

## How does Arnold describe the 18th-century literature or poetry?

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### **How does Arnold describe the 18th-century literature or poetry? [NU: 2018]**

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was an English poet and cultural critic. He provides a clear view of 18th-century English literature in his book, "The Study of Poetry" (1888). He calls it an age of prose and reason. Prose grows strong in this time. Poetry, however, loses spiritual depth. So, its rank is below the very best.

**Rise of Prose:** The era rejects Puritan intensity. Society needs order and clarity. Prose meets this need well. It values regularity, uniformity, precision, and balance. Arnold praises this achievement. But it favors prose over poetry.

**Lacking High Seriousness:** Great poetry must give a criticism of life. It must show truth with high seriousness. Arnold finds this missing in much 18th-century verse. The spirit is intellectual, not profound. Feeling is controlled. Moral depth is thin. So, poetry does not reach the highest rank.

**Powerful, Yet Not Supreme:** Arnold respects Dryden and Pope. He calls them "splendid high priests" of prose and reason. Their art is sharp, balanced, and exact. Yet their verse is often rhetorical. It rarely achieves deep spiritual elevation. Therefore, they are eminent writers, but not first-rate poets.

**Exceptions and Limits:** Arnold admits small exceptions. Thomas Gray sometimes catches a Greek classic spirit. Still, he is a "frail classic." The strength is brief and limited. The general tendency remains the same. Style is polished. The inner greatness is rare.

In short, Arnold's verdict is firm. The 18th century builds excellent prose and clear taste. But its poetry seldom reaches the classic height. It lacks the sustained truth, depth, and high seriousness that define the greatest verse.