

MOVING FROM SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE  
TO GRAY'S 'ELEGY'

Second Thoughts

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We were 30 minutes into the *Saturday Night Live* two-hour special, which was purported to be humor, when we realized it was not funny, and we were not enjoying the program.

Phil Hartman played Bill Clinton with all the subtlety of Refrigerator Perry sacking a quarterback. "I'm proud to say we've shot ahead of Mississippi," Hartman's Bill Clintons says in a predictable example of what comedy writers today think is funny dialogue.

We didn't see Chevy Chase doing Gerald Ford, but since about all Hollywood remembers about President Ford is that he stumbled getting out of an airplane, I wasn't prepared to see Chase stumbling through the White House.

But not to worry. The Giants were playing the Redskins on TNT. Well, as it turned out, the Giants were playing *with* the Redskins in a game about as exciting as watching an instant replay in a chess match.

After 8, Sunday night television leaves much to be desired, so off the shelf came "Adventures in English Literature," a textbook I liberated from discard while I was a math teacher at Castle Heights Military Academy.

Are there any Tennysons or Grays or Brownings or Swifts writing today? Maybe so, but not for television.

This, titled "The Eagle," from Tennyson:

*He clasps the crag with crooked hands,*

*Close to the sun in lonely lands,*

*Ringed with the azure world he stand.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath his crawls;*

*He watches from his mountain walls,*

*And like a thunderbolt he fall."*

And this from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Graveyard":

*The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,*

*The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,*

*The plowman homeward plods his wary way,*

*And leaves the world to darkness and to me."*

*"Full many a gem of purest ray serene*

*The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear'*

*Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,*

*And waste its sweetness on the desert air."*

Gray's "Elegy" was nine years in the writing! He is known for little else, but many think this is the best known poem in the English language.

And these bits of wisdom from Alexander Pope:

*"A wit's a feather and a chief a rod:  
An honest man's the noblest work of God."* And:  
*"In Words of fashion, the same rule will hold,  
Alike fantastic if too new or old;  
Be not the first by whom the new is tried  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."*

So, back to football and the current NCAA sanctions of the Auburn Plainsmen (renamed the Tigers by some unromantic slob). Where did Auburn get its name and the nickname, "The Plainsmen?" From Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," that's where.

The first two lines:

*"Sweet Auburn!" loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain."*

Yea, Rah! Auburn. Take your punishment and cheat no more.

And yea, rah! Tennyson and Pope and Goldsmith and Gray. You, too, deserve a cheer. We are enriched by your eternal gifts.

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