The Reflection of Eighteenth Century Thought in the Works of Thomas Gray

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THE REFLECTION OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
THOUGHT IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS GRAY

BY

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THE REFLECTION OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
THOUGHT IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS GRAY

Introduction

The average reader remembers Thomas Gray primarily as the author of the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." As a writer whose poetry and prose is an index to the temper of his age, he is not so widely known. Because many of his productions serve as an excellent commentary on his period, Gray's works seem to warrant special study.

The aim of this thesis will be then to discover in its broad aspects the reflections of Eighteenth Century life and thought in the works of Thomas Gray; specifically this study will deal with Gray's representative poetic productions and his Correspondence and Journals, exclusive of the Latin and Greek poems and translations.

After a certain amount of research had been made on this subject, it was found that each of the proposed chapter titles would be comprehensive enough in scope to warrant a thesis treatment. This presented the problem either of restricting the subject or of presenting a broad treatment of it. It was thought advisable to follow the latter procedure in the belief that such a survey would possess value as an overview of Eighteenth Century thought.

The first chapter is an attempt to give a cross section of the mind of the century. Chapter two attempts to tabulate the attitudes which make up the bents of the three periods--classical, transitional, and romantic--into
which the writings of this era naturally fall. Chapter three will aim to indicate which works of, and to what extent, Gray exhibits the traits and qualities peculiar to these three evolutionary periods. The fourth chapter will analyze Gray's aesthetic and religious attitudes; and the fifth chapter will have to do with Gray's social and political tenets.

The Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley edition of *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1935, was used for the text of the letters. This edition contains the best available text of the letters, about three-fourths of which are printed from the originals adhering carefully to Gray's spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Valuable contributions to the knowledge on Gray are contained in the twenty-six appendices in which difficult problems have been explained for the first time. For the poetry and journals the volumes from Edmund Gosse's edition of *Works of Thomas Gray in Prose and Verse* were used. The biographies consulted were Edmund Gosse's *Thomas Gray* and Robert Ketton-Cramer's *Thomas Gray*. The latter, a 1935 edition, contains the results of recent researches.

The work was facilitated by access to primary and secondary source material at the following libraries: Chicago Public, Loyola University, the Milwaukee Public, and the Newberry.
CHAPTER I

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MIND

Since the object of this study is to discover to what extent Thomas Gray's works reflect the tenets of his age, it will be necessary first to indicate what the mind of that age is. Then against this back-drop one can project the writer to determine in which of his works and to what extent he is a typical exponent of the era from which he derives.

Do the author's literary effects reflect the mind of his century as to content and form? To what degree does he reflect the aesthetic, religious, and social intellect of his age? Does he countenance the political and economic status? If there are divergent schools of thought current, with which one does the writer identify himself; or is there present a tendency to compromise?

Perhaps one of the salient virtues of Gray rests in the fact that his writings are an almost barometric reflection of the transitional processes which literature, in substance as well as in form, has undergone in its swing from the formalized standards of classical tradition to the freedoms which characterized the writings of the romanticists.

The Queen Ann period represented essentially a second-hand classical acumen. Yet, in spite of its superficial imitations and its uninspired spirit, this age set up rules of right reasonings, principles of correct form, and standards of restraint which have much to recommend them.
Almost from the turn of the century, however, readers began to voice a
dissatisfaction with classical delivery since it did not support a necessari-
ly complex, artistic, and human system of values. The new age began to look
to nature and to the common man for inspiration. Highly individualized char-
acters, improbable events, remote setting--these became the *sine qua non* of
the romantic school. Rousseau's theory affirming the fundamental good of the
individual until society had perverted nature's handiwork became the literary
and psychological canon of the age.

Imagination and license became legitimates; warmth and color and passion
became the purple from which poetry should be born, fullblown and unaffected.
Suddenly, and by juxtaposition, their slogan became: It is not *how* you say
it that signifies; it is *what* you say.

Conventional and solemn diction as well as the rhythm-bound, rhyming
couplet were substituted for by a romantic paraphernalia which eventually let
each writer become a law unto himself.

Briefly the essentials of this new school were a belief in the value of
the individual as opposed to group acceptance, of content over form, of the
subjective over the objective, of emotion and imagination over intellect and
judgment. Needleman and Otis epitomize the transition thus:

> It was the victory of mysticism over clarity,
> of color over symmetry, of sympathy over law,
> of feeling over intellect, of romantic atmos-
> phere of matter over classical precision of
> form.

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1 M. H. Needleman and William Bradley Otis. *Outline-History of English
But this emergency did not occur suddenly. Of uncertain and often painfully slow development, the intended transitional period was factually neither classical nor romantic, but a variable of the two schools. It is for this rather indeterminate middle period that the name of Gray has become a synonym. Yet Gray's writings portion themselves appropriately enough into the three periods which make up the Eighteenth Century. One of the ends of this essay is to graph the extent to which Gray reflects these three literary bents.

The whole of man's existence is dominated by his love of truth, his passion for justice, and his delight in beauty. These give direction to his interests, differentiate him from other orders of sentient beings, and assist him in his quest for happiness. This quest is realized only when man has arrived at truth—and such an arrival is one of the major satisfactions of life. Truth helps man to account for what is and why. It enables him to unify, harmonize, and systematize his knowledge.

Often, however, it is through the aesthetic, that faculty which delights the senses and confirms the mind, that man arrives at truth. And every genuine aesthete is a spiritual man. (The whole reason for revelation is the insufficiency of the human mind, and since religion will be discussed in later paragraphs it is deliberately excluded here.)

The aesthetic is that faculty which generates in man an awareness of existence, an awareness of the feelings and sensibilities of others; it familiarizes him with the fine, develops in him sympathy for architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, drama, music, and dancing. And no man is civil-
ized until he has generated a spiritual response to these artistic values. These arts have the power to exalt the sentiments, purify the taste, and correct the morals. Through them man's quest for beauty, truth, and happiness should ultimately arrive.

To gauge the aesthetic accomplishments of the Eighteenth Century one must discover what degree of encouragement was given to the arts. The loftiest manifestation of the aesthetic in England during this century rests in her literature. Its deliberate restraint, its intellectual objectivity, and its classical form have long demanded for it a respect and a consideration which all its limitations cannot dim. The Industrial Revolution had a crippling effect upon the more graphic arts; the machine replaced the craftsman, and art began to be looked upon as a luxury, an amusement, a diversion.

The Gothic of English churches, manor houses, and parks lost their purity because of the Renaissance influence which conditioned both design and ornamentation. Sculpture, dancing, and music were negligible. Painting, too, suffered greatly from foreign influence and even portraiture was executed in a strongly Italianized form with no imaginative power.

Gray himself writes that England was woefully deficient in an appreciation of the arts, but it did encourage throughout the century a deep and abiding love for nature. It was in nature that she experienced her profoundest aesthetic satisfaction. People delighted in formal gardens, avenues of trees, clipped yew hedges, bowling greens, fish ponds, and garden sculpture pieces.

By 1780 people had begun to turn away from these geometrically patterned
and methodized delights. In his *Spectator* Addison writes apropos: "I dislike trees rising in cones, globes, and pyramids. I would rather look upon a tree in all its luxury and diffusion of bough and branches." Eventually the fiercer and more tempestuous phases of nature—storms, mountains, precipices, the troubled waters—subjects hitherto abhorred by society, became the inspiration for artistic and aesthetic experience. But these experiences were too cool and too colorless to leave any profound or very personal effects upon society. The excesses of romantic subjectivity were, after all, quite a normal reaction to the restraint and formality of the classic school.

Religiously, the opening years of the century were marked by controversy and objective speculation. It is a fact that George I, as well as his son, had formally renounced Lutheranism for Anglicanism, but their conduct was motivated by expediency rather than by any religious conviction.

This much, too, is equally well established. The Protestant mandate, which encouraged each individual to let his imagination be his criterion in his interpretation of the Bible which he would translate according to his various moods and judgments, dealt a staggering blow to ecclesiastical authority. Religious bodies and societies began to pale, and soon they had arrived at a state of torpor. After 1717, the convocations of the legislative body of the Church ceased to assemble, and their only remaining influence and activity were in the fields of learning.

It was particularly among the intellectuals and among the socially select sets that sounds of skepticism began to be heard. There was abroad a growing conviction that man must follow a code of belief dictated by reason,
the only true criterion according to the ancients. The veracity of Christianity began to be questioned, and there evolved a kind of belief in a personal God founded on reason and excluding revelation. John Locke did much by his writings to popularize Deistic rationalism which argued that man must be guided by reason alone in all departments of thought.

Still others, rejecting the Bible, Christianity, and revelation, asserted that certitude is a comparative term and that truth can, therefore, never be attained. Since none of these quasi-attempts at systematized thought ever arrived, it is unnecessary to devote further study to their postulates. It was perfectly obvious, however, that any system which made its appeal immediately and only to the head must fail. What vestiges of influence the Church still had failed to convince the upper classes as completely as it failed to solace and to satisfy the masses.

The social aspects of the life of the first half of the Eighteenth Century has little enough to recommend it. The coming into power of the Hanoverian line disintegrated whatever refinement and grace Queen Ann may have succeeded in imposing upon the age. Wholly unclassical himself, George I, 1714-1727, did little for the social solidarity of his reign beyond encouraging a kind of colorless and coarse routine. Gentlemen were still born, not made, and the most uncouth country lout was still the gentleman if he happened to be of the manor born.

It was the age of general lawlessness. Rabble mobs gathered on the slightest pretexts; hangings were gala affairs; and highway looting was a profession. Immorality, gambling, and drinking continued to be prevalent
social vices; and masquerades, balls, and dueling represented the acme of sophisticated diversion. In music England could boast no native art. When musicales were sponsored, the performers as well as their repertoires were imported from Italy, France, or Germany.

Later in the century, when definitely the theater had freed itself of the patronage of court circles, the leisure classes began to develop a taste for light opera. Since there was little theater trivia extant, they were carried almost directly into the realm of serious drama and the legitimate stage through the efforts of one of the greatest dramatic interpreters of all time, David Garrick.

When George III, himself possessed of a delicate and genuine sense of social rectitude, came to the throne in 1760, society had become one colossal casino engaged in an endless round of box-rattlings and card-shufflings. But there were those in England to whom conversation was still an art. To convenience these armchair conservatives, some 3,000 coffee-houses drove a thriving business in coffee and chocolate for nearly a half century. Because women were excluded, these connoisseurs of news, politics, religion, literature, and dilettantism could bespeak themselves freely and frankly.

It was in one of these club houses that the first daily newspaper, a 14 x 8 inch brochure, came into being. Blank areas were left upon each issue; to this the wits of the respective units affixed their sage addendas. The papers were then filed for ready reference for small fry who rented their reading at the rate of a cent a sheet.

Formal education was at an ebb. Oxford and Cambridge were lethargic to
the extent that no formal examinations were given their students until 1770. Because endowments were inadequate and schools were not yet state-supported, gentlemen's sons were obviously preferred and pampered; and dissenters were barred. The occasional student of serious intentions was encouraged to provide his own tutor.

Man should know, in addition to the three R's, how to hunt and how to handle an estate; beyond these, common sense was the only education any man needed. In spite of this common contempt for scholastic equipment, an essential of every pseudo-intellectual was the Grand Tour. These wealthy sons traveled through France and Italy where they frequented inns, theaters, cathedrals, and the castles of nobility. They were expected to acquire "works of art" to freight their home walls—and all too often the acquisitions were spurious; in addition many of these scholastic lords acquired simultaneously finesse, affectation, and an accumulation of continental vices.

The political and economic status, at the turn of the century, witnessed the generation of a two-party system in England. There was on the one hand the Whig merchant class who supported the Hanoverian contingent and favored religious toleration. For the aggrandizement of English commerce and colonization they also encouraged wars against Spain and France.

On the other hand there were the landowning Tory squires who affiliated themselves with the Stuarts, via James III, who were opposed to war and seconded repressive measures against Catholics and dissenters.

But the desire on the part of the English people to return to the old
line gradually passed away. Because of the pronounced lack of essential sovereignty-virtue in the Hanoverian line, the importance attached to a king was rapidly falling off. By 1745 the power of parliament had, in fact become supreme; and there was little asked of royalty beyond that it accept the advice which the ministry gave.

Commerce and the wealth drawn from commerce had become all-important. The interest in trade and the prominence of money questions became the issue of the times, so that when George III succeeded his grandfather in 1760 the name of Great Britain was probably held in higher esteem than ever before or since. Its free institutions were envied by every continental nation. No anti-English tradition had yet arisen and the willful American colonies were still loyal to the mother country.

The interests of England had spread from its own small island of Britain to a world-wide empire. By interests and ambitions outside of her own island limits, England was led to take part in three great wars of the Eighteenth Century which were closed by the treaties of Utrecht in 1713, of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, and of Paris in 1763. In the latter treaty she secured control of the vast dominion of North America and India, and through her explorers she laid down the general course through which her later civilization was to flow.

Numerous factors explain why England was the predestined cradle of the Industrial Revolution. The peculiar laws and customs of Hanoverian England allowed unusual freedom to the individual and did little to discourage private initiative. Free trade extended over the length and breadth of the land
in contrast to the numerous custom barriers then dividing Germany, Italy, and France; and relatively few restrictions of State, municipality, or guild were placed on commerce or manufacturing. Capital had been accumulated as never before in the world's history, and the English capitalist accustomed to invest it on commerce on a grand scale would readily invest it in industry on a scale equally large; and above all the markets for English goods already existing in America, Europe, and the Orient could be indefinitely developed by the merchant marine to dispose of any increase in the quantity of goods at home.

The principal industry of England had always been agriculture, and the landowning class had always exercised the strongest influence over the government. However, during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries commerce was becoming a serious rival, and even manufacturing was spread widely through certain parts of the country. Farming, trading, and manufacturing were still being carried on by the same methods as had been in use for centuries. A rapid and extensive series of changes, however, began during the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, chiefly in the field of manufacturing. This whole series of changes known as the "Industrial Revolution" exercised a widespread influence upon the economic, social, and political life of the people.

Among the early inventions were several which revolutionized the textile industry. Since the newly invented machinery was large and heavy, factories were built either near the streams which furnished the power, or after the invention of the steam engine, wherever it was convenient to build them.
The old manufacturing in private houses or small shops, which had been customary for centuries, came almost entirely to an end. Large numbers of men, women, and children were now employed in large factories. Thus the factory system of industry developed.

