

II BA ENGLISH

BRITISH LITERATURE – BEN31

(Prepared by MS. B.Poovilangothai, Assistant Professor, Thiruvalluvar University College of Arts and Science, Arakkonam)

UNIT I – Poetry

**Paradise Lost Book IV**

**Excerpt – lines 131-287**

So on he fares, and to the border comes,  
Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,  
Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green,  
As with a rural mound the champain head  
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairie sides  
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wilde,  
Access deni'd; and over head up grew  
Insuperable highth of loftiest shade,  
Cedar, and Pine, and Firr, and branching Palm,  
A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend  
Shade above shade, a woodie Theatre  
Of stateliest view. Yet higher then thir tops  
The verdurous wall of paradise up sprung:  
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large  
Into his neather Empire neighbouring round.  
And higher then that Wall a circling row  
Of goodliest Trees loaden with fairest Fruit,  
Blossoms and Fruits at once of golden hue  
Appeerd, with gay enameldcolours mixt:  
On which the Sun more glad impress'd his beams  
Then in fair Evening Cloud, or humid Bow,  
When God hath showrd the earth; so lovely seemd  
That Lantskip: And of pure now purer aire  
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires  
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive  
All sadness but despair: now gentle gales  
Fanning thir odoriferous wings dispense  
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole  
Those balmiespoiles. As when to them who saile

Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past  
Mozambic, off at Sea North-East windes blow  
Sabean Odours from the spicieshoare  
Of Arabie the blest, with such delay  
Well pleas'd they slack thir course, and many a League  
Chear'd with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles.  
So entertain'd those odorous sweets the Fiend  
Who came thir bane, though with them better pleas'd  
Then Asmodeus with the fishie fume,  
That drove him, though enamour'd, from the Spouse  
Of Tobits Son, and with a vengeance sent  
From Media post to Aegypt, there fast bound.

Now to th' ascent of that steep savage Hill  
Satan had journied on, pensive and slow;  
But further way found none, so thick entwin'd,  
As one continu'd brake, the undergrowth  
Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplex'd  
All path of Man or Beast that past that way:  
One Gate there only was, and that look'd East  
On th' other side: which when th' arch-fellon saw  
Due entrance he disdain'd, and in contempt,  
At one slight bound high over leap'd all bound  
Of Hill or highest Wall, and sheer within  
Lights on his feet. As when a prowling Wolfe,  
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,  
Watching where Shepherds pen thir Flocks at eeven  
In hurd'l'd Cotes amid the field secure,  
Leaps o're the fence with ease into the Fould:  
Or as a Thief bent to unhoord the cash  
Of some rich Burgher, whose substantial dores,  
Cross-barr'd and bolted fast, fear no assault,  
In at the window climbs, or o're the tiles;  
So clomb this first grand Thief into Gods Fould:  
So since into his Church lewd Hirelings climbe.  
Thence up he flew, and on the Tree of Life,  
The middle Tree and highest there that grew,  
Sat like a Cormorant; yet not true Life  
Thereby regain'd, but sat devising Death  
To them who liv'd; nor on the vertue thought  
Of that life-giving Plant, but only us'd

For prospect, what well us'd had bin the pledge  
Of immortality. So little knows  
Any, but God alone, to value right  
The good before him, but perverts best things  
To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use.  
Beneath him with new wonder now he views  
To all delight of human sense expos'd  
In narrow room Natures whole wealth, yea more,  
A Heav'n on Earth, for blissful Paradise  
Of God the Garden was, by him in the East  
Of Eden planted; Eden stretchd her Line  
From Auran Eastward to the Royal Towrs  
Of great Seleucia, built by Grecian Kings,  
Or where the Sons of Eden long before  
Dwelt in Telassar: in this pleasant soile  
His farr more pleasant Garden God ordaind;  
Out of the fertil ground he caus'd to grow  
All Trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste;  
And all amid them stood the Tree of Life,  
High eminent, blooming Ambrosial Fruit  
Of vegetable Gold; and next to Life  
Our Death the Tree of knowledge grew fast by,  
Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill.  
Southward through Eden went a River large,  
Nor chang'd his course, but through the shaggie hill  
Pass'd underneath ingulft, for God had thrown  
That Mountain as his Garden mould high rais'd  
Upon the rapid current, which through veins  
Of porous Earth with kindly thirst up drawn,  
Rose a fresh Fountain, and with many a rill  
Waterd the Garden; thence united fell  
Down the steep glade, and met the neather Flood,  
Which from his darksom passage now appeers,  
And now divided into four main Streams,  
Runs divers, wandring many a famous Realme  
And Country whereof here needs no account,  
But rather to tell how, if Art could tell,  
How from that Saphire Fount the crisped Brooks,  
Rowling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold,  
With mazie error under pendant shades  
Ran Nectar, visiting each plant, and fed

Flours worthy of Paradise which not nice Art  
In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon  
Powrd forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine,  
Both where the morning Sun first warmly smote  
The open field, and where the unpierc't shade  
Imbround the noontide Bows: Thus was this place,  
A happy rural seat of various view;  
Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gumms and Balme,  
Others whose fruit burnisht with Golden Rinde  
Hung amiable, Hesperian Fables true,  
If true, here only, and of delicious taste:  
Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks  
Grasing the tender herb, were interpos'd,  
Or palmiehilloc, or the flourie lap  
Of somirriguous Valley spred her store,  
Flours of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose:  
Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves  
Of coole recess, o're which the mantling vine  
Layes forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps  
Luxuriant; mean while murmuring waters fall  
Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,  
That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crownd,  
Her chrystal mirror holds, unite thir streams.  
The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,  
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune  
The trembling leaves, while Universal Pan  
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance  
Led on th' Eternal Spring. Not that faire field  
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flours  
Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie Dis  
Was gatherd, which cost Ceres all that pain  
To seek her through the world; nor that sweet Grove  
Of Daphne by Orontes, and th' inspir'd  
Castalian Spring, might with this Paradise  
Of Eden strive; nor that Nyseian Ile  
Girt with the River Triton, where old Cham,  
Whom Gentiles Ammon call and Lybian Jove,  
Hid Amalthea and her Florid Son  
Young Bacchus from his Stepdame Rhea's eye;  
Nor where Abassin Kings thir issue Guard,  
Mount Amara, though this by somsuppos'd

