



# The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry: Contemporary Poets in Discussion and Practice

*Gary McDowell (co-editor) , F. Daniel Rzicznek (co-editor)*

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A wide-ranging gathering of 34 brief essays and 66 prose poems by distinguished practitioners, The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry is as personal and provocative, accessible and idiosyncratic as the genre itself. With its pioneering introduction, this collection provides a comprehensive history of the development of the prose poem up to its current widespread appeal. Half critical study and half anthology, The Field Guide to Prose Poetry is a not-to-be-missed companion for readers and writers of poetry, as well as students and teachers of creative writing.

## **The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry: Contemporary Poets in Discussion and Practice Details**

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## From Reader Review The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry: Contemporary Poets in Discussion and Practice for online ebook

**Blogbaas Van 'tVliegend Eiland says**

9/10

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**Anastasia Dotzauer says**

I absolutely adore prose poetry and this guide is filled to the brim with memoirs and reflections on the genre that changed my writing career. Unfortunately, my two-star rating stems from the redundancy and monotony of this guide. A few essays in, and it already begins to feel like déjà vu. However, I would recommend excerpts of this collection to novice poets and introductory writing classes. Prose poetry is heavily understudied and this guide does do one thing right: it illuminates and aptly defends the genre.

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**Antonia says**

"I imagine one is drawn to write prose poems not by sloth, which is better purely practiced in hammocks, but by an urge to participate in a different kind of psychic energy than verse usually embodies." -- William Matthews

I really love this book! I wanted to read it to educate myself about prose poetry. I'm forever wishing some prose poem had line breaks (never again!). The book comprises 33 short personal essays about prose poetry and the writing of it, how the author came to write in this form, etc., each essay being followed by two prose poems by that author. Very pleasing format. (Some of the essays contain a short prose poem or two, as well - so there are nearly 80 in the book.) And what a smorgasbord of treats here! I couldn't read without stopping every few pages to jot things down, copy out favorite passages. It's a wonderful course in the prose poem.

Bob Hicok starts the collection with a wonderful piece called "Prose Poem Essay on the Prose Poem." I wish that was available online. A couple of brief excerpts: ". . . though most of all I adore how marginal the margin becomes: it just falls plumb, Bob, down the right side, taking out the lineated huffnpuff of breath, leaving the plainly more said." And later, "The prose poem's the Texas of poetry, you got miles and miles and miles, then suddenly it's New Mexico and over, this whooping and hollering, this rodeoing of prosing."

James Harms asks, "Is Simic really writing prose poetry, or is he simply removing the line breaks?" This strikes me as a silly question, though I realize it's rhetorical. What would make a piece *really* one as opposed to the other? I suppose the answer has something to do with whether the sentence, as opposed to the line (or phrase), is the primary unit of thought/expression. But I agree with Harms when he says that "It seems like hokum to believe that there's an inevitability to a particular poem and its particular form." Though, I should add that many writers do claim that there's one right form for each poem and some say that the poem *knows* what it's supposed to be.

Oh, I can't help myself. Must copy out this excerpt from Denise Duhamel's essay: "Prose poetry and flash fiction are kissing cousins. They are kissing on *Jerry Springer*, knowing they're cousins and screaming "So

what?" as the audience hisses. They are kissing on *One Life to Live*, unaware that one's aunt is the other's mother. A prose poem suffers from amnesia, and when her friends tell her about her past, nothing they describe produces in her even a flicker. In a flash, she thinks they are wrong--something tells me I was once a short short. Flash fiction looks into the mirror and sees a prose poem. A prose poem parts his hair on the left instead of the middle, and his brother tells him he's flash fiction. A prose poem walks into a bar, and the bartender says, "What'll you have? The usual paragraph?" A flash fiction walks into the doctor's office and the doctor says, "How's that stanza feeling?" There may be a difference between flash fiction and prose poems, but I believe the researchers still haven't found the genes that differentiate them."

