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# Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard

By Thomas Gray.

## INTRODUCTION

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard is a poem by Thomas Gray. It was written in the year 1750 and published in 1751. How it came in Gray's mind but it was partly inspired by Gray's own thoughts and feeling following the death of a poet Richard West in 1742. The original titled was Stanzas Wrote in a Country Churchyard. After finishing the poem Gray sent to his friend Horace Walpole, who popularized the poem among London literary circles.

AN EXPOSITION OF THOUGHTS The poem is an elegy in name but not in form. It depicts a style equivalent to contemporary Ode (song). It gives emphasis on meditation on death and remembrances after death. The poem is claimed as best known and best loved one in English. It was printed many times and translated in many languages. Even critics dismissed other poems <sup>but</sup> praised this poem.

An elegy came to be known as a poem of mourning for the dead. In an elegy the theme is the main thing but not form. The theme of the

elegy must be mournful or sadly reflectively one.

Tennyson's Break, Break, Break is an example of elegy in expressing personal grief in a simple manner. Matthew Arnold's Rugby Chapel is the poet's direct expressing of grief on the death of his father and it is characterized by the sincerity of emotion. Tennyson's In Memoriam is a collection of lyrics on the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. The best known examples of the pastoral elegy in English are Milton's Lycidas, Shelley's Adonais and Arnold's Thyrsis.

Gray's elegy differs from the elegies written by other poets. Gray does not mourn the death of a friend but the death of poor people in general. Gray's Elegy is for the simple, unnamed people who lie buried in a quiet churchyard probably in the village Stoke Pogis. The poet speaks of their simplicity and their ordinariness. The poet speaks of a country churchyard at sun set which impels him to remember and invoke the classical idea of *memento mori* in Latin which means, "Remember that you must die."

The poet considers the fact that in death there is no difference between the great and common people.