

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE CRITICISM OF THE WORK OF  
WILLIAM COLLINS, 1765-1967

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## PREFACE

The first two chapters of this thesis owe a great debt to the work of Edward Gay Ainsworth who, in his book Poet Collins (N.Y., 1937) has traced the growth of the poet's reputation and influence up to the end of the nineteenth century. I have not in these chapters attempted to repeat Ainsworth's conclusions, but have instead described more fully the works of several important writers whose views he discusses only briefly.

The scope of my survey extends from 1751 to 1907, when a definitive edition of Collins' poetry had still not been published. This defect has since been remedied by the publication in 1965 of Roger Lonsdale's Poems of William Collins and Goldsmith (London, Longmans), and I have based my reading of Collins' poems on this text.

Throughout my thesis I have used the possessive form. All sources used in this thesis have been acknowledged, and the thesis is my own composition.

.. Carol F. Hurv. ..

PREFACE

The first two chapters of this thesis owe a great debt to the work of Edward Gay Ainsworth who, in his book Poor Collins (N.Y., 1937) has traced the growth of the poet's reputation and influence up to the end of the nineteenth century. I have not in these chapters attempted to repeat Ainsworth's conclusions, but have instead described more fully the works of several important writers whose views he discusses only briefly.

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Throughout my thesis I have used the possessive form 'Collins'', and have amended all quotations accordingly.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED:

- Epistle to Hanmer      An Epistle: Addressed to Sir Thomas Hanmer, on his edition of Shakespeare's Works.
- Odes      Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects.
- Highlands Ode      An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry.

The first attempt to edit the complete works was made by Dr Langhorne in 1764, and it is with this that the edition of Collins really begins.

The Monthly Review for January 1765 contained a review, apparently written by Dr Langhorne, of the previous December's *Biographical Dictionary*. The author states his belief that Collins is a greater lyric poet than any of his contemporaries, and singles out certain poems for praise or commendation. He thinks that 'The Muse be Fear'd' is so sprightly, so expressive, and so picturesque throughout, that we have seen no lyric performance superior to it in the English language. He finds it less easy to praise the 'Ode on the Spectral Character', which he finds 'too extremely wild and extravagant that it seems to have been written wholly during the tyranny of imagination'. But the

Collins, *Complete Works*, Ed. G. G. Smith, pp. 721-25.  
 The review of Collins's work in the *Biographical Dictionary* is to be found in the early part of Langhorne's 'Life' of Collins in *ibid.*, pp. 124-125.  
 The review of Collins, in his 'Ode on the Spectral Character' is in *ibid.*, pp. 124-125. Langhorne writes this review.

## CHAPTER 1

18th Century

During the lifetime of William Collins there were many printed references to his poetry, often alluding to his neglect by the general public.<sup>1</sup> His popularity began to grow after the publication of his works in Fawkes and Woty's Poetical Calendar for November and December 1763, which included most of his poems and a biographical memoir, written by Dr Johnson.<sup>2</sup> The first attempt to edit the complete works was made by Dr Langhorne in 1765, and it is with this that the criticism of Collins really begins.

The Monthly Review for January 1764 printed a review, apparently written by Dr Langhorne, of the previous December's Poetical Calendar.<sup>3</sup> The author states his belief that Collins is a greater lyric poet than any of his contemporaries, and singles out certain poems for praise or exoneration. He thinks that 'The "Ode to Fear" is so nervous, so expressive, and so picturesque throughout, that we have seen no lyric performance superior to it in the English language.' He finds it less easy to praise the 'Ode on the Poetical Character', which he finds 'so extremely wild and exorbitant that it seems to have been written wholly during the tyranny of imagination'. But the

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Cited by E.G. Ainsworth, Poor Collins, pp.223-25.

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Not acknowledged as Johnson's work in the Poetical Calendar, but later used as the main part of Johnson's 'Life' of Collins in his Lives of the English Poets.

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Sir Egerton Brydges, in his 'Essay on the genius and poems of Collins', Poet. Works, Lond., 1830, says that Langhorne wrote this review.

reviewer praises the poems wherever he can, and concludes by describing Collins as a poet who was too great to achieve popularity.

In the following year, 1765, Langhorne's edition of Collins' poems was published in London. It contains, in addition to the text, 'Memoirs of the author' and Langhorne's 'Observations' on the poems, and so attempts to provide a biographical and critical introduction to Collins and his poems, and to make the poems themselves accessible to the public. Langhorne believes Collins to be a great poet who is not popular with 'the generality of men' because his poems, the producers of 'The higher efforts of imagination', are necessarily 'above their capacity'.<sup>1</sup> Langhorne's version of Collins' life story, which has recently been corrected in many points by P.C. Carver in his book The life of a poet (London, 1967) is a gloomy one. He believes that Collins led an indolent and impecunious life after leaving Oxford, with a mind full of ambitious plans but no energy to carry them out; that he was bitterly disappointed by the lack of public response to his Odes; and that he inherited money from his uncle, Colonel Martin, only when he was already mentally disturbed. As if to make up for the failure of others to appreciate Collins' poetry, Langhorne praises it highly.

In his 'Observations on the Oriental Eclogues' Langhorne, with some exaggeration, claims that 'in simplicity of description and expression, in delicacy and softness of numbers,

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Langhorne ed. 'Memoirs of the poet', p.xii.

and in natural and unaffected tenderness, they are not to be equalled by any thing of the pastoral land in the English language'.<sup>1</sup> Langhorne's belief that Collins' 'Eclogues' are of unequalled merit may perhaps be challenged, but he is an astute enough critic to praise them for their qualities of simplicity, delicacy and tenderness, and so to direct the reader's attention towards some of their most likeable qualities.