Duhamel also quotes Peter Johnson: "Just as black humor straddles the fine line between comedy and tragedy, so prose poetry plants one foot in prose, the other in poetry, both heels resting precariously on banana peels."

I much enjoyed Jeffrey Skinner's essay (he's a great admirer of Fernando Pessoa). At one point, after talking about the poems he wrote about his father: "I know people who would say I was working something out in these poems. But when you come down to it, in the contest between psychology and poetry, the former is absurdly overmatched." This caught my attention because I've always thought this, have always been a bit impatient with people who try to tack psychological explanations onto poems or insist that the writer is reiterating his analysis or whatever. Poetry is much more complex and subtle. And it is not therapy. Although poetry may be the theatre of emotion. Skinner says it can be a comic operetta or a theatre for grief.

Here's one of Skinner's own prose poems: "Many Worlds"

Robert Miltner says: "Prose poetry is a double helix. Since a prose poem is simultaneously both prose and poetry, the problem is a double problem, requiring a double solution. Twice as difficult, the risk; twice as satisfying, the solution. Imagine train tracks merging in the distance. Imagine paired skaters. Imagine lovers. Imagine yourself in the mirror."

Miltner also says: "Prose walks but poetry dances. Which is why a prose poem moves so funny on the page."

Here's one of the prose poems by Robert Miltner:

### **You Know What They Say About Pears**

Frumpy, heavy-hipped, green with envy of apples, the pears wear babushkas and pull carts filled with celery and cabbage out past West 88th and Detroit. Grainy sweet like candy eaten at the beach, freckled in and out of the sun, a pear is the younger child all brothers and sisters watch out for but never want to play with. The sad pears--Bartlett and Bosc, Seckel and d'Anjou--cry themselves to sleep. They see themselves as teardrops, tongueless bells unable to celebrate, or quotation marks with nothing to say. In their dreams, they run away to Hollywood and become avocados.

I could post many more excerpts and good quotes, but I'll close with this one. "A good thing to do when you're inside a prose poem is to look around, If you can do that, you'll be okay." -- Mary Ann Samyn

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### **Keith Montesano says**

The prose poem has always been a form, admittedly, that I've never known much about. My reading of the prose poem has usually led to the question that I imagine I'm not the only one asking: "Isn't there a way the line could actually be utilized here?"

The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry doesn't try to explicitly answer that question. Instead, the essays within are used as catalysts to get into the minds of how actual poets write and discuss their prose poems. I don't want to overuse the phrase "personal essay" here, and though there are at least a few essays that are more scholarly, many of them are entertaining and insightful enough not only to give us a sense of who the poet is, but also how they go about creating their art.

Though this seems obvious, we've all read essays about poetry that become too long, stuffy, circuitous, confusing, etc. In this anthology, however, most of the essays are around 3-7 pages long, and each includes 2 poems by each poet. So not only is the variation great—both the included poems and writing style from each poet—but after reading the entire anthology, it becomes an easier task for a professor who wants to teach from it; out of 34 essays, there are many to pick and choose from. That said, at under 200 pages, this would also work as a great primary text for a full semester.

Insightful, engaging, varied, highly accessible, and handsomely designed, the editors and the press have done a great job here through and through. Whether it's for personal enjoyment, or you're looking to find an anthology on the prose poem for a future course you're teaching, this is where you want to start.

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### **Amorak Huey says**

This whole series is solid. Lots of advice, musing, helpful exercises. I would say all these books are perhaps best-suited as introductions to the forms -- they don't break a lot of new ground, so if you've already been reading and thinking in depth about the forms, you won't necessarily find many surprises here.

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### **Ken says**

If you're interested in exotic (or drab, maybe) birds like prose poetry, this is a fine place to sit and chat with 34 practitioners who tell us what prose poetry means to them. After each short essay, the writer/poet offers two to three of his or her own prose poems just to show us what s/he means.

