

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Text	Analysis	Notes & Queries	Editorial procedures
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You can add notes or queries to any part of the poetic text by simply clicking on the line in question and filling in the annotations form with your details. All contributions will be submitted to the editor in the first instance for review.

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

1

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

2

The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,

3

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,

4

And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

5

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,

6

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

7

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,

8

And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

9

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower

10

The moping owl does to the moon complain

11

Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,

12

Molest her ancient solitary reign.

13

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,

14

Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,

15

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,

16

The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

17

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,

18

The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,

19

The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,

20

No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

21

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,

22

Or busy housewife ply her evening care:

23

No children run to lisp their sire's return,

24

Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

25

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,

26

Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;

27

How jocund did they drive their team afield!

28

How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

29

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,

30

Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;

31

Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,

32

The short and simple annals of the poor.

About this text

Composition: c. 1745
(/resources/table.shtml#1745)
(/resources/table.shtml#1745)

Publication: 1751
(/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=1751)

Base text: 1768
(/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=1768)

Metre: iambic pentameter

Rhyme scheme: abab

Stanza: elegiac (heroic) stanza

Genre: elegy
(/resources/gllitterms.shtml#elegy)
retirement / graveyard poetry

Finding Aid: MS witnesses (/cgi-bin/findaid.cgi?ead=grayt.ead.0001&collection=primary&edition=1751)

Notes/Queries: 691

Translations: 57
(/texts/poems/elegy/#translations)

Source: TEI/XML
(/texts/poems/txt_GrayTh1751.xml)

Visualization: Poem Viewer
(http://www.eighteenthcenturyedition.org/england/welcc.shtml#poemvis)

Editions in the Digital Library

(/texts/diglib.shtml)

1751: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=1751)
An Elegy wrote in a Country Church Yard. London, 1751.

1753: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=1753)
Designs by Mr. R. Bentley, for six poems by Mr. T.

33	The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,	Gray. London, 1753.
34	And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,	1753: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
35	Awaits alike the inevitable hour.	<i>Designs by Mr. R.</i>
36	The paths of glory lead but to the grave.	<i>Bentley, for six poems by Mr. T.</i>
37	Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,	Gray. London, 1753.
38	If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,	1762: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
39	Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault	<i>An ELEGY written in a Country Church Yard.</i>
40	The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.	<i>With an HYMN to Adversity. By Mr.</i>
41	Can storied urn or animated bust	Gray. London, 1762.
42	Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?	1765 vol. iv: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
43	Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,	<i>A Collection of Poems in six volumes. By several hands. Vol. iv.</i>
44	Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?	London, 1765 [1st ed. 1758].
45	Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid	1768: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
46	Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray. A new edition. London, 1768 [1st ed. 1768].</i>
47	Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,	1768: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
48	Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray.</i>
49	But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page	Glasgow, 1768.
50	Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;	1768: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
51	Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray.</i>
52	And froze the genial current of the soul.	Dublin, 1768.
53	Full many a gem of purest ray serene,	1768: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
54	The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:	<i>Carmen Elegiacum. In coemeterio rustico compositum. [By Robert Lloyd, 1762.]</i>
55	Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray.</i>
56	And waste its sweetness on the desert air.	Dublin: W. Sleater, 1768, 117-125.
57	Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast	1768: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
58	The little tyrant of his fields withstood;	<i>Poems by Mr. T.</i>
59	Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,	Gray. Cork, 1768.
60	Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.	1771: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
61	The applause of listening senates to command,	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray. A</i>
62	The threats of pain and ruin to despise,	
63	To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,	
64	And read their history in a nation's eyes,	
65	Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone	
66	Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;	
67	Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,	
68	And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,	
69	The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,	
70	To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,	
71	Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride	
72	With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.	
73	Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,	
74	Their sober wishes never learned to stray;	
75	Along the cool sequestered vale of life	
76	They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.	
77	Yet even these bones from insult to protect	
78	Some frail memorial still erected nigh,	

