

## Elegiac Poems<sup>1</sup>

### A Nocturnal Reverie (1713)

By Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea

In such a night, when every louder wind  
Is to its distant cavern safe confined;  
And only gentle Zephyr fans his wings,  
And lonely Philomel, still waking, sings;  
[5] Or from some tree, famed for the owl's delight,  
She, hollowing clear, directs the wand'rer right:  
In such a night, when passing clouds give place,  
Or thinly veil the heav'ns' mysterious face;  
When in some river, overhung with green,  
[10] The waving moon and the trembling leaves are seen;  
When freshened grass now bears itself upright,  
And makes cool banks to pleasing rest invite,  
Whence springs the woodbind, and the bramble-rose,  
And where the sleepy cowslip sheltered grows;  
[15] Whilst now a paler hue the foxglove takes,  
Yet checkers still with red the dusky brakes  
When scatter'd glow-worms, but in twilight fine,  
Shew trivial beauties, watch their hour to shine;  
Whilst Salisb'ry stands the test of every light,  
[20] In perfect charms, and perfect virtue bright:  
When odors, which declined repelling day,  
Through temp'rate air uninterrupted stray;  
When darkened groves their softest shadows wear,  
And falling waters we distinctly hear;  
[25] When through the gloom more venerable shows  
Some ancient fabric, awful in repose,  
While sunburnt hills their swarthy looks conceal,  
And swelling haycocks thicken up the vale:  
When the loosed horse now, as his pasture leads,  
[30] Comes slowly grazing through th' adjoining meads,  
Whose stealing pace, and lengthened shade we fear,  
Till torn-up forage in his teeth we hear:  
When nibbling sheep at large pursue their food,  
And unmolested kine rechew the cud;  
[35] When curlews cry beneath the village walls,  
And to her straggl'ing brood the partridge calls;

---

<sup>1</sup> All poems in the public domain.

Their shortlived jubilee the creatures keep,  
Which but endures, whilst tyrant man does sleep;  
When a sedate content the spirit feels,  
[40] And no fierce light disturbs, whilst it reveals;  
But silent musings urge the mind to seek  
Something, too high for syllables to speak;  
Till the free soul to a composedness charmed,  
Finding the elements of rage disarmed,  
[45] O'er all below a solemn quiet grown,  
Joys in th' inferior world, and thinks it like her own:  
In such a night let me abroad remain,  
Till morning breaks, and all's confused again;  
Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed,  
[50] Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued.

### Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard (1751)

By Thomas Gray

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
    The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
    And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

[5] Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,  
    And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
    And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r  
    [10] The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such, as wand'ring near her secret bow'r,  
    Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
    Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,  
[15] Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,  
    The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
    The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
    [20] No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:  
No children run to lisp their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

[25] Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;  
How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
[30] Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
[35] Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,  
If Mem'ry o'er their tomb no trophies raise,  
Where thro' the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault  
[40] The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

[45] Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,  
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page  
[50] Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;  
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:

[55] Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast  
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;  
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
[60] Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,  
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,  
And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,

[65] Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone  
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;  
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,  
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,  
[70] To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,  
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride  
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,  
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;  
[75] Along the cool sequester'd vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,  
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,  
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,  
[80] Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,  
The place of fame and elegy supply:  
And many a holy text around she strews,  
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

[85] For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,  
[90] Some pious drops the closing eye requires;  
Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,  
Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead  
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;  
[95] If chance, by lonely contemplation led,  
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,  
"Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn  
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away  
[100] To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,  
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,  
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

[105] "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he would rove,  
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

"One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,  
[110] Along the heath and near his fav'rite tree;  
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

"The next with dirges due in sad array  
Slow thro' the church-way path we saw him borne.  
[115] Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,  
Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

#### THE EPITAPH

*Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,  
[120] And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.*

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:*

*He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,  
He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.*

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