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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to provide and summarize the information about the life, work, and poetics of the Reverend Robert Blair, with particular stress placed on his poem of renown, “The Grave”.

The first part focuses on introducing the reader to the historical contexts of the times of Robert Blair, and is accompanied by a compiled biography of the poet, along with a short account of his most prominent friends and acquaintances. The second part of the paper attempts to describe in detail the writing process of “The Grave”, and follow the track of changes and variations leading from its earliest known version to the first edition of the poem. In its third section, the thesis strives to discuss the influences of various works of literature upon the fabric of the piece.

The thesis will conclude with a discussion of the primary purposes and effects of “The Grave” on its reader, and its author’s intentions for the poem.

Key words:

Robert Blair, *The Grave*, eighteenth-century poetry, literary influence, religiousness, Graveyard School, William Shakespeare.

SOUHRN

Cílem této práce je poskytnout a shrnout informace o životě, práci a poetice reverenda Roberta Blaira s důrazem na jeho nejznámější báseň, “The Grave” (“Hrob”).

První část práce se soustřeďuje na představení historického kontextu Blairovy doby čtenáři, a je doplněna biografií básníka společně se stručným výčtem básnickových přátel a známých.

Ve své druhé části se diplomová práce pokouší detailně popsat proces tvorby “Hrobu” a snaží se vysledovat vývoj básně od první známé verze po její první edici .

Ve třetí části se práce sleduje vlivy různých literárních děl a kulturních tradic na strukturu “Hrobu”.

Práci pak zavšuje diskuse o primárních účelech “Hrobu” a efektu, který báseň ma na čtenáře

Klíčová slova:

Robert Blair, “The Grave”, poezie osmnáctého století, literární vlivy, religiozita, hřbitovní škola, William Shakespeare.

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1. Introduction

When the eighteenth century English poetry becomes the topic of a discussion, one simply does not expect a talk of graves and all-conquering death, but rather imagines the “mighty maze, but not without a plan” of Alexander Pope and his Neoclassical contemporaries, their stress on witty argument, and requirement of decorous language.

It is hidden behind this glittering wall of Neoclassical reason that looms the gloom of the grave. For out of the scope of the ‘mainstream’ poetry of the eighteenth century is found a group of poets who, rather than place their faith in all-pervasive sarcasm, wit, and high style of writing, chose to consider themselves with thoughts of bereavement, and meditations on mortality. Unlike the Romantic poets whom they preceded in particular aspects of their writing, these neither formed a formal school, nor did surround themselves with authors that were of the same kind. They lived separately, the answers to the question they sought to solve ranged from deeply religious to quite secular; where many turned to God, some chose the more humanistic idea of friendship. A great amount of features their poetry had in common, nonetheless. Perhaps the most substantial, so emblematic that it gave name to the whole ‘school’, was the place these authors chose to be the catalyst of their argument- the graveyard. We thus talk about the so-called Graveyard School of English poetry.

Though there are more names associated with this school of poetry, the indisputably greatest recognition (relative as it is in the case of first two) received three poets. The older of the three, Edward Young and Robert Blair, stand as the two most solid foundations of the movement. The third, Thomas Gray, born later and substantially more secular in nature than the two, rightfully ascended to true fame with his “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”. It will be found rather ironic by the end of this paper that “The Elegy”, meditating upon the similar questions, but answering them in much different manner, was repeatedly printed in the companionship of “The Grave” written by the subject of this work, the Scottish poet Robert Blair.

The aim of this thesis is to attempt to provide the reader with an analysis of the poetics of Blair, as realized in his sole work of literary importance, “The Grave”. The first part supplies the reader with mostly contextual information about the first half of the eighteenth century to which Blair was born, with special attention payed to the social, cultural, and religious setting of the times of the poet, followed by an account of the life and acquaintances of Blair. In its focus on the historical perspective, it also depicts the history of composition of “The Grave”, which provides essential information

for the proper understanding of Blair's poetics.

The middle section primarily aspires to trace various literary influences on "The Grave", and to depict the origin of themes which to a great extent help to constitute the main argument of the poem.

The third and final part takes up the duty of discussing the primary purpose of the Blair's finest work, the nature of its argument, and the instruments employed in order to achieve a certain desirable effect upon the mind of the reader.

2. Robert Blair and His Times

If an author is to be discussed and his poetical intentions fully understood, it must be considered necessary to provide a proper biographical and social background for such a discussion. In the case of Robert Blair, a Scottish poet of the first half of the 18th century, it is more than fitting to submit such an account, for Blair, though his name is to be found in a large variety of works of literary criticism, was seldom discussed as a primary focus of such works, and the authors of literary histories rarely introduced him out of the frame of the precursors to the Gothic and Romantic Literature of the 19th century, as Eric Parisot points out in his work, “Disinterring The Grave” (Parisot, 24). He was written about only in association with several poets such as Thomas Parnell, Edward Young and Thomas Gray, members of a group of authors whose works were bound by employment of melancholy in their quest to ponder the values of human existence, a group that bears the name of his great poem, the Graveyard School.

The pieces of information about the life of Blair are humble and scattered amongst various biographies. The following pages thus attempt to convey a more detailed account of the life and times of Robert Blair, with the help of several sources, the most contributive being *The Life of Blair* by Robert Anderson, M.D., *The Poetical Works of Bettie, Blair, and Falconer*, authored by Rev. George Gilfillan, chapter on Blair contained in *The Background to Grays Elegy*, written by Amy Louise Reed, and the poet’s biography written by Andrew Rudd for Literature Online.

2.1. The Age of Blair

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 which brought the installment of William of Orange and his wife, Mary, started a new era in the history of England and its people. The tumultuous times of the Civil War were over, and a new age of relative stability had come as the tensions that had troubled the English for a hundred years were continuously relieved throughout the first two decades of the eighteenth century. The Act of Settlement (1701) settled the succession of childless Queen Anne (1665-1714) upon George I. of the House of Hannover (1660-1727), thus ensuring for a greater political stability of the country. The Acts of Union (1707) established a single and unified Kingdom of Great Britain on English soil. Finally, the Wars of the Spanish Succession, which saw the famous victories of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, at Blenheim, Ramillies and Malplaquet, were brought to a satisfying end

by the Peace of Utrecht (1713).

This period of English literary history, including the reign of Queen Anne and the first two Georges, is often referred to as Neoclassical or Augustan, for authors from the Golden Age of Latin literature that were considered worthy of imitation, Vergil, Horace, and Ovid, celebrated emperor Augustus' reign.

With the new found economical, political, and cultural stability during the reign of Queen Anne, the importance of the capital, London, was steadily rising, and soon, it was London society that dictated what was fashionable for an Augustan reader to read, and what was not. The intellectual readers of London were considered the "chief, if not sole, audience" (Daiches, 590) for many a contemporary writer.

The older elements of London society were joined by the members of the upper-middle class that was vastly growing in size and importance, as it managed to prosper from the new found stability and growth of their country and the consequential economical and mercantile opportunities it offered to these mostly merchants and tradesmen. The days of rich patrons financially supporting authors had ended and ended the days when most writing was intended for the members of the Court, as the focus of power, both economical and political, gradually shifted from the side of the rich landowners and aristocrats to a different strata of society, the middle class townsfolk, the newborn gentility that was willing to pay for literary amusement and willing to pay its authors, providing they would fulfill their employer's purpose, be it political or didactic. The Augustan reader thus was not to be found in the Court, but in one of the plentiful coffee houses of London, reading books, and discussing manners, literature, poetry, and politics with their peers.

Such a shift in the target group of readers resulted in a substantial change in both the form, and the content of contemporary literature; in prose, novel was on the rise due to works of Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift, until it had, around 1760 established itself "as the most popular form of English literature"(Williams, 427), while journalism and essay writing experienced a massive expansion epitomized in the figures of two great essayists and educators of the middle class, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, and their famous periodicals, "The Tatler" and "The Spectator."

In poetry, satirical and political writings of Dryden and Pope flourished. Heroic couplet became the standard. Grammatical correctness and well turned style as well as proper

usage of 'poetic diction' were of utmost importance, if the author desired to be considered fashionable by the reading public. In the perspective of both the Augustans reader and writer, poetry "was a civilized activity, and civilization demanded a certain kind of perspective in looking at things, a certain polish and elegance of good society, wit, restraint, good taste, and the subordination of personal idiosyncrasy to a social norm"(Daiches, 591).

Of the situation in religion it can be said that even though the political and social situation of the nonconformists was gradually improving, the age did not prove very cheerful to a devout man. With Enlightenment on the move and society becoming increasingly interested in the new economical opportunities the times had offered them, religion was continuously deteriorating to a second-rate subject for many members of the society. It is in troubled times that men turn to God for answers, and the prosperity and optimism of the day proved that when wealth abounds, the state of one's soul becomes less of an importance. The main interest of the time is in man and his general nature, not God.

The new perceptions of God, as the men of science, philosophy, and theology, introduced it, proved destructive to the efforts of divines to a great extent. Prominent scientific view of Isaac Newton perceived God solely as an abstract and theoretical entity, a masterful creator, which brought the existence of the Universe and intervenes only to keep celestial bodies in motion and place.

Newton's philosophy was very close to another form of belief inspired by works of contemporary theologians such as Tindal, Toland and Hume, Deism. The notion that the Universe was created by a supreme being that does not interfere in its course or affairs of men in any way, thus basically neglecting the need for religion or organized faith, could hardly ever inspire any sort of religious devotion in a contemporary reader.

The Church of England as well was a sad sight to behold for the men of true religion; Not only was it "in the eighteenth century was more a social than religious organization, and looked suspiciously on any exhibition of deep religious feeling" (Daiches, 661), but it also, starting with 1714 when the Whigs came to power, became a political instrument in the hands of the Whig governments. This was painfully evident with some of the established church's bishops supporting the Whigs on numerous occasions in the House of Lords, where, as Williams describes, Prime Minister Robert Walpole's Whig administration was saved in 1733 on two occasions solely by the votes of twenty-four of twenty-five bishops present. Such frequent political involvement of the higher clergy

consequently led to neglect of their pastoral duties, as well as some instances of a rather scandalous behavior. One could hardly ask for a better example of profanity than that of bishop Lancelot Blackburne, who, quoting Basil Williams, “was a great, roistering, ex-naval chaplain, who shocked even one of his vicars by calling for pipes and liquor in the vestry after confirmation.” (Williams, 81)

Of the hardships of the time, David Addison Harsha, biographer of Doddridge, writes:

The religious feature of the age of Doddridge, does not, on the whole, afford a very cheering theme for the contemplation of the pious mind. While it was an epoch memorable for its speculative tendencies in theology, the grand doctrines of practical Christianity were comparatively little regarded by the great majority of professing Christians of all denominations. There seems, in fact, to have been a general decay of religion. As an indication of its low state in those days, it has been said, that piety was no longer considered essential, even by many among the dissenters, for an admission to the Christian ministry (Harsha, 14).

Such a decline of religion did not go unanswered, however; hymns were written, calls for a religion of a different kind from what The Church of England caused it to become ensued, religion that would be more personal, and would allow its listeners to experience it directly. Evangelical revival was born, an attempt to reestablish the importance of the Gospels, thus in some aspects returning back to the more zealous doctrines of the Calvinist faith of the seventeen century, took place during the fourth decade of the eighteen century at the hands of Brothers Wesley, John and Charles, and George Whitefield, resulting in foundation of a separate Methodist Movement. This, in its nature deeply anti-humanistic and anti-enlightenment, attempt for an Evangelical revival soon found a number of supporters, especially in the ranks of the dissenters, amongst whom belonged hymnodists Isaac Watts and Phillip Doddridge, as well as their friend, a Presbyterian minister and a poet, Robert Blair.

2.2. The Life of Blair

The Scottish poet Robert Blair was born in 1699, as the eldest son of Rev. David Blair, and his wife Euphemia Nisbet, daughter of Archibald Nisbet, Esq. of Carfin. The poet’s family had deep religious roots, as his father, himself a Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh and chaplain to the King, was a descendant of Rev. Robert Blair of Irvine, a “distinguished Scottish clergyman in the time of the civil wars.” (Anderson, xiii)

Robert’s student years led him first to Edinburgh University and afterwards to the

Netherlands where he took a degree; what the actual subject of his education was, however, we do not know. It was at Edinburgh University, that he met with William Law of Elvingston, his tutor, relation and friend, father of his future wife and professor of moral philosophy, a person upon whose death Blair in 1728 wrote one of the two poems the authorship of is usually ascribed to him, an elegiac verse of 138 lines, "Poem dedicated to the Memory of the Late Learned and Eminent Mr. William Law, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh."

Between 1718-31, following his return from the continent, Blair spent some time as an unemployed probationer of the church. Financial difficulties that would have ailed most men in such situation posed no serious difficulties for him, as he had inherited a large sum of money from his father, and it was, along with his disposition, this hereditary property that allowed him to pursue more elevated goals of poetry and natural science; he is described as a studious person and an ardent lover of books in "Epistle to Robert Blair" found in the second part of a volume of poems titled "Lugubres cantus: Poems on Several Grave and Important Subjects" written by Joseph Mitchell and published by Athenian Society in 1719.

In this place, it is perhaps appropriate to mention, that several of his biographers also suggest a more intimate connection of Blair with the Athenian Society, a small literary club in Edinburgh, among whose members could be counted, among others, David Mallet, poet and dramatist, author of "The Excursion", and Mallet's friend James Thomson, author of "The Seasons", a poem that had imprescriptible influence upon the subject of melancholy poetry.

In support of this supposition stands the fact that in 1720, Athenian Society published the first volume of anonymous poems, "Edinburgh Miscellany: Consisting of Original Poems, Translations, &c. By Various Hands", which contained, among others, two paraphrases of scripture signed "B" that "family tradition has attributed to Robert Blair" (Parsons, 186). This, along with the fact that John Callander, Esq. of Cragforth, its editor, is said to have been an intimate friend to Blair offers the possibility to view the poet and possible influences upon his work in a slightly different perspective.

In 1728, Blair, this time under his own name, published the above mentioned elegiac verse with the intention to praise the deceased distinguished academic and his relation, William Law.

The years of relative idleness ended on August 15, 1729. On this day, Blair received a license to preach, and on January 5, 1731, was ordained minister of a small country parish of Athelstaneford, in the country of East Lothian. Though charged with new

duties, his life didn't change to an extent one would perhaps expect; he still had a plenty of time to dedicate to his favorite studies, mainly botany, optics and microscopic knowledge, and, of course, poetry. Of his life as a country parish minister, one of his biographers writes:

Possessed of an easy competence, and a manageable field of labor, surrounded by simplicities of rural manners, and the picturesque features of rural scenery, -lord of his sphere of duty, and master of his time, -his life can be, and often is, one of the most useful and happy, honorable in its toils, and graceful in its relaxations, to be found on earth. (Gilfillan, 121)

In 1738, ten years after her father's death, he married Isabella Law, daughter of William Law, and sister of sheriff-depute of East Lothian. She is said to have made the poet very happy, and gave him six children, five sons, David, William, Francis, Robert, Archibald, and a daughter, Anne. She outlived her husband by twenty-seven years and died in 1774.

It is with "The Grave", a poem of 767 lines of blank verse of mostly iambic pentameter, that the literary importance of Blair rests. It was first published in 1743, approximately one year after the first night of "The Complaint; or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality" of Edward Young (1683-1765) appeared. Both pieces employed gloomy imagery of graveyards, the theme of both was primarily religious, and both in time became immensely popular with the readers (Though James Means argues that the poem did not ascend to popularity until 1780's, the fact that the poem "appeared in seventeen editions before 1785 indicates a continuing popularity" (Clymer, 385).) . Attention of this kind marked that the taste of the public was slowly changing from the eighteenth century reason and dignity towards the sensibility of the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century.