True Paradise under the Ethiop Line  
By Nilus head, enclosed with shining Rock,  
A whole days journey high, but wide remote  
From this Assyrian Garden, where the Fiend  
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind  
Of living Creatures new to sight and strange:

**Explanation:**

The excerpt (lines 131-287) describes the beauty of Eden gardens. Satan reaches paradise with the intention to make Adam and Eve disobey God. He stands at the gate and takes a good look at the garden. Paradise stands on a steep hill and is surrounded by wilderness. It is so high that anyone who looks at it will understand that they are not welcome there. There grew tall trees like cedar, pine, fir and branching palm. The enclosure of the garden had one set of greenery above the other. Over and above the enclosure of wild plants and trees appeared the walls of Paradise. It was covered with vine of all sort. Above that wall were seen trees with fruits of brilliant gold and other beautiful colours. Their colors were so bright and shiny that even the rainbow looked dull before them when the sun shined on them.

Then Satan comes to feel the pure air of the garden. The air is so pure that it is capable of driving away any negative feeling that anyone might have in their hearts except the feeling of despair. Milton states this exception with Satan in mind. Having banished to the underworld forever by God, all that Satan feels is hopelessness. The air also carried the sweet odors of the garden. Milton here compares the wind of Eden to the winds coming from Arabia. Traders who are travelling around Cape of Hope and Mozambique caught the wind coming from Saba filled with all the smell of the Arabia. They change plans and go to Arabia to buy the spices. In the same fashion, Satan smells the wind. Here Milton uses the story of Asmodeus to tell us beforehand that Satan will not be successful in his mission. Like Asmodeus was driven away from Sara by Tobias with the help of the angels, Satan will also be driven away by Gabriel.

Satan takes his tour of the garden slowly and observing it closely. There is no gap or space for any human or animal to break into the garden. He finds only one gate looking towards the east. Satan ignores the entrance and leaps over the huge enclosures and lands inside the garden. Milton here compares his act with that of a wolf. Like the wolf which keeps watch of the herd of sheep comes stealthily in the night to take his prey, Satan had leaped over the gates and enclosures of the garden with the intention to corrupt Adam and Eve. Satan is like a thief breaking into the house of a wealthy person at night even though the doors of the house are barred. Milton gives another comparison here which shows his righteousness and disdain for corruption. He compares Satan's entry into the garden with that of the entry of those into the church with only ambition in mind.

Satan like a thief enters the garden and sat on the Tree of Life in the form of a cormorant. Sitting on the Tree of Life, Satan is plotting of death. He doesn't understand anything about the

Tree of Life. Only God knows the true value of the tree. Satan is a person who will refuse to the good in front of him. All he can do is to pervert the truth "To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use".

From the top of the Tree of Life, he takes a good look at the garden. The garden is a Heaven on Earth. Eden stretched from Auran lands in the East to the Royal Towers of Seleucia somewhere near Babylon to Telassar which is a country believed to be near Assyria. Milton having established the location of Eden goes on to describe the virtues of the Tree of life and the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. The Tree of knowledge is also called "Our Death" by Milton. He says "Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill. "

In the southern side of Eden ran a large river which on reaching a hill, instead of changing the direction of its flow, went underneath and emerged in the opposite side and joined a fresh fountain which was watering a mountain garden. The entire region was one of nature's bounty beyond human comprehension. After this garden with mountains and beautiful flowers with nectar was a region which was shady. The lights found it difficult to pierce into the region there. This place contained many trees with sweet odours emanating from them and with golden fruits. This place looked as if the Hesperian fables had come true. This place contained flowers of all colours and the rose bushes here didn't have thorns.

On the other sides were "Grots and Caves" which provided cool shade. There were vines covering the area. In addition, the place has a waterfall which fell down and became a lake. The banks of the lake is crowned with myrtle. Birds were singing happily. The place looked as if it universal nature, the God of the shepherds pan has filled the whole of earth with spring eternally. The three sister Gods of merriment, Graces danced there. When compared to this place, the garden of Enna where Prosperine, daughter of Ceres was gathering flower when she was taken to the underworld by Dis and the beautiful grove Daphne near the river Orontes and the Castilian spring which was used for divination by the priestess of Apollo are nothing. The place could not be compared even to the Nyseian Island where Old Cham, the fourth son of Noah hid his mistress Amalthea and her son Baccchus to guard her from the jealousy of Rhea his wife. Even Mount Amara where the Abassin kings hid their children which was also called paradise can meet the beauty of Eden.

Satan looked at all these beauty with no happiness at heart. Milton says "the Fiend/Saw undelighted all delight". Milton might have said this because having banished to hell Satan could never feel happiness in his heart.

### **Summary of Book IV**

Satan lands atop Mount Niphates, just north of Paradise, the Garden of Eden. He becomes gripped with doubt about the task in front of him; seeing the beauty and innocence of Earth has reminded him of what he once was. He even briefly considers whether he could be forgiven if he repented. But Hell follows him wherever he goes—Satan is actually the embodiment of Hell.

If he asks the Father for forgiveness, he knows it would be a false confession; he reasons that if he returned to Heaven, he still could not bear to bow down. Knowing redemption or salvation cannot be granted to him, he resolves to continue to commit acts of sin and evil. He does not notice that during his internal debate, he has inadvertently revealed his devilish nature. He is observed by Uriel, the archangel he tricked into pointing the way. Uriel notices his conflicting facial expressions, and since all cherubs have permanent looks of joy on their faces, Uriel concludes that Satan cannot be a cherub.

Satan now approaches Eden, which is surrounded by a great thicket wall. He easily leaps over it like a wolf entering a sheep's pen. Inside he sees an idyllic world, with all varieties of animals and trees. He can see the tallest of the trees, the Tree of Life—and next to it, the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. He perches himself on the Tree of Life, disguised as a cormorant, a large sea bird. Finally, he notices two creatures walking erect among the other animals. They walk naked without shame, and work pleasantly, tending the garden. Satan's pain and envy intensifies as he sees this new beautiful race, created after he and his legions fell. He could have loved them, but now, his damnation will be revenged through their destruction. He continues to watch them, and the man, Adam, speaks. He tells Eve not to complain of the work they have to do but to be obedient to God, since God has given them so many blessings, and only one constraint: they must not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Eve agrees wholeheartedly, and they embrace.

