THE GRAVEYARD POETS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A STUDY IN GREY AND BLACK

A Thesis Presented for the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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Approved by:
Dedicated to the Library of
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O vault of dreariness! cavern of gloom!
Where timid footfalls echo through the room,
And heavy tables hold up heavy books
Perused by heavy folk with heavy looks,
Moist brows and wilting collars -- and dim eyes
Mark not where Freshness dims and Beauty flies.
Dead, dead to all delight they stand enslaved,
Learned, dull and weary, damp and well-behaved.
O better far to walk beneath the skies,
And watch the sunset fade its vermeil dyes,
Than bide in this dim tomb with dreary grinds,
And breatheth' effluvia of dried-up minds.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout literature, romanticism and melancholy have been closely allied. The ancients knew the dark power of melancholy, and in the 17th century, especially in its early years, it was a dominant feeling. The melancholy Dane whom we all know so well was one of many now forgotten types of the unhappy romantic, whose self-analysis and deep emotions lead him farther and farther into the gloom. At this time, there were two attitudes toward this emotional dusk. One, represented by Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy, shows it as a dread disease of the soul, and as such to be treated. The other attitude is that of Milton, in Il Penseroso, which pictures the delights of the solitary and retired personality, wandering through the summer dusk, or meditating before a winter fire in profound content.

Gradually, as time went on, and the seventeenth century yielded to the eighteenth, the philosophy of common sense rose up to conquer this gloom of romance. The feelings were suppressed in the poetry of this period; it was an age of didacticism and reason, of conventional terms, of brisk satire, of complete disregard of the deeper emotions.
Pope was the literary arbiter and standard bearer of the neo-classics. But every Caesar has his Brutus; and the reaction against conventionality was bound to come; was coming, in fact, even while Pope was busy writing down his nice neat rules for literary excellence. Certain poets began turning from the garish day and a false Arcadia to a more somber scene; and the melancholy which had occupied the writers of the century before emerged again. Gradually the movement gathered force. Darker and darker grew the tone of the poetry of the period. More and more the suppressed emotions found their way out, and nature began to lose her Arcadian aspect and take on the hue of twilight.

There seem to be two shades of this darkness. One, which I have chosen to call gray, is the viewpoint of Il Penseroso, and bears Milton's pleasant sense of retirement, meditation, and a delight in the more somber aspects of nature. The other, whose hue is far darker, seems to be a descendant of the more bitter melancholy of Burton, and the questioning despair of Hamlet. There is none of the bright classical "common sense" among these men; but there is a great deal of humanity. Your true poet is a melancholy person. Great souls feel deeply. Some of our sublimest poetry is born of an abiding sorrow, a wistful yearning, a frantic despair. And before the greatest enigma of all, Death, the voice of common sense is still.
To be sure, no two poets ever looked at the dark curtain with the same eyes. Imagine four poets coming in the blue light of evening to a little graveyard like Stoke Poges, for instance, and leaning each against an aged yew or mossy tombstone, allowing his creative fancy to roam. Number One is impressed by the blessed peace of the place. The noises of the world -- its yapping dogs and crying babies, street singers, mob scenes -- are far away. The wind whispers, and somewhere an owl hoots mournfully. How sweet to stray in this abode of everlasting quiet; letting one's thoughts follow some sad-sweet fancy, while "the beetle boometh against the mossed headstone", and over against the dark church tower, the first stars of evening come out one by one. No charnel gloom oppresses him; sweet Melancholy touches his heart that quivers like a smitten lute to that gentle inspiration. Sometimes he may think of the great democracy of the grave, musing upon quaint old monuments or low grassy mounds; and of the once uneasy hearts that rest beneath in the last untroubled sleep. He is a quiet personage, and now and then a slow smile curves his gentle lips.

Number Two is a more fashionable creature; not long out of college, or else possessing in respectable years the undergraduate mind. His thoughts run in molds poured long ago by the revered ancients. He looks down on the simple tribute to Miles, who was a loving husband and
father; or so his widow would have you believe; and immedi-
ately he is meditating an elegy in which Giles becomes
Damon, the faithful shepherd, whom love for cruel Phyllis
has slain; and whose lambs run untended upon the flowery
lawns. Or the mound becomes that of his own mistress,
real or Imaginary, whose charms he celebrates in soft
pentameters. Presently he gets up and leaves, and you
next may find him at Lady Ditherege's rout, the gayest of
the gay, and all the more admired for his pallid complex-
ion and occasional well-timed sighs.

Number Three wears a parson's wig and bands, as
you may still observe in the gathering dusk. His hand
upon his prayerbook in much the same way that Jerry Aber-
shaw's might rest upon his trusty pistol, he strays among
the graves with solemn tread. Him, too, the great demo-
cracy of the churchyard impresses; he thinks, with a cer-
tain mournful satisfaction, that the proud of earth here
lie prostrate, equal in the sight of God with the humblest
sleeper. Then his thoughts stray away to the great day of
reckoning, when these dead shall rise to be judged; the
weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth by presentiment
rise upon his ears. How little shall their former pomp
serve them then, he thinks; and, too, being a simple and
pious soul, he thinks of himself, robed and crowned, washed
of all earthly taint, meeting lost loved ones in the bright
land above, bowing before the great white throne among the
shouting cherubim. He clasps his prayerbook fervently. Can death be an evil to be dreaded, when through it we come to God? With an uplifted heart, he crosses through to darkness toward the light mildly beaming from his study windows.

