The Poetics of Prose:
Form and Structure
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Acknowledgement

Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.

Samuel Beckett,
“Dante…Bruno…
Vico… Joyce ” p. 10

I would like to thank Dr. Kian Soheil for his invaluable comments on the early draft of this book. I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Amir Ali Nojoumian for his accurate suggestions.
Preface

As Annie Dillard rightly notes in her article “Contemporary Prose Styles” (1981), we as contemporary readers keep our personal distance with not just the text and its style but also its literary gimmicks that we seek to understand. It is the distance that gives us a sense of psychological comfort and confidence while reading a text regardless of its form or genre. In our readings, nevertheless, we rarely struggle with the style of the text which hosts and transfers messages; rather, it is the message and the way it has been introduced that often challenges our reading abilities.

The style can be divided, as Dillard claims, into “plain” and “fancy”, which this book understands as simple and literary, respectively (“Contemporary” 207). For Dillard, some of the greatest prose stylists are Henry James, Thomas de Quincy, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce who could not only comfort their readers by maintaining a relevant sense of distance in their writings but also helped them understand difficult messages by indulging in an adaptable style. In other words, these were the ones who combined simple and literary spectra while introducing to their audience concepts that are inherently social, political, cultural, and literary. The poetics of prose for any modern text, in this respect, neither fits Dillard’s fixed, ‘black and white’ framework; nor is it formed around a selection of decorative literary

devices, or even a never-ending ocean of descriptions. Rather, the poetics of prose can be seen as an interconnected pattern that provides the author with a niche social, political and cultural understanding, incorporating whichever concept that gives life and weigh to their narrative. This, I shall claim, as textual recency in its diverse expression.

This book answers to the needs of having a fresh and thoroughly multidimensional look at the poetics of prose in English. Not only does the current generation of students demand contextual recency and textual freshness, but they also need the text to be relatable in terms of academic values and socio-cultural significance. For instance, global warming, Neuroscience fiction, Generation Z also known as The Internet Generation, hyper reality, digital humanities, The Cloud, e-Book culture, to name but a few, emerge as some of the most seemingly fluid subjects that appeal to the younger generation.

The proposed book improves upon the very imperfections implicit in other textbooks, especially their lack of recency and limited academic reciprocity. The book strives toward an academic end product which is at once pedagogically interactive and conceptually appealing. The multifaceted layout of the book allows for instructors to maintain an intellectually stimulating yet at the same time pleasant discussion and appreciation of the significance and development of prose in their classrooms. The categorical division of each chapter too enables students to have a broader understanding of not only the depth and breadth of literature written in plain, simple prose but also various structures, forms and historical backgrounds. The book, to this end, has been structured around six headings, each of which includes topical reading materials. In addition to such form-oriented classification, this book provides students with a broad outlook vis-à-vis the stylistic and thematic differences between ‘fiction’ and ‘non-
fiction’, complemented with an exemplary text.

Each unit is accompanied by interactive sections, namely, ‘Definition of the Term’, ‘The World of Words’, ‘Remembering the Technique’, ‘Author’s Craft’, and ‘Discussion’. These sections provide students with a deeper insight into literature and literary writing and at once improve their analytical vigor by posing various yet feasible tasks as well as organized questions.

- **Definition of the Term**
  Each unit opens with a ‘Definition of the Term’ which precedes the text and acts as a helpful gloss on ‘Whats’ and ‘Whys’ of not only the concept but also the text at large. The main objective of this section is to familiarize students with a wide range of styles and narrative formats without bombarding them with complex and unnecessary technicality, resulting in an improved general understanding of that concept. After each term is properly defined, students will be asked to provide an example from within the text to justify their choice and understanding.