Eve tells Adam of her first awakening as she came to life and how she wondered who and where she was. She found a river and followed it upstream to its source. Her path led to a clear, smooth lake, and Eve looked into the lake, seeing an image in its surface, which she soon discovers is her own. She hears a voice explaining to her that she was made out of Adam, and with him she will become the mother of the human race. Overlooking Adam and Eve, Satan sees his opportunity. If the Father has given them a rule to follow, then they might be persuaded to break it. He leaves the two for a while, going off to learn more from other angels. Meanwhile, Uriel comes before the Archangel Gabriel, at the gate of Eden, and tells him about the shape-changing spirit that he saw from the hilltop. They both suspect that it might be one of the fallen ones. Gabriel promises that if the spirit is in the garden, they will find it by morning. Around this time, Adam and Eve finish their day's work. They go to their leafy bower, praising God and each other for their blissful life, and after a short prayer, they lie together—making love without sin, because lust had not yet tainted their natures.

Night falls, and Gabriel sends search parties into the Garden. Two of his angels find Satan, disguised as a toad, whispering into the ear of Eve as she sleeps. They pull him before Gabriel, who recognizes him, and demands to know what he is doing in Paradise. Satan at first feigns innocence, as they have no proof that he means harm. But Gabriel knows him to be a liar, and threatens to drag him back to Hell. Enraged by this threat, Satan prepares to fight him. The two square off for a decisive battle, but a sign from Heaven—the appearance in the sky of a pair of

golden scales—stops them. Satan recognizes the sign as meaning he could not win, and flies off.

### Analysis

As Book IV opens, Milton presents Satan as a character deeply affected by envy and despair. Earlier in the poem, Satan seems perfectly confident in his rebellion and evil plans. His feeling of despair at the beauty of Paradise temporarily impairs this confidence. While in Hell, Satan tells himself that his mind could make its own Heaven out of Hell, but now he realizes that the reverse is true. As close to Heaven as he is, he cannot help but feel out of place, because he brings Hell with him wherever he goes. For Satan, Hell is not simply a place, but rather a state of mind brought on by a lack of connection with God. Satan's despondent recognition of this fact corresponds with what Milton sees as the worst sin of all: despair. If even this beautiful new world cannot make Satan forget Hell, then he can never hope to seek forgiveness and return to Heaven. As the Bible says, the one sin that cannot be forgiven is despairing of forgiveness; if one cannot even ask for mercy, it cannot be granted. Satan realizes this, and decides that the only course of action is to enjoy his own wickedness, and pursue it with all his strength. Milton preempts the crucial question of whether Satan could have successfully repented back in Book III. There, God said that he would give grace to humankind because Satan would prompt humankind's sin. But he would not help the fallen angels, and especially Satan, because their sin came out of themselves and from no other source.

Satan's continuing process of degradation is reflected in his use of progressively despicable, lowly disguises. Through these first three books of *Paradise Lost*, Satan's physical presence takes many different forms. In Book I, he is a monumental figure so large that the largest tree would seem a paltry wand in his hand. In Book III, he disguises himself as a cherub, but his inner turmoil ultimately ruins this benign-seeming appearance. Satan is later described as leaping over Eden's fence like a wolf into a sheep's pen. While he does not exactly take the form of a wolf, he continues to be compared to and associated with wild, predatory animals. He takes the shape of a bird atop the Tree of Life, then morphs into a toad to whisper temptation into Eve's ear. Satan's shapes become progressively less impressive and stately. Once an imposing figure, he shrinks himself to become a lesser angel, then a mere bird, and finally a much less appealing animal: a toad.

In this book, we are presented with Eve's first memories of awakening to consciousness, though we have to wait until Book VIII to see Adam's first memories. Eve's account subtly underscores her distance from God and need for guidance. She awakens in shade rather than daylight, suggesting her separation from the light of God's truth. Almost immediately, she finds herself captivated and deceived by an image—her reflection in the water, which she does not recognize as merely an image. She admits that she would probably still be by the water's edge, fixated there in vain desire, if it wasn't for God's calling her away. This image recalls the story of



Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a story that Renaissance poets such as Petrarch used to show that erotic desire is based on visual images that are inherently vain and deceptive.

Milton's allusion to Narcissus makes a similar point: human beings, especially women, need God's help to escape the trap of desire based on images. Significantly, it is the voice rather than the visual image of God that calls her away. Also noteworthy in this context is the fact that in his first speech to Eve, God says that Eve is herself an image—the reflection of Adam.

After God leads Eve away from her reflection, she first encounters Adam under a platan tree. Platan is the Greek name for plane tree, and by giving the name of the tree in Greek rather than English, Milton alludes to Plato, the Greek philosopher, whose name is etymologically linked with that of the plane tree. The most well-known of Plato's arguments is the thesis that reality consists of ideal forms that can only be perceived by the intellect, in contrast with the deceptive shades or reflections of these ideal forms that human beings perceive in everyday life. Milton associates the platan tree, or Plato, with Adam, suggesting that he is closer to the ideal forms or essences of things, whereas Eve is more part of the world of images, shade, and illusion, and is led away from illusions only reluctantly.

Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve was controversial in his time. Milton paints an idyllic picture of an innocent, strong, and intelligent Adam, whereas Christian tradition more typically emphasizes Adam's basically sinful nature. The Puritans, like many other Christians, viewed the sexual act as inherently sinful—a necessary evil that cannot be avoided precisely because man has fallen. Milton, in contrast, makes a point of noting that Adam and Eve enjoy pure, virtuous sexual pleasure without sin: they love, but do not lust. Milton implies that not only is sex not evil, but that demonizing it goes against God's will. He persuasively argues that God mandates procreation, and that anyone who would advocate complete abstinence (as St. Paul does in the New Testament) would be an enemy to God and God's magnificent creation. Furthermore, Eve's story about seeing her reflection in the water hints that her vanity may become a serious flaw—and weakness—later on. Her curiosity is sparked by her lack of understanding about who she is and where she is. She traces the river back to its source just as she wishes to trace herself to her source, through emotional self-reflection, in search of answers to her difficult questions. Also, her willingness to listen and believe the voice she hears, which tells her about her identity, also foreshadows that she will trust another voice she will hear later—Satan's.

Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve is controversial in our own time because the discourse between Adam and Eve strikes many modern audiences as misogynistic. Milton portrays Adam as her superior because he has a closer relationship to God. The idea that Adam was created to serve God only, and Eve is created to serve both God and Adam, illustrates Milton's belief that women were created to serve men. The narrator remarks of Adam and Eve that their difference in quality was apparent—"their sex not equal seemed" (IV.296). Milton implies that she is weaker in mind as well as body than Adam. Eve herself freely admits her secondary and subordinate role. When she explains her dependence on him she explains to Adam that she is created because of him and is lost without him. Having Eve herself possess and verbalize these misogynistic, submissive views adds a peculiar and somewhat disturbing power to the conversation. Milton's views on the relations between men and women were certainly

common, if not dogmatic, in his time. Milton's reading of the Bible dictated that in marriage the woman is to obey the man, and that he is her ruler. The relationship between Adam and Eve, though unequal, remains perfectly happy, because they both in the end live in praise of God. Eve accepts her role as Adam does his own, and God loves both equally.

### **Plot overview of Paradise Lost**

Milton's speaker begins *Paradise Lost* by stating that his subject will be Adam and Eve's disobedience and fall from grace. He invokes a heavenly muse and asks for help in relating his ambitious story and God's plan for humankind. The action begins with Satan and his fellow rebel angels who are found chained to a lake of fire in Hell. They quickly free themselves and fly to land, where they discover minerals and construct Pandemonium, which will be their meeting place. Inside Pandemonium, the rebel angels, who are now devils, debate whether they should begin another war with God. Bezelbub suggests that they attempt to corrupt God's beloved new creation, humankind. Satan agrees, and volunteers to go himself. As he prepares to leave Hell, he is met at the gates by his children, Sin and Death, who follow him and build a bridge between Hell and Earth.

In Heaven, God orders the angels together for a council of their own. He tells them of Satan's intentions, and the Son volunteers himself to make the sacrifice for humankind. Meanwhile, Satan travels through Night and Chaos and finds Earth. He disguises himself as a cherub to get past the Archangel Uriel, who stands guard at the sun. He tells Uriel that he wishes to see and praise God's glorious creation, and Uriel assents. Satan then lands on Earth and takes a moment to reflect. Seeing the splendor of Paradise brings him pain rather than pleasure. He reaffirms his decision to make evil his good, and continue to commit crimes against God. Satan leaps over Paradise's wall, takes the form of a cormorant (a large bird), and perches himself atop the Tree of Life. Looking down at Satan from his post, Uriel notices the volatile emotions reflected in the face of this so-called cherub and warns the other angels that an impostor is in their midst. The other angels agree to search the Garden for intruders.

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve tend the Garden, carefully obeying God's supreme order not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. After a long day of work, they return to their bower and rest. There, Satan takes the form of a toad and whispers into Eve's ear. Gabriel, the angel set to guard Paradise, finds Satan there and orders him to leave. Satan prepares to battle Gabriel, but God makes a sign appear in the sky—the golden scales of justice—and Satan scurries away. Eve awakes and tells Adam about a dream she had, in which an angel tempted her to eat from the forbidden tree. Worried about his creation, God sends Raphael down to Earth to teach Adam and Eve of the dangers they face with Satan.

Raphael arrives on Earth and eats a meal with Adam and Eve. Raphael relates the story of Satan's envy over the Son's appointment as God's second-in-command. Satan gathered other angels together who were also angry to hear this news, and together they plotted a war against God. Abdiel decides not to join Satan's army and returns to God. The angels then begin to fight, with Michael and Gabriel serving as co-leaders for Heaven's army. The battle lasts two days, when God sends the Son to end the war and deliver Satan and his rebel angels to Hell. Raphael tells Adam about Satan's evil motives to corrupt them, and warns Adam to watch out for Satan. Adam asks Raphael to tell him the story of creation. Raphael tells Adam that God sent the Son into Chaos to create the universe. He created the earth and stars and other planets. Curious, Adam asks Raphael about the movement of the stars and planets. Eve retires, allowing Raphael and Adam to speak alone. Raphael promptly warns Adam about his seemingly unquenchable search for knowledge. Raphael tells Adam that he will learn all he needs to know, and that any other knowledge is not meant for humans to comprehend. Adam tells Raphael about his first memories, of waking up and wondering who he was, what he was, and where he was. Adam says that God spoke to him and told him many things, including his order not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. After the story, Adam confesses to Raphael his intense physical attraction to Eve. Raphael reminds Adam that he must love Eve more purely and spiritually. With this final bit of advice, Raphael leaves Earth and returns to Heaven.

Eight days after his banishment, Satan returns to Paradise. After closely studying the animals of Paradise, he chooses to take the form of the serpent. Meanwhile, Eve suggests to Adam that they work separately for awhile, so they can get more work done. Adam is hesitant but then assents. Satan searches for Eve and is delighted to find her alone. In the form of a serpent, he talks to Eve and compliments her on her beauty and godliness. She is amazed to find an animal that can speak. She asks how he learned to speak, and he tells her that it was by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. He tells Eve that God actually wants her and Adam to eat from the tree, and that his order is merely a test of their courage. She is hesitant at first but then reaches for a fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and eats. She becomes distraught and searches for Adam. Adam has been busy making a wreath of flowers for Eve. When Eve finds Adam, he drops the wreath and is horrified to find that Eve has eaten from the forbidden tree. Knowing that she has fallen, he decides that he would rather be fallen with her than remain pure and lose her. So he eats from the fruit as well. Adam looks at Eve in a new way, and together they turn to lust. God immediately knows of their disobedience. He tells the angels in Heaven that Adam and Eve must be punished, but with a display of both justice and mercy. He sends the Son to give out the punishments. The Son first punishes the serpent whose body Satan took, and condemns it never to walk upright again. Then the Son tells Adam and Eve that they must now suffer pain and death. Eve and all women must suffer the pain of childbirth and must submit to their husbands, and Adam and all men must hunt and grow their own food on a depleted Earth. Meanwhile, Satan returns to Hell where he is greeted with cheers. He speaks to the devils in Pandemonium, and everyone believes that he has beaten God. Sin and Death travel the bridge

they built on their way to Earth. Shortly thereafter, the devils unwillingly transform into snakes and try to reach fruit from imaginary trees that shrivel and turn to dust as they reach them.