79	With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,	<i>new edition</i> . London,
80	Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.	1771:
81		(/cgi-
82	Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered muse,	bin/view.cgi?
83	The place of fame and elegy supply:	collection=primary&edition
84	And many a holy text around she strews,	<i>Poems by Thomas</i>
85	That teach the rustic moralist to die.	<i>Gray</i> . Dublin, 1771.
86		1772: (/cgi-
87	For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,	bin/view.cgi?
88	This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,	collection=primary&edition
89	Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,	<i>Elegia Inglese, del</i>
90	Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?	<i>signor Tommaso</i>
91		<i>Gray, sopra un</i>
92	On some fond breast the parting soul relies,	<i>cimitero di</i>
93	Some pious drops the closing eye requires;	<i>campagna,</i>
94	Ev'n from the tomb the voice of nature cries,	<i>trasportata in verso</i>
95	Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.	<i>italiano dall' A[bate].</i>
96		<i>M[elchior].</i>
97	For thee, who mindful of the unhonoured dead	<i>C[esarotti]</i> . Padua,
98	Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;	1772.
99	If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,	1773: (/cgi-
100	Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,	bin/view.cgi?
101		collection=primary&edition
102	Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray.</i>
103	'Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn	Glasgow, 1773.
104	'Brushing with hasty steps the dew away	1773: (/cgi-
105	'To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.	bin/view.cgi?
106		collection=primary&edition
107	'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray.</i>
108	'That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,	Edinburgh, 1773.
109	'His listless length at noontide would he stretch,	1775: (/cgi-
110	'And pore upon the brook that babbles by.	bin/view.cgi?
111		collection=primary&edition
112	'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,	<i>The Poems of Mr.</i>
113	'Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,	<i>Gray. To which are</i>
114	'Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,	<i>prefixed Memoirs of</i>
115	'Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.	<i>his Life and Writings</i>
116		<i>by W[illiam]. Mason.</i>
117	'One morn I missed him on the customed hill,	York, 1775.
118	'Along the heath and near his favourite tree;	1775: (/cgi-
119	'Another came; nor yet beside the rill,	bin/view.cgi?
120	'Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;	collection=primary&edition
121		<i>Poems by Mr. Gray. A</i>
122	'The next with dirges due in sad array	<i>new edition.</i>
123	'Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne.	Edinburgh, 1775.
124	'Approach and read (for thou can'st read) the lay,	1775: (/cgi-
125	'Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'	bin/view.cgi?
126		collection=primary&edition
127	<i>The Epitaph</i>	<i>Poems by Mr. Gray.</i>
128		Dublin, 1775.
129	<i>Here rests his head upon the lap of earth</i>	1775: (/cgi-
130	<i>A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.</i>	bin/view.cgi?
131	<i>Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,</i>	collection=primary&edition
132	<i>And Melancholy marked him for her own.</i>	<i>Elegia scritta in</i>
133		<i>Cimiterio di</i>
134	<i>Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,</i>	
135	<i>Heaven did a recompense as largely send:</i>	

123 He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
124 He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend.

125 No farther seek his merits to disclose,
126 Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
127 (There they alike in trembling hope repose)
128 The bosom of his Father and his God.

Gray's annotations

- 1 [tolls]
[Era gia l' ora, che volge 'l disio
A' naviganti, e 'ntenerisce 'l cuore
Lo di ch' han detto a' dolci amici addio:
E che lo nuovo peregrin d' amore
Punge, se ode] — squilla di lontano
Che paia 'l giorno pianger, che si muore.
[(It was already the hour which turns back the desire
Of the sailors, and melts their hearts,
The day that they have said good-bye to their sweet friends,
And which pierces the new pilgrim with love,
If he hears) — from afar the bell
Which seems to mourn the dying day.]
Dante. Purgat. l. 8. [Canto 8 lines i-vi.]
- 92 Ch'i veggio nel pensier, dolce mio fuoco,
Fredda una lingua, & due begli occhi chiusi
Rimaner doppio noi pien di faville.
[For I see in my thoughts, my sweet fire,
One cold tongue, and two beautiful closed eyes
Will remain full of sparks after our death.]
Petrarch. Son. 169. [170 in usual enumeration]
- 127 — paventosa speme. [— fearful hope]
Petrarch. Son. 114. [115 in usual enumeration]

Campagna. [By
Abbate Crocchi of
Sienna.] Poems by
Mr. Gray. Dublin: W.
Sleater, 1775, 153-
166.

