

# Elegy

## Definition of Elegy

Elegy is a form of literature which can be defined as a poem or song in the form of elegiac couplets, written in honor of someone deceased. It typically laments or mourns the death of the individual.

Elegy is derived from the Greek work “elegus”, which means a song of bereavement sung along with a flute. The forms of elegies we see today were introduced in the 16th century. “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” by Thomas Gray and “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” by Walt Whitman are the two most popular examples of elegy.

## Features of Elegy

- Usually, elegies are identified by several characteristics of genre:
- Just like a classical epic, an elegy typically starts with the invocation of the muse and then proceeds by referencing to the traditional mythology.
- It often involves a poet who knows how to phrase the thoughts imaginatively in the first person.
- Questions are raised by the poet about destiny, justice and fate.
- The poet associates the events of the deceased with events in his own life by drawing a subtle comparison.
- This kind of digression gives the poet space to go beyond the main or crude subject to a deeper level where the connotations might be metaphorical.
- Towards the end the poet generally tries to provide comfort to ease the pain of the situation. The Christian elegies usually proceed from sorrow and misery to hope and happiness because they say that death is just a hindrance in the way of passing from the mortal state into the eternal state.
- An elegy is not always based on a plot.

## Function of Elegy

Elegy is one of the richest literary forms because it has the capacity to hold emotions that deeply influence people. The strongest of the tools elegy uses is its

reliance on memories of those who are no more. Most of the poets who wrote elegies were evidently awed by the frailty of human beings and how the world completely forgets about the deceased at some point.

However, the function of elegy is not as limited as it is thought. Whenever we take a look at elegy examples, what come to mind are feelings like sorrow, grief and lamentation; but, a study of the Latin elegy tells us otherwise. A great deal of genre created in western literature was inspired by Latin elegy, which was not always so somber. The most famous elegiac poets in Latin literature such as Catullus, Ovid and Propertius, used humor, irony, even slotted narratives into a poem and still called them elegy.