**Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard**

 BY 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'er resign'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.

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard is a poem by Thomas Gray, completed in 1750 and first published in 1751.[1] The poem's origins are unknown, but it was partly inspired by Gray's thoughts following the death of the poet Richard West in 1742. Originally titled Stanzas Wrote in a Country Church-Yard, the poem was completed when Gray was living near St Giles' parish church at Stoke Poges. It was sent to his friend Horace Walpole, who popularised the poem among London literary circles. Gray was eventually forced to publish the work on 15 February 1751 in order to preempt a magazine publisher from printing an unlicensed copy of the poem.

The poem is an elegy in name but not in form; it employs a style similar to that of contemporary odes, but it embodies a meditation on death, and remembrance after death. The poem argues that the remembrance can be good and bad, and the narrator finds comfort in pondering the lives of the obscure rustics buried in the churchyard. The two versions of the poem, Stanzas and Elegy, approach death differently; the first contains a stoic response to death, but the final version contains an epitaph which serves to repress the narrator's fear of dying.

Claimed as "probably still today the best-known and best-loved poem in English",[2] the Elegy quickly became popular. It was printed many times and in a variety of formats, translated into many languages, and praised by critics even after Gray's other poetry had fallen out of favour. But while many have continued to commend its language and universal aspects, some have felt that the ending is unconvincing – failing to resolve the questions raised by the poem in a way helpful to the obscure rustic poor who form its central image.

**Background**

Gray's life was surrounded by loss and death, and many people whom he knew died painfully and alone. In 1749, several events occurred that caused Gray stress. On 7 November, Mary Antrobus, Gray's aunt, died; her death devastated his family. The loss was compounded a few days later by news that his friend since childhood[3] Horace Walpole had been almost killed by two highwaymen.[4] Although Walpole survived and later joked about the event, the incident disrupted Gray's ability to pursue his scholarship.[5] The events dampened the mood that Christmas, and Antrobus's death was ever fresh in the minds of the Gray family. As a side effect, the events caused Gray to spend much of his time contemplating his own mortality. As he began to contemplate various aspects of mortality, he combined his desire to determine a view of order and progress present in the Classical world with aspects of his own life. With spring nearing, Gray questioned if his own life would enter into a sort of rebirth cycle or, should he die, if there would be anyone to remember him. Gray's meditations during spring 1750 turned to how individuals' reputations would survive. Eventually, Gray remembered some lines of poetry that he composed in 1742 following the death of West, a poet he knew. Using that previous material, he began to compose a poem that would serve as an answer to the various questions he was pondering.

**Composition**

The poem most likely originated in the poetry that Gray composed in 1742. William Mason, in Memoirs, discussed his friend Gray and the origins of Elegy: "I am inclined to believe that the Elegy in a Country Church-yard was begun, if not concluded, at this time [August 1742] also: Though I am aware that as it stands at present, the conclusion is of a later date; how that was originally I shall show in my notes on the poem."[16] Mason's argument was a guess, but he argued that one of Gray's poems from the Eton Manuscript, a copy of Gray's handwritten poems owned by Eton College, was a 22-stanza rough draft of the Elegy called "Stanza's Wrote in a Country Church-Yard". The manuscript copy contained many ideas which were reworked and revised as he attempted to work out the ideas that would later form the Elegy. A later copy was entered into Gray's commonplace book and a third version, included in an 18 December 1750 letter, was sent to Thomas Wharton. The draft sent to Walpole was subsequently lost.[17]

**Genre**

The poem is not a conventional part of the Classical genre of Theocritan elegy, because it does not mourn an individual. The use of "elegy" is related to the poem relying on the concept of lacrimae rerum, or disquiet regarding the human condition. The poem lacks many standard features of the elegy: an invocation, mourners, flowers, and shepherds. The theme does not emphasise loss as do other elegies, and its natural setting is not a primary component of its theme. Through the "Epitaph" at the end, it can be included in the tradition as a memorial poem,[23] and it contains thematic elements of the elegiac genre, especially mourning.[24] But as compared to a poem recording personal loss such as John Milton's "Lycidas", it lacks many of the ornamental aspects found in that poem. Gray's is natural, whereas Milton's is more artificially designed.

Poem

The poem begins in a churchyard with a speaker who is describing his surroundings in vivid detail. The speaker emphasises both aural and visual sensations as he examines the area in relation to himself:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

 The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,

 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,

 And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,

 And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r

 The moping owl does to the moon complain

Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,

 Molest her ancient solitary reign.[34]

— lines 1–12

As the poem continues, the speaker begins to focus less on the countryside and more on his immediate surroundings. His descriptions move from sensations to his own thoughts as he begins to emphasise what is not present in the scene; he contrasts an obscure country life with a life that is remembered. This contemplation provokes the speaker's thoughts on the natural process of wastage and unfulfilled potential.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene

 The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:

Full many a flower 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 history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone

 Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;

Forbade to wade thro' 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.[36]

— lines 53–72

The speaker focuses on the inequities that come from death, obscuring individuals, while he begins to resign himself to his own inevitable fate. As the poem ends, the speaker begins to deal with death in a direct manner as he discusses how humans desire to be remembered. As the speaker does so, the poem shifts and the first speaker is replaced by a second who describes the death of the first:[37]

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.["][38]

— lines 93–100

The poem concludes with a description of the poet's grave, over which the speaker is meditating, together with a description of the end of the poet's life.