Though "The Grave" was a success, it did not bring any substantial changes to the life of Blair. He remained in Athelstaneford and would have perhaps written more, if he had not, sometime between January 1 and February 4, 1746 (As suggested by comparison of the date of his demise and the date the last known letter of Blair to Henry Baker was sent.), probably while exercising his pastoral duties, contracted a fever that overcame him on February 4. His body was buried at the Athelstaneford churchyard with only initials "K.B" to mark his final resting place.

2.3. Friends and correspondents

While performing his duties of a country minister, Blair acquainted several important personages of his day. His biographers speak about Sir Francis Kinloch, Baronet, of Gilmerton, patron of the parish, and John Callander of Craigforth, publisher from Edinburgh.

His interest in natural science brought him the friendship of Henry Baker, Esq., a member of Royal Society, a lesser poet, and author of several works including two pieces regarding microscopic knowledge, “The Microscope Made Easy” and “Employment for the Miscroscope”, the former of which, along with other Baker’s work, “The Natural History of a Polype”, Blair personally owned, as seen in “Testament Dative of Robert Blair”.

Of more interest however are the figures of three religious men that Blair carried on a correspondence with; Colonel James Gardiner, Dr. Isaac Watts, and Reverend Phillip Doddridge.

Of James Gardiner (1668-1745), “the worthy friend & gallant countrymen” (Blair, Rodgers, 409) as Blair describes him in a letter addressed to Baker dated January 1, 1746, a Scottish soldier serving under John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough during the Wars of the Spanish Succession, the principal source of information is found in “Some remarkable passages in the life” written by his friend Doddridge. Doddridge describes how Gardiner, in his youth “the happy rake” (Doddridge, Gardiner, 23), converted to become a man most devout and remained thus until his untimely death in the battle of Prestonpans in 1745, where he was slain defending the House of Hanover against its Jacobite enemies and their Scottish allies.

Dr. Isaac Watts (1674-1748), who was probably introduced to Blair by their mutual acquaintance, Colonel Gardiner during 1729, was, as all three most influential correspondents of Blair, a dissenter. Intending to become a minister of the church, he understood that the hymn and psalm employed in worship of his day was too harsh for a common member of a congregation to listen to, and thus decided to begin writing hymns of his own, which earned him the position of one of the principal hymn-writers of the Augustan era. He soon started to preach regularly and earned the reputation of a powerful preacher whose words had a deep power over both the believer and the unbeliever.

The literary talents of Watts however reached beyond the boundary of hymnody and sermon writing, as in 1705, he published a collection of poems termed “*Horae Lyricae*”, a work the preface of which, Watts promotes the method of “*Terror, Threatening and Amazement*” (Watts, quoted in Parrisot, 26) as an instrument against sin, which, the following chapters will show, is remarkably reminiscent of Blair’s own poetic approach. “*Horae Lyricae*” was followed by “*Hymns*” in 1707, “*Divine Songs for Children*” in 1715, and “*Psalms of David*” in 1719.

The acquaintance of Phillip Doddridge (1702-1751), a dissenter hymnodist, divine poet, and a principal of Daventry Academy, was probably gained through the friendship with either Watts or Gardiner. Their correspondence started in 1741, when Blair first contacted the divine in a letter concerning his melancholy poem, “*The Grave*”. It is in the correspondence of Doddridge, that most information about “*The Grave*” before it was published is found. Unfortunately, the perhaps even more interesting correspondence of Blair and Watts was not allowed to be viewed by the public, as Addison laments in his biography of Blair. (Blair, Addison, 1802) Were it not so, the insight into the most interesting stage of the history of “*The Grave*” would most likely have been substantially larger.

3. Composition History of “The Grave”

Over the course of the history, poets have always been dedicating vast periods of time to crafting the works that would perhaps make them immortal. Yet as the writing process continued, the attitude of the author towards the purpose of his work oftentimes changed. Influenced by new works published and old works re-discovered, pressured by new demands arising from new duties, and being witness to great events of their day, writers would alter their earlier drafts, add new stanzas, and remove older, now no longer fitting, ones. It can be said that as its author changes, so does his poem.

Robert Blair is no exception to this rule, as his path leading from the earliest drafts of “The Grave” to its first published version is marked by a number of revisions of the text of the poem, revisions that substantially changed the final face of the piece.

The following chapter accordingly attempts to describe the history of composition of “The Grave”, using the correspondence of Blair and his acquaintance Doddridge to illustrate the circumstances of the poem’s publishing, as well as three different versions of “The Grave” as they were documented and discussed by James Means in his article, “The Composition of ‘The Grave’” in order to retrace the variations and additions that occurred during the course of the composition process.

At least portions of the poem were composed before 1731, perhaps even during Blair’s student years at the Edinburgh University, as suggested by Blair’s letter addressed to Phillip Doddridge, dated February 25, 1741-1742, which offers a valuable insight into several aspects of history of composition and publication of “The Grave” as well as a hint at the poetic intention with which Blair wrote his famous piece:

You will be justly surprised with a letter from one whose name is not so much known to you; nor shall I offer to make an apology. Though I am entirely unacquainted with your person, I am no stranger to your merit as an author; neither am I altogether unacquainted with your personal character, having often heard honourable mention made of you by my much respected and worthy friends Colonel Gardiner, and Lady Gardiner.

About ten months ago, Lady Frances did me the favour to transmit to me some manuscript hymns of yours, with which I was wonderfully delighted.

I wish I could, on my part. Contribute in any measure to your entertainment, s you have sometimes done to mine in a very high degree. And that I may show how willing I am to do so, I have desired Dr. Watts to transmit to you a manuscript of a poem of mine, entitled, “The Grave”, written, I hope in a way not unbecoming my profession as a minister of the gospel, though the greatest part of it was composed s several years before I was clothed with so sacred a character [i.e. before his ordination of 1731].

I was urged by some friends here, to whom I showed it, to make it public;

nor did I decline it, providing I had the approbation of Dr. Watts, from whom I have received many civilities, and for whom I have ever entertained the highest regard. Yesterday I had a letter from the Doctor, signifying his approbation of the piece in a matter most obliging. A great deal less would have done me no smaller honor. But at the same time he mentions to me, that he had offered it to two booksellers of his acquaintance, who, he tells me, did not care to run the risk of publishing it. They can scarce think, (considering how critical age we live in, with respect to such kind of writings) that a person living three hundred miles from London, could write so as to be acceptable to the fashionable and polite. Perhaps it may be so; though at the same time, I must say, in order to make it more generally liked, I was obliged sometimes to go cross over my own inclination; well knowing that whatever poem is written upon serious argument, must, upon that very account be under peculiar disadvantages; therefore, proper arts must be used to make such a piece go down with a licentious age, which cares for none of those things. I beg pardon for breaking in on moments precious as yours, and hope you will be so kind as to give me your opinion of the poem. (Doddridge, 73-74)

It is quite palpable, why the first attempt of Dr. Watts to offer “The Grave” for publishing was not successful. The publishers the poem was offered to certainly did not turn it over for a want of poetic quality. As George Gilfillan suggests, the simple fact that the author was a parish minister living in a distant Scottish country was enough to convince them that any piece of writing that he could produce could hardly ever be successful with those “fashionable and polite“, the urbanized London society accustomed to the Neoclassical style of Alexander Pope and his numerous imitators (Gilfillan, 123). On the account of the two publishers, R. A Davenport, not without a sense of irony, later wrote: “To what distance from the metropolis these sapient booksellers conceived poetical inspiration to extend, we are not informed.” (Falconer et al, 199)

The direct consequence of these initial difficulties was the above quoted letter from Blair to Doddridge. His plea for the dissenter’s opinion on the qualities and possible faults of the poem did not go unanswered, and Doddridge offered his hand for a revision of “The Grave”. With his assistance, the final chapter of the composition history of “The Grave” was to be written.

That Doddridge found immediate interest in the minister’s poem is quite certain. On April 5, 1743, in a letter addressed to a fellow dissenter divine, Rev. Mr. Samuel Clark, one of men with whom Doddridge, apart from the traditional topics of religion, often discussed the literature of his day, as well as his own literary pursuits, he briefly comments on “The Grave” and his own involvement in the process of its final revision:

If you have not seen Mr. Blair's poem on the Grave, I will venture to recommend it to you. Its chief fault is, that most of the thoughts are too trite; some descriptions of it are great; and written much in the spirit of Shakespeare; you will, however, find many lines which contain very little poetry, and have a familiarity of expression which I can not approve. It passed through my hands in manuscript, and received considerable alternations; yet, after all, I wish I had presumed to give it more, though, perhaps, it was altered in at least fifty places, which would have been judged either dead or low. (Doddridge, 236)

Earlier the same year, the first small edition of "The Grave" appeared in London, followed by an Edinburgh reprint of 1747; by the time the second edition appeared to the public, its author had already been dead, and the history of the composition of the poem was seemingly finished, as, until 1972, there was very little information to be found on the variations and additions that would give a hint to the writing process "The Grave" underwent before the first print of 1743.

The only exception to this unfortunate fact appeared in the 1802 edition of *The Poetical Works of Robert Blair*, where Robert Anderson, nineteenth century editor and biographer of the poet accompanied the final version of "The Grave" of 1743 with "variations from common editions [...] printed from the original 1741-2, in the possession of Mr. Solicitor General" (Blair, Anderson, xv). The location of this manuscript is now no longer known, however; as the date to which Anderson has it to be dated is 1741-2, one can assume that, as James Means suggests, this manuscript is very similar, if not identical, to the manuscript Blair asked Watts to forward to Doddridge during the winter months of 1741-2. (Means, 1972, 7)

Additionally, in the above quoted letter, while recommending "The Grave" to Rev. Samuel Clark, Doddridge explains that the poem "received considerable alternations", and that "it was altered in at least fifty places, which would have been judged either dead or low." James Means, by drawing the comparison of the forty-three changes to have appeared sometime between 1742 and 1743 when "The Grave" was finally published, and these "fifty places" where the poem was altered according to the reviser himself, expresses the opinion that, as the amount of changes recorded by Andrews is roughly similar to those fifty variations mentioned by Doddridge, it is nigh certain that both the 41-42 recording and the manuscript sent to Doddridge are, in fact, similar. (Means, 1972, 7)

Until 1971, the changes and additions Anderson noted down were the only witnesses that could assist in understanding the process of shaping "The Grave" to its final form

and purpose. In February 1971, however, James Means, a professor of English at Northwestern State University, published a fragmentary holograph version of “The Grave” that was discovered in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. As this holograph manuscript greatly varies from the other readings of the poem, and as Blair himself informed Doddridge that the “greatest part of it [The Grave] was composed several years before I [Blair] was clothed with so sacred a character.”, it is presumed to be of an earlier date than that of 1741-2, and consequently the earliest recording of “The Grave” available (Means, 1971, 51)

Thus, there are three versions of “The Grave” to consider when attempting to retrace the path that Blair took while constructing his poem.

Providing that the chronological order of these versions as suggested by their respective discoverers, Means and Anderson, is correct, there are two comparisons to consider. The comparison of the earliest reading, discovered by Means in 1971, and the second one that Anderson recorded in 1802, should demonstrate the nature of changes and additions Blair decided to make at some point before his initial, unsuccessful, attempt to have “The Grave” published.

At the same time, the result between the comparison of the second version and the final state of the poem as it was printed in 1743 should serve to illustrate a number of variations that were made in the poem during 1741-2, after it was submitted to Phillip Doddridge for approbation. Changes made in this period can be considered the results of the final revision of “The Grave” that Blair asked Doddridge to undertake.

3.1. The Early Changes

What probably immediately attracts the attention of a reader of these fifty-one lines is the complete absence of the introductory eight and half lines found in both later versions of “The Grave”:

While some affect the sun, and some the shade.
Some flee the city, some the hermitage,
Their aims as various, as the roads they take
In journeying thro' life;--the task be mine,
To paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb;
Th' appointed place of rendezvous, where all
These travellers meet.--Thy succours I implore,
Eternal King! whose potent arm sustains
The keys of hell and death.

(The Grave, 1-9)

This invocation of Jesus Christ, “The Eternal King” who keeps “the keys of hell and death” (Rev, 1:18), is, according to James Means, an addition directly inspired by Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. “As Milton had invoked the inspiration of the Holy Ghost,” Means says, “so Blair calls upon the succorus of Christ himself, thus consciously following the example of England’s greatest divine poet.” (Means, 1972, 5) Whether Milton indeed invokes Holy Ghost as Means claims, or whether the invocation present at the beginning of Book I. Of “*Paradise Lost*” is that of “God’s creative power and wisdom,” (Milton, Bush, 212) as Douglas Bush understands it to be, is not the subject of this work to decide. Nevertheless, the similarity of the first lines of *Paradise Lost* and those of Blair’s poem is striking:

Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous son
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
 And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
 me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
 Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
 Illumine, what is low raise and support,
 That to the hight of this great argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence
 And justify the ways of God to men.

(Paradise Lost, Book I, 13-26)

This said, the greatest poem of Milton should not be considered the sole influence that could have led Blair to prefix his earliest conserved draft with the above quoted lines, as English poetry of the early eighteenth century has at least one more pieces that bears an uncommon resemblance to this initial invocation of “The Grave” to offer, though in a manner slightly different.

A common fashion amongst English religious poets at the outbreak of the eighteenth century was to preoccupy themselves with the theme of the Biblical Revelation. This fundamentally seventeenth century topic was an inspiration for a string of authors , amongst whom belonged Blair’s acquaintance Isaac Watts (“The Day of Judgment”), Michael Wigglesworth (“The Day of Doom”), Aaron Hill (“The Judgment Day”) and, most important, Edward Young, whose poem, “The Last Day” appeared before the public in 1713.

The significance of this poem in three books for the critics of Blair rests especially with its Book I, for its first lines in essence employ instruments very similar to those Blair chose to use:

While others sing the fortune of the great,
Empire and arms, and all the pomp of state;
With Britain's hero set their souls on fire,
And grow immortal as his deeds inspire;
I draw a deeper scene; a scene that yields
A louder trumpet and more dreadful fields:

(The Last Day, Book I, 1-6)

In the same fashion as Blair some years later, Young begins his piece with a proclamation of singularity of his literary quest, as his subject, much like that of Blair's, differs from the common road of those who "sing the fortune of great Empires and arms" or those whose aims are "as various, as the roads they take." The poet's task has not one thing in common with the mundane themes of other writers, who celebrate the victories of Duke of Marlborough in attempt to ascend to fame. Young, and Blair, on the contrary, attempt to "draw a deeper scene", or, to "paint the gloomy horrors of the Tomb." For them, there is a deeper, more essential path to tread, the path of a religious theme.

At the same time, however, realizing the grave importance, or perhaps the difficulty, of the task, there is an inherent undertone present that the poet considers himself unworthy of the task at hand. This sense of insufficiency, he attempts to compensate for by asking for the assistance of the divine powers:

But chiefly Thou, great Ruler, Lord of all!
Before whose throne archangels prostrate fall;
If at Thy nod, from discord and from night
Sprang beauty, and yon sparkling worlds of light,
Exalt e'en me: all inward tumults quell;
The clouds and darkness of my mind dispel;
To my great subject Thou my breast inspire,
And raise my labouring soul with equal fire.

(The Last Day, Book I, 23-30)

In these lines again, the similarity of "The Last Day" and "The Grave" resurfaces anew. Where Young calls upon the "great Ruler, Lord of All", Blair asks for the assistance of the "Eternal King". It should be noted, however, that the call for divine aid is not a completely unusual element in the poetry of the time, as it was first used by Milton,

whose “Paradise Lost” was considered a work most influential and prominent.

In this particular aspect of invocation of divine aid, Amy Reed describes how a friend of Young’s, poet Aaron Hill, employs a quite similar invocation in his poem, “The Judgment Day”(Reed, 100), and there is no reason not to believe that Young himself considered “Paradise Lost” a worthy source of inspiration.