God tells the angels to transform the Earth. After the fall, humankind must suffer hot and cold seasons instead of the consistent temperatures before the fall. On Earth, Adam and Eve fear their approaching doom. They blame each other for their disobedience and become increasingly angry at one another. In a fit of rage, Adam wonders why God ever created Eve. Eve begs Adam not to abandon her. She tells him that they can survive by loving each other. She accepts the blame because she has disobeyed both God and Adam. She ponders suicide. Adam, moved by her speech, forbids her from taking her own life. He remembers their punishment and believes that they can enact revenge on Satan by remaining obedient to God. Together they pray to God and repent.

God hears their prayers, and sends Michael down to Earth. Michael arrives on Earth, and tells them that they must leave Paradise. But before they leave, Michael puts Eve to sleep and takes Adam up onto the highest hill, where he shows him a vision of humankind's future. Adam sees the sins of his children, and his children's children, and his first vision of death. Horrified, he asks Michael if there is any alternative to death. Generations to follow continue to sin by lust, greed, envy, and pride. They kill each other selfishly and live only for pleasure. Then Michael shows him the vision of Enoch, who is saved by God as his warring peers attempt to kill him. Adam also sees the story of Noah and his family, whose virtue allows them to be chosen to survive the flood that kills all other humans. Adam feels remorse for death and happiness for humankind's redemption. Next is the vision of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel. This story explains the perversion of pure language into the many languages that are spoken on Earth today. Adam sees the triumph of Moses and the Israelites, and then glimpses the Son's sacrifice to save humankind. After this vision, it is time for Adam and Eve to leave Paradise. Eve awakes and tells Adam that she had a very interesting and educating dream. Led by Michael, Adam and Eve slowly and woefully leave Paradise hand in hand into a new world.

### **Life of Milton**

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, in London. Milton's father was a prosperous merchant, despite the fact that he had been disowned by his family when he converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. Milton excelled in school, and went on to study privately in his twenties and thirties. In 1638 he made a trip to Italy, studying in Florence, Siena, and Rome, but felt obliged to return home upon the outbreak of civil war in England, in 1639. Upon his return from Italy, he began planning an epic poem, the first ever written in English. These plans were delayed by his marriage to Mary Powell and her subsequent desertion of him. In reaction to these events, Milton wrote a series of pamphlets calling for more leniency in the church's position on divorce. His argument brought him both greater publicity and angry criticism from

the religious establishment in England. When the Second Civil War ended in 1648, with King Charles dethroned and executed, Milton welcomed the new parliament and wrote pamphlets in its support. After serving for a few years in a civil position, he retired briefly to his house in Westminster because his eyesight was failing. By 1652 he was completely blind.

Despite his disability, Milton reentered civil service under the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the military general who ruled the British Isles from 1653 to 1658. Two years after Cromwell's death, Milton's worst fears were realized—the Restoration brought Charles II back to the throne, and the poet had to go into hiding to escape execution. However, he had already begun work on the great English epic which he had planned so long before: *Paradise Lost*. Now he had the opportunity to work on it in earnest. It was published in 1667, a year after the Great Fire of London. The greatness of Milton's epic was immediately recognized, and the admiring comments of the respected poets John Dryden and Andrew Marvell helped restore Milton to favor. He spent the ensuing years at his residence in Bunhill, still writing prolifically. Milton died at home on November 8, 1674. By all accounts, Milton led a studious and quiet life from his youth up until his death.

### **Education**

Thanks to his father's wealth, young Milton got the best education money could buy. He had a private tutor as a youngster. As a young teenager he attended the prestigious St. Paul's Cathedral School. After he excelled at St. Paul's he entered college at Christ's College at Cambridge University. At the latter, he made quite a name for himself with his prodigious writing, publishing several essays and poems to high acclaim. After graduating with his master's degree in 1632, Milton was once again accommodated by his father. He was allowed to take over the family's estate near Windsor and pursue a quiet life of study. He spent 1632 to 1638—his mid to late twenties—reading the classics in Greek and Latin and learning new theories in mathematics and music.

Milton became fluent in many foreign and classical languages, including Italian, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, and spoke some Dutch as well. His knowledge of most of these languages was immense and precocious. He wrote sonnets in Italian as a teenager. While a student at Cambridge, he was invited in his second year to address the first year students in a speech written entirely in Latin.

After Cambridge, Milton continued a quiet life of study well through his twenties. By the age of thirty, Milton had made himself into one of the most brilliant minds of England, and one of the most ambitious poets it had ever produced.

## Early Works

In his twenties, Milton wrote five masterful long poems, each of them influential and important in its own separate way: “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” “Comus,” “Lycidas,” “Il Penseroso,” and “L’Allegro.” Through these poems, Milton honed his skills at writing narrative, dramatic, elegiac, philosophical, and lyrical poetry. He had built a firm poetic foundation through his intense study of languages, philosophy, and politics, and fused it with his uncanny sense of tone and diction. Even in these early poems, Milton’s literary output was guided by his faith in God. Milton believed that all poetry served a social, philosophical, and religious purpose. He thought that poetry should glorify God, promote religious values, enlighten readers, and help people to become better Christians.

Aside from his poetic successes, Milton was also a prolific writer of essays and pamphlets. These prose writings did not bring Milton public acclaim. In fact, since his essays and pamphlets argued against the established views of most of England, Milton was even the object of threats. Nevertheless, he continued to form the basis for his political and theological beliefs in the form of essays and pamphlets.

## Politics

Milton’s political ideals are expressed in the many pamphlets he wrote during his lifetime. He championed the absolute freedom of the individual—perhaps because he had been so often betrayed by the institutions in which he put his trust. His distrust of institutions was accompanied by his belief that power corrupts human beings. He distrusted anyone who could claim power over anyone else, and believed that rulers should have to prove their right to lead other people.