**Q1. Write a critical appreciation of Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."**

That Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is a powerful and poignant poem is evinced in its immediate success, as well as in the many imitations of this work. In fact, Samuel Johnson declared Thomas Gray the man who wrote the English poem most loved by "the common reader."

Gray felt that "the language of the age is never the language of poetry." Yet, although he uses archaic diction and distorted syntax at times, Gray's elegy balances Latinate phrases with current English expressions. Moreover, thematically it touches a common humanity that all readers can share. Johnson, who did not care for Gray's poetry, recognized this elegy as one that would last forever:

The churchyard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo.

In the neo-classical form of an elegiac poem, Gray expresses his individual estimate of the world using eloquent classical diction. The verses carry a lofty tone and are composed of heroic quatrains (four lines of iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme abab). The neo-classical use of personification abounds in this formal work, as well, as in the following stanza, which also exemplifies Gray's lofty tone:

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.

What lends the poem its beauty and poignancy is the moving expression of thought and emotion that is purely Romantic, as it touches upon Nature and sympathy for the unknown in the graveyard. The idea that

Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,

 And froze the genial current of the soul

is a poignant one, indeed, as Gray raises the implicit question of social class at a time when ideas of equality were exceptional. Also, the sentiment of remembrance for the "unhonored dead" who have waged battles of their own but their "lot forbade" their renown is brightened by the Romantic notion that Nature and the Eternal provide hope after death, as the soul reposes in "The bosom of His Father and his God."

This line about the bosom of God is the last of the elegy's epitaph. Traditionally, this elegy has begun solemnly with the poet's lament, but ends with an insight that enables the poet to cope with the loss he senses.

**Q2. What are some figures of speech in Thomas Gray's poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"?**

Figures of speech in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" include personification, as when the "moping owl" is described "complain[ing]" to the moon, and metaphor, as seen in the description of a grave as a "narrow cell."

There are numerous figures of speech to be found in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

A figure of speech is simply a literary device used to intensify imagery and heighten the effect of the writing. In this poem, Gray is particularly dedicated to the use of personification, which we first see in the description of the "moping owl" which issues a "complain[t]" to the moon. Personification is a form of metaphor in which human characteristics are attributed to something which is not human; here, Gray is imagining feelings and motivations for the owl, which in all probability, are not really there.

Later in the poem, we see personification used far more extensively to depict various abstract ideas, such as Honour, Knowledge, and Penury. When describing the old men of the "hamlet" who lie sleeping in the churchyard, Gray conjures the image of memory raising (or rather, failing to raise) "trophies" over their tombs. This is a vivid use of personification, as it encourages the...

**Q3. What is Gray's attitude toward death in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard?"**

Thomas Gray's “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” presents death as a physical finality that can rob its victims of their potential and also as a universal experience that happens to everyone. Finally, death is an escape from pain and an entry into Heaven.

In “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” Thomas Gray reflects on several different aspects of death. First, he notes the physical finality of it. The people buried in the churchyard will no longer rise “from their lowly bed.” They have been cut off from their daily lives. Women will no longer perform their duties around the house. Children and parents will no longer exchange kisses. Farmers will no longer till the soil or harvest their crops. Death has ended all of that.

Death has also robbed the people buried in the churchyard of their potential. Perhaps someone lying there had a heart filled “with celestial fire” that was never expressed in poetry. Perhaps another might have ruled an empire or composed wonderful music. Death has prevented that. But on the other hand, death may also have prevented another cruel tyrant from walking the earth and bringing pain and slaughter. This would be a more positive aspect of death.

Q4. What do you think prompts the speaker to start thinking about his own death? For the first twenty or so stanzas, he's cheerfully thinking about the dead villagers. What shifts, and why?

Q5. Why do you think Gray uses so much personification? Why?

Q6. If this is an "Elegy," or a poem of mourning, who or what is it mourning? How do you know?

Q7. Why do you think Gray insisted so much on the fact that it's a country churchyard? Would the poem be different if it were set in a city? How so?

Summary

Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” presents the omniscient speaker who talks to the reader. First, he stands alone in a graveyard deep in thought. While there, he thinks about the dead people buried there. The graveyard referred to here is the graveyard of the church in Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire. The speaker contemplates the end of human life throughout the poem. He remarks on the inevitability of death that every individual has to face.

Besides mourning the loss of someone, the speaker in the elegy reminds the reader that all people will die one day. Death is an unavoidable and natural thing in everyone’s life. When one dies today, tomorrow, a stranger will see the person’s tombstone. Out of curiosity, he will ask about the person buried there to a villager. The villager will reply that he knew the man. He would add that he had seen him in various spots. Sometimes, he will also remark that he had stopped seeing the man one day, and then there was the tombstone.

In the poem, Gray, the poet himself, writes the epitaph of his own. He says that his life is full of sadness and depression. However, he feels proud of his knowledge. He calls it incomparable. In addition to this, he says that ‘No one is perfect in this world.’ So, he asks the reader not to judge anyone in the graveyard. Each and every soul is different and takes rest for eternity in the graveyard. In conclusion, the poet, through the speaker, ends the elegy by saying that death is an inevitable event in this world. Also, he says that man’s efforts and his struggles to succeed in life comes to an end in death. Thus, death conquers man regardless of his successes and/or failures in his endeavors during his life.