Langhorne notes that Collins' 'Eclogues' are only 'Oriental' in their 'scenery and subjects', and that 'the style and colouring are purely European'.<sup>2</sup> He is not disturbed by this disparity between subject and style but must have accepted it as a proper convention, since he too, some years later, wrote an oriental tale in which even the scenery is thoroughly European. Langhorne's hero Solyman lives in a valley on the banks of the Irwan which is inhabited by blackbirds and is covered with 'green thyme' and 'the wanton rose, the daisy pied'.<sup>3</sup> Solyman leaves the valley and goes to India, where he encounters more exotic sights and customs, but, in general, Langhorne's 'Oriental' tale is in tone and style even less 'Oriental' than Collins' 'Eclogues', and illustrates the popularity in the eighteenth century of the pseudo-oriental romance. Langhorne knows that Eastern poetry is characteristically 'bold, wild and unconnected in its figures, allusions and parts, and has all that graceful and magnificent daring which characterises its metaphysical and comparative imagery'.<sup>4</sup> But he does not expect Collins' poetry to exemplify

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1 Langhorne ed., p.114.

2 Ibid.

3 Langhorne, Solyman and Almena, Lond., Harrison & Co., 1781, p.10.

4 Langhorne ed., p.113.



these characteristics because its subject is nominally an 'oriental' one.

In his 'Observations on the odes', in which he reveals his great admiration of Collins' poetry, Langhorne's comments again show him to be very much a man governed by the conventions of his time. 'The Passions' was Collins' most popular poem,<sup>1</sup> so Langhorne can confidently feel that 'there may be very little hazard in asserting that this is the finest ode in the English language'.<sup>2</sup> But he writes defensively about the more difficult and controversial 'Ode on the Poetical Character' that 'This ode is so infinitely abstracted and replete with high enthusiasm that it will find few readers capable of entering into the spirit of it, or of relishing its beauties'.<sup>3</sup> Thus Langhorne tempts the reader to enjoy the poem, and to feel a pleasurable sense of intellectual superiority in being able to appreciate it. But his method of overcoming a possible reluctance on the part of a reader to admire one of Collins' poems is sometimes even less subtle than this. When insisting that the absence of rhyme does not spoil the 'Ode to Evening' he cites the example of an unnamed 'lady to whom Nature has given the most perfect principles of taste' as an inducement to the reader not to be perturbed by the unrhymed lyric.<sup>4</sup> The comments shortly to be made by Mrs Barbauld, which will be cited later in this chapter, show however that Langhorne was right in feeling it necessary to plead for the poem's merits as an unrhymed lyric,

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<sup>1</sup> The Gentleman's Magazine, lii (1782), p.22 mentions the 'frequent public recitals' of 'The Passions'.

<sup>2</sup> Langhorne ed., p.181.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.157.

since this verse form was unusual and therefore, to eighteenth-century readers, suspect.

Langhorne's praise of Collins poetry is sometimes excessive, and he is too eager to excuse its defects. Thus he criticises two lines of the fourth 'Eclogue' because the scenes described in them are 'undiversified', but insists that this 'could not proceed from the poet's want of judgement, but from inattention'.<sup>1</sup> But he recognises that the 'Epistle to Hanmer' is not a very good poem, although he feels bound to insist that 'it has still more [merit] than the subject deserves'.<sup>2</sup> He occasionally reveals himself as an astute critic and, of the 'Dirge in Cymbeline' and 'Ode on the death of Mr Thomson' notes that 'Mr Collins had skill to complain'.<sup>3</sup> In this phrase he identifies an elusive but important ingredient of Collins' skill, revealed especially in these two pieces. Similarly, in discussing the 'Ode to Evening' he observes that 'No other of Mr Collins' odes is more generally characteristic of his genius', pointing out that the poem shows Collins' 'passion for visionary beings', his 'strong bias to melancholy', his 'taste for what is wildly grand and magnificent in nature' and his 'invariable attachment to the expression of painting'.<sup>4</sup> Here again Langhorne has succeeded in isolating some of Collins' most important characteristics, and has revealed his own clear-sighted appreciation of the poem. Langhorne believed that

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<sup>1</sup> Langhorne ed., p.131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.182.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.183.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.171-3.

Collins' poetry was generally overlooked or underestimated and, in trying to remedy this situation, he praises the poems as much as he can. His criticism is by no means unbiased, but he performed an important service to Collins' memory by issuing his edition of the poems and by his attempt to improve his critical reputation.

Langhorne includes in his text no poems of disputed authorship, printing only the 'Oriental Eclogues', 'Odes', 'Epistle to Hanmer', 'Dirge in Cymbeline', and 'Ode on the death of Mr Thomson'. There are some minor inaccuracies, notably in the 'Ode to Evening'. This is printed in its unrevised version, as it appeared in the 1746 volume of the Odes. Curiously, however, the second line, 'May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear', is taken from the revised version of the poem published in 1748 in the second edition of Dodsley's Collection.<sup>1</sup> But the text is, in general, reliable, and this first edition of Collins' poems, although far from perfect, is in many ways an admirable one.

In 1794 Mrs Barbauld's edition of Collins' poems was published in London. It includes the 'Highlands' ode, and so is more nearly complete than any previously published. Mrs Barbauld includes the 'Highlands' ode and is guilty of allowing a few misprints, like the title 'Ode on the death of Mr Thompson', but in the main she follows Langhorne's text, including his reading of the 'Ode to Evening'. Her version of the 'Highlands' ode is idiosyncratic. She follows the text published by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1784, and points out in her 'Prefatory

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The original version of this line was 'May hope, O pensive Eve, to sooth thine ear.'

