

Talking About the Poetic Quality of Prose

It's difficult to help but love the poetry of this sentence by Maria Popova in her book *Figuring*. She is describing scientist Maria Mitchell reaction to Cambridge Master William Whewell dislike of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"I can picture her eyelids lowering coolly over her large brown eyes as she seethed within--a curtain that half-hides, half-reveals her infinite scorn."

Here it is presented as a poem:

I can picture her eyelids
lowering coolly
over her large brown eyes
as she seethed within--
a curtain
that half-hides, half-reveals
her infinite scorn.

Here we have again good prose, this time from Virginia Woolf writing about the culture of fame surrounding the poets and their legendary love story Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett:

"Passionate lovers, in curls and side-whiskers, oppressed, defiant, eloping--in this guise thousands of people must know and love the Brownings who have never read a line of their poetry."

As poetry:

Passionate lovers,
in curls and side-whiskers,
oppressed,
defiant,
eloping--

In this guise
thousands of people must know
and love the Brownings
who have never read a line of their poetry.

Notice in that first stanza the final three single word lines, each punctuated by a sound known as a **mute** (b,d,k,p,q,t, and c and g) because of the way it leaves the mouth--stopping short rather than lingering. It is a sound that serves as a punctuation mark all its own.