**Analysis of Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard**

Stanzas 1 – 4

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.

As it opens, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” begins with the description of the evening in a rural place. The evening church bell tells the passing of the day. Cattle bleed as they turn homewards. Tired farmers also follow. Darkness begins to cover the world. The speaker, that is, the poet is standing in a graveyard. All is quiet and. Only the beadle buzzes and the owl hoots. Among a group of elm trees, there is the graveyard. It belongs to the village. There are burials of the villagers’ ancestors in the graveyard.

Stanzas 5 – 8

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.

In these stanzas of “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” the poet goes on to talk about the people buried in the graveyard. They are sleeping in beds that are low to the ground. No sound can wake them up. The twittering of the swallow, the morning call of the cock, even a horn cannot wake them. Their wives and their children, nobody care for them anymore. They were hard-working men when they were alive. Their plowing, their harvesting, and their farming, all were efficient. The speaker asks not to look down upon their simple life and hard work. Ambitious people think of village life as simple. But the villagers had their joy and sorrow much like others.

Stanzas 9 – 12

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.

Also, the poet says that the poor are not inferior to the rich in death. Invariably, every human life ends in death. The beauty, the wealth, the glory all lead to the unavoidable end. The villager’s grave does not have the grandness in ceremonies and tombstones. But, none of that can bring a person back to life. So, there is no use of them. One should remember that no one knew that one of the dead villagers may have achieved greatness in life. Therefore, there may be a ruler or a poet buried in there.

Stanzas 13 – 16

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,

In these stanzas, the poet remarks, the villagers who were dead would also have talent. There might be a Milton or a Cromwell buried there. They did not get opportunities to prove themselves. Like gems hidden deep under the ocean and like desert flowers, they have perished without notice. Given opportunities, they would have also succeeded. People would have read their deeds in history.

Stanzas 17 – 20

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.

To put the content of these stanzas in a nutshell, the villagers did not wish to involve in treachery and deceit. They were honest people and wished to lead simple lives. So, they kept themselves away from the mad crowd of the cities and kingdoms. They were true to themselves. They liked peace and honesty. But still, there were markings to note their memory. The tombstones were simple. The language was ordinary. But, there is truth in their memory.

Stanzas 21 – 24

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’er resign’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,

The dead villagers rest in the graveyard without recognition. Also, this poem will be a tribute to them. They lived their lives with morals. They died in the care of a loving person. And, they closed their eyes with prayers in one’s eyes. One day, a kind soul may come and enquire after the dead one out of curiosity.

Stanzas 25 – 29

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;

If someone asks about the poet who rests in the graveyard, one of the villagers may talk about him. A free-spirited man was the poet. He went to the mountains in the morning, stood under the beach tree sometimes. Then, he went to the brook. Besides, he was sometimes muttering his fancies. The villager would say that he missed seeing the man one day. The poet was missing. The villager did not see him in his usual places. But, he saw the funeral procession and how the man was buried in the graveyard

Stanzas 30 – 33

“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.

In this part of the poem, he says that his epitaph would read thus: Here lies the young man who was not popular. His life was full of sorrow. Knowledge was his only wealth. He gave his life to misery and all he longed was for a friend to support. One need not look away to know about him. All that he did lies with him, close to god in the lap of earth.

**Themes**

The poem, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”, speaks of ordinary people. It is an elegy for poor villagers. They are not famous but they are honest. So, the poet has written this poem in honoring them. The poem talks about death as an equalizer. Rich or poor should end in death. Moreover, no man can escape death. In death, all are equal. Besides, nothing including any amount of rich or glory can bring the dead to life. Even poor people deserve respect for their death. Given opportunities, they would have become great men in their times.

**Setting**

As far as the setting and mood go, the time is evening and every living being on earth is retiring for the night. As the poem opens, the speaker is seen at the churchyard; he hears the usual evening sounds. The church bell is ringing. The shepherds and their cattle are returning home after the day’s work. The location is rural. The atmosphere is subdued and melancholic. Darkness and silence fill the place except for the hooting of the owl, the buzz of the beetle, and the ringing of the bells. Regardless of all this gloom, the speaker stands in the middle of tombstones in the graveyard. And while there, he imagines the lives of the dead people who silently sleep there.

**Form and Style**

The poem “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” consists of 33 stanzas. Each stanza has four lines. As an elegy, this poem mourns the death of ordinary men. In this poem, Gray talks about the death and the lives of the middle-class people, the poem follows all the conventions of the elegiac tradition. Scholars look at this poem as a representative piece of literature for the genre of elegy.

To begin with, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” has heroic quatrains as stanzas. Four lines with iambic pentameter constitute each stanza. A pentameter consists of ten syllables. Also, the first and the third lines rhyme at the ending; the second and the fourth lines rhyme at the ending of each stanza. Secondly, the rhyming scheme is abab, cdcd, efef, … Thirdly and most importantly, the poem follows the conventions of an elegy. There is a pastoral setting; however, there are no pastoral characters. The poem ends in the poet’s own epitaph. In addition to its great content, the poem has beautifully executed figures of speech in the stanza that talks about ‘hidden gems’ and ‘desert flowers’.