As there are no material sources to acknowledge whether, and if at all, Blair was influenced directly by Milton, or indirectly, through a work that was inspired by the greatest English divine poet, the true source of the invocation of eight and half lines added to the earliest draft of “The Grave” can only be guessed at. The uncommon similarity of the initial portion of Young’s “The Last Day” and that of “The Grave” makes it worth noting down if nothing else.

Following the Miltonic, or perhaps Youngean, plea for divine aid, there seem to be no other substantial additions to consider until line twenty-two of the Berg Collection fragment. The correspondence with the 1741-2 version is not absolute, however, as there appear several variations in the choice of vocabulary used.

James Means understands these variations not to be of a random nature, but has them to be serving a similar purpose, that of supplying “The Grave” with “greater dignity- and especially an aura of religious ‘seriousness’” (Means, 1972, 5).

Time and time again, Blair decides to omit expressions that could perhaps be considered too rude or homely, and chooses to replace such items with their in style more elevated equals instead, though at a cost of making the poem somewhat less of a personal experience for its readers. There is a total of thirteen verbal changes counted by Means, of which probably the most fitting example yields the comparison of the very first line of the Berg fragment with its counterpart found at the ninth and tenth line of the later versions:

The Grave – cold thing! we shiver, when thou’rt nam’d,

The first line of the Berg fragment primarily appeals to the readers senses by associating the idea of a tomb with the tangible sensation of the coldness of the final resting place. To further amplify this appeal to the reader’s senses, it is followed by the first person plural “we”, thus incorporating the reader inside the apostrophe so as to bring him closer to the terrifying subject of the poem.

Blair, however, perhaps as a part of changes that were made in order to make his poem more liked for his target group of readers or to the reading public, decided to make alternations, resulting in replacement of both “cold” and “we” with less personal expressions:

The Grave, dread thing! Men shiver when thou'rt nam'd:

Means observes, how a shift in the choice of words from “cold” to “dread” “takes us one step away from the clammy chill of death to our thoughts about it” (Means, 1972, 5), and how the introduction of a “more general and less affecting subject” (*ibid*, 1972, 6) results in the similar effect as with the remaining eleven variations, that of elevating the poem to a more distinguished style, partially eliminating the echo of the Shakespearean language that the style of Blair has been often compared to by both his biographers and his critics.

While further reading the Berg fragment, at approximately half its length an experienced reader of “The Grave” will realize that following the initial apostrophe of the grave, there is a whole section of twenty- seven lines absent. These lines, evidently the most atmospheric in the whole, poem read:

See yonder hallow'd fane;--the pious work
Of those who lived some hundred years ago;
Where lie interr'd the more illustrious dead.
The wind is up:--hark! how it howls!--Methinks,
'Till now, I never heard a sound so dreary:
Doors creak, and windows clap, and night's foul bird,
Rook'd in the spire, screams loud; the gloomy aisles
Black plaster'd, and hung round with shreds f 'scutcheons,
And tatter'd coats of arms, send back the sound,
Laden with heavier airs, from the low vaults,
The mansions of the dead.--Rous'd from their slumbers,
In grim array the grisly spectres rise,
Grin horrible, and, obstinately sullen,
Pass and repass, hush'd as the foot of night.
Again the screech-owl shrieks--ungracious sound!
I'll hear no more; it makes one's blood run chill.

Quite round the pile, a row of reverend elms,
(Coeval near with that) all ragged show,
Long lash'd by the rude winds. Some rift half down
Their branchless trunks; others so thin at top,
That scarce two crows can lodge in the same tree.
Strange things, the neighbours say, have happen'd here;

Wild shrieks have issued from the hollow tombs;
Dead men have come again, and walk'd about;
And the great bell has toll'd, unring, untouch'd.
(Such tales their cheer at wake or gossiping,
When it draws near to witching time of night.)

(The Grave, 28-54)

So far, the new additions to the earliest text of “The Grave” as well as the alternations in its vocabulary selection were all to a great extent concerned with religiousness. Christ was invoked and an attempt to raise the text to a greater, for Means religious, dignity took place. With the addition of these twenty-seven lines, however, a different chapter, perhaps as important to the correct interpretation of the poem as the religious strain pervading it opens before the reader for the first time, as the style of these lines would not be termed ‘religious’ by any standards by a late seventeenth or a early eighteenth century critics. Term ‘melancholy’ would be used instead.

In her work, *The Background to Gray’s Elegy*, Amy Reed describes conditions that in the eighteenth century would suffice to mark a poem melancholic. In the multitude of listed elements there appear familiar images from Blair’s newly added passage. Reed enumerates night, “a ruin covered by ivy and hunted by owls, bats, ravens (birds of ill omen), [...]description of a graveyard or charnel house, preferably in ruin, thickly shaded by cypress and yew, haunted by ghosts [...] and offering unpleasant evidences of physical decay“ (Reed, 177). Of these elements, Blair does not fail to miss a single one.

The whole passage concludes with line probably inspired by words uttered by the Shakespeare’s greatest melancholic hero, Hamlet, found in the act III of the famous drama of the same title:

Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world.

(Hamlet, act III, scene ii, 395-397)

Following the twenty-seven lines of melancholy theme, no substantial additions took place that would call for a closer examination, and all ensuing variations that yet remain follow the rule of increased dignity set by James Means.

As to the novelty of the described additions to the poem’s motif, it nigh impossible to judge the degree of innovation these changes to the Berg fragment were, simply for the

reason that both the main argument and the theme of “The Grave“ becomes apparent in its second half, which, unfortunately, was not preserved.

One can, however, observe, that the pre-revision state of the fragment exhibits a complete lack of religious images, and that almost everything that could be considered religious in the first eighty-four lines of the later versions of the poem amounts only to the results of revisions of the original Berg text which, with its description of spectres, lonely churchyards, sadness stricken widows, and solitary candles, inspires in its reader not the thoughts of religious dedication, but of William Shakespeare and of dark brooding melancholy.

This said, and assuming that similar kind of changes was applied to the unpreserved whole of the Berg fragment, the reader is suddenly left with a descriptive melancholy piece on death with no religious purpose whatsoever that only later has been modified to serve a different purpose.

Interestingly enough, such perception of the first recorded section of “The Grave” surprisingly well supports a supposition which James Means expresses while discussing the initial invocation of Jesus Christ, suggesting the possibility that “in the years following his ordination in 1731, and under the influence of men like Isaac Watts, Blair came increasingly to view the composition of ‘The Grave’ as a religious duty, not merely as a literary diversion” (Means, 1972, 5). It indeed is not very difficult to imagine the young poet living in Scotland writing melancholy poetry for personal amusement and that of his friends, who, as new duties came with age, converted a literary venture of his youth to a new, more worthy purpose.

3.2 The Late Changes

While the comparison of the Berg Library fragment and the second version of “The Grave“ as Andrews recorded it offered a plenty of substantial and partially uncharted differences, the variety between the recording of 1741-2 version and the first edition is much less abundant in terms of major additions, as there are only two new lines to have been introduced before the first edition was published.

In variations, however, there is much more material to discuss, as between 1741-2 and 1743, appears a total of forty-one lines to have seen changes of various extent ranging from replacement of a single lexical item, to a reconstruction of several successive lines.

Means observes that in most cases, the tendency to suppress the simple, raw, language

in order to make the piece more distinguished in style appears throughout the later stages of the poem's creation as well (Means, 1972, 7). Thus, while describing the final victory of Jesus over the grave, Anderson recording reads:

Heaven's gates are strait unbarred to let him in.
Nor are his friends shut out; as some great prince
Not only for himself procures admission,
But for his train; so he. It was his will,
That where he is, there should his followers be.
(Blair, Anderson, p.49)

The first edition, however, contains a slightly different version of these lines:

Heaven's portals wide expand to let him in.
Nor are his friends shut out; as some great prince
Not for himself alone procures admission,
But for his train. --- It was his royal will,
That where he is, there should his followers be.
(The Grave, 683-687)

The palpable attempt to elevate the language of the poem is embodied here in the forms of the replacement of the word "gate" with its distinguished sibling of Latin origin, "portal", and by making "will" "royal", premodifying it, thus fulfilling one of the requirements of a proper use of poetic diction, as well as perhaps alluding to the Christ's position of "King of kings" (Rev, 19:16).

It is important to note that in the case of these changes, the agent is not Blair himself, but Phillip Doddridge, whom Blair, his piece not having been published, asked for assistance in the above quoted letter from February 25, 1741-2. The hymnist then, having found "at least fifty places, where the poem would have been judged dead or low" suggested revisions in order to elevate the "familiarity of expression" he criticizes "The Grave" for in his letter to Rev. Samuel Clark from April 5, 1743.

To conclude, as two distinct versions of "The Grave" to have been written before the poem was published in 1743 survived through the course of the centuries, a possibility of delving into the evolution of Blair's poetic intentions opens up in front of the critic.

The earliest version discovered by James Means in a sense reminds very little of its later versions, as it is almost void of any references of religious nature, and abounds solely with melancholy descriptions of a ghost-hunted graveyard and its two solemn visitors.

With the second version of 1741-2, the gates of heaven open wide and allow religiousness to take its undeniable place within "The Grave". Initial, by Means ascribed to Milton, invocation of Christ appears to properly introduce the perhaps new-found purpose of the poem and its author. Verbal changes are made to make the poem more pleasing to the eye of the contemporary, particular style demanding, reader, and to provide the piece with what Means understands to be religious seriousness. Additionally, the melancholy mood of the earliest manuscript is not denied growth as well, and a whole passage of twenty-seven lines focusing mostly on the frightening aspects of the tomb is added to prepare ground for the macabre imagery that is soon to follow.

As the 1741-2 version that Anderson preserved presumably represents the state "The Grave" found itself in prior to its revision made by Phillip Doddridge, the comparison of it with the first edition of "The Grave" of 1743 yields alternations that were made by Doddridge himself, or at his advice. In nature, these alternations mostly continue in the tendency begun somewhere between the first two versions, attempting to rise the language of the poem to a higher, more serious, level.

4, Literary Influences

When Amy Reed approaches her description of the 'plot' of "The Grave", she explains why the work of Blair is in her book, *Graved in Tropes*, treated before the "Night Thoughts" of Edward Young, saying that "The Grave" is a perfect example of the fact that "many ideas that appear in Young were ready to his hand in the work of the seventeenth and eighteenth century authors and were making an appeal to another serious poet of the same time" (Reed, 190).

With the observation of Amy Reed in mind, this chapter attempts to submit a detailed account of the possible literary influences, both positive and negative, to be observed in "The Grave", with particular attention paid to the the authors of he seventeenth and eighteenth century stressed by Reed .

4.1. The Influence of Shakespeare

The Grave is worth a thousand common poems. The language is such as Shakespeare would have used ; yet he no where imitates Shakespeare, nor uses any expression of his. It is frugal and chaste; yet, on occasions, highly poetical, without any appearance of research (Pinkerton, quoted in Blair, Anderson, xxx-xxxii).

These observations of John Pinkerton, so favorite with biographers of Robert Blair that they appeared in several biographies of the poet, are but partially correct. It indeed has been noted by some early critics of Blair that the language of his poem often reminds one of the language of William Shakespeare's plays, however; the similarity between Blair and the greatest Elizabethan poet does extend beyond the mere border of familiarity of expression , both commended and criticized, as throughout the fabric of "The Grave" are often found interwoven passages directly culled from Shakespeare's famous tragedy, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

Up until the present, no detailed account has been given of the particular sections of "The Grave" to have been either written in the image of, or simply under influence of Shakespeare's work. This does not, however, mean, that the early critics of Blair remained completely oblivious to this possibility. For example, Anderson, though he, in the fashion of Pinkerton whom he too chose to quote, and claims that "in Blair, it is difficult to discover any material traces of imitation, or even to conjecture who were his favourites among the poets of the country" (Blair, Anderson, xxvii), contradicts himself

on at least two occasions by considering passages from “The Grave” to be of Shakespearean decent.

Probably the highest degree of detail as far as the influence of Shakespeare is concerned can be attributed to Amy Reed for a brief discussion of “The Grave” found in her publication, *The Background of Gray’s Elegy*. To the subject of the influence of Shakespeare’s tragedy upon “The Grave”, she suggests where the similarity of versification might stem from:

Blair, like Thompson, uses blank verse but he employs a large number (17½ %) of feminine endings. His verse therefore differs from that of either Milton or Thomson, and approaches more nearly that of Shakespeare’s latest plays. It resembles Shakespeare’s also in its skillful use of alliteration and in peculiar sonorousness (Reed, 189).

Also, she claims, there are found “certain passages from Shakespeare about sleep, the grave, ghosts, about midnight as the time of dreadful deeds, and about decay of body after death” (Reed, 189).

Reed unfortunately did not decide to go into deeper detail with her discussion of the Shakespearean residue to be found in Blair’s poem. Thus, as Shakespeare seems to have been one of Blair’s favorite authors, this sub-chapter attempts to chart this rather blank space in the literary criticism of “The Grave”.

In order to ensure a certain degree of organization, the influences are treated in order in which they appear in Hamlet.

4.1.1 Hamlet, Acts I. – IV.

The initial four acts of Hamlet provide the critic of “The Grave“ with a rather limited amount of subject matter to relate to. Most resemblances found here, especially those concerning ghosts and the night, amount to no more than a line or two of traceable similarity.

This said, there also are two passages of greater significance to consider, as it is in acts iii and iv that Blair seems to have found inspiration for the initial stanzas of his passage against suicide, and his argument of deploring worldly power and its insignias.

Suicide

In the first scene of act three, the Danish prince, upon meeting Ophelia, is found contemplating life, death and suicide in arguably the most remembered passage of the whole play, a soliloquy beginning in a question gone immortal; 'To be or not to be'. Here too, probably, is found the first major similarity of Shakespeare's play with "The Grave". At about a half of the soliloquy's length, Hamlet begins to ponder the truth behind why it is that men rather bear the oftentimes dreary circumstances of existence rather than choosing to end it by one's own hand:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
[...]
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience makes cowards of us all;
(Hamlet, act iii, s. i, 70-73, 75-83)

Hamlet's soliloquy has always been subject to a vast number of attempts of analyses, with various critics arriving at various conclusions of what exactly the Danish prince is pondering. As this work does not attempt to argue what the main theme of Hamlet's speech is but rather aims at pointing out its connection with particular passages of "The Grave", it is sufficient to say that, among other themes, an undercurrent connected with pondering the fate of one's soul after death is present in these stanzas as well, as described by Dr. Samuel Johnson in his attempt to reconstruct the the train of thought of the tragic hero:

Hamlet, knowing himself injured in the most enormous and atrocious degree, and seeing no means of redress but such as must expose him to the extremity of hazard, meditates on his situation in this manner: *Before I can form any rational scheme of action under this pressure of distress, it is necessary to decide whether, after our present state, we are to be, or not to be.* (Johnson, quoted in Shakespeare, 2001,205)

Blair, though aiming at a different end, as he, preacher as he is, fundamentally opposes the idea of a suicide which Hamlet seemingly supports, leads an argument of

uncommon resemblance. He too chooses to employ the theme of suicide consideration, which is at first shown as quite logical in a world where nothing would succeed after death. He begins by drawing a scene of what the world might look like if there were no hereafter:

If death were nothing, and naught after death;
If when men dy'd, at once they cease to be,
Returning to the barren womb of nothing,
Whence first they sprung;
(The Grave, 382-4)

Then, much in the manner of Shakespeare, asks :

--Who could force
The ill pleas'd guest to sit out his full time,
or blame him if he goes?
(The Grave, 394-6)

The question set, the ensuing answer leaves little doubt as to where from its ancestor came:

But if there's an hereafter,
And there is, conscience, uninfluenc'd
And suffer'd to speak out, tells ev'ry man;
Than must it be an awful thing to die.
More horrid yet, to die by one's own hand.
(The Grave, 398-402)

For Hamlet, the natural fear that there actually is "something after death" is what makes men "rather bear those ills we have", implying that if there was certainty that there is no hereafter, nothing would hinder one from willingly ending their lives.

