**PLAN**

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**1.Thomas Gray Biography**

**THOMAS GRAY**, English poet, the fifth and sole surviving child of Philip and Dorothy Gray, was born in London on the 26th of December 1716. His mother's maiden name was Antrobus, and in partnership with her sister Mary she kept a millinery shop in Cornhill. This and the house connected with it were the property of Philip Gray, a money-scrivener, who married Dorothy in 1706 and lived with her in the house, the sisters renting the shop from him and supporting themselves by its profits. Philip Gray had impaired the fortune which he inherited from his father, a wealthy London merchant; yet he was sufficiently well-to-do, and at the close of his life was building a house upon some property of his own at Wanstead. But he was selfish and brutal, and in 1735 his wife took some abortive steps to obtain a separation from him. At this date she had given birth to twelve children, of whom Thomas was the only survivor. He owed his life as well as his education to this "careful, tender mother," as he calls her. The child was suffocating when she opened one of his veins with her own hand. He went at her expense to Eton in 1727, and was confided to the care of her brother, William Antrobus, one of the assistantmasters, during some part at least of his school-life.  
  
 At Eton Gray's closest friends were Horace Walpole, Richard West (son of the lord chancellor of Ireland and grandson of the famous Bishop Burnet), and Thomas Ashton, afterwards fellow of Eton. This little coterie was dubbed " the Quadruple Alliance "; its members were studious and literary, and took little part in the amusements of their fellows. In 1734 Gray matriculated at Peterhouse, Cambridge, of which his uncle, Robert Antrobus, had been a fellow. At Cambridge he had once more the companionship of Walpole and Ashton who were at King's, but West went to Christchurch, Oxford. Gray made at this time the firmest and most constant friendship of his life with Thomas Wharton (not the poet Warton) of Pembroke College. He was maintained by his mother, and his straitened means were eked out by certain small exhibitions from his college. His conspicuous abilities and known devotion to study perhaps atoned in the eyes of the authorities for his indifference to the regular routine of study; for mathematics in particular he had an aversion which was the one exception to his almost limitless curiosity in other directions.  
  
 During his first Cambridge period he learnt Italian " like any dragon," and made translations from Guarini, Dante and Tasso, some of which have been preserved. In September 1738 he is in the agony of leaving college, nor can we trace his movements with any certainty for a while, though it may be conjectured that he spent much time with Horace Walpole, and made in his company some fashionable acquaintances in London. On the 29th of March 1739, he started with Walpole for a long continental tour, for the expenses of which it is probable that his father, for once, came in some measure to his assistance. In Paris, Gray visited the great with his friend, studied the picture-galleries, went to tragedies, comedies, operas and cultivated there that taste for the French classical dramatists, especially Racine, whom he afterwards tried to imitate in the fragmentary " Agrippina." It is characteristic of him that he travels through France with Caesar constantly in his hands, ever noting and transcribing. In the same way, in crossing the Alps and in Piedmont, he has "Livy in the chaise with him and Silius Italicus too." In Italy he made a long sojourn, principally at Florence, where Walpole's life-long correspondent, Horace Mann, was British envoy, and received and treated the travellers most hospitably. But Rome and Naples are also described in Gray's letters, sometimes vividly, always amusingly, and in his notes are almost catalogued. Herculaneum, an object of intense interest to the young poet and antiquary, had been discovered the year before.  
  
 At length in April 1741 Gray and Walpole set out northwards for Reggio. Here they quarrelled. Gray, "never a boy," was a student, and at times retiring; Walpole, in his way a student too, was at this time a very social being, somewhat too frivolous, and, what was worse, too patronizing. He good-humouredly said at a later date, "Gray loves to find fault," and this faultfinding was expressed, no doubt with exaggeration, in a letter to Ashton, who violated Gray's confidence. The rupture followed, and with two friends, John Chute of the Vyne, Hampshire, and the young Francis Whithed, Gray went to Venice to see the doge wed the Adriatic on Ascension Day. Thence he returned home attended only by a *laquais de voyage*, visiting once more the Grande Chartreuse where he left in the album of the brotherhood those beautiful alcaics, *O Tu severa Religio loci*, which reveal his characteristic melancholy (enhanced by solitude and estrangement) and that sense of the glory as distinct from the horror of mountain scenery to which perhaps he was the first of Englishmen to give adequate expression. On the 18th of September 1741 we find him in London, astonishing the street boys with his deep ruffles, large bag-wig and long sword, 12 and "mortified " under the hands of the English barber. On the 6th of November his father died; Philip Gray had, it is evident, been less savage and miserly at last to those who were dependent upon him, and his death left his wife and son some measure of assured peace and comfort.  
  
