

9. The prose poem

Bonnie COSTELLO

The Prose Poem : Traditions and Forms

Donna STONECIPHER

The Prose Poem and The City

Cole SWENSON

Lyric Slither : How Form Slides Through Sound

Bonnie Costello (Boston U., USA)

The Prose Poem : Traditions and Forms

Between-ness is of course a characteristic of this hybrid form, which has roots in a variety of linguistic traditions. One focus of our panel will be the similarities and divergences between the French prose poem (as it was established in Baudelaire's *Spleen* though of course there are many antecedents) and the American prose poem as it has emerged, especially in contemporary poetry, as a major genre. And in inquiring of these traditions the panelists will also be asking what kinds of meanings and ontologies are mapped out in these formal spaces. A second focus of our panel will be generic convention and classification. How far can we go in defining the prose poem generically? What motivates poets who usually write in lines to turn, on occasion, to this form? What formal rigors and inventions have prose poets found to replace the line breaks, rhythms and rhymes of verse? How does the prose poet create the quality of lyric (polysemy, musicality, vocal drama, etc.) within the units of sentences and paragraphs, rather than the traditional poem's lines and stanzas? The panel will also explore prose poetry's disposition toward the page and white space. Since Mallarmé, at least, the page, rather than the individual voice, has often been the ground of lyric. The page and white space have a surprising presence for many prose poets. They allude to it meta-poetically, and they shape it in a variety of ways to direct the reader's emotion and cognition.

Donna Stonecipher (U. Iowa, USA)

The Prose Poem and The City

Stonecipher takes as her starting point Baudelaire's famous claim in a letter to Arsene Houssaye that the prose poem emerged as a way of responding to urban experience. "It was, above all, out of my exploration of huge cities, out of the medley of their innumerable interrelations, that this haunting ideal [of lyric prose] was born.". In what sense might we see the prose poem as ontologically urban? How might more recent theories of urban experience, and particularly Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City," with its contrast between the objectifying rhetoric of the "voyeur" and the "rhetoric of the walker" who employs "tactics" to navigate the street, help us understand the sense of lyric subjectivity moving through prose?

Cole Swenson (Brown U., USA)

Lyric Slither : How Form Slides Through Sound

The ways in which sound implies form, deforms form, and expands form is at the center of this informally structured talk. I'm particularly interested in the "politics of genre"—what does a given genre imply and what does it enable? What is the relationship between genre and authority? And whose, then, is it? And why might a writer want to present a given genre in the guise of another? I'll be considering prose-presented-as-poetry as well as the more frequent poetry-presented-as-prose—and questioning the possibility of there being, truly, something in between. Examples will range from Stein to Reznikoff to Smithson. Because the visual element is important in all of these cases, Powerpoint images of the texts will support the talk.