Blair too, arrives at the same conclusion, as, "if death were nothing, etc.", nothing would "force the ill pleased guest to sit out his full time".

However, as death is not a simple matter of cessation of our earthly frame, which both authors attempt to point out, men rather choose to endure the misfortunes of life for fear that the death of the body is not the death of the soul. The question of what it is then, that brings into existence this fear of what might become of one after death is answered in the same manner- it is human conscience. Conscience is the inciting agent, which makes "cowards of us all", inspiring fear, telling all men alike "that it must be an awful thing to die, more horrid yet, to die by one's own hand. "

The Conqueror Worm

Having slain Polonius, Hamlet decides to hide his body, the result of which is a series

of dialogues between him and Rosencrantz who unsuccessfully attempts to elicit its hiding-place. In the second scene of act iv, Hamlet's uncle, the king, continues with the interrogation begun by Rosencrantz, at first receiving an elusive reply that the former counselor is at supper. At this supper, however, he is shown not to be the banqueter, but a dish, for the only guests at the table that Hamlet has in mind, are worms. Fascinated by the idea of bodily decay, the Danish prince quickly moves from Polonius to the whole of mankind, saying:

We eat all creatures
else to eat us, and we eat ourselves for maggots. Your
eat king and your lean beggar is but variable service-
two dishes, but to one table.

(Hamlet, act iv, s.iii, 20-24)

Using the image of physical decay, Hamlet discards the value of titles and of high decent, and accompanies this rejection with an unusual message of equality achieved in death.

A similar tendency both in form and function can be observed in lines concluding Blair's meditation on the figure of the tyrant:

Under ground
Precedency's a jest; vassal and lord,
Grossly familiar, side by side consume.

(The Grave, 229-231)

The tyrant, though perhaps mighty in life, same as Polonius, is no different from the lowliest beggar in death, as the worm does neither heed titles, nor noble blood, both of which are just artificial marks of distinction created and valued by most men, yet quickly proven pointless when confronted with the dreary reality of death.

The images of king and beggar made equal in death, such as Shakespeare and Blair present them, particularly recall to mind some of the the dreary frescoes found in numerous late-medieval churches and illustrations present in many a contemporary religious tome or chronicle; images of lean figures of the dead, grotesquely dancing hand in hand with the clumsy living of all descents and professions; the kings, the beggars, the beautiful dames, the cheerful youth, death sets aside their differences- within a morbid allegory on the universality of death, they all have no choice but to join in the so called *danse macabre*, the dance of death.

4.1.2. Hamlet, Act V.

Whereas the preceding four acts supplied the examples of only two resemblances that one could perhaps term major, Act V seems to have been especially influential with Blair. Perhaps it is thus as its scene i is situated in a place for Blair most suitable, a graveyard, and as the greatest amount of the fitting subject matter on ephemerality of human existence and its vanity is found in here, or perhaps it was a simple matter of the poet's personal preference. Wherever the truth may lie, Hamlet's Act V arguably represents the greatest source of inspiration to "The Grave" as far as William Shakespeare is concerned, as illustrated by the familiarity of the following lines.

The Rich Lawyer; One That Became Two

Upon seeing the carelessness with which the first clown keeps on digging graves, disregarding the remnants of what once were human beings, the prince of Denmark launches into a series of meditations upon the identities of those whom the now nameless skulls once belonged to. The sense of pity prevailing in the first two such meditations gives way to a different note once the figure of a rich lawyer comes to Hamlet's mind:

There's another [skull]. Why may not that be a skull
of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillets,
his cases, his tenures and his tricks? Why does he
suffer this mad knave now to knock him about the
sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his
action of battery?

(Hamlet, act v, scene i, 96-101)

Blair, following his Elizabethan example, writes:

Here! the tongue-warrior lies, disabled now,
Disarm'd, dishonour'd, like a wretch that's gagg'd,
And cannot tell his ail to passers by.
Great man of language!--whence this mighty change?
This dumb despair, and drooping of the head?
Though strong persuasion hung upon thy lip,
And sly insinuation's softer arts
In ambush lay about thy flowing tongue;
Alas! how chop-fall'n now! Thick mists and silence
Rest, like a weary cloud upon thy breast,
Unceasing.--Ah! where is the lifted arm,
The strength of action, and the force of words,
The well-turn'd period, and the well-tun'd voice,

With all the lesser ornaments of phrase?
 Ah! fled for ever, as they ne'er had been!
 Perchance some hackney hunger-bitten scribbler
 Insults thy memory, and blots thy tomb
 With long flat narrative, or duller rymes,
 With heavy-halting pace, that drawl along;
 Enough to rouse a dead man into rage,
 And warm with red resentment the wan cheek.
 (The Grave, 297-317)

Firstly, in terms of the form, both passages are similarly written in a *ubi sunt* motif, a quite common instrument to “express the theme of loss, transitoriness, and devaluation of culture” (Myers, Wukasch, 390) used first in Medieval Latin poetry, with the very phrase *ubi sunt* meaning ‘where are they’ or ‘where have they gone’.

Secondly, the subjects of the *ubi sunt* argument are alike in the nature of their occupation in life. The lawyer, who necessarily requires eloquence for a proper performance of his profession, is paralleled by the figure of a rhetorician, for whom well pursued argument and “lesser ornaments of phrase” are essential for his trade as well.

Thirdly, the *ubi sunt* argument of both Shakespeare and Blair slightly differs from the general usage of such motif, as represented in the most typical member of its class, the “Ballad of Ladies of Begone Times” by Villon, or *Beowulf*. For in this case, instead of solely stressing the ephemerality of human existence and expressing pity in the same fashion as is done with the skull of Yorick the clown, Shakespeare and Blair alike employ *ubi sunt* to scorn the apostrophized dead, as if they revelled in the pointlessness of his mundane desires and values; both orators are dumb, silenced forever by death, unable to take action against mockery.

Here one should mark how Blair deliberately uses the term “chop-fallen”, found in the description of Yorick (Hamlet, 1980, 189) and reused for his figure of orator, supplying an additional amount of scornful irony, as “chop-fall’n” means both “sad” and “jaw less”. Blair thus literally disarms the tongue warrior by ridding him of an essential portion of the apparatus that allowed him to utter his arguments, rendering him dumb and helpless.

Then, the final victory over the mundane is achieved as the skull of one is “knocked around [...] with the dirty shovel” while the other suffers under an ironic punishment that a reader would perhaps expect to have originated in the very depths of Dante’s Inferno, as he is being mocked and dishonored by a “long flat narrative, or duller rhymes, with heavy-halting pace“, a bitter parody of the very instrument he so

embellished in life.

Hamlet then continues to further ponder the lawyer's life, choosing a different perspective:

Hum! This fellow might be in's
time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recog-
nizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries.
Is this the fine of fines, and the recovery of his
recoveries, to have his plate full of fine dirt? Will
his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and
double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair
of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will
scarcely lie in this box, and must the inheritor himself
have no more, ha?

(Hamlet, act v, scene i, 101-110)

Blair decides to follow Shakespeare sixteen lines later in his apostrophe of the rich man:

Here! the lank-sided miser, worst of felons!
Who meanly stole, discreditable shift!
From back, and belly too, their proper cheer;
Eas'd of a tax, it irked the wretch to pay)
To his own carcase, now lies cheaply lodg'd,
By clamorous appetites no longer teas'd,
Nor tedious bills of charges and repairs.
But ah! where are his rents, his comings-in?
Ay! now you've made the rich man poor indeed,
Robb'd of his gods, what has he left behind?

(The Grave, 337-346)

Excluding the fact that in "The Grave" these two aspects of one person in the speech of Hamlet are actually used to epitomize the figures of two different vane men, the similarity here is striking nonetheless. Blair's passage on the rich man seems to be the result of the same tendencies as were described in reliance with the men of language. Again, both the landowner and the miser in essence parallel each other as the desire for wealth is common to either of them. Similarly, the mundane longing of both is questioned and consequently discarded by the living, who, not without irony, ponder the true value of "his rents, his comings-in" or whether "will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases" now that they are dead.

The Sextons

A resemblance of a more distant kind, based not on the likeliness of an argument, but

on a rather vaguer type of similarity, connects the characters of the caretakers. On this sameness which belonged amongst the first observed traces of Shakespeare within “The Grave”, Anderson without further explanation comments, suggesting that “the sexton will be recognized as a relation of the grave-digger in Hamlet.”(Blair, Anderson, xxv) As there seem to be no similarities in terms of argument or choice of identical words, while referring to Blair’s sexton as “a relation”, Anderson supposedly is alluding to the character traits of the gravedigger in Hamlet, as well as the gravedigging imagery of act v, wherein the gravedigger appears.

The passage from “The Grave” Anderson chose to accompany his suggestion of similarity reads :

The Sexton! hoary-headed chronicle,
Of hard unmeaning face, down which ne’er stole
A gentle tear; with mattock in his hand
Digs through whole rows of kindred and acquaintance,
By far his juniors.--Scarce a skull’s cast up.
But well he knew his owner, and can tell
Some passage of his life.

(The Grave, 452-458)

As the character traits of Hamlet’s sexton are spread over a large quantity of stanzas, no direct quotation was deemed necessary. Rather, several passages a reader will find corresponding in nature to that on Blair’s sexton are suggested by the following short comparison instead.

The similarities connecting the two grave-makers are plentiful. The gravedigger of Blair is well accustomed, or even ignorant, to the proximity of death as is his Shakespearean comrade, who spends his time digging graves singing a tune, much to the amazement of Hamlet (Hamlet, act v, scene i, 61-70). He too is in possession of a very good memory, much like the digger of Ophelia’s grave, who angrily recalls the silly deeds of Yorick the clown (ibid, 176-178) or the period that particular skulls spent buried in earth (ibid, 170). These skulls, too, both have an uncanny habit of casting up whenever an observer is in sight (ibid, 74, 95).

To sum up, the subject matter of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Prince of Denmark can metaphorically be called the seasoning of “The Grave”, as passages culled from the famous tragedy take part in nigh all general motifs of the poem.

Acts i-iv supply Blair with material for the stanzas on worm and on suicide. Whence

the maggots of Blair and Hamlet alike strive to teach the reader of the insubstantiality of titles and of noble blood, Hamlet's soliloquy on the burdens of living furnishes the poet with an argument against the worst of sins, suicide, which, as the following chapters will show, with its implied proclamation of the immortality of the soul plays a role of utmost importance in Blair's dialogue with Lucretius and his poetic followers.

Act v of the Shakespearean drama is, in regard to "The Grave", more influential by itself, probably as its first scene abounds with graveyard imagery accompanied by meditations on death- both undoubtedly quite attractive inspirations for the Scottish poet. Thus the figure of the rich landowner, projected by Blair into his miser and orator, embodies the vanity of the profane endeavors, and stands as an perfect example of an uncommon employment of the *ubi sunt* motif that Blair shares with Shakespeare, and which, by the frequency of its use, the preacher-poet seems to consider as one of his most efficient instruments in his strife again the secular. Finally, the figures of the two sextons, both sharing the identical characteristics, alike stand as a testament to the ignorance of men, who fail to realize the all-important fact that death never is too far.

4.2. The Dance, The Art: The Influences of Medieval Origin

This sub chapter attempts to point out the influence of several well known medieval Christian traditions connected with ideas of death, bodily decay, and universality of death, which to a great extent help to shape the argument of “The Grave” to its form and purpose. The subject discussed is relevant more to the general tone of the poem and is often found intermingled with other tendencies of religious origin.

The late-medieval period saw European states ravaged by countless epidemics of Black Death and plundered by endless wars. Death, often in its most violent or painful forms would not avoid even the highest ranks amongst the clergy or nobility. As a consequence, untimely death and its inevitability became a very actual, and common, topic for the contemporary artist and clergyman, most notably represented in traditions of *danse macabre*, *ars moriendi*, and *memento mori*.

4.2.1. The Dance

Though a great portion of the initial two thirds of “the Grave” celebrates the victory of death over men and the secular, it is important to note that Blair is not always ardently celebrating the defeat of the mundane with the same delight as he does with the six apostrophized deplorable qualities, a delight that James Means compares to “a sadistic relish” (Studies in Scottish Literature, 1975, 272).

Nearing the 500th line of “the Grave”, Blair attempts to imbue his poem with a clearly pronounced message to its reader, message, which in both the purpose and the form greatly resembles the theme of the medieval *danse macabre*, the *dance of death*. As was briefly mentioned in the discussion of the earlier harbingers of this message, Hamlet’s and the Grave’s worms, *danse macabre* is “a representation of Death in the act of leading all ranks and conditions of men to the grave”(Holbein, 14). Works of this kind were intended to stress the universality of death, and to constantly remind the medieval person of death certain and uncertain; it is certain to come, yet no one can be certain about when and how it will arrive to claim its prize.

This gloomy teaching introduced by *danse macabre* is not restricted solely to its medieval origins, as the identical message of universality of death also appears in the works of Cicero (Reed, 44), or of the Latin poets of the Golden Age, such as Lucretius

(Ibid, 37).

These poets were amongst the prominent sources of the Neoclassical poetic inspiration at the time of Blair's life, which would promote them into position of the perfect candidates for the inspiration of this kind. Nevertheless, as their argument against the fear of death is built on denying the immortality of the soul, it is rather difficult to imagine Blair, coming from a deeply religious background and a minister himself, willingly adopting the ideas of authors whose argument in essence disclaim one of the principal pillars of the Christian faith, especially in regard to a theme of such importance, the universality of death, and the grim equality it brings.

A supposedly *dance of death*-like image, extending to fifty lines of poetry, is found at the end of the medieval/melancholy touched section of "The Grave", and would, one might surmise, form a fitting conclusion to the whole of the preceding 540 lines, were it not for the Biblical argument that follows it.

These fifty lines of poetry in quick succession submit an account of about fifty men and women of various ages, occupations, and beliefs to meet in the grave, and are written in a much milder and more forgiving tone that attempts to provide a conclusive consolation and guidance rather than, as one would perhaps expect Blair to do, heap an additional amount of scorn on particular wrongdoers.

Anticipating the theme of unity in death, Blair first, much in the manner of Young, who as well introduces a very similar idea in the second book of "The Last Day", rhetorically asks:

What is this world?
What? But a spacious burial-field unwall'd,
[...]
The very turf on which we tread once liv'd;
And we that live must lend our carcasses
To cover our own offspring: in their turns
They too must cover theirs.

(The Grave, 483-4, 487-90)

Death is inevitable and all are to be united under its banner, for:

--- 'Tis here all meet!
The shiv'ring Icelander, and the sun-burn'd Moor;
Men of all climes, that never met before;
[...]

Here are the wise, the generous, and the brave;
The just, the good, the worthless, the profane,
The downright clown, and perfectly well-bred;
The fool, the churl, the scoundrel, and the mean,
The supple statesman, and the patriot stern;
The wrecks of nations, and the spoils of time,
With all the lumber of six thousand years.

(The Grave, 490-92, 534-40)

Gone is the relish in the numbness of the Shakespearean orator, misers' ultimate penury, and morbid pleasure in physical decay that expects king and beggar alike. One after another, as if pointed out on a *dance of death* painting, the inhabitants of the grave are described, attention only paid to what they were in life and what they are no more. Blair, in tone returning closer to the original ideas of *danse macabre*, strips the dead of their former differences and depicts all in one line led by the message of death's inevitability, explaining that in the unavoidable death, in the grave, all are equal.