 London was Gray's headquarters for more than a year, with occasional visits to Stoke Poges, to which his mother and Mary Antrobus had retired from business to live with their sister, Mrs Rogers. At Stoke he heard of the death of West, to whom he had sent the "*Ode on Spring*," which was returned to him unopened. It was an unexpected blow, shocking in all its circumstances, especially if we believe the story that his friend's frail life was brought to a close by the discovery that the mother whom he tenderly loved had been an unfaithful wife, and, as some say, poisoned her husband. About this tragedy Gray preserved a mournful silence, broken only by the pathetic sonnet, and some Latin lines, in which he laments his loss. The year 1742, was, for him, fruitful in poetic effort, of which, however, much was incomplete. The "*Agrippina*," the *De principiis Cogitandi*, the splenetic "*Hymn to Ignorance*" in which he contemplates his return to the university, remain fragments; but besides the two poems already mentioned, the "*Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* " and the "*Hymn to Adversity*," perhaps the most faultless of his poems, were written before the close of the summer.  
  
 After hesitating between Trinity Hall and Peterhouse, he returned to the latter, probably as a fellow-commoner. He had hitherto neglected to read for a degree; he proceeded to that of LL.B. in 1744. In 1745 a reconciliation with Walpole, long desired probably on both sides, was effected through the kind offices of Chute's sister. In 1746 he spent his time between Cambridge, Stoke and London; was much with Walpole; graphically describes the trial of the Scottish rebel lords, and studied Greek with avidity; but "*the muse*," which by this time perhaps had stimulated him to begin the "*Elegy*," "has gone, and left him in much worse company." In town he finds his friends Chute and Whithed returned to England, and "flaunts about" in public places with them. The year 1747 produced only the *ode on Walpole's cat*, and we gather that he is mainly engaged in reading with a very critical eye, and interesting himself more in the troubles of Pembroke College, in which he almost seems to live, than in the affairs of Peterhouse. In this year also he made the acquaintance of Mason, his future biographer. In 1748 he first came before the public, but anonymously, in Dodsley's Miscellany, in which appeared the Eton ode, *the ode on spring*, and that on the cat. In the same year he sent to Wharton the beginning of the didactic poem, "*The Alliance of Education and Government*," which remains a fragment. His aunt, Mary Antrobus, died in 1749.  
  
 There is little to break the monotony of his days till 1750, when from Stoke he sent Walpole "a thing to which he had at last put an end." The "thing" was the "*Elegy*." It was shown about in manuscript by his admiring friend; it was impudently pirated, and Gray had it printed by Dodsley in self-defence. Even thus it had "a pinch or two in its cradle," of which it long bore the marks. The publication led to the one incident in Gray's life which has a touch of romance. At Stokehouse had come to live the widowed Lady Cobham, who learnt that the author of the "*Elegy*" was her neighbour. At her instance, Lady Schaub, her visitor, and Miss Speed, her protegee, paid him a call; the poet was out, and his quiet mother and aunts were somewhat flustered at the apparition of these women of fashion, whose acquaintance Gray had already made in town. Hence the humorous "*Long Story*." A platonic affection sprang up between Gray and Miss Speed; rumour, upon the death of Lady Cobham, said that they were to be married, but the lady escaped this mild destiny to become the Baroness de la Peyriere, afterwards Countess Viry, and a dangerous political intriguante.  
  
 In 1753 all Gray's completed poems, except the *sonnet on the death of West*, were published by Dodsley in a handsome volume illustrated by Richard Bentley, the son of the celebrated master of Trinity. To these designs we owe the verses to the artist which were posthumously published from a MS. torn at the end. In the same year Gray's mother died and was buried in the churchyard at Stoke Poges, the scene of the "*Elegy*," in the same grave with Mary Antrobus. A visit to his friend Dr Wharton at Durham later in the year revives his earlier impressions of that bolder scenery which is henceforth to be in the main the framework of his muse. Already in 1752 he had almost completed "*The Progress of Poesy*," in which, and in "*The Bard*," the imagery is largely furnished forth by mountain and torrent. The latter poem long held fire; Gray was stimulated to finish it by hearing the blind Welsh harper Parry at Cambridge. Both odes were the first-fruits of the press which Walpole had set up at Strawberry Hill, and were printed together there in 1757. They are genuinely *Pindaric*, that is, with corresponding strophes, antistrophes and epodes. As the Greek motto prefixed to them implies, they were vocal to the intelligent only; and these at first were few. But the odes, if they did not attain the popularity of the "*Elegy*," marked an epoch in the history of English poetry, and the influence of "*The Bard*" may be traced even in that great but very fruitful imposture, the pseudo-Ossian of Macpherson. Gray yields to the impulse of the Romantic movement; he has long been an admirer of ballad poetry; before he wrote "*The Bard*" he had begun to study Scandinavian literature, and the two "*Norse Odes*," written in 1761, were in style and metrical form strangely anticipative of Coleridge and Scott.  
  
