry uses words both as referents to the physical world and as sound values that accumulate the way phrases in a symphony might. ee cummings's "I was sitting in mcsorley's" paints a soundscape that evokes the visual and aural environments of a pub. In the prose poem "I question if I," Kristin Ryling selects words for their aural effects rather than for their denotative meanings, so that meaning seeping through the cracks and edges of the poem. It is evident Ryling celebrates the simple pleasure in the music of words, a pleasure that may be at the heart of our collective impulse to make poetry.

The music of words is what drives many Language poets, with their distrust of the speech-based assumptions behind most contemporary American poetry, to use the prose poem as a means of redefining the goals and methods of poetic language. Language poetry's notion of poetry as a scriptural art and medium also applies to what Ron Silliman calls the "New Prose Poem," and thereby referring to his own creative prose and that of most poets commonly associated with the Language movement. In his introduction to *In the American Tree*, Silliman distinguishes the New Prose Poem from the short narratives and neo-Surrealist fables characterizing many contemporary American prose poems, stating, "In the sense familiar to us from French modernism, there are no prose poems here. And beyond organization into paragraphs, these works share little with the dramatic monologues and short stories that characterize other recent prose writing by American poets" (xvii). Silliman's own syntactic dynamics are directly inspired by the work of Gertrude Stein, recognized as a precursor of Language poetry.

According to Delville, Silliman shares Stein's skepticism about the naturalness of descriptive and argumentative syntax and of implicit relationship of language to reference sustained by the simple, seemingly obvious concept that words should derive from speech and refer to things (196). In regards to language as it functions in poetry, Silliman writes "the torqueing which is normally suggested by line breaks, the function of which is to enhance ambiguity and polysemy, has not moved directly into the grammar of the sentence (90). This torqueing of the syllogistic movement of prose has the effect of constantly forcing the reader to consider the sentences and paragraphs as so many relatively autonomous units, the semantic potential of which, as Delville notes, does not depend on a particular logical, narrative, metaphorical, or emotive sequence (198).

Critic Stephen Burt coined the phrase "elliptical poet" to describe those poets, who, like the Language poets, admire disjunction and confrontation, and, as he states in *Close Calls with Nonsense: Reading New Poetry*, "seek the authority of the rebellious" (346). Elliptical poets want to challenge their readers, surprise or explode assumptions about what belongs in a poem, and they do so without sacrificing traditional lyrical goals. Burt states elliptical poets are past masters at prose poetry, with works that boast "menageries of of similes" and "caress the technical" (348). Prose poetry allows these poets, such as Lyn Hejinian and Rosmarie Waldrop, to reinvent or eliminate transitions; one thought, one impression, tailgates the other while laying down a series of hints, or residues, of experience.

Prose poetry written by Language poets and/or Elliptical poets falls into the category poet and critic Charles Bernstein labels "Difficult Poetry". In his book, *Attack of the Difficult Poem*, Bernstein argues that when a text is dressed in the costume of poetry, that, in and of itself, is a provocation to consider these basic questions of language, meaning, and art (9). Poetry, he

continues, is marked by its aversion to to conformity, to received ideas, to the expected or mandated or regulated form. Bernstein presents a difficult poem as one meeting several criteria—is the poem hard to appreciate; is its vocabulary and syntax hard to understand; do readers struggle with the poem; is the reader’s imagination affected by the poem (4). Much like Silliman and the Language poets, Bernstein studies speech and scriptural language, noting that writing not only records language, it also changes language, and consciousness. Alphabetic writing makes its own particular marks on language, allowing for greater levels of abstraction and reflection, which has often resulted in diminishing the amount of action and “doing” (95).

Bernstein suggests that alphabetic language—written language—ultimately freed poetry, though not completely, from the necessity of storage and transmission of the culture’s memories and laws—poetry’s epic function. In the age of literacy, this task was ultimately assumed by prose. Poetry, released from this overriding obligation to memory storage, increasingly became defined by the individual voice, poetry’s lyric function. In this way, the lyric is contrasted to the impersonal authority of prose, constituted by such subjects and law and philosophy (104).

In *The Language of Inquiry*, Lyn Hejinian writes that language is nothing but meanings, and meanings are nothing but a flow of contexts, with such contexts rarely coalescing into images, rarely coming to terms (1). Interviewed by Dubravka Djuric, Hejinian elaborates on this, stating that language is qualitatively different from other artistic mediums in that it isn’t a single thing or a single type of material; “language consists of a vast array of strategies and situations for discovering and making meaning. It not only exists in multitudes, it is multitudes of context” (162).