1775: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition=
Elegia inglese del
signor Tommaso
Gray, sopra un
cimitero di campagna
trasportata in versi
latini, e volgari. [By G.
Costa and G.
Gennari, respectively,
1772.] Poems by Mr.
Gray. Dublin: W.
Sleater, 1775, 189-
211.

1775: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition=
Carmen Elegiacum.
In coemeterio rustico
compositum. [By
Robert Lloyd, 1762.]
Poems by Mr. Gray.
Dublin: W. Sleater,
1775, 115-125.

1775: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition=
Elegia, scripta in
Coemeterio Rustico.
Latine reddita. [By
Christopher Anstey
and William Hayward
Roberts, 1762.]
Poems by Mr. Gray.
Dublin: W. Sleater,
1775, 126-151.

1776: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition=
Poems by Mr. Gray. A
new edition. London,
1776.

1776: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition=
Elegia di Tommaso
Gray, poeta inglese,
per esso scritta in un
cimitero campestre,
tradotta in versi
italiani [da Giuseppe
Torelli]. Verona,
1776.

1782: (/cgi-

bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray.*
Edinburg, 1782.

1783: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=secondary&editi
*A Criticism on the
Elegy written in a
Country Church Yard.*
London, 1783.

1787?: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
*The Grave, by Robert
Blair; to which is
added Gray's Elegy.*
London, [1787].

1788: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
*Élégie composée
dans un cimetière de
campagne, traduite
en françois, vers
pour vers, de
l'anglois de Gray, par
P. G. D. B. ... On y a
joint une traduction
de la même pièce, en
vers latins, par un
membre de
l'Université de
Cambridge.* Croydon,
1788.

1793: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
*Elegeia Thomæ Gray,
græcè reddita.* [trans.
John Norbury.]
Etonæ: excudit T.
Pote... 1793.

1794: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
*Elegeia Thomæ Gray
græce reddita.*
Curavit B. E. Sparke,
A.M. Londini:
excudebat J. Nichols.
1794.

1794: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
*Της ελεγειας, ην
Θωμας Γραιος ... εν
κοιμητηριω αγροικω
εζεχυσε μεταφρασις
ελληνικη* [trans.

Charles Coote].
Londini: typis Josephi
Cooper impressus
est hic libellus; ...
1794.

1795: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*Elegia Grayiana
Græce, accedit etiam
Epitaphium in
Ecclesia Episcopali
Bristolensi et Græce
redditum, interprete
Edvardo Tew, A. M.
Coll. Etonens.*
London, 1795.

1798: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray.*
London, 1798.

1799: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray.*
London, [1799].

1799: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray, LL.B.*
London, 1799.

1800: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray, LL.B.*
London, 1800.

1800: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poems of Gray. A
new edition.* London,
1800.

1805: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray.*
London, 1805.

1814: (/cgi-bin/view.cgi?collection=primary&edition=
*The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray.*
London, 1814.

1814: (/cgi-

bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
The Works of
Thomas Gray, Vol. I.
Ed. Thomas James
Mathias. London,
1814.

1816: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
The Works of
Thomas Gray, Vol. I.
Ed. John Mitford.
London, 1816.

1826: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
The Poetical Works of
Thomas Gray.
London, 1826.

1836: (/cgi-
bin/view.cgi?
collection=primary&edition
The Works of
Thomas Gray,
Volume I. Ed. John
Mitford. London,
1836.

audio clip
(/texts/diglib.shtml#avm)
of a reading by
Michael Burrell
(unabridged; run
time: 9 min 35 sec)

audio clip
(/texts/diglib.shtml#avm)
of a reading by Sir
Michael Redgrave
(abridged: ll. 1-20, 29-
36, 41-48, 57-76, 93-
104, 109-116; run
time: 4 min 43 sec)