Milton was an activist in his middle years, fighting for human rights and against the rule of England’s leaders, whom he believed were inept. Knowing he was not a fighter, he demonstrated his activism by writing lengthy, rhetorical pamphlets that thoroughly and rigorously argue for his point of view. Although he championed liberty and fought against authority throughout his career, in theory he believed in a strict social and political hierarchy in which people would obey their leaders and leaders serve their people. He believed that leaders should be leaders because they are better and more fit to rule than their subjects. But despite these rigid views of authority, Milton believed that the social hierarchy that actually existed in his day was extremely corrupt, and he directly challenged the rule of Charles I, the king of England during much of Milton’s lifetime. Milton argued that Charles was not, in fact, fit to lead his subjects because he did not possess superior faculties or virtues.

## Religion

In his later years, Milton came to view all organized Christian churches, whether Anglican, Catholic or Presbyterian, as an obstacle to true faith. He felt that the individual and his conscience (or “right reason”) was a much more powerful tool in interpreting the Word of God than the example set by a church. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton expresses the idea that Adam and Eve’s fall from grace was actually fortunate, because it gives individual human beings the opportunity to redeem themselves by true repentance and faith. The importance of remaining strong in one’s personal religious convictions, particularly in the face of widespread condemnation, is a major theme in the later Books of *Paradise Lost*, as Michael shows Adam the vision of Enoch and Noah, two followers of God who risk death to stand up for him. *Paradise Lost* also presents a number of Protestant Christian positions: the union of the Old and New Testaments, the unworthiness of mankind, and the importance of Christ’s love in man’s salvation. Nonetheless, the poem does not present a unified, cohesive theory of Christian theology, nor does it attempt to identify disbelievers, redefine Christianity, or replace the Bible. Instead, Milton’s epic stands as a remarkable presentation of biblical stories meant to engage Christian readers and help them to be better Christians.

## Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

THOMAS GRAY

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

Now fades the glimm'ring 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,  
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,

And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone

    Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;  
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,  
    And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

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

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

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

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

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'erresign'd,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
    Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

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

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead  
    Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;  
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,  
    Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE EPITAPH

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
    A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,  
    And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
    Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,  
    He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

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

## Thomas Gray (1716-1771)

Thomas Gray was one of the most important poets of the eighteenth century. This scholar and poet was the most famous for his poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Thomas Gray was born on December 26, 1716 in London. He was the only child in his family of eight to survive infancy. His father was Philip Gray, a scrivener and exchange broker who treated his wife with extreme cruelty. As a result, Dorothy Antrobus Gray left him several times. It was Gray's mother who saw to her son's education, running a millinery business to earn money for Gray's education. At the age of eight, he was sent to Eton College where her brothers, Robert and William Antrobus, were teaching. (Eton College is neither public nor a college but a prep school for wealthy boys who expected to go to Cambridge or Oxford.)

Eton gave him companionship with other boys, especially with ones who had the same interests, such as books and poetry, as he did. It was here where he and his three friends—Horace Walpole, later the architect of Strawberry Hill and inventor of the Gothic novel as well as the son of England's prime minister; Thomas Ashton; and Richard West, son of Ireland's lord chancellor and grandson of the famous Bishop Burnet--formed the 'Quadruple Alliance' which would play an important part in his adult life, and many scholars now believe that it was in this environment that he first realized he was gay.

### Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Gray worked on this poem from 1742 to 1750. Like *Lycidas*, it is a memorial to actual people, but a reflection on much more. In the poem, Gray makes the point that there is inherent nobility in all people, but that difficult circumstances prevent those talents from being manifested. He speculates about the potential leaders, poets, and musicians who may have died in obscurity and been buried there. At various stages of composition, the poem had several different endings. Critics do not agree about the merits of the differing versions. Some critics approve of the additional lines; others spoke of the new stanzas and the epitaph as "a tin kettle tied to the poem's tail. The poem now ends with the epitaph which sums up the poet's own life and beliefs.

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
A Youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy marked him for her own.

Beginning with the eighth of the alternately rhymed decasyllabic quatrains, Gray contrasts the simplicity and virtue of the stalwart English yeomanry of the past with the vain, boastful present. The ambitious of the growing age of industrialism should not mock their "useful toil," nor cloud over their "homely joys," nor hear a recitation of their "short and simple annals" with disdain. The lesson that their humble graveyard teaches is that whether life is blessedly simple, as it was for these rustics, or adorned with "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,/ And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave," the fact is that "the inevitable hour" awaits. To be sure,

the grave is the terminus of the "paths of glory," but for the paths of the humble as well. The fact that no impressive memorials marked their resting places, nor "pealing anthems" of funerals in "long-drawn aisle and fretted vault" does not matter. These displays of earth's glories make their honorees no less dead:

Can storied urn or animated bust,  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?"

Gray then conjectures what losses may have occurred to art and science because these rural folk never could avail themselves of the opportunities that those of greater advantage could. Perhaps a would-be clergyman, with "heart once pregnant with celestial fire," or a potential great political leader with hands "the rod of empire might have sway'd," or poet who might have "wak'd to extasy the living lyre" lies in the cemetery. But their careers were stanch'd by the dual forces of ignorance and poverty. Knowledge did not reveal to them "her ample page" laden with the "rich with the spoils of time," while "chill penury" disabled their creative spirits. As a result, their geniuses went to the grave unblossomed, just as (in a reference to *Lycidas*)

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;  
Full many a flower is born to lush unseen  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

With a sense of futility, Gray notes that all life's endeavors, whether positive or negative, are rendered useless by the shadow of the tomb. To be sure, some "village Hampden" (that is, a benefactor of the people) or "mute inglorious Milton" may have been stifled by rural poverty and inaccessibility, but likewise a potential dictator (Gray was a Tory) such as Cromwell may have been saved from shedding "his country's blood." Here is the poetic consolation, not only for the dead but the living, conservative poet; destiny has shut off from them the very avenues of advancement associated with the oligarchy of 18th century England, so that none of their rank will ever be glutted with "th' applause of listening senates," nor will they ever read their histories in the chronicles of the nation. Gray's Tory position, then, used here almost to justify their poverty, is that destiny confined not only their "growing virtues" but "their crimes confin'd" as well. From their ranks no one will "wade through slaughter to a throne," or open eyes of mercy on humankind. In the most often quoted (or misquoted) line in the poem, Gray says that their aspirations never deviated very much from the quietude that lies "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." Instead, they adhered to the "cool sequester'd vale of life."