Essay' that additions have been made to the text by Carlyle and Mackenzie but she marks with inverted commas only Mackenzie's interpolations, leaving Carlyle's shorter contributions unmarked; and in the sixth stanza she gives only the first eight lines, supplied by Mackenzie and placed accordingly within inverted commas, and omits the rest of the verse, written by Collins. Mrs Barbauld's editorial method is careless, and her text unreliable.

The most valuable part of Mrs Barbauld's book is her 'Prefatory Essay', which provides a lengthy criticism of Collins' poetry. She first discusses what she believes to be the characteristics of lyrical poetry, and states her belief that it is usually inferior to didactic or epic poems, because the lyric is 'so extremely slender, that it requires not only art, but a certain artifice of construction, to work it up into a beautiful piece, and to judge of or relish such a composition requires a practised ear and a taste formed by elegant reading...a scientific and perhaps, in some degree, a factitious taste'.<sup>1</sup> So, to Mrs Barbauld, lyrics can be pleasing but not great or important. She expects them to follow certain rules, and to rhyme. She believes that the 'Ode to Evening' is the best unrhymed lyric ever written, but is certain that 'in the chief object of its construction' it will be regarded as a 'literary curiosity' rather than as an example to other poets.<sup>2</sup> Mrs Barbauld is correct in her surmise that few other poets will be able successfully to imitate the construction of this ode,

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs Barbauld, p.vi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xxxii.

but she shows herself to be a woman conditioned by the more conventional poetry of her time, with its insistence on a rhyme-scheme in lyric poetry, when she says that 'the ear is disappointed' by the 'Ode to Evening'.<sup>1</sup> Langhorne's fear that readers would be so startled by the absence of rhyme that they would fail to recognise the merit of this poem was, apparently, justified, and Mrs Barbauld adds dogmatically that 'however difficult it may be to bind in rhyme the unwilling phrase, the poet should remember that he cannot free himself from a chain but by abandoning an ornament'.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs Barbauld reveals no sympathy with the idea of poetic license, and likes the meaning of a poem to be apparent and unambiguous, and the facts mentioned in the poem to be correct. Thus she sees 'no propriety in calling Thomson a druid or a pilgrim',<sup>3</sup> although Langhorne had found the terms appropriate. But Mrs Barbauld interprets words literally, and her sympathies lie with the poetry of reason and common sense, not with poetry which tries to convey imaginative ideas. She is also upset by the fact that the scene described in the 'Ode on the death of Mr Thomson' is an imaginary one, and reminds us that in reality the church at Richmond is not white, has no spire, and cannot be seen from the river; 'and as to the monument, erected in the last verse to this great Poet, it must be looked on in the light of a prophecy which is not yet fulfilled'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs Barbauld, p.xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xxxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.xliii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.xliv.

Mrs Barbauld's insistence on factual correctness is again revealed in her comments on the 'Ode to Liberty', which she finds 'beautiful' but misleading, since 'The ideas of Liberty referring to ancient states, are formed upon those splendid notions which are imbibed in early youth, and are little applicable to the real and practical principles of just legislation'.<sup>1</sup> In Sparta, she reminds us, the state interfered with the rights of parents to educate their children; there was no religious liberty in the ancient Greek states; and in imperial Rome personal freedom was suppressed. Mrs Barbauld has, apparently, little sympathy with the idea of poetic licence, and to her the distortion of historical fact can only detract from the poem's merit.

It is in her comments on the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' that Mrs Barbauld most fully reveals the extent of her reliance on the conventions of her age. As an eighteenth century christian, accepting her religion with calmness rather than with excessive fervour, her sense of decorum is outraged. She believes that the poem describes the courtship and mating of God and fancy, and finds this 'allegory' 'neither luminous nor decent'.<sup>2</sup> Many other readers of the poem have felt a sense of outrage at this apparent blasphemy, and many alternative explanations of the poem's meaning have been advanced to excuse it.<sup>3</sup> But Mrs Barbauld recognises that the poem, despite its disturbing subject, is in some ways an admirable one. She likes some of the images, and attempts to discover the meaning of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs Barbauld, p.xxx.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> See below, chapters 4-7.

poem, concluding that Collins believed 'that true Poetry being a representation of Nature, must have its archetype in those ideas of the Supreme Mind, which originally gave birth to Nature; and therefore that no one should attempt it without being conversant with the fair and beautiful, the true and perfect, both in moral ideas...and the productions of the material world'.<sup>1</sup> This is a perceptive interpretation of the poem's meaning and shows that, although Mrs Barbauld was subject to the usual prejudices of her time, she was not blinded by them, and could perceive merit in a poem even where the subject displeased her.

More to Mrs Barbauld's taste is the 'Ode to fear', which she judges 'one of the finest in the collection'.<sup>2</sup> She likes the spirited opening and the personifications of fear and danger, but dislikes the poem's division into epode and antistrophe, believing this to be an affectation. She also feels that the closing line, 'And I, O fear, will dwell with thee' is merely a compliment to Milton and not a suitable ending to the poem, since nobody could wish to spend his life with such a companion as fear. Mrs Barbauld is clear-sighted enough to see through pretentiousness in poetry, and so her criticism is often refreshing. Like her own poems, which are usually correct but undistinguished, always unpretentious, and occasionally pleasing, her criticism reveals a mind happy to obey the rules governing the writing of correct eighteenth century poetry, and suspicious of any attempt to exalt the powers of the imagination rather than the dictates of rationality.

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Mrs Barbauld, pp.xxiv-xxv.

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Ibid., p.xx.

