



Diana Wilson

Laces in the Corset: Structures of Poetry and Prose that Bind the Lyric Essay

What if the poem and prose could party together and neither would regret it the next morning?

—Amy Newman, “The Poem In The Gray Flannel Suit”

Imagine a warp in time, centuries deep, where writers gather on full-moon nights. Perhaps it surrounds a Concord bar where in the darkest corner sit Henry David Thoreau and Sylvia Plath—she’s on her third vodka-on-the-rocks; he nervously swirls a tall glass of water. Envision them sharing a slow dance beneath a disco ball. During a lull in the music you overhear her confessing a fear of commitment while he strokes her hair, gazes into her bleary eyes, and murmurs that he sometimes questions the solitary life. Picture them in the hours before dawn, strolling along a winding woodland path leading back to his place; his long drawn-out sentences matching his long stride as he expounds on the wildness of the woods, unaware that his companion has fallen behind.

Lost in the thicket, Sylvia shivers and looks to the stars. She says, “The yew tree points up. It has a gothic shape. / The eyes lift after it and find the moon” (Plath 172-173). A wolf howls; Sylvia screams and Henry David rushes to her side.

Years later their progeny Lyric Essay—half-prose and half-poetry—dresses in loose tunics, wears his hair slightly too long to be considered conventional, and whiles away his days wandering through forests and meadows while contemplating metaphors for life and love. He spends his nights lying in soft grass gazing at the constellations while neighbors gossip across the fence and cluck their tongues at his seeming lack of

discipline. These casual observers never notice that the maze Lyric Essay has worn in the grass is a labyrinthine path; they never notice that Lyric Essay's wanderings are structuring a carefully crafted border.

Like our fictitious "wild child," a progeny of poetry and prose, the literary lyric essay is often misunderstood, considered a self-indulgent, willy-nilly collection of disjointed thoughts and sentences that lead nowhere. But a careful study of lyric essays will reveal a cornucopia of connectors and structures rooted in both poetry and prose—mythology, reflection, irony, repetition, spiraling perspective, lists, sensory details, voltas—binding the fragmented imagery within braided, hermit crab, collage, and elegy structures—bringing order to apparent literary chaos and allowing lyric essayists the freedom to push and prod poetic prose until an emotional message pops from the page.

The definition of lyric essay remains elusive, for good reason. The *Seneca Review* devoted an entire 2007 issue to answering this question. In an introduction titled "New Terrain: The Lyric Essay," the lyric essay form was described as developing "by fragments, taking shape mosaically—its import visible only when one stands back and sees it whole." Julie Marie Wade follows this mosaic structure in her memoir *Wishbone: A Memoir in Fractures*. Wade's memoir is a collection of lyric meditations that, rather than accrete through flash back reflections, circles time counterclockwise. Wade directly addresses readers, invites them to walk a labyrinthine path. You can almost see her arms raised, reaching for your hand as she writes, "Welcome to the floor show of the future," a journey that ends in the Garden of Eden with "Adam and Eve (and) the delectable spectacle of the fruit" (152).

Wade's lyric meditation, "Bouquet," is a collection of word pictures that, viewed individually, could be a series of shape poems using flowers as their frames. Viewed as a whole, they form a collage of disparate botanicals linked by reflection, a structure that Dinty W. Moore describes as "made up of various pieces, or images, but the scraps are cut from the writer's memory... Still, the various parts all combine to form the whole" (Moore 96). In "Bouquet," a meditation on heterosexual and lesbian love, Wade uses flowers as the unifying imagery and reflection riffing off the botanical and cultural descriptions:

Cornflower

(Centaurea cyanus) Also known as Bachelor's button, which refers to the long-lasting quality of the flower when cut and placed in the buttonhole of a shirt or suit. Decades ago, bachelors sported the flower when they went courting. These dark blue flowers grow wild in cornfields and bloom until harvest begins

There is no question life was simpler with a man. *Simple*, I say, not *easy*. . . .

At one time, I longed to be the second in a fresh set of towels: *his 'n' hers* . . .

Did I lie? Did I misrepresent myself? Warning: certainties not included. Small print: hoping no one would notice.

But when I met you, the story does not turn fairy tale. The wanderer in the forest does not stumble upon a gingerbread house, only to open the door to find a sensual Wiccan waiting to shampoo her hair and bring her to climax in front of the fire.