Much the same kind of change that took place in manufacturing took place in other lines. Some of these modifications affected communications and transportation. The roads of the country were extremely bad and many of them had scarcely been repaired since Roman days. They were generally under the charge of the authorities of each locality who had not the means or perhaps the initiative to improve them or keep them in repair. Coaches were continually sinking into ruts, and goods and persons were more commonly carried on horseback than by wheeled vehicles. It was not until near the close of the century that improvements were actually made.

Briefly, the Eighteenth Century was an era of dramatic conflicts for England, conflicts from which the nation always emerged victorious. Internally the coming of the "Industrial Revolution" effected a complete transformation also. It was the beginning of a new way of life industrially, politically, and economically for these island people.
CHAPTER II
LITERARY TRENDS AS REFLECTED IN THOMAS GRAY'S POETRY

The popular conception of Thomas Gray is that he was a literary recluse who spent most of his life at Cambridge studying the classics, reading old manuscripts, and occasionally writing a poem. Perhaps a slight acquaintance with the writer and his poetry leaves one with this impression of the man. However, to form a just estimate of his character and ability and to acquire a true understanding of the period, his correspondence as well as his poetry must be studied. In addition to the intrinsic excellence which differentiates the writings of Gray, his output is an index to the period out of which it came.

In respect to the writer's prose as a reflection of the thought of his age, Beers remarks:

His letters, journals, and other prose remains, posthumously published, first showed how long an arc his mind had subtended on the circle of art and thought. He was sensitive to all the fine influences that were in the literary air.¹

Of his poetry as a reflection of the trends of his age one of his biographers affirms: "Unconsciously, instinctively, this indolent and retiring scholar expressed in the splendor and melancholy of a dozen poems the spirit of his age."²

On the same subject Hudson has this to say:

Gray's poetry is indeed, as one of his critics has said, an epitome of the change which the influence of a new spirit and new ideas was gradually bringing about in the literature of his century. The period of his poetic activity was an age of transition—of a slow and for the most part an unconscious movement away from the Augustan school towards the Romantic. In that transition Gray was to some extent a follower of the changing taste, but to some extent also a pioneer of it. He moved with his time, but especially towards the close of his life he moved ahead of it.3

After reading Gray's representative prose and poetry one is inclined to agree with critics, like Beers and Hudson, who affirm that the author's works serve as a definite reflection of the evolution of Eighteenth Century literary transitions. His work reflects certain literary characteristics of the classical school; but he also shares with some of his contemporaries the reawakened interest in nature, in common man, and in medieval culture; consequently, he is one of the significant precursors of the romantic movement.

Before entering upon a treatment of the literary trends of his times as reflected in Gray's works, it seems advisable at this point to devote some space to a biographical sketch of the poet.

It was at Cornhill, London, on December 26, 1716, that Thomas Gray, the fifth and sole surviving child, was born to Philip Gray and Dorothy Antrobus.

Much of Gray's childhood must have been unhappy. His father, a man of some wealth, brutal and extravagant in temperament, ill-used and neglected his family. To him the poet owed little beside the musical quality of his poetry, for Philip Gray, like the father of Milton, was a skilled musician. Since his father refused to educate him, the poet's mother, to whom Gray remained tenderly attached all his life, managed to send him to Eton.

For the poet the most important happening here was the formation of the Quadruple Alliance with Horace Walpole, Thomas Ashton, and Richard West, whose common intellectual tastes cemented their friendship. Walpole, son of the Prime Minister, was a lad of genteel and fastidious interests who was to become the great letter writer of the century. The friendship between Gray and Walpole lasted, except for a short interval, until Gray's death. The intimate association with West was broken off early by the latter's untimely death at the age of twenty-six. The tie between Ashton and the poet was less intimate, and the former slipped inconspicuously out of the history of the Quadruple Alliance.

Gray's deep interest in natural history, particularly in botany, during the last years of his life can be traced to the study of the subject at Eton with his uncle, Robert Antrobus. The poet's school days must, judging from circumstances, have been happy. He found relief from an unpleasant home life, independence, and friends of his own age amid the surrounding and traditions of Eton.

On October 9, 1734, Gray entered Peterhouse, Cambridge, which was to be his main domicile until 1756. By this time the Alliance had been broken,
since Walpole had entered King's College where Ashton was already enrolled and West had gone to Oxford. The firmest and most lasting friendship which Gray made at Peterhouse was that with Thomas Wharton.

Gray's melancholy, one of his major character traits, was intensified by the dull university education of the day. He loved the classics which were then in little favor; but for mathematics, which was stressed, he had no taste. Philosophy, such as it was, interested him slightly, though apparently he read and understood Locke. With the exception of a few friends, he had no fondness for students or teachers. The fragmentary poem "Hymn to Ignorance" indicates his attitude toward the school. While an undergraduate he began to publish Latin verses and in 1738 to translate classical passages into excellent English verse.

Intending later to read law, Gray left Cambridge in the autumn of 1738, not yet having his degree, and apparently without any definite plan of action. In March, 1739, at the generous offer of Horace Walpole, his Eton College friend, he started on a Grand Tour of the Continent. This pilgrimage was to last two and one-half years. This was the only time that Gray was out of his native country, but this single visit produced a deep impression on his character. The travels of the young men taken in leisurely comfort are described in their letters.

During the two months sojourn in Paris, Gray cultivated a taste for the French classical dramatists, especially Racine, whom he later tried to imitate in his fragmentary "Agrippina." Walpole and Gray attended the Comedy and the Opera, visited Versailles, attended installations and spectacles,
and saw all of the best that was to be seen. After visiting other French cities such as Rheims, Dijon, and Lyons they proceeded on their journey to Italy.

Upon crossing the Alps for the first time, Gray became impressed with the striking beauty of the mountain scenery which had been previously regarded, even by the poets, with more horror than admiration. They took a long route through Savoy that they might visit the Grande Chartreuse which impressed Gray forcibly by the noble grandeur of its location. In Italy the rich treasures of art and the absorbing historical background of Rome, Florence, and Herculaneum occupied the travelers during their sojourn in these cities.

In April, 1741, they started for Venice but parted at Reggio as a consequence of a quarrel. The affair has been garbled by literary gossip mongers, but the reason for the quarrel remains obscure. Gray proceeded to Venice alone, and returned through Verona, Milan, Turin, and Lyons. He paid a second visit to the Grand Chartreuse where he wrote the famous "Alcaic Ode" in the album of the Fathers at the monastery.

Two months after his return to England his father died, after having squandered a fairly considerable fortune. In October, 1742, Gray's mother went to live with her two sisters in the house owned by one of them at Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire, and Gray went to Cambridge to study civil law.

In June of the same year West, with whom Gray had corresponded while he was abroad and to whom he had sent his "Ode on the Spring," died. As in the
case of Milton, Shelley, and Keats, each of whom was prompted to write a poignant lyric upon the death of a friend, so the fire of poetic genius seemed to be kindled in Gray as the result of his grief over the loss of his friend, Richard West. In memory of him he wrote his "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West."

The year 1742 is a significant date in Gray's life, for it marks the beginning of his work as an English poet. During this, the most fruitful year of his poetic effort, he wrote the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West," the "Hymn to Adversity," and possibly the "Hymn to Ignorance" which appeared after the poet's death. In 1743 Gray was made LL.B., but he really spent most of his time reading Greek and annotating what he had read with the care he had displayed in noting what had interested him during the tour. One of his delightful short poems was the "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat," which he sent to Walpole after their reconciliation in 1745.

The most widely known of his works, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," was begun in 1743 but was not completed until 1750. In manuscript form it attracted so much attention that a pirate announced his intention of printing it. Alarmed at this turn of events, Gray authorized Dodsley, to whom he yielded all his profits, to print an edition in 1751. At once it attained the popularity it has never lost.

In 1750 "A Long Story" was written, and in 1753 his six best poems, including a "Hymn to Adversity" were published with designs by Richard Bentley. During the next four years he wrote his two Pindaric odes, "The Progress of
Poesy" and "The Bard," among the best of their kind in English.

The rest of Gray's life was devoted to his friends, his studies, and his travels. In 1756 he changed his quarters from Peterhouse to Pembroke because of a rude prank played on him by a group of undergraduates. At Pembroke he found consolation in making friends with young men like Norton Nicholls. Early in 1759 when the British Museum first opened, Gray settled in London to study in the reading room. Except for short visits he did not return to Cambridge until the summer of 1761. He also made tours through regions marked by romantic scenery, the beauties of which he was one of the first to appreciate in modern fashion.

The office of laureateship was offered to the poet in 1757, but he declined it. In 1764 and 1765 he visited Scotland, and in 1769 he paid a visit to the English Lakes, which he described in his Journals. In addition to his love of romantic scenery and his morbid temperament which gave him his prominent place among the "Churchyard Poets," mention should be made of his enthusiasm for the buildings and writings of the "Gothic" past. His deep interest in the "Poems of Ossian," purported to be translations by James Macpherson, prompted him to write in imitation of the Norse and Welsh his "The Fatal Sisters," "The Descent of Odin," "The Triumphs of Owen," and "The Death of Hoel."

In 1762 he had applied for the professorship of history and modern languages at Cambridge, but he failed to secure it; in 1768 his successful competitor having died, the post with its good salary and nominal duties was given to Gray. For the installation of the Duke of Grafton as chancellor
at Cambridge, Gray wrote an ode. One of the last and most ardent of his friendships was formed with a brilliant young Swiss, Charles de Bonstetten, whom he visited in London. Gray hoped to follow him on a journey to Switzerland, but failing health prevented this. He died on July 30, 1771, and was buried beside his beloved mother in the churchyard in Stoke Poges.

Such in outline is the biography of the poet whose works will form the basis of the study in this thesis. The total output of Gray's poetry is very small, but it is metal without the mass. His prose which consists primarily of his familiar letters—among the most delightful in the language—is considerably larger in bulk.\(^4\)

His poetic development is excellently summarized by one of his biographers, Mr. Gosse:

His metrical work steadily advances: we have the somewhat cold and timid odes of his youth; we proceed to the superb "Elegy," in which the Thomsonian school reaches its apex... we cross over to the elaborate Pindaric odes, in which Gray throws off the last shackles of Augustan versification and prepares the way for Shelley; and lastly, we have the purely romantic fragments of the close of his life, by those lyrics inspired by the Edda and by Ossian, in which he steps out of the eighteenth century altogether, and find ourselves in the full stream of romanticism.\(^5\)

Gray's works fall appropriately enough into these three distinct


classifications: (1) the Augustan, (2) the Transitional, and (3) the Romantic periods. Since the poet began his literary career during the Augustan, or Classical period, it might be well to outline briefly the standards and trends of that age before attempting to determine to what extent Gray is an apostle of the Augustans.

This age was called the Augustan, or Classical, because the writers strove to imitate the dominant figures of Rome—Caesar, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, and Lucretius who, in their times, aimed to emulate the methods of the classical Greeks of a few centuries earlier. Definite standards were set for the literary writer. Almost all were focused around the single point of common sense applied to the imagination. Classical authority was a prime necessity for every type of writing, and every innovation was forced to stand the test of its rules and unities. Consequently the temper of the age became essentially critical, warping the creative.

Serious verse was practically tethered to the heroic couplet, two rhyming lines of five beats each. In an age concerned with externals and with the manipulation of language it was likely that the vital parts of literature might be neglected. Hence while writers were polishing their couplets and clarifying their sentences, they ignored the natural instincts of the heart. Active intellectual activity, devoid of intensity, pathos, or passion, characterized the age. Its admirable qualities were its good sense, its solidity of judgment, and its close attention to thoroughness and simplicity.

6 Ibid., 380.
These were the literary standards of the age when Gray began his career. He was swayed like his contemporary Collins by conflicting literary forces. Respect for Dryden, on the one hand, forced him to imitate the great exemplar of Augustanism; while on the other hand his own retiring, reflective temperament impelled him to write in the strain of tender regret and twilight meditation of Collins. This was "the still small voice of poetry" which spoke to the heart of Gray. His love of Spenser implied kinship with romantic art. Nevertheless, he wrote under the shadow of Dryden's great name, still powerful though fading.

Occasionally, however, he threw off the shackles of Augustan forms and authority and emerged from its shadow to give expression to his own thoughts and feelings. Since this seldom occurred, we are led to believe that the subsequent loss to poetry was great. His imagination, stimulated by the influence of Spenser, awakened in him a love of sound, color, and human emotion which drew him to the call of romance.

Spenser was among his favorite poets. Nicholls quotes Gray as having confessed that he (Gray) never sat down to compose poetry without reading Spenser for a considerable time previously; but he could not, on the other hand, tolerate any criticism of Dryden. Gray told Beattie that if there was any excellence in his own numbers, he had learned it wholly from the great poet. He advised the same writer: "Remember Dryden, and be blind to all

his faults." He considered Dryden as the most excellent writer of odes. His love for him led Gray away from his natural bent of writing to the more fixed and pompous style of which Dryden was still the acknowledged leader; however, the poet's temper was not suited to this style of writing.

Johnson speaks of Gray's attempt "to be tall by walking on tiptoe." His success is a tour de force rather than a natural artistic expression of his genius when he does succeed in this loud rhetorical style of verse.

Caught by the conflicting intellectual and artistic currents of the age, Gray fluctuated between Spenser and Dryden and between romantic feeling and imagination, on the one hand, and the classic restraint on the other. It must not be concluded, however, that his poetry is a mere reflection of these models. It expresses the mood of the writer caught in an age of disillusion. The result is introspective, reflective poetry. The poet is revealed to us sometimes clearly, at other times in a penetrable disguise. Gray was held in the grip of the restless, morbid, introspective spirit of the time, and in his lonely seclusion he fell an easy victim. Disillusion marks his work.8

This prefatory explanation of the trends of the age and the standards set for its literature forms the background for those poems of Gray which show the Augustan or classical influence. His first important effort was the fragmentary "De Principius Cogitandi" (1740-1742), in which he put Locke's philosophy into Latin hexameters. To this period also belong two scenes of a "Classical" tragedy, "Agrippina" (1741-1742); a "Hymn to Ignorance" (1742),

and an essay on the "Alliance of Education and Government" (1748), both in classic couplets, didactic in content, and both unfinished; and several lyric poems. The lyrics "Ode on the Spring," "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," and "To Adversity," each written in 1742, show the influence of Dryden's lyrics. Conventional imagery and diction are noticeable in these poems.9

The "Ode on the Spring," typical of Gray's poetry of this period, will serve as an example for detailed discussion of the use Gray made of his poetical powers during this period. In spite of the fact that this ode is no longer a favorite part of Gray's poetical works, it was especially significant in 1742 on account of its form. Here Gray sounds a note of protest against the rigid versification, the iambic rhyming lines, which had reigned in England for more than sixty years.