He does not see the shadow within the shadow of the oldest yew, of a man crouching, half-kneeling, whose glittering eyes hold a fire reflected from no rural stars. This fourth man has the wan face, the weary, frightened, half-mad look of the sick soul. To him the blackest shadows; and deep terrors of the death that is already upon him. There is no peace here for him; he sees not the quiet grassy mounds, but with the horrified eyes of the mind, the moldering bones, the green slime, the rottenness and corruption below. The end of all -- dreams, hopes, vain imaginings -- a heap of putrescence slowly rotting into dust. And the soul? Does it --- ? He groans. Nightmare visions whirl before his mind; he cannot avoid them, they are too horrible to be without their own macabre charm. Before him rolls the eternal pageant of death, down the ages gone and the ages yet to come; the tears, the parting groans, the everlasting farewells. Close to the shrinking tenement of flesh he clutches his terrified soul; not even the first gray glimmering of dawn can dispell his familiar demon. "De profundis clamavi."
Such are the poets, gray and black, with whom we are concerned. Between the hours of twilight and gloom we shall watch them, and note their place in English literature. For to these men we owe a little debt of gratitude. They brought back the poetic spirit, and nurtured it through the famine of classicism, when all around little men were abusing each other with big words and heroic couplets. They showed to the world an English landscape at evening, defending its charms against the dead Arcadia of Theocritus and Virgil. They opened the deep well of the human heart, shut by the politely rigid classicism of their century. They linked what was truly romantic in Milton with what was romantic in Wordsworth, Keats, and their fellows.

Throughout their poetry run the two deep emotions of Romanticism; the passion for brotherhood, and the aching loneliness of the human soul. What Coleridge was to say,

"Alone! Alone! all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea --"

runs, a recurring cadence through the poetry, good and bad, of the Graveyard School. If Grey, for instance, turns with a heart full of brotherly affection for the humble dead in the country churchyard, he writes too, of

the gentle youth who lived and died alone, that

"Melancholy marked him for her own"

and

"He gained from heaven -- 'twas all he wished --
a friend." (3)

Someone to share with us the long endurance run that is
life. Yet we do not read that the friend was with him at
the end.

There is a statue called The Solitude of the
Soul. Around a great rough square of granite stand four
human figures -- weary faces, drooping eyes, hands still
stretched in vain to each other; forever alone, forever
Such was the romantic, yearning for the warmth of the soul’s comradeship. He
bore a rich gift, but no one wanted it, and at last, he
learned to sit alone in the dusk and draw from his yearn-
ing heart a melancholy pleasure, infinitely sad and tor-
mentingly sweet. To live on such nutriment exclusively
is unwholesome; it breeds madness; it brings him gladly
to the release of death; but what else is he to do? So he

" -- sits, like Patience, on a Monument,
Smiling at grief,"

and sings, sometimes, a plaintive swan song before he goes
into the night.

(2) Gray, T., Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,
p. 109.

(3) Ibid., p. 110.
"Come, pensive Nun --- "

These are the poets who represent the pleasant silvery tones of Miltonic melancholy. They share a delight in solitude, and a pleasure in the twilight aspects and the wilder face of nature. Gradually, as the century moves on, we find that the tone of the picture deepens into a darker hue. The winter storms of Thomson, the desolate ruins of Dyer and Ralph replace the pleasant evening pictures of Anne of Winchilsea. And slowly, as the age feels its way out of the confines of Pope and his school, the profounder feelings of the heart come to be expressed.

It is my purpose, in this section, to show the various aspects of these pensive poets, and to indicate how their lighter melancholy slowly deepened into churchyard dusk.

Toward the close of the 17th and in the early years of the 18th century, Ardelia, otherwise Anne, Countess of Winchilsea, was scribbling into modest manuscripts her vagrant fancies. She was an early type of the romantic-melancholy; partially through her feeble health, which led to troubled sleep, bad dreams, and a love of solitude. Then too, her family was on the wrong side in the revolution of 1688. Frustrated in ambition and
weakened in body, she turned in upon herself, and produced poetry, melancholy in type, but with an odd turn toward a new nature. Influenced by Milton, delighting in retirement, she differed from him in that to her landscape she gave something of a reality, not found in the work of the greater poet. Retired and solitary, she took a delight in the quiet evening, when, slipping out of doors, she might see

"in some river, overhung with green
The waving moon and trembling leaves --"(4)

and she could observe that

"Odors, which declined repelling day,
Through tem'prate air uninterrupted stray,
When darkened groves their softest shadows wear,
And falling waters we distinctly hear."(5)

She might have done rather more with the idea of the sweet odors released in the evening, but the fact that she did mention them shows observation. Nor would Milton have put in such a homely touch as this

"the loosed horse now, as his pasture leads
Comes slowly grazing through th' adjoining meads,
Whose stealing pace, and lengthened shade we fear,
Till torn up herbage in his teeth we hear."(6)

but to me at least it is rather pleasing, and shows that here was one poet who didn't get her views on Nature out

(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid., p. 270.
of some dusty tome. She liked to ramble through the twilight, through the evening dusk,

"When a sedate content the Spirit feels
And no fierce light disturbs, whilst it reveals,
But silent musings urge the mind to seek,
Something too high for syllables to speak
... In such a night, let me abroad remain." (7)

Here certainly is an example of the paler tint of Melancholy. Her walk does not lead her to the churchyard; but the gentle retired thoughtfulness of the tone show us plainly in which direction she was going; and too, it is pleasant to think of one of my own maligned sex as a pioneer in this movement. Therefore, although not strictly of the school which we are to consider, I have presented Lady Anne, as a forerunner of the coming of romantic melancholy.