My own prose poems are attempts to produce an experience of language as a social material, evoking, in the process, material facts about language and rhythms within language that

each of us knows as well as our own breath or the thud of our heart. As Silliman, Burt, Bernstein, and Hejinian write, such poetry is often accused of being obscure, difficult, inaccessible, but, as they've stated, preconceptions about what poetry should be like block out the very real experiences possible with language not tethered to stylistic conventions.

The prose poems in *The Rule of Contraction* evidence my deliberate erasure of standard syntactic progression, normal relations of time and space, and explicit frames of reference to a world outside the text forces readers to make sense of the poems by digging into their own associative and interpretive competence, rather than merely subscribing to a predetermined model of narrative or syntactic procedures. As is typical of much language-oriented poetry, my prose poems are marked by the absence of normative or prescriptive elements in that the reader is not forced into a restrictive, paradigmatic frame of reference. On a metaphorical level, the sequence of images refuses to yield to any ultimate interpretation and allows for a polysemy of semantic associations. When Silliman writes of an "increased polysemy" leading to a proliferation of referential vectors by which to create new conditions for a cognitive approach to language and the creation of meaning, he is echoing Bernstein's appreciation of a "recharged use the multivalent referential vectors that any word has, how words in combination tone and modify the associations make for each of them" (203). By using the non-sequential narrative associated with the Language poets which are at once highly disrupted and highly organized, I am consciously using this diminishing of normative frames of reference and the consequent explosion of associational energy so to allow my readers to redistribute meaning in a personal, writerly fashion of their own.

Readers of my prose poetry will find similarities with the work of several Language poets. Typical of the new compositional syntax inaugurated by the New Prose Poem is Kit

Robinson's prose poem, "Verdigris." Characteristically divided into stanzagraphs of more or less equal length, the relationships of contiguity are interrupted and deviated by the disjunction between the sentences which read in part as:

The sign is a raw shape. People river. Space lights up the porch. Dust clouds the window. Ashes break down into sky. A bird flies parallel to the slope of roof. Wires hang at a like angle. (69).

In the absence of explicit syntactic links between the sentences or an overall referential or contextual focus, the connections the reader can make both between the sentences within each paragraph and among the paragraphs and the piece in its entirety can only be tentative and partially realized. Throughout its entirety, Robinson's prose poem lacks the traditional elements of linearity, plot, or characterization underlying conventional narrative, whether of the fictional or poetic variety. The poem is not, however, devoid of elements conveying a sense of unity or closure, using alliteration and assonance to do so. In this prose poem is a world in which language and the self seem on the verge of becoming engulfed in angles and curves of the material environment.

The prose poetry of Diane Ward possesses most of the external attributes of language-oriented poetry, including an attention to the material quality of words, a highly experimental and self-reflexive stance, and the use of essentially abstract, quasi-expository rhetoric. Ward conceives of poetry as a means of account for the complex dialectics of language and desire. Her abstract descriptions of private experience account for the complex verbal and gestural strategies used by people in relating with one another, or simply to themselves, in seemingly casual situations. The following short excerpt from "Pronouncing" from the collection *Never Without One* shows Ward's fragmented landscapes:

Ears leveled to the silence of a structural sidewalk movement. Feet leveled to the sidewalk sustained. And enemy massages an enemy. Lower and lower, enter with

monotony. All the rage, for effect. White town connected by blue ink threads on perfumed white envelopes (87).

Ward's writings are often characterized by a sense of what Jean Baudrillard calls "the loss of the real," a condition in which the modernist tension between reality and illusion, the "authentic original" and the copy, has been dissipated and replaced by the "simulacrum"—a model of "a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2). In *In the American Tree*, Silliman writes Baudrillard's "simulacrum" is a relevant interpretive model for Ward's "Pronouncing," in which the self, confronted with "window oddities painted like painting," is liable to mistake "the forest for trees and tree-like devices" (332).

Lyn Hejinian's *A Thought Is the Bride of What Thinking* is a chapbook-length extended series of prose poems using in aphoristic prose; a mode of complete but heterogeneous thoughts. Various statements seem succinct, compressed, as though all the parts of a syllogism were condensed into a single excessive logical moment, but one with explosive properties. Throughout, the language is elliptical, inhabiting gaps and spaces, but exhibiting gaps and spaces within itself as well. For example, from the section entitled "Variations: A Return of Worlds:"

Lucidities, or, lines. The starry angular varieties of recurrent word and changed idea in constellation gather. On the nectarine and on the clarinet distinction casts a light, the two in turn. One has to only look at the one to think to see the other (3).