From the beginning of his career Gray showed a disposition to use the more national forms of verse and to work out his stanzas on a more harmonic principle. The couplet and the vague length to which it might be repeated did not appeal to him. He believed that a poem should have a vertebrate form which should respond at least to the mood if not to the subject. This reveals his acute perception of true lyrical beauty. In the "Ode on the Spring" he uses a quatrains of the common ballad measure; he adds an octosyllabic couplet, followed by three lines prolonging the music, and he closes

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it gravely with a short line of six syllables. In respect to the content of the poem, the poet as a lover of nature is surrounded by all the delights of spring in the woodlands. Here he sits in quiet, pensive thought, tinged with the melancholy of disillusion:

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch  
A broader browner shade;  
Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech  
O'er-canopies the glade;  
Beside some water's rushy brink  
With me the Muse shall sit, and think  
(At ease reclin'd in rustic state)  
How vain the ardour of the Crowd,  
How low, how little are the Proud,  
How indigent the great!

When the poet sees the insects hummimg and flying around in the sunlight, his thought takes a new turn. With memories of lines from Virgil, Milton, and Thomson he describes them. This is Gray's custom. He gives evidence of being a "literary poet" because books are a greater inspiration to him than real life. However he is interested in man as man and after describing the insects in the poem, he continues:

To Contemplation's sober eye  
Such is the race of Man:  
And they that creep, and they that fly,  
Shall end where they began.  
Alike the Busy and the Gay  
But flutter thro' life's little day,  
In fortune's varying colours drest:  
Brush'd by the hand of rough Mischance,  
Or chill'd by age, their airy dance  
They leave, in dust to rest.

12 Ibid., 6.
The pseudo-classic habit of personification is distinctly noticeable in this poem as well as in others of this period. The introspective mood leads Gray to think and speak of himself. In his imagination, the insects answer his questions:

Methinks I hear in accents low
The sportive kind reply:
Poor moralist! and what art thou?
A solitary fly!
Thy Joys no glittering female meets,
No hive hast thou of hoarded sweets,
No painted plumage to display:
On hasty wings thy youth is flown;
Thy sun is set, thy spring is gone—
We frolick, while 'tis May.13

It seemed that Gray never learned the lesson of the closing line of this poem, for it was his custom to dream of winter’s cold amidst the spring sunshine. This characteristic mood of the poet developed early. It started almost as a pleasing pastime in his early life.

The "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" modelled on Horace's "Ode to Fortune" regards boyhood in a singular manner unless we realize in the author the true elegaic temper. Seeing boys in the schoolyard, Gray reflects upon the probable unhappy fate of each one as soon as he reaches manhood. A terrible throng—Black Misfortune, Angry Passions, Fear, Unhappy Love, Despair, Unkindness, Remorse, Madness, Poverty, Age, Disease, and Death—surround youth. The sole pleasure he derives from the scene is the reflection, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." Contemplating humanity as a whole, he thinks of man as under the sentence:

13 Ibid., 7.
To each his sufferings: all are men,
Condemn'd alike to groan,
The tender for another's pain;
Th' unfeeling for his own. 14

During the second or transitional period of the Eighteenth Century, intellectual activity loomed less largely; and the writing was more genial, more enthusiastic, and more varied. The first flush of the summer of romanticism is discernible. In poetry, though the general type still remained artificial, there was no longer the cultivation of one form to the exclusion of all others. English verse quietly reasserted its characteristic qualities and resumed powers heretofore prohibited. This change was devoid of sensation, revolution, or violent initiative. Passion, notably absent from the poetry of the previous period, did not return suddenly; but melancholy did assume a significant place in the emotional element of poetry. 15

Gray's compositions of this period which will be treated here are "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" and the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Since the first of these does not rank as a significant poem in Gray's collection, it is solely for the contrast that it furnishes to his more serious poetry that it is included here.

The first of the compositions, "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" celebrating an occurrence in Walpole's household, shows Gray's ability to write in a playful vein. This bit of "society verse" written with playful

14 Ibid., 20.
solemnity is marked by lightness, vividness, and sufficiency of detail. Representative of these qualities are the stanzas which follow:

'Twas on a lofty vase's side,
Where China's gayest art had dy'd
The azure flowers, that blow;
Demurest of the tabby kind,
The pensive Selima reclin'd,
Gazed on the lake below.

Her conscious tail her joy declar'd;
The fair round face, the snowy beard,
The velvet of her paws,
Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,
She saw; and purr'd applause.

Still had she gaz'd; but 'midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream:
Their scaly armour's tyrian hue
Thro' richest purple to the view
Betray'd a golden gleam.

The most significant production of the transitional period is Gray's immortal "Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard." The poem was not a presentation of a unique thought but the expression of a widespread popular feeling, the "melancholy" of the first half of the Eighteenth Century. An able explanation of this mood is given by Amy Reed.

'It] was partly an implication in the classic and in the English literary tradition, partly the result of the political and religious upheavals of the seventeenth century and partly the by-product of contemporary philosophic and scientific thought. It was a sentiment widely diffused among everyday average people, and had been repeatedly the subject of poetical effusions.
by authors who had found the largest possible audience. Against such a background of melancholy literature, Gray's skillful synthesis of the mood and thought of the moment stood out with peculiar effectiveness, and was therefore destined both to find instant popularity and to become a new center of influence radiating melancholy lyricism throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. 18

Neo-classical elements are evident in form, quotability, and aphoristic sentiments. It follows an approved classical form, the elegy, and it fulfills perfectly Pope's dictum, "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." Illustrative of the neo-classical elements is the following stanza:

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. 19

It is to be noted that the poem is a certain departure from Pope and that it points to the romantic movement in its delicate feeling for nature, its exaltation of lowly folk, and its mood of reflective melancholy. It is the best example of several of the so-called "graveyard poems" which in this century followed Milton's "Il Penseroso" in expressing a thoughtful and somber view of life. A passage descriptive of nature and the somber view of life is the following:

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,

19 Edmund Gosse. Works of Thomas Gray. 75.
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.20

Indicative of the exaltation of the lowly is this stanza:

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.21

Dr. Johnson remarked of the poem that “it abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo.” Some of these images are “drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds,” “all the air a solemn stillness holds,” “the ivy-mantled tower,” “that yew tree’s shade,” “the breezy call of incense-breathing morn,” and others. The lasting qualities of the poem can be explained by the universality of its appeal, the thoughts on the ever present facts of life, death, and the transiency of human labor combined with melody and beauty of phrase. These qualities are conspicuous in this stanza:

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.22

Gray’s use of nature deserves special consideration since the landscape of the “Elegy” is introduced only incidentally and as a background for human life. Stoke Poges cemetery is most likely the scene of the poem. Gray’s method of treating nature in this poem is markedly different from that in his early odes. In the latter he used such classic expressions as

20 Ibid., 73.
21 Ibid., 76.
22 Ibid., 74.
"Venus' train" and the "Attic warbler." Nevertheless in the "Elegy" the realities of the quiet scene rise before us and nature is seen and explained directly. Consequently the poem deserves a place in the history of the rise and spread of the admiration for nature in the Eighteenth Century.

Added to this development of a feeling for nature, the poem marks the beginning of the mood of tender melancholy—the mood so noticeable in later romantic literature, but which was entirely absent in the taste and habits of the Augustan age. The poet's own temperament explains the melancholy of the poem; moreover the sentiment he expresses here was "in the air" at the time; other poets, notably Collins and Joseph and Thomas Wharton, expressed it too; thus the "Elegy" while entirely personal, is also something more than personal. It was in harmony with the prevalent feeling of the day and because of its instant and wide popularity it did much to stimulate a tendency already existing—that of dwelling upon the night side of nature and the pathos of human life.23

The history of English poetry in the last of the three divisions of the Eighteenth Century is marked by a reaction against the dominant ideals of the Augustan school. Its inception dates from the time Pope himself was at the height of fame, and it gained considerably in volume and influence during the decades that preceded the rise of Wordsworth. Since the movement had no leader, nor any definite program, it was primarily tentative in character, and it sought many avenues of escape from the conventions of the Augustan

period which were beginning by degrees to be recognized as restrictive and oppressive. 24

Certain well-marked trends are conspicuous in this movement to which the name romantic is given. At times these tendencies are conflicting, yet in the final analysis they are closely connected. They are (1) the cry of long-stifled emotion and of return to nature in the most general sense which that phrase will bear, (2) the utterance of individual personality, (3) the renewed love of external nature, and the sense of a living bond between it and man, (4) the reawakening of religion, (5) the revival of humor, (6) the return towards the medieval past, (7) the craving for the remote and the supernatural, (8) the reversion to the ideals of Greek poetry and the simplicity of Greek imagination. 25

The nucleus of the whole movement, so far as it is related to romance, lies in the revolt of the emotions against the dominance of the intellect. The Augustan poets had focused their interest on reason as their guiding star, and reason to them meant common sense as a guide in the affairs of every day life. After two generations a strong reaction set in against this distorted view of poetry.

The reaction had begun first in England in the poetry of Thomson, in the novels of Richardson, and in a large section of English society among cultivated women. Through Richardson the movement spread to Europe and particularly to France. In English literature the change resulted in empha-
sis being placed upon originality as contrasted with mere craftsmanship, and in the poet's becoming, in the phraseology of the period, an "enthusiast" rather than a "wit." Interest in past ages, meanwhile, promoted the restoration of romance to poetry. This romantic movement is specifically associated with imitation of Spenser and the old ballads and with a "Gothic" or medieval revival. At the same time changes were taking place in the form and diction of poetry. Outstanding was the effort to make poetry speak in a simpler and more natural style than that of the school of Pope. The couplet which had been supreme now yielded place to other media—the Spenserian stanza, the ode, blank verse, and various other forms. 26

Gray's place in the romantic movement is thus explained by Eric Partridge:

Gray possesses a great importance for our literature when he is considered as an early worker in the Romantic movement. Gray did bring something new into English poetry—he made the ode and the lyric express with warm emotion and exquisite technique the nobler sentiments, broad aspects of art and literature, and the aesthetic joys of Nature; he broke away from conventional metres and stanza forms. Gray almost throughout his career harked back every now and then to certain minor characteristics of the Pope school, as for instance, in the personifications that tend to "suffocate" the seventh and eighth stanzas of the "Eton Ode." Gray heralded and embodied in his best poems many of the Romantic qualities so eminently possessed by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and others. 27

26 John Buchan, ed. 388-389 also Cambridge Modern History. VI, 823.
Gray's elaborate Pindaric odes, "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard," exemplify the step Mr. Gosse speaks of in these words: "... we cross over to the elaborate Pindaric odes, in which Gray throws off the last shackles of Augustan versification and prepared the way for Shelley." Both in content and form these odes are a departure from the standards of the preceding age. "The Progress of Poesy" which is a rapid and brilliant account of the history of poetry and the divine influence on the life of man shows a new conception of poetry and its functions.

The attitude was changed by the growth of interest in folk songs and ballads and by the increasing knowledge of early and savage peoples. In contrast to the previous popular conception of poetry as a matter of mere technique, it was coming to be recognized as a growth and as an inspiration; the expression of feelings was beginning to be valued. The originality of structure and the varied music of the balanced strophes constitute the poetic architectonics of the odes by which Gray broke away from classicism.

The first two stanzas of "The Progress of Poesy" are quoted to illustrate outstanding features of the poem: an elaborate metrical scheme, romantic love of wild scenery, spirited declamation, romantic fervor, and exalted imagination.

Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake,
And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.
From Helicon's harmonious springs
A thousand rills their mazy progress take:
The laughing flowers, that round them blow,

29 William H. Hudson, 85-86.
Drink life and fragrance as they flow.
Now the rich stream of music winds along
Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong.
Thro' verdant vales, and Ceres' golden reign:
Now rolling down the steep amain,
Headlong, impetuous, see it pour;
The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.
   Oh! Sovereign of the willing soul,
Parent of sweet and solemn-breathing airs,
Enchanting shell! the sullen Cares
   And frantic Passions hear thy soft controul.
On Thracia's hills the Lord of War
Has curb'd the fury of his car,
And drop'd his thirsty lance at thy command.
Perching on the scept'red hand
Of Jove, the magic lulls the feather'd king
With ruffled plumes, and flagging wing:
Quench'd in dark clouds of slumber lie
The terror of his beak, and light'nings of his eye.

As a discoverer of the romance of primitive literature, Gray showed a prophetic trait. He grew enthusiastic over Ossian and valued the poetry as much as the Europeans had done. The details of the Ossianic problem lie beyond the scope of this study. Only the characteristics and the influence of the poetry are concerned here.

The final explanation of the popularity of these poems was to be found in their matter and their spirit. They were wild, romantic, and filled with supernaturalism. They were permeated with romantic melancholy. They stirred the imaginations of men since they presented to readers a world of heroic simplicity set in a landscape of mists and mountains. The poems on northern and Celtic themes written under the influence of Ossian were "The Fatal Sisters," "The Descent of Odin," "The Triumphs of Owen," and "The Death of Hoel."

31 John Buchan, 400-401.
Representative of this group of compositions was "The Descent of Odin" which was a vigorous paraphrase of an ancient Scandinavian poem dealing with the fate of Odin's son, Balder, who had been warned by dreams of his approaching death. Disguised, Odin goes down into the realms of the underworld to consult the prophetess who darkly foreshadows his doom. He is to be slain by a slip of mistletoe, the only thing on earth which had not sworn not to injure him. The mistletoe had been placed by Loki, the evil spirit, in the hands of the blind Hoder. Historically, "The Descent of Odin" was significant, for it showed that Gray had left the Augustan tradition and was now a purely romantic poet.32

In retrospect it may be said that Gray occupies a distinctive niche in the temple of poetry. At the outset of his literary career he followed from a distance the beaten path of the Augustan writers. Not content however with all of their standards, he made definite departures in content and versification. The English form of versification in vogue for the preceding sixty years did not suit his taste or purposes. Consequently instead of using the two iambic rhyming lines he adopted a meter and line length appropriate for each respective poem. Variety in content and verse form marks the poems of this period as well as those in later years. The conflicting forces of Dryden and Spenser caused him to fluctuate in his poetic impulses. Occasionally he freed himself from the inhibiting authority and forms of the age and expressed freely his own emotions.

