

## Elegy - Written in a Country Churchyard

Rick Wakeman

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lee  
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way  
And leaves the world to darkness  
And to me  
Now fades the glimmering landscape on the site  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds  
Save where the beetle wheels his drowning flight  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds  
Save that from yonder isly mantle tower  
The moping owl doest to the moon complain  
Of such as, wondering near her secret bower  
Molest her ancient solitary reign  
Beneath those rugged elms that yew tree shade  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid  
The rude forefathers of the hamlets  
The breezy call of incense breathing morn  
The swallow twittering from the strawdirt church  
The cock's shrill clarion of the echoing hoard  
No more to arouse them from their noble death  
For them no more the blazing hearths will burn  
Or busy housewives ply their evening care  
No children run to list their sires return  
Or climb his knees, the envied kiss to share  
Oft' did the harvest to their sick weald  
Their furrow oft' a stubborn glebe was broke  
How jockeyed did they drive their team afield  
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke  
Let not ambition rock their useful toil  
Their homely joys and destiny obscure  
Nor grandeur here with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor  
The boast of heraldry  
The pomp of power  
And all that beauty  
All that wealth 'er-gave  
Awakes alike the inevitable hour  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave  
Nor you 'ere prow  
Impute to these the fault of memory  
Or their tool no trophies raise  
Where through the long drawn aisle  
Of threaded vault  
The peeling anthem swells a note of praise  
The stored urn or animated bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath  
Can honour's voice provoke the silent dust  
Or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death  
Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid some heart  
Once pregnant with celestial fire  
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed  
Or wake to ecstasy  
The living liar  
The knowledge to their eyes  
Her ample page  
Rich with the spoils of time

Did n'er unroll  
'Til penury repressed their noble rage  
And froze the genial current of the soul  
For many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear  
For many a flower is born to blush unseen  
And wasted sweetness on the desert air  
Some village hamlet  
But with dauntless breast the little tyrant of his fields  
Withstood some mute and glorious pilgrim  
Here may rest  
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood  
The applause of listening senates to command  
The threats of pain and ruin to despise  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land  
And weave their history in a nation's eyes  
Their lot forbade  
Nor circumscribed alone their growing virtues  
But their crimes confide  
The mad to wade through slaughter to a throne  
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind  
The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide  
To quench the blushes of ingenious shame  
Or heat the shrine of luxury and pride  
With incense kindled at the muses' flame  
Far from the madding crowds  
In noble strife  
Their sober wishes never learned to stray  
Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way  
Yet in these bones, from insult  
To protect some frail memorial  
Still erected high  
With uncouth rhymes  
And shapeless sculptured debt  
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh  
Their name  
Their years  
Spelt by the unlettered muse  
The place of fame and elegy supply  
And many a holy text around she strews  
That teach the rustic moralist to die  
For who, to dumb forgetfulness at pray  
This pleasing anxious being 'er resigned  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day  
Or cast one longing, lingering look behind  
On some fond breast the parting soul relies  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires  
E'en from the tomb  
The voice of nature cries  
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires  
To thee, who mindful of the un-honoured dead  
Doest in these lines their artless tale relate  
If chance, by lonely contemplation led  
To some kindred spirit, should enquire thy fate  
Happily some hoary headed swain may say  
Oft' we've seen him at the peep of dawn  
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away  
To meet the sun upon the aplen lawn  
There at the foot of yonder nodding beach  
That weaves its old fantastic route so high  
Its listless length at moontide  
Would he stretch

And pour upon the brook that babbles by  
Hard by yon wood  
Now smiling at him scorn  
Muttering his wayward fancys he would roam  
Now drooping  
Would for one  
Like one forlorn  
Or crazed with care  
Or crossed in hopeless love  
One morn' I missed him on the 'customed hill  
Along the heath  
And near his favourite tree  
Another came  
Nor yet beside the rill  
Nor up the lawn  
Nor at the wood was he  
The next  
Its dirges due in sad array  
Slow through the churchway path  
We saw him borne  
Approach and read  
For thou canst read  
The ley graved on the stone  
Beneath yon aged thorn  
Here rests his head  
Upon the lap of earth  
The youth to fortune and to fame unknown  
Fair science frowned not on his humble birth  
And melancholy marked him for her own  
Large was his bounty  
And his soul sincere  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send  
He gave to misery all he had  
A tear, he gained from heaven  
T'was all he wished  
A friend  
No father 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