 Meanwhile his Cambridge life had been vexed by the freaks of the fellow-commoners of Peterhouse, a peculiarly riotous set. He had suffered great inconvenience for a time by the burning of his property in Cornhill, and so nervous was he on the subject of fire that he had provided himself with a rope-ladder by which he might descend from his college window. Under this window a huntingparty of these rude lads raised in the early morning the cry of fire; the poet's night-capped head appeared and was at once withdrawn. This, or little more than this, was the simple fact out of which arose the legend still current at Cambridge. The servile authorities of Peterhouse treated Gray's complaints with scant respect, and he migrated to Pembroke College. "I left my lodgings," he said, "because the rooms were noisy, and the people of the house dirty." In 1758 died Mrs Rogers, and Gray describes himself as employed at Stoke in "dividing nothing" between himself and the surviving aunt, Mrs Oliffe, whom he calls "the spawn of Cerberus and the Dragon of Wantley."  
  
 In 1759 he availed himself of the MS. treasures of the British Museum, then for the first time open to the public, made a very long sojourn in town, and in 1761 witnessed the coronation of George III, of which to his friend Brown of Pembroke he wrote a very vivacious account. In his last years he revealed a craving for a life less sedentary than heretofore. He visited various picturesque districts of Great Britain, exploring great houses and ruined abbeys; he was the pioneer of the modern tourist, noting and describing in the spirit now of the poet, now of the art-critic, now of the antiquary. In 1762 he travelled in Yorkshire and Derbyshire; in 1764 in the Lowlands of Scotland, and thence went to Southampton and its neighbourhood. In 1765 he revisits Scotland; he is the guest of Lord Strathmore at Glamis; and revels in "those monstrous creatures of God," the Highland mountains. His most notable achievement in this direction was his journey among the English lakes, of which he wrote an interesting account to Wharton; and even in 1770, the year before his death, he visited with his young friend Norton Nicholls "five of the most beautiful counties of the kingdom," and descended the Wye for 40 m.  
  
 In all these quests he displays a physical energy which surprises and even perplexes us. His true academic status was worthily secured in 1768, when the duke of Grafton offered him the professorship of modern history which in 1762 he had vainly endeavoured to obtain from Bute. He wrote in 1769 the "*Installation Ode*" upon the appointment of Grafton as chancellor of the university. It was almost the only instance in which he successfully executed a task, not, in the strictest sense, self-imposed; the great founders of the university are tactfully memorized and pass before us in a kind of heraldic splendour. He bore with indifference the taunts to which, from Junius and others, he was exposed for this tribute to his patron. He was contemplating a journey to Switzerland to visit his youthful friend de Bonstetten when, in the summer of 1771, he was conscious of a great decline in his physical powers. He was seized with a sudden illness when dining in his college hall, and died of gout in the stomach on the 30th of July 1771. His last moments were attended by his cousin Mary Antrobus, postmistress through his influence at Cambridge and daughter of his Eton tutor; and he was laid beside his beloved mother in the churchyard of Stoke Poges.  
  
 Owing to his shyness and reserve he had few intimate friends, but to these his loss was irreparable; for to them he revealed himself either in boyish levity and banter, or wise and sympathetic counsel and tender and yet manly consolation; to them he imparted his quiet but keen observation of passing events or the stores of his extensive reading in literature ancient, medieval or modern; and with Proteus-like variety he writes at one time as a speculative philosopher, at another as a critic in art or music, at another as a meteorologist and nature-lover. His friendship with the young, after his migration to Pembroke College, is a noteworthy trait in his character. With Lord Strathmore and the Lyons and with William Palgrave he conversed as an elder brother, and Norton Nicholls of Trinity Hall lost in him a second father, who had taught him to think and feel. The brilliant young foreigner, de Bonstetten, looked back after a long and chequered career with remembrance still vivid to the days in which the poet so soon to die taught him to read Shakespeare and Milton in the monastic gloom of Cambridge. With the elderly "*Levites*" of the place he was less in sympathy; they dreaded his sarcastic vein; they were conscious that he laughed at them, and in the polemics of the university he was somewhat of a free lance, fighting for his own hand. Lampoons of his were privately circulated with effect, and that he could be the fiercest of satirists the "*Cambridge Courtship*" on the candidature of Lord Sandwich for the office of high steward, and the verses on Lord Holland's mimic ruins at Kingsgate, near Margate, sufficiently prove.  
  
 The faculty which he displayed in humour and satire was denied to his more serious muse; there all was the fruit of long delay; of that higher inspiration he had a thin but very precious vein, and the sublimity which he undoubtedly attained was reached by an effort of which captious and even sympathetic criticism can discover the traces. In his own time he was regarded as an innovator, for like Collins he revived the poetic diction of the past, and the adverse judgments of Johnson and others upon his work are in fact a defence of the current literary traditions. Few men have published so little to so much effect; few have attained to fame with so little ambition. His favourite maxim was "to be employed is to be happy," but he was always employed in the first instance for the satisfaction of his own soul, and to this end and no other he made himself one of the best Greek scholars at Cambridge in the interval between Bentley and Porson. His genius was receptive rather than creative, and it is to be regretted that he lacked energy to achieve that history of English poetry which he once projected, and for which he possessed far more knowledge and insight than the poet Thomas Warton, to whom he resigned the task.  
  
