I'm not a bot

Literary genre Gaspard de la Nuit (1842) by Aloysius Bertrand, one of the first western instances of prose poetry. Prose poetry is poetry written in prose form instead of verse form while otherwise deferring to poetic devices to make meaning. This section possibly contains original research. Please improve it by verifying the claims made and adding inline citations. Statements consisting only of original research should be removed. (February 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message) This section needs additional citations for verification. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources in this section. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed.Find sources: "Prose poetry" – news · newspapers · books · scholar · JSTOR (February 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message) Prose poetry is written as prose, without the line breaks associated with poetry. However, it makes use of poetic devices such as fragmentation, compression, repetition, rhyme,[1] metaphor, and figures of speech.[2] Prose can still express the lyricism and emotion of poetry, and can also explore many different themes. There are subgenres within the prose genre, and these include styles like deadpan narrative, surreal narrative, factoid, and postcard. Prose offers a lot of creative freedom to writers, and does not contain as many rules as some poetic styles do. Many writers have different opinions on the form of this genre because it is so open, which makes it harder to objectively define. The prose genre has been used and explored by writers like Walt Whitman, Franz Kafka, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Anne Carson. Almost every form of art can be categorized under either the prose or poetry genre. Poetry covers forms like song lyrics, different poetry forms, and dialogue that contains poetic characteristics like iambic pentameter. On the other hand, prose includes novels, short stories, novellas, and scripts. Although the Bible is written in prose, it maintains poetic features such as rhythms and lyricism. [3] In 17th-century Japan, Matsuo Bashō originated haibun, a form of prose poetry combining haiku with prose. It is best exemplified by his book Oku no Hosomichi,[4] in which he used a literary genre of prose-and-poetry composition of multidimensional writing.[5] In the West, prose poetry originated in early-19th-century France and Germany as a reaction against the traditional verse line.[citation needed] The German Romantics Jean Paul, Novalis, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Heinrich Heine may be seen as precursors of the prose poem.[citation needed] Earlier, 18th-century European forerunners of prose poetry had included James Macpherson's "translation" of Ossian and Évariste de Parny's "Chansons madécasses".[citation needed] At the time of the prose poem's establishment as a form, French poetry was dominated by the alexandrine, a strict and demanding form that poets starting with Maurice de Guérin (whose "Le Centaure" and "La Bacchante" remain arguably the most powerful prose poems ever written[according to whom?]) and Aloysius Bertrand (in Gaspard de la nuit) chose, in almost complete isolation, to cease using.[citation needed] Later Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé followed their example in works like Paris Spleen and Illuminations.[6][7] The prose poem continued to be written in France into the 20th century by such writers as Max Jacob, Henri Michaux, Gertrude Stein, and Francis Ponge.[citation needed] In Poland, Juliusz Słowacki wrote a prose poem, Anhelli, in 1837. Bolesław Prus (1847–1912), influenced by the French prose poets, wrote a number of poetic micro-stories, including "Mold of the Earth" (1884), "The Living Telegraph" (1884) and "Shades" (1885).[8][9] His somewhat longer story, "A Legend of Old Egypt" (1888), likewise shows many features of prose poetry.[10] In 1877–1882 Russian novelist Turgenev wrote several 'Poems in prose' (Стихотворения в прозе) which have neither poetic rhythm nor rhymes but resemble poetry in concise but expressive form. The writings of Syrian poet and writer Francis Marrash (1836–73) featured the first examples of prose poetry in modern Arabic literature.[11] From the mid-20th century, the great Arab exponent of prose poetry was the Syrian poet, Adunis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber, born 1930), a perennial contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature.[12] The Modernist poet T. S. Eliot wrote vehemently against prose poems.[citation needed] He added to the debate about what defines the genre, writing in his introduction to Djuna Barnes' highly poeticized 1936 novel Nightwood that it could not be classed as "poetic prose" as it did not show the rhythm or "musical pattern" of verse.[citation needed] By contrast, other Modernist authors, including Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson, consistently wrote prose poetry.[citation needed] Poet and critic Donald Sidney-Fryer, a leading scholar of the works of American poet Clark Ashton Smith, praised "the extremely picturesque or pictorial character of many of Smith's typical, far-ranging, and most polished fantasies, his extended poems in prose."[13] Canadian author Elizabeth Smart's By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept (1945) is a relatively isolated example of mid-20th-century English-language poetic prose.[citation needed] Prose poems made a resurgence in the early 1950s and in the 1960s with American poets Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Russell Edson, Charles Simic, Robert Bly, John Ashbery, and James Wright.[citation needed] Simic won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his 1989 collection, The World Doesn't End.[14] Since the late 1980s, prose poetry has gained in popularity.[citation needed] Journals have begun specializing in prose poems or microfiction.[citation needed] In the United Kingdom, Stride Books published a 1993 anthology of prose poetry, A Curious Architecture.