

*“If it isn’t composed on the tongue, it’s an essay.”*

— Allen Ginsberg

*“Because everything depends upon the idea and the form, and neither the idea nor the form of prose can be restricted by the boundaries of language.”*

— Lafcadio Hearn

# Prose (n.)

## *In relation to Literature*

Prose appeared in lexical form within the English language in the 14c, deriving its name from the Middle-French *prosa* which was cut from the Latin *prosa oratio* meaning 'direct speech.' Prose, despite its etymological connection to the Greek *pezós lógos*, was a little known or respected form of literature in 14c England. At this time verse held its archaic regard as the higher form of writing, an attitude left over from the Greeks. The educated were taught to read and write mostly in Latin, and the common tongue was neglected from written form. Writers such as John Wycliffe and Geoffrey Chaucer are recognised as some of the first practitioners of prose in English with works *Wycliffe Bible* and *The Tale of Meribee* respectively. As Gangi Chen (2) explains *'for a long time the study of prose has been overlooked and even the definition of it lacks the precision and to some degree is very vague.'* As a keyword within the culture of Literature, prose becomes a very difficult word to define and pin down to set of rules or recognisable structures— the very act of writing prose itself defies the definition of prose.'

From the Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory (3) — *'In theory there are as many different kinds of prose as there are to write it.'* From its Greek origin down through centuries and empires, prose has landed in the 21st century as the most widely read and least recognised form of literature.

*'After sleeping a few hours, I stole quietly out of camp, and climbed the mountain that stands between the two glaciers. The ground was frozen, making the climbing difficult in the steepest places; but the views over the icy bay, sparkling beneath the stars, were enchanting. It seemed then a sad thing that any part of so precious a night had been lost in sleep.'* — John Muir, *Glaciers by Starlight* (6)

*pezós lógos*— speech that goes on foot. The Greeks referred to prose with a comparison to the more accepted form of writing — *emmetros lógos*, meaning measured speech, or speech that goes on wings, verse. Great works of verse, epics and histories were traditionally written in verse and held in high regard. Prose was seen as ordinary, common. Although we see prose in a similar way now, common and ordinary were terms by no means sought by the Greek writers.

When Aristides chose to write about the Gods in prose styling, he found himself defending his doing so, as Trapp (8) elucidates *'he argues that poets cannot reasonably claim sole rights over the praising of the gods for a whole series of reasons, ranging from the greater degree of system and completeness that goes with prose as opposed to verse delivery, to the priority of prose over verse in age and value, and (most strikingly) the alleged ability of prose to embody the key quality of metron (measure-metre) to a higher degree.'*

Though the word *be* may be traced back to its Greek form, the English *prose* finds its most accurate source from the Latin definition in its use and understanding in Middle-English onwards to present.

*Prosa oratio* — straightforward or direct speech. With the Latin definition we find the closest correlation to *prose's* understood contemporary meaning. The first known example of *prosa oratio* comes from the 160BC *De Agri Cultura* by Marcus Porches

Cato (9), an agricultural manual. The book reads like a random compilation of a farmers lists and jottings, and is distinct in this sense from verse in its lack of structure and metre. The definition of *prose* arrived out of a need to categorise a type of literature from the more common forms of lyrical verse and epic verse—largely structured forms of literature following strict shape and conventions. It may be said that *prose* brought written language back to its fount— *spoken* language.

Prose followed a slow path through from the 14c into the 16c until the style was brought to a degree of respectability with Elizabethan writers such as John Lyly with his euphemistic prose, which would influence many including Shakespeare. Works from Robert Greene and Thomas Delonely would also bring the word into more common use in their adaptations of the style. Though prose was beginning to define itself within English literature, it was a style building off of learnt Latin patterns, bringing a structure not found in earlier Middle-English examples.

In the 17c, Sir Thomas Browne would lay out a style of prose that would further separate the supervision of classical literature on English prose. Although Browne would display influences still from the antiquarian examples before him, he would do so sparingly and only in service to the point of his works. To quote Lafcadio Hearn (7.4) upon Browne; *'Sir Thomas Browne was the first great English writer who made an original classic style. By classic style I mean an English prose style founded upon a profound study of the ancient classic writers, Greek and Latin, and largely coloured and made melodious by a skilful use of many-syllabled words derived from antique tongues.'*

The 18c brought prose as a term into common use. With the rise of journalism prose became a day-to-day interaction for the common man who found his speech relayed plain and directly in the daily news. Prose began to split away from its Latin influences and became simpler and less ornate. The 18c brought with it also what would become to most common and popular form of prose; the novel. Defoe produced *Robison Crusoe* in 1719 and is commonly credited with publishing the first novel in English literature. To have a recognisable and respectable prose style became in vogue for the educated, and it was considered important in the same sense that verse was previously. Prose took it's place within literature that it had held with legal and commercial writing, that being of a solidified and respected format.