 He had a fine taste in music, painting and architecture; and his correspondence includes a wide survey of such European literature as was accessible to him, with criticisms, sometimes indeed a little limited and insular, yet of a singularly fresh and modern cast. In person he was below the middle height, but well-made, and his face, in which the primness of his features was redeemed by his flashing eyes, was the index of his character. There was a touch of affectation in his demeanour, and he was sometimes reticent and secretive even to his best friends. He was a refined Epicurean in his habits, and a deist rather than a Christian in his religious beliefs; but his friend, Mrs Bonfoy, had "taught him to pray" and he was keenly alive to the dangers of a flippant scepticism. In a beautiful alcaic stanza he pronounces the man supremely happy who in the depths of the heart is conscious of the "fount of tears," and his characteristic melancholy, except in the few hours when it was indeed black, was not a pitiable state; rather, it was one secret of the charm both of the man and of the poet

**2.The Works of Thomas Gray**

Poetical Works   
  
***An Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*  (1747)**  
  
***An Elegy wrote in a Country Churchyard*  (1751)**  
  
In Greek, Latin, German, Italian, and French - Google Books  
  
***Designs by Mr. Bentley: for six poems by Mr. T. Gray*  (1753)**  
  
Ode on the Spring  
Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat  
Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College  
A Long Story  
Hymn to Adversity  
Elegy written in a Country Church-yard  
  
***Odes* (1757)**  
   
The Progress of Poesy. A Pindaric Ode  
The Bard. A Pindaric Ode.  
  
***Poems by Mr. Gray*  (1768)**  
  
Ode on the Spring  
Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat  
Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College  
Hymn to Adversity  
The Progress of Poesy  
The Bard  
The Fatal Sisters: An Ode  
The Descent of Odin: An Ode   
The Triumphs of Owen: A Fragment  
Elegy written in a Country Church-yard  
  
***Ode performed in the Senate-House at Cambridge, July 1, 1769***



***The Candidate*  (1774?)**  
  
***The Poems of Mr. Gray. To which are prefixed  
memoirs of his life and writings*  by W. Mason, ed.  (1775)**  
  
***The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray; with a Memoir* by J. Mitford, ed.  (1854)**  
  
***The Works of Thomas Gray In Prose and Verse* 4 vols., by Edmund Gosse, ed.  (1884)**

Prose Works  
  
  
  
*Phaedo*  
On the Philosophy of Lord Bolingbroke  
On Norman Architecture  
Observations on English Metre  
The Measures of Verse  
Observations on the Pseudo-Rhythmus  
Some Observations on the Use of Rhyme  
Additional Observations and Conjectures on Rhyme  
Some Remarks on the Poems of John Lydgate  
Samuel Daniel



Letters  
  
**Letters in Mason's *The Poems of Mr. Gray* by W. Mason  (1827)**  
  
***The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and the Rev. Norton Nicholls* - by John Mitford  (1843)**  
  
***The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and William Mason* - by John Mitford  (1853)**

**3. “Elegy written in a Churchyard”**

......."Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is—as the title indicates—an elegy. Such a poem centers on the death of a person or persons and is, therefore, somber in tone. An elegy is lyrical rather than narrative—that is, its primary purpose is to express feelings and insights about its subject rather than to tell a story. Typically, an elegy expresses feelings of loss and sorrow while also praising the deceased and commenting on the meaning of the deceased's time on earth. Gray's poem reflects on the lives of humble and unheralded people buried in the cemetery of a church.

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/redirect?tag=thecompleteshake&creative=374725&camp=211173&link\_code=ur1&path=subst/home/home.html.......The time is the mid 1700s, about a decade before the Industrial Revolution began in England. The place is the cemetery of a church. Evidence indicates that the church is St. Giles, in the small town of Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, in southern England. Gray himself is buried in that cemetery. William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, once maintained a manor house at Stoge Poges.

.......Gray began writing the elegy in 1742, put it aside for a while, and finished it in 1750. Robert Dodsley published the poem in London in 1751. Revised or altered versions of the poem appeared in 1753, 1758, 1768, and 1775. Copies of the various versions are on file in the Thomas Gray Archive at Oxford University.

**Meter and Rhyme Scheme**

.......Gray wrote the poem in four-line stanzas (quatrains). Each line is in iambic pentameter, meaning the following:

1..Each line has five pairs of syllables for a total of ten syllables.    
2..In each pair, the first syllable is unstressed (or unaccented), and the second is stressed (or accented), as in the two lines that open the poem:

.......The CUR few TOLLS the KNELL of PART ing DAY   
.......The LOW ing HERD wind SLOW ly O'ER the LEA

.......In each stanza, the first line rhymes with the third and the second line rhymes with the fourth (abab), as follows:

**a**.....The curfew tolls the knell of parting **day**,    
**b**.....The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the **lea**,   
**a**.....The plowman homeward plods his weary **way**,    
**b**.....And leaves the world to darkness and to **me**.