Instead: each year when the spring comes, I line my collar with little blue flowers and ask again, with foreknowledge and flush, *will you please come outside and walk around in circles with me?* (114-115)

A total of sixteen botanicals—including “Love in a Mist,” “Love Lies Bleeding,” “Sword Lily,” “Wallflower”—form the structural imagery; sixteen reflections form the linkage. Throughout, both the imagery and the connectors follow one pattern: A common name of a flower is listed followed by the botanical name, habitat description, and cultural requirements; reflective flash prose sections state a situation, ruminate on aspects of the situation, then turn at the end (a volta) in an epiphany, drawing loosely on the sonnet form of poetry with sentences that are undeniably prose.

Richard Selzer also uses reflection as connective tissue to structure his lyric essay “The Knife.” Selzer employs what Michael Theune calls a (poetic) Emblem Structure that “begins with an organized description of an object and culminates with a meditation on that same object.” Selzer, in Theune’s words, “moves from *sight* to insight, from perception to reflection” as he (Selzer) writes: “One holds the knife as one holds the bow of a cello or a tulip—by the stem . . . The knife is not for pressing. It is for drawing across the field of skin. There is sound” (Theune 27; Selzer 708). Selzer sets the stage visually and aurally

for a lyric essay replete with sensory detail that rings with the music of poetry, using the poetic Emblem Structure cohered by prose reflection:

Like a slender fish, it waits, at the ready, then, go! It darts, followed by a fine wake of red. The flesh parts, falling away to yellow globules of fat

A stillness settles in my heart and is carried to my hand. It is the quietude of resolve layered over fear. And it is this resolve that lowers us, my knife and me, deeper and deeper into the person beneath

An arc of the liver shines high and on the right, like a dark sun. It laps over the pink sweep of the stomach, from whose lower border the gauzy omentum is draped, and through which veil one sees, sinuous, slow as just-fed snakes, the indolent coils of the intestine

I must confess that the priestliness of my profession has ever been impressed on me.

(708-709)

In Selzer's hands, the operating theatre becomes a temple, he the priest, the knife his sacred instrument. Additionally, Selzer's essay could be read like an ABAB poem, the "A" section the imagery, the "B" section connecting the imagery with reflection. By bending the poetic ABAB form into lyric prose: poetic imagery / reflection / poetic imagery / reflection, Selzer constrains (structures) the essay, providing boundaries for the imagery and allowing readers space to connect emotionally. Rather than turning away in horror, readers follow the knife as the intense word pictures carved by the knife are softened by deep cleansing breaths of reflection before the author begins again, the rhythms steady as the *beep beep beeps* in the operating theatre.

Brian Doyle's poetic repetition connects his imagery, rather than prose reflection, in his essay on people leaping from the twin towers on September 11, 2001. In her introduction to Brian Doyle's essay "Leap," Jennifer Sinor says of Doyle's work: "the lyric (is) a space defined by emotion rather than reason, a space defined by association rather than chronology, where his sentences tumble across one another, falling like so many bodies down the page, only to topple into a heap at the end, leaving his body holding onto

their bodies ‘against horror and loss and death’” (58). Doyle’s words, “A couple leaped from the south tower, hand in hand” (61), become the connecting refrain poetically twisted and fragmented in a way that echoes bodies falling, soft *l* and *f* and the hard *j* and *p*. The refrain modulates through the essay and connects horrifying imagery:

They reached for each other and their hands met and they jumped

Many people jumped. Perhaps hundreds. No one knows. They struck the pavement with such force that there was a pink mist in the air

A kindergarten boy who saw the people falling in flames told his teacher that the birds were on fire

Tiffany Keeling saw fireballs falling that she later realized were people

. . . he too saw the couple leaping hand in hand

But he reached for her hand and she reached for his hand and they leaped out the window holding hands

I keep coming back to his hand and her hand nestled in each other . . .

Their hands reaching and joining are the most powerful prayer I can imagine . . .

. . . they both decided at the same time to take two running steps and jump out the shattered window, but they *did* reach for each other, and they held on tight, and leaped, and fell endlessly . . . (61-63)

A modulating repetend becomes the underpinning; reflection becomes a prose volta, and like a poem this lyric essay turns at the end. But Doyle again twists the poetic structure and uses the volta to enter the essay.