A quote from Defoe's essay *An Essay upon Projects* (5a) gives us an example of contemporary 18c prose and his aims for it; *'We want indeed a Richlieu to commence such a Work: For I am persuaded, were there such a Genius in our Kingdom to lead the way, there wou'd not want Capacities who cou'd carry on the Work to a Glory equal to all that has gone before them. The English Tongue is a Subject not at all less worthy the Labour of such a Society than the French, and capable of a much greater Perfection.'*

The English language was beginning to claim prose for itself in use and definition.

The 19c saw prose reach the great heights it would remain at, largely through the expanding publishing of journalism and the novel. As reading became more accessible to the every-man, prose as the style of direct common speech naturally came to be the most popular form of literature. Writers such as Brontë, Austen,

Dickens, Melville, Wilde and countless others would expand the boundaries of prose's definition as they each took the format and applied their own understanding, viewpoints, dialects and vocabulary. Prose was becoming increasingly difficult to define.

The 20c would see prose reach its arguable peak. From *The Oxford Companion to The English Language* (5); *'More prose writing in English has probably been published in this century than in all past centuries combined.'* With a bounty of previous works within the genre to build off of, the limits and boundaries of prose expanded to depths and widths beyond its own definition. Sub-cultures began appearing within prose, 'Prose-poetry' and 'spontaneous prose' began rising as keywords in literate magazines and publications. Modernists such as James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway were reimagining prose for themselves, and pushing prose's regard higher and higher among the educated, as-well as among the common-man.

In the mid-20c, a group of bohemian writers from the East and the West coast of USA hell bent on creative expression and beauty, brimming with inspiration fired up from the modernists a generation before them, would create a body of work and social phenomenon known as the 'beats.' Blending the rules of poetry and prose, writers like Gary Snyder and Lew Welch would draw inspiration from the likes of W.C. Williams and Ezra Pound and create prose-poetry, a new type of poetry that freed itself of metre and structure and focused on imagery and expression. Perhaps most famous among the beats was Jack Kerouac, whose spontaneous ramblings about his adventures across the United States would go on to become classics of the 20c. Below is Kerouac's rules for 'spontaneous prose.' (1).

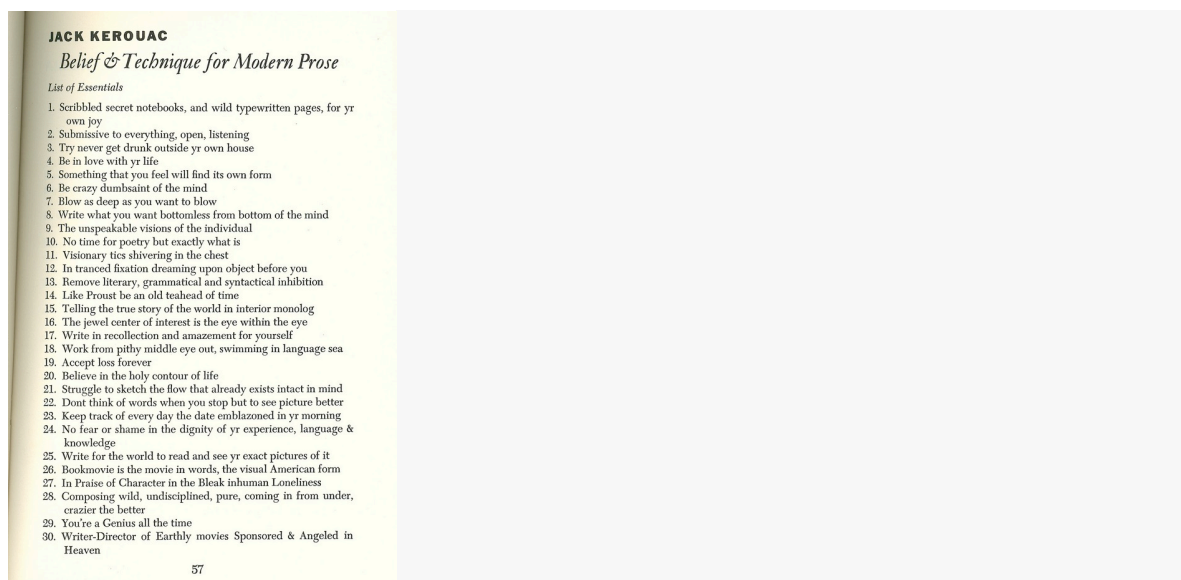
With the genre becoming so large and offering so many differing examples and schools, prose had become an extremely hard thing to point at. Just as it is impossible to declare any specific man's speech the speech of man, it is impossible to point at a single writer's work and say it is prose. Yet it is, if written as direct as if it were spoken, prose.