In these prose poems, Robinson, Ward, and Hejinian deprive the reader of any figurative or emotional content, the objects and discourses cease to be symbols and become symptoms of a new form of linguistic and psychological depthlessness. This interest in surfaces is illustrated further in this section of a stanzagraph appearing in Craig Watson's prose poem "Discipline":

Shadow, in the next moment, will reverse. Surfaces pass through surfaces, edge slit by edge, consuming friction. A threshold grinds into position, numbing the glare of straight time (n.p.).

and this stanzagraph taken from Tom Beckett's "The Picture Window":

They are curiously interfaced. Their surfaces forming a common boundary. One might say that he thought of her as a person. No one feels composed. She is spectacularly encumbered. They are finding themselves alone. Each of them (119).

Whether the surfaces and edges of Watson's and Beckett's poems are "consuming friction" or "curiously interfaced," they have in common their continual addition to the erosion of human relationships and the individual consciousness into a space of two-dimensional anonymousness.

Also concerned with surfaces and what lies beneath are Eric Baus's prose poem collections *The To Sound, Tuned Doves, Scared Text*, and *The Tranquilized Tongue*, all of which exist in the place, as is typical of the New Prose Poem, where the relationships of contiguity continue to be interrupted and deviated by the disjunction between his sentences. For example, Baus writes in the poem "The Amplified Tribe" from *The Tranquilized Tongue*:

The recessive films synchronized with the water in the conductor's bones. The stunted scenes nested in baroque ocean vessels. The host bottled the scarlet phoneme in a submerged physician's chest. The acoustic net dispersed a long pause. The tattered surface of a purr survived the sigh (51).

Similar to Hejinian's use of aphoristic prose, Baus compresses elliptical language into a succinct logic of distortion and increased polysemy.

Readers experience these elements again throughout all of Laynie Browne's many prose poetry collections. Featuring self-reflexive disjunction between sentences so that the sequence of images is polysematic, Browne's poetry features strongly the musicality brought forth through her use of alliteration and assonance. In her book, *Drawing of a Swan Before Memory*, Browne creates several sequences which function as though flickering trails on a map. In the sequence "The Name of the House," she writes:

Perhaps because time has become an apothecary, beside the pumpkin lake, she asks, must I go further? Gather the red haw. Invite the hawthorne to enter. Hollow the shell of a form gathered from a field? (10)

And then later:

As water draws spectators or a magnet grazes an invisible surface, before recollection is the physical envelopment of color, which seems to appear all at once, regardless of the location in question. The same way a name can appear everywhere—a promise (14).

In one of her more recent books, *Practice*, Browne creates a sequence of 66 prose poems in which she continues her meditation on time and memory with even greater musicality:

Practice applauding mist, or mold it into morning. If you forget where you have been take careful impressions of all premises. To impress air, lean heavily into the space your body occupies (52).

These poets are all masters of the New Prose Poem, and I continue to learn from their strategies. Combined with this appreciation of the New Prose Poem, it is my reading of Stein, particularly as to her ideas about the sentence and the way sentences build into a paragraph, I find most influential in my development as a poet. In my prose poems, I listen to the sounds in my first sentence, which then sparks the next sentence, the energy building. I listen to the round vowels and rolling consonants, the bright vowels and the sibilant consonants. I also am inspired as to how Stein's work questions the nature of language as the basis for knowledge of the world and explores the effect of technical aspects of language, which would-be parts of speech, sentence structure, grammar, and the poetic devices, such as images, patterns, and paradox, which is used. In Stein's writings, the word values, which are often conventionally hierarchical, are spread out within the sentence. The role of noun and verb gets shifted or bounced back and forth across the sentence, and words trade functions, something that is relatively easy in our scarcely inflected English where many words can be nouns or verbs, or, in some cases adjectives without any alteration, making the movement multidimensional and multirelational.

It is important in my poetry that I set the poem in motion against itself. I work to create semantic rhythm, incremental movement, cognitive pulse, and with gaps and discontinuities as

well as stillness and lulls, using formal devices such as repetition, permutation, and seriality. The prose poems in *The Rule of Contraction* are places in which I attempt to follow and emphasize the ways in which structures of thinking echo structures of language and then reconstruct them, detailing the inverse situation where language echoes and reconstructs thinking. The reader is constantly rethinking within a context that is always changing. I can reiterate words or phrases throughout my poems, but their practical effects and implications differ among the poems. As Stein points out, repetition is not sameness.