In 1726, a young Scotchman, James Thomson brought out his poem, "Winter"; to be followed shortly by the rest of the seasons. Here was a new poetical subject. The winter storms have an echo in the heart of the poet. He has a melancholy delight in the majesty of nature aroused, even though, or perhaps because, - it shows him how feeble he is beside the might of the Almighty. Bleak aspects of nature are dwelt on; "rude" winter had never so absorbed a poet's interest. It is a new consideration, when:

(7) Winchilsea, Poems, p. 270.
"up among the loose disjointed cliffs,  
And fractured mountains wild, the brawling brook  
And cave, presageful, send a hollow moan." (8)

He shows here the gloomy side of nature, which he further delineates by pointing out the distresses of mankind in this season; how creditors

"tore from cold wintry limbs the tattered weed,  
Even robbed them of the last of comforts,  
sleep." (9)

The new humanitarianism displays itself here. However, in the opening lines of the poem, he shows himself loving the bleaker aspects of nature

"Be these my theme,  
These, that exalt the soul to solemn thought,  
And heavenly musing. Welcome, kindred glooms!  
Cogenial horrors, hail! with frequent foot

Pleased have I wandered through your rude domain

Heard the winds roar and the big tempests burst,  
Or seen the deep fermenting tempest brewed  
In the deep evening sky." (10)

This was a man who belonged to the group of those who loved the wildness, the darkness, the tempests; the darker face of nature.

That he succeeded in molding men's minds in his way is evidenced by the floods of imitations which followed,


(9) Ibid., p. 218.

(10) Ibid., p. 215.
one of which, by James Ralph, was typical of the sort of thing for which a popular poet may be held responsible. Night is a kaleidoscope of disconnected images, most of which have been drawn from other sources; the horrors of war, the happy sleep of the noble savage in the wilds of America, is contrasted with the sorrows of the insomniac:

"Black melancholy glooms his mournful thought,
And gives a dreadful horror to the night;

All plaintive down the headlong wave she glides
And wakes lone echoes of the saddening sound."

In the third book of this peculiar opus, the poet describes a ruined castle with some gusto, and to our surprise, we discover that it is haunted by the ghost of Chaucer. "Fancy meeting you here!" As if the pleasantly-smiling, gently sneering old fellow were ghost material! And so on, accompanied by pictures of the plague, typhoons and other horrors. Inferior poetry that it is, it shows us how deep-seated is this new growth of melancholy. And it was the wild nature scenes as a setting for emotions hitherto unexpressed.

In the same year which saw the publication of Thomson's Winter, John Dyer, who was by profession a painter and by avocation a poet, felt his heart trembling with the melancholy strain as he gazes on the "Ruins of Rome" and the gray tint deepens.

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"There is a mood
(I sing not to the vacant or the young)
There is a kindly mood of melancholy,
That wings the soul and points her to the skies.

..............................................
'Tis sweetly-soothing sympathy to pain
A gently wakening call to health and ease,
How Musical! When all devouring Time
Here sitting on his throne of ruins hoar
With winds and tempests sweeps his various lyre
How sweet thy diapason, Melancholy!" (12)

Here is something of the pensive Nun who so delighted a
greater poet. Again, Dyer turns to "Gronger Hill," and
notes, somewhat in the rhythm and style of Il Penseroso,
the ruined castle on its brow;

"'Tis now the raven's bleak abode
'Tis now the apartment of the toad,
And there the fox securely feeds

.................................
A little rule, a little sway,
A sunbeam in a winter's day
Is all the proud and mighty have
Between the cradle and the grave" (13)

The ruin, as a property of romantic melancholy,
has now appeared, and continues to be a feature of the
poetic landscape.

Like Anne of Winchilsea, a poet of the twilight
hour, is William Collins, one of the two great poets of
the century. In the "Ode to Evening", we find the famili-
lar description of the summer dusk. There is nothing
startlingly original about this poem. Rather, from famili-
lar material, the poet makes something rich and strange.

(13) Ibid., p. 551.
How beautiful, to one weary of the everlasting nymphs and
swains and flowery meads of the period, is this poignant
appeal to one who sees

".... hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,
And hears their simple ball, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil."

"where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn
As oft he rises midst the twilight path
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum." (14)

Here, by the way, is an insect to be associated
with these evening poems, along with the other creatures
of the twilight; the bats and owls, flitting among the
ruins.

Collins, too, was one of the first to find in-
spiration for poetry in the fairy folk-lore of the High-
lands; and to ask a polite world of common sense to become
interested in hearing how Scotch seers

"see the gliding ghosts' unbodied troup,
Or, if in sports, or on the festive green,
Their destined glance some fated youth descry
Who now perhaps, in lusty vigor seen
And rosy health, shall soon lamented die.
And heartless, oft like moody madness, stare
To see the phantom train their secret work
prepare." (15)

An expression of the supernatural was rare at
this time; but the way is being prepared for Ossian, and

(14) Collins, William, Poets of Great Britain, Vol. 9,
p. 526.

(15) Ibid., p. 531.
the Gothic literature of the later century.

Always, to my mind, associated with Collins as a poet of the evening, is his greater contemporary, Thomas Gray. Now, for the first time, we are entering the actual churchyard, where we have been tending all this while.

Gray was by nature a retiring, thoughtful man, interested in antiquities, and taking a deep and genuine pleasure in twilight rambles among graveyards, ruins and historical places. It is not strange therefore, that his great *Elegy* should begin to take form in his mind on these churchyard strayings, nor that to the evening picture should be added the graveyard scene, and its attendant meditations. It is an outdoor melancholy; thoughtful, but not gloomy; the precise attitude of Il Penseroso. And like Collins, his picture is not startlingly original; it uses the old familiar evening scenes.