Turning his attention to the unsophisticated memorial stones in the cemetery, Gray notes the "uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculptures" which call from the sentimental passerby the "passing tribute of a sigh." The scriptural texts which adorn them "teach the moralist to die," yet even these simple memorials call for us, the living, to see that we still share in their

humanity: "Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,/ Ev'n in our ashes live their wanted fires."

In the conclusion of the poem, Gray recognizes that as he contemplates the efforts, hapless as they may be, of these rustics to insure some kind of earthly immortality through their tombstones, he is giving voice to his own impulse toward immortality. Neoclassical decorum demands, however, that he remove himself from the poetic expression; therefore, he conjures up a persona, one who "mindful of the unhonor'd dead" did their "artful tale relate." And "hoary-headed swain" will tell the "kindred spirit" passer-by that this poet could in times past be seen meeting the sun at early dawning, wandering through the forests and by the brook all day: "Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,/ Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love." But mortality claimed him at last. The passer-by is asked to read the epitaph of this "youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown." The stressing of both human knowledge and piety suggests Gray's own image of himself. "Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,/ And Melancholy mark'd him for her own." Large in kindness as well as holiness, this self-projection of the poet lies (as eventually Gray would be buried beside his mother in the Stokes Poges churchyard) trusting not in human endeavor but in "the bosom of his Father and his God." In such terms, he agrees with both Pope in *The Essay on Man* and Johnson in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.

Many critics point out how the poem conveys so perfectly what others have always felt. Its reflections on fame, obscurity, ambition, and destiny tend to sound as if they have always been written in stone. Samuel Johnson said, "I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them." If you remember Pope's definition of **wit** in *The Essay on Criticism* ("What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed,"), Gray's *Elegy* is the perfect example of neoclassic wit in action. In many ways, the poem has become the representative poem of its age. It is still one of the most popular and best-loved poems in the English language.

In 1734 he entered Peterhouse College, Cambridge University, where he studied for four years. He decided not to take a degree; instead, he decided to go on and study law at the Inner Temple in London. He made a Grand Tour of the continent with Walpole (who paid all the expenses) in 1739. The two had a falling out, for reasons that are not known, and Gray concluded the tour alone and returned to London in September 1741. He was not reconciled with Walpole until 1745. After Gray's return from the Continental tour, his father died. His mother, aunt, and he moved to the village of Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire.

When his best friend, Richard West, died of tuberculosis at the age of 24 in 1742, Gray wrote his first important English poems: the "Ode on Spring," "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," "Hymn to Adversity." (See "Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West," Longman p. 2682). Here too he began his greatest masterpiece, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." It was these poems that solidified his reputation although the total published work in his lifetime was very small-- a little less than 1,000 lines, but those are considered to be perfect technical accomplishments.

In October of 1742, Gray returned to Peterhouse College, Cambridge, as a Fellow-commoner (a student not pursuing a degree). In December of 1743, he took the degree of Bachelor of Civil Law (LL.B.) at Cambridge but never practiced. He remained at Cambridge, and tolerated it only because it had libraries to study Greek. He wrote and rewrote but was never satisfied; as a result, he left most of his work unfinished. The *Internet Public Library* notes that Gray wrote poetry in unpredictable bursts of activity. He said, "Whenever the humour takes me, I will write, because I like it; and because I like myself better when I do. If I do not write much, it is because I cannot." Gray was always reluctant to publish his works; had Walpole not printed some of them privately, many of the greatest poems in English literature would never have seen publication. His travel writings, however, became very popular and were very influential on Austen and the Romantics.

He was often with his mother and aunt at Stoke Poges. He traveled a great deal to London and to other parts of England, Scotland and Wales after his mother's death on March 11, 1753. On her tomb, he wrote that she was "the tender careful mother of many children: one of whom had the misfortune to survive her." When the British Museum (now the British Library) was opened to the public in 1759, he spent two years working in the great library. In 1762 he applied for the Regius Professorship of Modern History at Cambridge but only got the position (in 1768) because the successful candidate was killed. Although he was made professor of history at Cambridge, he never delivered any public lectures.

His health was always frail. At 55, Gray suffered a violent attack of gout and died in his rooms at Peterhouse on July 30, 1771. He was buried beside his beloved mother at Stoke Poges churchyard, the scene of the "Elegy". (The village of Stoke Poges has erected quite a memorial to Gray in honor of the poem.)

The Thomas Gray Archive has annotated online editions of the 14 poems published during Gray's lifetime, as well as biographical information and links to secondary criticism.

### **His Poetry**

Literary historians usually identify Gray with a literary movement called **sensibility**. Where earlier neoclassical poets like Swift and Pope emphasized the rational powers of human beings, poets of sensibility turned their attention to the individual's capacity for sympathetic and empathetic emotional response. (Consider, for instance, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, where rational and emotional approaches to life are so well contrasted.) The ability of the individual to respond with intense feeling to a scene or a subject is the primary interest of poems of sensibility. They want to evoke an emotional response from the reader: whereas neoclassical poets try to teach their readers how to think, poets of sensibility try to teach their readers how to feel. Again there is that need for moral instruction through literature, but the means of reaching the reader are different.

As we have noted, in the eighteenth century, the audience for literary works had broadened considerably, so poets tended to choose subjects that would appeal to the largest possible

audience. In order to do this, they tended to favor the "general truths" of "nature", "human nature", and the English countryside. Poets of sensibility, therefore, tried to write poetry that would offend no one by avoiding direct commentary on the divisive issues of class conflict, religious strife, and the political world. But we should always remember that this avoidance suggests just how unsettled life in England was at this time: the more poets insist that their work "transcends" politics and history, the more unsettled their world is likely to be.

The English countryside was one of the most popular subjects of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry for precisely this reason: the nationalism that poets used it to evoke tends to transcend class, religious, and political divisions. The England that we know today was not, of course, Gray's or Pope's England. It was, for example, only one generation removed from a century of bloody civil wars of succession and religion that saw the execution of one king and the deposition of another. The educated English audience, therefore, could be expected to enjoy poetry that offered an escape from these issues. In response to the ever-changing social world, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English poets increasingly defined their work as "art" that transcends historical change. As a result, as the eighteenth century unfolds, English poetry comes to sound increasingly personal: poets use "public private voices" that base their claims to authority on their capacity for authentic emotional response.