These formal devices come from an awareness of the simultaneous but apparently contradictory operations of continuity and discontinuity on perception, values, meaning, feeling, objects, and identity. Seriality is something a bit different. Hejinian speaks to the idea that time as it divides produces repetitions and permutations; time as it accumulates produces sequences, series (167). Serial forms permit a writer, and a reader, to take the fullest possible advantage of the numerous logics within language. These logics provide ways of moving from one place to another, they make the connections or linkages that in turn create pathways of thinking, forming patterns of meaning, and sometimes, risking incoherence.

Throughout *The Rule of Contraction*, I take Robert Duncan's instruction to never be confined within the boundaries of one poem, that there is really no single poem, but that poems should echo and reecho against each other—they should create resonance, so that two inconsequential things can combine to become a consequence (32). I also take instruction from Hejinian's use in her poetry of what is termed "nonnarrative narration" or "non-referential writing." As she does, I try to not to simply identify something in already in existence, but rather to upset entrenched and unquestioned ideas about the relationship of words to things, emotions, and ideologies. Hejinian questions the possibility of "nonreferential writing" while

acknowledging its importance in creating the possibility of referring farther and farther into unforeseen aspects of the world (169). Similarly, she questions the existence of “nonnarrative narration,” but the term is a reminder that there are many forms, qualities, and experiences of the time in which things unfold, and narration is the unfolding of things in time. Nonnarrative narration can be unconventionally chronological and unconventionally logical. By its disarranging conventional chronologies and logics, it animates others existing in real realms of experience.

The Rule of Contraction embraces the strategies of the New Prose Poem to explore alternatives to narrative in relation to one of the primary narratives of human experience—the story of creation, of how humans perceive their relationship to the mystery of cosmos, and how we then construct poetry to make meaning of our lives. Intrigued initially by the question of genre which is present throughout the Hebrew Bible, I then looked to the additional questions of syntax and narrative structure, and to the accompanying issues of linearity, plot, and characterization. Not only did the exploration of the concept of reimagining creation narratives call to me as a poet, but the complexity and nuances of the Hebrew language itself added a new and intriguing twist to endeavor. In this sense, I was able to take inspiration from the ancient to the postmodern and back again.

The postmodern experience is multiple, random, and fragmented. For Alexander, writing in *Family Portrait*, the prose poem emerges as a form suited to the depiction of singular, discrete moments in all their immediacy (24). The prose poem can shift between lyric and narrative textures as it provides a sharp focus and condensed scope conducive to rendering particular moment or scene as it embraces disparate emotional and stylistic leaps, allowing for a controlled

distraction. Syntactic devices can foreground or create the conjunction or disjunction between ideas. Maximally enjambed, these ideas are put under the pressure of abutment, contingency, and contiguity, and their relationships are constantly susceptible to change. The prose poem's typical brevity offers a focus and intensity unfettered by other purposes such as a contribution to plot or situation in a novel or the construction of cadence or the structure of line verse poetry. Such a distillation of prose can create, states David Young, "[l]ife histories reduced to paragraphs, novels in nutshells, maps on postage stamps, theologies scribbled on napkins"(244). *The Rule of Contraction* makes use of this strategy of distillation. Compact, controlled, melodic, polyphonic, lyric, polysemic. This is the poem in a box. The prose poem.

CHAPTER 2
THE RULE OF CONTRACTION

Voice wrestles conjecture, the fulcrum distant. Wedge of bridge
and name. Into fiber and sequence, a performance of discord.
Placement ripens the leaf, the breath. Your tongue, a scale to truth.
Is it one branch, one fall? Broken inscription, truncated
consequence. The loom of memory precipitates pause. Black wing
flat against the bone-stretched sky, an annunciation of skin. Water
legible in tears.

Water.

And darkness.

The consequence of breath. Distance a backward conclusion, line static to the stream. An opposition of place. A portion alternate to outer boundary. Dry ground a small inquiry, a gradient superstition. Ten days, articulate.

Contract the enclosure of your name.

Edge pale without threshold, breath to gasp. Rise to the rain. No
boundary a shelter. Destiny and mistake manifest raw curve, so
simple the slide. Point, periphery. Ratio, reference. Narrowed
constellations a pressure of recognition. The eye empty. Language
pervades tissue, a frequency nested in the spleen.

You intone the disturbance of pollen.