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

Save that, from yonder ivy-mantled tower,  
The moping owl doth to the moon complain  
Of such as wandering near her secret bower  
Molest her ancient solitary reign." (16)

In these two stanzas, we encounter many stock properties of the melancholy school; the fading light,

the beetle, the owl's cry, and the ancient tower, clad in ivy; the rising moon. It is the indefinable touch of the poet that blends them into a scene of rare beauty and charm, so that even the careless reader cannot fail to feel the gentle sweetness that melancholy may have. He turns to the sleepers in the graveyard; he thinks of their eternal peace; he thinks, too, that poor and humble though they were in life, in death they are equal with the great ones of the earth. They had loved ones to mourn for them and erect their pious epitaphs; are they to be pitied more than those whom "storied urn and animated bust" cannot recall to life? In such surroundings, too, he thinks, a poet might fittingly live and die, and in trust "rest his head upon the lap of earth." Here is solitude and meditation; but the melancholy is the "divinest melancholy" of the thoughtful man. Gray's philosophy of life may find expression in the following lines from the "Ode on the Pleasures arising from Vicissitudes":

"Smiles on past Misfortunes's brow
Soft Reflection's hand can trace,
And o'er the cheek of sorrow throw
A melancholy grace;
While hope prolongs our happier hour,
Or deepest shades, that dimly lour
And blacken round our weary way,
Gilds with a gleam of distant day". (17)

We notice that he does not dwell on the life beyond the grave; there is no speculation beyond the

briefly expressed trust in God. This is, I think, compatible with the expressed character of this rambler in the twilight.

With Gray and Collins, we have reached the high point in the graveyard group. The poetry which became so popular had its countless imitators, of course. In fact, the verse form of Gray's *Elegy* became the accepted form for verse of this nature, and many tried its charms, more or less unhappily. In the Gentleman's Magazine for 1757, seven elegies occur which use both the rhythm and rhyme, and something of the tone and setting, of the *Elegy*. In the 1756 volume, one Oxford student laments another in a similar style. And John Cunningham, in 1762, published the decided imitation, "Elegy on a Pile of Ruins", which definitely strives after a similar effect.

"What then avails ambitions wide-stretched wing,
The schoolman's page, or pride of beauty's bloom?
The crape-clad hermit and the rich robed king,
Levelled, lie mixed promiscuous in the tomb."(18)

But there are a few others of this twilight group who deserve a special glance. First come the Wartons. The poetry of Joseph is more purely nature; but Thomas Warton was fascinated by the poetry of Milton; especially the lyrics; so fascinated that they colored his poetry to an extent which becomes downright plagiarism. For instance,

in the *Pleasure of Melancholy*, he takes one whole line bodily out of Milton, and the verse is a hopeful imitation of the greater poet: And the color is deepening — the gray becomes gloom.

"Beneath yon ruined abbey let me sit
When through some western window the pale moon
Pours her long-levelled rule of streaming light'
While sullen sacred silence reigns around
Save the lone screech-owls note, who builds his bower
Amid the moldering caverns dark and damp
Or the calm breeze, that rustles in the leaves
Of flaunting ivy, that with mantle green
Invests some wasted tower." (19)

Again, the ruin, the twilight, the owl, the stillness, are found.

Speaking of melancholy, James Beattie's "Hermit" moved Dr. Johnson, the gruff and crusty, into shedding tears.

(20) There are some very interesting things about this poem. First, its strongly marked rhythm, a strange thing to encounter in the time of the rocking-horse couplet, resembles that of Thomas Moore, of a later and more romantic date. And second, it expresses a hopelessness which the other twilight poets do not seem to feel. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now; this is a blending area between the dark gray and the black.


"'Tis night, and the landscape is lovely no more
I mourn, but ye woodlands, I mourn not for you,
For morn is approaching, your charms to restore
Perfumed with fresh fragrance and glittering
with dew.
Nor yet for the ravage of Winter I mourn
Kind Nature the embryo-blossom shall save. —
But when shall Spring visit the mouldering urn?
O when shall it dawn on the night of the grave?"(21)

Doctor Johnson was a brave man afraid of death;
and we can see what must have moved him. There is a depth
of despair unencountered until now. Perhaps of us moderns
the White Knight might justly remark that we do not cry as
much as he hoped. But in an age of restraint and reason,
such thoughts as we find expressed in the Hermit, and the
manner of their expression, might easily strike a new and
thrilling chord.

With some hesitation, I now approach the second
type of pale gray poet, the poet of polite melancholy.
With hesitation, because, looking back over two hundred
years, I may be judging them too harshly. I know how
steeped that age was in its classics; and I know, too,
how slavishly we follow fashions in verse, who presume to
criticise these others for that sin. Nevertheless, I
feel that there bare some examples of poetry less genuine,
less moving, than that which has gone before; poetry

(21) Doughty, Oswald, Forgotten Lyrics of the 18th
Century, p. 128.
written because everybody was doing it. Hold fast to Gray's Elegy, and compare with it these.

Here is a sad gentleman, who after addressing Hesper in suitable lines, heaves a sigh and says,

"Alas, but now I paid my tear
On fair Olympia's virgin tomb
And lo, from thence in quest I roam
Of Philomela's bower." (22)

With a feeling that all these Philomelas and Hesper and Olympias are a bit out of place, we continue;

"Propitious send thy golden ray
Thou purest light above
Let no false flame seduce to stray
Where gulph or steep lie hid for harm
But lead where music's healing charm
May soothe afflicted love.

To them, by many a grateful song
In happier seasons vowed
These lawns, Olympia's haunt, belong
Oft by yon silver stream we walked,
Or fixed, while Philomela talked
Beneath yon copses stood." (23)

So, with hand suitably upon his heart, we can imagine the poet wandering on, listening to the nightingale, and meditating

"-- of heaven's disposing power
Of man's uncertain lot." (24)

And yet this poet is Mark Akenside, whose nature poetry is genuinely beautiful and may have influenced

(22) Akenside, Mark, British Poets, Vol. 9, p. 763.
(23) Ibid., p. 784.
(24) Ibid.
Wordsworth! And then the gentle landscape gardener of Leasowes is capable of leaning on a shepherd's crook and getting out lines like these:

"The glimmering twilight and the doubtful dawn
Shall see your step to these sad scenes return
Constant, as crystal dews impearl the lawn
Shall Strephon's tear bedew Ophelia's urn!