Mrs Barbauld's comments often reveal a high degree of perception, as in her interpretation of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'. Sometimes they show too a preoccupation with the more general problems since, in a manner typical of the earlier poets of the eighteenth century, Mrs Barbauld is more interested in problems and ideas which have a universal application than in particular instances. Thus, when discussing 'The Passions', she asks 'Is it because the nature of man is less formed for rapture, than for moderate exhilaration, that when the Poet endeavours to rise from Cheerfulness to Joy, the images are less distinct, and the effect less forcible?'<sup>1</sup> Mrs Barbauld is less enthusiastic about Collins' poetry than was Langhorne, but she finds much to admire in it. She says that he possesses 'imagination, sweetness, bold and figurative language', and the ability to write memorable poems. His sentiment 'is by turns tender and lofty, always tinged with a degree of melancholy, but not possessing any claim to originality'.<sup>2</sup> Mrs Barbauld here appears to be using the word 'originality' in the sense in which it was used by Young, in his 'Conjectures on original composition, in a letter to Sir Charles Grandison', published in 1759. Here Young says that 'Imitations are of two kinds; one of nature, one of authors: the first we call originals, and confine the term imitation to the second'.<sup>3</sup> Mrs Barbauld evidently believes that the emotions expressed in Collins' poetry proceed from intellectual convictions rather

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1 Mrs Barbauld, p.xli.

2 Ibid., p.xliv.

3 The works of the Rev. Dr. Edward Young, vol.4, Edinburgh, Martin & Wotherspoon, 1770, p.260.



than from an unselfconscious response to the natural world, and so are not 'original'. But she grants him some originality 'in the highly figurative garb in which he clothes abstract ideas; in the felicity of his expressions, and his skill in embodying ideal creations', and concludes that 'He had much of the mysticism of poetry, and sometimes became obscure, by aiming at impressions stronger than he had clear and well-defined ideas to support'.<sup>1</sup> This summary, although omitting to mention many important characteristics of Collins' poetry, gives the reader some idea of what to expect from it, and provides an interesting introduction to the poems.

Collins' popularity was obviously increasing, as several other editions of his work were published during the eighteenth century. In Edinburgh in 1773 Balfour and Creech printed The poetical works of Mr. William Collins. To which are added Mr. Hammond's elegies. This volume includes the 'Oriental Eclogues', the 'Odes', with again only the 1746 version of the 'Ode to Evening', the 'Epistle to Hanmer', the 'Dirge in Cymbeline' and the 'Ode on the death of Mr Thomson'. There are no textual notes, and there is no critical comment.

Again in Scotland, in Glasgow, Andrew Foulis printed an ambitious folio-sized edition of Collins' works in 1787. This begins with a 'Life of Mr. Collins' which is apparently a paraphrase of Johnson's 'Life'. Thus Dr Johnson had said 'A man doubtful of his dinner, or trembling at a creditor, is not much disposed to abstract meditation, or remote enquiries'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs Barbauld, p.xlviii.

<sup>2</sup> In Lives of the English poets, Lond., Dent, vol.2, p.313.

In the Foulis edition this becomes 'A man surrounded with wants against which he has made no provision, is seldom disposed to abstract enquiries'.<sup>1</sup> Some incidents not mentioned by Dr Johnson make an appearance here, such as the unproved story that Collins burned all unsold copies of his 'Odes'.<sup>2</sup> But the 'Life' is unoriginal, and tells us nothing not previously said elsewhere.

The text of the poems printed in this folio edition is a good one. The first version of the 'Ode to Evening' is printed, but a note at the back of the book gives variant readings. As well as all the poems printed in the Balfour and Creech edition, Foulis prints the lines 'To Miss Aurelia C - R' with, however no indication that Collins' authorship of this poem is uncertain. Thus by the end of the eighteenth century there had been several attempts to edit Collins' complete works. None of these was fully authoritative, but the number of editions published indicates a growing interest in his poetry and an increase in popular demand for it. But it was not until the next century that a truly scholarly edition of the poems was published.

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Foulis, p.iii.

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This story originated with Thomas Miller, 'Memoir of William Collins'. See Carver, The life of a poet, p.134.

CHAPTER 219th Century

Throughout the nineteenth century Collins' popularity grew steadily, since the romantic elements of his poetry accorded with the poetical climate of the age. Most of the great Romantic poets commented on, or were to some extent influenced by Collins' poetry, as Ainsworth has demonstrated in his book Poor Collins (pages 257-87). The 'romantic' nature of Collins' poetry was widely recognised and somewhat over-emphasized; but there was some criticism which took account of other aspects of his work, and four important editions of the poems were published.

The first of these, edited by Alexander Dyce, was published in London by William Pickering in 1827. It contains a wealth of material: Johnson's 'Life of William Collins'; notes on the 'Life' by Dyce, a list of the chief editions of Collins' works; additional biographical notes by the Reverend John Mitford; Langhorne's 'Observations'; and various explanatory notes by Dyce and others, drawn partly from comments by Thomas Warton and Mrs Barbauld.

Dyce's edition of the poems is a careful one. He prints the first version of the 'Ode to Evening', following Longhorne's edition, but gives in footnotes the changes made when the poem was republished in the second edition of Dodsley's Collection in 1748. The 'Epistle to Hanmer' is printed in its corrected version, with the lines from the 'Verses to Hanmer' which had been changed or omitted supplied in footnotes. Dyce relates the history of Bell's 'London edition' of the 'Highlands' ode

in a note at the back of his book, concluding that 'all doubts seem at last to have subsided'<sup>1</sup> concerning its authenticity; an opinion which he was later to revoke. However he prints the text of Henry Mackenzie's additions to the ode, so that all relevant material is available to the reader. He includes some poems on rather vague grounds. Of the 'Verses written on a paper which contained a piece of bride-cake' he notes that 'I believe this poem was first printed in Pearch's Collection; at least I cannot find it in any earlier publication',<sup>2</sup> but this rather flimsy provenance does not apparently make him doubt that Collins wrote the poem. He also includes the lines 'Young Damon of the Vale is dead' on the authority of a former editor of Collins, called Park, who 'has now forgotten on what authority he gave it as the production of Collins'.<sup>3</sup> Dyce feels that despite this forgetfulness Park must have had good reason to believe the poem to be by Collins, so he includes it in his edition. Dyce also prints the lines 'To Miss Aurelia C - R' without adequate proof of authorship. Thus his edition of the poems contains many flaws, but is important as the first attempt to provide a fully annotated text of Collins' complete works.