# APPENDIX

## DEFINITIONS // EXAMPLES of Prose

### 1. Jack Kerouac on Modern Prose (example)

( Jack Kerouac, “Belief & Technique For Modern Prose: List of Essentials,” from a 1958 letter to Donald Allen, published in *Heaven & Other Poems*, Grey Fox Press, 1958, 1977, 1983. This was also published in the spring 1959 issue of *Evergreen Review*. )



- 1 Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
- 2 Submissive to everything, open, listening
- 3 Try never get drunk outside yr own house
- 4 Be in love with yr life
- 5 Something that you feel will find its own form
- 6 Be crazy dumb saint of the mind
- 7 Blow as deep as you want to blow
- 8 Write what you want bottomless from bottom of mind
- 9 The unspeakable visions of the individual
- 10 No time for poetry but exactly what is
- 11 Visionary tics shivering in the chest
- 12 In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
- 13 Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
- 14 Like Proust be an old teahead of time
- 15 Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog

- 16 The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
  - 17 Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
  - 18 Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
  - 19 Accept loss forever
  - 20 Believe in the holy contour of life
  - 21 Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
  - 22 Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better
  - 23 Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
  - 24 No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
  - 25 Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
  - 26 Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
  - 27 In Praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
  - 28 Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
  - 29 Youre a Genius all the time
  - 30 Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven
- As ever,  
Jack [Kerouac]

Jack Kerouac reading spontaneous prose from his novel *On the Road*  
(<https://youtu.be/3LLpNKO09Xk?si=AvjWIDSOBQUHdgko> — from 3:15)

## 2. A Literature Review on Prose Study — Gangni Chen 2019 Atlanta Press

( <https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/125934222.pdf> )

II. CONCEPT OF PROSE A definition of prose for long time the study of prose has been overlooked and even the definition of it lacks the precision and to some degree is very vague. For the convenience, it is required that a clear understanding of what is prose is necessary. Originally, the word prose originated from the Latin one "prosa" meaning straightforward discourse. In the new oxford American dictionary it is defined as "written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure." This indicates that any writing not in verse form can be thought of prose. It can also be termed in two senses: the broad one and the narrow one as well as the one which is in between. In a broad sense, it refers to a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its irregularity and variety of rhythm and its close correspondence to the patterns. According to this definition, fiction and drama fall within the scope of prose. In a narrow sense, however, it refers to a type of literary genres opposed to poetry, fiction and drama. And there are some features which make it possible to distinguish it from poetry, drama and fiction. Poetry is mostly characterized by its meter and stanza which can strike reader immediately. And meter and stanza are the two obvious ways to differ a piece of poetry from prose. Sometimes poetry can be called verse, and this depends greatly on the natural rhythms and sounds of language for its special effects (Burton, 1973:1). Most often, the first word of every line begins with a capital letter, even in

the middle of a sentence. While meters in prose are hardly unperceivable to reader and stanza does not exist which makes a prose passage seems to be shapeless. Fiction is different from prose in its imagination. It includes characters who does not really exist, event which have never occurred and places which may not be real. As we read fiction our imagination is stimulated so that we become part of the action as it unfolds, sympathetic towards characters as they develop and aware of the world in which they live. The story in fiction can be narrative by different person, first person perspective, the third person, while prose is often concerned with the writer's experience, speculation or their preference. The narrator in most cases is the writer. While in fiction, the narrator and the writer are different persons. Drama is literature designed to be performed by actions. Like fictions it may focus on a single character or a small number of characters and it enacts functional elements as if they were happening in the present, to be witnessed by an audience. Although most modern plays use prose dialogue, in the belief that dramatic speech should be as lifelike as possible, many play from the past like those of ancient Greece and renaissance England are in poetic form. It is mainly composed of the character's conversation or monologue, which is sometimes called line.