Sure nought unhallowed shall presume to stray
Where sleep the relics of that virtuous maid
Nor aught unlovely bend its devious way
Where soft Ophelia's dear remains are laid.

Then elegance with coy judicious hand
Shall call fresh flowerlets for Ophelia's tomb
And beauty chide the fate's severe command
That shewed the frailty of so fair a bloom!"(25)

Too, too touching! But this is the same William Shenstone
who wrote "The Schoolmistress", whose reality is not less
charming than its simple sentiment! The "Soft Ophelia"
and the melancholy Strephon shedding tears on her urn are
china figures; but there was a Schoolmistress; and she is
as real as the Wife of Bath. It just seems that writing
an elegy went to the heads of these gentlemen, and caused
them to burble a bit.

Out of the dusty files of the Gentleman's
Magazine come these poetical efforts. The author of this
one, described as a "late ingenious clergyman of Northum-
berland" wrote it first in Latin, then in English, and

(25)Shenstone, William, Works, edited by Dodsley, Vol. 1,
London, 1773, pp. 56-37.
invited the readers of the magazine to try their hands at translating it. They did, and a merry time was had by all, I'm sure;

"Is this my Cloe, once the lovely gay? Are these the ruins of her moulding clay? ........
Where is that sparkling form in which was seen The flattering sweetness of the Cyprian queen? Stop, courteous stranger, in compassion throw The last sad tributes mortals have below, Conceal her reliques, heaping earth and stones Lost dogs should tear these execrable bones." (26)

His Cloe is only too plainly a peg to hang a verse upon. I feel, as any romantic must feel, that there is no point in writing an elegy unless we feel it deeply; unless it comes from an experience so profound and painful that it cannot be glibly expressed.

It becomes a pleasure to this unknown poet to point out to his "fair" the transient nature of her butterfly beauty;

"Behold, my fair, with sweet surprise, The living mass of jewels flies But know, fair nymph, that one short day Beholds it glitter and decay. So all our glittering belles and beaux ........
Alike to worms shall turn Their bed the dust that fills their urn In death then equal -- ere you die Be something more than butterfly." (27)

A very pretty lesson. I rather like that second line, though; it has color and movement.

(27) Ibid., July, 1746.
Poor James Hammond, who seems to have died of a broken heart if any man ever did, wrote elegy after elegy to "Delia", who remained cold and coy. Possessed by love, he too seeks sympathy, sitting by the tomb of a mutual friend, "Coelia"

"To her sad tomb at midnight I retire
And lonely sitting by the silent stone,
I tell it all the griefs my wrongs inspire,
The Marble image seems to hear my moan." (28)

It was just as well, for evidently, Delia didn't. His mind turns, like many a despairing lover's, to thoughts of death, and he longs for the day when he too shall be carried to his grave. Then, he indicates, she'll be sorry. It seems too bad that a man who felt his passion sincerely could not have expressed it more convincingly.

We have moved through the gray of twilight, then, and have seen those who dwell therein. Some of them, like Lady Anne Winchilsea, Thomson and Dyer, were content to walk abroad at twilight and merely to feel the pleasant melancholy of the hour enfold them; others, like Beattie and Warton, begin a deeper note of gloom. Towering above them all, however, like giants in the dusk, are the forms of Gray and Collins; Gray, of whose Elegy Johnson says, "The churchyard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom

returns an echo." Johnson could say this; Johnson, a classicist of the age of reason; and it can be echoed justly by any of us of the Machine Age. Stoke Poges churchyard has become part of our literary landscape. And Collins, without, perhaps having such a universal appeal, has equal, if not superior music in him. "There is a classical quality in his verse -- -- a union of Attic form with romantic sensibility . . . the warmth seems to come from without; the statue of a nymph flushed with sunrise."

(29) Doughty, O., Forgotten Lyrics, p. 71.

THE BLACK GROUP

"The various labour of the silent night"

-- Thomson.

Before we draw deeper into the gloom, we must realize that the men of the group which I have designated as "black", are not so at all times. If we dwell with Melancholy long when she wears her "raven-colored robe", she surely will release us into madness. These poets, greater and less, have not an equal tone of blackness in their work. But the dark is there, and when it comes, there is no mistaking it. It is the dark melancholy of Burton, not the pleasant pensiveness of Milton; the deep fear and sadness seemingly without cause, that tortures and blights its victims. If it brings with it a certain sadistic fascination with the grave and the charnel house, it borders on melancholia. Burton thought meditation and solitariness might help such a mental disease; but the poets of this black group do not seem to find it so.

I have chosen to group these poets roughly into two divisions; those of a more didactic nature, like the good clergyman of the introduction, and those who can see no hope -- or at least, do not express it. The first group is necessarily the largest, for this was a didactic, and a reasoning age. It seems natural, that when faced with the greatest of our fears, the Augustans should try
to suppress terror with reason; horror at the fate of the body with faith in a glorious resurrection. No man knows what his own last thoughts are to be; whether he will cringe or act the Roman's part. But if he is to die unafraid, he will have to develop a philosophy which will carry him to the ultimate gate in a more or less firm condition. To anyone who has undergone "the little death" of ether, the recollection of the last whirling minute is pregnant with speculation. What comes next? And no one can answer that.

It is to be the purpose of this section, then, to show what philosophies of death were being developed in the graveyard poetry of the early and middle years of the eighteenth century.