William Wordsworth thought highly of Collins, and said that he, Thomson and Dyer, 'had more poetic Imagination than any of their Contemporaries'.<sup>4</sup> After Alexander Dyce published

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<sup>1</sup> Dyce ed., p.203.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.197.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>4</sup> The letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth ed., E. de Selincourt, Oxf., 1939, vol. 1821-1850, p.346 (letter to Dyce, 12 Jan. 1829).

his edition of Collins' poetry Wordsworth wrote to him, giving his reasons for believing that the 'London edition' of the 'Highlands' ode, printed by John Bell in 1788, was a forgery. He recounts the suspicious circumstances of publication of this version of the poem, then cites internal evidence to support his view. He is adamant in his opinion that 'Collins could at no period of his life have suffered so bad a line to stand as They mourned, in air, fell fell Rebellion slain, or such a one as Pale red Culloden where those hopes were drowned'.<sup>1</sup> These lines, missing from the original version of the Ode published in 1788 in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, were supplied by Bell in his 'London edition' and supposed to be genuinely Collins' work. Wordsworth's letter convinced Dyce that this edition of the ode was spurious, and Dyce subsequently repudiated it.

In 1830 William Pickering published another edition of the Poetical works of William Collins. This, the 'Aldine edition' by Sir Egerton Brydges, contains a 'Memoir of Collins' by Sir Harris Nicolas, an 'Essay on the genius and poems of Collins' by Brydges, and Langhorne's 'Observations'. The poems are largely printed as in Dyce's edition, with the addition of the lines 'On our late taste in music'. Nicolas states in his prefatory memoir that he cannot prove that Collins wrote these lines, but that he feels that they are probably his, and so are included in this edition. The spurious 'London edition' of the 'Highlands' ode is printed here, with no mention of the interpolations, although 'variations' are given in footnotes,

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<sup>1</sup>

Ibid., pp.313-16 (letter to Dyce, 29 Oct. 1829).

with no indication that these are Collins' original lines. This is surprising, since in his 'Essay on the genius and poems of Collins' Brydges states that he has no doubt that Bell's version of the ode is not authentic, and that 'There is not one line among these interpolated stanzas which it is possible that Collins could have written'.<sup>1</sup> However when editing the poems Brydges seems to have forgotten this conviction, and Bell's version of the 'Highlands' ode is allowed to stand unchallenged.

The 'Memoir of Collins' by Sir Harris Nicolas is a work compiled from other acknowledged sources, particularly from Johnson's 'Life of Collins' and Dyce's editorial comments. Nicolas warns the reader against Collins' occasional obscurities and other failings, and informs us that he prefers the 'Epistle to Hanmer' and 'Highlands' ode to the 'Oriental Eclogues', although he feels that this admission, since he is the first to make it, 'may possibly be deemed to betray a corrupt taste'.<sup>2</sup> It is unfortunate that Nicolas' comments are so brief, since they indicate an original approach to Collins' poetry.

The 'Essay on the genius and poems of Collins' by Sir Egerton Brydges is, in contrast, filled with excessive praise. Brydges believes that 'Collins is the founder of a new school of poetry of a high class',<sup>3</sup> and goes on to assert that 'Collins' images are as pure, and of as exquisite delicacy, as they are spiritual'.<sup>4</sup> He is not prepared to listen to any criticism of

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<sup>1</sup> 1830 Aldine ed., p.iv.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xxxvii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.xliiii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.xlvi.

Collins, is 'disgusted'<sup>1</sup> by the severity of Dr Johnson's remarks about him, and claims that 'there is not a single figure in Collins' Ode to the Passions which is not perfect, both in conception and language'.<sup>2</sup> Brydges cannot even attempt to criticise the 'Ode to Evening' which, he feels, 'is so subtle that it escapes analysis'.<sup>3</sup> He reaches the conclusion that Collins

lived in an atmosphere above the earth, and breathed only in a visionary world. He was conversant with nothing else, and this must have been the secret by which he produced compositions so highly spiritual.<sup>4</sup>

Brydges' unqualified enthusiasm for Collins' poetry leads him to claim too much for it. But he manages to convey one useful piece of information when he tells us that 'from the time of Langhorne's first edition Collins became a popular poet...and as long as I can remember books, which goes back at least to the year 1770, Collins' poems were almost universally on the lips of readers of English poetry'.<sup>5</sup> This remark must have been overlooked by the many commentators who continued to believe that Collins was never a popular poet.

A clear indication of the demand for Collins' poems in the nineteenth century is given by the fact that although the 'Aldine edition' was reprinted in 1853, another collection was published as early as 1858, edited this time with a proper

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1 1830 Aldine ed., p.lii.

2 Ibid., p.xlvii.

3 Ibid., pp.xlvii-xlviii.

4 Ibid., p.xlix.

5 Ibid., p.lx.

respect for the text by W. Moy Thomas. In his 'Preface' Thomas lists the sources of the poems he includes, and says that he has authenticated from the original authorities all except the 'Epistle to Hanmer', which is reprinted from Dyce's edition, which Thomas feels is an admirable one.