[15] Free verse Lyric essay Fu (poetry) Gasa (poetry) Prosimetrum Rhymed prose Vignette (literature) Double Room The English Mail-Coach Suspiria de Profundis ^ "Poetic form: Prose poem", Poets.org, New York, Academy of American Poets. ^ "Glossary of Terms", Poetry Magazine, Chicago, Poetry Foundation, 2015. ^ Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. (2015-08-26). On Biblical Poetry. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-024013-4. ^ Robert Hirsch, A Poet's Glossary, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, ISBN 9780151011957. ^ Lowenstein, Tom, ed., Classic Haiku, London, Duncan Baird Publishers, 2007. ^ Stuart Friebert and David Young (eds.) Models of the Universe: An Anthology of the Prose Poem. (1995) ^ Gedichte in Prosa. Von der Romantik bis zur Moderne. Vorwort und Auswahl, Alexander Stillmark, Frankfurt a. Main (2013) ^ Christopher Kasparek, "Two Micro-stories by Bolesław Prus", The Polish Review, vol. XL, no. 1, 1995, pp. 99–103. ^ Zygmunt Szweykowski, Twórczość Bolesława Prusa, p.99 ^ Zygmunt Szweykowski, Twórczość Bolesława Prusa, pp. 149, 183, 301, 444. ^ Jayyusi, Salma Khadra (1977). Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry. Volume I. Brill. p. 23. ^ Robyn Creswell, "Hearing Voices: How the doyen of Arabic poetry draws on—and explodes—its traditions", The New Yorker, 18 & 25 December 2017, pp. 106–9. ^ Donald Sidney-Fryer, "Klarkash-Ton and 'Greek'," The Freedom of Fantastic Things: Selected Criticism on Clark Ashton Smith, Scott Connors, ed. (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2006); reprinted in Donald Sidney-Fryer, Random Notes, Random Lines: Essays and Miscellanea (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2021), pp. 144-171. ^ "The World Doesn't End". ^ A Curious Architecture: New British and American Prose Poetry, London, Stride Press, 1993. Robert Alexander, C.W. Truesdale, and Mark Vinz. "The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry." New Rivers Press, 1996. Michel Delville, "The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre." Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 1998 Stephen Fredman, "Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse." 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Ray Gonzalez, "No Boundaries: Prose Poems by 24 American Poets." Tupelo Press, 2003. Christopher Kasparek, "Two Micro-stories by Bolesław Prus", The Polish Review, vol. XL, no. 1, 1995, pp. 99–103. David Lehman, "Great American prose poems: from Poe to the present." Simon & Schuster, 2003 Jonathan Monroe, "A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre." Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987. Marguerite S. Murphy, "A Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem from Wilde to Ashbery." Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Twórczość Bolesława Prusa (The Creative Writing of Bolesław Prus), 2nd ed., Warsaw, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972. Look up prose poem in Wiktionary, the free dictionary. The Prose Poem -International journal-The Berkeley Electronic Press Sentence Double Room William Stafford and David Shumate describe prose poetry Poetic Form: Prose Poem inc example by Charles Baudelaire'Be Drunk' Retrieved from " And if sometimes, on the steps of a palace or the green grass of a ditch, in the mournful solitude of your room, you wake again, drunkenness already diminishing or gone, ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, everything that is flying, everything that is groaning, everything that is rolling, everything that is singing, everything that is speaking. . . ask what time it is and wind, wave, star, bird, clock will answer you: “It is time to be drunk! So as not to be the martyred slaves of time, be drunk, be continually drunk! On wine, on poetry or on virtue as you wish. -- Charles Baudelaire, Be Drunk Prose poetry remains one of the most misunderstood forms of poetry. Often confused with free verse, prose poetry eschews the technical, poetic techniques that are often used to give free verse its impact. Writing in the prose format often suffers the same criticisms as free verse poetry in that it is easier, or lazier, than traditional structured forms. Hopefully, this article will help you to understand prose poetry a little better, highlight the differences between prosaic poetry, a traditional prose piece or piece of flash fiction, structured poetry and even free verse itself. What Is Prose Poetry? Prose poetry is a hybrid genre of writing that combines elements of both prose and poetry. Rather than presenting ideas in traditional poetic form with line breaks, rhyme schemes, and a focus on sound devices such as alliteration and assonance, it employs many of the conventions of prose writing such as paragraphs, sentences, and dialogue. At its simplest prose poetry definition, it is a blending of both prose and poetry to create a unique style that is more condensed than prose but with the same linearity as traditional narrative. Prose poetry often uses poetic devices such as imagery and metaphor, while still maintaining its storytelling qualities. Is Prose Poetry A Kind of Free Verse? Prose poetry isn’t technically a form of free verse, although the two do share many similarities. For example, both can rely on a rejection of standard or traditional poetic forms and structures, such as stanzas. However, free verse doesn’t necessarily need to borrow techniques or structure from traditional prose writing. What Makes Prose Poetry Different From Plain Prose? Prose poetry is distinctly different from plain prose as it makes an effort to capture the aesthetic qualities of a poem, such as rhythm and meter. It also often employs more condensed language and structure than traditional prose, making it more succinct while still maintaining narrative qualities. Additionally, the tone of prose poetry is often more lyrical and poetic than that of plain prose. Prose poetry also typically uses a lot of imagery and figurative language, which helps to create an atmosphere or mood that can be felt even if the poem doesn’t have a traditional structure. What Literary Techniques Are Often Used In Prose Poetry? The literary techniques used in prose poetry often come from both the traditional world of poetry and the realm of fiction. In addition to imagery, metaphor, and simile (which can be found in both genres), prose poetry may also utilize