**The Pleasures of the Imagination**

Pleasures Of Imagination. Spectator. No. 411, June 21, 1712.

Avia Pieridum peragro loca, nullius ante

Trita solo; juvat integros accedere fonteis;

Atque haurire:—3

I travel unpathed haunts of the Pierides,

Trodden by step of none before. I joy

To come on undefiled fountains there,

To drain them deep.

—Lucretius, De reum Natura, I, 926-8

OUR sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses. It fills the mind with the largest variety of ideas, converses with its objects at the greatest distance, and continues the longest in action without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments. The sense of feeling can indeed give us a notion of extension, shape, and all other ideas that enter at the eye, except colours; but at the same time it is very much straitened and confined in its operations, to the number, bulk, and distance of its particular objects. Our sight seems designed to supply all these defects, and may be considered as a more delicate and diffusive kind of touch, that spreads itself over an infinite multitude of bodies, comprehends the largest figures, and brings into our reach some of the most remote parts of the universe.

It is this sense which furnishes the imagination with its ideas; so that by the pleasures of the imagination, or fancy, (which I shall use promiscuously), I here mean such as arise from visible objects , either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion. We cannot, indeed, have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight ; but we have the power of retaining, altering, and compounding those images, which we have once received, into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination ; for by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature.

There are few words in the English language which are employed in a more loose and uncircumscribed sense than those of the fancy and the imagination. I therefore thought it necessary to fix and determine the notion of these two words, as I intend to make use of them in the thread of my following speculations, that the reader may conceive rightly what is the subject which I proceed upon. I must therefore desire him to remember, that by the pleasures of the imagination, I mean only such pleasures as arise originally from sight, and that I divide these pleasures into two kinds my design being first of all to discourse of those primary pleasures of the imagination, which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes; and in the next place to speak of those secondary pleasures of the imagination which flow from the ideas of visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious.

The pleasures of the imagination, taken in their full extent, are not so gross as those of sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding. The last are, indeed, more preferable, because they are founded on some new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man; yet it must be confessed, that those of the imagination are as great and as transporting as the other. A beautiful prospect delights the soul, as much as a demonstration; and a description in Homer has charmed more readers than a chapter in Aristotle. Besides, the pleasures of the imagination have this advantage above those of the understanding, that they are more obvious, and more easy to be acquired. It is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. The colours paint themselves on the fancy, with very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of anything we see, and immediately assent to the beauty of an object, without inquiring into the particular causes and occasions of it.

A man of polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable companion in a statue. He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude, uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasures: so that he looks upon the world, as it were in another light, and discovers in it a multitude of charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind.

There are, indeed, but very few who know how to be idle and innocent, or have a relish of any pleasures that are not criminal: every diversion they take is at the expense of some one virtue or another, and their very first step out of business is into vice or folly. A man should endeavour, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with safety, and find in them such a satisfaction as a wise man would not blush to take. Of this nature are those of the imagination, which do not require such a bent of thought as is necessary to our more serious employments, nor, at the same time, suffer the mind to sink into that negligence and remissness, which are apt to accompany our more sensual delights, but, like a gentle exercise to the faculties, awaken them from sloth and idleness, without putting them upon any labour or difficulty.

We might here add, that the pleasures of the fancy are more conducive to health, than those of the understanding, which are worked out by dint of thinking, and attended with too violent a labour of the brain. Delightful scenes, whether in nature, painting, or poetry, have a kindly influence on the body, as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination, but are able to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the animal spirits in pleasing and agreeable motions. For this reason Sir Francis Bacon, in his Essay upon Health, has not thought it improper to prescribe to his reader a poem or a prospect, where he particularly dissuades him from knotty and subtile disquisitions, and advises him to pursue studies that fill the mind with splendid and illustrious objects, as histories, fables, and contemplations of nature.

