“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”

by Thomas Gray

Gray is a transitional author, his writing more resembles the next period (Romantics) as it is not about logic, rational topic, daylight of 18th Century; instead more emotional, into feelings. Gray is a PRECURSOR to Romantics.

ELEGY = sad, mourning loss, grieving

PASTORAL = idealized country life

PASTORAL ELEGY because this poem is sad, grieving, and set in an idealized country setting.

32 stanzas (quatrains with abab rhyme), 128 lines

Setting is rural area, in a cemetery in a churchyard (city churches do not have cemeteries in yard)

**SETTING/MOOD**

STANZA 1) bell tolling, becoming night, plowman heads home ALONE after tiring day

S2) night continues, hear beetle, distant tinkling of bell = QUIET, STILLNESS

S3) QUIET: own hooting in distance, bothered at some disturbance (owl, bell both symbols of death)

S4) DEATH: beneath the elm, GRAVE, mounds of earth, “narrow cell forever laid” = grave. Uneduc tiny town ancestors are laid (rude = uneduc); sleep symbol for DEATH

S5) **DURING LIFE**: swallow, cock = rooster wake up people daily, but now never again

S6 + S7) Activities that filled day when alive: housewife and chores; kids running and greeting dad after work; dad farming. ☺ ☺ jocund = happy

**S8-11 WARNINGS**

S8) Narrator warns Ambition (greed for power/position) not to mock these people. They didn’t have great, worldly acheivements, poor needed work and did chores to SURVIVE; Warns Grandeur (greatness) not to look down on these people

S9) worldly possessions cannot be taken with the person; noble birth, wealth, power (all of which these townspeople have none) will be equal to the poor when they die; “inevitable hour”= death

S10) warns reader or proud people not to misinterpret these people; tho no great tomb, statue, urn, or even tombstone to mark their grave, they are NO DIFFERENT to those who do. Praise and monuments cannot bring back the dead. Dead is dead.

**S12-14) Possible people buried there**

S12)”neglected spot” means that no one has taken care of grave (maybe family died out); p. who lie here may have been a very godly p., a very powerful p., a talented artist (music, writing, etc)

S13) PENURY (poverty) held the p. back, could not reach his full potential

S14) “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen…” The flower is not less beautiful in not seen; however NOT APPRECIATED until someone sees it. Same for people….may have great talent, but if kept to self and no one knows, that talent cannot be appreciated, so impact is less

S15-16) Some potentially great p. may lie here, but we will never know (great leader like statesman, great poet like Milton, great political leader such as Cromwell), virtuous

S17) situation prohibits /limits the poor and rural; not great alone undiscovered, but CRIMES undiscovered too

S18) both good and bad, virtuous and sinful deeds all buried

S19) “Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife” = away from the frenzied life of common city struggles (city looked at as worse than country life, very Romantic idea)\*\*; their hopes and desires never strayed from tiny town

**CEMETERY PLOT**

S20) simpleness of poor grave contrasts to “storied urn” on rich graves; makes narrator, reader and anyone looking at grave and SIGHS for loss of what could have been

S21) Dead poor people have simple writing on tombstone, if any writing at all

S22) All these people are forgotten; nar. Wonders if they had any regrets?

S23) The alive people looking at the graves, the ones that KNOW what lies beyond the borders of the tiny village, and even NATURE SIGHS

S24) people lying here are unhonored, so poet/nar says he will honor them with this poem

**PARTICULAR COUNTRY MAN**

S25-26-27) A particular man goes about his life, going about simple, normal activities people see him but really don’t pay attention to him

S28) until he is MISSED (most people don’t appreciate things/people until they are gone)

S29) Hear funeral dirges (sad songs at funerals), realize man died

**EPITAPH (inscription written on tombstone)**

S30- 31) This man will have simple writing on his tombstone, would read as written in poem, summarized here: Tho this man has no formal educ, fame, or wealth, he is still important and valued as a human being. He may not have had much on this earth, but he gave everything his best, and now Heaven will reward him for his loyalty

**ADVICE to reader**

S32) Don’t look any further into this man to find his virtues or faults; instead, use this to look at SELF because we will all end at the same destination -🡪 DEATH (very similar to Defoe’s idea of the “common grave of mankind” from *Journal of the Plague Year*