personification, diction, juxtaposition, irony, hyperbole, allusion, and other literary devices. What Does Prose Poetry Normally Focus On? Prose poetry often focuses on everyday moments or experiences, typically with a deeper meaning. It may also explore the feelings and emotions experienced in those moments, often without explicitly stating what those feelings are. One of the most distinctive qualities of prose poetry is that it has a narrative quality to it—it’s not just about presenting an idea or emotion, but it’s also about telling a story. How Long Do Prose Poems Need To Be? There is no definitive answer to this question as there are no set guidelines or rules for how long a prose poem needs to be. That said, many prose poems tend to be shorter than traditional narrative poems and don’t run much longer than one page. They may also make use of shorter sentences and more concise language in order to keep their length to a minimum. How Do I Identify A Prose Poem Compared to Regular Prose? Prose poetry tends to stand out from regular prose due to its focus on imagery and figurative language, as well as its more lyrical tone. Additionally, the narrative elements of prose poetry can be quite distinctive and will often contain an underlying message or moral. When reading a piece of writing, it’s helpful to pay attention to the structure of sentences and paragraphs, as well as the use of literary devices, in order to identify whether a piece is prose poetry or just plain prose. What Is The History Of Prose Poetry? The history of prose poetry goes back to at least the 19th century. French poets such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé were among the first to experiment with blending traditional poetic elements with that of prose writing. In the 20th century, American poet James Schuyler is credited with popularizing the form. Today, prose poetry is an established genre of literature and many poets and writers continue to explore its possibilities. From novels in verse to experimental works, there’s no shortage of creativity when it comes to the prose poem. While it is quite easy to discover prose poetry examples, it can be difficult to find prose poems which have gained a substantial readership in the last generation or so. The dominance of free verse poetry, while being an incredible poetic form, has had an impact on the prevalence of other forms of poetry, including prose poetry. In fact, you’re more likely to read poetic prose (which is well-written, image-heavy prose) rather than prosaic poetry as a poetic form. How Popular Is The Prose Poetry Form Today? Today, prose poems as a form aren’t exactly popular, but it does continue to have some readership, particularly online. A large number of Instagram poets, for example, along with other digital poets, regularly write and share prose poems. Additionally, there are several online magazines dedicated to this form of poetry, where you can find examples that explore different styles, themes, and topics. Overall, prose poetry is a unique literary form which continues to have influence in the world of literature today. It provides poets with an opportunity to play with traditional forms and creative expression in a way that most poetry doesn’t allow. How Do I Write A Prose Poem? When writing a prose poem, it’s important to keep in mind that you are blending both poetry and prose. As such, think of the piece as being narrative-based but with poetic elements woven throughout. To do this, focus on creating vivid imagery and using figurative language to convey emotion, setting, or feelings without explicitly stating them. Additionally, it’s important to keep the poem concise and focused on one idea or emotion. As with any form of poetry, there isn’t really a hard guide that you can use to create a poem, and certainly not a good poem. Unless you’re working to a fairly strict structure, such as a haiku, tanka or sonnet, there isn’t anything dictating what you need to write about when you write prose poetry. While that can be immensely freeing, it can also be somewhat paralysing or problematic if you just want to sit down and start writing poetry. But that, of course, opens up a whole other discussion about what it means to be a poet, and whether its a decision or a compulsion to write poetry. Do Prose Poems Need to Rhyme? No, prose poems do not need to rhyme. While some writers may choose to use rhyme or other poetic techniques within a prose poem, it’s by no means necessary and is often not found in the genre. The focus of writing and reading a prose poem should be on the narrative elements and imagery used, as writing prose poetry is more about conveying an emotion or idea through words than creating rhymes to structure the poem’s flow or pace. What Do Prose Poems Look Like? Just like with any other type of poem, there is no one way that a prose poem should look. However, they are often written in shorter paragraphs or sentences, as opposed to the larger passages of traditional narrative poetry. Additionally, since a prose poem doesn’t necessarily have to rhyme or follow a set structure, it isn’t required to utilise line breaks or enjambment to create a sense of rhythm or flow. Instead, any pacing or musicality within the poem needs to be entirely generated through the use of carefully chosen words, imagery and punctuation. Do Prose Poems Have Stanzas? No, prose poems do not have stanzas. However, prose poems may be organised into sections or parts in order to better convey the narrative of the poem and maintain focus on its main idea or emotion. Organising a prose poem into sections can help keep readers engaged and ensure that ideas are clearly articulated and presented in an easy-to-understand manner. Ultimately, the structure of a prose poem is up to the writer, and there really aren’t any rules dictating how it should or shouldn’t look. Regardless of the form it takes, however, a successful prose poem will be able to effectively convey its underlying message in an interesting and engaging way. Are Prose Poems Written In Paragraphs? Yes, prose poems are typically written in paragraphs. However, there is no set structure that must be adhered to when writing a prose poem. Just as with any other type of poetry, the