



## Dancing with Prose

### Guided Exercise from Lorna Crozier

It's easy to dance with poetry because we know poetry is based on sound or music more than any other genre. Although prose is rhythmic, we tend to think of it a flatter thing than poetry.

That said, the prose poem hasn't been written in English for hundreds of years like poetry has and so it gives us more freedom. There is a lesser burden of the greatness of those who have come before us. The weight of our forebearers is lightened.

The main distinction between prose poems and poetry is that the unit in poetry is the line (long or short, metrically regular or irregular). The unit in the prose poem is the sentence. Therefore, the challenges of the prose poem is to write a good sentence.

The prose poem does has been called a genre-less genre. However there are many sub-sub genres of this genre-less genre:

- Micro fiction
- The lyric prose poem (rhythmic prose poem with a heightened use of metaphor and literary tropes like you'd find in other forms of poetry)
- Dramatic monologue (the playwright's version of a prose poem)
- The prose poem as short-short essay (more on this below)

Below are two options to begin the exercise of writing a prose poem:

1) The ancient, oral forms of prose poetry are fables or parables. One way to approach your own prose poem is to write a fable. You could use animals like Aesop and many other cultures have used, but you don't need to.

Fables tell us how things came about. For instance: *how did the stars get in the sky?* Maybe through your prose poem you will find a new way to say/ explain something.

2) If you decide against writing a fable, another option is to write a short-short essay. This should be an essay in the briefest form you could imagine, but that shares the qualities of longer personal/ intimate essays: one voice talking to another. How short do you dare to go? It's possible to write a simple essay in one sentence!

Some of the qualities of essays:

- conversational element
- honesty (it is hard for the poetic persona to hide the self)
- the contractions and expansions of the self (personal essayists are adept at interrogating their ignorance)
- the tole of contrariety (intentionally go against the grain of popular opinion, compulsion towards fresh expression)

Your prose poem might be *on* something (*on laziness, on appetite*). Or you could choose an abstraction and do a little riff on it. Two book to give you inspiration are Stephen Dunn's *Riffs and Reciprocities* and Jean McKay's "Last Things" in *Exploded Views*.

Now is the time for you to write this wonderful oxymoron thing, the prose poem: written in sentences, but having the brevity of poetry; having the rhythm of poetry, but not as obviously; using metaphors; using anecdote; using characters; using whatever you need to make something new and fresh and wonderous in this form. I hope you have fun with it.