As for definitions, good luck. The long and short of it is this: prose poetry is either both prose and poetry or neither prose nor poetry. Pick your poison or ambrosia. But it appears to be liberating to some, especially for poems that don't seem to come alive in lines and stanzas and white space.

You will also learn that this new-fangled beast isn't as new-fangled as you think. Some old French dudes were at it some time ago. Guys with names like Rimbaud and Baudelaire.

For me, like auditing a course. And yes, I've been a good student and tried my hand at it, too. Inspired. Anything that inspires writing is a good thing by definition.

Here's a quote from the final essay by David Shumate:

"The prose poem is often the object of derision among poetic purists. They consider the loss of the poetic line a final blasphemy. They've relinquished rhyme. And meter. But never the line itself. They claim a poem must be vertical. A poem must look like a poem.

"Maybe they're right. Maybe there is a special purgatory for our kind. Perhaps I'm already a resident there. That would explain a lot...

"But I've overheard some fairly comical conversations between poets concerning the proper placement of a line break. Should it go here? Or here? Or here? Often it comes just to the brink of fisticuffs. Then the poet goes off and reads the poem to an audience, completely ignoring the line breaks he fought so hard to justify. Often if they do read their own line breaks rigidly, the overall effect can be a sort of literary stutter as if there might be a sudden shortage of air in the room."

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## **Brenda says**

In "Whatchamacallit & Me," one of 34 essays in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry: Contemporary Poets in Discussion and Practice*, John Bradley quips:

"How many prose poets does it take to change a lightbulb?  
Ask me later. We're still debating the question, 'What is a lightbulb?'" (150).

One might argue that Bradley fairly sums up the entire anthology with this statement, but the debate (hosted by Gary L. McDowell and F. Daniel Rzicznek) never grows tedious. Indeed, the collection's views on prose poetry are insightful, funny, though, sometimes, oblique. See, for example:

Mary Ann Samyn: "The surest way to write a bad poem is to set out with something important to say. Better to begin with a little string of willingness" (164).

Beckian Fritz Goldberg: "The prose poem is still for me the most evanescent of creatures. I still can't define it anymore than I can adequately define a poem, but recently a student of mine said for her the prose poem 'is like the ugliest girl at the party who is having the best time.' To which I say, Party on" (67).

Bob Hickock: "The prose poem's the Texas of poetry, you got miles of miles and miles, then suddenly it's New Mexico and over, this whooping and hollering, this rodeoing of prosing. Certain questions are answered best with a shrug: why write until the carriage returns? Cause it's a pumpkin and I want pie. It could also be that as a blockhead I naturally write in blocks. Whatever the why or is of it, the longer stride of the poem makes me relax, not like anal iambic or geez, why diva sestina when you can relatively siesta your way to an opener sense of life?" (1-2).

McDowell and Rzicznek have compiled the book I wish I'd read in graduate school—if only I'd been able to wave such sentences at those who told me I wrote prose "like a poet," and that was not a compliment! What a relief to read analysis that erupts with delighted perversity into sparks of lyricism (something like farts of light).

I was also impressed by the actual prose poems that follow each poetic essay. Although a number of the poets were familiar (Denise Duhamel, Amy Newman, Nin Andrews, James Harms, Hickock, Samyn, and Goldberg), others were new to me (David Shumate, Nancy Eimers, David Lazar, Arielle Greenberg, Andrew Michael Roberts, Robert Miltner, and others).

Here are some sparks from two of my favs:

"He wore his skin like a shell. He kept another skin inside, the difference between bark and bite, smoke and fire. He knew the questions long after everyone's answers.

One day, he reached down into his throat and pulled himself inside out, sock-like, sack-like, right in the street, his internal works exposed like a busted watch.”

(Robert Miltner, “Schism” 111)

“Measured by human reading time, they are old stars. Something that belongs not to the past but to us though I wasn’t there yet. Left-handed stars, each begun and ended at its radiating upper point. Often the lines don’t meet, the star stays open a crack. Or the line continues through itself just below the place it started and the star opens up again. I don’t want to make too much of this, just everything.”