**Stanza Form: Heroic Quatrain**

.......A stanza with the above-mentioned characteristics—four lines, iambic pentameter, and an abab rhyme scheme—is often referred to as a heroic quatrain. (Quatrain is derived from the Latin word *quattuor*, meaning *four*.) William Shakespeare and John Dryden had earlier used this stanza form. After Gray's poem became famous, writers and critics also began referring to the heroic quatrain as an elegiac stanza.

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**Stanza 1**

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

*Notes*

(1) *Curfew*: ringing bell in the evening that reminded people in English towns of Gray’s time to put out fires and go to bed. (2) *Knell*: mournful sound. (3) *Parting day*: day's end; dying day; twilight; dusk. (4) *Lowing*: mooing. (5) *O'er*: contraction for *over*. (6) *Lea*: meadow.



**Stanza 2**

5. Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,    
6. And all the air a solemn stillness holds,   
7. Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,    
8. And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.

*Notes*

(1) *Line 5*: The landscape becomes less and less visible. (2) Sight . . . solemn stillness . . . save: alliteration. (3) *Save*: except. (4) *Beetle*: winged insect that occurs in more than 350,000 varieties. One type is the firefly, or lightning bug. (5) *Wheels*: verb meaning *flies in circles*. (6) *Droning*: humming; buzzing; monotonous sound. (7) *Drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds*: This clause apparently refers to the gentle sounds made by a bell around the neck of a castrated male sheep that leads other sheep. A castrated male sheep is called a *wether.* Such a sheep with a bell around its neck is called a *bellwether*. *Folds* is a noun referring to flocks of sheep. (8) *Tinklings*: onomatopoeia.



**Stanza 3**

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

*Notes*

(1) *Save*: except. (2) *Yonder*: distant; remote. (3) *Ivy-mantled*: cloaked, dressed, or adorned with ivy. (4) *Moping*: gloomy; grumbling. (5) *Of such*: of anything or anybody. (6) *Bow'r*: bower, an enclosure surrounded by plant growth—in this case, ivy. (7) *Molest her ancient solitary reign*: bother the owl while it keeps watch over the churchyard and countryside. (8) Her ancient solitary rein: metaphor comparing the owl to a queen.



**Stanza 4**

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

*Notes*

(1) *Where heaves the turf*: anastrophe, a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (*the turf heaves*). (2) *Mould'ring*: mouldering (British), moldering (American), an adjective meaning decaying, crumbling. (3) *Cell*: metaphor comparing a grave to a prison cell. (4) *Rude*: robust; sturdy; hearty; stalwart. (4) *Hamlet*: village.



**Stanza 5**

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

*Notes*

(1) *Breezy call of incense-breathing Morn*: wind carrying the pleasant smells of morning, including dewy grass and flowers. Notice that *Morn* is a metaphor comparing it to a living creature. (It calls and breathes.) (2) *Swallow*: Insect-eating songbird that likes to perch. (3) *Clarion*: cock-a-doodle-doo. (4) *Echoing horn*: The words may refer to the sound made by a fox huntsman who blows a copper horn to which pack hounds respond.



**Stanza 6**

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

*Notes*

(1) *hearth . . . housewife . . . her*: alliteration. (2) *Climb his knees the envied kiss to share*: anastrophe, a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (to share the envied kiss).



**Stanza 7**

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

*Notes*

(1) *Sickle*: Harvesting tool with a handle and a crescent-shaped blade. Field hands swing it from right to left to cut down plant growth. (2) *Furrow*: channel or groove made by a plow for planting seeds. (3) *Glebe*: earth. (4) *Jocund*: To maintain the meter, Gray uses an adjective when the syntax call for an adverb, *jocundly*. Jocund (pronounced JAHK und) means cheerful.



**Stanza 8**

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

*Notes*

(1) *Ambition*: Personification referring to the desire to succeed or to ambitious people seeking lofty goals. (2) *Destiny obscure*: the humble fate of the common people; their unheralded deeds. (3) Lines 29-30: anastrophe, a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (let not Ambition obscure their destiny and homely joys).   
(4) *Grandeur*: personification referring to people with wealth, social standing, and power. (5) *Annals*: historical records; story.



**Stanza 9**

33. The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,   
34. And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,   
35. Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.   
36. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

*Notes*

(1) *Boast of heraldry*: Proud talk about the aristocratic or noble roots of one's family; snobbery. Heraldry was a science that traced family lines of royal and noble personages and designed coats of arms for them. (2) *Pomp*: ceremonies, rituals, and splendid surroundings of nobles and royals. (3) Pomp of pow'r: alliteration. (4) E'er: ever. *General meaning of stanza*: Every person—no matter how important, powerful, or wealthy—ends up the same, dead.