author has creative freedom when it comes to deciding how the poem should be structured and presented on the page. Short sentences or even single words can be used to convey emotion or ideas, and the length of each paragraph is entirely up to the writer. It’s also entirely feasible that prose poetry is written in one solid black, rather than being broken up into paragraphs. It all depends on a range of factors, including the poet’s decisions, the topic, the kind of pace you want to set and so on. What Are Some Examples Of Prose Poems? In the English Language, there are thousands of examples of prose poems. These are largely the domain of American poets, such as Walt Whitman, Sylvia Plath and Langston Hughes, but there is still a significant number of British poets and poets from elsewhere in the world working or who have previously worked, in this form. Here are some examples of some famous prose poems: ‘We Real Cool’ by Gwendolyn Brooks ‘The Desire To Paint’ by Charles Baudelaire ‘The Sky Is Low, The Clouds Are Mean’ by Emily Dickinson ‘The Story of an Hour’ by Kate Chopin ‘A Dream within a Dream’ by Edgar Allen Poe Prose poetry can also be found in other languages, including Spanish and French. Perhaps the most renowned example of this is Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer’s Rimas (Rhymes), a collection of lyric poems written in prose. When it comes to writing and reading poetry, prose poems are often overlooked or seen as a less-serious form. However, they can be some of the most powerful pieces of literature available and should not be ignored or dismissed out of hand. For example, Baudelaire’s prose poem “The Desire to Paint” is full of powerful literature, and strong, abstract imagery – if this were structured in the form of free verse, it wouldn’t be less powerful, but we would read it differently. Remember, there is a reason that Charles Baudelaire, one of Europe’s most evocative poets, chose to write and structure in this way: “Unhappy perhaps is the man, but happy the artist, who is torn with this desire. I burn to paint a certain woman who has appeared to me so rarely, and so swiftly fled away, like some beautiful, regrettable thing the traveller must leave behind him in the night. It is already long since I saw her. She is beautiful, and more than beautiful: she is overpowering. The colour black preponderates in her; all that she inspires is nocturnal and profound. Her eyes are two caverns where mystery vaguely stirs and gleams; her glance illuminates like a ray of light; it is an explosion in the darkness. I would compare her to a black sun if one could conceive of a dark star overthrowing light and happiness.” What’s The Difference Between Prose Poetry & Narrative Poetry? The main difference between prose poetry and narrative poetry is structure. Prose poems are typically written in short paragraphs or sentences, while narrative poems often have longer passages of text and employ line breaks and enjambment to create a more lyrical feel. Narrative poems often focus on telling a story or recounting an experience, while prose poems can be more abstract and focus on the power of words and imagery to convey an emotion or idea. Ultimately, it’s up to the individual writer to decide what type of poetry they want to create, but it’s important to note that both forms have their place when it comes to creating powerful pieces of literature. What’s The Difference Between Prose Poetry & Flash Fiction? Flash fiction is a form of prose writing that focuses on exploring a narrative in as few words as possible. The most popular example is a six-word story, but the form can also be extended to stories of 2,000 words or fewer (often causing some confusing cross-over with short stories). Prose poetry is similar in that it also relies on short passages of text to convey an idea or emotion. But unlike flash fiction, prose poems are often more abstract than narrative, focused on exploring an idea or image than telling a concrete story. Who Famously Wrote Prose Poetry? Some of the most famous poets who wrote in prose include Walt Whitman, Sylvia Plath and Langston Hughes. Other notable poets include Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, Kate Chopin and Edgar Allen Poe. Famous Spanish-language writers such as Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer have also worked in this form, along with French poets such as Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire. Prose poetry is an incredibly diverse form of expression, so while the writers mentioned above are some of the most well-known practitioners of this type of poetry, there are many more talented poets out there exploring this fascinating style. How Do I Recognise If A Poem Is Written In Free Verse Or Prose Poetry? It can be understandably confusing when you come to differentiate between free verse and prose poetry. For example, both of them can share the same rejection of traditional poetic form and techniques, such as rhyme, enjambment and so on. However, looking at the structure of a poem will typically help you on your way to understanding the precise form of a poem. It’s common that there are cross-overs – for example, a free verse poem might also be prosaic in its composition, or a prose poem may rely on free verse as its essential language. As a practical example, let’s take a look at one of my favourite imagist poems, “The Red Wheelbarrow”, by William Carlos Williams. so much depends upon a red wheel barrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens While you might consider this a prose poem due to its simple language, its actually a free verse imagist poem because of a few distinct factors. For example, the line breaks within each stanza, and the presence of the four stanzas themselves immediately mean that this piece of work cannot be categorised as a prose poem. If we were to rewrite it as a prose poem, there are a few factors we’d need to change: Firstly, the removal of the line breaks. Secondly, the removal of the stanzas. Thirdly, the inclusion of punctuation to make this poem make grammatical sense from a prosaic perspective. The end result would look something like this: “So much depends upon a red wheel barrow, glazed with rain water, beside the