The bruise of the flood belies familiarity, form. Stones restless
arise from the fathoms, rotation descrying direction. The body's
gravity expansive, the risk of torso. Hips. Blood's chaste penumbra
flays façade, hands entomb the affliction of subtraction. The door,
a symptom of absorption. Amorphous.

Calcine hours crack vertical night, wing and grass bending. Bent.
Inflection of shadow consumes my body. You recognize the
dispersed outline. Vertebrae cursive, the compromise of skin. A
scratch of rain. Inception of shore an inversion to symmetrical
cloud. Yesterday's flesh becomes our dwelling.

Our doubt.

Within the white room, long, easeful dreams.

Point and light edit attraction, relation. The solitary tree. Smear of red outlines our diminishment. The dilation of night less discrete. Three colors precise. Below the evidence, the inquiry. The skin asleep, the sequence of crevice and scar.

Whispered texts.

The wind begins the lie. A phrase between breast and tooth. An
argument of sky and ladder you cannot delay or embrace.

Riot of blood.

Maw.

The sea surrounds the riverine tongue, bathes the failed edge.
Unpronounced. Ask for axis, alibi. Through the leaving, swerve of
marrow, endless.

Subtract only outline. Endless margin disinvents the curve.
Calipers, a division. Gnomon frayed on the surface, drawn flat.
Border compliant beneath the body. As though a sphere. Hinged to
birth, we hold the breath. Suspend the morning's leaf and tale,
every imbrication lost.

First step solves the hoarded motion. The curve aspires, rivulose
intervals renamed at the gainsay. Meniscus of hope shrinks wide,
hollow pail and crow unthinkable. Patterned dust our observed
deficiency, ordinary coupling's impatient press. Waters splinter.
Every age, its coincidence. Its sympathy.

Ribcage curved to niveous shiver. Our fingerprints lentic.
Language split and cleared. A humor measures the remaining
apostasy. The stranger assembles exclusion as a question of
gesture. A voice reproduced. Annealed.

Stem the fissure. The body's fall between groin and span.

Too soon, the apex and margin of rain.

Exclude the simplicity of excess and you conceive the hour of salt.

Doors betray the immobility of ghosts. Words open a pulse, a sentence released, sediment of artery and field inferred. A grammar divided. To name this is to name doubt.

The wall affords two meanings.

By iteration, assemblage of horizon drifts dissonant to the event.
Impalpable sanctity stretches the darkening, directs the increase.
The collapse fricative, cornice and call. A fugue. The red thread
phoretic to your count. Time distilled from the estuary of hours.
Flight and gravity by degrees.

Dimension deaf to dreams falters westward. Dawn unravels the night, the river returning with the rhythm of copper and parenthetical flesh. A benison of embrace. The smaller touch. We have forgotten the tonality of the sea.

The articulation of door. Hinge exempt of belief.

As if from right to left.

In the brake, the fret of a serpent.

Crepitation and atlas exhume a litmus from mud. Season the
equation of discourse. Beneath the cryptic tongue, bright more than
blind, the sedition of armature and fascia.

A palmate scale.

Wrestle the bite from the tail, and ours is shameless belly no
longer. Filament outweighs the void. Here is what was gathered.
Lexicon of sun and bondage. Fire's surface burns the swallowing.
Planes the grammar. Awakens dust.

In no throat the apple's seed.

Your cry, without reach, without stalk, revives the boundary of speech and sky. Dark, another hunger. Why the ordinal? The garment? Compare hand to grist. The ration of deciphering tooth, lateral predilection. Consume the edge of sequence, less for claim than survey.

Fault line through the riddle. The economy of thirst.

Circumference.

Eye subtle of its feeling, differing puzzle of perturbation and light.

Analogue rehearsed.

Ellipse of blunt river, soot and blind parabola. Here we gain the wave of sky. Catch the labor of grass. Roots defeat the rain, hold the occasion of the body. Again to linger, and not to rise consumed.

In scrape of shadow inverted, this lengthening isthmus. Here, an
instinct for hemisphere. Assign promontory, elevation. Familiar
bones mark the angle, the axis conceded. Waters congregate. A
series of absences and unseen storms. You glimpse the script of
cantered leaves. Of waves. Your mouth wounds the weft of egress
and river, the incision and the interval. The echo and the episode.
A risk ordinary. Almost blue.

Cartography of rain. Unsteady weight, and eclipse decays the color
of cadence. An unease of light splinters the current. Two histories,
a portrait of our pliant forgetting. A bleach of moths upon the glass
tree, silvered.

Too close.

Reclose the approach, the implicit chamber.

Red.

Crooked.

At what point name? Covetousness?