**Questions:**

**1. How does Addison distinguish among the pleasures of the imagination,**

**the pleasures of the senses, and the pleasures of the understanding?**

**2. Clarify Addison’s distinction among pleasures of the imagination, of**

**sense, and of the understanding. Which of these is the most refined and**

**which the least refined?**

**3. Describe the salutary effects mentioned by Addison of the imaginative**

**pleasures ultimately arising from the perception of light and color.**

**4. What qualities of objects in the world does Addison discus which occasion the pleasures of the imagination?**

**5. What two main kinds of beauty does Addison describe and what is their**

**origins?**

**6. What does he think is a final cause of æsthetic pleasure? Why does he**

**think the Supreme Being created mankind with the capacity for experiencing pleasures of the imagination?**

**7. How does Addison relate the beauty of art to the beauty of nature? Why**

**does he think the artistic beauty inferior to that of nature even though**

**natural beauty embodies æsthetic principles?**

**She Stoops to Conquer**

**BOOK - Oliver Goldsmith CATEGORY - Play**

**NUMBER OF ACTS - 5 FIRST PRODUCED -1773**

**GENRES - Comedy, Parody, Satire SETTINGS - Period, Multiple Settings**

**TIME & PLACE - England, 1770s**

**IDEAL FOR - College/University, Professional Theatre, Regional Theatre**

**CASTING NOTES**

**Mostly Male Cast - Includes Adult, Young Adult, Mature Adult Characters**

**SYNOPSIS**

One of the eighteenth-century’s most enduring comedies, She Stoops to Conquer takes a comedic, often farcical, look at the behavior and marital expectations of the upper classes in England at this time. The play centers around the desire of Hardcastle, a wealthy landowner in the country, for his daughter, Kate Hardcastle, to marry the well-educated Charles Marlow. Together with Marlow’s father, Sir Charles Marlow, they arrange for the younger Marlow to visit the Hardcastle’s house and court Kate. However Kate is less than impressed when she finds out that, despite his otherwise strong, respectable character, Charles is extremely shy and reserved around ladies. She therefore vows to herself that she could never marry him. Before Charles and his friend, George Hastings, can arrive at the house, they are waylaid by Mr. Hardcastle’s stepson at the local alehouse. A mischievous joker, Tony Lumpkin persuades them that the Hardcastle’s house is, in fact, the local inn. Thus, when Marlow and Hastings arrive, Marlow treats the Hardcastle family with impudence and disrespect, falsely believing them to be servants there. In order to get to the bottom of his true character, Kate disguises herself as a maid and comedy ensues as Marlow makes love to the “maid” and disregards her father. Meanwhile, George Hastings is thrilled to find his true love, Constance Neville, living at the Hardcastle’s house. Through the scheming of Mrs. Hardcastle, she is due to marry Tony, despite their mutual dislike of each other. Finding a way to get out of his marriage, Tony helps Constance to retrieve her inheritance and gets his mother out of the way, dumping her in a local horsepond! Finally, as Marlow’s father arrives, all is put to right and Charles Marlow is mortified by his behavior. Forgiven by all, the two couples find happiness with each other, and Tony successfully gains his rightful inheritance without an unwanted engagement.

It was first produced in London in 1773, and was a massive success. It was reputed to have created an applause that was yet unseen in the London theatre, and almost immediately entered the repertory of respectable companies. Within a decade, it had traveled both throughout the European continent and to the United States.

This was particularly significant considering the lack of success Goldsmith had with his previous comedy, The Good-Natured Man. This play, which explores similar themes within the same "well-made play" frame, performed very poorly when first produced. There are many reasons for this: where She Stoops to Conquer feels natural, The Good-Natured Man can seem stagey and forced; the complicated plot is far less accessible than in She Stoops to Conquer; and the deliberate exploration of the conventions of "sentimental comedy" are less sharp in the earlier work.

However, what perhaps influenced Goldsmith most about its failure was the audience reaction to a scene of "low" behavior, in which the hero is accosted by buffoonish bailiffs. The near-universal disdain for the scene led it be cut from future performances, while the work of a colleague, Hugh Kelly's False Delicacy, was immensely popular. Owing to his jealous nature and disdain for genteel comedy, Goldsmith seems to have sworn he would avenge his loss with a hit play that skewered the very problems that he blamed for the failure of The Good-Natured Man. As time has proved, he accomplished his goal with She Stoops to Conquer.

Finally, the play is often published with a sub-title, as She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night. The sub-title was originally its working title, but perhaps due to evoking too strongly Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Goldsmith re-titled the play.

Sir Charles Marlow

The father of Young Marlow and friend of Hardcastle. A respectable and aristocratic fellow from the town who believes his son is of very modest character.

Marlow

Ostensibly the hero of a play. A respectable fellow who comes to Hardcastle's home to meet Kate Hardcastle. Possessed of a strange contradictory character, wherein he is mortified to speak to any "modest" woman, but is lively and excitable in conversation with barmaids or other low-class women.

Hardcastle

The patriarch of the Hardcastle family, and owner of the estate where the play is set. He despises the ways of the town, and is dedicated to the simplicity of country life and old-fashioned traditions.

Hastings

Friend of Marlow's, and lover of Constance Neville. A decent fellow who is willing to marry Constance even without her money.

Tony Lumpkin

Son of Mrs. Hardcastle from an earlier marriage, and known for his free-wheeling ways of drinking and tomfoolery. Loves to play practical jokes. Proves to be good-natured and kind despite his superficial disdain for everyone. His mother wants him to marry Constance but he is set against the idea.

Diggory

Hardcastle's head servant.

Mrs. Hardcastle

Matriarch of the Hardcastle family, most notable for her pronounced vanity. She coddles her son Tony, and wants him to marry her niece, Constance Neville.

Kate Hardcastle

Called "Miss Hardcastle" in the play. The heroine of the play, she is able to balance the "refined simplicity" of country life with the love of life associated with the town. She pretends to be a barmaid in order to judge her suitor Marlow's true character.

Constance Neville

Called "Miss Neville" in the play. Niece of Mrs. Hardcastle, an orphan whose only inheritance is a set of jewels in the care of her aunt. Her aunt wishes her to marry Tony Lumpkin, but Constance wants to marry Hastings.

Maid

Kate's servant. The woman who tells her that Marlow believed Kate to be a barmaid, which leads Kate towards her plan to stoop and conquer.