**Stanza 10**

37. Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,   
38. If Mem'ry o'er their tomb no trophies raise,   
39. Where thro' the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault   
40. The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

*Notes*

(1) *Impute*: Assign, ascribe. (2) *Mem'ry*: Memory, a personification referring to memorials, commemorations, and tributes—including statues, headstones, and epitaphs—used to preserve the memory of important or privileged people. (3) *Where thro' . . . the note of praise*: Reference to the interior of a church housing the tombs of important people. *Fretted vault* refers to a carved or ornamented arched roof or ceiling. (4) *Pealing anthem* may refer to lofty organ music.



**Stanza 11**

41. Can storied urn or animated bust    
42. Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?   
43. Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,   
44. Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

*Notes*

(1) *Storied urn*: Vase adorned with pictures telling a story. Urns have sometimes been used to hold the ashes of a cremated body. (2) *Bust*: sculpture of the head, shoulders, and chest of a human. (3) *Storied urn . . . breath?* Can the soul (fleeting breath) be called back to the body (*mansion*) by the urn or bust back? Notice that urn and bust are personifications that call. (4) *Can Honour's . . . Death?* Can honor (*Honour's voice*) attributed to the dead person cause that person (*silent dust*) to come back to life? Can flattering words (*Flatt'ry*) about the dead person make death more "bearable"? (5) *General meaning of stanza*: Lines 41-45 continue the idea begun in Lines 37-40. In other words, can any memorials—such as the trophies mentioned in Line 38, the urn and bust mentioned in Line 41, and personifications (honor and flattery) mentioned in Lines 43 and 44—bring a person back to life or make death less final or fearsome?



**Stanza 12**

45. Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid   
46. Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;   
47. Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,   
48. Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

*Notes*

(1) *Pregnant with celestial fire*: Full of great ideas, abilities, or goals (*celestial fire*). (2) *Rod of empire*: scepter held by a king or an emperor during ceremonies. One of the humble country folk in the cemetery might have become a king or an emperor if he had been given the opportunity. (3) *Wak'd . . .lyre*: Played beautiful music on a lyre, a stringed instrument. In other words, one of the people in the cemetery could have become a great musician if given the opportunity, "waking up" the notes of the lyre.



**Stanza 13**

49. But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page   
50. Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;   
51. Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,   
52. And froze the genial current of the soul.

*Notes*

(1) *Knowledge . . . unroll*: Knowledge did not reveal itself to them (*their eyes*) in books (*ample page*) rich with treasures of information (spoils of time). (2) *Knowledge . . . unroll*: Personification and anastrophe a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (knowledge did ne'er enroll). (3) *Chill . . . soul*: Poverty (*penury*) repressed their enthusiasm (*rage*) and froze the flow (*current*) of ideas (*soul*).



**Stanza 14**

53. Full many a gem of purest ray serene,   
54. The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:   
55. Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,   
56. And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

*Note*

*Full . . . air*: These may be the most famous lines in the poem. Gray is comparing the humble village people to undiscovered gems in caves at the bottom of the ocean and to undiscovered flowers in the desert.



**Stanza 15**

57. Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast   
58. The little tyrant of his fields withstood;   
59. Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,   
60. Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

Notes

(1) John Hampden (1594-1643). Hampden, a Puritan member of Parliament, frequently criticized and opposed the policies of King Charles I. In particular, he opposed a tax imposed by the king to outfit the British navy. Because he believed that only Parliament could impose taxes, he refused to pay 20 shillings in ship money in 1635. Many joined him in his opposition. War broke out between those who supported Parliament and those who supported the king. Hampden was killed in battle in 1643. Gray here is presenting Hampden as a courageous (*dauntless*) hero who stood against the king (*little tyrant*). (2) Milton: John Milton (1608-1674), the great English poet and scholar.



**Stanza 16**

61. Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,   
62. The threats of pain and ruin to despise,   
63. To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,   
64. And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,

*Notes*

The subject and verb of Lines 61-64 are in the first three words of  Line 65, *their lot forbade*. Thus, this stanza says the villagers' way of life (*lot*) prohibited or prevented them from receiving applause from politicians for good deeds such as alleviating pain and suffering and providing plenty (perhaps food) across the land. These deeds would have been recorded by the appreciating nation.



**Stanza 17**

65. Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone   
66. Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;   
67. Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,   
68. And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

*Note*

*General meaning*: Their lot in life not only prevented (*circumbscrib'd*) them from doing good deeds (like those mentioned in Stanza 16) but also prevented (*confin'd*) bad deeds such as killing enemies to gain the throne and refusing to show mercy to people.



**Stanza 18**

69. The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,   
70. To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,   
71. Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride   
72. With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

*Notes*

(1) *General meaning*: This stanza continues the idea begun in the previous stanza, saying that the villagers' lot in life also prevented them from hiding truth and shame and from bragging or using pretty or flattering words (*incense kindled at the Muse's flame*) to gain luxuries and feed their pride. (2) *Muse's flame*: an allusion to sister goddesses in Greek and Roman mythology who inspired writers, musicians, historians, dancers, and astronomers. These goddesses were called *Muses*.