Coupled preparation, and the hand declines the prerogative of rumor. A clot of salt stipples the strike of skin, stunts the nakedness of our parents' crime.

Thin loaves. The impulse of skin.

Born of a pattern and the word for sand, a collusion of foam and
amends. Afterthought's disguise, the tongue reddening. Pretense
upright in the wind.

Anther. Stamen. The little hip.

Gravity of bone upon the perch. Mountains as for a surface, gaping
at the rib. Heavy in the belly. Your hand along the horizon,
reluctant at the ledge. Ache of arcuate wing.

Ox gall. And lightning.

Hollow shelter of arm and eye, breast and throat. Helical ridge of
word uncluttered by the parallel, the close. Minimal dark, and
promised sleep. Span of perception bereft a window. A periphery
eager for its reading.

Shell game of alphabet, interruption of identity. A figure removed.

Accrue currency, a buoyancy small to the waiting, fierce
membrane scaling wide and brittle. Shimmer without embrace.

Swift trill.

A bridge in profile, an excess of direction. Your head, and the sun.

Imperfect path imagines wilderness. Separate seas. Outer cadence
of broken riverbed and vanished road a constant epiphany.
Urgency. Seal the voice. Stand at the point of sequence with
flawless breath.

Particle.

Resonance.

Mountain lifting.

The stranger's map. Cerulean.

The gray ladder of your eye admits the impediment of speed. Soft
invasion of matter. Hours, delicate mirrors, night-colored. Salt-
stained. The sky closing, entering the shadows of birds.

Water, my desire.

Porous sun. The volition evaporated.

Recessed years a hovering wind. Unknot the day's sanctioned purchase. Extravagance of form, and the mind's foothold, astray. A shift in the architecture of consonants, surfaces simple and domestic. The river possesses our deepening hunger. Our thinning history.

Absent appetite of bone, vesseled heartbeat opens, imperfect.
Hollow. The duration of flooded angle unfolding. Unfettered. The
circumference of day distant.

A winnowed leaf recoils.

Seeds garment our eyes, inhabit the withdrawal. Inward, we know
the moon. The aperture, a topography of cloud and milk. The night
boat a pale vowel. A balm.

By measure, this mark, our expunged migration. An exhale.

Cresting horizon, we forget sleep. The mast sags at the oar. Water undeterred by the density of the season. Echo the touch of stone upon grass. A different hearing of particles and the field. Fire feeds the deep note, captive frequency in the grain.

With calendar of bone and silence, the injunction of birth
disappears. Murmur of valves. Focus of current. Vellumed rituals,
and the promise of fingerprint for name.

Upon approach, some borders recede. Bound together, we think
opposite function. Estimate the exhaustion of dust, frame the effort
by the inch. Moon apprehends in modest increase. A machinery of
west and east.

Behind, in the daybreak, the sparse oasis descends.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, Robert, ed. *Family Portrait: American Prose Poetry 1900-1950*. Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2012. Print.
- Alexander, Robert Eugene. "The American Prose Poem: 1890-1980." University of Wisconsin, 1982. Print.
- Alexander, Robert, and Dennis Maloney, eds. *The House of Your Dream*. Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2008. Print.
- Alexander, Robert, Mark Vinz, and W. W. Truesdale, eds. *The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry*. Minneapolis: New Rivers Press, 1995. Print.
- Alsop, Maureen. *Later, Knives & Trees*. Mobile: Negative Capability Press, 2014. Print.
- Andrews, Nin. *Sleeping with Houdini*. Rochester: BOA Editions Ltd., 2007. Print.
- . *Southern Comfort*. Fort Lee: CavanKerry Press, 2009. Print.
- . *The Book of Orgasms*. Cleveland: Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2000. Print.
- . *The Secret Lives of Mannequins*. Cleveland Heights: Kattywompus Press, 2012. Print.
- . *Why God Is a Woman*. Rochester: BOA Editions Ltd., 2015. Print.
- Ashbery, John. *Three Poems*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972. Print.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Paris Spleen*. Trans. Louise Varese. New York: New Directions Books, 1970. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra & Simulation*. Trans. Glaser, Sheila Faria. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995. Print.
- Baus, Eric. *Scared Text*. Fort Collins: The Center for Literary Publishing Colorado State University, 2011. Print.