During the transitional period emotion, which had been almost a negligible factor in the poetry of the preceding years, gradually came to the fore. Intellectual activity grew less manifest, and the first symptoms of romanticism were discernible. The "Elegy Written in the Country Church-yard" is the outstanding poem of the period. In its feeling for nature, its mood of tender melancholy, and the universal appeal of its theme, the "Elegy" ranks as Gray's finest poem of the transitional period. In a more marked degree than heretofore his poetry contained effects of the subtle fitness and suggestion which announce romanticism.

In his last group of poems he again reflects romantic tendencies by his devotion to the Middle Ages and to Scandinavian antiquity. In "The Bard," "The Fatal Sisters," and "The Descent of Odin" there is evident a more conscious innovation than appears in any of his other works. In his love for the old and in his adventures into the new he initiated the romantic impulse or at least gave it practical poetic impetus.
CHAPTER III

AESTHETIC AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

AS REFLECTED IN GRAY'S WORKS

What the world is inclined to look upon as effeminacy in Gray was in reality a fastidiousness which contributed some of the finer qualities in his work. This fact may explain the many-sidedness of the poet's aesthetic interests. In his conversation he expressed himself with elegant accuracy of phrase. His crowning accomplishment rests in the fact that he composed the "Elegy" with such terseness and simplicity that it is inimitable. In this poem he has compressed into a few aptly chosen phrases what other writers had been saying verbosely for centuries; in short it is a triumph of nicety and fastidiousness.\(^1\)

Since it is as a poet that Gray is most widely known, it should be observed that he set rigid standards for himself in poetic art: "Extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, & musical, is one of the grand beauties of lyric poetry. this I have always aim'd at, & never could attain."\(^2\)

Meticulous and exacting, he believed that he could never attain this high goal, but his critics remain adamant in their insistence that he most certain-

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ly obtains in conciseness, beauty of expression, and musical qualities. John Morley says of Gray with reference to his work on the "Elegy"... "to find beautiful and pathetic language, set to harmonious numbers, for the common impressions of meditative minds, is no small part of the Poet's task. Gray performed that task supremely well."  

Even so severe a critic as Mr. Swinburne had been obliged to praise the "Elegy" as a poem of high perfection and of universal appeal to the tenderest and noblest of human feeling; and he further remarks, "as an elegiac poet Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station."  

In the management of meter, Elwin contends, "Gray has no superior. His ear was exquisite, and the few harsh lines, and very harsh they are, which are to be found in his poetry were evidently left because he preferred to sacrifice melody for expression."  

It was natural that Gray, possessed of a discerning judgment, would evaluate the books which he read; and here again he reveals his aesthetic equipment. Gray's enthusiasm for French writers was far greater than was that of his fellow countrymen; and his letters are replete with references to them. All his life he remained an avid reader of French works; and he with the fashionable world flaunted a fondness for inferior fiction. He read such writers as Montesquieu, Buffon, and the encyclopedists with enthusiasm. For Voltaire he had no sympathy, and the only work of Rousseau which appealed to  

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3 Eric Partridge, 159.  
4 Edmund Gosse. Gray, 98.  
him was *Emile.*

Of the latter's works he says:

Rousseau's people do not interest me; there is but one character and one style in them all, I do not know their faces asunder. I have no esteem for their persons or conduct, am not touched with their passions; and as to their story, I do not believe a word of it—not because it is improbable but because it is absurd.

After reading six volumes of *Nouvelle Éloïse* he wrote to Mason:

...all I can say for myself is, that I was confined three weeks at home by a severe cold, & had nothing better to do. In short I went on & on in hopes of finding some wonderful denouement that would set all at right, & bring something like Nature & Interest out of absurdity & insipidity. No such thing: it grows worse & worse, & ...is the strongest instance I ever saw, that a very extraordinary Man may mistake his own talents.

Pope, the literary figure who established the social prestige of the litterateur, commanded Gray's attention. He was also a shining example of what attention for perfection and style can accomplish.

As to the Dunciad, it is greatly admired: the Genii of Operas and Schools, with their attendants, the pleas of the Virtuosos and Florists, and the yawn of dulness in the end, are as fine as anything he has written. The Metaphysician's part is to me the worst; and here and there a few well expressed lines, and some hardly intelligible.

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6 [Cambridge History of English Literature. X, 152.](#)
7 [Gray to Horace Walpole, December, 1760. Correspondence. II, 717.](#)
8 [Gray to Reverend William Mason, from London, January 22, 1761. Correspondence. II, 722.](#)
9 [Gray to West, from Cambridge, April 1, 1742. Correspondence. I, 189.](#)
Gray comments on Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*:

I have myself, upon your recommendation, been reading *Joseph Andrews*. The incidents are ill laid and without invention; but the characters have a great deal of nature, which always pleases even in her lowest shapes. Parson Adams is perfectly well; so is Mrs. Slipslop, and the story of Wilson; and throughout he shows himself well read in Stage Coaches, Country Squires, Inns, and Inns of Court. His reflections upon high people and low people and misses and masters, are very good. However the exaltedness of some minds (or rather of feeling and want of feeling or observation) make them insensible to these light things. (I mean such as characterize and paint nature) yet surely they are as weighty and much more useful than your grave discourse upon the mind, the passions, and what not.

It is not surprising that a poet who was so lyrically sensitive should have almost a passion for music. Mason states that if we exclude his frequent experiments with flowers, music was the chief and almost the only diversion Gray indulged in. His taste in music was well-developed and was founded on the best models, the great masters who flourished about the time of his favorite, Pergolesi.

While he was on the Grand Tour, he made a valuable collection of the compositions of Pergolesi, Buononcini, Vinci, and Hasse particularly such of their vocal compositions as he had heard and admired. He was judicious in his collection, his object being not to collect the complete sets of the works of any master but only the best of their kind. His instrument was the harpsichord; and although he was not a skilled musician, when he sang to its

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accompaniment, his voice was capable of conveying to the intelligent and appreciative listener more than an ordinary degree of satisfaction. However he could seldom be prevailed upon to play even for intimate friends.

Of the volumes in Gray's musical collection, some possess special interests. They are securely bound in pigskin covers, several of them being lettered on the front and back in the handwriting of the poet. The music had been copied, as a rule, by a professional copyist in a bold style; but Gray has added besides some notes, some airs, and has made for each volume a table of contents in his beautiful and legible handwriting. Most of the music consists of operatic airs from the foremost composers of the Italian schools of the Eighteenth Century.

Gray's annotations relate to the titles of the operas from which the airs are taken, to the names of the singers who participated in the performances he had heard, and to those who in any significant way were identified with the music. Although this point cannot be determined with certainty, the circumstance that a city or a date was added seems to indicate that Gray wished to preserve a record of the performances he had enjoyed.11

It is evident that a large part of the musical collection was made while he was in Italy in 1740. Four of the volumes marked by the poet himself bear this date. Another volume, although it does not bear the date 1740, can be safely said to have been made in that year; but the inclusion of some material by contemporaries of Gray who had not yet achieved distinction indicates that

Gray continued to collect music after his return to England. The entire collection is representative of the classic Italian school in opera writing and is an indication of the cultivated musical tastes of Gray.  

While he was in Italy, Gray wrote to friends in England of the pleasures he experienced in listening to the various musical entertainments.  

When Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater" was first presented in England, the poet made a special trip to London to attend the performance.  

...there is to be a Concerto Spirituale, in which the Mingotti (who has just lain in) & Ricciarelli will sing the Stabat Mater of Pergolesi. You & Mason & I are to be at it together, so pray make no excuses, or put-offs.  

Another letter to Wharton which evinces Gray's delight in music states:  

I have got a Mass of Pergolesi, which is all divinity: but it was lent me, or you should have it. by all means send for six Lessons (for the Piano-Forte Harpsichord) of Carlo Bach, not the Opera-Bach, but his Brother. to my fancy they are charming, & have the best Italian style: Mr. Neville & the old Musicianers here do not like them, but to me they speak not only musick, but passion. I can not play them, tho' they are not hard: yet I make a smattering that serves—to deceive my solitary days. & I figure to myself, that I hear you touch them triumphantly.  

John Parry, the blind harper from North Wales, came to London and performed at Ranelagh Gardens in April, 1746. Gray's enthusiastic praise of enchanting music of the harper is conveyed in his letter to Mason:  

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12 Ibid., 15-16.  
13 Gray to Wharton, Pembroke Hall, March 25, 1756. Correspondence. II, 460-61.  
...and yet Mr. Parry has been here, &
scratch'd out such ravishing blind Har-
mony, such tunes of a thousand years old
with names enough to choke you, as have
set all this learned body a' dancing, and
inspired them with due reverence for Odilke,
whenever it shall appear.

Reverend John Mitford says of Gray's musical ability:

His [Gray's] taste in music was excellent
and formed on the study of the great Italian
masters who flourished about the time of
Pergolesi, Marcello, Leo, and Palestrina;
he himself performed upon the harpsichord.
And it is said that he sang to his own ac-
companiment with great taste and feeling.16

The neglected status of the opera in England Gray ascribes to a lack of
a genuine love for Italian music and to the English language which still re-
tains traces of its barbarous original.

...the truth is, the Opera itself, tho sup-
ported here at a great expense for so many
years, has rather maintained itself by the
admiration bestow'd on a few particular
voices, or the borrow'd taste of a few Men
of condition, that have learn'd in Italy how
to admire, than by any genuine love we bear
to the best Italian musick: nor have we yet
got any style of our own & this I attribute
in great measure to the language, wch in
spite of its energy, plenty, & the crowd of
excellent Writers this nation has produced,
does yet (I am sorry to say it) retain too
much of its barbarous original to adapt it-
selves to musical composition. I by no means
wish to have been born anything but an
Englishman; yet I should rejoice to exchange
tongues with Italy.17

15 Gray to Mason. Cambridge, Tuesday, May 124 or 317, 1757. Correspondence.
II, 804.
16 Henry Edward Krehbiel, 16.
17 Gray to Count Algarotti, Cambridge, September 9, 1763. Correspondence.
II, 812.
In summarizing the discussion on Gray's interest in music one can conclude that the poet's sensitivity to its beauty must have afforded him many hours of deep enjoyment during his attendance at concerts, operas, and in his own playing of his harpsichord. An incidental remark now and then in his correspondence indicates that he was interested in having his friends develop an interest in the art. His penetrating judgment led them to evaluate and appreciate the best in music.

In respect to nature he loved the hills and woods for themselves. The task in this portion of the study will be to show the scope and depth of Gray's aesthetic interest in nature by citing representative passages. So replete are Gray's correspondence and poetry with descriptions of the beauties of nature sketched with unique pictorial power that one is tempted to quote them in abundance.

The first expression of the modern feeling for the picturesque is Gray's description of Burnham beeches in the region of his uncle's home where he spent part of his vacation days.

...it is a little Chaos of Mountains & Precipices; Mountains it is true, that don't ascend much above the Clouds, nor are the Declivities quite so amazing, as Dover-Cliff; but just such hills as people, who love their Necks as well as I do, may venture to climb, & Craggs, that give the eye as much pleasure, as if they were dangerous: both Vale & Hill is cover'd over with most venerable Beeches, & other very reverend Vegetables, that like most other ancient People, are always dreaming out their old stories to the Winds....At the foot of one of these squats
me I, il Penseroso, and there I grow to the
Trunk for a whole morning.\(^{18}\)

Though his love of wild scenery becomes more marked in his later life, evidences of it are present in his earliest letters. His description of the ascent to the Monastery of the Chartreuse when he was twenty-three shows his fondness for nature in its rugged forms. He wrote:

It is six miles to the top; the road runs winding up it, commonly not six feet broad; on one hand is the rock, with woods of pine-trees hanging over head; on the other, a monstrous precipice, almost perpendicular, at the bottom of which rolls a torrent, that sometimes tumbling among the fragments of stone that have fallen from on high, and sometimes precipitating itself down vast descents with a noise like thunder, which is still made greater by the echo from the mountains on each side, concurs to form one of the most solemn, the most romantic, and the astonishing scenes I ever beheld.\(^{19}\)

On the Grand Tour Gray witnessed many scenes of rare natural beauty. One would be obliged to search long to find another concise description of peerless beauty such as this:

...it is the most beautiful of Italian nights
...There is a moon! there are stars for you! Do you not hear the fountain? Do you not smell the orange flowers? That building yonder is the Convent of S. Isidore; and that eminence, with the cypress trees and pines upon it, is the top of M. Quirnal. This is all true, and yet my prospect is not two hundred yards in length.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Gray to Mrs. Gray. Lyons, October 13, N. S., 1739, *Correspondence*. I, 122.
\(^{20}\) Gray to West, Rome, May, 1740, *Correspondence*. I, 161.
One of the most enthusiastic descriptions of nature is that of the Scotch Highlands which he visited in 1765. The subjective element in this passage arrests attention.

I am returned from Scotland charmed with my expedition; it is of the Highlands I speak; the Lowlands are worth seeing once, but the mountains are ecstatic, and ought to be visited in pilgrimage once a year. None but those monstrous creatures of God know how to join so much beauty with so much horror. A fig for your poets, painters, gardeners, and clergymen, that have not been among them; their imagination can be made of nothing but bowling-greens, flowering shrubs, horse-ponds, Fleet ditches, shell grottoes, and Chinese rails. I shall certainly go again; what a pity it is I cannot draw, nor describe, nor ride on horseback. 21

In 1769 Gray and Wharton set out on a trip to the lakes region. Almost at the outset of the journey Wharton fell ill and turned back, but Gray kept a Journal of the trip for Wharton. It is an interesting document not only for its many beautiful descriptions but for the spirit in which it is written. The following portion of the description of Gordale-scar is telling and typical:

The rock on the left rises perpendicular with stubbed yew-trees and shrubs, starting from its side to the height of 300 feet; but these are not the things: It is that to the right under which you stand to see the fall, that forms the principal horror of the place. From its very base it begins to slope forwards over you in one black and solid mass without any crevice and overshadows half the area below.

21 Gray to Reverend William Mason, October 25, 1765. Correspondence. III, 207.
with its dreadful canopy. When I stood at (I believe) full four yards from its foot the drops, which, perpetually distill from its brow, fell on my head; and in one part of the top more exposed to the weather there are loose stones that hang in air; and threaten visibly some idle spectator with constant destruction. The gloomy uncomfortable day well-suited the savage aspect of the place and made it still more formidable. I stayed there (not without shuddering) a quarter of an hour, and thought my troubles richly paid, for the impression will last for life.  

