(1) BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
Oliver Goldsmith (1730? - 1774)
- B.A. at Trinity College, Dublin in 1749 (at age of 19);
- went to Edinburgh and Padua to try and study medicine, but eventually returned to London in 1756, giving up medicine and turning all his attention to writing;
- from 1759 to 1774 he dabbled in writing, but produced poorly researched histories of England, Rome and Greece; however, his easy and friendly style of writing appealed to many readers;
- he gained fame after publishing The Citizen of the World: or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to his Friends in the East in 1762;
- in 1766, after Samuel Johnson sold the manuscript, Goldsmith's popularity was forever woven into the knit of English literary history with The Vicar of Wakefield;

(2) TEXT OF WORK
Read the poem with annotations at: http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/875.html

(3) ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY
The Deserted Village, A Poem
composed 1770, published 1770
- evokes sympathy and sentiment for country life;
- unlike traditional pastoral poetry, does not present the country as an Arcadian paradise, but rather as a paradise lost;
- Goldsmith believed country life was being ruined by British interest in foreign trade and the concentration of capital and land in the hands of a small number of millionaires; to better understand the poem, read the short, prose sketch of the poem, an essay called The Revolution in Low Life published in 1770 in the appendix to this study guide;
- in the Dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds, Goldsmith writes:
  “I know you will object... that the depopulation it [the poem] deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarce make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege; and that all my views and enquiries have led me to believe those miseries real, which I here attempt to display... In regretting the depopulation of the country I inveigh [declaim; speak against passionately] against the increase of our luxuries; and here also I expect the shout of modern politicians against me. For twenty or thirty years past, it has been the fashion to consider luxury as one of the greatest national advantages; and all the wisdom of antiquity in that particular, as erroneous. Still however. I must remain a professed ancient on that head, and continue to think those luxuries prejudicial to states, by which so many vices are introduced, and so many kingdoms have been undone.” (compare underlined portion to the last paragraph of Goldsmith's essay in appendix).
Goldsmith revisits Auburn, a village of which he had fond memories, and marks the depopulation brought about through the emigration of its peasant community and the influx of monopolizing riches. He mourns over the state of a society where "wealth accumulates and men decay". Using images pertaining to the land in his poem, he gives to his readers a sense of what it was like to live in the countryside during modernization and how it has destroyed the land the former inhabitants worked so hard to maintain.

At the time in which this poem was written, it was true that the laboring class was in a dire situation. Changes in land ownership led to shortages in labor, and poverty became a common problem. Small farmers were forced out of the countryside. Alongside this problem came the new zest for luxuries and possessions. Poets became enamored by each situation, and accordingly much poetry of the time uses the labouring class and the growth of the luxury as a key theme. Thus, it is equally possible that Oliver Goldsmith's Deserted Village is a critique of luxury, or alternatively, an engagement with the realities of laboring-class poverty.

Goldsmith believes it is vital that their lives are portrayed truthfully and lucidly, perhaps without the typical frills of pastoral poetry.

Keep in mind for context:

Goldsmith's success as a writer lay partly in the charm of personality emanated by his style—his affection for his characters, his mischievous irony, and his spontaneous interchange of gaiety and sadness. He was, as a writer, "natural, simple, affecting.” It is by their human personalities that his novel and his plays succeed, not by any brilliance of plot, ideas, or language. In the poems again it is the characters that are remembered rather than the landscapes—the village parson, the village schoolmaster, the sharp, yet not unkindly portraits of Garrick and Burke. Goldsmith’s poetry lives by its own special softening and mellowing of the traditional heroic couplet into simple melodies that are quite different in character from the solemn and sweeping lines of 18th-century blank verse. In his novel and plays Goldsmith helped to humanize his era’s literary imagination, without growing sickly or mawkish. Goldsmith saw people, human situations, and indeed the human predicament from the comic point of view; he was a realist, something of a satirist, but in his final judgments unfailingly charitable.