4.2.2. The Art

The wonder at the folly of the living, who fail to realize that life is never certain, for death always treads only one step behind, leads Blair to exclaim:

Fools that we are!
Never to think of death, and of ourselves
At the same time: as if to learn to die
Were no concern of ours.

(The Grave, 471-4)

The poet is upset; though they are oftentimes confronted with death, men fail to take its inevitability to their hearts, and thus must necessarily end up unprepared for the world to come, simply because they neglected their preparation for the inevitable. To "learn to die" was of no concern to them.

Though learning to die is of little concern to Blair's worldly men, it is of concern to Blair himself, and to the concept of the Christian art of dying, *ars moriendi*.

Ars moriendi, or, *ars bene moriendi*, the art of (good) dying, which in essence provided guidelines for achieving a proper Christian death, has been and very common theme of Christian literature since the late middle ages. The perception of this notion in the late-medieval period, as represented for example in the anonymous *Ars Moriendi* treatise, focused primarily on the imminent situation of death, prescribing "rites and prayers to be used at the time of death" (<http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/Ars->

[Moriendi.html](#)).

The beginning of the sixteenth century forms an important milestone to the appearance of books on good dying. The original medieval manuals describing how to die well, which placed the deciding prerequisites of a good death to the very end of one's life, continuously began to change this emphasis to preparation for death in a 'new style'. The main effort of these precepts was to achieve good death through living a good life. The art of dying was replaced by the art of living, *ars moriendi* was becoming *ars vivendi*. [...]

These sacred treatises of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century were not as much trying to prepare one for death, but rather contemplate it in many particular situations. All was based on presumption, that man is always standing with one leg in his grave, and thus should prepare for it constantly – not just at the moment it waylays them (translated from: Holý, Mikulec, 8).

That the question of good death lost none of its potency in the times of the troubled seventeenth century and at the outbreak of the upcoming one is described by Amy Reed in her discussion of the favorite melancholy-related authors and themes in the English literature of the final decade of the seventeenth century, where she mentions several specimen of the *ars moriendi* tradition, which, with regard to the frequency they were published with, should be considered a favorite with the readers. In particular, she talks about Bishop Taylor's renown *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, which in the extent of a decade saw four editions, and William Sherlock's *Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, that between 1690-1700 was published in ten editions, the tenth in 1699, the same year Robert Blair was born (Reed, 29)

Following the beginning of the eighteenth century, the *ars moriendi* phenomenon continues to retain the position of an attractive theme for English poets. Especially interesting in this regard are the figures of two men who are usually connected with Churchyard poetry, Thomas Parnell and Edward Young. Parnell's "Night-Piece on Death" and Young's "Night Thoughts" both show the influence of *ars moriendi*, as described by Rodney S. Edgecombe in his article "Thomas Parnell's Night-Piece on Death and Edward Young's Night Thoughts" (ANQ, fall 2007, 6-7).

The reliance of "The Grave" and the *ars moriendi* tradition could perhaps be referred to as 'strictly Blairian', for the poet, having written the major portion of his poem in a style which exalts in the vanity arising from the deficiencies of his subjects, retains his poetic standpoint in respect to the art of dying as well.

Though *ars moriendi* is instructive in its nature, Blair does not mean to provide his reader with direct guidance. Instead, he chooses to go the other way around; rather than

giving an account of principles of good dying, he decides to vividly describe one who in life did not follow the path that would lead him to good Christian death.

He begins by apostrophizing death in order to introduce his subject:

How shocking must thy summons be, O death!
To him that is at ease of his possessions;
Who counting on long years of pleasure here,
Is quite unfurnish'd for that world to come?
(The Grave, 350-53)

This apostrophe is followed with a vigorous depiction of the terrors the soul that was not prepared for the inevitable must surely experience when the end comes:

In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
Raves round the walls of her clay tenement,
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But shrieks in vain!-- How wishfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer her's!
A little longer, yet a little longer,
Oh! might she stay, to wash away her stains,
And fit her for her passage.--Mournful sight!
(The Grave, 354-71)

In the above passage, Blair expresses his allegiance to the authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth century who considered themselves with the art of dying. He too is prone to judge a person and their preparation for death from a long-term perspective, adhering to the 'modern' perception of *ars moriendi*, as wishes and repentance in the dire moments are not enough to overcome the life-long ignorance of the sacral principles.

Blair's "frantic soul" was in life, as was his orator or the miser, a person that failed to live properly, as the life he led was supposedly a profane one. The counting "on long years of pleasure here", and the consequent neglecting of his preparation for what must come, can only lead to one end. Now that he is assailed by death, it is too late for penance, and the reader probably will not have much difficulty in imagining what destination such unprepared soul is bound for.

It has already been brought to attention that Blair rarely deviates from his usual way of focusing on the less pleasant side of things he has in mind, and scarcely turns to directly instruct or provide consolation.

Clearly pronounced instances of the above described notion of preparation for a good death by living a good life to be found within "The Grave" are no less rare, yet not

completely absent; a description of a man that has appropriately prepared according to the principles of good death unveils before the reader in the final part of the poem, and leaves little doubt to what Blair had in mind:

Sure the last end
Of the good man is piece. How calm his exit!
Night-dews fall no gently on the ground,
Nor weary worn-out winds expire so soft.
Behold him in the ev'ning tide of life,
A life well spent, whose early care it was,
His riper years should not upbraid his green:
(The Grave, 712-18)

The important phrase here is “a life well spent” which again stresses the ‘requirement’ of a life-long preparation for death. The good man, one might assume, lived a life of a good Christian, spent in preparation for what must come, and who did not let himself be fooled by the would-be glitter of the mundane qualities the boast of which brought the strong man, the beauty, the orator, the astronomer, the doctor, and the miser, to their present pitiful state.

In conclusion, Blair uses the medieval traditions of *danse macabre* and *ars moriendi* to achieve two different results. *Dans macabre*, the dance of death, is the main constituent of how death is depicted in the greater part of the poem; all men are equal in it, no man can escape it, and it is ever present.

Ars moriendi, a long lasting Christian tradition depicting the the necessities required for a proper Christian death , is evidently of immense importance to Blair, who is quite displeased by the ignorance of death, such as is described in his passage on the previously discussed sexton. This ignorance leads men to forget the message *dans macabre* preaches and allows them to live in destructive neglect of their sacred duties. In reply, the poet is at pains to describe with appropriate amount of malice and vividness the last moments of such a person, one who lived a life of profanity and did not follow the rules of good death. Based on particular expressions found in this passage, it is beyond any doubt that Blair, in the fashion of divine authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, considers good life as an essential requirement for any person who wishes to die a good death.

Finally, to illustrate where perfect holiness in life will bring an obedient listener, Blair in the final third of the poem, in his passage on the death of a good man, does not forget to stress that his life was well led.

4.3. The Condemnation of the Classical

Only few readers would disagree with a statement that “The Grave” is a rather a grim and decorum lacking poem intent on preaching its serious sermon, with its author assuming the position of an “orthodox Christian, scanning from the Mount of Revelation the misshapen ruins of pagan presumption” (Means, 1975, 275).

The more surprising then are the following lines, situated quite near the beginning of the poem:

Oh! when my friend and I
In some thick wood have wander'd heedless on,
Hid from the vulgar eye, and sat us down
Upon the sloping cowslip-cover'd bank,
Where the pure limpid stream has slid along
In grateful errors through the under-wood,
Sweet murmuring;

(The Grave, 94-100)

One simply does not expect to find Blair sitting in a intimate company of a close friend on a “cowslip-cover'd” bank, allowing his thoughts to flow gently with a woodland stream, with no churchyard, or epitome of mundane vanity to heap scorn at in sight.

The image of poet sitting in springtime in seclusion under a tree adjacent to a brook is not, however, unique to Blair, as it was a quite common instrument of what Amy Reed terms “Retirement theme” of English poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, who, in turn, adopted this theme from Latin poets, especially Horace (Reed, 41).

For example, Dryden's translation of the second book of Lucretius features an identical image:

Yet on the grass, beneath the popular shade
By the cool stream our careless limbs are laid;
With cheaper pleasures innocently blessed,
When the warm spring with gaudy flow'rs is dress'd.

(Lucretius, quoted in Reed, 39)

The image of “Epicurean picnic” is the less harmful aspect of Lucretius and other classical poets. It was mentioned in the preceding chapter that Lucretius and his imitators also introduce an argument against the dread of death, which is built upon two already discussed notions, the universality of death and its inevitability, but also states

that death is final, both for the living frame and the soul. The third book of Lucretius reads:

When once the Fates have cut the mortal Thred,
The Man as such to all intents is dead,
Who dyes today, and will so long be so,
As he who dy'd a thousand years ago.

(Lucretius, quoted in Reed, 43)

Even “Dryden felt obliged to protest against its leading idea, that there is no individual consciousness after death” (Reed, 42), and same effect the arguments of Lucretius had upon Christian poets, who “promptly attacked with “anti -Lucretian” poems, asserting personal immortality” (Reed, 43).

In order to fully understand the most probable reason why Blair decided to incorporate passages from authors who, from the Christian point of view, should be expected to serve as an object of deploring rather than of inspiration, one must return back to the, in chapter 2 quoted, letter of Blair to Doddridge from February 1741. There, Blair, having informed the divine about the first unsuccessful attempt to have “The Grave” published, disagreeing with the publishers upon the subject of the poem’s acceptability to the “fashionable and polite”, writes:

I must say, in order to make it more generally liked, I was obliged sometimes to go cross my own inclination; well knowing that whatever poem is written upon a serious argument, must, upon that very account, be under peculiar disadvantages; and , therefore, proper arts must be used to make such a piece go down with a licentious age, which cares for none of those things. (Doddridge, 74)

Taking these lines into consideration, James Means offers a suitable answer to the question of why Blair included bits of Latin classics in his work. These allusions, he says, “amount to no more than appliqué” and thus correspond with the term “proper arts” which Blair claims to have used to make the poem more accessible to contemporary reading public of the “licentious age” (Means, 1975, 274).

Blair’s more likely opinion of the ancient poets is especially palpable when contrasted with a paraphrase of Senecas’s *Troades*, which, Reed describes, is built on the themes employed by Lucretius:

After death nothing, and nothing death,
The utmost limits of a gasp of breath.
Let the ambitious zealot lay aside

describes, is found to be the “in its most impressive form” (Reed, 42).

The two initial lines of Dryden’s translation read:

What has this Bugbear Death to frighten Man,
If Souls can die, as well as Bodies can?

(Lucretius, quoted in Reed, 42)

What may at first glance seem a common quote announcing reliance to Lucretius quickly becomes an expression of disregard, simply because these apply, only “If death was nothing”. As it is not, the whole preceding 380 lines should have already convinced the reader of this, Blair attempts to strike with his argument at the very heart of the Lucretian persuasion against the fear of death.

A sensation of fear is found in both Blair’s and Rochester’s poem. In the Neoclassical rational argument of Rochester, fear of death (and of consequential residency in hell) is a mere instrument of religious zealots which only fools may fear. Contradicting this claim, Blair turns to the idea of conscience found in Hamlet, and sets reader’s sense, clad in the garments of their conscience, to compete against the argument built on the cold logic of Neoclassical reason:

But if there is an hereafter,
And there is, conscience, uninfluenc’d
And suffer’d to speak out, tells every man;
Then must it be a horrid thing to die:

(The Grave, 365-401)

This tendency of Blair to confront the culture idolized by the Neoclassicists resurfaces anew in the invocation of ancient heroes. When Blair presents this invocation of Roman Caesars, and the Grecian Chiefs, Means explains, “it is to condemn them and the cult of personal glory”(Means, 1975, 274):

Where are the mighty thunderbolts of war?
The Roman Caesars, and the Grecian chiefs,
The boast of story? Where the hot-brain’d youth
Who the tiara at his pleasure tore
From kings of all the then discover’d globe;
And cried forsooth, because his arm was hamper’d,
And had not room enough to do its work?
Alas! how slim, dishonourably slim!
And cramm’d into a place we blush to name.

(The Grave, 123-31)

Means then points out the same tendency to oppose the Neoclassical being applied to the scornful passage on futility of human endeavor not to be forgotten through building

monuments or other works of art. (Means, 1975, 275) The works of sculptors and of bards, as well as the pyramid of the ancient Egypt, all are but subjects of time, and sooner or later will succumb to it, the names of their authors fall into oblivion:

Absurd! to think to over-reach the grave,
And from the wreck of names to rescue ours.
The best concerted schemes men lay for fame
Die fast away: only themselves die faster.
The far-fam'd sculptor, and the larell'd bard,
Those bold insurances of deathless fame,
Supply their little feeble aids in vain,
The tapering pyramid" th' Egyptian's pride,
[...]
Shatter'd with age, and forrow'd o'er with years,
The mystic cone with hieroglyphics crusted
Gives way at once. Oh! Lamentable sight!
[...]
Ambition! Half convicted of her folly,
Hangs down her head, and reddens at the tale.
(The Grave, 183-90, 195-7, 206-7)

To conclude, though there is a certain amount of residue of Latin poetry and other pieces of literary antiquity to be found within "The Grave", these, in view of the Blair's displayed opinion of Lucretius, can hardly be termed more than just an artificially employed instrument meaning to achieve at least some degree of acceptability in the decorum burdened minds of the Neoclassical publishers and their readers.

The true nature of Blair's relation to the Neoclassical is first pronounced in his passages on ancient heroes, the condemnation of which he quite enjoys. The same tendency is then apparent in the refusal of the attempts of some to ascend to immortality through various works of art.

However, it is not until the initial stanzas of his passage against suicide that Blair fully unveils his distaste of the blasphemous teaching of Lucretius, choosing to directly respond to the argument against the fear of death found in *Troades*, which in itself is unacceptable to a temperate religious person, save an orthodox preacher such as Robert Blair was. Adhering to his Shakespearean inspiration, Blair argues that the conscience, not the reason, of the reader is what should decide the implied question of the immortality of the soul. One must, however, first remove the gag forced upon conscience by the rationalism of the Latin poets and their followers who rarely suffer the sense, and conscience with it, to speak out.

4.4. Scriptural Influences

Until this point, many works to consider while discussing the theme and poetic intention of “The Grave” have been discussed, yet two works, which undoubtedly belong amongst the class of prominent religious readings, were paid very little attention- The Bible and “The Paradise Lost”.

4.4.1 The Graveyard Job

The Book of Job, along with Ecclesiastes and “penitential psalms”, Amy Reed describes, have served as a source of inspiration for a vast number of poets both before and after Blair. Having “set forth the vanity of life, the insignificance of men, and the finality of death” (Reed, 46), the story of Job could hardly be excluded from a work such as “The Grave” by its religious author.

Even before the initial line of the poem, the voice of Job is heard for the first time, as Blair, announcing the scriptural treatment of his poem (Means 1975, 273) selects for its motto a line from Job, “The House Appointed for All Living”. This line, taken from verse 23 of chapter xxx, in itself comprises the inevitability and universality of death, the main themes of the preceding bulk of the poem that was so far discussed.

The subject matter of Job then pervades “The Grave”, ranging from the theme of the universality of death, described in chapter iii, verses 13-19, to the stress on the fixedness of the days of human life, expressed in chapter xiv, verse 5, which Blair adopts for his argument against the fear of death. These are further reinforced by quotations selected from their respective chapters. Thus “the petty tyrant” (The Grave, 218) who now that he is no more “calls the worm his kinsman” (ibid, 228), closely paraphrases the words of Job: “I have said [...] to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister“ (Job, 17:13).

Similarly, the slave of Blair in death escapes “where tyrants vex not, and the weary rest” (The Grave, 506) following Job, who enumerates the inhabitants of the grave, a place where, “the weary rest” (Job, 3:17) in a passage of uncommon similarity to that discussed as a part of the *danse macabre* theme.