(Nancy Eimers, “I Find in a Boke Compiled to this Matere an Old Histoire” (117).

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### **Hobie Anthony says**

I've been writing flash fiction for a few years and have Rose Metal's Field Guide to Flash Fiction (awesome). Since I tend to be fairly poetical in my stylings, I was intrigued when this volume was published. I purchased it on pre-order and I'm sure one day I'll buy a second copy, when this one is finally shot-out and brown from coffee stains.

If you're interested in the craft of prose poetry, I can't recommend this book highly enough. It's opened up a new genre to me.

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### **Erin Lyndal says**

I am really disappointed in this book.

I've really enjoyed the other Rose Metal Press Field Guides I've read, and I thought this one would be just as engaging, offer some exciting prose poem exercises, and some great theory/craft talk.

Sadly, I found very little to be engaged by here. First, there are no exercises. That was my biggest disappointment. The authors just write a short piece, usually about how they came to like the prose poem, and then share some of their own work. I really really wanted exercises.

I had also hoped for better theory and craft writing in the authors' essays. There were glimmers of discussion about theory or how the prose poem differs from lineated poetry, and those were definitely the highlight of the book. But, as I said, the essays largely focus on the author's introduction to prose poetry, which makes for very tepid and very repetitive content. The authors don't really seem like they've \*taught\* prose poetry much, however much they'd written it.

Please save your money and get a good book of exercises or a good prose poem anthology like Models Of the Universe.

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## **Lisa says**

Now I understand why it's a field guide, not a how-to. Each poet provides a brief essay about what prose poetry is to them, then you get two of the poet's prose poems. Quite often, I thought I grokked the poet's philosophy only to read their poems and find little resemblance between what they *said* and what they wrote. Denise Duhamel's and Nin Andrew's poems actually reflected their philosophies. The best part of this book is the wide range of styles represented and the copious recommendations for further reading. I feel I now have a better idea of how flash fic and prose poems differ and overlap, and I know what kind of prose poetry I like and aspire to write.

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## **Ian says**

A selection.

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## **Casey Hampton says**

I know, right? But it's solid.

Maybe the final 1/5th wears a little thin, but I think this is a good thing. Careful readers and writers that reach, and that sort.

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## **Rachel Laverdiere says**

I have mixed feeling about The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry--but mostly because I did not carefully read the full title (Contemporary Poets in Discussion and Practice) before I started reading it and assumed it would have advice and exercises like the RMPFG to Writing Flash Nonfiction. So, really, it's my own fault.

Once I got over the fact that there would be no advice or exercises, I thought about the content differently, digested each chapter slowly, lingered over each author's prose poems. By the last quarter of the book, the prose poem started making more sense to me and the epiphanies were more intense.

In hindsight, this whole book was a bit like a prose poem--I went in with expectations (as many do when they see "prose" or "poem" affixed to a piece of writing), but once I opened up my mind, I came out with a greater expectation of prose, poetry and prose poems.

I recommend reading this one small dose at a time.

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## **Gary McDowell says**

The book is available for order at the Rose Metal Press website. Check it out!

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<http://www.rosemetalpress.com/Catalog...>

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## **R.I. says**

Wow, this book is a treasure. You've heard the question, if you were stranded on a desert island, what one book would you want to have with you? This is the one I'm taking with me.

This book fed my two souls, the one that belongs to the writer part of me and the one that belongs to the reader part of me. Not only is it jam packed with gorgeous prose poetry, but the essays themselves are as evocative and sensual as the poems.

Also, this isn't one of those books you buy only to be disappointed in the length. This one is substantial and so satisfying.

If you love reading prose poetry, you need this one in your hands. And if you want to learn the craft, I can't think of any better source than The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry. Highly recommend it to all my writer friends.

Time luxuriously spent.

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