### 3. Dictionary of **LITERARY TERMS & LITERARY THEORY** — Penguin Reference Print Pg. 705

**prose** . The word derives from the Latin *prosa* or *provers oratio*, 'straightforward discourse'. Thus, direct, unadorned form of language, written or spoken, in ordinary usage. It differs from poetry or verse (*qq.v.*) in that it is not restricted in rhythm, measure or rhyme (*qq.v.*) However, there are such things as poetic prose and the prose poem.

In theory there are as many different kinds of prose as there are to write it, as becomes plain from a cursory study of such different practitioners as: Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, Hobbes, George Savile Marquess of Halifax, Swift, Locke, Addison, Johnson, Fielding, Goldsmith, Hume, Berkeley, Macaulay, Jane Austen, Gibbon, Coleridge, Scott, Dickens, Carlyle, George Eliot, Hardy, Lytton Strachey, Jack London, Henry James, Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, Nabokov and Samuel Beckett.

### 4. **THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE** AN INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH IN THE UNITED STATES BY H. L. Mencken NEW YORK — ALFRED-A-KNOFF Pg. 480

'It was not until Samuel Johnson's Dictionary (1755) that Englishmen had a universally accepted guide to orthography. In the presence of conflicting usage,

Johnson always took the conservative side. He thus ordained that *critic*, *music* and even *prosaic*, which he considered Old English words, should have a final *k*, though all were borrowed from Latin through French.'

## 5. THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE Pg. 814

**PROSE** . 14c: through French from Latin *prosa* (*oratio*) direct or straightforward (speech), from *prosus* or *prorsus* direct, straight, contracted forms of *provorsus* or *proverbs* (literally 'turned forward': compare VERSE). *Prosa oratio* was the Latin equivalent of Greek *pezós lógos* speech that goes on foot, as opposed to *emmetros lógos* ('measured speech') or verse, whose high prestige was reflected in the image of riding on horseback. A form of written discourse based on the sentence and without the stylised patterning of *verse* (with which it often contrasts). A negative perception of prose, which has persisted from classical times virtually to the present day, sees it as a medium that lacks strong features and creative vigour: whence the use of *prosaic* to mean 'dull, commonplace, unimaginative'. This ancient perception has, however, diminished greatly in the 20c, in the courses of which prose has become the dominant form of printed discourse and verse has become largely peripheral. The term covers two kinds of procedure: employing physical features such as the non-metrical line, the paragraph, and sentence-based punctuation, and styles of discourse that serve narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive, dramatic, and other ends. Prose writing is so similar in many ways to carefully organised speech, and the two have been linked for so long in the world of education, that prose is often thought of as simply speech transferred to paper: see SPOKEN PROSE. Everyday speech, however, is much less tightly structured than most types of prose, and its dynamics are quite distinct from those of formal writing. Colloquial English, for example, is not arranged according to the classical theory of the well-formed sentence ('a sentence is a complete thought'), long a key criterion for producing and evaluating prose. Such a criterion for producing and evaluating prose. Such a criterion has been used by elocutionists and others in an attempts to 'improve' speech, but without great success: spoken usage that is too 'prosy' sounds artificial and perhaps pretentious. IN the classical world, the study and use of prose were linked with rhetoric, grammar, and logic but whereas the rhetorical tradition was oral in origin, the beginnings of grammar and logic lay in the use and study of writing. Lacking the mnemonic quality and often the histrionic roles of verse, prose has depended largely on writing (not oral delivery) for its transmission, and has come only within the last 300 years to serve as a regular vehicle for 'high' literary genres such as drama and the epic ( the latter essentially in the form of the novel).

**Kinds of prose** . Because of its wide present-day use, prose ranges across many activities, including: the writing of technical instructions; the presentation of information in newspapers and other periodicals; legal, business, and other reports; personal letters; and the writing of fiction and drama. *Literary prose*, considered by



many to be its highest form, shares with verse (despite the classical view) an intensification and stylisation of rhythm and a greater than usual attention to rhetorical features and aesthetic factors such as euphony and assonance. Its status as prose is sustained, however, by the absence of recurring metrical patterns, however 'poetic' in form and content such texts may be. Many writers of literary prose have followed Aristotle's dictum that it 'must neither possess metre nor be without rhythm' (Rhetoric, 3.8), and at times it can have a quality close to *free verse* or *blank verse*: see DICKENS. Just as the line of demarcation is not always easy to find between prose and verse, so there is no easy demarcation between one kind of prose and another. Prose discourses occupy a spectrum in which the extremes are easily identified: 'poetic' prose on one side, 'technical' or 'functional' prose on the other, with the middle ground often uncertain.