Izvadak iz Poezije engleskog romantizma:
"Goldsmith je u svoju poeziju unio izrazitu socijalnu notu. Ona još nije dovoljno snažna da bi prerasla u bunt nego se zadržava na razini melanholičnih reminiscencija. Pjesnik se sjeća mladosti provedene u Irskoj, u selu kojem je dao poetski naziv Auburn. (...) Ta je mladost bila bezbrižna i vesela, kao što je bio i idilično prikazani život u kultiviranom, civiliziranom seoskom ambijentu. (...) Pjesnik nesmotreno smatra da je to bilo doba prije nego su se na Englesku sručile mnoge nevolje. (...) One su izazvane procesom 'ograđivanja' zemlje zbog kojeg su mnogi seljaci bili prinuđeni da odu i gradove i potraže zaposlenje u novootvorenim tvornicama. Zbog toga su mnoga sela ostala bez svojih žitelja i polakno propadaju. Dok opisuje te prizore opadanja i propadanja, zapuštenih kuća sada nalik na ruševine, pjesnik se još uvijek nada nekom boljem ishodu. (...) Grad u koji se sliša ta nekadašnja zdrava seoska populacija ne
doprinosi nimalo srećnom životu dostojnog čovjeka. U gradu se socijalne razlike između tankog sloga bogatih i mase siromašnih itekako primjećuju. One utiču na pojačavanje utiska očajanja kod onih koji su lakomisleno krenuli iz sela ka nepredvidivoj budućnosti. (...) Pjesnik je svjestan da je gubitak nenadoknadiv i obraća se svojoj muzi – poeziji – sa zahtjevom da progovori istinito o onome što se događa njegovoj zemlji. Na tom mjestu, u zaključku pjesme, izbija snajan moralizatorski i didaktički stav o ulozi poezije. (...) Goldsmithov jezik je neposredniji i razumljiviji od jezika njegovih savremenika. Njegova rečenica direktna i bliska svakidašnjem govoru, pa se (...) stiče utisak da je on prirodniji i jednostavniji.” (Dizdar 47-49)