It should be noted that the amount of actual Biblical quotations within “The Grave” is still a subject to interpretation. Means recognizes the inspiration arisen from various

books of the Bible in nine lines of the poem (Means, 1975, 273). His predecessor and author of footnotes for the 1787 edition of “The Grave” conjoined with Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”, George Wright, considers the work to be under a more substantial influence of the scripture, and describes about thirty-seven lines or passages of Biblical heritage.

Interestingly enough, only twelve of the thirty-seven supposedly Biblical passages appear before line 540 of “The Grave”, again pointing at the sudden outburst of Biblical language in the final third of the poem.

4.4.2. The Holy Paradise

Until the last third of the poem, instances of clearly pronounced religious themes are rather difficult to discern amongst the often repulsive imagery of “The Grave” and Blair’s overall stress of the negative examples, which hardly allows for a description of the holy to take place.

The last third of the poem, however, is in marked contrast to the preceding stanzas, which attempt to inspire fear in the reader, and preach a grim message of the Middle Ages and of the Old Testament. If there was holiness to be found in them, it mostly, both literally and figuratively, lay hidden under a layer of the mundane dead.

With the last 227 lines of “The Grave”, the general mood of the poem undergoes a substantial alternation from its former course, however. One moment, the reader is acquainted with the train of all those to make the grave a place of their eternal rest, the other, starting with line 541 they are set into a world of The Holy Bible, and of Milton’s grand divine poem. This ‘new’ world, while not completely at odds with Blair’s other imagery, allows the dead a short respite, and, in a sudden fit of morality, attempts to teach a lesson no less serious than the preceding pages, yet far less grim in nature.

As “The Paradise Lost” in essence reproduces the rather brief account of the early history of man as described in the first book of The Bible, Genesis, it is proper, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, to treat the general Biblical theme together with the “Paradise Lost”.

The Miltonic spirit, in the manner of which the initial invocation of “The Grave” was observed to have been written, resurfaces anew with a immense force in the final third

of “The Grave”. This time, it is Book X of “The Paradise Lost” that serves as a main source of inspiration, especially, however, the passages concerning Death and Sin (Reed, 189).

Here, Blair begins by drawing an image of the happiness that Adam and Eve must have felt living their immortal lives in the Garden of Eden. Both the soul and the body were living in harmony, for “all was pure within”(The Grave, 549), untainted by knowledge. These “thrice blessed days”(ibid, 557), however, were not to last long, as the original sin came to be:

--Scarce had the happy tenant
Of the fair spot due time to prove its sweets,
Or sum them up, when strait he must be gone,
Ne'er to return again.---And must he go?
Can nought compound for the first dire offense
Of erring man?---Like one that is condemn'd,
Fain would he trifle time with idle talk,
And parley with his fate.
[...]
---At once he lost
His glory and his God---If mortal now,
And sorely maim'd, no wonder! Man has sinn'd.
(The Grave, 566-73, 579-81)

The original sin thus took place and damned mankind for eternity. Man, realizing it too late, in vain would make amends.

So far, Blair does not attempt to turn from the path of the traditional story found in the chapters two and three of Genesis or its Miltonic paraphrase. However, starting with line 600, two successive apostrophes unfold which bear marks of Miltonic origin.

The dreadful effect of Satan's success in the Garden of Eden is the journey of his two 'children', Sin and Death (Whence Milton uses capital letters when talking about this pair, the version of “The Grave” used for this work did not employ capitals. Thusly, when Milton's poem is discussed, Sin and Death will retain their initial capital letters.), from the gates of Hell to the earth, where they ascend to the position of the two greatest scourges of mankind. Where one goes, the other follows, Death and Sin are inseparable in the Bible and “The Paradise Lost”, and inseparable they are in Blair's poem as well, for immediately after the first appearance of sin in “The Grave”, Blair first addresses it first and death immediately afterwards.

In this apostrophe of thirty-two lines, along with the ensuing address to death the longest to be found in the poem, the poet first attempts to compare the destructive power of sin to that of natural disasters. Nonetheless, the volcano and the earthquake are no match for the “greatest and first of ills” (The Grave, 601), the mightiest instrument of Satan, as they have their limits. Sin, on the contrary:

has laid waste,
Not here and there a country, but a world:
Dispatching at a wide-extended blow
Entire mankind;

(The Grave, 614-17)

Thereafter follows a contemptuous enumeration of the evils by which sin defaced the splendors of the God’s creation, succeeded by the poet’s attempt to express in words a proper name inclusive of all its horrors. It is up to the reader to decide whether the resulting ‘title’, “pregnant womb of ills” (The Grave, 623) is fitting.

It is in this appellation, however, that Blair seemingly makes a reference to Milton, whom, as was previously mentioned, described Satan, Sin, and Death, as a sort of “parody on the Trinity” (Milton, Bush, 406), in an allegory of a infernal family of father Satan, his daughter and “incestuous mother” (Paradise Lost, 602) Sin, and their son, the “Sin-born Monster” (ibid, 596), Death, their ‘family’ relations derived from the importance of the roles these were meant to play in the fatal chapter of men’s history.

By chance, the discussed expression from line 623 belongs amongst those to have been subject to the revision at the hand of Philip Doddridge. The earlier version of line 623 from the 1741-2 manuscript features an appellation of a quite similar kind, sin is referred to as the “big-bellied ill” (Blair, Anderson, 44), stressing its maternal nature. The former intention of Blair to depict sin as a ‘mother’ of unholy things was somewhat lost in the labyrinth of decorous expression, yet its spirit remains unchanged; sin is described as an implicitly feminine entity from which more evil is born, a ‘mother’.

Caring mothers do rarely appear unaccompanied by their children, and the case of “The Grave” is no different in this respect from that of Milton, as immediately after the apostrophe of sin, the attention of the poet is turned to the lesser of the two great evils, death.

At first, Blair depicts death in the relatively common image of a devourer of men, which Milton uses as well. His Death is a perpetually hungry monster which, when asked by Sin about what he thinks of their newly acquired empire, answers:

To me, who with eternal famine pine,
Alike is hell, or Paradise, or heaven,
The best, where most with ravin I may meet;
Which here, though plenteous, all too little seems
To stuff this maw, this vast unhidebound corpse.
(Paradise Lost, Book X, 597-601)

Death as Blair presents it is an abomination of no smaller appetite:

O great man-eater!
Whose every day is carnival, not sated yet!
[...]
Methinks the countless swarms thou hast devour'd,
And thousands that each hour thou gobblest up,
This, less than this, might gorge thee to the full!
But ah! Rapacious still, thou gap'st for more:
(The Grave, 639-40, 645-48)

Nonetheless, death, no matter how terrible or indefatigable it might seem, is shown not to be omnipotent. The dead are in its keeping only until the Last Day. In fact, it is long before the Day of Judgment that death suffers its first defeat, for in the resurrection of Christ, it is forced to loosen its grip on the “illustrious deliverer of mankind“ (The Grave, 668). Blair then continues describing in the spirit of the gospels the doings of Christ and his appearance”to chosen witnesses” (ibid, 675) before his ascend back to his father on heavens, where, most importantly”

As a great prince,
Not for himself alone, procures admission,
but for his train. It was his royal will,
That where he is, there should his followers be.
(The Grave, 684-87)

The whole Biblical/Miltonic story of the fall of men, and of sin and death, narrated with the substantial aid of Blair’s favorite tropical instruments of personification and apostrophe, thus serves a common purpose- to show that death, which in the earlier stages of the poem was often depicted as power most terrifying and deplorable, in fact is something quite different.

The victory over death, which Apostle Peter discusses in the chapter fifteen of the first letter to Corinthians, serves a platform for his argument. As Jesus came to life and so will men at the end of all time, Death ceases to be the “terrible gulf” from which there seemingly nothing might arise. Instead, defeated by the Son of God, who brought redemption to human kind, it suddenly is depicted as:

--A gloomy path!
Made yet more gloomy by our coward fears:
But not untrod, nor tedious: the fatigue
Will soon go off.--Besides, there's no bye-road
To bliss.

(The Grave, 688-92)

In the main theme of his lines, Blair treads the same path that many a religious poet, including John Donne with his Holy Sonnet, "Death be not Proud" (1663), before him trod, and which likewise was not unknown to his contemporaries. Young in "The Night Thoughts" (1742-5) uses it, and so does Parnell in "A Night-Piece on Death" (1722), who probably manages to express it in manner most appealing to the reader's eyes:

Death's but a path that must be trod,
If one would ever pass to God;
A port of calms, a state of ease,
From the rough rage of swelling seas.
(A Night-Piece on Death, 67-70)

Reminding the reader of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, its significance to the race of men, and of the Gospels, Blair in essence instructs his readers of the true nature of death, teaching them to die, so to speak, thus reinforcing the stress previously placed on the *ars moriendi* phenomenon, and a good Christian life in general. Death is nothing more than a transitory state, a portal to eternal life. For the good, no doubt religious, man it is:

---Thrice welcome death!
That after many a painful bleeding step
Conducts us to our home, and lands us safe
On the long wish'd shore---Prodigious change!
Our bane turn'd to blessing!
(The Grave, 706-10)

Whether it is so beautiful to a person of different qualities is left on the first two thirds of "The Grave" to decide.

Lastly, as the conclusion of the poem approaches, the Biblical theme of Revelation of St. John appears for a short period of time, for an anticipation of the Judgment Day is pronounced. Blair, however, does not attempt to dwell on the repulsive matter of the end of the world (though there no doubt is plenty to draw from), but only chooses to describe the reunion of the soul and the body.

Such event, which for some of Blair's contemporaries served as a fitting occasion for

grotesque descriptions of skulls and bones finding each other amidst the last breaths of the dying world, leaves Blair unexpectedly solemn. Apocalypse is described in a quite pensive manner by the poet, who rather decides to talk about the “new elegance of form” (The Grave, 753), and of a “thrice happy meeting” (ibid, 760) of the soul and her once lost body now destined for eternal life, than launch into another vision filled with morbid descriptions.

To conclude, though the occurrence of scriptural themes is omnipresent within “The Grave”, the fact that it is mostly concentrated in the final 250 lines of the poem suggests an important, and at the same time special, role Blair intended for it.

The Book of Job is the very first scriptural voice allowed to speak by Blair, as the motto of the poem, “The House Appointed for All Living” originates here. Job then, much like the passages inspired by Shakespeare's tragedy, takes part in most motifs of “The Grave”, supporting the argument against suicide with proclamation of the fixedness of the days of men, or reinforcement of the perception of death as the ultimate leveler of all.

Where the passages on inevitability and universality of death fit the intentions that Blair has for the great bulk of his poem, it is with the Genesis, Gospels, and Revelation that the last third of the poem must resound.

Here, Blair in essence retells the story of death, its victorious past and its future of defeat, as described in various books of The Bible. First, he reminds the reader of the happy state of things before the original sin took place and brought death to existence. Then, meditating upon the fallen state of men and the evils of both death and sin, he apostrophizes these two entities in the spirit of Milton, only to show that death is not all-powerful, as it was defeated in the resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospels, and is bound to face an ultimate defeat when the event described in the Revelation finally take place.

As Christ defeated death, it suddenly turns from an all-devouring monstrosity to a welcomed event in life, as, for the followers of the King of Kings, it is but a path to heaven. Blair then concludes with anticipation of the Apocalypse, which he, perhaps quite unexpectedly, uses to draw the image of the perfect bliss that those to count themselves amongst the ranks of the good men will surely experience.

Whereas the passages from Job mostly serve a greater purpose, as they usually support and illustrate a higher argument rather than incite one of their own, the first book of the Bible, Genesis, side by side with *The Paradise Lost* of John Milton, ascend

to one of the most prominent roles “The Grave” has to offer, for it is on a stage set by the the tale they tell, that the greatest and arguably the most important contrast of Blair’s poem takes place, as described in the following chapter.

5. The Religious Grave

As the brief overview of the religious aspects of Blair's day outlined, though substantially more calm and prosperous, the first half of the eighteenth century proved to be a source of disillusionment and controversy for many men of serious piety. The traditional perception of faith was being continuously undermined by a large variety of factors, ranging from increased interest in the new found economic prosperity, over scientific attempts to explain the nature of God, popularity of certain Latin poets and philosophers, to disunity in the ranks of the church itself.

It is then of a little surprise that those who had the will and the strength to support them felt obliged to do all that was in their powers to attempt the reestablishment of the old orders.

Reverend Blair, whose religious origins were closely connected with Calvinism of his father and grandfather, did not intend to publish "The Grave", until, he "was urged by some friends [...] to make it public" (Doddridge, 74). Though there is no mention of Isaac Watts being counted among these 'friends', the positivity of his opinion of the piece no doubt was of a great importance to Blair: "Nor did I decline it [The idea of having the poem published], providing I had the approbation of Dr. Watts" (ibid, 74). Moreover, Blair, when his poem did not succeed in impressing the London publishers, asked for assistance none other than Phillip Doddridge, the master of Norfolk academy, and a renown divine hymnodist.

Only few other facts from Blair's life can serve as stronger indicators of Blair's religious intention for The Grave than the figures of the two men he chose to place his trust in concerning his poem; the opinion of one he held in high regard, the assistance of the other he asked when the first publishing attempt had failed.

The aim of this chapter thus is to discuss the primary religious argument of Blair, the branch of religion he strives to promote, and the building-up sense of ultimatum the reader is forced to face whilst proceeding through the premises of "The Grave".

5.1. The Righteous Fear

Historical Christianity is thus a religion in which anxiety plays a far greater part than faith, and in which this anxiety is even valued as a virtue because it is a constant check to presumption and pride. Our culture has thus evolved a species which might be called homo sollicitus, "anxious man", always remembering that sollicitus means oscillating, wobbling, or trembling (Watts, A. 1975, 208).

If the perspective of Alan Watts regarding the position of anxiety in Christianity is to be taken into account, “The Grave” no doubt can be considered a quite ‘virtuous’ poem from the Christian point of view, for especially in its central section the sense of fear abounds greatly.

As was already alleged by Blair’s anti-classicist tendencies, his poem does not intend to persuade its reader by a force of witty, well invented and crafted, argument, such as Dryden or Pope would certainly have written.

Instead, Blair directs the force of his utterances at the reader’s sense by appealing to it directly, as in the case of suicide condemnation, and by confronting it with a number of images the purpose of which is to bring the reader, by force of fear if necessary, from the state of sinful existence to righteousness.

A similar observation is made by Means (Means, 1975, 271), who describes this technique of appealing to reader’s sense to be quite common amongst the Evangelicals by the time Blair decided to attempt the publishing of “The Grave”:

No, the orthodox had found that rational argument with deists, neo-stoics, neo-epicureans, or downright atheists frequently yielded no fruit; consequently, they changed their tactics. By mid-century, the Evangelicals had discovered that the most convincing “argument” with which they can convince the unbeliever was the grim fact of the death itself. (Means, 1975, 271).

5.1.1. The Graveyard Sextet

That the triumph of death is omnipresent within “The Grave” is indisputable and in various forms has been traced throughout the poem in the course of this work. However, one section, which yearns perhaps the most convincing evidence of this has so far been partially neglected.

In his crusade against all mundane, between lines 237-349, Blair takes his reader for what Lorna Clymer recognizes to be a “graveyard tour to certain extent” (Clymer, 363). Here, the reader is confronted with a set of images, or graves, which depict six various emblematic inhabitants of the last resting place in a quite vivid and disturbing manner, with special stress placed on a variety of repulsive, night naturalistic, detail. The beauty (ibid, 237-256), the strong man (ibid, 257-285), the philosopher (ibid, 286-296), the Shakespearean orator (ibid, 297-318), his kin, the miser (ibid, 337-349), and finally, the physician (ibid, 319-336) are invoked to become subjects of the poet’s apostrophes in a series of scornful *ubi sunt* arguments.