**Prose and style** . Although style is sometimes thought to reside only in 'good' literary writing (however judged), it is a factor in all writing; every specimen of prose from instructions on how to put together a piece of furniture to James Joyce's *Ulysses* has features that can be described, analysed, and evaluated by stylistic and aesthetic criteria. The evolution of Western prose has produced a variety of styles, often characteristic of a particular period, writer, or function. The traditional division of styles has been into *high*, *middle* and *low*, according to the rhetorical principle of *decorum* (that the manner of writing should be adapted to subject and recipient). This socially ranked system, however, has not proved useful in contemporary analysis because it lacks objectivity (though it partly incorporates the present-day linguistic category of *register*: see entry). Like other Western European vernaculars, English developed in the shadow of Latin, and its models for prose were therefore Latinate, at first through translation, imitation, and experiment, later as a consequence of its hybrid inheritance. Because of the classical legacy (and despite specific differences), the prose styles of English have much in common with those of French, Italian, Spanish, German, and other languages also influenced by Latin models. It is possible therefore to talk of a broad European prose tradition of which English is part.

**Old and Middle English prose** . Old English prose writing was largely a matter of translation from Latin, as in the works of Alfred the Great (9c), but original vernacular prose was produced by such writers as Aelfric of Eynsham (10-11c) and the clerics who compiled the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. By and large, the style is straightforward and unadorned. In the centuries immediately after the Norman Conquest (1066), the development of Middle English prose waited on the decline of French as the language of the aristocracy and government and of Latin as the dominant language of religion and learning. There was therefore little demand for vernacular prose in the Middle Ages and as a result it was generally poorly structured in comparison with Latin. However, the vernacular sermon added persuasive rhetorical strength to some English prose texts, notably in the writings of John Wycliffe, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Malory, and William Caxton.

**Elizabethan and Jacobean prose** . In the 16c and the 17c, more and more

writers chose to develop English prose rather than continue with Latin. Although their prose still followed Latin models, it necessarily accommodated itself increasingly to such vernacular usages as the compound noun and phrasal verb, as well as less formal syntactic constructions. Elizabethan prose often seems self-conscious in attempting to imitate Latin, with the Roman lawyer and orator Cicero as the supreme model. Style was based on the periodical sentence, formal and ordered in structure, building to its climax before the full meaning is revealed. This apparent neo-classical artificiality tightened up the loose, rambling style of Middle English and took on a powerfully disciplined form in the preface to the Authorised Version of the Bible:

But how shall men meditate in that, which they cannot vnderstand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? As it is written, *Except I know the power of the voyce, I shall be to him that speaketh, shalbe [sic] a Barbarian to me.* The Apostle ecepteth no tongue; not Hebrewe there ancientest, not Greeke the most copious, not Latine the finest. Nature taught a naturall man to confesse, that all of vs in those tongues which wee doe not vnderstand, are plainly deafe; wee may turne the deafe eare vnto them. The *Scythian* counted the *Athenian*, whom he did not vnderstand, barbarous: so the *Romane* did the *Syrian*, and the *Iew*, (euen *S. Hierome* himselfe calleth the Hebrew tongue barbarous, belike because it was strange to so many) so the Emperour of *Constantinople* calleth the *Latine* tongue, barbarous, though Pope *Nicolas* do storme at it: so the *Iewes* long before *Christ*, called all other nations, *Lognazim*, which is little better then barbarous. Therefore as one complaineth, that alwayes in the Senate of *Rome*, there was one or other that called for an interpreter: so lest the Church be driuen to the like exigent, it is necessary to haue translations in a readinesse. Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may looke into the most Holy place; that remooueth the couer of the well, that wee may come by the water, euen as *Iacob* rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which meanes the flockes of *Laban* were watered. Indeede without translation into the vulgar tongue, the vnlearned are but like children at *Iacobs* well (which was deepe) without a bucket or some-thing to draw with: or as that person mentioned by *Esay*, to whom when a sealed booke was deliuered, with this motion, *Read this, I pray thee*, he was faine to make this answer, *I cannot, for it is sealed.*