white chickens.” Here you can see that, while the poetic language, the strong imagery and so on remains the same, the changes to its form reveal a fundamnetal change to it structure and impact. None of the images within the work are given the chance to be explored alone. While remaining an imagist poem, the individual images themselves are pushed into a single image, which fundamentally changes the overall impact of the work. What Are Some Tips For Writing Prose Poetry? As I’ve said many times, writing poetry is something that should be wholly personal and, in my opinion, you shouldn’t necessarily choose a particular form and bend your intentions to suit it. Forms came about because they’ve been seen as a good framework for certain ideas or thoughts – no one woke up one day and said “You can only write in the sonnet form, everything is else is worthless. With that in mind, here are a couple of tips if you’re looking to write in prose poetry: Make Sure There’s A Reason For It: If you’re going to write in prose poetry, you should make sure you know why. If you traditionally write in prose, it can often seem like the next logical step, as you can work within the parameters of something you already know well. However, that doesn’t mean you should ignore other poetic techniques, such as rhyme, rhythm or structure. Good technical poets have an understanding of techniques, even if they neglect to use them, or deliberately avoid them. Poetry is so much more than just writing a good sentence – its a combination of language, technical understanding, imagery and so much more. Don’t Ignore Punctuation: If you can’t use line breaks or other traditional poetic tools, then you need to be clever with your use of punctuation. Full stops, for example, can be used cleverly to cut sentences and even thoughts short, highlight certain words and draw attention to specific phrases. Don’t just write in simple sentences unless those sentences are a deliberate construct to further improve your poem. Focus on Imagery: Prose poems, as we discussed above, aren’t narrative poems. Therefore, you should just use them to tell a simple narrative. Instead, use them to present beautiful themes and images, in much the same way as you would with other forms of poetry. Prose poetry is so much more than poetic prose, and you can’t afford to forget it. Though the name of the form may appear to be a contradiction, the prose poem essentially appears as prose, but reads like poetry. In the first issue of The Prose Poem: An International Journal, editor Peter Johnson explained, “Just as black humor straddles the fine line between comedy and tragedy, so the prose poem plants one foot in prose, the other in poetry, both heels resting precariously on banana peels.” While it lacks the line breaks associated with poetry, the prose poem maintains a poetic quality, often utilizing techniques common to poetry, such as fragmentation, compression, repetition, and rhyme. The prose poem can range in length from a few lines to several pages long, and it may explore a limitless array of styles and subjects. History of the Prose Poem Form Though examples of prose passages in poetic texts can be found in early Bible translations and the Lyrical Ballads of William Wordsworth, the form is most often traced to nineteenth-century French Symbolists. The advent of the form in the work of Aloysius Bertrand and Charles Baudelaire marked a significant departure from the strict separation between the genres of prose and poetry at the time. A fine example of the form is Baudelaire’s “Be Drunk,” which concludes: And if sometimes, on the steps of a palace or the green grass of a ditch, in the mournful solitude of your room, you wake again, drunkenness already diminishing or gone, ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, everything that is flying, everything that is groaning, everything that is rolling, everything that is singing, everything that is speaking . . . ask what time it is and wind, wave, star, bird, clock will answer you: “It is time to be drunk! So as not to be the martyred slaves of time, be drunk, be continually drunk! On wine, on poetry or on virtue as you wish.” The form quickly spread to innovative literary circles in other countries: Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka in Germany; Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, and Octavio Paz in Latin America; and William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein in the United States. Each group of writers adapted the form and developed their own rules and restrictions, ultimately expanding the definitions of the prose poem. Prose poetry mixes traditional poetry’s lyrical and metric aspects with prose’s idiomatic elements, such as conventional punctuation and the absence of line breaks. A prose poem may appear to be an unremarkable paragraph of standard prose at first glance, but a reader who digs deeper will notice poetic undertones in its metre, repetition, and language choice. Most forms of creative expression in the English language can be divided into two categories: prose and poetry. Novels, short tales, novellas, and scripts all fall under the category of prose. The language used in this type of writing is similar to that used in normal conversation. Song lyrics, diverse poetry forms, and theatrical dialogue with poetic features, such as iambic pentameter, are all examples of poetry. Prose and poetry, on the other hand, are not entirely stratified to the point where one can never contain the elements of the other. This is a type of creative writing that incorporates characteristics of both the poetic and prose forms. Origin and History Prose poetry, particularly in Anglophone culture, went out of favour during the Modernist era. Although T.S. Eliot was an outspoken critic of the form, Gertrude Stein, an American expatriate in Paris, admired its adoption in French culture. The style of writing a renaissance in the United States around the mid-twentieth century. Long and short prose-based variations on free poetry were brought to coffeehouses in New York and San Francisco by poets like William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Charles Simic, and Robert Bly. This form of writing can be found in a variety