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THE DESERTED VILLAGE BY OLIVER GOLDSMITH: NOSTALGIA AND MEMORIES OF THE PAST

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Abstract

The *Deserted Village*, by Oliver Goldsmith, movingly depicts the themes of longing for a simpler time and industrialization's destruction of rural communities. This essay delves into how Goldsmith conjures up a deep yearning for a time gone by through his expressive language and detailed descriptions. Analysis of the poem's imagery, structure, and themes demonstrates Goldsmith's criticism of the economic and societal shifts that force rural populations to leave their homes. The poem's introspective atmosphere and melancholy tone highlight the profound relationship between identity and memory as Goldsmith laments the loss of ancient values and the simplicity of country life. By dissecting important sections, this research shows how *The Deserted Village* is still relevant today as a reflection on the effects of modernity and the common human desire for a simpler time.

Keywords The Deserted Village, Oliver Goldsmith, rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

This paper concentrates on the theme of nostalgia and memories of the past as they are reflected in Oliver Goldsmith's blank-verse poem *The Deserted Village* (1770). The work has consequently been referred to as 'the second most frequently quoted' in the English language. The importance of Goldsmith's setting is justified by critic Frederick Kipp stating readers 'return to it again and again', even offering that rapid shifts in historical opinion and judgment possess the power to make those revisiting rural Auburn suitable for a more recent set of critical perspectives, justifying its continued study at such intervals across the span of time (Slemon, 2007).

The poem locates for us a village in Ireland and transposes it from a poverty-stricken, beautiful, pre-Enclosure location to a violent and ugly one. The village falls victim to the 'clearing' era

described by Scottish historian Thomas Sowell as one of depopulation, leading the characters of farm leaders Mr. Primrose and his son George early and late in the novel, respectively, to 'prognosticate' the extinction of such settlements. Thus, the poem's rural ideal represents 'the simple life' at which it glances away from various corruptions that still make their obscure marks upon its fabric. Goldsmith's continued depiction of society as vast primitivist Arcadia argues for enough of a corresponding perspective in history as acquired by perception. Displacement along a mere temporal sphere scarcely accounts for such compassion for everyday life. (Zimny, 2013) Such distance from Auburn and our present day's concrete agendas, I argue, can be seen as ranging through various historical periods. Given that Goldsmith wrote 'The Deserted Village' in 1840 – the threshold of the modern age, following Giedion – we can see such melancholic mourning as still

relevant within our accelerated time of computers and planetary consumer capitalism.

1.1. Background of Oliver Goldsmith and 'The Deserted Village'

Oliver Goldsmith was an Anglo-Irish poet, playwright, essayist, and novelist whose work may be seen as representative of the classical tradition in English literature. Influenced by the French essayists, Goldsmith grants prime importance to the depiction of life as it is and to the discovery of underlying meaning behind common practices. (Sridharan, 1999) His almost exclusive focus on human life in realistic settings has led to the publication of many important works, including the novel "The Vicar of Wakefield," which is a significant work that has enjoyed lasting success with readers of English literature. Goldsmith's works have been praised for their honest depictions of life and for the rich, vivid, and elegant prose he employs. Born in County Longford, Ireland, in 1730, Goldsmith died in London, England, in 1774. Though he lived most of his life in England, Goldsmith never became a naturalized English citizen, and he always remembered his native Ireland with affection.

"The Deserted Village" was written between 1764 and 1770; the poem was published on May 26, 1770. The poem was inspired by the visit which Goldsmith made to his young brother, Henry, who resided in the village of Athlone. Though Goldsmith was urged to cut down the initial version of the poem, he eventually published it in the longer 430-line edition. (Powell, 2018) He added the "Preface" to the second version, which made it clear that the treatment of contemporary social issues was not intended as an allegory, a figure of speech with a non-apparent meaning, and strongly opposed those who accused him of the same. Goldsmith also included the "Dedications" to two important figures at the end of his poem: Sir Joshua Reynolds and Dr. Thomas Bernard. Goldsmith was not quite

happy with the last two verses of the second version of the poem.