**Stanza 19**

73. Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,    
74. Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;   
75. Along the cool sequester'd vale of life   
76. They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

*Note*

(1) *General meaning*: The villagers plodded on faithfully, never straying from their lot in life as common people. (2) *Madding*: maddening; furious; frenzied. (3) *Noiseless tenor of their way*: quiet way of life.



**Stanza 20**

77. Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,   
78. Some frail memorial still erected nigh,   
79. With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,   
80. Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

*Note*

*General meaning*: But even these people have gravestones (*frail memorial*), although they are engraved with simple and uneducated words or decked with humble sculpture. These gravestones elicit a sigh from people who see them.



**Stanza 21**

81. Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,    
82. The place of fame and elegy supply:   
83. And many a holy text around she strews,   
84. That teach the rustic moralist to die.

*Notes*

(1)*Their . . . supply*: Their name and age appear but there are no lofty tributes. (2) *Unletter'd muse*: Uneducated writer or engraver. (2) *Holy text*: probably Bible quotations. (3) *She*: muse. See the second note for Stanza 18. (4) *Rustic moralist*: pious villager.



**Stanza 22**

85. For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,   
86. This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,   
87. Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,   
88. Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

*Note*

*General meaning*: These humble people, though they were doomed to be forgotten (*to dumb Forgetfulness a prey*), did not die (did not leave *the warm precincts of cheerful day*) without looking back with regret and perhaps a desire to linger a little longer .



**Stanza 23**

89. On some fond breast the parting soul relies,    
90. Some pious drops the closing eye requires;   
91. Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,   
92. Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

*Note*

*General meaning*: The dying person (*parting soul*) relies on a friend (*fond breast*) to supply the engraved words (*pious drops*) on a tombstone. Even from the tomb the spirit of a person cries out for remembrance.



**Stanza 24**

93. For thee [32], who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead   
94. Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;    
95. If chance, by lonely contemplation led,   
96. Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate [33],

*Notes*

(1) *For thee . . . relate*: Gray appears to be referring to himself. Mindful that the villagers deserve some sort of memorial, he is telling their story (*their artless tale*) in this elegy (*these lines*). (2) *Lines 95-96*: But what about Gray himself? What if someone asks about his fate? Gray provides the answer in the next stanza.



**Stanza 25**

97. Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,   
98. "Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn   
99. Brushing with hasty steps the dews away   
100. To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

*Notes*

(1) *Haply*: Perhaps; by chance; by accident. (2) *Hoary-headed swain*: Gray-haired country fellow; old man who lives in the region.



**Stanza 26**

101. "There at the foot of yonder nodding beech   
102. That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,   
103. His listless length at noontide would he stretch,   
104. And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

*Notes*

(1) *Nodding*: bending; bowing. (2) *Listless length*: his tired body. (3) *Pore upon*: Look at; watch.



**Stanza 27**

105. "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,   
106. Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he would rove,   
107. Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,   
108. Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

*Notes*

(1) *Wood, now smiling as in scorn*: personification comparing the forest to a person. (2) *Wayward fancies*: unpredictable, unexpected, or unwanted thoughts; capricious or flighty thoughts. (3) *Rove*: wander. (4) Craz'd . . . cross'd: alliteration.



**Stanza 28**

109. "One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,   
110. Along the heath and near his fav'rite tree;   
111. Another came; nor yet beside the rill,   
112. Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

*Notes*

(1) *Another came*: another morning came. (2) *Nor yet*: But he still was not. (3) Rill: small stream or brook.



**Stanza 29**

113. "The next with dirges due in sad array   
114. Slow thro' the church-way path we saw him borne.   
115. Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,   
116. Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

*Notes*

(1) *The next*: the next morning. (2) *Dirges*: funeral songs. (3) Lay: short poem—in this case, the epitaph below.

**4.The Epitaph**

117.  Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth   
118.  A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.    
119.  Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,    
120.  And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.    
121.  Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,    
122.  Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:    
123.  He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,    
124.  He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

125.  No farther seek his merits to disclose,    
126.  Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,    
127. (There they alike in trembling hope repose)    
128.  The bosom of his Father and his God.

*Note*

*General meaning*: Here lies a man of humble birth who did not know fortune or fame but who did become a scholar. Although he was depressed at times, he had a good life, was sensitive to the needs of others, and followed God's laws. Don't try to find out more about his good points or bad points, which are now with him in heaven. 

**Inversion**

.For poetic effect, Gray frequently uses inversion (reversal of the normal word order). Following are examples:

Line 6: And all the air a solemn stillness holds (all the air holds a solemn stillness)   
Line 14: Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap (Where the turf heaves)   
Line 24: Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share. (Or climb his knees to share the envied kiss)   
Line 79: With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd (deck'd with uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture)

**Syncope**

Omitting letters or sounds within a word.