Thomas' 'Memoir of Collins', which follows the Preface, combines biographical material and critical comment. He relates the publishing history of the 'Highlands' ode, and accepts Bell's 'London edition' on the grounds that the Warton brothers, to whom it was dedicated, never repudiated it. However Thomas in a footnote quotes an anecdote showing that Joseph Warton's memory was notoriously bad. Thus it is strange that Thomas should place so much reliance on the fact that the Warton brothers, elderly men when the 'London edition' was published, did not repudiate it. If they had done so they would have demonstrated truly remarkable powers of recall, since Collins showed them the poems, perhaps only once, when they were young men.

Apart from this odd lapse Thomas' edition is a praiseworthy one. He provides variant readings where they exist, includes no poem whose authenticity was at the time questioned, and gives in the 'Memoir' an intelligent discussion of the merits of some of the poems. Although Brydges was unable to analyse the effectiveness of the 'Ode to Evening' Thomas finds no difficulty. He attributes the poem's success to 'the fine tone of tranquil musing which pervades it',<sup>1</sup> and observes that 'The absence of rhyme leaving the even flow of the verse

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<sup>1</sup>

W. Moy Thomas ed., p.liv.



unbroken, and the change at the end of each stanza into shorter lines, as if the voice of the reader dropped into a lower key, contribute to the effect.'<sup>1</sup> But his praise of the poem is not unqualified, since he remarks that 'some obscurity in the invocation arises from the long inversion of the sense'.<sup>2</sup> This is a better discussion of the 'Ode to Evening' than any previously published, and is especially welcome after the indiscriminating and enraptured praise of Sir Egerton Brydges.

Thomas provides new insights in his discussions of the other poems, and particularly in the 'Highlands' ode which he like Sir Harris Nicolas, admires. He finds in it reminiscences of 'Il Penseroso', and feels that in this ode 'the spirit of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" mingles with the more cruel and mystic superstitions of the north'.<sup>3</sup> Thus the critical comment in this edition is valuable, and Thomas has worked hard to edit the poems as well as possible. It served as a substitute for Dyce's edition, now out of print, but did not supersede it.

In addition to the critical essays in the various editions of Collins' poems, several other discussions of his poetry were published during the nineteenth century, further demonstrating his popularity at this time. William Hazlitt appraised Collins' work in his lecture 'On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins etc.' saying that Collins 'had that true vivida vis, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts

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W. Moy Thomas ed., p.liv.

2

Ibid., p.lv.

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Ibid., p.lvii.

of poetry'.<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt believes that, although he was potentially a great poet, Collins was prevented first by 'neglect and pecuniary embarrassment' then by 'the gloom of an unconquerable and fatal malady' from ever fully realising his potential.<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt is generous in his praise of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' from which he says, 'a rich distilled perfume emanates' like 'the breath of genius'.<sup>3</sup> He also admires the 'Ode to Evening' in which, he says, 'The sounds steal slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself'.<sup>4</sup> In the debate on the relative merits of Collins and Gray, Hazlitt concludes that 'Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray: he had more of that fine madness which is inseparable from it'.<sup>5</sup> Thus Hazlitt likes Collins' poetry, and believes that although some of it is very good Collins, had he lived longer, could have written truly great poems.

Later in the century the prolific poet and prose writer Algernon Charles Swinburne expressed his high opinion of Collins' poetry. He wanted to edit a selection of Collins' poetry for T.H. Ward's The English poets, and wrote to Edmund Gosse to inform him of this desire, telling him that 'I hold Collins as facile principem in the most quintessential quality

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1

William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English poets, Oxf., 1924, Lect. IV, pp.178-79.

2

Ibid., p.179.

3

Ibid., p.180.

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Ibid.

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Ibid., p.182.

of a poet proper'.<sup>1</sup> Gosse told Ward of Swinburne's wish to edit Collins, and Ward agreed to let him do so. Swinburne's 'critical introduction' to the poems of Collins which finally appeared in volume three of Wards The English poets: selections (published 1880) was to enjoy a wide circulation and to influence all subsequent critics of Collins for many years.

In the perennial argument on whether Gray or Collins was the greater poet, Swinburne takes Collins' part enthusiastically, stating firmly that 'it is not a question which admits of debate at all, among men qualified to speak on such matters, that as a lyric poet Gray was not worthy to unloose the lachets of his shoes'.<sup>2</sup> He speaks no less strongly of Collins' 'magnificent Highlands ode, so villainously defaced after his death by the most impudent interpolations on record' in the 'London edition' of the poem. He likes the original, unfinished version, and decides that here 'for vigour of virile grasp and reach of possessive eyesight, Burns himself was forestalled if not excelled'.<sup>3</sup> This is high praise, since Swinburne makes it clear that he greatly admires Burns' poetry.

Like many other nineteenth century critics Swinburne thinks that Collins' poems revive ideas dormant since Milton's death: but he feels that Collins' special merit is that he was the first poet 'to blow again the clarion of republican faith and freedom: to reannounce with the passion of a lyric and

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<sup>1</sup> Complete works of A.C. Swinburne (Bonchurch ed.), ed. by Sir E. Gosse & T.J. Wise, vol.18, p.314 (letter to Gosse, 10 Oct. 1879).