(4) GLOSSARY

swain n. (2) – servant to a knight, young man living in the country
bower n. (5) – arboreal shelter, rustic cottage
loiter v. (7) – stand idly, delay or procrastinate
decent adj. (church, l. 12) – becoming, pleasing to the eye
contend v. (20) – compete, contest, argue
gambol n. (21) – a skipping or frisking about; frolic
sleight n. (22) – craft, artful practice
mirthful adj. (24) – amusing, full of or showing high-spirited merriment
smutted adj. (27) – carbon-black, filthy, stained with soot (čađ)
sidelong adj. (29) – askance, glancing, directed to the side, sideways
reprove v. (30) – admonish, disapprove of
bittern adj. (44) – a bird that lives in marshy, desolate areas, referred to in the Bible in connection with the devastations upon Babylon, Idumea and Nineveh
lapwing n. (45) – “unclean” bird, mentioned in Leviticus; also called peewit
mould’ring (or moldering) adj. (48) – disintegrating
ere prep. - before
hamlet n. (665) – a community of people smaller than a village
cumbrous pomp repose (66) – cumbersome gaudery/display of power rest
opulence n. (67) – luxury, wealth, abundance
pang n. (68) – sudden, sharp feeling (usually of pain)
bade to bloom (69) – caused to damper, to chill, fig caused a cloudy area on something shiny
pant v. (94) – to gasp, breathe quickly
vexation n. (95) – annoyance, irritation, concern
surly adj. (105) – inclined to anger or bad feeling with overtones of menace
spurn v. (106) – reject with contempt
bay v. (121) – (of dogs) bark with prolonged noises
flasy adj. (130) – soft and watery, marshy
mantling cresses (132) – a plant draped across the stream like a cloth decor is from a helmet
kopse n. [kɒps] (137) – a brush, or a dense growth of bushes
fawn v. (145) – to be obsequious, to try to gain favor by cringing or flattering
vagrant adj. (149) – a wanderer without an established residence or visible means of support
chide v. (150) – to censure severely or angrily; reproach
endearment n. (167) – affection
meek and unaffected (177) – humble/tame and genuine/honest
scoff v. (180) – jeer, laugh with contempt and derision
wile n. (183) – allurement
straggling adj. (193) – sprawling, spreading out in different directions
furze n. (194) – gorse, a shrub
stern adj. (197) – austere; of a strict bearing or demeanor; severe
boding adj. (199) – portending, ominous
trembler n. (199) – one who quakes or trembles in fear
cypher v. (208) – calculate, count, use arithmetic
presage v. (209) – to make predictions, to predict
parson n. (211) – curate, a person authorized to conduct religious worship (i.e. the preacher from the poem)
vanquish’d (from vanquish) adj. (212) – overcome, defeated
reprieve v. (238) – postpone or remit punishment; relieve from harm or discomfort temporarily
pond'rous (or ponderous) adj. (246) – heavy, clumsy and unwieldy because of its weight, slow
coy adj. (249) – affectedly modest or shy esp. in a playful or provocative way
deride v. (251) – ridicule, harshly mock, treat or speak of with contempt
disdain v. (251) – contemn, look down on, treat with condescension
congenial adj. (253) – having the same or very similar nature, personality, tastes or interests; close to, similar to
slight v. (289) – pay no attention to, treat with disrespect
contiguous adj. (304) – near, touching, connected, adjacent, fig in connection with, that goes together with
scanty adj. (306) – bare, spare, meager, slight
profusion n. (310) – extreme abundance
baneful adj. (311) – deadly or sinister, exceedingly harmful
extort v. (314) – obtain by coercion or intimidation or other means of pressure
brocade n. (315) – a heavy fabric interwoven with a rich, raised design
plaint n. (379) – an utterance of grief or sorrow; lamentation
insidious adj. (387) – beguiling but harmful, intended to entrap
gale n. (400) – a strong wind
connubial adj. (404) – conjugal, of or relation to a relationship in a marriage
decry v. (411) – to openly condemn or ridicule
equinoctial adj. (419) – relating to the vicinity of the equator
fervour (also spelled fervor) n. (419) – excitement, ardor, passionate enthusiasm
redress v. (422) – to right, to make reparations of amends for
inclement adj. (422) – severe or cruel (weather or climate)
(5) APPENDIX
Excerpted from: Maria, Robert. (Check sources cited list for citation.)

THE REVOLUTION IN LOW LIFE (1762)

TO THE EDITOR OF LLOYD’S EVENING POST (14–16 JUNE 1762)

SIR,
I spent part of the last summer in a little village, distant about fifty miles from town, consisting of near an hundred houses. It lay entirely out of the road of commerce, and was inhabited by a race of men who followed the primeval profession of agriculture for several generations. Though strangers to opulence, they were unacquainted with distress; few of them were known either to acquire a fortune or to die in indigence. By a long intercourse and frequent intermarriages they were all become in a manner one family; and, when the work of the day was done, spent the night agreeably in visits at each other’s houses. Upon those occasions the poor traveller and stranger were always welcome; and they kept up the stated days of festivity with the strictest observance. They were merry at Christmas and mournful in Lent, got drunk on St. George’s-day, and religiously cracked nuts on Michaelmas-eve.

Upon my first arrival I felt a secret pleasure in observing this happy community. The cheerfulness of the old, and the blooming beauty of the young, was no disagreeable change to one like me, whose whole life had been spent in cities. But my satisfaction was soon repressed, when I understood that they were shortly to leave this abode of felicity, of which they and their ancestors had been in possession time immemorial, and that they had received orders to seek for a new habitation. I was informed that a Merchant of immense fortune in London, who had lately purchased the estate on which they lived, intended to lay the whole out in a seat of pleasure for himself. I stayed till the day on which they were compelled to remove, and own I never felt so sincere a concern before.