- . *The to Sound*. Amherst: Verse Press, 2004. Print.
- . *The Tranquilized Tongue*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014. Print.
- . *Tuned Drones*. Brooklyn: Octopus Books, 2008. Print.
- Beachy-Quick, Dan. *Wonderful Investigations*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2012. Print.
- Beckett, Tom. *Unprotected Texts: Selected Poems 1978-2006*. San Francisco: Meritage Press, 2007. Print.
- Benedikt, Michael. *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology*. New York: Dell, 1977. Print.
- Bernstein, Charles. *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Print.
- Bertrand, Aloysius. *Gaspard De La Nuit*. Trans. Donald Sidney-Fryer. Encino: A Black Coat Press Book, 2004. Print.
- Bly, Robert. *What Have I Ever Lost by Dying?* New York: Harper Perennial, 1993. Print.
- Breton, Andre. *The Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Trans. Richard Seaver. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969. Print.
- Brown, Nickole. *Fanny Says*. Rochester: BOA Editions Ltd., 2015. Print.
- Browne, Laynie. *Drawing of a Swan before Memory*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005. Print.
- . *Mermaid's Purse*. New York: Sputen Duyvil, 2005. Print.
- . *Pollen Memory*. New York: Tender Buttons, 2003. Print.
- . *Practice*. Ann Arbor: SplitLevel Texts, 2015. Print.
- . *Rebecca Letters*. Berkeley: Kelsey St. Press, 1997. Print.
- . *Scorpyn Odes*. Tucson: Kore Press, 2015. Print.
- . *The Scented Fox*. Seattle: Wave Books, 2007. Print.

- Browne, Laynie, and Lee Ann Brown. *Nascent Toolbox*. Woodacre: The Owl Press, 2004. Print.
- Burt, Stephen. *Close Calls with Nonsense: Reading New Poetry*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2009. Print.
- Clements, Brian, and Jamey Dunham. *An Introduction to the Prose Poem*. Newtown: Firewheel Editions, 2009. Print.
- Cummings, E. E. *Complete Poems: 1913-1962*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Law of Genre." *Appendix: Bulletin of the International Colloquium on Genre* (1978): 202-32. Print.
- Dobyns, Stephen. *Next Word, Better Word: The Craft of Writing Poetry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- Duncan, Robert. *Bending the Bow*. New York: New Directions, 1968. Print.
- Edson, Russell. *The Rooster's Wife*. Rochester: BOA Editions Ltd., 2005. Print.
- . *The Tormented Mirror*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001. Print.
- Forché, Carolyn. *Gathering the Tribes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. Print.
- Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: Schocken Press, 2000. Print.
- Friebert, Stuart, and David Young. *Models of the Universe*. Oberlin: Oberlin College Press, 1995. Print.
- Gonzales, Ray. *No Boundaries: Prose Poems by 24 American Poets*. Dorset: Tupelo Press, 2003. Print.
- Hejinian, Lyn. *A Thought Is the Bride of What Thinking*. San Francisco: TUUMBA Press, 1976. Print.
- . *Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Print.

- . *My Life and My Life in the Nineties*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013. Print.
- . *The Beginner*. Berkeley: TUUMBA Press, 2002. Print.
- . *The Book of a Thousand Eyes*. Richmond: Omnidawn Publishing, 2012. Print.
- . *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Print.
- . *Writing Is an Aid to Memory*. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1996. Print.
- Hemmingway, Ernest. *In Our Times*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970. Print.
- Iglesias, Holly. *Souvenirs of a Shrunken World*. Tucson: Kore Press, 2008. Print.
- . *Angles of Approach*. Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2010. Print.
- . *Boxing inside the Box*. Niantic: Quale Press. Print.
- Johnson, Peter. *The Best of the Prose Poem: An International Journal*. Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2000. Print.
- Kenzie, Mary. *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Print.
- Kessler, Milton. "Selected Random Sayings by Kosho Shimizu, Chief Abbot, Todajj." *Artful Dodge* (2004): 54-6. Print.
- Kiplinger, David. *The Most Natural Thing*. Kalamazoo: A Green Rose Book, 2013. Print.
- . *The Prayers of Others*. Kalamazoo: A Green Rose Book, 2006. Print.
- Lazar, David. "Goodness Knows." *Sentence: A Journal of Prose Poetics* (2007): 118 Print.
- Lehman, David. *Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present*. New York: Scribner Poetry, 2003. Print.
- Maloney, Dennis. *Dreaming the Miracle: Three French Prose Poets--Jacob, Ponge, Follien*. Buffalo: White Pines Press, 2002. Print.
- Marcus, Morton. *Moments without Names: New & Selected Prose Poems*. Buffalo: White Pine