I would also argue that this essay incorporates a poetic structure that poet Mark Yakich calls “Retrospective-Prospective.” Yakich defines it this way: “A two-part structure that begins with a retrospective consideration of the past and then concludes with a prospective look at the present, or even a prediction or hope for the future. Sometimes this first part reveals very private dilemmas, traumas, or

feelings dear to the speaker's heart; sometimes it merely identifies past experiences" (61). Although Doyle states that he did not witness the events he describes in this essay, he inhabits the piece, internalizing and contorting the imagery into a final, conclusive phrase that, as in any good poem, makes the reader suck in a deep breath, turn, and reread—and like any good creative nonfiction essay, elevates the piece to the universal experience and gives readers something to ponder. He writes: "Jennifer Brickhouse saw them holding hands, and Stuart DeHann saw them holding hands, and I hold onto that" (63).

In the *Seneca Review's* 2007 issue devoted to the lyric essay, Martha Ronk, in "Lyric Essay as Constellation," writes:

the lyric essay is shot through with the sort of semi-coherence that comes from recurring analogy, from an attention to language for its own sake, from the pleasures of the associative around an ill-defined center or shape. I envision a constellation, perhaps, bits (stars) that looked at long enough produce a coherent figure. (54)

In this same issue of the *Seneca Review*, Marcia Aldrich writes: "The lyric essay does not narrate a story so much as express a condition—often named, sometimes called human, but still to us unknown. It reverses foreground and background, cultivating leaps and juxtaposition, tensing between the presentational and the representational" (111).

If *representational* is defined as "depicting an object in a recognizable manner," and the definition of *presentational* is "notional; abstract, theoretical, or speculative, as reflective thought," then Bia Lowe uses both Ronk's and Aldrich's concepts in her *Splendored Thing: Love, Roses, and Other Thorny Treasures*, a meditation on life, lust, love and relationships. Lowe binds the imagery with both list-infused sentences and the retelling of ancient myths. The following excerpts from the chapter "This Mouth" illustrates this method while at the same time exemplifying Lowe's meditational structure using Monk's "attention to language," Aldrich's

“presentational and representational” imagery, and Yakich’s previously mentioned poetic “retrospective-prospective” structure:

They say in the beginning was the word, but I ask you, where did the word come from? Wasn’t it formed from breath, some proto or pre-proto breath, spelunked through the almighty glottis, and molded finally, given flavor and texture, in the mouth . . .

The mouth is the primal mind. Its first epiphany is the synthesis of gimme and food, its first prayer the utterance of mama. The word “mouth” mirrors the word “mother,” matches a summons to a mouthful. These words brim with labial sounds, sounds that bring vibrations to the lips, that coax the lips to open and release their vowels—a e i o u

Here is a weaning story about a little girl and a little boy. Their world is like their mother’s breast: full, generous, without condition (1-3)

Of course the first orifice was not the mouth, not the bellows spout, the pump sucking the sky, working the breast. Not the trumpeter of “mine.” At the beginning, despite all the brouhaha about the Word, we spoke through a mouth at the belly. The naval was the causeway of all need, the course of life’s infusion, the first source of the unconditional. Now that knot’s a fossil, a cowry’s cast, an imprint of life lived in a forgotten sea. (175)

Lowe’s rhythms bump and grind like jazz, her words husky and earthy as those used by torch singers in smoky bars. Wielding language like a virtuoso, Lowe segues from reality into fantasy and back again. Riffing off Ronk’s “lyric constellation,” Lowe’s readers become astronomers gazing into meditations orbiting around the facets of the human condition. In the following excerpt from “Seeing Things,” another essay in the collection, Lowe reflects on a lifelong fascination with constellations while maintaining what Aldrich calls “tensing between presentational and representational” within Yakich’s poetic “retrospective-prospective structure,” this time connecting imagery with the retelling of the *Rapunzel* myth:

Celestial seraphs and submarine phantoms enact our primal psychic dramas. The beloved, the object of our desiring, is continually transmuted by our imaginations, one minute a goddess, the next a gorgon . . .

Imagine for a moment a tale of such paradox. You are an adventurer, a sailor, drawn to a shore by a woman's beautiful soprano . . . At last you come to a tower surrounded by brambles, her candlelit chamber like the moon against the starry night . . . And then you hear the other voice, "Let me up, you insufferable cunt! . . . Let your hair down!"