Richness and vividness of detail make this, another passage from his Journal, one of his choicest bits of nature description. The sheer beauty of the scene is impressed upon the reader by the incisive closing statement.

...our path here tends to the left, and the ground gently rising, and covered with a glade of scattering trees and bushes on the very margin of the water, opens both ways the most delicious view, that my eyes ever beheld. Behind you are magnificent heights of Walla-crag; opposite lie the thick hanging woods of Lord Egremont, and Newland valley, with green and smiling fields embosomed in the dark cliffs; to the left the jaws of Borrodale, with the turbulent chaos of mountain behind mountain, rolled in confusion; beneath you, and stretching far away to the right, the shining purity of the Lake just ruffled by the breeze, enough to shew it alive, reflecting rocks, woods, fields, and inverted tops of mountains, with the white buildings of Keswick, Crosthwait church, and Skiddaw for a background at a distance. Oh! Doctor! I never wished more for you.  

Even a casual review of the material devoted, by Gray, to nature reveals

23 Ibid., 254.
that from his youth until his death he was keenly appreciative of nature's beauties; at times he becomes almost ecstatic in the expression of his delight in an impressive scene. He loved nature for itself and not for any association of ideas it called to mind. In his attitude he was in advance of his age since several of the writers of the time looked upon the rugged aspects of nature with horror. While traveling through the Alpine region, Gray was oblivious to the discomforts of travel in his eagerness to enjoy to the full the surpassing beauty of the mountain scenery.

Another of Gray's aesthetic interests was architecture. In his foreign travels, Gothic art and architecture, which was to occupy a place of importance in his later studies, was a matter of deep interest to him. The passage from Norton Nicholls' Reminiscences on the poet's love and knowledge of Gothic architecture is worthy of notice. "Mr. Gray's love of, & knowledge in Gothic Architecture was well known; he contended particularly for the superiority of its effect in churches; & besides, admired the elegance, & good taste of many of its ornaments." 24

The chief attraction in Amiens was the Gothic cathedral which he thus describes:

...huge Gothic building, beset on the outside with thousands of small statues, and within adorned with beautiful painted windows, and a vast number of chapels dressed out in all their finery of altarpieces, embroidery, gilding, and marble. 25

25 Gray to Mrs. Gray. Amiens, April 1, N. S., 1739. Correspondence. I, 100.
In Sienna likewise the cathedral was the most interesting edifice to
Gray. What it has most considerable is its cathedral, a huge pile of
marble, black and white alternately, and labored with a gothic niceness and
delicacy in the old fashioned way. Within too are some paintings and sculpture of considerable
hands. The sight of this, and some collections that were showed us in private houses, were a
sufficient employment for the little time we were to pass there.26

Gray’s interest in architecture carried him from the Gothic to the
study of the Norman. In summarizing his thought on the subject, Gray states in his Essay on Norman Architecture:

Upon the whole, these huge structures claim not only the veneration due to their great
antiquity, but (though far surpassed in beauty by the buildings of the three succeeding cen-
turies) have really a rude kind of majesty, resulting from the loftiness of their naves, the
gloom of their aisles, and the hugeness of their massive members, which seem calculated for a
long duration.27

Mr. Basil Champney, art critic, affirms that the essay is of much inter-
est chiefly because it reveals Gray’s accuracy of observation and because it illustrates the point of view from which he approaches the study of Roman-
esque architecture. The critic takes exception to several of Gray’s opin-
ions; however at the close of his comments on the subject he remarks: "Other-

26 Gray to Mrs. Gray. Rome, April 2, N.S., 1740. Correspondence. I, 144.
wise Gray's accuracy of observation, considering the time at which he writes, is very remarkable." 28

Without doubt the focal point of interest in Gray's travels was Rome. The beauty and magnificence of the city so far surpassed his expectations that he was astounded.

The first entrance of Rome is prodigiously striking. It is by a noble gate, designed by Michel Angelo, and adorned with statues; this brings you into a large square, in the midst of which is a vast obelisk of granite, and in front you have at one view two churches of a handsome architecture, and so much alike they are called the twins; with three streets, the middlemost of which is one of the longest in Rome. As high as my expectation was raised, I confess, the magnificence of this city infinitely surpasses it. You cannot pass along a street but you have views of some palace, or church, or square, or fountain, the most picturesque and noble one can imagine. We have not yet set about considering its beauties, ancient and modern, with attention; but have already taken a slightly transient view of the most remarkable. St. Peter's I saw the day after we arrived, and was struck dumb with wonder. 29

During the two and a half months Gray spent in Rome he saw many of the famous paintings and pieces of sculpture. He catalogued and made notes on more than two hundred and fifty paintings. He was not so attentive to sculpture since he mentions not more than forty pieces. The points that he noted in judging a picture were items such as the following: the propriety of the

28 Ibid., 301-302.
subject, the correctness of the drawing, the characteristics of the painter, and the state of preservation. His discerning taste led him in general to study the best pictures accessible. Few were the mistakes he made in judgment. In his dislike of Andrea del Sarto he is perhaps most at variance with modern views. The following excerpts from his notes on Guido Reni's paintings are indicative of his taste and judgment.

The Magdalen: Such eyes and such a face, such beauty and such sorrow were never seen in any mortal creature...Drapery in vast magnificent folds...a colouring solemnly sweet, though all is light and exquisitely harmonious; most divine!

The Annunciation: Such heavenly beauty in both figures as no words can express, the drawing of the virgin under her blue drapery incorrect.

A Lady in Black by Van Dyck: No grace or beauty for a portrait. A painter must take nature as he finds it, and must imitate also the Gothic dress of the times, but the face, the hands are painted to a miracle, the skin perfectly transparent, true flesh and blood.

Although Gray spent most of his time on paintings he was not oblivious of sculpture, neither ancient nor modern. His attention to its details is as noticeable as that in painting. Some of his notes will indicate the range of his interest.

Alexander the Great in the Palazzo Barberina is impressive, vastly striking, and undoubtedly the work of some great master.

31 Ibid., 427-428.
The Bacchus, or the Sleeping Fawn is in the noblest style possible and perfectly fine in every respect.

The Dying Gladiator is for expression (after the Laocoon), to be sure the noblest statue in the world.

Christ Triumphant by Michael Angelo—the head somewhat inclining to one side, the looks full of mildness and extensive humanity, and an attitude perfectly easy and natural; the marble truly softened into flesh; nothing can be more exquisite than the turn of the limbs; sculpture can go no further. 32

Such was the wealth of the art gallery in Florence that Gray admits that it was capable of furnishing amusement for months. One can imagine the enjoyment which he, with his innate love of beauty, must have experienced in viewing the treasures of art here.

...the famous gallery, alone, is an amusement for months; we commonly pass two or three hours every morning in it, and one has perfect leisure to consider all its beauties. You know it contains many hundred antique statues, such as the whole world cannot match, besides the vast collection of paintings, medals, and precious stones, such as no other prince was ever master of; in short, all that the rich and powerful house of Medicis has in so many years got together. And besides this city abounds with so many palaces and churches, that you can hardly place yourself anywhere without having some fine one in view, or at least some statue or fountain, magnificently adorned. 33

Of the treasures of St. Denis, a rare vase of entire onyx was of absorbing interest to Gray.

32 Ibid., 427-428.
was a vase of an entire onyx, measuring at least five inches over, three deep, and of great thickness. It is at least two thousand years old, the beauty of the stone and sculpture upon it (representing the mysteries of Bacchus) beyond expression admirable; we have dreamed of it ever since.  

Walpole, aware of the sure and delicate taste of the poet, consulted him frequently about the furnishings for Strawberry Hill. Norton Nicholls writes of Gray:

He was pleased at first with Strawberry Hill; but when Mr. Walpole added the gallery, with its gilding, & glass he said 'He had degenerated into finery'...Mr. Gray disapproved the additions of Sir Christopher Wren, (the two towers) to Westminster Abbey.

When Wharton moved to Old Park, Durham, he requested Gray to find a suitable type of Gothic wall paper to be used in redecorating the home. In an amusing letter Gray tells of rummaging through all of the shops in London in an effort to fulfill his friend's request. When he was unsuccessful, he suggested that Wharton have his own paper printed from a specially drawn design after one of the motifs in the Cathedral at Durham. Gray's enthusiasm about the color scheme of Wharton's rooms rivals that of a modern interior decorator.

Possessing a discriminating taste in art, Gray disliked ornateness. The following excerpt describes his reactions to the landscaped grounds of Versailles:

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35 Norton Nicholls. Reminiscences, Correspondence. III, 1303.
36 Gray to Thomas Wharton. Southampton Row, October 22, 1761. Correspondence II, 233.
...everything you behold savours too much of art; all is forced, all is constrained about you; statues and vases sowed everywhere without distinction; sugar-loaves and minced-pies of yew; scrawl-work of box, and little squirting jets d'eau, besides a great sameness in the walks, cannot help striking one at first sight, not to mention the silliest of labryinths, and all Aesop's fables in water; since these were designed in usum Delphini only.37

Aesthetically, a discriminating judgment of what is art in literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music remained, until the end, the distinguishing virtue of Gray's response to values.

It is in keeping, too, with his devotion to culture, in its aesthetic aspects, that Gray returned from his pilgrimage with sheaves of sketches on Gothic cathedrals, wood carvings, paintings, and with portfolios full of musical scores from the repertoires of masters like Pergolesi and Palestrina.

One is as triumphant over, as one is startled by, his records of glowing appreciation of Catholic liturgical observations particularly since Gray had never evinced even a remote sympathy for the Catholic way of worship.

Religiously, the early decades of the century were disturbed. The infiltration of French thought had sent its vibrating current of rationalism and free thought through the not-too-definitely established systems which had been troubling the English mind since the religious upheavals initiated by Henry VIII and furthered by Knox, Calvin, and other reformers.

A cult of freedom, fathered by Rousseau, and a school-of-denial, the result of the mind of the volatile atheist Voltaire, had been eagerly subscribed

to by synthetic and superficial intellectuals of the island. During the three years of his exile in England Voltaire had met several men through whom his views were spread. Rousseau's *Emile*, purporting freedom, was factually a bid for unbridled license and eventual disintegration.  

It is not difficult to understand why Gray, a man of deep religious feeling, should have had a contemptuous attitude toward materialism, skepticism, atheism, and the exponents of these "isms". Infidelity, under whatever guise it appeared, found in him an uncompromising assailant. Realizing the ill-effects of the spread of all philosophies opposed to orthodox Christianity, manifest in France, but discernibly manifest in England too, he frequently ridiculed and denounced these teachings.

Gray's disgust of free-thinkers is unmistakable:

*The Town are reading of K: of Prussia's Poetry (Le Philosophe sans Souci) & I have done, like the Town. they do not seem so sick of it, as I am. it is all the scum of Voltaire and Ld Bolingbroke, the Crambe recocata of our worst Free-thinkers, tossed up in German-French rhyme.*

When Walpole wrote to him of atheism of the French, Gray replied:

*Their atheism is a little too much, too shocking to rejoice at. I have been long sick of it in their authors, and hated them for it: but I pity their poor innocent people of fashion. They were bad enough, when they believed everything.*

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That Gray was conversant with the materialistic writings in vogue during the age is certain, for he states that he will read no more of them. He confessed, "I can be wretched enough without them." To the followers of this philosophy he believed the way lay open to "a full license for doing whatever we please." His succinct and vigorous denunciation of materialism is expressed in a letter to a friend:

That we are indeed mechanical and dependent beings, I need no other proof than my own feelings; and from the same feelings I learn, equal conviction, that we are not merely such: that there is a power within that struggles against the force and bias of that mechanism, commands its motion, and, by frequent practice, reduces it to that ready obedience which we call Habit; and all this in conformity to a preconceived notion (no matter whether right or wrong) to that least material of all agents, a Thought. I have known many in his case who, while they thought they were conquering an old prejudice, did not perceive that they were under the influence of one far more dangerous; one that furnishes us with a ready apology for all our worst actions, and opens to us a full license for doing whatever we please; and yet these very people were not all the more indulgent to other men (as they naturally should have been)...His French Author I never saw, but have read fifty in the same strain, and shall read no more. I can be wretched enough without them. They put me in mind of the Greek Sophist that get immortal honor by discoursing so feelingly on the miseries of our condition, that fifty of his audience went home and hanged themselves; yet he lived himself (I suppose many years after in very good plight). 41

Although Gray delighted in the pleasantries of Voltaire and ranked his

41 Gray to Stonehewer. [Stoke], August 18, 1758. Correspondence. II, 582-583.
tragedies next to those of Shakespeare, he detested him because he scoffed at religion. He realized the harm that this writer had done for religion in France and feared what the future might bring. Norton Nicholls in his Reminiscences states:

The great objects of his detestation was Voltaire, whom he seemed to know even beyond what had appeared of him, & to see with the eye of a prophet in his future mischiefs: he said to me 'No one knows the mischief that man will do'—When I took leave of him, & saw him for the last time, at his lodging in Jermyn Street before I went abroad in the beginning of June 1771 he said 'I have done one thing to beg of you, which you must not refuse'—I replied you know you have only to command, what is it? —'Do not go to see Voltaire & then he added what I have written above.—I said 'Certainly I will not; but what would a visit from me signify?'—'Every tribute to such a man signifies'—This was when I was setting out for Switzerland to pay a visit to Monsr de Bonstetten in which he could have accompanied me if his health had permitted. I kept my word.42

Another passage that shows Gray's contempt of Voltaire is the following:

He must have a very good stomach that can digest the Crambe recoccta of Voltaire. Atheism is a vile dish, tho' all the cooks of France combine to make new sauces to it. As to the Soul, perhaps they have none on the Continent; but I do think we have such things in England. Shakespeare, for example, I believe had several to his own share. As to the Jews (tho' they do not eat pork) I like them because they are better Christians than Voltaire.43

Speaking of Rousseau's religious discussions, Gray writes:

As to his religious discussions which have alarmed the world & engaged their thoughts more than any other part of his book, I set them at naught, & wish they had been omitted. 44

Gray's dislike of Hume was almost as marked as that of Rousseau. He contemned speculations which appeared to be the product of prejudice, vanity, or sophistry.