<sup>2</sup> Swinburne, vol.14, p.149.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., vol.14, pp.151-52.

heroic rapture the divine right and the god-like duty of tyrannicide'.<sup>1</sup> This rather idiosyncratic interpretation of Collins' ideals is based on the reference in the 'Ode to Liberty' to Alcaeus, to whom Collins mistakenly attributed a poem praising Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who conspired to slay the tyrants of Athens. Swinburne feels that the 'Ode to Liberty' contains some of the noblest lines in the whole of English poetry, but admits rather sadly that the final couplet shows 'not so much the flatness of failure as the prostration of collapse'.<sup>2</sup>

In common with many other critics Swinburne detects an affinity between Collins' poetry and various paintings. He thinks that 'Corot on canvas might have signed his "Ode to Evening"; Millet might have given us some of his graver studies' and that the 'Highlands' ode 'has much in it of Millais and something also of Courbet'.<sup>3</sup> This desire to compare Collins' poetry with different paintings was to seize many later writers, and comparisons of this sort are still being made in some of the most recent works of criticism.<sup>4</sup>

Swinburne is not completely blind to Collins' defects. He thinks that the 'Epistle to Hanmer' shows a sad lack of 'critical instinct',<sup>5</sup> and that the ending of the 'Ode to Liberty'

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<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, vol.14, p.152.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.151.

<sup>4</sup> See chapters 4-7 below.

<sup>5</sup> Swinburne, vol.14, p.154.

is a failure. But he certainly believes that Collins was the only true lyrical poet of his generation, describing him as 'a solitary song-bird among many more or less excellent pipers and pianists'.<sup>1</sup> His opinions dominated most discussions of Collins' poetry for more than forty years after their publication in 1880, and eventually led H.W. Garrod, in 1918, to write a book redressing the balance.

At about the time that Swinburne was becoming interested in Collins' poetry many other critics commented on it favourably. The American writer J.R. Lowell feels that Collins was historically important as the reviver of 'a harmony that had been silent since Milton', but does not go nearly so far as Swinburne in comparing the ideas of the two. He is delighted by the 'Highlands' ode which, he claims, contains 'The whole Romantic School, in its germ no doubt, but still unmistakably foreshadowed'. He also praises Collins for being 'the first to bring back into poetry something of the antique fervour', asserting that he 'found again the long-lost secret of being classically elegant without being pedantically cold'.<sup>2</sup> Thus Lowell sees Collins as a poet looking to the future and the past, as simultaneously the first Romantic and the reviver of the ancient beauties of English poetry. This view of Collins was prevalent during the nineteenth century.

Edmund Gosse, Swinburne's editor and close friend, wrote an account of Collins' poetry which reveals that he shares some of Lowell's attitudes. He sees Collins as belonging to a group

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<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, vol.14, p.154.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from J.R. Lowell, My Study Windows, Boston, 1871, p.337.

of poets including Young, Savage, Dyer, Shenstone, Thomson, Gray, and others less well-known, whose works 'mark the faint glow of the coming naturalism'.<sup>1</sup> He shares Swinburne's opinion that Collins wrote some of the best poetry of his century, and praises his 'delicate art of melody', concluding that 'Collins was the type of poet who sings, as the birds do, because he must'.<sup>2</sup> Gosse gives due consideration to the classical qualities of Collins' poetry, seeing in it a sculpturesque effect, but concluding that the verse 'is clearly-cut and direct; it is marble-pure, but also marble-cold'.<sup>3</sup> Like almost everyone else writing about Collins at this time, Gosse feels that he must compare him with Gray, and decides that 'while Gray was the greater intellectual figure of the two, the more significant as a man and writer, Collins possessed something more thrilling, more spontaneous, as a purely lyrical poet'.<sup>4</sup> Finally Gosse reveals that his own estimate of the value of Collins' poetry is a very high one, suggesting that 'It may perhaps be allowed to be an almost infallible criterion of a man's taste for the highest forms of poetic art to enquire whether he has or has not a genuine love for the verses of William Collins'.<sup>5</sup>

Gosse's praise of Collins influenced an American critic, Charles Hunter Ross, who wrote an article called 'William

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1

Gosse, History of 18th century Lit. 1660-1780, Lond., 1889, p.208.

2

Ibid., pp.233 and 235.

3

Ibid., p.233.

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Ibid., p.235.

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Ibid.

Collins' for volume four of the Sewanee Review (1895-96). He too feels that Collins was the leader of a new movement in poetry, and that 'After being imprisoned in dreary and narrow cloisters for half a century' English poetry was led, by Gray and Collins, 'into the beautiful light of a new dispensation'.<sup>1</sup> Both poets wrote in the time of what Ross calls 'the early dawn of naturalism in poetry'.<sup>2</sup> But Ross feels that Collins, although anticipating in some ways the poetry of the Romantic school, treats nature in an essentially non-romantic way. He distinguishes between Chaucer's approach to, and feeling for, nature, and Collins', saying that 'Chaucer looks at nature from the point of view of a man; Collins looks at it from the point of view of an artist'.<sup>3</sup> This is a valid distinction, and it shows how Collins uses the natural world. He seems to be fully in control at all times and is never carried away, as the great Romantic poets sometimes were, by a feeling of deep personal involvement in the natural world. He does not see nature as a manifestation of the divine, and there is no element of pantheism in his poetry.

Ross, then, sees Collins as a poet who lacks warmth and personal involvement in his subject-matter. Echoing Gosse's assessment he states that Collins 'has chiselled out his poetical material into a beautiful statue that must be looked at and admired, but whose polish and finish are its chief characteristics'.<sup>4</sup> He distinguishes three main elements of

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<sup>1</sup> Sewanee Rev., vol.4, p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.53.

