

Elizabeth Tollet, “In Memory of the Countess of Winchelsea”

**Description**

ELIZABETH TOLLET

“In Memory of the Countess of Winchelsea”

—Effugiunt avidos carmina sola rogos. Ovid.

Sad *Cypress* and the Muses Tree  
Shall shade *Ardelia's* sacred Urn:  
These with her Fame and Fate agree,  
And ever live, and ever mourn.

While ev'ry Muse with vocal Breath 5  
In moving Strains recites her Praise:  
And there assumes the *Cypress* Wreath,  
And on her Tomb resigns the Bays.

What Pow'r shall aid the Virgin Choir 10  
To make her Worth and Virtue known?  
Who shall the Sculptor's Art inspire  
To write them on the lasting Stone?

The honour'd Streams of ancient Blood,  
And Titles, are by Fortune giv'n: 15  
But to be virtuous, wise, and good,  
Derives a kindred Claim from Heav'n.

Virtue, and Wit in Courts admir'd,  
The shining Pattern shall diffuse:  
Nor, tho' to private Life retir'd,  
Are lost, but flourish with her Muse. 20

Of those the *Sister-Nine* shall sing,  
Yet with their Voice their Verse shall pass:  
And Time shall sure Destruction bring  
To wounded Stone, or molten Brass.

Tho' Titles grace the stately Tomb, 25  
Vain Monument of mortal Pride!  
The Ruins of the mould'ring Dome  
Its undistinguish'd Heap shall hide.

Wit, which outlasts the firmest Stone,  
    Shall, *Phoenix*-like, its life prolong;  
No Verse can speak her but her own,  
    The Spleen must be her fun'ral Song.

30

**NOTES:**

**Title** *Countess of Winchelsea* The poet Anne Finch (1661-1720); she gained her title in 1712 when her husband, Heneage Finch, became the 5th Earl of Winchilsea.

**Epigraph** *Effugiunt avidos carmina sola rogos* "Only songs escape the greedy funeral pyres." From Ovid's "Elegy on the death of Tibullus," *Amores* iii.9.

**1** *Cypress* In ancient Greece, the cypress tree was associated with sorrow, and was often planted near graves to ward off evil spirits; *Muses Tree* The laurel tree, associated in ancient Greece with Apollo and the muses.

**2** *Ardelia* Literary name or pseudonym used by Anne Finch; *Sacred Urn* Used to hold ashes.

**21** *Sister-Nine* The nine muses. Goddesses of science, literature, and art.

**27** *mouldering Dome* That is, the decaying tomb, or monument, that marks Finch's grave.

**30** *Phoenix* Mythological bird with the ability to resurrect. After the phoenix dies in a self-made fire, it is reborn and rises from its own ashes.

**32** *The Spleen* An ode written by Anne Finch, first published in 1701.

**Source:** *Poems on Several Occasions. With Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle* (London, 1755), pp. 49-50. [Google Books]

*Edited by Talia Uribe*