Many elements of Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* indicate their place in the tradition of sensibility. Gray writes these poems in first person, but unlike Pope, he does not speak to a specific listener. Instead, he writes **dramatic monologues**—in other words, extended soliloquies, in poetry rather than in drama. The poems ask us to imagine that we, as readers, overhear the speaker talking to himself and reflecting on the scene before him: they ask us to believe that we listen in on the speaker's private thoughts. As you read these poems, think about the relationship between form and content: how do they comment, fairly explicitly, on political or generic issues while claiming to represent the speaker's stream-of-consciousness?

Gray is regarded by many as a "pre-Romantic" because his poetry signals a shift from the characteristics of the Augustan age with its public focus, heroic couplets, and satire to the Romantic age with its focus on private thoughts, lyrical poems with alternating rhyme schemes, and exploration of the self. In the 18th century, art was regarded as artifice, thus the popularity of ornate, flowery language. The Romantics wanted art not to be so artificial. Gray's poems reveal the characteristics of both literary periods. For example, in "Eton College," Gray describes the young boys swimming in the Thames river with the line: "And cleave with pliant arm, Thy glassy wave," a style very much in keeping with the 18th century. Gray uses this poetic diction to establish his credibility because the language sets a certain decorum and appropriateness which his audience and critics would expect. Yet, these elite gestures are contradicted by a respect for the poor. He can fashion a poem that focuses uncharacteristically for his age on the poor and on the internal thoughts of the poet. It has been said that the Romantics discovered the poor; Gray comes pretty close. He further separates himself from Neoclassical poetry with his metrical innovation—he abandons the **heroic couplet** for metrically irregular and inventive stanza forms.



One of the most profound assumptions that Gray contributes to the study of literature is the notion that poets are not simply those who produce poems. For Gray, it involved having a certain sensitivity, whether the poet ever wrote or not. In other words, a poet was simply a certain kind of person. It has been said that for the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "heard melodies" are sweet; whereas for the Romantics, it is the "unheard melodies" that are best. Gray is best understood as a transitional figure between the two periods.

## 'The Tyger'

**William Blake (1757-1827)**

TygerTyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

William Blake (1757 – 1827) is poet, painter and print maker. Though he was largely unrecognized during his life time, today he is chiefly remembered as a pre-romantic poet. Beginning in the 1740s pre-romanticism marked a shift from the Neo-classical “grandeur, austerity, nobility, idealization, and elevated sentiments towards simpler, more sincere, and more natural forms of expression.” The poem “Tyger” stands as the most appropriate example of pre-romantic poetry.

The poem is written in six short stanzas of four lines each. Of these, the sixth stanza is a repetition of the first stanza. It follows an end rhyme pattern of aabb, ccdd... The chief emotion aroused by the poem is wonder, and the object of wonder is a single animal tiger. All these factors make it the best example of pre-romantic simplicity and anticipates the poems of the romantic age.

“The Tyger” appeared in the collection Songs of Experience published in the year 1794. It is often contrasted with “The Lamb” another poem by Blake which appeared in the collection Songs of Innocence (1789). ‘The Tyger’ is arguably the most famous poem written by Blake. The poem’s opening line, ‘TygerTyger, burning bright’ is among the most famous opening lines in English poetry.

Framed as a series of questions, ‘Tyger Tyger, burning bright’ (as the poem is also often known), in summary, sees Blake’s speaker wondering about the creator responsible for such a fearsome creature as the tiger. The fiery imagery used throughout the poem conjures the tiger’s aura of danger: fire equates to fear. Don’t get too close to the tiger, Blake’s poem seems to say, otherwise you’ll get burnt.

The first stanza and sixth stanza, alike in every respect except for the shift from ‘Could frame’ to ‘Dare frame’, frame the poem, asking about the immortal creator responsible for the beast. The second stanza continues the fire imagery established by the image of the tiger ‘burning bright’, with talk of ‘the fire’ of the creature’s eyes, and the notion of the creator fashioning the tiger out of pure fire, as if he (or He) had reached his hand into the fire and moulded the creature from it. (The image succeeds, of course, because of the flame-like appearance of a tiger’s stripes.) It must have been a god who played with fire who made the tiger.

In the third and fourth stanzas, Blake introduces another central metaphor, explicitly drawing a comparison between God and a blacksmith. It is as if the Creator made the blacksmith in his forge, hammering the base materials into the living and breathing ferocious creature which now walks the earth.

The fifth stanza is more puzzling, but ‘stars’ have long been associated with human destiny (as the root of ‘astrology’ highlights). For Kathleen Raine, this stanza can be linked with another of William Blake’s works, The Four Zoas, where the phrase which we also find in ‘The Tyger’, ‘the stars threw down their spears’, also appears. There it is the godlike creator of the universe (Urizen in Blake’s mythology) who utters it; Urizen’s fall, and the fall of the stars and planets, are what brought about the creation of life on Earth in Blake’s Creation story. When the Creator fashioned the Tyger, Blake asks, did he look with pride upon the animal he had created?

How might we analyse 'The Tyger'? What does it mean? The broader point is one that many Christian believers have had to grapple with: if God is all-loving, why did he make such a fearsome and dangerous animal? We can't easily fit the tiger into the 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' view of Christian creation. As Blake himself asks, 'Did he who made the Lamb make thee?' In other words, did God make the gentle and meek animals, but also the destructive and ferocious ones? Presumably the question is rhetorical; the real question-behind-the-question is why. (This might help to explain Blake's reference to 'fearful symmetry': he is describing not only the remarkable patterns on the tiger's skin and fur which humans have learned to go in fear of, but the 'symmetry' between the innocent lamb on the one hand and the fearsome tiger on the other. ('Fearful' means 'fearsome' here, confusingly.)

Indeed, we might take such an analysis further and see the duality between the lamb and the tiger as being specifically about the two versions of God in Christianity: the vengeful and punitive Old Testament God, Yahweh, and the meek and forgiving God presented in the New Testament. What bolsters such an interpretation is the long-established associations between the lamb and Jesus Christ. The tiger, whilst not a biblical animal, embodies the violent retribution and awesome might of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

But none of these readings quite settles down into incontrovertible fact. 'The Tyger' remains, like the creature itself, an enigma, a fearsome and elusive beast.