In 1711, the wife of Thomas Parnell died, and his grief developed into a melancholia which threatened insanity. He found, as have all poets, that expressed sorrow eases the heart; and presently he wrote the "Night Piece on Death"; one of the earliest of the genuine graveyard type. The poet describes his walk beside the waters of a star-lit lake; on his left hand is a churchyard, whose monuments he can see by the dim light of a clouded moon. Across his mind comes the thought:

"Time was, like thee they life possessed; And Time shall be, that thou shalt rest."(31)

As he looks upon the ambitious carving with which men have endeavored to preserve the fame of the sleepers, he has a vision of Death, speaking in "hollow groans" from the charnel house. The message of the King of Terrors is that men fear him too greatly:

"Death's but a path that must be trod,
If Man would ever pass to God." (32)

There is no need for funereal pomp; the dead does not appreciate it, and it is unseemly that we should greatly mourn what must be, to the pious man, a joyful release from the cares of this world.

If this sounds impersonal and chilly coming from a man whose grief at the death of his wife nearly drove him insane, we must remember that he was trying to be philosophical; and also that he was submitting what he wrote to Mr. Pope, whose displeasure at any mention of mere personal grief would have been intense. Like Gray's Elegy, this is a churchyard poem. But just as the hour is later, so the gloom is far more intense than in the Elegy. All this is the more striking because the "Night Piece" was written so long before the Elegy; and it must have been contemporary with the work of Anne of Winchilsea. We can plainly see that the gray and black melancholy might exist together -- and did.

Another man who found a consolation in the thought that through death we find God, was the dissenting clergyman, Isaac Watts. He indulges in charnel house descriptions, as in the poem "Death and Eternity"; but there is the unpleasing feeling that we listen to the fire-and-brimstone preacher of old times, who tries successfully to scare his listeners out of the error of their ways.

"These skulls, what ghastly figures now!
How loathsome to the eyes!
These are the heads we lately knew
So beauteous and so wise." (33)

Their souls are now on

"-- " that unfathomable sea,
Those deeps without a shore,
Where living waters gently play
Or fiery billows roar.

There we shall swim in heavenly bliss,
Or sink in flaming waves," (34)

as the case may be, while some sorrowing friend shall draw a lesson from our bones.

His ode on "The Day of Judgment", paints a ghastly picture of the great Archangel shaking

"----- ----- ----- -- the creation
Tears the strong pillars of the vault of heaveh,
Breaks up old marble, the repose of princes,
See, the graves open, and the bones arising,
Flames all around them." (35)

(33) Poets of Great Britain, Vol. 9, p. 308.
(35) Ibid., p. 317.
These horrors, he says, shall not shake the godly; he hopes to be there at the last;

"O may I sit there when he comes triumphant,
Dooming the nations! then ascent to glory,
While our hosannas all along the passage
Shout the Redeemer." (36)

The Sephpic verse form used in this poem seems to have a peculiarly stirring effect.

In his "Funeral Hymn", David Mallet expresses in the midst of the terrors of the grave, the hope of eternal life. He begins:

"Ye midnight shades, o'er nature spread,
Dumb silence of the dreary hours,
In honour of the approaching dead,
Around your awful terrors pour." (37)

But in a milder strain he concludes,

"Raise hallelujahs! God is just,
And man most happy when he dies!
His past winter
Fair spring at last
Receives him on her flowery shore
Where sin and sorrow are no more." (38)

In "The Excursion", he gives us this typical churchyard description.

"-- a place of tombs,
Waste, desolate, where ruin dreary dwells,
Brooding o'er sightless skulls and crumbling bones
All is dread silence here and undisturbed,
Save what the wind sighs, and the wailing owl
Screams solitary to the mournful moon,
Where the sad spirit walks with shadowy foot,
His wonted round, or lingers o'er his grave." (39)

(37) Mallet, D., Ibid., 378.
(38) Ibid.
(39) Ibid., p. 690
This is a scene with which we grow more and more familiar; it is a favorite type, with this group.

In this early period also belongs William Broome's poem on "Death". It is a very evident effort to form a philosophy of death, and resolves itself into several parts. At first, he views the typical charnel scene; the desolate burial place, the birds of evil omen flying around; and in fright and horror he wishes for "Elijah's car" to carry him away from this dreadful fate. But a messenger from heaven reminds him that such has been the fate of man since Adam; the Saviour deigned to die; and if he has lived the good life, he need not dread what is to come. Resigned he yields; and further remarks that the misery of life certainly should not endear it to us. Death is a refuge; and

"from the silent clay,
Man mounts triumphant to eternal day."(40)

He is not so hopeful, however, in the ode on "Melancholy", which was occasioned by the death of his daughter. He abandons himself to sorrow:

"Open thy marble jaws, 0 tomb,
And earth conceal me in thy womb,
And you, ye worms, this frame confound,
Ye brother reptiles of the ground.

0 life, frail offspring of a day!
'Tis puffed with one short gasp away,
Swift as the short-lived flower it flies,
It springs, it blooms, it fades, it dies."(41)

Thus we see that while the air of hope is given to these poems, there is far more of darkness than light. It is with effort that the eyes of the poets are raised from the grave to the contemplations of life eternal; that is for the good only, and we are all poor creatures.

There is little light in the elegiac poetry dealing with the death of some well-loved person. If the poet is a poet, and his feeling genuine, it is difficult to express a peaceful resignation in the face of the everlasting farewell of the living to the dead. Friend, wife, lover, is gone — they will not come back; we shall not see them again. So the tone of the elegy becomes a mournful celebration of the virtues of the departed, and an expression of the overwhelming grief in the heart of the poet. When Lord Lyttelton laments, in "To The Memory of a Lady" the death of a wife whom he tenderly loved, and who had been a close companion and confidant, he turns in vain for consolation to his books and his friends, for she had shared both with him. He can say only,

"Yet, 0 my soul, thy rising murmurs stay,  
Nor dare th' all-wise Disposer to arraign  
Or against his supreme decree  
With impious grief complain.  
That all thy full-blown joys at once should fade  
Was his most righteous will, and be that will obeyed."  (42)

Then Thomas Tickell laments the death of Addison, he recalls

"How silent did his old companions tread
By midnight lamps, the mansions of the dead!
And the last words, that dust to dust conveyed,
While speechless o'er they closing grave we bend,
Accept these tears, thou dear departed friend!
O, gone forever! " (45)

and recollects the many services that his friend paid him, and though the scenes of their daily life can but recall the dead to mind, he finds but faint consolation in the hope that they may meet again above.