Whence the previous entities such as the widow or the schoolboy followed by a glimpse of regret for lost friendship, were treated in almost a romantic spirit, all those to appear after them are depicted as but embodiments of the vanity of the profane, mocked either by purposeless respect paid to their lifeless, rotting corpse which “in the nose smells horrible” (ibid, 170-71), their unattainable attempts to ascertain to endless fame, or the futility of the earthly power they once cherished and abused only to become no more than the lowest of the low in death.

The meditative, subtler, sense of melancholy predominant within the initial 110 lines of the poem, thus swiftly changes to irony and openly pronounced disdain, which culminates with these six apostrophes and the following passages on death of the unprepared one, and the suicide.

It is in these lines that the attempt to inspire anxiety, arising from macabre images and blunt truth, is found in its most consistent form. The sheer amount of malignity expressed on the account of the strong dying man along with a sadistic glee voiced at the view of his final misery (which a reader unaware of the passage’s origin would most likely ascribe to a nineteenth century Zola or Hardy) by themselves pose a frightful sight to behold:

What groan was that I heard?--Deep groan indeed!
With anguish heavy laden! let me trace it:
From yonder bed it comes, where the strong man,
By stronger arm belabour'd, gasps for breath
Like a hard-hunted beast. How his great heart
Beats thick! His roomy chest by far too scant
To give the lungs full play,--What now avail
The strong-built sinewy limbs and well spread shoulders?
See! how he tugs for life, and lays about him,
Mad in his pain!--Eager he catches hold
Of what comes next to hand, and grasps it hard,
Just like a creature drowning!--hideous sight!
Oh! how his eyes stand out, and stare full ghastly!
While the distemper's rank and deadly venom
Shoots like a burning arrow 'cross his bowels,
And drinks his marrow up.--Heard you that groan?
It was his last. See how the great Goliath,
Just like a child that brawl'd itself to rest,
Lies still.

(The Grave, 262-280)

The effect of the above passage is made the more forceful, as described by Eric Parisot, by directly involving the reader in the persuasive performance of the dying brute. On

four occasions in this passage only, Blair in one way or another commands the senses of the reader to actively experience the suffering at first hand. The poet conducting his moral tour through the graveyard, no doubt accompanied by the reader, first asks: “What groan was that I heard?” appealing to the reader’s inattentive hearing. Then, having traced the source of the sound, orders his ‘companion’ to “See!”, to personally experience the abhorrent end of the strong man’s life with him (Parisot, 29-30). Finally, as the last breath leaves the mighty one’s lungs, the poet for the final time questions the reader if he “heard [...] the groan“, and commands him to view the strengthless stillness of the dead brawler: “See how the great Goliath, [...] lies still”.

Illustrations of such inclusion through instruction are spread throughout the text of “The Grave”, as the readers in approximately eleven cases find themselves asked to “hear” (262, 277), “see” (28, 156, 270, 278, 452, 628) , “look” (253), “behold” (716), or “hark” (32).

By repeatedly instructing his ‘companion’ on the graveyard tour to join in with him in the scenes described, the poet’s “instruction enhances the intimate space between the poet and the reader, as both poet and reader are brought within close vicinity of the dead” (Parisot, 29).

The overall inspiration of fear and sense of uncertainty awakened by the vivid descriptions of suffering is aimed at a purpose, which Means explains while discussing the above passage: “The more terrible his portrayal of death, the more likely Blair was to realize his evangelical purpose: to awaken a sense of sin in what he termed a “licentious age” and to bring the unregenerate to repentance” (Means, 1975, 273).

5.1.2. Of Tropes and Dead Men

Nevertheless, the anxiety arising from these six apostrophes as well as the moral taught by them is not to be ascribed solely to the work of the dreary imagery or inclusion of the reader in the poetic text. In her article, *Graved in Tropes*, Lorna Clymer gives an account of how, in order to deepen the macabre effect that he attempts to convey to the mind of the reader, Blair employs tropes in a quite unusual manner.

Clymer describes how prosopopoeia and apostrophe are both used by the poet so as to cast a veil of animosity over lifeless entities in order to stress their lifelessness by not allowing them to respond to the narrator’s poetic inquires once they have been supposedly animated by his addresses or personifications (Clymer, 366).

In general, there is a repetitive structure in Blair's apostrophes of the dead. Though the order of the second and the third places might vary, first always arrives the animation through address, usually followed by *ubi sunt* or rhetoric questioning of the values of the addressed entity, and finally, moral-implying rejection of its animosity achieved through denying the apostrophized the right of response.

To illustrate this tendency, Clymer uses the passage on the physician, (Clymer, 366) in this work, let us once again return to the figure of the chop-fallen orator:

Great man of language! whence this mighty change,
This dumb despair, and drooping of the head?
Though strong persuasion hung upon thy lip,
And sly insinuation's softer arts
In ambush lay about thy flowing tongue,
Alas, how chop-fall'n now! Thick mist and silence
Rest, like a weary cloud, upon thy breast
Unceasing. Ah! Where is the lifted arm,
The strength of action, and the force of words,
The well-turn'd period, and the well-tun'd voice,
With all the lesser ornaments of phrase?
Ah! fled for ever, as they ne'er had been!
(The Grave, 300-311)

The Poet animates the rhetorician by directly addressing him (Great man of language!), scornfully questions the validity of his boasted values (Where is the lifted arm, the strength of action, and the force of words, with all the lesser ornaments of phrase?), but never allows the addressed, whom the apostrophe has bestowed with temporal animosity, to answer his inquires, in this case prohibiting response before the question is actually asked (Thick mist and silence rest, like a weary cloud, upon thy breast unceasing).

To strenghten the resulting effect, "their inability to respond is even thematized", Clymer describes (Clymer, 366). One instance of such thematization is discussed in chapter three, section dedicated to the evolution of the lawyer of Shakespeare to the orator and miser of Blair. Another example is then found in the passage on the physician, where, demanding answer from the master of the healing about where his "recipes and cordials" are now that he is no more, Blair proceeds to comment:

Alas! thou speaks not-- The bold impostor
Looks not more silly when the cheat's found out.
(The Grave, 335-37)

The resulting effect of Blair's unorthodox trope usage as described by Lorna Clymer is

strikingly effective; through apostrophe and prosopopeia, the dead are given opportunity to speak only so they can be proved not to be able to do so- they amount to nothing more than lifeless corpses whom lack of faith and false trust in profane things has brought to such a pitiful and at the same time horrifying state.

As a consequence of this unorthodox and skillful trope usage, the readers are brought to a close vicinity of the lifeless dead that serve as an embodiment of the finality of death, for the poet “bestows animation only to put it under erasure for moral purposes“ (Clymer, 366).

5.2. The Holy and the Profane

The Holy...

When Clymer argues that “death’s presence makes all life *vanus*, empty, without substance” (Clymer, 368) she probably has in mind only the first five hundred lines of the poem, for contrasted with its last part of half length, it would be more appropriate to say that death’s presence makes all profane *vanus*. Life itself, if properly lived, is not vane to Blair, it is a preparation for something far greater, as was already alluded in chapter 3.2.

Though living is marked by “many a painful step” (The Grave, 707) it is in the death of the good man, that the true nature of human life is pronounced:

By unperceiv’d degrees he wears away;
Yet, like the sun, seems larger at his setting.
(High in his faith and hopes), look how he reaches
After the prize in view! And, like a bird
That’s hamper’d, struggles hard to get away;
Whilst the glad gates of sight are wide expanded
To let new glories in, the first fair fruits
Of the fast-coming harvest.

(The Grave, 719-726)

Important here is the alliterate reward of “the first fair fruits of the fast-upcoming harvest”. The metaphor of harvest being that what follows after death naturally implies that what preceded this harvest was sowing. Without hard work and good care of the field, there can be no good harvest. Without a good life, there can be no reward found in death.

...and the Profane

The fault of the six men thus is not that they were physically strong, beautiful, or sought wisdom. One can be strong and still follow the path of Christ. Their real fault is rooted in the fact that these six promoted their emblematic quality above what Blair argues is more important, living a life of a good Christian, learning to die. Instead, they chose to remain ignorant to the field of faith, charmed by the ephemeral quality they were endowed with, only to find out that very quality expunged by death. This supposition is further supported by Blair talking about “boast“ in connection with strength and beauty alike, or by his triumphant mockery of “the lesser ornaments of phrase” that, the nature of the passage speaks for itself, the orator considered his pride as well. Thus, the fact that out of weakness and ignorance these six decided to follow such representatives of humanistic ‘gifts’ at the cost of properly fulfilling their religious duties is what leads Blair to condemn them along with the heroes of olden times, or power-hungry villains, and use them as moral-eliciting negative examples of the false trust in the secular. The moral these corpses teach, the moral that, if they were aware of it, might have turned them from the mundane path is the moral of the major part of “The Grave“ ---death is final, inescapable, and does not care about titles.

Thou they each have different answers to what is important in life, Blair’s opinion of the secular and qualities associated with it in this case is much like that expressed by Thomas Gray some four years after the former’s death:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow’r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave,
Awaits alike th’ inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

(Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, 33-36)

The condemnation of the secular, the stress on the fallen state of humanity, and the message of religiousness being the only positive thing that matters is the main feature of the poem. This most likely is why the schoolboy or the widow from the poem’s opening escape the scornful mockery of Blair; so far, they did little to stray from the road to bliss, for the youngster is still innocent, and the poet strives to condemn the boast of beauty, not love.

Consecutively, Blair in essence creates an ultimatum: it is imperative to learn from the grave and the message it is a harbinger of. If this is not done, if the reader continues in his sinful existence of neglecting his sacred duties, he will quickly find himself in the

position of the unprepared one, one at ease in his possessions, one whom wishes and sudden fits of regret when death is in sight will not redeem. The promotion of the mundane above the sacred closes the door to salvation, and thus, the reader should discard all that is mundane, and give themselves to God.

In this regard, Blair is a perfect Calvinist, as James Means describes in “A Reading of The Grave”. Means writes:

In the uncompromising spirit of the Hebrew prophets, or of Bunyan, Blair utterly rejects anything--- apart from the Gospel--- that tends to make men feel at home in the world, or that distracts them from leading a holy life and preparing to face death and judgment.[...]

Blair is no Christian that regards beauty, strength or intelligence as gifts of God. On the contrary, good Calvinist that he was, Blair treats all these possessions as positive evils, because, in his view they tend to alienate man from God by fostering an illusion of security (Means, 1975, 276, 278).

5.3. How to Kill Two Birds with One Suicide

Though the existence of the immortal soul should be self-evident for the reader of “The Grave”, in the religiously rather unstable times of Blair’s life, this assumption was far from certain. Discussed in the chapter on the poet’s anti-classicist tendencies, the issue of soul dying with the body was described to have found its way back into the awareness of both Blair’s late ancestors as well as his contemporaries through the translations of the Latin poet’s of the Golden Age, and their overall recommendation from the side of the Neoclassicists.

Blair, perhaps in retaliation against the argument that to a holy man doubtlessly was a blasphemy, thus opened his passage on suicide with a direct response to the admirers of Lucretius and his contemporaries. Encompassed within this passage also is found what was recognized to be an appeal towards the reader to question his own consciousness about whether there is something after death or not. What side the mind of the reader is prone to choose is not too difficult to imagine, having just concluded the tour de grave and experienced the suffering of the soul of the one unprepared.

The remaining twenty-seven lines of this passage, however, Means recognizes to be of equal importance, as apart from the issue of the immortality of the soul, Blair at the same time deals with yet another major moral contemporary controversy, the self-destruction itself.

The notion of suicide as a justifiable act, Means describes, received a widespread attention throughout the years of Blair, continuously fueled by either the suicides of renown men, such as Thomas Creech, a translator of Lucretius in 1700, and Eustace Budgell, the cousin of Joseph Addison, some thirty-seven years later, or works of literature written either in support of it, or attack against. (Means, 1975, 279, 280)

As a Calvinist, Blair joins the ranks of the opponents of the suicide, not only condemning it, but also naming it the worst of sins, for there is a very special position reserved for those to die by their own hand in hell:

--Unheard-of tortures
Must be reserved for such: these herd together;
The common damn'd shun their society,
And look upon themselves as fiends less faul.
(The Grave, 413-15)

Blair in essence uses his passage on suicide to fulfill two purposes, as he, with his common instruments of appellation to the consciousness of the reader, defends the immortality of the soul against its eighteenth century enemies, and at the same time denounces yet another contemporary representation of the profane, the worst of sins, the act of suicide.

To sum up, “The Grave“ of Robert Blair is a poem the purpose of which can be, with a slight degree of exaggeration, compressed into a space of mere four short sentences:

The faith thus sustained by all prophecies, evangelical truth, and Christ himself, let us hold fast—the faith that our spirit is in the image of God, like whom it lives, understands, and is eternal. As long as it is in the body it exerts its powers; but when it quits this prison-house it returns to God, whose presence, it meanwhile enjoys while it rests in the hope of the blessed Resurrection. The rest is its paradise. On the other hand, the spirit of the reprobate, while it waits for the dreadful judgment, is tortured by that anticipation, which the Apostle for that reason calls *φόβος*, (fearful.)

The source of the citation was withheld for a reason, which an attentive reader might already have guessed. For these words, in which most major features of The Grave are recognized and the holy attempt of Robert Blair is found, belong to John Calvin himself. (Calvin, quoted in Cronfel, 175)

6. CONCLUSION

The first half of the eighteenth century proved to be a serious challenge for religious men. The new-found political and economical stability brought times of great prosperity and relative ease for most strata of English society. The middle-class merchant replaces the aristocrat both in politics and at reading tables. Science flourishes. England becomes Britain, and its wars are won.

Most of these factors, though positive in themselves, proved to be a double edged sword for the state of religiousness in England. Prosperity is a perpetual enemy of faith, as men tend to turn to God with questions in the times of need. Science encouraged new attempts to understand the nature of the universe and of God, resulting in the spread of Deistic theories, and the new-born reading public was too prone to listen to the voices of Neoclassical poets and the morals of humanistic reason, not to the voices of piety.

Into this time was in 1699 born Robert Blair, a grandson of a famous preacher from the times of Civil War, and a son of the chaplain to the King. He studied first at the Edinburgh University, then at the continent, in Netherlands. In 1731 he was ordained minister of a small country parish of Athelstaneford, East Lothian, where he remained until his death in 1746. During his life of a country clergyman, Blair acquainted two important religious figures from the ranks of his fellow Dissenters, hymnodists and divine poets Isaac Watts and Phillip Doddridge, whom he exchanged letters with.

It is with Watts and Doddridge that the history of the composition of Blair's sole work of recognition, a didactic piece on death and bereavement of 767 lines titled "The Grave", is inherently connected. This work he started writing probably during his student day at the Edinburgh University, and had a major bulk of it finished before 1731, as he informs in his letter to Doddridge from 1741-2. This letter provides a substantial amount of insight into the history of composition of the poem, as with its help, certain events and their chronological arrangement can be reconstructed.

Further sources that allow for an analysis of the composition process are two early versions of "The Grave", one discovered by James Means, the other preserved by Robert Anderson in 1802. The comparisons of the chronologically related versions then display several tendencies that help to illustrate how the mind and the aims of the poet kept changing during the composition process. Where the earliest preserved version of the student Blair, a fragment of only 55 lines, abounds with melancholy descriptions of ghosts and graveyards, the first edition of the Reverend Robert Blair, subjected to

continuous tendency endeavoring to elevate the language of the poem to a more distinguished level and additions of religious elements, is more befitting of the term 'religious didactic poem'.

The literary influences projected in "The Grave" create a unique combination of themes, well suiting Blair's purpose, as the selected motifs all complement the mood that Blair strives to create- of inescapable presence of death and vanity of the mundane in the first five hundred lines, and of drawing an escape route from the inescapable for those willing to learn in the final, Bible and Milton abounding, section of the poem.