...I have always thought David Hume a pernicious writer, and believe he has done as much mischief here as he has in his own country. A turbid and shallow stream often appears to our apprehensions very deep. A professed sceptic can be guided by nothing but his present passions (if he has any) and interests; and to be masters of his philosophy we need not his books or advice, for every child is capable of the same thing, without any study at all. Is not that naïve and good humor, which his admirers celebrate in him, owing to this, that he has continued all his days an infant, but one that unhappily has been taught to read and write? That childish nation, the French, have given them vogue and fashion, and we, as usual, have learned from them to admire him at second hand. 45

Norton Nicholls in his Reminiscences refers to Gray's aversion to Hume:

...he thought him irreligious, that is an enemy to religion; which he never pardoned in anyone, because he said it was taking away the best consolation of man without substituting anything of equal value in its place.—He thought him likewise an unprincipled sceptick, refuted & vanquished (which the philosophers will not allow) by Beattie; & besides this is in politics a friend in tyranny. 46

45 Gray to Beattie. Pembroke Hall, July 2, 1770. Correspondence. III, 1141.
In reply to Stonehewer's expression of surprise at the popularity of Shaftesbury's views, Gray explains the reasons in the following logical manner:

You say you cannot conceive how Lord Shaftesbury came to be a Philosopher in vogue; I will tell you: First, he was a Lord, 2dly, he was as vain as any of his readers; 3dly, men are very prone to believe what they do not understand; 4thly, they will believe anything at all, provided they are under no obligation to believe it; 5thly, they love to take a new road, even when that road leads no where; 6thly, he was reckoned a fine writer, and always seemed to mean more than he said. Would you have any more reasons? The mode of free-thinking is like that of Ruffs and Farthingales, and has given place to the mode of not thinking at all; once it was reckoned graceful, half to discover and half to conceal the mind, but now we have been long accustomed to see it quite naked: primness and affectation of style, like the good breeding of Queen Ann's Court, has turned to hoydening and rude familiarity.47

Gray's religious interest was not confined to mere intellectual controversies, but manifested itself in personal reaction. That he had a deep religious sense and was awed by the manifestation of God's power as shown in nature is evident from this portion of his description of the ascent to the Grand Chartreuse.

I do not remember to have gone ten paces without an exclamation, that there was no restraining: Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument. One need not have a very fantastic imag-

47 Gray to Stonehewer. [Stoke], August 18, 1758. Correspondence. II, 583.
ination to see spirits there at noon-day:
You have Death perpetually before your eyes, 
only so far removed as to compose the mind 
without frightening it. I am well persuaded 
St. Bruno was a man of no common genius, to 
choose such a situation for his retirement; 
and perhaps should have been a disciple of 
his, had I been born in his time. 

His letters of condolence also reveal that he thought of God in an or-
thodox Christian manner and that he believed that He alone could offer true 
consolation in time of affliction and grief. To a friend whose uncle had 
died, he wrote in August, 1766:

... he who best knows our nature (for he 
made us, what we are) by such afflictions 
recalls us from our wandering thoughts & 
idle merriment, from the insolence of youth 
& prosperity, to serious reflection, to our 
duty & to himself: nor need we hasten to 
get rid of these impressions; Time (by the 
appointment of the same Power) will cure 
the smart, & in some hearts soon blot out 
all traces of sorrow: but such as preserve 
them longest (for it is left partly in our 
own power) do perhaps best acquiesce in the 
will of the Chastiser.

Gray wrote a tender letter of sympathy to his mother upon the death of 
his sister, one of his devoted aunts. He expressed the wish that she would 
be supported in her grief by resignation to God's will.

... He who has preserved her to you for so 
many years, and at last, when it was his 
pleasure, has taken her from us to himself; 
and perhaps, if we reflect upon what she 
felt in this life, we may look upon this 
as an instance of his goodness both to her,

and to those who loved her...However you may deplore your own loss, yet think that she at last is easy and happy; and has now more occasion to pity us than we her. I hope, and beg, you will support yourself with that resignation we owe to him, who gave us our being for our good and who deprives us of it for the same reason.50

The tributes of contemporaries of Gray are further proof of his religious convictions. Robert Potter, one of the most eminent scholars of the time, paid tribute to the poet for his outstanding qualities among which he mentioned purity of morals and religion. "Superior knowledge, and exquisite taste in the fine arts, and above all purity of morals, and an unaffected reverence for religion, made this excellent person an ornament to society, and an honor to human nature."51

One of his biographers affirms that Gray was "throughout his career, though in a very unassuming way, a sincere believer in Christianity. We find him exhorting Dr. Wharton not to omit the use of family prayer, and this although he had a horror of anything like 'Methodism' or religious display."52 Elsewhere the same biographer states that Gray was "essentially a Puritan at heart."53

An evaluation of Gray's character indicates that he was a man of thought rather than of action, intensely critical, slightly and delicately creative, of deep religious convictions yet not untouched by doubt, strange and contra-

51 Edmund Gosse. Gray. 212.
52 Ibid., 202.
53 Ibid., 27.
dictory characteristics, which, nevertheless, went to form his highly com-
plicated temperament.

Gray's criticisms of religious belief and practice are definitive and few. Aversion and contempt mark his statements concerning philosophies and persons which aimed to lead men away from the orthodox worship of God. The firm conviction of his viewpoints indicates that he considered religion a vital factor in aiding man to lead an upright life and a sustaining force in times of affliction and sorrow.
CHAPTER IV
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES
AS REFLECTED IN GRAY'S WORKS

That Gray's life was not entirely devoted to study, solitude, and introspection is demonstrated by numerous letters which relate his observations of the daily affairs of men and women, bits of gossip and scandal, and the tenor of the political life of the age in England and on the Continent. The social and political aspects, particularly the former, are revealed in such a wealth of detail that his correspondence furnishes an excellent commentary of the period.

These letters date back to his collegiate days. Strange as it may seem since it was his domicile during most of his life, Gray wrote in an uncomplimentary vein of Cambridge, of its courses, students, and teachers. In one of his first letters from the University, he writes:

...now what to say about this Terra Incognita, I don't know; First then it is a great old Town, shaped like a Spider, with a nasty lump in the middle of it, and half a dozen scrambling long legs...The Masters of Colledges are twelve grey-haired Gentle folks, who are all mad with Pride; the Fellows are sleepy, dull, drunken, illiterate Things...The Pension: grave, formal Sots who would be thought old; or else drink Ale, & sing Songs against ye Excise. The Sizers are Graziers Eldest Sons, who come to get good Learning, that they may all be Archbishops of Canterbury: these last two Orders are quali-
fied to take Scholarships; one of which your humble Servt has had given him.1

Distractions and amusements which could lend variety to college life were utterly lacking. "when you have seen one of my days, you have seen a whole year of my life; they go round and round like the blind horse in the mill, only he has the satisfaction of fancying he makes a progress and gets some ground, my eyes are open to the same dull prospects."2

Another reference to the dull routine of the institution is the following: "...in Cambridge there is nothing so troublesome, as that one has nothing to trouble one. everything is so tediously regular, so samish, that I expire for want of a little variety."3

Despite its unattractiveness Gray admits his reluctance to leave Cambridge: "...I don't know how it is, I have a sort of reluctance to leave this place, unamiable as it may seem; 'tis true Cambridge is very ugly, she is very dirty, & very dull: but I'm like a cabbage, where I'm stuck, I love to grow; you should pull me up sooner, than anyone, but I shall be ne'er the better for transplanting."4

Although Gray confessed an aversion to humanity, he found it necessary to leave his scholastic seclusion at times and mingle with people. "as to Humanity you know my aversion to it; wch is barbarous & inhuman, but I cannot help it; God forgive me."5

There were intervals when Gray left his books, traveled, observed, and participated in the diversions and amusements of his fellowmen. The two and a half years of the Grand Tour afforded him ample opportunity to note the customs, habits, and amusements of the French and Italian peoples. The constantly varying sights—street scenes, balls, concerts, gatherings of great personages, fairs, stops at inns, visits to convents and monasteries, attendance at church services in the great cathedrals, and drives through the countryside were sources of keen interest to Gray. The reader finds recorded here factors of human life which the professional historian is likely to overlook. In several of the letters Gray appears to be an impartial observer; in others he becomes articulate in stating his preferences and dislikes, drawing contrasts between native Englishmen and the Europeans, and in one or other instances venturing to prophesy. Of the method of travel and of the roads and inns of France he writes:

This chaise is a strange sort of conveyance, of much greater use than beauty, resembling an ill-shaped chariot, only with the door opening before instead of the side; three horses draw it, one between the shafts, and the other two on each side, on one of which the postillion rides, and drives too. This vehicle will, upon occasion, go four score miles a-day...the motion is much like that of a sedan, we go about six miles an hour, and commonly change horses at the end of it: It is true they are no very graceful steeds, but they go well, and through roads which they say are bad for France, but to me they seem gravel walks and bowling-greens; in short it would be the finest travelling in the world,
were it not for the inns, which are mostly terrible places indeed.\(^6\)

That the accommodations and the fare at the inns of Europe were entirely unsatisfactory is manifest from this description of an inn located in the mountain district at which Gray and Walpole stopped on their journey into Italy.

...such chambers, and accommodations, that your cellar is a palace in comparison; and your cat sups and lies much better then we did; for, it being a saint's eve, there was nothing but eggs. We devoured our meagre fare; and, after stopping up the windows with the quilts, were obliged to lie upon the straw beds in our clothes. Such are the conveniences in a road, that is, as it were, the great thoroughfare of all the world.\(^7\)

One of the striking impressions made upon Gray by the pleasure-loving Parisians was the necessity of a visitor's possession of certain definite abilities and traits of character if he were to enjoy their gayety. The majority of contemporary Englishmen, he remarks, are deficient in the knowledge requisite to the enjoyment of the company of Parisians.

To be introduced to the People of high quality, it is absolutely necessary to be master of the Language, for it is not to be imagin'd that they will take pains to understand anybody, or to correct a stranger's blunders...there is not a House where they don't play, nor is anyone at all acceptable, unless they do so too...a professed Gamester being the most advantageous Character a Man can have at Paris. The Abbes indeed &

\(^6\) Gray to Mrs. Gray. Amiens, April 1, N. S., 1739. \textit{Correspondence.} I, 99-100.

\(^7\) Gray to Mrs. Gray. Rome, April 2, N. S., 1740. \textit{Correspondence.} I, 145.
Men of learning are a People of easy access
enough, but few English that travel have
knowledge enough to take any great Pleasure
in their Company, at least our present Set
of travellers have not. 8

Gray, a man of keen intellectual curiosity, is surprised at the lack of
curiosity of the French. He is irked at an annoying habit his countrymen
have of herding together when they visit France.

Mr. Conway is as usual, the Companion of our
travels, who, till we came, had not seen any-
thing at all; for it is not the fashion here
to have Curiosity. We had at first arrival an
inundation of Visits pouring in upon us, for
all the English are acquainted, and herd much
together & it is no easy Matter to disengage
oneself from them, so that one sees but little
of the French themselves. 9

In describing Paris, Gray speaks of the crowds of people and gives an
impressionistic sketch of the fashions for men and women.

There are infinite Swarms of inhabitants &
more Coaches than Men. The Women in general
dressed in Sacs, flat Hoops of 5 yards wide
nosegays of artificial flowers, on one shoul-
der, and faces dyed in Scarlet up to the Eyes.
The Men in bags, roll-upps, Muffs and Solitaires. 10

While in France Walpole was presented to the Electress Palatine Dowager,
a sister of the late Duke. The formality of the ceremony is described by
Gray.

...a stately old lady, that never goes out but
to church, and then she has guards, and eight
horses to her coach. She received him with

8 Gray to Ashton. April, 1739. Correspondence. I, 105.
9 Ibid., 105.
10 Ibid., 105.
much ceremony, standing under a huge black canopy, and, after a few minutes talking, she assured him of her good will, and dismissed him. She never sees anybody but in this form. 11

Like the Parisians the people of Rheims, Gray finds, are a pleasure-loving type. Once diversions are mentioned, everyone is eager to join. He describes a gathering at which he and Walpole were present. It was composed of eighteen men and women of the best fashion. He gives in some detail the happenings of the evening and the early morning hours.

...when one of the ladies bethought herself of asking, Why should we not sup here? Immediately the cloth was laid by the side of a fountain under the trees, and a very elegant supper served up; after which another said, Come, let us sing; and directly began herself: From singing we insensibly fell to dancing, and singing a round; when somebody mentioned the violins, and immediately a company of them was ordered: minuets were begun in the open air, and then came country-dances, which held till four o’Clock next morning; at which hour the gayest lady there proposed, that such as were weary should get into their coaches, and the rest of them should dance before them with the music in the van; and in this manner we paraded through all the principal streets of the city, and waked everybody in it; Mr. Walpole had a mind to make a custom of the thing, and would have given a ball in the same manner next week, but the women did not come into it; so I believe it will drop, and they will return to their dull cards, and usual formalities. 12

On his visit to Versailles, Gray makes note of the grounds, gardens, courts, buildings, and works of art. His interest in the artistic aspects

of the scene have been discussed in Chapter III under his aesthetic interests.

During his prolonged sojourn in Florence, Gray had an opportunity to obtain a cross-section of the life and amusements of all classes of people ranging from the poor observed on the streets, the mixed groups at the fair, and the people of rank and fashion at the reception ball for a great Milanese Lady. From reports he learns of the economies practiced by the Florentine Cardinals and the newly elected Pope.

The Florentine fairs present a decided contrast to the fairs in Gray's native England. Instead of riding on hobby horses, listening to musical clocks, seeing tall Leicestershire women, and eating ginger-bread, in Florence "one has nothing but masquing, gaming, and singing."13

The diversions during the Lenten season in Florence, as Gray describes them, would have no appeal to an epicure.

The diversions of a Florentine Lent are composed of a sermon in the morning, full of hell and the devil; a dinner at noon, full of fish and meager diet; and, in the evening, what is called a Conversazione, a sort of assembly at the principal people's houses, full of I cannot tell what.14

The arrival of a great Milanese Lady in Florence in October, 1740, occasioned one round of balls and entertainments. Gray declares that the only thing the Italians are noted for is their hospitality toward strangers. In remarking upon it, Gray says:

At such times everything is magnificence: The

more remarkable, as in their ordinary course of life they are parsimonious, even to a degree of nastiness. I saw in one of the vastest palaces in Rome (that is Prince Pamphilio) the apartment which he himself inhabited, a bed that most servants in England would disdain to lie in, and furniture much like that of a soph at Cambridge, for convenience and neatness. This man is worth 30,000 £ sterling a year.15

In the city of Viterbo, Gray noticed that the houses had glass windows which was not usual in that part of the country. The menu is commented upon also. "Here we had the pleasure of breaking our fast on the leg of an old hare and some broiled crows."16

Not only the life of the French and Italian laity, which has thus far been discussed, but that of the religious orders and the hierarchy as well occupied the interest of Gray during the entire sojourn abroad. Both he and his companion availed themselves of every opportunity to visit and attend services and special devotions in the Catholic churches and visit convents and monasteries where they gained impressions about the faith and the various religious orders of the Church. Following a reference to their attendance at a certain church service, he jestingly remarks: "I believe I forgot to tell you, that we have been sometime converts to the holy Catholic Church."17

While in much of his correspondence Gray simply reports what he saw and heard, there are a few instances in which he steps out of the role of an impartial observer and commits his views. He visited the convents of the Dominicans,

Capuchins, Ursulines, and Carmelites, and the monasteries of the Minims, Benedictines, Cistercians, and Carthusians. In the case of the monks he invariably speaks of their cordial hospitality. Probably because of the unique beauty of the location of the monastery on a mountain height and because of the kind hospitality extended on his first visit, Gray paid a second visit to the monks of the Grand Chartreuse.