of cultures around the world. Poetic prose has its origins in seventeenth-century Japan, when Matsuo Bash, a prominent poet during the Japanese Edo period, established a poetic variety known as haibun, which combined prose and traditional haiku features. Beginning with Aloysius Bertrand’s compilation Gaspard de la Nuit, a group of French poets pioneered a push toward prose poetry in Western culture. Stéphane Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire, and Arthur Rimbaud are examples of later nineteenth-century French prose poets. This form was also embraced by English language poets, such as Oscar Wilde of Ireland and Edgar Allan Poe of the United States. Prose poetry is not only a development of how writers express the poetic impulse but is perhaps an index of how traditional lineated lyric poetry is increasingly being replaced and, in the process, transformed by prosaic modes in a prosaic age, where traditional notions of the lyric have become increasingly problematic. Simic’s collection of The World Doesn’t End, published in 1989, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Consequently, it has grown in popularity since the late 1980s. Journals have started to focus on prose poems and microfiction. Despite its creation in sentences and paragraphs, the French Romantic prose poets’ inventions altered French and international poetry, and their prose poetry remained a kind of poetry. One of this form’s merits is its proclivity for challenging or stretching our preconceptions of what poetry looks like. Prose poetry implies that the poetic reaches further than any of us could have dreamed. The mode of prose is not used in the same way in good prose poetry as it is in most conventional and discursive novels or nonfiction. Prose becomes a revived medium that focuses less on a story’s chronological progression. As a result, it is rather straightforward: Prose poetry is anything that combines these characteristics into a single piece of writing! If you want a more precise definition, prose poetry is poetry that is not written in verse but yet incorporates poetic elements like rhythm and metaphors. Without the line breaks associated with poetry, it is written as prose. However, poetic methods like fragmentation, compression, repetition, rhyme, metaphor, and figures of speech are used. “The Prose Poem” by Campbell McGrath: On the map it is precise and rectilinear as a chessboard, though driving past you would hardly notice it, this boundary line or ragged margin, a shallow swale that cups a simple trickle of water, less rill than rivulet, more gully than dell, a tangled ditch grown up throughout with a fearsome assortment of wildflowers and bracken. There is no fence, though here and there a weathered post asserts a former claim, strands of fallen wire taken by the dust. To the left a cornfield carries into the distance, dips and rises to the blue sky, a rolling plain of green and healthy plants aligned in close order, row upon row upon row. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. 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To the curious souls who find delight in the world of literature, welcome! We are about to explore an interesting facet of the literary world—prose poetry. This comprehensive guide will help us understand prose poetry better, including its history, characteristics, and why it matters. By the end of this guide, you'll even have a grasp on how to create your own prose poem! Ready to dive in? Let's go!What is Prose Poetry?The definition of prose poem can be a bit elusive, but let's break it down. Imagine a beautiful fusion of prose and poetry—this fusion is what we call a prose poem. Often, it combines the characteristics of both prose and poetry, resulting in a unique form of expression that is a joy to read and write.Here's a more formal definition of prose poem for you: a prose poem is a piece of writing in prose that has obvious poetic qualities, including intensity, compactness, prominent rhythms, and imagery.Intensity: Just like a thrilling roller coaster ride, a good prose poem keeps you on the edge of your seat. Every word matters, and the emotions run high.Compactness: Prose poems are generally short and sweet. They don't ramble on but get straight to the point, packing a punch in a few paragraphs or less.Prominent Rhythms: Even though it's written in prose, you can almost hear the beat in a prose poem. It has a rhythm that's undeniably poetic.Imagery: Prose poetry paints a vivid picture. When you read it, you can visualize the scenes, the characters, the emotions—just like watching a movie in your mind.In essence, the definition of prose poem is a creative blend of prose and poetry, offering readers the best of both worlds. Isn't that a fascinating concept? Next, let's dive into the history of prose poetry to see how this unique form of literature came to be.History of Prose PoetryOnce we've got a grasp on the definition of prose poem, it's time to embark on a time-traveling journey to understand its history. Prose poetry has a rich past, which started centuries ago.Prose poetry was born in 19th century France. It was a time when writers were seeking to break free from the rigid rules of traditional poetry. One of the earliest practitioners of this form was the French poet Charles Baudelaire. His book, "Paris Spleen", is a collection of prose poems that beautifully illustrate the life of 19th-century Paris.The trend of prose poetry didn't stop at France's borders, but it spread worldwide. Writers in the United States, such as Walt Whitman and Gertrude Stein, also incorporated prose poetry into their work, providing a fresh, new perspective to American literature.However, despite its growing popularity, prose poetry was often met with resistance. Many traditionalists thought that it was a rebellious act against the established norms of poetry. But, the prose poets were undeterred. They continued to write, and over time, prose poetry has carved out its own niche in the literary world and continues to thrive today.Now that we've explored the history of prose poetry, it's time to understand its characteristics. Let's delve deeper into what makes a prose poem, well, a prose poem!Characteristics of Prose PoetryAs