It can hardly be doubted that Blair was acquainted with the works of William Shakespeare. His language was time and time again termed Shakespearean, and though some of the early critics and biographers of the poet considered this tendency to be mostly projected in the language of the narrator, but not in terms of particular phrases, the similarities with passages from Hamlet, Prince of Denmark's five acts found in Blair's characters of orator and miser, the moral taught by his 'Hamletan' worms, the figures of gravediggers, or, perhaps most prominently, the similar stress on fear arising from conscience being the best proof of the continuity of the soul after death, put this claim of early critics of Blair to question.

Following the medieval traditions of *ars moriendi* and *danse macabre*, the poet establishes the general mood of the poem as far as death is concerned. It is a universal, remorseless scourge of mankind, the dance of which all are bound to join. Simultaneously, a special stress placed upon the art of dying is observed throughout various stages of the poem, supporting the two different perspectives which Blair strives to confront his readers with. One, faithful to the spirit of the initial two thirds of the poem offers a remorseless vivid description of the terrors a for death unprepared person must surely experience. The other, present in the concluding third of the piece, neither does struggle against the spirit of its own section, and supplies an example of a good man, who in his life did not neglect his sacred duties, and whom the rewarding afterlife awaits.

The Grave, however, does not only deal with the moral abstract side of things, as there seems to be a direct attack at the 'blasphemous' ideas derived from translations of Lucretius and other Latin poets. As their argument against the fear of death is built upon pronouncing the mortality of the soul, Blair, a devout person, directly responds to several well known passages translated or adapted from Lucretius, appealing in Shakespearean manner to the reader's conscience, letting it, not the sterile argument of his opponents, to decide. The condemnation of the Classical is then further traced

thought “The Grave”, using the findings of James Means.

Whence the *danse macabre* and *ars moriendi* traditions are more prominently present in the negativity abounding initial five hundred lines of the poem, the theme adopted from the Bible and Book x of Milton’s “Paradise Lost” is almost exclusively found in the final section of “The Grave”. This imbalance in distribution is not without a purpose, as it belongs amongst the constituents of Blair’s bad-example-good-example, policy. Utterly shifting the viewpoint, the poet sets out on the path of the Bible and of Paradise Lost in order to depict where perfect holiness might lead the reader, providing they decide to follow its rules, of course. The example now is not the strong man, stifled with agony, but the good man, whom death approaches in a state of perfect calm and sweet expectation.

The view of the importance of a religious life as Blair presents it points at his deep Calvinistic devotion, as his main instrument for bringing the reader to the holy side is by the orthodox promoted sense of fear. This he continuously attempts to inspire in the reader, especially, though, in the middle section of the poem, where the apostrophes of six vane men take place. Employing tropes in a quite unusual fashion, the reader is directly confronted with the lifelessness of the mundane dead, who thus serve as embodiments of the vanity of the profane.

The repeating instructions to “hear” or “see” the dead and the dying from the side of the narrator fulfill the same purpose as well, along with the abhorrent description of the fate of those who would dare to listen to the blasphemous arguments of Lucretius and his followers, and commit suicide.

To conclude, the reader is made an offer they can hardly refuse, for on one side stands death as it is depicted in the initial five hundred lines of the poem- a thing of terror inspiring vanity, suffering. In its train stands all that is profane- the boasts of strength, beauty, knowledge, wealth – which, when forced to face the inevitable reality of the grave and compared to the fruits the good life will certainly yearn, quickly turn to nothing but dust and suffering, for in the end:

--Then! oh then!
Each earth-born joy grows vile, or disappears,
Shrunk to a thing of nought.

(The Grave, 726-28)

On the other side, however, stands a requirement of a life well led, no doubt filled with proper performance of the Christian duties. And hand-in-hand with it again stands

death, now tame and humble, which to the follower of its vanquisher, Jesus Christ, is but a “bane turned to blessing”(The Grave, 710), a threshold that must to be passed on the way to eternal life spent in heavenly bliss.

7. Resumé

Cílem této diplomové práce je analyzovat poetiku skotského básníka první poloviny osmnáctého století Roberta Blaira a poukázat na možné literární prameny, kterými byl inspirován, a zasadit jeho tvorbu do dobového kontextu.

První kapitola diplomové práce se zabývá shrnutím informací o historickém a sociálním kontextu první poloviny osmnáctého století, životem Roberta Blaira a stručným přehledem jeho přátel a známých, zdůrazňujíc především osoby Philipa Doddridge a Isaaca Wattse, dvojice obzvláště významné.

Počátkem první poloviny osmnáctého století zažívala Anglie po dlouhých letech vnitropolitické nestability nový věk ve znamení ekonomické prosperity a poklidu ve společnosti. V oblasti kultury byl šlechtic vytlačován jak z politických kruhů, tak i od knihovního stolu obchodníkem a intelektuálem pocházejícími ze střední třídy. Věda zažívala rozkvět a Anglie se léta Páně 1707 rozrostla o svého skotského souseda, dávajíc tak vznik Království Velké Británie.

Většina těchto faktorů, ač sama o sobě pozitivní, se pro stav anglické víry prokázala být dvojsečnou zbraní. Prosperita v životě touze po duchovním klidu dozajista nepřidává, a je to konec konců ve zlých dobách, kdy lidé nejčastěji obracejí tváře k Bohu. Věda jen podporovala novátorské pokusy vysvětlit se svojí pomocí povahu vesmíru a Boha samotného, dávajíc tak vznik deistickým teoriím, a nově vzniknuvší čtenářská veřejnost byla ve své podstatě příliš náchylná k naslouchání hlasu básníků neoklasicismu a moudrům humanistického rozumu, ne hlasu víry.

Do takového světa se roku 1699 v Edinburghu narodil Robert Blair, syn králova kaplana a vnuk Roberta Blaira, slavného kazatele z dob Občanské války. Studia jej nejdříve zavedla na universitu v Edinburghu, dále pak do Nizozemí. Počátkem roku 1731 byl Blair ustanoven duchovním v malé vesničce Athelstaneford v kraji Východního Lothianu, kde setrval až do své smrti léta Páně 1746. Za svého života vesnického kněze se Blair seznámil se dvěma významnými rozkolníky, hymniky a náboženskými básníky, Isaacem Wattsem a Phillipem Doddridgem, s nimiž po léta vedl korespondenci.

Ve své druhé části se práce pokouší podat informace o rozdílných verzích Hrobu a vykreslit historické okolnosti a myšlenkové procesy spojené s vývojem Blairových básnických záměrů na základě analýzy rozdílů těchto verzí.

Právě s osobami Wattse a Doddridge je svojí historií pevně spjata jediná Blairova významná práce, didaktická báseň o smrti a odloučení v rozsahu 767 řádků s názvem

“The Grave” (“Hrob”). Na této básni začal Blair pracovat pravděpodobně již za svých studentských let v Edinburghu, a , jak se dozvídáme z Blairova dopisu Doddridgovi ze 7. prosince roku 1741-2, byla její větší část dokončena ještě před tím, než byl básník vysvěcen na kněze. Právě tento dopis zůstává jedním z nejdůležitějších zdrojů při snaze rekonstruovat historii kompozice “Hrobu”, neboť s jeho pomocí lze Blairovy oči nahlédnout především na soudobý stav poezie a informovat se o několika milnících na cestě básně k vydavateli.

Další dva neméně důležité zdroje pro analýzu procesu kompozice představují dvě rané verze “Hrobu”.

Jedna je známa již od roku 1802, kdy rozdíl mezi touto verzí a první edicí “Hrobu” zaznamenal Robert Anderson, tehdejší editor Blaira. Druhá spatřila světlo světa až v poměrně v nedávné době, v roce 1971, kdy ji v Berg collection Newyorské veřejné knihovny objevil pravděpodobně nejdůležitější Blairův kritik současnosti, James Andrew Means.

Porovnání chronologicky následných verzí pak přináší několik zajímavých poznatků, jež dokumentují, jak se básnickovy cíle v průběhu tvorby “Hrobu” postupně vyvíjely. Zatímco nejranější dochovaná verze “Hrobu” studenta Blaira, kratičký fragment o padesáti pěti řádcích, překypuje melancholickými popisy hřbitova a duchů, první edice reverenda Roberta Blaira, po několika přídavcích a opakovaných změnách majících za účel povýšit jazyk básně, předkládá čtenáři “Hrob”, který je o mnoho víc hoden označení ‘religiózní didaktická báseň’.

Třetí část diplomové práce se pokouší zmapovat vlivy rozličných literárních děl, projevující se jak v myšlenkách, tak i formulacích Blairovy básně. Tyto vlivy pak vytváří jedinečnou kombinaci, která se společně s Blairovým způsobem vyjadřování uplatňuje v atmosféře, kterou Blair touží navodit. Pro prvních přibližně pět set řádků atmosféru s důrazem na marnost všeho světského a vše prostupující smrt, neodvratitelnou, která nehledí na tituly a vznešenou krev a nezná rozdíl mezi králem a chudákem. V poslední třetině básně pak Blair nabízí únikovou cestu od neuniknutelného pro ty, kdo budou ochotni se poučit z Miltonem a Biblí naplněné části práce.

Faktu, že Blair byl dobře seznámen s pracemi Williama Shakespeara, lze jen těžko odporovat. Již raní kritici si povšimli neobvyklé podobnosti mluvy Blairovy a Shakespearovy, vlivu projevujícímu se použitím určitých frází však většinou opomněli věnovat pozornost. Někteří dokonce zašli tak daleko, že ve svých pracích tvrdili, že v této otázce zůstal Blair Shakesparem neovlivněn.

Při bližším porovnání Blairova “Hrobu” a Shakespearova Hamleta však začíná být podobnost některých pasáží více než patrná. Obzvláště se projevuje v pohrdavých pasážích o Blairovu řečníkovi a chamtivci, o jejichž podobnosti s Shakespearovým právníkem lze jen těžko pochybovat. Stejně tak i poučením plynoucím z popisu červů hodujících na králi i chudákovi lze jen těžko odepřít shakespearovské dědictví. Též hrobníci obou autorů jsou si neobvykle podobní a slavný Hamletův monolog zdůrazňující, jak strach plynoucí z hlubin lidského svědomí je tím nejlepším důkazem o existenci nesmrtelné duše, je snad tou nejdůležitější pasáží shakespearovského původu v “Hrobu”.

Následováním středověkých tradic *ars moriendi* a *danse macabre*, umění dobrého umírání a tance smrti, Blair navozuje žádoucí atmosféru ve vztahu člověka ke smrti. Ta je znázorněna jako vše postihující, nelítostná metla lidstva, jejíž tance se musí nakonec každý zúčastnit. Zároveň s tím lze v celém textu básně vyzorovat velký důraz na umění „dobré smrti“, který slouží k vykreslení dvou rozdílných perspektiv, s nimiž se Blair snaží konfrontovat svého čtenáře. Jedna zůstává věrná duchu prvních dvou třetin básně a sestává z nemilosrdných, odpudivých popisů hrůzy, kterou musí na smrt nepřipravený jedinec pociťovat. Ani druhá perspektiva, přítomná v závěrečné třetině básně, neodporuje duchu, ve kterém byla tato třetina napsána, a přináší naopak čtenáři vizi smrti dobrého muže, který během celého svého života, neopomínal naplňovat své křesťanské povinnosti, a kterého tudíž očekává překrásný a blažený život po smrti.

“Hrob” se ale nepokouší promlouvat jen o abstraktní moraliťe, jelikož v básni je přítomen i přímý útok vedený proti ‘rouhačským’ myšlenkám odvozeným z překladů Lukrecia a jemu podobných básníků. Jelikož lukreciovský argument proti strachu ze smrti staví především na tvrzení, že duše umírá společně s tělem, Blair jako ortodoxní věřící se přímo ohrazuje proti několika v Anglii té doby dobře známým pasážím z Lukreciových prací, které byly přeloženy či přebásněny. Součástí jeho protiargumentu je právě i ze Shakespearea převzatý přístup, kdy Blair apeluje přímo na čtenářovo svědomí, které má pak samo rozhodnout, je-li duše smrtelná, či ne. Netřeba podotýkat, že po předchozí baráži pohrdavých personifikací zatracujících vše světské a víc než realističticky popsaném zoufalství duše nepřipraveného nebude mít čtenář příliš těžké rozhodování.

Zatímco dříve popsané tradice *danse macabre* a *ars moriendi* byly mnohočetné převážně v negativitou oplývajícími počátečními pěti stech řádkách, témata převzatá z Bible a desáté knihy Miltonova “Ztaceného ráje” lze téměř exkluzivně nalézt v

posledním úseku “Hrobu”. Tento zdánlivý nesoulad však není bezdůvodný, jelikož patří do Blairovy strategie dobrých a špatných příkladů.

Obraceje úhel pohledu, básník se vydává stezkou Bible a “Ztraceného ráje”, aby mohl vyobrazit, kam až může poctivé vykonávání křesťanských povinností čtenáře dovést, to vše samozřejmě za předpokladu, že budou následovat jím určená pravidla. Příkladem náhle není odstrašující postava siláka, jenž umírá v bolestech za pohrdavé přítomnosti jak autora, tak i čtenáře, ale dobrý muž, který očekává smrt ve stavu dokonalého klidu a ve sladkém očekávání.

Závěrečná kapitola se zabývá přímou dikusí na téma základních Blairových ideí, motivů a hlavních nástrojů, s jejichž pomocí se pokouší přesvědčit čtenáře o opodstatněnosti svých argumentů.

Důraz, který Blair klade na život spořádaného křesťana, společně se snahou přesvědčit čtenáře o své pravdě za pomoci zavražďování ukazují na Blairův hluboký kalvinismus, neboť právě zavražďování ve formě literatury patří mezi nástroje ortodoxních kalvinistů. Pocit strachu a nejistoty ve čtenáři se Blair pokouší probudit neustále, nejzřetelnější je ale tato snaha v prostřední části “Hrobu”, kde se objevuje šest za sebou jdoucích oslovení různých marností oplývajícími jednotlivci. Díky neobvyklému využití řečových figur Blair namísto efektu oživení dosahuje pravého opaku a zdůrazňuje tak neživost mrtvol, které všechnu svoji víru namísto do rukou božích svěřili do světských vlastností, jako je krása, síla, moudrost nebo řečnictví.

Aby zdůraznil kýžený efekt vzbuzování nejistoty a strachu, Blair opakovaně instruuje čtenáře, aby „pohlédl“ na mrtvé či „naslouchal“ skřekům umírajícího, přiváděje jej tak do blízké vzdálenosti k těm, jež zvolili špatně. Stejný cíl pak má již zmiňovaná pasáž popisující nezvratné zoufalství na smrt nepřipraveného, jehož jeho pokání a marná přání v hrozivých posledních chvílích zachrání jen těžko.

Pod tlakem těchto vlivů je čtenář postaven před nabídku, kterou lze jen těžko odmítnout, neboť na jedné straně se tyčí smrt taková, jakou ji představuje prvních pět set řádků básně, - hrůzu vzbuzující entita, která nabízí jen pocity marnosti a utrpení. V jejím zástupu stojí vše světské - pýcha silných, krásných, moudrých, bohatých, která ve stejnou chvíli, kdy jí přes cestu přejde smrt, se z nenadání proměňuje jen v prach a zbytečnost. Tento obraz je umocněn porovnáním s ovocem, které přináší dobrý život.

Na druhé straně stojí požadavek křesťanského-tedy dobrého-života, bezpochyby naplněného pilným vykonáváním křesťanských povinností. A ruku v ruce s ním znovu stojí smrt, však zkrocená a pokorná, která pro následovníka svého přemohitele, Ježíše Krista, je jen ‘hrůzou v požehnání přeměněnou’, jen prahem, který je nutno překročit

na cestě k životu strávenému ve věčné blaženosti.

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