A highly artificial but influential style was that of John Lyly, named *euphuism* from the hero of his prose romances. It was characterized by long periodic sentences, with abundant tropes and figures of rhetoric, classical allusions, and improbable analogies from the natural world. Shakespeare parodied it in *Love's Labour's Lost* (c.1595) and elsewhere: see EUPHUISM. A more restrained style, formal but somewhat less manered, was achieved by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Arcadia* (1581) and *Defence of Poetry* (1579-80). The Elizabethans could also produce fresh colloquial prose, especially in controversies like the Marprelate pamphlets (1588-9) and in tales of low life like those of Robert Greene (1558-92) and Thomas Deloney (? 1560-1600). The excitement of English as an emerging literary language in its own right brought exuberance to contemporary writing. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) criticized the tendency of the periodic style to mask sense with rhetoric. His own style was sometimes rhetorical, but produced greater simplicity, combined with balance and antithesis, in his *Essays* (1597-1625). In the early 17c, preference for the Latin of Seneca and Tacitus rather than Cicero helped to bring more brevity and

precision into English prose, as seen in the work of Thomas Overbury (1581-1613) and John Earle (?1601-1665), and in the learned, allusive prose of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton (1577-1640).

**Restoration and Enlightenment prose** . The Restoration period saw the emergence of a distinctly native prose style, whose seeds were sown in the polemical writings of the Civil War. The new prose was simpler and less ornate, further from Latin syntax, more familiar in tone, though still polished and urbane. The beginnings of journalism strengthened the closer relationship between writer and reader; the political prose of Hobbes and the critical prose of Dryden are typical. Prose was increasingly used for instruction as well as for persuasion and entertainment. The members of the Royal Society (founded in 1662) were expected to prefer ‘the language of artizans, countrymen, and merchants, before that of wit and scholars’. The polite, familiar style was further developed in the early 18c by Addison, Defoe, Steele, and Swift. The following is from Defoe’s *An Essay upon Projects* (1697) (5a), relating to the establishing of an English equivalent of the Académie française (see ACADEMY):

I had the honour once to be a Member of a small Society, who seem’d to offer at this Noble Design in England. But the Greatness of the Work, and the Modesty of the Gentlemen concern’d, prevail’d with them to desist an Enterprize which appear’d too great for Private Hands to undertake. We want indeed a *Richlieu* to commence such a Work: For I am persuaded, were there such a *Genius* in our Kingdom to lead the way, there wou’d not want Capacities who cou’d carry on the Work to a Glory equal to all that has gone before them. The *English* Tongue is a Subject not at all less worthy the Labour of such a Society than the *French*, and capable of a much greater Perfection. The Learned among the *French* will own, That the Comprehensiveness of Expression is a Glory in which the *English* Tongue not only Equals but Excels its Neighbours; *Rapin*, *St. Evermont*, and the most Eminent *French* Authors have acknowledg’d it: And my Lord *Ros-common*, who is allow’d to be a good Judge of *English*, because he wrote it exactly as any ever did, expresses what I mean, in these Lines;

*‘For who did ever in French Authors see  
The Comprehensive English Energy?  
The weighty Bullion of one Sterling Line,  
Drawn to French Wire wou’d through whole Pages shine.*

And if our Neighbours will yield us, as their greatest Critick has done, the Preference for Sublimity and Nobleness of Stile, we will willingly quit all Pretensions to their Insignificant Gaiety.’

’Tis great pity that a Subject so Noble shou’d not have some as noble to attempt it: And for a Method, what greater can be set before us, than the Academy of *Paris*? Which, to give the *French* their due, stands foremost among all the Great Attempts in the Learned Part of the World.

With the rise of the essay and the novel in the 18c, prose took the assured and accepted place in literature that it already held in legal, commercial, and other uses.

Critical responses, both casual and professional, which had previously been mainly confined to poetry, came to be applied to literary prose as well. In addition, a good prose style was considered a desirable accomplishment for the cultivated, and attention to models of 'good writing' in essays, letters, etc., became more and more a required part of education. However, in the late 18c there was a return to the periodical Latinate style. Johnson wrote with involved syntax and the frequent use of classical words, and Burke (1729-97) in political prose and Gibbon (1737-94) in historical prose followed a similar style. At the same time, a comparable prose was developing in North America, and is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence of July 4 1776 (signed by John Hancock on behalf of the Congress), which opens with the following statement:

When in the Course of Human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation. We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and The Pursuit of Happiness— That, to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of those Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government (*A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled, 4 July 1776*).