- Press, 2002. Print.
- Maxwell, Glynn. *On Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. Print.
- McDowell, Gary L., and F. Daniel Rzicznek. *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry: Contemporary Poets in Discussion and Practice*. Brookline: Rose Metal Press, 2010. Print.
- McGookely, Kathleen. *Whatever Shines*. Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2001. Print.
- McGookey, Kathleen. *Mended*. Somerville: Kattywompus Press, 2014. Print.
- McGrath, Campbell. *Road Atlas: Prose & Other Poems*. New York: The Ecco Press, 1999. Print.
- Merwin, W. S. *Houses and Travellers*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994. Print.
- . *The Book of Fables*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2007. Print.
- Milosz, Czeslaw. *Second Space*. New York: Ecco, 2004. Print.
- . *Road-Side Dog*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998. Print.
- Mistral, Gabriela. *Selected Prose and Prose-Poems*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2002. Print.
- Monte, Steven. *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. Print.
- Moore, Jonathan. *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. Print.
- Murphy, Marguerite S. *A Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992. Print.
- Neruda, Pablo. *The House in the Sand*. Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2004. Print.
- Neville, Michel. *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form & the Boundaries of Genre*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998. Print.
- Notley, Alice. *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls*. Middletown: Wesleyan University

- Press, 2011. Print.
- Parini, Jay. *Why Poetry Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. Print.
- Ponge, Francis. *Mute Objects of Expression*. Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2008. Print.
- Ponge, Francis, and Robert Bly. *Ten Poems of Francis Ponge & Ten Poems of Robert Bly Inspired by the Poems of Francis Ponge*. Trans. Bly, Robert. Riverview: Owl's Head Press, 1990. Print.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Trans. Mitchell, Stephen. New York: Vintage International, 1989. Print.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Illuminations*. Trans. Mathieu, Bertrand. Brockport: BOA Editions, 1979. Print.
- . *Illuminations*. Trans. Ashbery, John. New York: W. W. Norton, 2011. Print.
- Robinson, Kit. *Windows*. Iowa City: Whale Cloth Press, 1985. Print.
- Ryling, Kristin. "I Question If I." *Sentence: A Journal of Prose Poetics* 5 (2007). Print.
- Sabines, Jaime. *Weekly Diary & Poems in Prose & Adam & Eve*. Trans. Carberry, Colin. New York: Exile Editions, 2004. Print.
- Santilli, Nikki. *Such Rare Citing: The Prose Poem in English Literature*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. Print.
- Silliman, Ron. *In the American Tree*. Chicago: National Poetry Foundation, 2001. Print.
- . *The Alphabet*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008. Print.
- . *The New Sentence*. New York: Roof Books, 1995. Print.
- Simic, Charles. "The World Doesn't End." San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989. Print.
- Stein, Chris. "Forgive and Forget." *No Exit: Beyond Music*, 1999. Print.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon

- Press, 1991. Print.
- Waldrop, G. C. *Archicembalo*. North Adams: Tupelo Press, 2009. Print.
- Waldrop, Ketih. *Transcendental Studies: A Trilogy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Print.
- Waldrop, Rosmarie. *Curves to the Apple: The Reproduction of Profiles, Lawn of Excluded Middle, Reluctant Gravities*. New York: New Directions Books, 2006. Print.
- . *Driven to Abstraction*. New York: New Directions Books, 2010. Print.
- Ward, Diane. *Never without One*. New York: Roof Books, 1984. Print.
- Watson, Craig. *Discipline*. Providence: Burning Deck, 1986. Print.
- Williams, William Carlos. *Imaginations*. New York: New Directions, 1971. Print.
- Wright, C. D. *Deepstep Come Shining*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1998. Print.
- Zbigniew, Herbert. *Selected Poems*. New York: The Ecco Press, 1968. Print.

VITA

Bonné A. de Blas was born in Tucson, Arizona, to parents Romualdo and Bonné de Blas. She is the first of two children; her younger brother is Damian de Blas. She attended Encanto and Clarendon Elementary schools and continued to Central High School in Phoenix, Arizona. After graduation, she attended Phoenix College, and upon graduation with an Associate Arts degree, transferred to Arizona State University, completing her Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History in May 1983. After working in public and private sectors, Bonné attended Case Western Reserve University's Franklin Thomas Backus School of Law. She graduated with a Juris Doctor in May 1996. After many years in professional occupation, Bonné accepted a graduate assistantship at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in the Creative Writing Program. Bonné graduated with a Masters of Arts degree in English in May 2016. Bonné is continuing her education by pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at Kent State University.