

EBB TIDE

(on re-reading Gray's "Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard")

I knew this place long years ago: was raised
in neighbouring Upton – baptized, confirmed
and married in a Norman church
whose yew tree shade succumbed in '78,
800 years after its own baptism in that rich soil.

A chipping from its trunk, carved cross-shape,
stands still on my cliff-top window-sill.

Now, as I read Gray's Elegy, my salt-encrusted heart
retreats inland – not to the rat-race babel of today,
nor to my old St Laurence church, but to the churchyard
in Stoke Poges where that ploughman plodded
his weary way and where my springtide love and I first met;

for even though the sun went down upon our union,
I recall that hush of early evening; the blush of sunset;

and I know the soul can be at peace – even this night
when motorbikes and cars rage near that holy place
filling the air with petrol fumes and razzmatazz,
for beetles wheel still on their droning flight
unaided by technology and Man;

while owls survey with an unswerving eye
the coming gloom, as only night-owls can.

Seagulls will sweep detritus out to sea: but I'll still cling
to memories – rising at dusk above a country churchyard
like a murmuration of starlings.

Carolyn King