

Critical Analysis of Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard by Thomas Gray=

Thomas Gray has been one of the most prominent poets of English Literature and his fame lies upon the poem *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* although he has written many other works. The poem is one of the beautiful and finest elegies written in English literature. The poem took around seven years to complete and remains immortal to date.

The major idea behind writing this piece is to make people realize that death cannot be avoided. The speaker is sitting on a graveyard and as the sun sets, he ponders over the fact that death is universal. He says that wealth, power or fame cannot save people from death and there are times when most people die with unfinished ambitions in their hearts.

As we reach towards the core of the poem we realize that death will come to all whether they are rich, poor and even the narrator will die one day. *Elegy* is a poem written to lament one's death and this theme is aptly used in the poem. The elegy is meant for everyone who has been buried in *Country Churchyard*, a graveyard that is attached to a rural church. It is also for those who will be buried in the same graveyard in the future, including the narrator.

The poem is not only for those who are not in this world anymore but also reminds all mortal beings of the fact that death is unavoidable at any cost. The poem also touches the sentiments of the narrator and there is a darkness that surrounds the churchyard with an inescapable and hovering mortality. The bells of the church remind the speaker of the parting day and leave him alone as the night falls.

The speaker can see death everywhere as the light starts fading in the graveyard as if death has covered the world completely. The speaker thinks about all the graves around him and is struck by the realization that people die irrespective of the fact that they are rich or poor. The graves in the churchyard look very dirty but the speaker says that even if a rich person has a beautiful grave he will never return to this world alive.

The speaker also talks about the proper burials of powerful and rich people to convey that death is a universal phenomenon. Some people will have trophies on their tombs or busts and urns on their graves which makes people understand their achievements but these things cannot call the fading breath back into a dead man's body.

Death does not listen to any praises in favour of the person who is no more and neither any amount of glory and fame can defeat death. The speaker says that whenever a person dies, he dies for good. The narrator also discusses his death and imagines that he will be buried under an old tree. The poem ends with an imaginary epitaph from the narrator. The poem starts with a gloomy note and ends with the narrator's death which makes the poem completely soaked in death which is inescapable, universal and ultimate.

Though the speaker says that death cannot be escaped and it comes to everyone, he also speaks about the value of remembering, honouring or just imagining the life of those who are

no more. The poem suggests that if we do so it can become a meaningful act of remembering those whom history and the world have forgotten long back.

The poem also tries to convey that these acts of remembering someone can help us face our mortality. Commemorating the dead makes it easy for us to live and enjoy the present. The people who have been buried in the churchyard do not have any proper memorials and the narrator says that their graves are heaps of dirt and dust without any proper decorations which are found on the tombs of rich people.

The graves at the most have their names and years during which they were alive. All the simple graves have a grave effect on the narrator who imagines what kind of lives these people might have led when they were alive. He imagines that they would have woken up by the call of a rooster.

He thinks that they would have cheerfully ploughed their lands by driving a team of oxen. He also thinks that one of them might have stood up against the tyranny of the greedy landlord of the village. While thinking about the lives of these people, he honours them with all his heart. He imagines that their lives had meaning and genuine emotions.

He also says that even the small and simple traces of the dead can have a deep effect on those who are living. These simple gravestones can make people think of their death. The narrator says that simple rural people engrave Biblical verses and poetries on their graves to teach a mortal rural living being the art of death.

People like to crave sayings that can provide some wisdom about dying and death. Visiting someone's grave not only implies that we should remember someone's life but also face death and find a way to accept it. The poem says that the dead are remembered for two reasons. The first one is honouring and remembering those who are no longer in this world and the second is facing the fact that death is inevitable.

When the narrator ponders over death, he also thinks about the common people who have died without power, fame or wealth. He realizes that many people would have become famous and great if they had grown up under the right conditions. He does not regret the fact but instead says that these people led less troubled lives as compared to the elite class. The narrator rejects fame, wealth and power and celebrates regular people who lead normal lives. The poem says that anonymity is better for one's soul.

The narrator imagines the power and fame common people might have got if they were born in high-class families. The speaker expresses this idea metaphorically by saying that many flowers bloom and nobody looks at them. The same implies to common people, whose power and skills can go unrecognized at times.

The narrator then imagines this potential with reference to some famous people of the past. He imagines that there might be few people in these graves who might have achieved the heights of John Milton, a famous poet of the Puritan Age. The dead, however, were illiterate and restricted to rural trade so they never got a chance to write glorious poems and they were rather unable to express their thoughts in a written form.

The wasted potential imagination of the narrator is pretty sad but then he thinks about the horrible people who got power in history. He mentions Oliver Cromwell who ruled England during the mid 17th century and says that someone in this graveyard might have the same potential for injustice but never got a chance because of their anonymity.

He says that the lives of common people prevent them from becoming a monster. Their place in the world has contained their crimes to a greater degree. They are simple and unknown farmers who live from one harvest to another and do not slaughter anyone for getting the throne. The narrator says after considering everything that power, fame or wealth are not important as common people have simple wishes.

Regular people want understandable and simple things like food and a roof which makes them stay away from the dirty fights of powerful people. Commoners can find happiness by keeping their minds clear. The speaker says that he can relate to this anonymity. The narrator, in the epitaph written at the end of the poem, thinks of himself as a young man who never received an education and dies without wealth and fame.

Though he dies with sadness in his heart, he has found peace in anonymity. He dies without being polluted by fame or wealth. The poem says that life may not be happy but anonymity gives a golden chance to people to live and die in peace without having a cruel or over the top ambition.

There are different kinds of symbols used in the poem to deepen its meaning and enhance its beauty. Darkness and night in the poem are a symbol of isolation and death. The darkness shows the inevitability of death. The darkness in the poem also shows the isolation of the poet from other people.

To overcome this isolation, the poet starts imaging the lives of those who have been dead. The yew tree is also a symbol of death and is a common tree found in British graveyards. The darkness makes the poet feel that death is closing on to him. The light and fire are symbols of life in the poem.

It can be concluded that the poem, on the one hand, talks about death and on the other hand it also talks about methods of accepting death by understanding the lives of those who lived and taking inspiration from them.