One night you stand at the foot of the tower and call up to her . . . You recite the crone's words. "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!" . . . You climb over the window ledge and peer into the chamber . . . Your arms open to bring her near . . . "It is I . . . your love" you say by way of introduction. The room has an echo. It is colder than you'd expected and there is an unpleasant smell. The scratchy drone of rock begins, "I don't know you," it says. It is deafening, this grinding sound, why is it here among all this softness? . . . She moves toward you and into the shaft of starlight falling from the window . . . Her face is grotesque, her flesh scaled like a fish, her hair an enormous tangle of kelp. What choice do you have but to throw yourself out of the tower, away from this horrid sight, and into the brambles? (112-113)

Lowe is unafraid to combine fiction and nonfiction in search of emotional truth, a writer who, in the words of Robert Pinsky, "groove(s) on images" (4). A writer who, in the words of essayist Phillip Lopate, "attempts to surround a something—a subject, a mood, a problematic irritation—by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk, each seemingly digressive spiral actually taking us closer to the heart of the matter" (*Tell It Slant* 92).

"Coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk" also describes Robin Hemley's lyric essay "Twirl/Run." In this essay written to accompany a book of photographs, Hemley approaches the topic in prose as a poet enters an ekphrastic poem and draws on poetic irony which, according to poet C. Bakken, "offers two points of view, or two conflicting attitudes towards a single subject, and allows the playful tension of those contradictory impulses to stand" (9). Hemley creates this "playful tension" through

word play, using irony combined with repetition to bind the imagery. In an essay of less than 400 words, Hemley uses “twirl” and “run” in their conjugations and synonyms forty times. Hemley begins the essay with literal “running and twirling,” but then moves like a poet into the realm of the ironic. In the following excerpt, “running” morphs into a society of “mad dash(ers)” running from place to place” where we are eventually killed for being late:

We’re all in our own worlds, but few of us more so than runners and hair twirlers. We twirl our hair absently. We run with scarcely a glance at the rest of the world . . . We do not think about those who observe us because we’ll pass them soon enough and forget them.

‘Where’s the fire?’ We might overhear as we whiz by. For some of us, the fire is at our feet, always nipping our heels. Tomorrow, this mad dash, this very important date, will be replaced by another . . . running seems useless. You are not merely late; you are history . . .

You will be killed, surely, when you arrive. Spears will be hurled at you and you will die in St. Stephen-like agony, a martyr of time. And so this is why, this is exactly why you don’t care who looks your way as you huff by. (54)

Marrying poetry and prose, Hemley “grooves on the images” of runners and twirlers, sliding effortlessly from thought to thought and image to image. The repetitive words give the sentences punch, like beats in a measure. Hemley’s essay is not a straight narrative but rather a circular journey. He ends as he begins, literally running and twirling and connecting imagery with ironic word play: “The hair cascades and dances as you run. But it will not twirl, Medusa-like, on its own. Imagine the specter of a woman running, her hair twirling as if twisted by invisible fingers—or perhaps a drowned girl twisting in a current, the waters twirling her hair” (56).

Like Hemley, Lia Purpura uses irony, in the form of irony-infused lists, to bring cohesion to imagery in her book *On Looking*, a collection of lyric meditations about finding beauty in the repulsive and meaning in the commonplace. In the essay “Autopsy Report,” she incorporates what C. Bakken calls poetic structural irony, “a way of organizing a series of utterances so that what is first proclaimed is suddenly or

systematically undermined by what follows” (10)—I like to think of this essay as an elegy with a twist, written within the frame of this ironic structure, in which Purpura mourns the living and celebrates the dead.

Purpura’s poetic roots are apparent. She opens the essay with a series of modified anaphoras: “I shall begin . . . I shall stand . . . I shall touch . . . I shall note” as she sets the stage for a cast of deceased characters (1-2). White space both provides visual starkness and separates short passages into prose stanzas while a confessional substructure adds reflection, remaining true to the creative nonfiction form. But again, as the following passage illustrates, Purpura’s reflection is with a twist—a series of questions:

Have I thought of the body as sanctuary . . .

Here’s the truth: when I first saw the bodies, I laughed out loud. . . sure proof I held other images dear: shrouds, perhaps? Veils? . . . Had I assumed crisp sheets drawn up, as in surgery, to section off an operating theater around the site of death . . .

Was I awaiting some sign of passage, the strains of ceremony slapping in its wake . . .