1.2. Definition and Significance of Nostalgia in Literature

Texts where nostalgia is a main theme always possess a charm that conquers the readers' interest and allows them to unleash their creativity. Nonetheless, the concept of nostalgia is essential, even though the fascination for the concept has diminished. Some argued that in recent years, nostalgia regained its former vigor as a general consensus in various fields emerged. Nostalgia has a powerful effect on people, as it often leads to inconsistent emotions. Moreover, it encourages the active participation of the reader. (Oliver, 1996) Without his personal idea of the past, the tale of yore loses its substance. Thus, the narrative reaches its primary purpose, that of infusing emotions and changing mentalities. Therefore, mankind becomes ready to move on, leaving behind experiences that are no longer valid. The observers of the past help the world assess what is relevant and, thus, decide what cultural remains are to be inherited. In the end, the power to reach the universal is still solely in the author's hands.

In literature, nostalgia is a bittersweet longing for the things of the past. Without the sweet and sour taste of the past, writing would be fragile and would not transmit any emotions. The philosophy of such a sentimental movement's mindset aimed to bestow their readers the right stimulus in order to reawaken the memories of a bygone era. Consequently, different sorts of feelings were delivered to the broad masses. Oliver Goldsmith's poem, "The Deserted Village," was one of the most delightful deliveries of such a portrait. His poem recalls many of the features that are vividly presented in some of the best eighteenth-century nostalgia poems. (Fulmer, 1993) A tour through Ireland would confirm many of the features of "The

Deserted Village' and other such popular English nostalgia poems. This particular volume of nostalgic poetry was genre-bending, as unlike the more traditional forms of self-indulgence used in such poems, these poems portrayed a setting rather than poetical inspirations upon which to sentimentally reflect, and thus, were sometimes not taken seriously.

2. Literary Analysis of 'The Deserted Village'

'The Deserted Village' by Oliver Goldsmith is known for its theme of nostalgia and memories of the past. The poem slightly surprises in style, not only because of its personal, affectionate, and sympathetic tone, but also because while it lauds the old, it is neither severely satirical nor openly critical of the present day times of its composition. The Deserted Village is really a poetic form of the scholarly prose essays of Steele, Johnson, Burke, and Goldsmith, or the chapters on village life in Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe*. The poem talks of two villages: one the poet has seen in his childhood (a description of it), and the other as the poet saw it when he grew older. The former type is symbolized in the village of Nesof, which has been called by some Derry. In the second village depicted in the poem, the poet praises the charm of a village which had been destroyed by the upgrading of the Heathcote family.

The Deserted Village is representative of the school of poetry that celebrates the beauty of yesteryears in simple and unsophisticated manners. It deliberately invokes simple feelings and pleasures and the simplicity of our country life associated with the poet's joys in the lap of nature. (Bartner, 2020) It is symbolic of that unique beauty and charm, which can be felt in memory and in memories. The poet soothes his dreamy mind by the remembrance of the idyllic peace and happiness of old days, of the vision of standing grain waving in the wind, of the evening time, and the landmarks of the village.

2.1. Themes of Nostalgia and Memories

Dr. Johnson said in the preface to *Lycidas*, "He that has once admired the task of untwisting the involved sentences and finding the scattered members heaping together and those that are disjoined dispersing, may she be reminded how many mortals he has outlasted, and how many he shall outlast." Goldsmith addresses such readers - readers who make of the poem a "silent, wandering doomsday." Certainly, *The Deserted Village* has been received warmly by readers of all ages for almost two centuries, since it was first published in 1770. Critics, Goldsmith has invited readers to share in his sadness, as he detours the present and ponders on the past. In this poem, we find "what pleasure lives in the detail of reminiscence and what pain." As F. J. Easteray has noted, nostalgia and memories of an almost fantastic past constitute the themes around which the poem is woven.

Readers that to be pathetic, the present of his people is far removed from the past; in a sense, Goldsmith was not so much editorializing on the reality of the rural scene in Ireland or England, the two countries of his loyalty, but was corporatizing on the reality of the human mind in a private way, no matter how the poet who the readers in the actual announced his desire to render an accurate rural history just as he saw that, in so doing it, would bear some social relevance. (Al-Onizi, 2012) Emotional. The emotional aspect of such an act is not surprising; the celebrated description of the hamlet in decay sits here in a rhetoric of yearning, one exhorted by the trope of memory: "thus, as told of yore, the way to life," And such is largely the way that "The Deserted Village" is read.