Collins, while voicing a similar complaint in the "Ode on the Death of Thomson", expresses no hope of future meeting; and derives consolation only in the thought that in the well-tended grave he may see that his friend is not forgotten.

"Yet once again, dear parted shade
Meek Nature's child again adieu!
The genial meads assigned to bless
Thy life, shall mourn thy early doom;
Their hinds, and shepherd girls shall dress
With simple hands thy rural tomb.
Long, long thy stone and pointed clay
Shall melt the musing Briton's eyes
O! vales and wild woods, shall he say
In yonder grave your Druid lies! (44)

We note too, in the last line, the reference to antiquity which was fast taking hold of the poetic fancy.

The haunting spirit of the past -- of "old, unhappy far-off things" stirring the imagination into fantastic flights, is linked with these men of the churchyard.

Perhaps mention should be made here of the contemporary elegies in the Gentleman's Magazine. There are many, and some of them have been referred to elsewhere in this paper. But an especially tender and touching example is this one, by an unknown author:

"Blasted like some fair flower in early bloom,
She fades beneath the winter of the tomb,
Yet shall the thought my rising griefs restrain,
The time will come when she shall bloom again."(45)

An expression of grief so simple, so touching, seems worthy of mention, coming as it does among stilted Latin odes and frivolities to Flora tying on a flowered hat, seems to presage the coming of a more sincere mood of poetry.

So, we have drawn to the last scene of all, where the shade is deepest, and the melancholy in its profundity and horror, approaches melancholia. With Blair and Young we spend the blackest hours of our sojourn.

Robert Blair was a Scotch divinity student, a friend of Watts, and had evidently read Thomson and Mallet's "Excursion". "The Grave", his greatest work, is written in blank verse, but it is blank verse of the

(46) Reed, Background of Gray's Elegy, p. 188.
Shakespearean order, with many feminine endings, alliteration, and a musical quality, which accents skillfully the solemnity of his subject. "The Grave" resembles Thomson's "Seasons", in that it presents vivid pictures and gives meditations upon them. But here most of the resemblance ends. Too, this is a charnel interior, not a churchyard; and the horror is intensified by enclosure.

"The Grave" opens with a description of an ancient cathedral where sleep the illustrious dead. This description is similar to the typical charnel house scene, but it seems unusually powerful.

"The wind is up; hark, how it howls! Methinks
Till now I never heard a sound so dreary
The gloomy aisles
Black-plastered, and hung round with shreds of scutcheons
And tattered coats of arms, send back the sound
Laden with heavier airs, from the low vaults,
The mansions of the dead. Roused from their slumbers,
In grim array the grisly specters rise,
Grin horrible, and obstinately solemn
Pass and repass, hushed as the foot of night.

Strange things, the neighbors say, have happened here;
Wild shrieks have issued from the hollow tombs,
Dead men have come again, and walked about,
And the great bell has tolled, unrung, untouched. (47)

It has been suggested that the graveyard by St. Giles' church in Edinburgh suggested these scenes of horror to Blair; he must have been acquainted with its gruesome carvings of skulls and skeletons, covered with the

green slime deposited by the damp mists. He may have
witnessed the schoolboy hurrying past the churchyard by
night, whistling to keep up his courage, and beheld the
widow lying grieving upon her husband's tomb; which he de-
scribes vividly in the next few passages.

From the contemplation of such scenes, he passes
into meditations on how death sunders friendship, stops
the laughter of the gay, and puts an end to the triumphs
of the conqueror. The king, wrapped in balms and spices,
sleeps no more securely than the slave buried in the high-
way. Next he describes a pompous funeral, with nodding
plumes and rich trappings, and mourners insincere, follow-
ing what is merely a carcass

"that's fallen to disgrace, and in the nostril
Smells horrible." (48)

He meditates on all the care which man has bestowed on
monuments to preserve his fame, and all in vain, as the
crumbling granite shows. Before death, flattery is still;
beauty vanishes; the strong man is a child before that
mightier strength; the scholar is dumb; the physician is
unable to defend himself, with all his arts; and the
miser's gold cannot buy his immunity.

He pauses, then at the brink of death, and marks
how the terrified soul clings to the dissolving body,
until

(48) Blair, r., in Poets of Great Britain, Vol. 8, p. 258.
"this wings its way to its almighty source,
That drops into the dark and noisome grave."(49)

Yet, he says, the grave would lose many of its terrors if
we could be sure that in the grave is nothing but un-
troubled sleep for the weary soul. How gladly would we
escape our dreary life by departing through any of death's
"thousand doors"! But we do not have that confidence.
The thought of life beyond the grave holds us steady at
our posts; "to run away is cowardly". Like many another,
he wonders why the departed souls cannot speak to those
left behind, to warn or to encourage; but the dead are
silent

"-- like lamps in sepulchres, your shine
Enlighten but yourselves." (50)

and we shall all find out, in time. Strange, too, he
says, that we are so constantly surrounded by death, and
yet never think of it as inevitable to ourselves. The
sexton's duty is to dig the graves for all; yet he is
merry, and never thinks of the day when his own grave shall
be dug.