- **The World of Words**
  ‘The World of Words’ is the very section that follows the text, and stands as a practical platform for students to build their vocabulary domain by finding the new words in one location and understanding the proper usage of these words. This latter stands as the zenith of vocabulary building skill whereby students learn to use new words effectively through pre /during / post reading phases, as they have already seen these new words within the text written in bold and italic font. ‘Words to Remember’ is the second section of vocabulary building strategy, testing the students’ understanding of the new words within a multiple-choice question framework.
• **Remembering the Technique**\(^1\)

The post reading exercise continues with ‘Remembering the Technique’ wherever applicable, functioning as a critical component of each chapter whereby students can examine and discuss the soundness of their understanding of the technique implemented by the author. Each unit, in this respect, stands as a medium that involves reading various samples of simple prose with conceptual and thematic underpinning, being open to a range of interpretations. *The very aim of this section* is to enable students to remember previous techniques learned in last chapters, and effectively put that understanding into practical re-examination.

• **Author’s Craft**

‘Author’s Craft’ emerges as a general introductory platform that allows students to first understand and then identify the literary terms and devices used by the author within a textual framework. Concepts and terms such as types of rhetorical questions, types of irony, satire, sarcasm, metaphor, paradox, circumlocution, tone, and mood would get the most textual emphasis in each chapter, preparing students for more advanced courses such as *Literary Criticism*, and especially (*The Practice of*) *Literary Terminology*.

• **Discussion**

The diversity and *recency* of themes and cultural concepts presented in each chapter will allow students to make an opportune logical and cultural connection with the text. Each chapter, in this respect, can be read as a textual incentive, preparing students for not only more advanced prose in other courses but the art of critical discussion. This

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1. Remembering the Technique and Author’s Craft will appear in each unit when applicable, and based on the following elements: content of the text, the availability and application of literary terms, the style and structure of the text.
book can be regarded as a platform that bridges the gap between *Advanced Literary Prose* and *Reading and Comprehension* courses taught to first-year, undergraduate students. ‘Discussion’, in this respect, emerges as a medium which takes advantage of contemporary issues presented in each chapter, and prepares a relevant academic atmosphere for proper critical discussion.

Topics in this section can be considered as the confluence of contextual messages learned from the text and relevant, ‘extra statements’ that underpin their understanding of that very message. These ‘statements’ purposefully placed in this section, at once tend to improve students’ vocabulary domain and accommodate their appreciation of certain expressions and phrases used under certain socio-cultural circumstances.

**Competing titles**
The most notable titles on the market, addressing the emergence and significance of simple prose in English literature are *Simple Prose Texts* by the late Dr. Abbas-Ali Rezai, and Dr. Helen Oliyaie-Niya published by SAMT; *Simple English Prose* compiled by Karim Nazari Bagha and Vida Sadrolmamaleki published by Azad Islamic University, Ardabil Branch; and *Simple English Prose* by Dr. Behrooz Azabdaftari published by PayamNoor University, Tehran.

*Simple Prose Texts* by Dr. Rezai is still regarded as a seminal introduction to English prose, providing students with a general knowledge of simple prose. What it lacks, however, is more about the depth than the breadth of texts it covers. The issue of contextual coherence and textual cohesion plagues this title, leading students further toward conceptual division and analytical incongruity. Moreover, literary terminology, concepts, and glossary of terms are limited to the very basics, lacking sophistication, and proper gloss and commentary.
Textual consistency between units and texts is almost nonexistent, while thematic uniformity is irregular. While students will appreciate the text, they might not value the underlying literary structure as to why that particular text has been selected; nor will they recognize the logic behind the implication of such literary terms in the text. The “Writing Projects”, as a section that meant to cement each chapter’s message through written reproduction of that concept is generally more about individual, empirical recollection of those adventures than literary prose.

*Simple English Prose* emerges as an unsteady work of compilation by Nazari Bagha and Sadrolmamaleki, providing only a mere patchwork of texts, and thus fails to meet the demands and standards of a progressive academic market even in its early units.

And finally, Dr. Azabdaftari’s book on English Prose emerges as an academic endeavor to not only explore the boundaries of prose but familiarize students with its *hows* and *whats*. Had it not missed the very essence of a literary project and included a section or two on literary terms and concepts, genres, and vocabulary *Simple English Prose* by Dr. Azabdaftari could have been considered the most notable title in the field and on the market.