we continue our journey in understanding the definition of prose poem, it's valuable to identify its key characteristics. So, what makes prose poetry unique?One of the primary features of prose poetry is its form — or rather, its lack of form. Unlike traditional poetry that often adheres to a specific structure or rhyme scheme, prose poetry takes on the appearance of prose. It's written in paragraphs, not in verse, but it maintains the freedom and creativity of poetry.Prose poetry also utilizes poetic devices like metaphor, simile, and personification. It's like a chef using a mix of ingredients to prepare a delicious meal. Each device adds a different flavor, enhancing the overall taste of the prose poem.Another characteristic is the use of vivid imagery. A prose poem paints a picture in the reader's mind. It's as if you're standing in an art gallery, looking at a masterpiece and feeling a rush of emotions.Lastly, prose poetry often explores abstract concepts and ideas. It's like a deep dive into the depths of the ocean, exploring the unknown. It's a journey that can be both exciting and thought-provoking.Now, with these characteristics in mind, reading prose poetry might seem like a daunting task. But, fear not! The next section will guide you on how to read prose poetry.How to read Prose PoetryUnlocking the magic of a prose poem can feel like solving a puzzle. But don't worry, with some pointers, you'll soon be navigating these literary pieces like a pro. So, how do you read a prose poem?First, approach it like a story. Remember, prose poetry looks like a paragraph, so start by reading it from beginning to end. Try to grasp the overall narrative, but don't stress if everything doesn't make sense just yet.Next, slow down and savor the words. Prose poetry often uses striking language and imagery. Take a moment to visualize the scenes and emotions. Imagine you're watching a movie, and each sentence is a new scene. Notice any feelings or thoughts the words stir in you.Thirdly, focus on the poetic devices. Remember when we talked about metaphors, similes, and personification? Well, they're your tools for understanding the depth of a prose poem. They can help you uncover layers of meaning that aren't immediately obvious.Lastly, don't rush to understand everything. Prose poetry can be complex and sometimes, a bit mysterious. And that's okay. The beauty of a prose poem often lies in its ability to make you think and feel deeply. So, let it simmer in your mind. You might be surprised by what you discover.Now that you know how to read prose poetry, let's take a look at some notable prose poets and their works in the next section.Notable Prose Poets and their WorksProse poetry has been blessed with many gifted writers who have taken this form to new heights. Let's explore some of these notable prose poets and their works.Charles Baudelaire is often hailed as the father of prose poetry. His collection— Paris Spleen— is a classic example of the form. Baudelaire's prose poems are known for their lyrical beauty and poignant exploration of urban life.Next up, we have the legendary Gertrude Stein. Stein's work— Tender Buttons— is a masterclass in prose poetry. Her innovative use of language and form has influenced countless poets and continues to captivate readers.Russell Edson is another name you should know. Often called the godfather of American prose poetry, Edson's absurd and humorous prose poems— such as those in The Tunnel: Selected Poems— have a unique charm that's hard to resist.And we can't forget Margaret Atwood. Yes, the renowned novelist is also a prose poet! Her collection— Morning in the Burned House— showcases her gift for crafting evocative prose poems.These are just a few examples of the many talented prose poets out there. Exploring their works can provide a deeper understanding of prose poetry and inspire your journey into this fascinating world. So, why not pick up a collection or two and start reading?Next, let's delve into how you can start writing your own prose poetry.Writing your own Prose PoetryFeeling inspired by the works of these masterful poets, and want to try your hand at prose poetry? That's great! Let's start with a simple definition of prose poem. Prose poetry is a type of poetry that uses the natural flow of speech, but still maintains the qualities of a poem—like imagery and rhythm.Begin your journey into prose poetry by immersing yourself in the works of the greats. Reading is one of the best ways to absorb the style and rhythm of prose poetry. As you read, take note of the elements that appeal to you, and think about how you can incorporate them into your writing.When you're ready to write, start small. Choose a moment, a thought, or a feeling, and write about it in a paragraph or two. Don’t worry too much about form or structure yet—just let your words flow.Remember, a good prose poem paints a picture. So, focus on creating vivid, sensory details that draw in your reader. Try to capture the essence of your chosen moment or feeling, and convey it in a way that makes your reader feel something too.As you continue to practice, remember that writing is a process. Don't be disheartened if your early attempts don't live up to your expectations. Keep reading, keep writing, and keep refining your craft.And most importantly, have fun with it! Prose poetry is a wonderfully flexible and expressive form. So, feel free to experiment, take risks, and find your unique voice.Happy writing!Prose Poetry vs. Free VerseNow that we've explored the definition of a prose poem and how to write one, it's time to differentiate between prose poetry and another popular form—free verse. While they share similarities, understanding their unique features will give you a clearer picture of the literature landscape.Free verse, like prose poetry, breaks away from the traditional rules of poetry. It doesn't stick to a specific rhyme scheme or meter. This gives it a certain level of freedom—hence the name! But while free verse can feel liberating, it's not just about writing anything that comes to mind. It requires control and intention to create a meaningful piece.On the other hand, prose poetry, as we've established, has the appearance of prose but the soul of a poem. It