Landlord

Landlord of the Three Pigeons, who welcomes Marlow and Hastings, and helps Tony to play his trick on them.

Jeremy

Marlow's drunken servant. His drunken impertinence offends Hardcastle, which leads Hardcastle to order Marlow to leave.

Class

While the play is not explicitly a tract on class, the theme is central to it. The decisions the characters make and their perspectives on one another, are all largely based on what class they are a part of. Where Tony openly loves low-class people like the drunks in the Three Pigeons, Marlow must hide his love of low-class women from his father and “society.” His dynamic relationship with Kate (and the way he treats her) is defined by who he thinks she is at the time – from high-class Kate to a poor barmaid to a woman from good family but with no fortune. Hastings’ and Marlow’s reaction to Hardcastle is also a great example of the importance of class—they find him impudent and absurd, because they believe him to be of low class, but his behavior would be perfectly reasonable and expected from a member of the upper class, as he truly is.

Money

One of the factors that keeps the play pragmatic even when it veers close to contrivance and sentiment is the unavoidable importance of money. While some of the characters, like Marlow and Hardcastle, are mostly unconcerned with questions of money, there are several characters whose lives are largely defined by a lack of access to it. Constance cannot run away with Hastings because she worries about a life without her inheritance. When Marlow thinks Kate is a poor relation of the Hardcastles, he cannot get himself to propose because of her lack of dowry. And Tony seems to live a life unconcerned with wealth, although the implicit truth is that his dalliances are facilitated by having access to wealth.

Behavior/Appearance

One of the elements Goldsmith most skewers in his play's satirical moments is the aristocratic emphasis on behavior as a gauge of character. Even though we today believe that one's behavior – in terms of “low” versus “high” class behavior – does not necessarily indicate who someone is, many characters in the play are often blinded to a character's behavior because of an assumption. For instance, Marlow and Hastings treat Hardcastle cruelly because they think him the landlord of an inn, and are confused by his behavior, which seems forward. The same behavior would have seemed appropriately high-class if they hadn't been fooled by Tony. Throughout the play, characters (especially Marlow) assume they understand someone's behavior when what truly guides them is their assumption of the other character's class.

Moderation

Throughout the play runs a conflict between the refined attitudes of town and the simple behaviors of the country. The importance of this theme is underscored by the fact that it is the crux of the opening disagreement between Hardcastle and his wife. Where country characters like Hardcastle see town manners as pretentious, town characters like Marlow see country manners as bumpkinish. The best course of action is proposed through Kate, who is praised by Marlow as having a "refined simplicity." Having lived in town, she is able to appreciate the values of both sides of life and can find happiness in appreciating the contradictions that exist between them.

Contradiction

Most characters in the play want others to be simple to understand. This in many ways mirrors the expectations of an audience that Goldsmith wishes to mock. Where his characters are initially presented as comic types, he spends time throughout the play complicating them all by showing their contradictions. Most clear are the contradictions within Marlow, who is both refined and base. The final happy ending comes when the two oldest men – Hardcastle and Sir Charles – decide to accept the contradictions in their children. In a sense, this theme helps to understand Goldsmith's purpose in the play, reminding us that all people are worthy of being mocked because of their silly, base natures, and no one is above reproach.

Comedy

Though it is only explicitly referred to in the prologue, an understanding of Goldsmith's play in context shows his desire to reintroduce his audience to the “laughing comedy” that derived from a long history of comedy that mocks human vice. This type of comedy stands in contrast to the then-popular “sentimental comedy” that praised virtues and reinforced bourgeois mentality. Understanding Goldsmith's love of the former helps to clarify several elements of the play: the low scene in the Three Pigeons; the mockery of baseness in even the most high-bred characters; and the celebration of absurdity as a fact of human life.

Deceit/Trickery

Much of this play's comedy comes from the trickery played by various characters. The most important deceits come from Tony, including his lie about Hardcastle's home and his scheme of driving his mother and Constance around in circles. However, deceit also touches to the center of the play's more major themes. In a sense, the only reason anyone learns anything about their deep assumptions about class and behavior is because they are duped into seeing characters in different ways. This truth is most clear with Marlow and his shifting perspective on Kate, but it also is true for the Hardcastles and Sir Charles, who are able to see the contradictions in others because of what trickery engenders.

**She Stoops to Conquer Summary and Analysis of Prologue**

Summary

The prologue is attributed to David Garrick, Esq., a popular actor of his day. The basic premise of the prologue is that the comic arts are passing away, and that Dr. Goldsmith might prove the doctor, and She Stoops to Conquer the medicine, that will cease its death.

At the play's opening, Mr. Woodward enters and speaks a prologue. Woodward, a celebrated actor of his day and one who had turned down the role of Tony Lumpkin in the play's initial production, is drying his eyes as though he has been crying.

In verse, Woodward laments to the audience that "the Comic muse, long sick, is now a-dying!" As an actor trained in comedy, he intuits that his own career will pass away along with comedy itself, since he "can as soon speak Greek as sentiments!" Unable to tell moralistic, sentimental stories, he fears for the fate of himself and his brethren.

