

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD.

First published in 1751.

An Elegy is a poem or song expressing the writer's feelings of sorrow or mourning. The churchyard referred to in the poem is that of Stoke Pogis in Buckinghamshire, where Gray's mother lived during the latter part of her life. Gray is buried in this churchyard.

8. yonder ivy-mantled tower. The tower of the village church at Stoke Pogis.

13. that yew-tree's shade. It has been suggested that this should read, "that yew-trees shade," because the yew is not a large tree. In that case the meaning would be "those rugged elms that shade the yew-trees of the churchyard."

16. rude. Lacking refinement, unpolished.

17. incense-breathing. Breathing fragrance.

26. glebe. Sod, turf.

29. Ambition. Ambitious people. Such personification is frequent throughout the poem.

33. The boast of heraldry. The pride of lineage or family descent. Heraldry was the science that dealt with armorial bearings; and a family who were versed in heraldry and knew the meaning and history of their coat-of-arms might be in a position to boast of their lineage.

38. trophies. Memorials to commemorate their great deeds.

39. fretted vault. The arched ceiling ornamented with fretwork.

41. storied urn. A vessel containing the ashes of the dead, and inscribed with a record of his virtues.

animated bust. A life-like image.

43. provoke. Call forth.

41-44. What is the use of such trophies? they cannot bring the dead back to life, and neither honour nor flattery can appeal to those who are dead.

46. pregnant with celestial fire. Filled with the poetic spirit.

48. the living lyre. The musical instrument seeming almost as if it had life.

51. Their poetic fervour (rage) was repressed by poverty.

52. the genial current of their soul. The flow of their finer feelings and emotions.