When we came there, the two fathers, who are commissioned to entertain strangers, (for the rest must neither speak one to another nor to anyone else) received us very kindly; and set before us a repast of dried fish, eggs, butter, and fruits all excellent in their kind, and extremely neat. They pressed us to spend the night there, and to stay some days with them; but this we could not do, so they led us about their house, which is, you must think, like a little city; for there are 100 fathers, besides 300 servants, that make their clothes, grind their corn, press their wine, and do everything among themselves: The whole is quite orderly and simple; nothing of finery, but the wonderful decency, and the strange situation, more than supply the place of it.18

Of a visit to a Benedictine abbey he says, "The jolly old Benedictine, that showed us the treasure, had in his youth been ten years a soldier; he laughed at all the reliques, was very full of stories, and mighty obliging."19

Anticipating a visit to the Abbey of the Cistercians near Dijon, France, Gray states:

Tomorrow we are to pay a visit to the Abbot of the Cistercians, who lives a few leagues off, and who uses to receive all strangers with great civility; his Abbey is one of the richest in the

18 Gray to Mrs. Gray. Lyons, October 13, N. S., 1739. Correspondence. I, 123.
kingdom; he keeps open house always, and lives with great magnificence. 20

The lack of interest of the Minim Fathers and the Ursuline nuns in the remains of relics of ancient history in the region of their grounds is manifest in this reference:

Here are the ruins of the Emperors' palaces, that resided here, that is to say, Augustus and Severus; they consist in nothing but great masses of old wall, that have only their quality to make them respected. In a vineyard of the Minims are remains of a theatre; the Fathers, whom they belong to, hold them in no esteem at all, and would have showed us their sacristy and chapel instead of them; The Ursuline Nuns have in their garden some Roman baths, but we having the misfortune to be men, and heretics, they did not think proper to admit us. 21

His sojourn in Rome, when it seemed probable that the election of a new Pope was imminent, provided the culmination of all that Gray, now deeply interested in matters Catholic, had anticipated. Proof of this is the following excerpt from a letter to his father:

You may imagine I am not sorry to have this opportunity of seeing the place in the world that best deserves it: Besides as the Pope (who is eighty-eight, and has been lately at the point of death) cannot probably last a great while, perhaps we may have the fortune to be present at the election of a new one, when Rome will be in all its glory. 22

20 Gray to Philip Gray. Dijon, Friday, September 11, N. S., 1739. Correspondence. I, 117.
21 Gray to West. Lyons, September 18, N. S., 1739. Correspondence. I, 119.
His astonishment at the beauty and the magnitude of St. Peter's and the description of this famous church has been referred to in Chapter III under Gray's aesthetic interests. He was, as he had anticipated, in Rome during the Conclave which met to elect a new Pope. Both Walpole and Gray exhibited intense interest in all of the popular reports of the proceedings of the Conclave. At the end of July, 1740, after the Cardinals had been in session for several weeks, Walpole and Gray wrote to West of the Conclave still subsisting, of the increase of divisions within it, and of the imminence of a schism. Indicative of the weakness of the faith among the powers of Europe, as it appeared to them, is the comment at the end of the letter: "I don't know whether one should wish for a schism or not; it might probably rekindle the zeal for the church in the powers of Europe, which has thus far been decaying."23

Gray's apparent gullibility was substantiated when he accepted as truth unofficial reports of the proceedings of the Conclave. His account of the speech given by the Pope-elect's nephew is marked by extreme levity. Gray gives the story in both English and Italian; his preference was for the Italian version because it was more expressive he thought. On the other hand he speaks of having seen the new Pope—Benedict XIV—two or three times; and his impression of him is, on the whole, favorable.

He bears a good character for generosity, affability, and other virtues; and, they say, wants neither knowledge nor capacity. The

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23 Walpole and Gray to West. Florence, July 31, 1740, N. S., Correspondence. I, 171.
worst side of him is, that he has a nephew or two; besides a certain favourite, called Melara, who is said to have had, for some time, the arbitrary disposal of his purse and family. 24

His sojourn in Florence gave Gray a good insight into the religious life of its inhabitants. The deep faith of the people was manifested at various services at which Gray was present. One which he describes in detail is of a noted statue of the Virgin—a miracle-working image—Madonna dell' Imprunetta—which was carried in procession. The history of the image is also given in the letter. 25 A footnote to this letter states that in earlier times this image was carried on occasions of distress in Florence.

Gray was interested in the domestic life of the clergy as well as in their official role.

As for eating, there are not two Cardinals in Rome that allow more than six paoli, which is three shillings a day, for the expense of their table; and you may imagine they are still less extravagant here than there. But when they receive a visit from any friend, their houses and persons are set out to the greatest advantage, and appear in all their splendour; it is, indeed, from a motive of vanity, and with the hopes of having it repaid them with interest, whenever they have occasion to return the visit. I call visits going from one city of Italy to another; for it is not so among acquaintance of the same place on common occasions. The new Pope has retrenched the charges of his own table to a sequin (10 s.) a meal. The applause which all he says and does meets with, is enough to encourage him

really to deserve fame. They say he is an able and honest man; he is reckoned a wit too.  

While in Naples, Gray attended the Corpus Christi services where he "...saw the Sicilian Majesties to advantage." He tells of having seen several possessed persons at church on one occasion before the services started. At a private ceremony to which the public was not admitted, they were exorcised. At the conclusion Gray saw them again restored to normal life.  

In recapitulation of the religious life of the French and Italian laity and clergy it has been noted that Gray had an opportunity to see it at close range in all its various aspects. He had attended Mass and special devotions frequently, had seen laity and clergy at worship, witnessed religious processions, visited religious houses, listened to accounts of the private life of the hierarchy, heard the popular reports of the Conclave in its meeting to elect a new Pope. In a few instances Gray makes disparaging remarks about the Church or at some member of it; whether these are to be attributed to ignorance, prejudice, or a desire to be clever is problematical; but in fairness to Gray it must be remarked that, after the European tour, no depreciating statements about the Church are to be found in his writings.  

Having completed the Grand Tour, Gray returned to his native country where during the next thirty years of his life he occasionally left his studies and set out on pleasure trips. The physical and mental advantages which he believed accrued to travelers are mentioned in a letter in which he

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26 Gray to Philip Gray. Florence, October 9, 1740. Correspondence. I, 179.  
speaks of two foreigners who had come to England to see the country.

It is doubtless highly reasonable, that two young Foreigners come into so distant a Country to acquaint themselves with strange Things should, have some Time allowed them to take a View of the King (God bless him) & the Ministry, & the Theatres, & Westminster Abbey & the Lyons, & such other Curiosities of the Capitol City: you civilly call them Dissipations, but to me they appear Employments of a very serious Nature, as they enlarge the Mind, give a great Insight into the Nature and Genius of a People, keep the Spirits in an agreeable Agitation, and... amazingly fortify & corroborate the whole Nervous System.28

Ordinarily travel in England by stagecoach in Gray's time was not attended with much pleasure, for the roads were bad, the rate of travel was slow, and oftentimes companions were not congenial. Occasionally the tedium of a journey was relieved by an agreeable companion. One instance in Gray's experience of a pleasurable trip is cited in this excerpt from one of his letters:

...my journey was not so bad as usual on the Stage-Coach. there was a Lady Swinburne, a Roman-Catholick, not young that had been abroad, seen a great deal, knew a great many people, very chatty, & communicative, so that I passed my time very well.29

The coffee-house assemblies were of significance in forming public opinion. "...our people (you must know) are slow of judgement; they wait till some bold body saves them the trouble, and they follow his opinion; or

29 Gray to Wharton. Stoke, October 18, 1753. Correspondence. I, 385-386.
stay till they hear what is said in town, that is at some bishop's table, or some coffee-house about the Temple."\textsuperscript{30}

David Garrick, the actor who was later to become widely known, made his appearance in London in October, 1741. Gray reports the popularity that the actor had attained at that early date in his career. "did I tell you about Mr. Garrick, that the Town are horn-mad after; there are a dozen Dukes of a night at Good-mans--fields sometimes."\textsuperscript{31}

Gray writes sarcastically of the petty attitude of the pleasure seekers who frequented Ranelagh Gardens. He asserts, too, that the English people are deficient in personality traits which the French and the Italian people possess.

People see it once or twice & so they go to Vaux-Hall... and then it's too hot, and then it's too cold, & here's a Wind, & there's a Damp;... you are to take Notice, that in our Country, Delicacy & Indelicacy amount to much the same thing, the first it will not be pleased with any Thing, & the other cannot; however to do us Justice, I think, we are a reasonable, but by no means a pleasurable People, & to mend us we must have a Dash of the French, & Italian. Yet I don't know, Travelling does not produce its right Effect.\textsuperscript{32}

Gray frequented Ranelagh and Vaux-Hall as this statement shows: "My Evenings have been chiefly spent at Ranelagh & Vaux-Hall, several of my Mornings, or rather Noons, in Arlington Street, & the rest at the Tryal of the Lords."\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} Gray to Walpole. January or February, 1748. \textit{Correspondence}. I, 297.
\textsuperscript{31} Gray to Chute. May, 1742. \textit{Correspondence}. I, 205.
\textsuperscript{33} Gray to Wharton. August, 1746. \textit{Correspondence}. I, 233.
Lottery tickets served as one medium of winning money by chance in Gray's time. He seems to have been fond of lotteries for he writes to Wharton requesting him to buy a lottery ticket for him. "...if you find the Market will not be much lower than at present; & (if you think it has no great hazard in it)."34

Probably typical of the recreation enjoyed by pleasure-loving English women of the Eighteenth Century is that described here of three women who lived in a house where Gray spent one month. He was happy to return to a quiet place to enjoy pleasure.

Company and cards at home, parties by land and water abroad, and (what they call) doing something, that is, racketting about from morning to night are occupations, I find, that wear out my spirits, especially in the situation where one might sit still, and be alone with pleasure.35

The varied means by which Gray's friends showed their solicitude and charity towards him after his house and property had been destroyed by fire impressed him as very extraordinary.

...they were all so sorry for my Loss, that I could not chuse but laugh. one offer'd me Opera-Tickets, insisted upon carrying me to the Grand-Masquerade, desired me to sit for my Picture. others asked me to their Concerts, or Dinners & Suppers at their Houses; or hoped, I would drink Chocolate with them, while I stayed in Town. all my Gratitude (or if you please, my Revenge) was to accept of every Thing they offer'd me: if it had been but a Shilling, I could have taken it. thank Heaven,

34 Gray to Wharton. Stoke, August 9, 1758. Correspondence. II, 578.
35 Gray to Clarke. August 12, 1760. Correspondence. II, 693.
I was in good Spirits; else I could not have done it. I profited all I was able of their Civilities, & am returned into the Country loaded with Bontes & Politesseg, but richer still in my own Reflexions, wch I owe in good Measure to them too.  

When Gray was appointed professor of modern history at Cambridge through the recommendations of the Duke of Grafton, he met the King who signed the warrant. Gray makes reference to the incident in four letters but he is loath to give the details. "...on Thursday the K: signed the warrant, & next day at his Levee I kissed his hand. he made me several gracious speeches, wch I shall not report, because everybody, who goes to court, does so."  

The most extraordinary and magnificent spectacle Gray saw in his native country was the coronation of King George III in 1761. The lengthy and graphic description which he gives of the event possesses special interest. It is worthy of note that Gray gives his personal opinion of the manner in which the King and Queen eat when he says, "They both eat like Farmers."

Excerpts from his description of the ceremony of the coronation follow:

...the Queen, & then the King took their places in their chairs of state, glitt'ring with jewels (for the hire of wch, beside all his own he paid 9,000 £) & the Dean & Chapter (who had been waiting without doors a full hour & half) brought up the Regalia...the Heralds were stupid; the Great Officers knew nothing they were doing; the Bp. of Rochester would have drop'd the Crown, if it had not been pin'd to the Cushion, & the King was often obliged to call out, & set matters right:

37 Gray to Wharton. August 1, 1768. Correspondence. III, 1037-1038.
But the Sword of State had been entirely forgot; so 1d Huntington was forced to carry the 1d Mayor's great two-handed sword instead of it. this made it later than ordinary, before they got under their canopies, & set forward...the old Bp. of London with his stick went doddling by the side of the Queen, & the Bp. of Chester had the pleasure of bearing the gold paten...the tables were now spread, the cold viands set on & at the King's table & side-board a great show of gold plate, & a desert representing Parnassus with abundance of figure of Muses, Arts, &c. designed by 1d Talbot. this was so high, that those at the end of the Hall could see neither K: nor Queen at supper...the most significant spectacle, I ever beheld remained. the K: (bowing to the Lords as he pass'd) with his crown on his head, & the sceptre & orb in hands, took his place with great majesty & grace: so did the Q: with her crown, sceptre, & rod. then supper was served in gold plate, the Earl Talbot, D: of Bedford, & E. of Effingham, in their robes, all three on horseback prancing & curvetting like the hobby-horses in the Rehearsal ushered in the courses to the foot of the haut-pas...the E. of Denbigh carved for the King, E. of Holdernesse for the Queen: they both eat like farmers...3 persons were knighted, & before 10 the K: & Q: retired. then I got a scrap of supper, & at one o'clock walked home.38

Socially considered, Gray, whose social affinities were anything but pronounced, realized during his tour and after it as diversified and profitable a series of experiences as it is possible for the ivory-tower recluse to obtain. Amusements, food, travel, apparel, theater, people, education, the Church—each contributed to that fullness and ripeness which give to Gray's prose its substance and its sanity.

