

<p><b>College of Education</b></p> <p><b>Department of English</b></p> <p><b>Third Stage (Morning)</b></p> <p><b>Lecture 2</b></p>		<p><b>Instructor: Dr.Mugdad</b></p>
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**Romanticism**, attitude or intellectual orientation that characterized many works of literature, painting, music, architecture, criticism, and historiography in Western civilization over a period from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. Romanticism can be seen as a rejection of the precepts of order, calm, harmony, balance, idealization, and rationality that typified Classicism in general and late 18th-century Neoclassicism in particular. It was also to some extent a reaction against the Enlightenment and against 18th-century rationalism and physical materialism in general. Romanticism emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary.

### **Thomas Gray: Poems Background**

The spring and summer of 1742, the interval between Thomas Gray's return from abroad and his establishment at Peterhouse (Cambridge) witnessed a remarkable spell of creative activity. The sights and sound of the Buckinghamshire countryside inspired him to write the *Ode on the Spring*. Almost immediately after this, he received the news of the death of Richard West, who had been his only intimate friend (especially after his quarrel with Walpole).

His sorrow and loneliness found expression in the poems which now followed in close succession the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, the *Hymn to Adversity*, and the *Sonnet on the Death of Ricard West*. He also added to the

ambitious philosophical poem *De Principiis Cogitandi*, which had been begun at Florence, some lines of the remarkable intensity of feeling and beauty of expression. this passage was the climax and the close of his Latin writing. In 1751 appeared the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (composed perhaps in 1742, perhaps at a later date), the success of which was instantaneous.

Gray celebrated his first meeting to the admirers of his *Elegy* in a poem entitled *A Long Story*, a gay and fanciful example of the humorous vein in which he too seldom indulged. The success of his *Elegy* led also to the publication in 1753 of the first collected edition of Gray's poems, in a handsome volume with remarkable illustrations by Walpole's friend Richard Bentley.

In 1757 were published the two Pindaric odes *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* which met with a mixed reception and which were widely criticised for their alleged obscurity.

*Ode on Spring*, *Sonnet on the Death of Richard West*, *A Long Story*, *The Bard*- a *Pindaric Ode* are his notable works.

### **Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard**

1The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
2The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
3The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
4And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r  
The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,  
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,  
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,  
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:  
No children run to lisp their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke:  
How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray is a 1751 poem about the buried inhabitants of a country churchyard and a meditation on the inevitability of death for all.

- At dusk, the speaker observes the rural landscape and watches the plowman and his cattle heading home.
- Upon seeing grave sites in the shade of a yew tree, the speaker considers the deaths of poor and rich people alike.
- The speaker praises the modesty of the graves in the churchyard and realizes that death consigns all people, poor and rich, obscure and renowned, to a fate of oblivion.

## Poem Summary

Lines 1-4

In the first stanza, the speaker observes the signs of a country day drawing to a close: a curfew bell ringing, a herd of cattle moving across the pasture, and a farm laborer returning home. The speaker is then left alone to contemplate the isolated rural scene. The first line of the poem sets a distinctly somber tone: the curfew bell does not simply ring; it “knells”—a term usually applied to bells rung at a death or funeral. From the start, then, Gray reminds us of human mortality.

#### Lines 5-8

The second stanza sustains the somber tone of the first: the speaker is not mournful, but pensive, as he describes the peaceful landscape that surrounds him. Even the air is characterized as having a “solemn stillness.”

#### Lines 9-12

The sound of an owl hooting intrudes upon the evening quiet. We are told that the owl “complains”; in this context, the word does not mean “to whine” or “grumble,” but “to express sorrow.” The owl’s call, then, is suggestive of grief. Note that at no point in these three opening stanzas does Gray directly refer to death or a funeral; rather, he indirectly creates a funereal atmosphere by describing just a few mournful sounds.

#### Lines 13-16

It is in the fourth stanza that the speaker directly draws our attention to the graves in the country churchyard. We are presented with two potentially conflicting images of death. Line 14 describes the heaps of earth surrounding the graves; in order to dig a grave, the earth must necessarily be disrupted. Note that the syntax of this line is slightly confusing. We would expect this sentence to read “Where the turf heaves”—not “where heaves the turf”: Gray has inverted the word

order. Just as the earth has been disrupted, the syntax imitates the way in which the earth has been disrupted. But by the same token, the “rude Forefathers” buried beneath the earth seem entirely at peace: we are told that they are laid in “cells,” a term which reminds us of the quiet of a monastery, and that they “sleep.”

Lines 17-20

If the “Forefathers” are sleeping, however, the speaker reminds us that they will never again rise from their “beds” to hear the pleasurable sounds of country life that the living do. The term “lowly beds” describes not only the unpretentious graves in which the forefathers are buried, but the humble conditions that they endured when they were alive.

## **Thomas Gray: Poems Themes**

### **Death**

Very few poets enjoy such a reputation and fame based almost solely on a single world. If Gray had not written “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” there is a good possibility his name would not be found in literature textbooks across the world. But he did write that poem and it did seal his reputation. More than that, however, it is also quite representative of the theme that dominates those others poems. Being the poet he was, Gray chose quite wisely when he chose to title his most famous poem an elegy. Much of his verse can effectively be described as elegiac. And why not? Things might well have turned out quite differently if Gray’s eleven siblings had survived infancy into adulthood alongside him. Perhaps, in fact, he might have been

too busy helping to raise them to write so much poetry with “Ode” in the title. His very first poem was titled “Ode on Spring” and its completion coincided with news of the death of his closest friend. That Gray’s poetry is obsessed with death seems almost a mandate; anything else seems illogical.

### **The Quality of Mortality**

Perhaps it is too simplistic to attribute to [Thomas Gray](#) an obsession with death as a theme of his poetry. For within his odes and elegies can always be found a questioning toward the very concept of mortality and what it really means to say one exists. In many poems that are framed as a thematic analysis of the effects of loss and grief, Gray at some point or at some level seeks to find a meaning for mortality. “Hymn to Adversity” is the strongest and most complete and precise example of this search for a meaning as the poem reminds the reader that everybody is subject to adversity in life, but that those who learn from that adversity increase the quality of whatever mortal time frame they have left.

### **Isolation and Alienation**

Over the course of two short years, Thomas Gray declined the offer of a position as secretary to Earl of Bristol and the offer to be named England’s Poet Laureate. He was intensely private man who established deep and often lifelong friendships with a very selected few, but was not a man who sought out the company of crowds. Surrounded by so much death and loss, many turn to others to fill that absence. Gray belonged to the company of men who sought solace aside from social discourse interaction and that sense of his isolation and alienation from others is manifested throughout much of his poetry as recurring them. His most famous poem can be interpreted as a search for identity on one’s own ground and apart from the perspective of how others view you and that sense of self is a dominant one that serves as the fuel that powers the engine of exploration of what it means to be alienated and what are the real consequences of isolation.

## **Class Conflict**

Thomas Gray is often looked at as writing poems that speak for the common man. The rejection of the offer to serve as secretary to an Earl speaks to a lifelong disenchantment with England's aristocracy and his most famous poem is also often interpreted as a shout-out for the common man against the trappings of England's class system.