THE REVOLUTION IN LOW LIFE
1 St. George’s-day April 23. 2 Michaelmas the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, September 29.
I was grieved to see a generous, virtuous race of men, who should be considered as the strength and the ornament of their country, torn from their little habitations, and driven out to meet poverty and hardship among strangers. No longer to earn and enjoy the fruits of their labour, they were now going to toil as hirelings under some rigid Master, to flatter the opulent for a precarious meal, and to leave their children the inheritance of want and slavery. The modest matron followed her husband in tears, and often looked back at the little mansion where she had passed her life in innocence, and to which she was never more to return; while the beautiful daughter parted for ever from her Lover, who was now become too poor to maintain her as his wife. All the connections of kindred were now irreparably broken; their neat gardens and well cultivated fields were left to desolation.

\[Strata jacent passim, hominumque boumque labores.\]

Such was their misery, and I could wish that this were the only instance of such migrations of late. But I am informed that nothing is at present more common than such revolutions. In almost every part of the kingdom the laborious husbandman has been reduced, and the lands are now either occupied by some general undertaker, or turned into enclosures destined for the purposes of amusement or luxury. Wherever the traveller turns, while he sees one part of the inhabitants of the country becoming immensely rich, he sees the other growing miserably poor, and the happy equality of condition now entirely removed.

Let others felicitate their country upon the increase of foreign commerce and the extension of our foreign conquests; but for my part, this new introduction of wealth gives me but very little satisfaction. Foreign commerce, as it can be managed only by a few, tends proportionally to enrich only a few; neither moderate fortunes nor moderate abilities can carry it on; thus it tends rather to the accumulation of immense wealth in the hands of some, than to a diffusion of it among all; it is calculated rather to make individuals rich, than to make the aggregate happy.
Wherever we turn we shall find those governments that have pursued foreign commerce with too much assiduity at length becoming Aristocratical; and the immense property, thus necessarily acquired by some, has swallowed up the liberties of all. Venice, Genoa, and Holland, are little better at present than retreats for tyrants and prisons for slaves. The Great, indeed, boast of their liberties there, and they have liberty. The poor boast of liberty too; but, alas, they groan under the most rigorous oppression.

A country, thus parcelled out among the rich alone, is of all others the most miserable. The Great, in themselves, perhaps, are not so bad as they are generally represented; but I have almost ever found the dependents and favourites of the Great, strangers to every sentiment of honour and generosity. Wretches, who, by giving up their own dignity to those above them, insolently exact the same tribute from those below. A country, therefore, where the inhabitants are thus divided into the very rich and very poor, is, indeed, of all others the most helpless; without courage and without strength; neither enjoying peace within itself, and, after a time, unable to resist foreign invasion.

I shall conclude this paper with a picture of Italy just before its conquest, by Theodoric the Ostrogoth. 3 The whole country was at that time, says the Historian, 'one garden of pleasure; the seats of the great men of Rome covered the face of the whole kingdom; and even their villas were supplied with provisions not of their own growth, but produced in distant countries, where they were more industrious. But in proportion as Italy was then beautiful, and its possessors rich, it was also weak and defenceless. The rough peasant and hardy husbandman had been long obliged to seek for liberty and subsistence in Britain or Gaul; and, by leaving their native country, brought with them all the strength of the nation. There was none now to resist an invading army, but the slaves of the nobility or the effeminate citizens of Rome, the one without motive, the other without strength to make any opposition. They were easily, therefore, overcome, by a people more savage indeed, but far more brave than they'.

3 mansion home.
4 Strata... labores 'the works of men and beasts are strewn all over' (echoing Virgil, Eclogue 7.54).
5 Theodoric the Ostrogoth he became King of Italy in 493 and died in 526; among Goldsmith's many rapid productions was a Roman history (1769).
(6) SOURCES CITED