3. Historical Context of the Poem

The history of any artwork deeply reflects the time and space it belongs to. It is shaped and created by the circumstances of its own age. The rural landscape that Oliver Goldsmith depicts in 'The

'Deserted Village' is also a product of 18th-century contemporary Irish society. His view of the history of Auburn is similar to that of the sources he had read: the Yankee Farmers and the British Government's parliamentary reports. In making his portrait of the lost village, the location is unspecified. Historical, geographical, and other evidence is washed out. (Chow, 1993) However, it is obvious and easily imaginable that Goldsmith's Auburn is the symbol of the homeland Ireland, the unspoiled uplands of the poet's imagination. Auburn of 'The Deserted Village' is a product of Oliver Goldsmith's despair and his society's guilt.

The last four villagers, he tells us, are bored, exhausted, apathetic, toiling to no purpose after all the rest of the villagers have been evicted and dispersed. As the villagers scatter into other parishes, the entire social system falls into decay: the marriage system, the chieftain system, the village school, the village industries, all fall into final decline. When Goldsmith dated 'The Deserted Village' 1770, there were results corresponding to the parliaments in Ireland to the Land Commission in 1819, 1825, and 1826. In other words, Goldsmith's details and anger are indiscriminate. More importantly, he chose to depict a decaying economy on the brink of catastrophic change in order to attack those changes: luxury, charities, enlightenment, pamphleteering, summits, budgets, bids, and the rest. Goldsmith, writing in the mid-18th century, stares a swift and complex transformation dead in the face, laments my beautiful ways, and anticipates a ruined very soon.

3.1. 18th-century Ireland: Socioeconomic Changes

The long 18th-century (1691–1800) is of great importance in the context of Irish history, as this period was marked by several socioeconomic changes in the country. Ireland lost its position as a colony to an extent and became a fully political and administrative member of the United Kingdom

in 1800. The Penal Laws and the enactment of the 1709 Statutes enacted against the woolen industry in Ireland saw the emigration of a sizeable chunk of Irish men and women to continental Europe and the United States. A lot of Irish people went to France as British-Irish soldiers on loan, among whom a few stayed back and married French women. There were sizeable numbers of Irish soldiers all across Europe in different Christian/Jesuit regiments.

The two greatest forces that caused the decline of the village were, firstly, the enclosure and consolidation of commons and common land; and secondly, the slump in agricultural prices. As a result of the enclosure of Common Lands, several thousand rural families living in the village of Lissoy lost their common rights and commons over the land. Several clans and landlords of bigger estates initiated the process. Enclosure is one of the biggest concomitant effects of the Agricultural Revolution as it leads to the consolidation of the landed estates as well as the disempowerment of the tenants or the agricultural smallholders. To survive the poverty of wages, many tenant farmers and rural workers emigrated to London, Liverpool, Manchester or to the Caribbean and the United States. A number of them worked as weavers in the South of Ireland as handloom weaving was in great demand in the early nineteenth century, especially in Manchester, England.

4. The Role of Memory in 'The Deserted Village'

Memory is one of the principal components of the narrative of pastoral romantic vision, and the presence of memory in, or rather as, the poem is very important. The narrative of the poem shifts between the present and the past, between the reader's time and a recalled time. The shift from description to the villagers in the poem is also a shift of narrative from present scenes to the remembered past of the village schoolmaster, the parish priest, and the village youths gathered in the

ale house. The journey to this place seems separated by scores of years, and it is the memory of the whole social life that characterizes the village people and portrays our lives. The poem is a lasting theme on the life of the poet himself. Human memory, which the poet makes use of, is the reflector of past images.

The poet also pictures his characters, his ideal village, and all those natural scenes of life by calling upon the patrons of memory. The poem is therefore fashioned with a purpose. The village will not become idealized as long as its name is cherished through the retrospect of rustic and pastoral vision. Sweet memories will occupy the heart. This village, sweetly remembered, will remain forever the poet's pasture landscape, sprinkled with the charm of village shyness, an idyllic rural, rustic, and reflective painting at once - "And the eyes of the smile." He is too polarizing as he divides all human values throughout. Hence, the good-hearted teacher is of such a summer blue-eyed angelic soul compared with the learned lutes of the schools and expert manias of cities. The focal points remain not only the village but also the village teacher of the poet's childhood.

4.1. Memory as a Reflective Tool

When 'The Deserted Village' was published, this form of nostalgia was not only idealistic - the past was better, according to Goldsmith - but was directly related to contemporary historical events. America was revolting, and Goldsmith took it as an opportunity to criticize the colonialism of his own nation in two stanzas, alongside denunciate the approaching changes that capitalism would bring to his own country and other nations. The landowners were taking people's land away from them to raise livestock and increase their profits. The author criticizes the need for progress that these men have, talking about how change is necessary, but not the one that was imposed on the villagers. Change was going to affect not only them

but every other person who was living in a rural environment within England.