Did I expect, finally, the solemnity of procession? (3-4)

This is not your traditional grief-stricken elegy. But according to poet D. A. Powell, “the (poetic) structure of the elegy is difficult to pin down; in fact, the elegy is more a mode of thinking, or a complex set of conventions, than a single structure. An elegy often serves as an occasion for considering numerous issues, from the political to the deeply personal, apart from the mourning of the dead” (83). Purpura’s attention to detail lets her voice inhabit the subject. What could have read like a police report, in Purpura’s hands, becomes poetry through prose. A series of negative lists structurally reiterate the sense of the “something missing” that surrounds death: “. . . the mass of organs held in the arms, a cornucopia of dripping fruits . . . The bladder . . . cupped in hand like a water balloon . . . the perforating branches of the internal thoracic artery leaving little holes behind in the muscle like a child’s laced-up board. The mitral valves sealing like the lids of ice cream cups” (6).

At the end of the essay, Purpura introduces a poetic volta to add prose reflection. She slides into fantasy, lyrically describing how she has changed as she relives the autopsy experience during a trip to the supermarket: “Later that day, at the grocery store among the other shoppers, I saw all the scalps turned over faces, everyone’s face made raw and meatlike, the sleek curves of skulls and bony plates exposed. I saw where to draw the knife down the chest to make the Y that would reveal” (8). But lest the reader think that the autopsy experience has caused Purpura to morph into a mass murderer, she turns again, adding a second volta of reflection:

Then, stepping out into the street...everything fresh and washed in the cold March rain, there was that scent hanging in the air— . . . and I knew it to be the milky blueness I saw, just hours ago, cut free and swaying, barest breath and tether. That scrim, an opacity, clung to everyone . . . Yes, everything looked as it always had—bright and pearly, lush and arterial after the rain. (8)

In “The Meandering River: An Overview of the Subgenres of Creative Nonfiction,” Sue William Silverman states:

In the lyric essay . . . the writer is not constrained by a narrative of action; the movement is from image to image, not from event to event . . . The lyric essay doesn’t care about figuring out why papa lost the farm, or why mama took to drink. It’s more interested in replicating the feeling of that experience . . . The reader is required to fill in the blanks as much as possible while, at the same time, accepting that much will remain mysterious . . . the reader accepts the emotion of the piece itself as the essential ‘fact.’ (155)

Annie Dillard is rarely considered a lyric essayist, but *For the Time Being* is a book-length meditation in the form of a braided essay, a term applied when fragmented images are woven together like threads into a literary tapestry. Dillard’s threads are pulled from “The legend of the Traveler (who) appears in every

civilization, perpetually assuming new forms, afflictions, powers, and symbols” (1). These “forms, afflictions, powers and symbols”—Birth, Sand, China, Clouds, Numbers, Israel, Encounters, Thinker, Evil, Now—become the weft and warp threads that, when viewed as a whole, form a complex word picture. Like many lyric essays, *For the Time Being* must be read more than once to fully appreciate the underlying “tapestry” structure. Brenda Miller describes this type of lyric essay, one that:

doesn't look too long at itself in the mirror. Rather it is the mirror, the silver film reflecting whatever passes its way . . . The lyric essay is made in a special way with soft fibers on the outside and strong fibers on the inside. This gives you the softness you want and the strength you need. . . . The lyric essay happens in the gaps. In the pause before the next breath demands to be taken. (*Seneca Review* 23-25)

Dillard's chapters, titled simply “Chapter One,” “Chapter Two,” etc., belie the complexity of the braiding within. Dillard's genius is a poetic use of sensory detail to create dynamic imagery that comes to life on the page. Throughout the book, Dillard accretes images into a word fabric splashed with the sensory detail. A decapitated snake, clay men swimming from walls, boiling soup, dust that smells like bone (or pie) and laughter over courtyard walls—through careful braiding, Dillard expertly brings together unrelated images by pulling threads from the strands—Birth, Sand, China, etc.—and shuttling them from one section to another like a master weaver. Bird-headed dwarfs, a French paleontologist, terra-cotta warriors, an elderly rabbi, a Roman emperor, and a brain damaged Elvis—to name but a few—aggregate into one tapestry. In the following excerpt Dillard applies the framing imagery, then ties the braids into one with reflection:

Then before me in the near distance I saw the earth itself walking, the earth walking dark and aerated as it always does in every season, peeling the light back: The earth was plowing men under, and the spade, and the plow. . . The green fields grow up forgetting.