**Prose in the nineteenth century** . This century brought as much variety and abundance in prose style as in other things. The reading public expanded on an unprecedented scale, the popularity of the novel in particular giving impetus to prose writing for entertainment and the growth of journalism making it a major vehicle of news and opinion. Although there are marked differences between the leading novelists of the period, they shared a desire to write accessibly and to keep the interest of the reader, who is addressed directly, as a friend. Narrative style became more assured in the hands of Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Hardy, and many other both 'literary' and 'popular' writers. A more didactic type of prose, designed to inform and convince was practiced by Arnold, Carlyle, Macaulay, and others. The following is from Macaulay's essay on Bacon, in the *Edinburgh Review* (1837):

Lady Bacon was doubtless a lady of highly cultivated mind after the fashion of her age. But we must not suffer ourselves to be deluded into the belief that she and her sisters were more accomplished women than many who are now living. ON this subject there is, we think, much misapprehension. We have often heard men who wish, as almost all men of sense wish, that women should be highly educated, speak with rapture of the English ladies of the sixteenth century, and lament that they can find no modern damsel resembling those fair pupils of Ascham and Aylmer who compared, over their embroidery, the styles of Isocrates and Lysias, and who, while the horns were sounding and the dogs in full cry, sat in the lonely oriel, with

eyes riveted to that immortal page which tells how meekly and bravely the first great martyr of intellectual liberty took the cup from his weeping gaoler. But surely there complaints have very little foundation. We would by no means disparage the ladies of the sixteenth century or their pursuits. But we conceive that those who extol them at the expense of the women of our time forget one very obvious and very important circumstance. In the time of Henry the Eighth and Edward the Sixth, a person who did not read Greek and Latin could read nothing, or next to nothing. The Italian was the only modern language which possessed anything that could be called literature. All the valuable books then extant in all the vernacular dialects of Europe would hardly have filled a shelf.

Carlyle wrote in idiosyncratic and sometimes turgid style, but his vigorous use of 'Saxon' forms and his defiance of classical smoothness made him a strong influence on polemical prose: see CARLYLE. In addition, prose writing in English took firm root during this century in many parts of the world, particularly in the US but also in Australia, Canada, India, and New Zealand.

**Prose in the twentieth century** . More prose writing in English has probably been published in this century than in all past centuries combined. Because, however, the quantities involved are so vast and the objectives and styles have been so varied, it is virtually impossible to make more than a few provisional statements about 20c prose. It can, for example, be argued that there has been in literacary and journalistic writing a move away from (often in tandem with a distaste for) the elevated literary and classical style, towards the more direct, immediate, and colloquial. In other areas, however, such as scholarly, scientific, medical, and legal writing, there continues to be an assumption that technical prose is necessarily complex and abstruse: see ACADEMIC USAGE, PLAIN ENGLISH. Despite the work of experimental stylists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, creative writing has on the whole become more functional rather than more artistic, and although the 'literary novel' continues to be distinguished from its 'popular' cousin, many writers with a distinct popular bent have from the mid-19c onward come to be regarded as classics in their own right and to be presented as such in university courses in English literature. By and large, although every kind of prose can be found in English in the late 20c, there is a general tendency towards factual and referential writing, favouring shorter sentences and a vocabulary as simple as the subject allows.

## 6. *Glaciers by Starlight* by **John Muir** (example of 19c prose) ((from *The Wilderness World of John Muir*—Houghton Mifflin Company Boston))

We gathered a lot of fossil wood and after supper made a big fire, and as we sat around it the brightness of the sky brought on a long talk with the Indians about the stars; and their eager, childlike attention was refreshing to see as compared with

the deathlike apathy of weary town-dwellers, in whom natural curiosity has been quenched in toil and care and poor shallow comfort.

After sleeping a few hours, I stole quietly out of camp, and climbed the mountain that stands between the two glaciers. The ground was frozen, making the climbing difficult in the steepest places; but the views over the icy bay, sparkling beneath the stars, were enchanting. It seemed then a sad thing that any part of so precious a night had been lost in sleep. The starlight was so full that I distinctly saw not only the berg-filled bay, but most of the lower portions of the glaciers, lying pale and spirit-like amid the mountains. The nearer glacier in particular was so distinct that it seemed to be glowing with light that came from within itself. Not even in dark nights have I ever found any difficulty in seeing large glaciers; but on this mountain-top, amid so much ice, in the heart of so clear and frosty a night, everything was more or less luminous, and I seemed to be poised in a vast hollow between two skies of almost equal brightness. This exhilarating scramble made me glad and strong and I rejoiced that my studies called me before the glorious night succeeding so glorious a morning had been spent!

