

certainly in beauty, in poetry, and the arts of form. It was essentially the age of prose; but still it was not prosaic. Its imaginative genius spoke in prose and not in verse. There is more poetry in "The Vicar of Wakefield" than in "The Deserted Village," in "Tom Jones" than in Pope's *Iliad*, and the death of *Clarissa Harlowe* is more like *Sophocles* than the death of *Addison's Cato*. The age did not do well in verse; but if its verse tended to prose, its prose ever tended to rise into poetry. We want some word (Mr. Matthew Arnold will not let us use the word poetry) to express the imaginative power at work in prose, saturating it with the fragrance of proportion and form, shedding over the whole that indefinable charm of subtle suggestion, which belongs to rare thoughts clothed in perfect words. For my part I find "the vision and the faculty divine" in the inexhaustible vivacity of "Tom Jones," in the mysterious realism of "Robinson Crusoe," in the terrible tension of *Clarissa's* tragedy, in the idyllic grace of the vicar's home. This imaginative force has never since been reached in prose save by Walter Scott himself, and not even by him in such inimitable witchery of words. If it be not poetry, it is quite unlike the prose that we read or write to-day.

Besides, one cannot allow that there is *no* poetry in the century. Let us give a liberal meaning to poetry; and where we find creative fancy, charm of phrase, the vivid tone of a distinct voice that we could recognize in a thousand—there, we are sure, is the poet. For my part, I go so far as to admit that to be poetry which is quite intelligible, even if it have no subtlety, mystery, or inner meaning at all. Much as I prefer Shelley, I will not deny that Pope is a poet. Tennyson perhaps would never have run so near commonplace as to do stanzas

here and there in the famous "Elegy," but does any one doubt that Gray's "Elegy" is poetry? And though Wordsworth is a greater man than Cowper, it is possible, had there never been a "Task," that there might never have been an "Excursion." The poetry of the century is below our lofty English average, but it is not contemptible; and when it is good it has some rare qualities indeed.

In the poetry of the century are three distinct types: first, that of Pope; next, that of which the "Elegy" is the masterpiece; lastly, the songs of Burns. Now the first belongs to the age of Louis XIV. The second is the typical poetry of the century. The third is but the clarion that heralds the revolutionary outburst which gave us Byron, Shelley, Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, and Schiller. Cowper in part belongs to the three types: he is the connecting link between them all; touching Pope by his easy mastery of rhyme, akin to Gray by his exquisite culture and grace, foretelling Wordsworth and Shelley by his moral and social earnestness. If the century produced little true poetry, it produced some little that is very good, and a good deal which has some very fine qualities. "The Rape of the Lock" is a poem in a class by itself, and Pope wrote other pieces of magical skill and verve. Goldsmith's poems would please us more if he had not bettered them himself in his own prose. Burns wrote the most ringing songs in our literature. Cowper is a true poet of a very rare type, one of the most important in the development of English poetry. And Gray's "Elegy" is better known and more widely loved than any single poem in our language. All this should be enough to save the age of prose from the charge of being prosaic.

In the best poetry of the century (at least after Pope's death) there is a