builds a rhythm without the constraints of line breaks. It's about finding the poetry in everyday language, and using it to create something beautiful.So, what's the main difference? Format is key. While free verse may break into lines and stanzas, prose poetry presents itself as a block of text. But they both share a love for freedom—freedom from traditional structures, that is!Understanding these differences won't just help you identify prose poetry and free verse—it'll also broaden your perspective of poetry as a whole. And who knows, maybe it'll inspire you to explore different kinds of poetry in your writing journey.Why Prose Poetry mattersWith all this talk about prose poetry, you might be wondering—why does it matter? Well, there's more to this form of poetry than meets the eye.First off, prose poetry challenges the traditional boundaries between prose and poetry. It proves that poetry isn't confined to verses and rhymes—it can take on many forms. This opens up a whole new world of expression for writers and poets. You don't need to worry about fitting into a specific box—you can simply focus on telling your story the way you want to.Moreover, prose poetry makes poetry accessible. If you've ever felt intimidated by the complex language and difficult-to-decipher metaphors in traditional poetry, prose poetry is a breath of fresh air. Its simple, conversational language can help you appreciate the beauty of poetry without feeling overwhelmed. It's like a gentle introduction to the world of poetry.But don't be fooled by its simplicity—prose poetry can be just as powerful and evocative as traditional poetry. It can paint vivid pictures in your mind, stir up deep emotions, and make you see the world in a new light. That's the true beauty of prose poetry—it's simple, yet profound.In a nutshell, prose poetry matters because it breaks the mold. It pushes the boundaries of what poetry can be, making it more inclusive and accessible. So next time you come across a prose poem, remember—it's not just a piece of writing. It's a testament to the limitless possibilities of the human imagination.If you're fascinated by the world of prose poetry and want to enhance your writing skills, check out the workshop 'Writing From Memory - Part 2' by Charlie Brogan. This workshop will help you dive deeper into the creative process and explore the power of writing from memory, which can be an essential tool in crafting beautiful prose poetry. Last month, I recommended some books to kick off your new year. One of them was Partial Genius, by Mary Biddinger. This book is a collection of prose poems, which might be an unfamiliar format for many readers. The prose poem form actually began in Japan in the 17th century, is evident in the work of French writers in the mid-1800’s, and regained popularity with the Beat Poets in the 1950’s and ‘60’s. Its most distinctive trait is that there are no line breaks; a prose poem looks like a prose paragraph. The main elements of poetry, however, remain central to the crafting of these pieces. Prose poems include metaphor, imagery, repetition, figures of speech, and internal rhyme schemes. Prose poems do not necessarily contain elements of fiction, such as plot, inciting incident, character arcs, climaxes, or falling action. Let’s take a quick look at a fun example. “Be Drunk,” by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) You have to be always drunk. That’s all there is to it—it’s the only way. So as not to feel the horrible burden of time that breaks your back and bends you to the earth, you have to be continually drunk. But on what? Wine, poetry or virtue, as you wish. But be drunk… Read the rest of the poem at Poets.org. As we can see, though this piece is in paragraph form, it is more a commentary on the human condition than a story. In the first paragraph, we have the image of backs being bent over and the beautiful alliteration of the “b” sound. In the third paragraph we have the quick repetition of nouns and the phrase “everything that is…” to create an impatient, almost ecstatic tone. On the other hand, there is no plot or character development in this piece. There are no elements of fiction utilized here, but there are many poetic elements. The only thing missing is line breaks. Why break from line breaks? Why would poets choose to abandon line breaks, you might ask? Why not just write prose instead? Well, besides the previously mentioned differences between poetry and prose, authors might choose the prose poem format if the introduction of line breaks changes the tone of the poem to something overly wrought or dramatic. The prose poem relies on the integrity of the sentence to convey the tone and the author may not want the added tension or layered meanings a line break introduces. A prose poetry writing exercise Find a favorite poem, either a famous example or one you’ve written yourself. Write it out with no line breaks, in sentence form. Let’s use a famous Dickinson stanza as an example: I'm Nobody! Who are you? Are you – Nobody – too? Then there's a pair of us! Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know! Would become: I’m Nobody! Who are you? Are you—Nobody —too? Then there’s a pair of us! Don’t tell! They’d advertise—you know! Look at the two examples, the poem version and the prose version, and consider which one you like better, and why. Does the pace of the poem change when you read it as sentences? Do the words that end the lines with breaks seem to carry more weight and power—do they get lost in the sentence versions? If you read them aloud, does one version sound different from the other? Can you see how line breaks in the first version bring a kind of drama and attention to the Nobody, despite her efforts to remain anonymous, and how that contrast creates a tension that fuels the poem? Take the line or sentence that most interests you and make it the first line of a new prose poem. Try to focus more on imagery, metaphor, and language than plot or characters. In other words, show us an emotional state, rather than tell us a story with a beginning, middle, and end. What do you think of prose poems? Will you try this writing exercise? Share with us in the comments. 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