He attempts to tell a moral poem beginning with "All is gold that glitters," but performs poorly and stops himself. He offers one final hope for his problem – "a doctor [has come] this night to show his skill," perhaps to make the audience laugh through his five "draughts" of medicine (paralleling the five acts of the play). He urges the audience to accept the doctor's comic medicine willingly, to laugh heartily, and stresses that should the doctor's goal not be achieved, then they can hold it against him and deny him his fee.

Analysis

Though not written by Goldsmith, the play's prologue is useful in the way it provides insight into Goldsmith's purpose in the play. Obviously, the most explicit purpose is to make the audience laugh. The speaker – Mr. Woodward, who would have been portrayed by a different actor – comes out in mourning, already having been crying, which in a way poses a challenge to the play. If we, as actors and audience, are in a state of sadness, can the play lift our spirits?

However, most relevant is the state of affairs sculpted here. The prologue mirrors the trend in theatre that writers like Goldsmith were desperately trying to change. At the time of She Stoops to Conquer, popular theatre comedy was separated into what was commonly termed "sentimental comedy" and "laughing comedy." The former was concerned with bourgeois (middle-class) morality and with praising virtue. The latter, which dated back to the Greeks and Romans and through Shakespeare, was more willing to engage in “low” humor for the sake of mocking vice.

Woodward suggests that a certain class of actor (and by extension, then, audience and writer) were dying out as sentimental comedy became more popular. So Goldsmith's play has an extra purpose: it must rejuvenate the joy taken in “laughing comedy,” which could be willing to be more stupid, to dramatize base characters and characteristics, and to mock even the characters who profess to be moral.

1. Explain the meaning and significance of the title She Stoops to Conquer.

Even without reading the play, the irony of the title is obvious, since the "she" in question is lowering herself in order to prove herself superior. In context of the play, the title could be argued to refer both to Kate's plan to trap Marlow and to Goldsmith's purpose of using “low comedy” to convince his audience to embrace it. The former is a good description of the irony of Kate's plan: in order to convince herself she is a worthy match for Marlow, she has to first convince him she is of a low class. However, the title also describes Goldsmith's purpose: he wishes to convince an audience to embrace this “low” or “laughing” comedy, and by indulging in it, he might convince them that it is superior to “sentimental” comedy. Regardless of which description one uses, the irony of the title expresses Goldsmith's view of humanity: while we pretend to be of impeachable high class, we all have a “low,” base side that we should celebrate rather than try to ignore.

2. How is Kate an example of moderation? Explain how her personality stands as the way of life Goldsmith most recommends.

The play is organized into a series of conflicting philosophies: high-bred aristocrats vs. low-bred common folk; city life vs. country life; wealth vs. poverty, etc. Much of the absurdity that fuels Goldsmith's comedy comes from exploiting the way most people engage in contradictions even when they pretend to be examples of virtue. The best example is Marlow, and his bizarre contradictory attitudes towards women depending on their class. Kate stands at the center of most of these, and as such is the best depiction of Goldsmith's message. As a country girl who has spent time in town, she is an example of what Marlow calls "refined simplicity," and knowing as much as she does about humanity, is able to also enjoy and be amused by the contradictions rather than disgusted by them (as most of the elder characters are).

3. In what ways is Tony Lumpkin a hero in the play? Use historical/social detail to explain why this heroism is unconventional.

Tony Lumpkin would traditionally have been considered nothing but comic relief. Consider most Shakespeare plays, where the poor, common characters might have wisdom, but are primarily used to comedic effect, and are rarely engaged in the main plots. Tony is presented this way initially in She Stoops to Conquer, but we quickly see that there is a great wisdom to his lifestyle, which prizes enjoyment of life over heavy considerations of it. When his parents discuss the way to live in Act I, Tony takes off quickly for the Three Pigeons, where he sings a song that expresses a desire for true life rather than the hypocrisy of overly-educated or overly-religious lifestyles. Tony perhaps has more agency than any other character in the play, setting in motion the confusions that ultimately allow everyone to be happy. The message, of which Tony is the best representative, is that by engaging in the confusions and contradictions of human nature, we can find our best happiness.

4. For a comedy, She Stoops to Conquer has a serious vein of commentary of class. Explain.

In a traditional sentimental comedy, money would ultimately be shown to be irrelevant in the face of true love, so as to stress the characters’ virtue. Of course, the characters would have almost all been high-bred and money not a serious issue in their lives. In this play, there are characters, like Tony or Constance, who really do need money if they want a strong future. Even in what is perhaps the most cliché romantic subplot – that between Constance and Hastings – money becomes an inescapable force, and in the end they turn to the virtue of asking Hardcastle's permission not because of some innate virtue, but because they acknowledge that they will need money. In another way, Marlow's class contradictions are certainly meant to be amusing, but there is a serious criticism in the way that a class system has led him to despise what he enjoys. He considers himself inferior for his love of unpretentious women, and assumes that he ought to love a “modest” woman. Part of the lesson Kate teaches him is that the substance of a person is what matters, and not the way one gauges her behavior as high or low class.