Ours is a planet sown in beings. Our generations overlap like shingles. We don't fall in rows like hay, but we fall. Once we get here, we spend forever on the globe, most of it

tucked under. While we breathe, we open time like a path in the grass. We open time as a boat's stem slits the crest of the present. (203)

Dillard's *For the Time Being* is the type of lyric essay that Judith Kitchen writes “must, in fact, be held in the mind—intact. . . . It swallows you, the way a poem swallows you, until you reside inside it. Try to take it apart and you spin out of control. It is held together by the glue of absence, the mortar of melody, the threnody of unspent inspiration” (48).

Anne Carson's *Nax* might also be described as held together “by the glue of absence . . . the threnody of unspent inspiration.” A lyric essay pushed to the genre's limits (in terms of both content and length), Carson's book-length literary lyric essay consists almost entirely of imagery that must be viewed whole to be fully appreciated. *Nax* is structured as a hermit crab essay, a form of lyric essay that Miller describes as one that “appropriates other forms as an outer covering, to protect its soft, vulnerable underbelly” (111). Written as an epitaph for her brother, *Nax* is a visual medium consisting of pages folded accordion-style within a sturdy book-like box. At first glance, the images of torn letters, bits of prose, drawings, clippings and one-line poems intermingled with shadowy photographs—all taped to the page—seem like your usual family scrapbook.

But Carson's *Nax* is not an ordinary book. Carson draws on her background—a professor of ancient Greek—to ironically structure a book with an abundance of white space and then title it *Nax* (the ancient Greek personification of the god Night); Carson covers left sides of pages with clippings from Latin- and Greek-English dictionaries that could easily be read as lists that connect numbered prose segments on the right sides of pages. The following excerpt illustrates this technique. (There are no page numbers in this book.)

per

per preposition with accusative case . . .

haud per ambages portendere:

by no means implying a riddle, enigma or dark fact.

1.1 History and elegy are akin. The word “history” comes from an ancient Greek verb meaning “to ask.”

2.2 My brother ran away in 1978, rather than go to jail. . . He wrote only one letter, to my mother, that winter the girl died.

Carson uses repetition to connect imagery. There is verbal repetition: The 2.2 section is repeated four times, over four folded pages. There is visual repetition: Torn fragments of a handwritten letter overshadow the prose. Other pages are left blank except for a single line of prose—e.g. “In an ordinary envelope (it was written)”—a riff off a Haiku poem.

In pushing the boundaries of the lyric essay, Carson’s *Nox* embodies what Miller describes as “allow(ing) for moments of pause, the gaps, the silence. The fragmentation feels correct to the piece: it allows for the moments of ‘not knowing,’ the unspoken words that seem truer than anything I could ever say aloud” (106).

I would argue that Carson’s *Nox* is the ultimate lyric essay, incorporating the visual structure of poetry linked by prose reflection. Rather than being a straight narrative, or a straightforward elegy, this lyric essay meanders through unnumbered pages and challenges the reader to find an emotional truth. *Nox*’s length—190 pages—stretches the boundaries of the essay medium. While unconventionally long, Carson’s book-length lyric essay is not unprecedented. Eula Biss’s *The Balloonists* weaves stories of disasters through family memories to create a book-length lyric essay of 55 pages plus a fourteen-page Prelude. Arielle Greenberg and Rachel Zucker’s book-length lyric essay on motherhood and the politics of birth, *Home/Birth: A Poem*, stretches 201 pages.

I often think of the lyric essay as a mysterious sea creature, its structure hydrostatic, like a jellyfish that appears, to the casual observer, to be nonexistent. The lyric essay, a subgenre of creative nonfiction, is a wild thing born of poetry and prose, the prose sentences appearing to wave and dance willy-nilly like tentacles of jellyfish while poetic elements flicker and flash through the sentences like neon luminescence. Only careful study reveals the muscular structure that propels the lyric essay forward.

In the end, poetry and prose are inextricable in the form of the lyric essay, each binding to the other through form and structure: A hermit crab essay couched within a book-like box, a collection of related images forming a mosaic (collage) essay, disparate strands woven into a braided essay. Sometimes the structures examined are imagery connected by myth, or reflection, or repetition, or a spiraling perspective, or series of lists. But whatever structure the author chooses, the lyric essay is an unconventional journey, an art form that can only be fully appreciated when viewed as a whole, and always a wild ride.

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