

# Context for Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770)

- Industrial Revolution
- **Enclosure Acts** (not to be confused with **Foreclosure** acts)
- Popularity of Nostalgic & Elegiac Verse
  - Reflective poetry on the past and on loss.

# The Industrial Revolution

This movement is not the main focus of this poem but supplies some context

- The 1700's saw the emergence of factories.
- 1770 reveals early beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, not its height.
- Seed drills, ploughing engines, and threshing machines allowed for farming on a new mass scale.
- The latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> C brought important inventions that helped facilitate mass production, especially w/ things such as textiles and metals.
  - Notable examples: the spinning jenny and the steam engine
- There was a rise in textile mills and mining (especially for coal).
  - Pollution would come later.
- Some strains of Romanticism (with its interest in nature, nostalgia, and the plight of the poor) might be viewed as the beginnings of environmentalism and the hippie/folk movement of the sixties.

“*The Deserted Village* is an idealization of English rural life...”

“Goldsmith was seriously concerned about the effects of the agricultural revolution then in progress, which was being hastened by **Enclosure Acts**. Either for the sake of more profitable farming or to create vast private parks and landscape gardens, arable land was being ‘enclosed’—i.e. taken out of the hands of small proprietors—thus displacing yeoman farmers who, like their ancestors, had lived for generations in small villages grazing their cattle on common land and raising food on small holdings. The only alternative available to many such people was to seek employment in the city or to migrate to America” (NA 3062-3063, note 1).

## **Enclosures:**

“The man of wealth and pride / Takes up a space that many poor supplied; / Space for his lake, his park’s extended bounds, / Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds” (275-78)



“Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide, /  
And even the bare-worn common is denied” (307-08)



## The Kinks "Village Green" (1968)

### *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*

Out in the country,  
Far from all the soot and noise of the city,  
There's a village green.  
It's been a long time  
Since I last set eyes on the church with the steeple  
Down by the village green.  
'Twas there I met a girl called Daisy  
And kissed her by the old oak tree.  
Although I loved my Daisy, I sought fame,  
And so I left the village green.

I miss the village green,  
And all the simple people.  
I miss the village green,  
The church, the clock, the steeple.  
I miss the morning dew, fresh air and Sunday school.

And now all the houses  
Are rare antiquities.  
American tourists flock to see the village green.  
They snap their photographs & say "Gawl darn it,  
Isn't it a pretty scene?"  
And Daisy's married Tom the grocer boy,  
And now he owns a grocery.

I miss the village green,  
And all the simple people.  
I miss the village green,  
The church, the clock, the steeple.  
I miss the morning dew, fresh air and Sunday  
school.

And I will return there,  
And I'll see Daisy,  
And we'll sip tea, laugh,  
And talk about the village green.  
We will laugh and talk about the village green.

## “The Green Movement”:

A bunch of hippies from the British Invasion of the 1960s  
whose message echoes “The Deserted Village”

*I miss the village green,  
And all the simple people.*

*I miss the village green,  
The church, the clock, the  
steeple.*

*I miss the morning dew,  
fresh air and Sunday  
school.*



# The Grass Is Always Greener...

- *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse*
  - This children's tale reminds us of human nature:
  - It's easy to idealize both the country and the city.
- ***Paradise Lost***: Rural England as The Garden of Eden

**A time there was, ere England's griefs began,  
When every rood of ground maintained its man  
For him light labor spread her wholesome store,  
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:  
His best companions, innocence and health;  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth. (57-62)**

# Where have all the flowers gone?

63 But times are alter'd; trade's unfeeling train  
64 Usurp the land and dispossess the swain;  
65 Along the lawn, where scatter'd hamlets rose,  
66 Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose,  
67 And every want to opulence allied,  
68 And every pang that folly pays to pride.  
69 Those gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,  
70 Those calm desires that ask'd but little room,  
71 Those healthful sports that grac'd the peaceful scene,  
72 Liv'd in each look, and brighten'd all the green,--  
73 These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,  
74 And rural mirth and manners are no more.

# Thoughts on Trade, Resources, & Luxuries: “The Royal Exchange”?

283     Around the world each needful product flies,  
284     For all the luxuries the world supplies;  
285     While thus the land adorn'd for pleasure all,  
286     In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.

# Betrayed by Luxury: The Landscape as a Lady

287 As some fair female unadorn'd and plain,  
288 Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,  
289 Slights every borrow'd charm that dress supplies,  
290 Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes;  
291 But when those charms are past, for charms are frail,  
292 When time advances, and when lovers fail,  
293 She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,  
294 In all the glaring impotence of dress.  
295 Thus fares the land by luxury betray'd:  
296 In nature's simplest charms at first array'd,  
297 But verging to decline, its splendours rise,  
298 Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;  
299 While, scourg'd by famine from the smiling land,  
300 The mournful peasant leads his humble band,  
301 And while he sinks, without one arm to save,  
302 The country blooms--a garden and a grave.

303 Where then, ah! where, shall poverty reside,  
304 To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride?

## Here or There?:

### Either Way, the Poor Appear on the Outside Looking In

309 If to the city sped--what waits him there?  
310 To see profusion that he must not share;  
311 To see ten thousand baneful arts combin'd  
312 To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;  
313 To see those joys the sons of pleasure know  
314 Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe.  
315 Here while the courtier glitters in brocade [fancy fabric],  
316 There the pale artist plies the sickly trade;  
317 Here while the proud their long-drawn pomps display,  
318 There the black gibbet [for execution] glooms beside the way.

# Rumor has it that Samuel Johnson wrote the last four lines:

427      That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,  
428      As ocean sweeps the labour'd mole<sup>1</sup> away;  
429      While self-dependent power can time defy,  
430      As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

<sup>1</sup>mole = a man-made breakwater.

**NOTE: Some have argued that forcing rural peasants into the city helped promote real “self-dependent power” rather than debilitate it. Others lament how the country peasants the became fodder for factory work in the cities.**