5. How does the device of dramatic irony facilitate the play's major themes and comedy?

The play is a masterpiece of dramatic irony, which is a device where the audience has information and knowledge that the characters do not. From the moment Tony plays the practical joke on Marlow and Hastings, the audience learns secrets that will grow more complicated and hence create confusion that leads to hilarious situations. The best example is perhaps the way Marlow and Hastings treat Hardcastle, because they think him a landlord. Because we understand the details of the confusions, we understand the jokes whereas the characters only grow more offended. However, the behavior wrought by the dramatic irony reveals much of Goldsmith's view on humanity and class. The same example listed above is funny, but also shows the cruelty that comes from a rich man's entitlement. Throughout the play, much of the class commentary derives from the behaviors people show when they don’t' realize they are being judged. Kate exploits this to try and find out what kind of person Marlow actually is.

6. In what ways are the characters of the play comic archetypes? How does Goldsmith deepen these stock characters?

At the beginning of the play, it seems as though all the characters fall into traditional comic patterns. Hardcastle is the old curmudgeon who hates modern life, Mrs. Hardcastle a vain old lady, the young men are handsome heroes, Kate is the pretty young heroine, and Tony is the comic drunkard. Very quickly, Goldsmith explores the depth of class, money and human contradictions by putting those qualities in broader contexts. Hardcastle turns out to be not entirely incorrect about the impertinence of the young (which he discovers because of Tony's trick), but turns out to be forgiving. Mrs. Hardcastle is frankly never deepened, and stays who she is throughout. Hastings remains a valiant young man, but Marlow is obviously full of absurd contradictions very much connected to the very aristocratic virtue that seems to define him in the beginning. And Kate, of course, is perhaps the deepest and fullest character of all, not a simple heroine to be won by the young man.

7 Does the play's ending undercut Goldsmith's attempt to write a "low" and not "sentimental" comedy? Explain.

Mrs. Hardcastle perhaps speaks to Goldsmith's own concern over the ending when she remarks that "this is all but the whining end of a modern novel." It is clear from both the prologue and his "Essay on the Theatre" that he wishes to write a play that mocks vice rather than praises virtue. And yet the ending of the play finds not only all the characters ending up happy, but happy because of very clear-cut lessons. In a way, even the most grievous characters (like Marlow, whose contradictions lead him to some rather unsavory behavior) are forgiven for their vices. However, one can argue that Goldsmith provides an entertaining end for his audience while not diving fully into the conventions. For one, Constance and Hastings's realization about the necessity of money adds a pragmatic reality to the otherwise sentimental end. Further, the play's end does not suggest that the absurd contradictions of humanity will go away, which could lead to the belief that such problems will never go away, even if the play wraps up nicely within its five acts.

8 Define what "town" and "country" mean in the context of this play, using characters as examples.

There is a strong conflict between town and country set up from the very opening of the play, when Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle argue about the virtues and vices of town and country. The town is associated with several elements: wealth and pretension, education, style, and in the broadest sense, living life for itself. The country is associated with simplicity and a slower, more considered way of life. The characters who come from town are certainly to be admired, and would be by Goldsmith's audience. And yet they are shown to have serious faults, particularly in terms of their pretensions and cruelty towards Hardcastle when they think he is a landlord and not their host. Likewise, while the theatre audience at the time would probably consider the country characters to be overly simple, there is a great kindness revealed in the way Hardcastle is willing to forgive everyone despite how he is treated. The best character overall is Kate, who shows a moderation in her way to find "refined simplicity" by embracing the best of both worlds.

Explain how much of Goldsmith's comedy relies on his ability to set-up a joke.

Most of the comedy in She Stoops to Conquer comes from the deep dramatic irony wherein characters do not realize quite who one another are. However, for the audience to clearly understand all the complications, Goldsmith has to set up the details of the jokes to come. He does this masterfully in Act I. For instance, it is set up that the old Hardcastle home resembles an inn, important so that we believe Marlow and Hastings could believe as much. Further, the strange behavior whereby Kate dresses plainly in the evenings is important so as to understand Marlow's confusion over her class standing. Throughout the play, elements are introduced, or "set-up," so that our expectations can be manipulated later. The use of the jewels, of Tony and his mother's relationship, and of who is lying to whom are all examples of set-ups that produce great comic dividends.

Q6 How can one make a Freudian analysis of this play?

Though it is folly to suggest an explicitly Freudian intent in this play (since it was written so much earlier than Freud's day), the same could be said about Oedipus Rex or Hamlet, both of which stand as seminal texts in Freud's theories. There are definitely Freudian undercurrents in the Oedipal complex suggested as existing between Tony and Mrs. Hardcastle, and more implicitly between Marlow and his mother. The former is expressed in Tony's professed hatred of his mother, though it is a hatred that makes him insistent on constantly waging war with her. If he truly despised her, he could simply blow her off, but he takes too much pleasure in wickedly tormenting her through his tricks and behavior. Many characters remark on how they spoil one another, which parallels a sort of destructive romantic relationship, all of which can be interpreted through a Freudian lens. In terms of Marlow, his strange behavior can be linked to a self-hatred, an inability to appreciate his own love of "immodest" woman and inability to speak to "modest" woman whom he feels he ought to appreciate. At one point, he mentions that his mother was the only "modest" woman he could ever speak to, which could suggest that their relationship has polluted him somewhat, led him to compare other women to her and hence to grow into a bumbler when attempting to woo them romantically.