Gray's letters and his own admission in one of them demonstrates that occasionally he was sufficiently interested in contemporary political figures and affairs to comment upon them. In one instance he and Walpole had been discussing a point regarding the marriage of Henry VI in 1445. Lest his friends might conclude that he was interested only in the history of the past, he writes:

...why should you look upon me as so buried in the dust of an old Chronicle, that I do not care about what happens in George, 2nd's reign? I am still alive (I'd have you to know) & tho' these events are indeed only subjects of speculation to me, feel some difference still between the present & the past.39

"Gray's hatred of the Stuarts," as Gosse states, "was one of his few pronounced political sentiments, and whilst at Rome he could not resist making a contemptuous jest of them in a letter which he believed that James would open."40 The excerpt from the letter asserts that: "This letter (like all those the English send, or receive) will pass through the hands of that family, before it comes to those it was intended for."41

While the poet was in Europe he had frequent opportunities, as he states in his correspondence, to observe the Pretender at church and other places; however it was at a great ball at which he and his sons were present that Gray had the best opportunity to see him at close range. The uncomplimentary description he gives of him follows:

...he is a thin ill-made man, extremely tall and awkward, of a most unpromising countenance, a

good deal resembling King James the Second, and has extremely the air and look of an idiot, particularly when he laughs or prays. The first he does not often, the latter continually. He lives private enough with his little court about him, consisting of Lord Dunbar, who manages everything, and two or three of the Preston Scotch Lords, who would be very glad to make their peace at home.\textsuperscript{42}

One of the first references Gray makes to George III after his accession is that in which he remarks that all reports of the new incumbent are favorable. He infers from two incidents relating to the new King that he will be a worthy occupant of the throne. The first concerned the sermons of the courtly chaplains. In the excerpt from his letter the King said, "I desire those Gentlemen may be told, that I came here to praise God, & not to hear my own praises." The other incident was the King's reply when the Duke of Newcastle asked him what sum should be spent on the next election. The King replied, "Nothing, my Lord. Nothing I say, my Ld: I desire to be tried by my country."\textsuperscript{43}

As a world power England's international relations had become far-reaching by the Eighteenth Century. Of these relations Gray gives several glimpses in his letters, particularly those with Ireland, France, and the American Colonies. The century was marked with political agitation between England and Ireland. Late in 1759 a riot broke out in Dublin following a rumor of a contemplated union between the two countries. An English Lord had expressed a desire in Parliament a year or two before for such a union.

\textsuperscript{42} Gray to Philip Gray. Florence, July /107, 1740. Correspondence. I, 167.
\textsuperscript{43} Gray to Mason. December, 1760. Correspondence. II, 715.
The immediate occasion of the uprising was the dropping of a hint to the same effect by the same Lord while he was in Dublin. In reality a union was not contemplated but so strained were the relations between the countries that some change in the form of government was inevitable. Of the outrages committed during the riot, Gray writes:

They made my Lord-Chief Justice administer an oath (which they dictated) to my Lord Chancellor; beat the Bishop of Killaloe black and blue; played at football with Chenevix, the old refuge Bp of Waterford; roll'd my Lord Farnham in the Kennel; pulled Sir Tho: Fordersgate by the nose (naturally large) till it was the size of a Cauliflower; & would have hanged Rigby, if he had not got out of the window. all this time the Castle remain'd in perfect tranquillity. at last the Guard was obliged to move (with orders not to fire) but the Mob threw dirt at them. Then the Horse broke in upon them, cutting the slashing, and took 17 prisoners: next morning they were all set at liberty, & said to be poor silly people, that knew nothing of the matter. the same night there was a Ball at the Castle, & Play till four in the morning....the notion, that had possessed the crown, was, that a Union was to be voted between the two Nations, & they should have no more Parliaments there.

Gray was well-informed on the relations between the English and the French in Canada and between the English and the Colonies. In one of his letters he writes at some length of Murray's defeat in Canada. Murray had had command of the left wing in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham where Wolfe had fallen September 13, 1760. After this battle he was left in com-

44 Cambridge Modern History, VI, 491.
mand of the English garrison; he took part in the capture of Montreal in 1760. A brief reference is made in Gray's Correspondence to the Stamp Act: "...the Bill to repeal the Stamp act went thro' that House, & today it is before the Lords, who surely will not venture to throw it out." The footnote adds: "The Bill was passed in the House of Lords on 7 Mar. by 105–71. It received the royal assent on the 18th Mar. 1766."  

During Gray's lifetime when there were frequent wars and rumors of war, one would expect him to make some reference to them in his writings. His cynical attitude toward war is seen in this excerpt: "I take no joy in the Spanish War, being too old to privateer, & too poor to buy stock."  

Dispassionate as Gray is about war, he feels that the English are too indifferent about the danger to their country in time of war.  

...the Common-People in Town at least know how to be afraid: but We are such uncommon People here as to have no more Sense of Danger, then if the Battle had been fought when & Where the Battle of Cannae was. then perception of these Calamities and of their Consequences, that we are supposed to get from Books, is so faintly impress'd, that we talk of War, Famine, & Pestilence with no more Apprehension, than of a Broken Head, or of a Coach overturn'd between York & Edinburgh. I heard three People, sensible, middle-aged Men (when the Scotch were said to be at Stamford, & actually were at Derby) talk of hireing a Chaise to go to Caxton (a Place in the High Road) to see the Pretender & the Highlanders, as they passed."  

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47 Gray to Wharton. Pembroke C., March 5, 1766. Correspondence. III, 921.  
Rumors were current of a French invasion of England in 1759. Gray comments on it thus: "Everybody continues as quiet about the Invasion, as if a Frenchman, as soon as he set foot on our coast, would die, like a Toad in Ireland: yet the King's tents and Equipage are order'd to be ready at an hour's warning."  

Of the Peace of Paris, Gray writes:

You see we have made a peace. I shall be silent about it, because if I say anything antiministerial, you will tell me, you know the reason: & if I approve it, you will tell me, I have expectations still. all I know is, that the D: of Newcastle & L'd Hardwick both say, it is an excellent Peace; & only M' Pitt calls it inglorious and insidious.

Gray followed the fortunes of Pitt as Prime Minister whose popularity suffered during the course of his ministry. One cause is given here:

The Ministry are much out of joint. M' P. much out of humour, his popularity tottering, chiefly occasioned by a Pamphlet against the German War, written by that squeaking acquaintance of ours, M' Manduit. it has had a vast run.

Current questions and problems, it is true, did command Gray's attention as the quotations indicate. Living much in the past, but receptive of the present, he was cognizant of new tendencies. Although he does exhibit an alert interest and abundant curiosity in contemporary events, he does not appear to have been seriously concerned with them, probably because they did not touch his life directly. He seems to have been neither very glad nor very sad in his incidental remarks about public events.

51 Gray to Wharton. December, 1762. Correspondence. II, 788.
Conclusion

The Eighteenth Century, not one of the great literary centuries of all time, makes up in diversity, to a degree at least, for what it lacks in extension and intensity. It is understandable that an age which within a single century had swung from the cold remoteness of classicism to the warm tender effusiveness of romanticism could not normally have produced any superior work either in form or in substance.

Thomas Gray is obviously an index to the age in which he lived. His works are important primarily, but not solely, because they are an epitome of his age. While he failed to arrive at greatness in any one of the mediums which he undertook, his writings are a definite reflection of the evolutionary processes through which literature arrived. His alert and appraising mind and his inclination for introspection were definite assets in his assessments of what qualities constitute literature. Possessed of a genuine love of the subject, he pursued its study with earnestness and thoroughness. It is no mean realization to have written both prose and poetry which has stood the test of time and which records graphically the modifications which conditioned literature in its gradual emergence from the formalities of classicism to the freedom of romanticism.

Submissively at first Gray observed the modes and mannerisms of the Augustans. His solemn and pompous language he regimented carefully into heroic couplets. In his effort to have common sense control his imagination,
he stifled a strong creative impetus. He developed a fondness for Dryden and a taste for Racine whom he attempted to emulate in his "Agrippina."

On the other hand the virtues of the classical school were likewise the virtues of the cold and timid odes of his youth. "Ode to the Spring," "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," " Alliance of Education and Government," and "Hymn to Ignorance" are poetic attempts in the repertoire of Gray which reflect at once the weakness and the strength of his first period.

It was natural, however, that possessing a pronounced lyrical bent, Gray should early have grown dissatisfied with the restrictions of the Augustan period.

Deep within his soul there was an inbred interest in nature and in the common man. Evidences of this interest and of his deep melancholy appear in such transitional pieces as "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" and the inimitable "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." In the latter there is manifest a definite feeling for nature and a mood of deep melancholy. The theme, death, while it expresses beautifully and concisely Gray's own emotional convictions is, too, of universal appeal. It reveals the definite decline of intellectual dominance and the ascendancy of emotional response, though it is still somewhat classical in form seasoned with quotable aphoristic iambic pentameter verses.

In his third stride Gray moved ahead of his age. He launched into new fields of literature where his complex verse patterns and his use of Norse and Celtic themes reflect marked modifications and new tendencies. "The
Fatal Sisters," "The Descent of Odin," and the "Triumph of Owen" as well as Gray's Correspondence exhibit the full flowering of the romantic impulse.

Aesthetically Gray was more than merely in advance of his time; not until fifty years after his death did English writers develop anything like a parallel response to values. He made his first point of definite departure in that he loved nature for itself and not for any association of ideas with which interpretations of nature were then weighed down. He further bespoke a strong romantic bent in his highly personal response to nature's more rugged and tempestuous aspects—her wild scenery, her violent and untamable moods. Gray's Journal (1769) gives literary evidence of his devout and tender attitude towards the new back-to-nature trend.

Gray further possessed a superior knowledge of, and a discriminating taste for several of the fine arts; and all that he writes or implies concerning the arts makes a direct appeal to what is high, tender, and noble in his reader. Lyrically sensitive to the beauty of music, blessed with an exquisite ear, he became a player and a singer of some consequence. In the course of years he accumulated an enviable collection of carefully selected airs.

Of paintings, including portraiture, Gray was a discerning critic; and from a distance he admired the elegance and taste of Gothic architecture and even took pains to align its designs, colors, and contours. His delight in the more concrete arts never approached what he felt for nature and music, however.

It is somewhat hazardous to attempt to pigeon-hole Gray religiously.
Certainly he was in no way a reflection of the disturbed and distraught attitudes and affiliations of his era. Religiously Gray was far more solidly established in the principles of Christianity than were his contemporaries. Awed by God's power as revealed in nature, he maintained that Faith was as vital a force in aiding man to lead an upright life as it was a sustaining factor in affliction and sorrow. Throughout his life he held religion in profound reverence and the purity of his morals as well as his otherwise rather blameless life were evidence sufficient of his deep convictions.

He could not endure atheistic schools of thought, regretted the infiltration of French free thought under its guises of skepticism, materialism, and rationalism; and he detested Rousseau and Voltaire because they had the temerity to scoff at belief.

Although Gray hated the Catholic Stuart, James III, pretender to the throne, from his Journal one learns that he preserved throughout his life an abiding interest in, and a profound love of, things Catholic. He haunted monasteries during the Grand Tour; the Chartreuse was a favorite haven from the frivolities of his generation. He knew more about the life of the Church--its Pope, its hierarchy, religious orders, liturgy--than many a continental Catholic. He followed breathlessly the slow and painstaking processes of a Papal election, and in general had a fine sense of respect for Rome. At heart Gray had long nurtured something deeper than toleration for things Catholic, but for some unaccountable reason never received the grace of conversion.
Gray's writings, particularly his later pieces, are an excellent commentary on his times. The country itself was so engrossed in the business of contesting her sea supremacy and in acquiring possessions, that it had little time to devote to social niceties and the academic aims. Nevertheless there was a social life of a kind. The coffee-houses which became the meccas of the leisure classes, were scoffed at by Gray, who held in contempt men who based their opinions on what they heard at these rendezvous.

Lacking all receptive qualities for amusements and celebrations, Gray wrote with contempt of everything from the banalities of a Coronation Ceremony to the stupid and unethical buying of lottery tickets, though he himself inconsistently enough occasionally trafficked in them.

An academic education, once an indispensable acquisition for the Englishman of quality, became a commendable substitute for idleness or boredom; and ostensibly it remained the predisposition for the Grand Tour.

Practically, if a man had mastered the three R's, if he could hunt and manage an estate, the only other virtue needed was common sense, which, according to the Eighteenth Century squire, could not be extracted from textbooks; either a man had it or he did not.

With these prosaic views Gray had nothing in common, and learning remained the via media to a full, deep and complete life. The theater had staged a kind of comeback, but anything less than a Garrick could not satisfy him. With the lax morality, the system of unethical bargainings, the practices of dueling and gambling, and the other stock-in-trade vices of the age, he had no patience. These were the stupidities which went a far way,
doubtlessly, towards generating that profound contempt which Gray felt for man en masse.

Although he kept himself informed of the political, social, and economic complexities of his time, Gray's interest in, and concern for, these was often remote and academic. Certain it is that for the science of politics he had small respect. Because of his intense dislike of war and conflict, he voiced his animosities and discouraged all attempts to dispose of the Hanoverian power. He wrote in a derogatory manner of the mad surge towards England's commercial aggrandizement and condemned the amassing of wealth as an end, advocating the humanitarian postulate which proposed that one should possess only so that one might give more generously to those in distress.

It is apparent, then, that in even so unmeteric an undertaking as that of attempting to determine to what extent Gray's writings run parallel to the diversified elements which make up the Eighteenth Century mind, some degree of accuracy can be approached. Obviously Gray was often not one with his age. Certainly in his response to values he was far in advance of anything the age had to offer. Nevertheless his writings indicate specifically where he differs, how and why.

Aesthetically equipped with a soul sensitized to the beauties of nature and art, Gray succeeded in establishing for his age a precedent. Certainly no other writer or group of writers in his century did more to prepare the way for the coming of what was exquisite, inspirational, and spiritual. In matters of faith, too, he was far more devout and confirmed than Eighteenth Century England warranted.
With the current social, political, and economic issues—the Whig-Tory conflict, the deflation of sovereignty powers, free trade, farming and industry—Gray took for the most part a tolerant and objective attitude. Probably he more than any other author reflects accurately the changing mind of the Eighteenth Century. His works mirror with remarkable likenesses the three shifts which resulted in the three ages of the century.
Bibliography

for

THE REFLECTION OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THOUGHT IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS GRAY

(Book)


**Gray's Works**


The thesis submitted by Sister M. Wilfred Ross, O.S.F. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

December 2, 1943
Date

Signature of Adviser