## 7. from **STUDIES OF EXTRAORDINARY PROSE —** (COMPLETE LECTURES ON ART, LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY By Lafcadio Hearn Pg. 291)

(1) 'Now there are two ways of writing artistic prose, both depending a good deal upon the character of the writer. There is a kind of work of which the merit is altogether due to vivid and powerful senses, well trained in observation. The man who sees keenly and hears keenly, who has been well disciplined how to use his eyes and ears both with quickness and caution, who has been taught by experience the value of accuracy and the danger of exaggeration (exaggeration being, after all, only an incorrect way of observing and thinking)— such a man, if he can write at all, is apt to write interestingly.' pg. 291

(2) 'The other method of writing artistic prose is more particularly subjective; it depends chiefly upon the man's inner sense of beauty, — upon his power to feel emotionally, and to express the emotion by careful choice of words.' pg. 292

(3) 'The Norse people were perhaps not the first to discover that description was unnecessary in great writing. They loved it in their poetry; they avoided it in their prose.' pg. 296

(4) 'Sir Thomas Browne was the first great English writer who made an original classic style. By classic style I mean an English prose style founded upon a profound study of the ancient classic writers, Greek and Latin, and largely coloured and made melodious by a skilful use of many-syllabled words derived from antique tongues.' pg. 301

(5) 'he (Sir Thomas Browne) was able to influence English prose for considerably more than two hundred years.' pg. 302

(6) 'because everything depends upon the idea and the form, and neither the idea nor the form of prose can be restricted by the boundaries of language.' pg. 316

(7) 'Baudelaire believed that prose could be made quite as poetical as verse or even more so, for a prose that could preserve the rhythm of poetry without its monotony, and the melody of poetry without rhythm, might become in the hands of the master even more effective than verse.' pg. 323

## 8. from **In Praise of Asclepius Selected Prose Hymns** — 2. The Form of the Prose Hymn Pg. 22 by Micheal Trapp

In choosing praise of the gods as material for prose oratory, and in calling the resulting products "hymns",<sup>88</sup> Aristides was not doing anything startlingly new or original for his times. What gives him his special status in this connection is the fact that later writers on oratory, particularly Menander Rhetor, identified him as the classic model for this kind of composition, and that he himself in the opening paragraphs of his *Sarapis* explicitly defended the production of hymns in prose as well as in verse. In this programmatic statement (*Sarapis* [Or. 45] 1–14) he argues that poets cannot reasonably claim sole rights over the praising of the gods for a whole series of reasons, ranging from the greater degree of system and completeness that goes with prose as opposed to verse delivery, to the priority of prose over verse in age and value, and (most strikingly) the alleged ability of prose to embody the key quality of metron (measure-metre) to a higher degree.<sup>89</sup> For Menander Rhetor, writing in the following century, this generic self-consciousness combined with the volume of his output of prose hymns made Aristides the prime model for the form, as is shown not only by his glowing praise at the end of his book of instructions on hymns (Treatise I, 344.1–4 Spengel 3) but also in the advice he gives for beginning an oration in praise of Apollo (a 'Sminthiac'), which echoes the opening of the *Sarapis* (Treatise II, 437.6–27 Spengel 3).

## 9. Cato, M. P. & Mazzarino, A. (1982) *M. Porci Catonis de agri cultura*. 2. Aufl. Leipzig: Teubner.

1. It is true that to obtain money by trade is sometimes more profitable, were it not so hazardous; and likewise money-lending, if it were as honorable. Our ancestors held this view and embodied it in their laws, which required that the thief be mulcted (fined) double and the usurer (money lender who collects interest) fourfold; how much less desirable a citizen they considered the usurer than the thief, one may judge from this. And when they would praise a worthy man their praise took this form: "good husbandman, good farmer"; one so praised was thought to have received the greatest commendation. The trader I consider to be an energetic man, and one bent on making money; but, as I said above, it is a dangerous career and one subject to disaster. On the other hand, it is from the farming class that the bravest men and the sturdiest soldiers come, their calling is most highly respected,

their livelihood is most assured and is looked on with the least hostility, and those who are engaged in that pursuit are least inclined to be disaffected (discontented). And now, to come back to my subject, the above will serve as an introduction to what I have undertaken.

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