In this context, memory becomes a tool for reflection, mainly because it impacts how the character is represented in the poem. The villagers (and indirectly the actual Irish people) are remembered fondly, as Goldsmith calls them "the best". When a character is remembered this way, they are represented as oppressed and/or aggrieved. The poem does content with actual, factual loss, but individuals are written in such a way through memory so as to evoke empathetic responses. On the surface, 'The Deserted Village' remembers a cared-for place much as it does philanthropic characters. However, the titular village already is, in a sense, actually deteriorated and partially deserted at the same time one recalls it as the idyllic "Sweet Auburn" of old.

5. Nostalgia and Emotion in the Poem

Nostalgia is an "emotion" that attracts "serious sentimentalism" as it takes the reader into the world of "recollections of one's own life". Goldsmith realizes the evocative force of nostalgia and plays on the memories that will be stirred up in each type and section of audience he envisions. The thirty years and more of public opinion, critical judgment and historical interest confirm the poem's total impact of emotional effects, moral sentiment and the "grave philosophy" conveyed in Goldsmith's "maturest work".

The Deserted Village elicits pathos and an entire range of feeling from its readers in many strategic ways. The very idea of nostalgia is grounded in emotion. This is the elegiac note of much eighteenth-century topographical poetry of Norwich. Such poetry and The Deserted Village both connect with our emotions in ways other literary forms do not. A widely discussed poem that counts as late Augustan poetry and underlines "its direct appeal to the emotions". Consequently with his stage management of time of day, seasonal

instance and memorabilia, the poem extols the emotion of nostalgia as it moves through the tonalities of emerging sentiment to a final "emotion of tranquillity". The movement from a sensibility predominating, by varying degrees, mirth, gossipy minuteness, melancholy, anxiety and beneficent sadness to informed despair.

5.1. Sentimentalism and Emotional Impact

The context of sentimentalism indeed reveals that nostalgia and feelings stemming from remembrance and memory provide a very strong emotional impact. Sentimentalism, as a literary and artistic trend, does not solely relate to feelings; it also refers to the emotional impact of certain surroundings or the influence of time and memory. This is the aspect that "The Deserted Village" primarily exemplifies. By elaborately investigating the feelings present in the poem, we may come to a fuller understanding of how the emotional grip is exerted, and to what extent nostalgia actually captures the emotions of people, including modern readers.

One of the most dramatic sentiments is perhaps pity in the poem. The comparison of medieval scenes and the contemporary forlorn ones only pays off a solemn-luxurious emotional effect. The general impression is gloomy, but this last comparison makes the effect more specific and profound, and the reader can more distinctly realize the unhappy change. Religious sadness then begins to ascend in the abased mournful feeling. Although the poet is not deeply religious, he is, as we hinted before, anti-materialistic, and there is almost another degree of the feeling beyond sensibility in him. Meanwhile, pity, attending the abandon of rural life on a daily painful level which is again unbearable, fades gradually out. Not like Goldsmith, truly celebrated age poets utilize divine feelings and matters in their works, and readers can find them again in "The Seasons," for that very instance. The poem

possesses the most human-hearted kind of feelings, aroused by unity of relations, the control of disillusioned emotional effects and faiths. These sometimes hyperbolic sentiments can inspire candid readers. In so doing, from sadness the moral mood of the reader will become positively uplifted, with a lesson accompanied: nostalgia can in fact instruct and guide behavior and caution.

CONCLUSION

Oliver Goldsmith hauntingly portrays a bygone rural town's vibrant past in "The Deserted Village," evoking a sense of nostalgia and mixed emotions. Using poetic imagery and sincere lyrics, Goldsmith mourns the village's fall and blames the invasion of riches and urbanization for its ruin. The poem is homage to the rural way of life, contrasting it with the modern world and all its complexity and modernity. The nostalgia that Goldsmith sows as he recounts the thriving history of the community makes one want for a simpler time when people lived closer to one another, and nature thrived. Ultimately, "The Deserted Village" is a thought-provoking piece that delves into the effects of societal change and encourages readers to value and protect the intangible assets of tradition and memory.

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