Gray also frequently uses a commonplace poetic device known as syncope, the omission of letters or sounds within a word.

The lowing herd wind slowly **o'er** the lea (line 2)   
Now fades the **glimm'ring** landscape on the sight (line 5)   
Save that from yonder ivy-mantled **tow'r** (line 9)   
The swallow **twitt'ring**  from the straw-built shed (line 18)

**Figures of Speech**

..Following are examples of figures of speech in the poem.

**Alliteration**

Repetition of a Consonant Sound

The **p**lowman **h**omeward **p**lods **h**is **w**eary **w**ay (line 3)   
.   
The **c**ock's shrill **c**larion, or the e**c**hoing horn (line 19)   
.   
Nor cast one **l**onging, **l**ing'ring **l**ook behind? (line 88)   
.   
Now drooping, **w**oeful **w**an, like **o**ne forlorn (line 107)   
.   
Or **c**raz'd with **c**are, or **c**ross'd in hopeless love. (line 108)

Anaphora   
Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of word groups occurring one after the other

And **all that** beauty, **all that** wealth e'er gave (line 34)

**Their** name, **their** years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse (line 81)

**Ev'n** from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,   
**Ev'n** in our ashes live their wonted fires. (lines 91-92)

Metaphor   
Comparison between unlike things without using like, as, or than

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,   
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:   
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,   
And waste its sweetness on the desert air. (lines 53-56)   
**Comparison of the dead village people to gems and flowers**

Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride   
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame. (lines 71-72)   
**Comparison of flattering words to incense**

Metonymy   
Use of a word or phrase to suggest a related word or phrase

To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land   
**Land stands for people.**

Personification   
A form of metaphor that compares a thing to a person

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. (lines 29-32)   
**Ambition and Grandeur take on human characteristics.**

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page   
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll (line 49-50)   
**Notice that Knowledge becomes a person, a female.**

Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,    
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own. (lines 119-120)   
**Science and Melancholy become persons.**

.Scholars regard "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" as one of the greatest poems in the English language. It weaves structure, rhyme scheme, imagery and message into a brilliant tapestry that confers on Gray everlasting fame. The quality of its poetry and insights reach Shakespearean and Miltonian heights.

**5.Conclusion**

As a poet Gray was admired and influential out of all proportion to his ambitions and modest output of verse. The whole of his anthumously published poetry amounts to less than 1,000 lines. He was unquestionably one of the least productive and yet, besides William Collins (1721-1759), the predominant poetic figure of the middle decades of the 18th century, and an important reference point for the Romantic revival which was soon to come. Gray's poetry was strongly marked by the taste for sentiment controlled by classical ideals of restraint and composure that characterized the later Augustans, but prepared the way for the inward emotional exploration displayed by the Romantics of the 1790-1820 generation. He shows sensitive response to natural environment without the sense of organic union with human nature predominant in the later generation. Yet Gray was neither a half-hearted Augustan, nor a timid Romantic, he may rather be considered as the Classicist variant of the transition into the Romantic era. He combined traditional forms and poetic diction with new topics and modes of expression. He almost worshipped Dryden and loved Racine as heartily as Shakespeare. He valued polish and symmetry as highly as the school of Pope, and shared their taste for didactic reflection and for pompous personification. Yet he also shared the taste for sensibility, which found expression in the Romanticism of the following period. In poetry he was regarded as an innovator, for, like Collins, he revived the poetic diction of the past. The adverse judgements of Johnson (*Life of Gray* [27ff.]), Wordsworth (*Preface to Lyrical Ballads* [1802]) and others upon his work are, in fact, seldom more than a defence of current literary practice. Gray was in his own time a distinguished practitioner of poetic form, exemplified by his abandonment of the close discipline of the heroic couplet for the greater rhetorical freedom of his odes, a form nevertheless sanctioned by antiquity. A man of studious instincts, of a retiring and somewhat melancholy temperament, he nevertheless set his mark upon his age. And his one poem, the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", considered as *the* representative poem of its age, was to become a lasting contribution to the English heritage. It is no doubt thanks to the "Elegy" that Gray has been able to continuously attract the attention of literary scholarship. It has spared Gray the fate of many 18th-century poets falsely considered as "minor": if reception history is incomplete or ceases and an author drops out of informing the reception and interpretation of an age and other writers, he becomes a relic, a thing of another period altogether, and isolated from literary discourse.

It had been a lifetime of reading, of reflection, of essentially unsupervised and uncreative study and research in the academic seclusion of Cambridge, diversified only by little outward incident. Gray's favourite maxim was "to be employed is to be happy", and "to find oneself business is the great art of life." In pursuance of this end he made himself one of the best Greek scholars at Cambridge, and cultivated his fine taste in music, painting, prints, gardening and architecture. He was interested in metaphysics, criticism, morals, and politics, and his correspondence includes a wide survey of European history and culture, with criticisms of a fresh and modern cast.