Looking out upon the world, he sees it all as a
vast burial ground, where all climes, all conditions meet
in death, along with

"the wrecks of nations and the spoils of time,
With all the number of six thousand years."(51)

(49) Blair, R., in Poets of Great Britain, Vol. 8, p. 360.
(50) Ibid.
(51) Ibid., p. 361.
He thinks of the lost Eden, where death could
not enter, and which is now barred to us by the angel with
the flaming sword. Then, after apostrophising death in
all his horrors, he reminds the king of shades that the
time is coming when he shall render up all that he has
taken. The Son of God has conquered him; and between us
and God lies only the narrow bridge of dissolution.
Surely for the good man, there should be no fear of death;
and on the last day, soul shall rush to an awakened and
glorified body,

"nor time nor death shall ever part them more." (52)

In spite of this pious ending, we can see that
the tone of the poem is one of horror and despair at the
mystery and inevitability of death.

Edward Young, in his Night Thoughts, adds a
more sable hue than Blair, to this final picture. It is
not that he piles horror of the physical grave on horror;
but that, instead of objective description, however
gloomy, he takes us into the darksome chambers of his own
sick heart. He is a man weary of life. And with the
strong tendency of the true romantic, he tells of his own
feelings in the bitterest and most melancholy strain.

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"I wake; how happy they, who wake no more!
I wake, emerging from a sea of dreams
Tumultuous, where my wrecked desponding thought
From wave to wave of fancied misery
At random drove, her helm of reason lost.
.. The day too short for my distress, and night
Ev'n in the zenith of her dark domain
Is sunshine to the color of my fate." (53)

Here is the deeper blackness, which we have felt
approaching; the blackness and despair of the lonely human
soul. And throughout the nine Nights, we hear, over and
over, the loneliness, the disillusion, the hopelessness,
the half-insane broodings, the aching sense of the imper-
manence of everything but death.

"Is death at distance? No; he has been on thee,
And given sure earnest of his final blow.
Those hours that lately smiled, where are they now?
Pallid to thought, and ghastly! drowned, all
drowned
In that great deep, which nothing disembogues.
... A moment, and the world's blown up to thee,
The sun is darkness, and the stars are dust." (54)

To the man truly sick at heart, death grows to
have a dark fascination. Death becomes

"--- the deliverer, who rescues man!
Death, the rewarder, who the rescued crowns!
Rich death, that realizes all my cares,
Tails, virtues, hopes; without it a chimaera!
... Death is the crown of life
Were death denied, poor man would live in vain,
Were death denied, ev'n fools would wish to die
... Death gives us more than was in Eden lost.
This king of terrors is the prince of peace.
When shall I die to vanity, pain, death?
When shall I die? when shall I live forever? (55)
The physical grave has no fears for the man who goes willingly from a life too hard. It is our senses which make death a terror;

"The knell, the shroud, the mattock and the grave,
The deep damp vault, the darkness and the worm,
These are the terrors of a winter's eve,
The terrors of the living, not the dead.
Imagination's fool and errors, wretch,
Man makes a death which nature never made;
Then on the point of his own fancy falls,
And feels a thousand deaths in fearing one."

We forget that when the senses die with the body, these fears must die too.

So, wrapped in his mantle of gloom, he looks from his retreat upon the world of ambitious, worldly, rapacious men, and sees them in their proper proportion at last;

"Earth's highest station ends in 'Here he lies',
And 'dust to dust' concludes her noblest song."

If he falls back on religion for his consolation, it is not for long. He has had too much of grief in this life to be satisfied with a shadowy promise of a doubtful life beyond. We poor humans cling to what reality we know. And that reality teaches us that the end is darkness and eternal sleep. Faced with this prospect, life falls into its proper sphere, and we know the mockery of wealth and fame. And this is the philosophy which we can

(56) Young, Works, p. 62.
(57) Ibid., p. 65.
best comprehend, with our finite minds. All around us we see the universality of death;

"Where is the dust that has not been alive?  
The spade, the plough, disturb our ancestors;  
From human mould we reap our daily bread.  
... As nature, wide, our ruins spread; man's death  
Inhabits all things, but the thought of man."

The deep sense of personal loss invades these meditations. There was Narcissa, who died so young; and Philander, whom he dearly loved. They are gone; and the longing for them makes him want to believe he shall see them again. In his loneliness, he longs to find God:

"--- like him of Uz,  
I gaze around; I search on every side ---  
O for a glimpse of him my soul adores!  
As the chas'd hart, amid the desert waste,  
Pants for the living streams; for him who made her  
So pants the thirsty soul, amid the blank  
Of sublunary joys. Say, goddess, where?  
Where blazes his bright court? where burns his throne? (59)

His nature, his source, his destiny, alike unknown to him; worn with sorrow and weariness, he cries out upon the unknown God, and the answer that he hears may be only his excited fancy. And alone, on the edge of the abyss, he stands waiting dumbly for the moment

"When, like a taper, all these suns expire;  
When time, like him of Gaza in his wrath,  
Plucking the pillars that support the world  
In nature's ample ruins lies entombed;  
And midnight, universal midnight, reigns." (60)

(58) Young, Works, p. 264.
(59) Ibid., p. 318.
(60) Ibid., p. 344.
So ends our journey into the night. The men whom we have encountered in this group are not of those who love melancholy for her own sake. They are men whose souls are darkened by a deeper shadow than that of a pleasant twilight. How they encounter it denotes their type; whether like Parnell and Watts, they viewed death as a way to life eternal, or tried, like the elegists, to ease their grief in song, or whether they found themselves, like Blair and Young, alone on the edge of an awful precipice, faced with the eternal question.
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* (Note: These two references, while not in the library
of Ohio State University, would be interesting
and undoubtedly valuable.)