Collins' poetry: 'beauty of form, a simple expression of natural pictures, and an exact delineation of certain allegorical emotions of the human mind'.<sup>1</sup> This last characteristic is, he believes, the most 'Augustan' and least pleasing of the three. He recognises Collins' excellence as a lyric poet and, inevitably, compares him with Gray, deciding that he is 'superior to Gray in spontaneous outbursts of lyric melody, inferior to him in the organic development and evolution of the ode'.<sup>2</sup> He feels that Collins, although an innovator, was prevented from reaching the heights of poetic greatness by 'the cold, exact and uncritical standards of his day' and concludes that he will only ever be popular with 'the intellectual few'.<sup>3</sup>

Another American critic, Henry A. Beers, goes further than Ross in his interpretation of Collins' feeling for nature. Beers, in attempting to trace the growth of English romanticism, seizes on Collins' poetry as an example of the beginnings of this movement. He considers that Collins was a member, with Gray, Mason, and the Warton brothers, of a new group of lyrical poets who were influenced by Milton's earlier, more 'romantic' poetry, but not by his later, more 'classical' works. In this way, Beers is able to regard the 'Ode to Evening' as the culmination of 'the thoughtful, scholarly fancy of the more purely romantic poets', who 'haunted the dust' and whose imagery was 'crepuscular'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sewanee Rev., vol.4, p.51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>4</sup> Beers, History of English romanticism in the 18th century, N.Y., 1968 (first pub. 1899), pp.164-65.



Beers agrees with Gosse's judgement of Collins on several points. He too feels that Collins is 'among the choicest of English lyrical poets' and like Gosse and Swinburne, hears 'a flute-like music in his best odes'.<sup>1</sup> He refers to Gosse's remark that Collins' poetry is 'marble pure' and 'marble cold', and attributes the coldness to 'the abstractness of his subjects and the artificial style which he inherited, in common with all his generation'.<sup>2</sup> He compares Collins with Gray, concluding that his best odes 'are sweeter, more natural, and more spontaneous' than Gray's, but that Gray is more important in the intellectual history of his age. But both of them, Beers concludes, were in their odes 'bookish, literary, impersonal, retrospective. They had too much of the ichor of fancy and too little red blood in them'.<sup>3</sup>

Beers finds the 'Highlands' ode the most interesting and, from his point of view, significant of Collins' poems. He praises it highly, particularly the ninth stanza, which he finds the most imaginative. Beers is using Collins to try to prove his theory of the growth of English romanticism, and so only single out those aspects of the poems which support his argument. He says little that is new about Collins and exaggerates his romanticism, but expresses many of the opinions of Collins' poetry most commonly held in the nineteenth century. His search for romantic elements was to be continued by many critics, notably by Myra Reynolds, in the next decades.

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1 Beers, p.168.

2 Ibid., p.169.

3 Ibid., p.175.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, in 1898, another edition of the Poems of William Collins was published, in Boston, edited with an introduction and notes by Walter C. Bronson. In his preface Bronson praises Dyce's edition, now out of print, and states that the present edition is 'of broader scope' than any previously published. It contains:

a critical text carefully transcribed from the original editions; variant readings, with their sources and comparative value set forth; numerous notes, including a good deal of new illustrative material; a biographical sketch based as far as possible upon original records (newly verified) and the statements of the poet's contemporaries, the sources and their relative trustworthiness being indicated; and a comprehensive and systematic study of the poetry of Collins.<sup>1</sup>

This is an ambitious list of contents and Bronson does nearly all that he promises, so that his edition of Collins' works is more comprehensive and reliable than any previously published.

In his introduction Bronson, after giving an account of Collins' life, discusses his alleged neglect during the eighteenth century. He points out that Collins' poetry was always appreciated by 'the more intelligent readers in his own century', and that 'the very references to him as "neglected" prove that the judicious few, at least, already knew his worth, and that he had missed rather of popularity than of appreciation'.<sup>2</sup> Some of these contemporary references are quoted to support this statement.

Bronson next discusses 'Collins and Romanticism'. He feels that 'Collins was a romanticist by nature' but that 'elements of a true classicism were deep within him'.<sup>3</sup> He

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1 Bronson, ed., Preface.

2 Ibid., p.xxxi.

3 Ibid., p.xxiv.

gives evidence to support this conclusion both from the comments of Collins' friends and from the poems themselves, again stating his case in a reasoned and convincing manner. He perceptively analyses the 'Ode to Evening', showing that Collins, who 'was literally a visionary', was here, as elsewhere, 'more dreaming than seeing', and was not demonstrating minute or subtle observation of the natural world.<sup>1</sup> For Bronson the poem is marred by a conventional ending, 'with a group of wooden abstractions, stiffly sitting in the "sylvan shed"'.<sup>2</sup> He compares the poem with Keats' 'Ode to Autumn' in which the season of Autumn and the personified figure, Autumn, are identical. In Collins' poem, Bronson says, there is no such fusion, since 'the spirit was as real to him as the hour, and probably he would not have cared to identify the two'.<sup>3</sup> Thus Bronson suggests convincingly that the 'Ode to Evening', often hailed as showing a new attitude towards the natural world, is far from being a 'romantic' poem.

In discussing the 'classical' elements of Collins' poetry Bronson, like many other critics, finds sculptural and picturesque effects. To him, the odes seem 'characterised by a repose, an economy of expression, and a purity of outline which suggest Greek sculpture, the pictures of Raphael, or the tapestries of Mantegna'.<sup>4</sup> He thinks that Collins' most 'classical' poem is the 'Ode to Simplicity' and, not surprisingly, that the

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<sup>1</sup> Bronson ed., pp.xliv and xlvii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xlvii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.xlix.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.li.

least 'classical' is the 'Highlands' ode. Here again Bronson makes a pertinent observation when he suggests that the absence of a didactic point of view in this poem is remarkable, and shows how imaginatively Collins had identified himself with the superstitions he mentions.

Next Bronson, in an 'appreciation of the poetry of Collins', examines the merits and faults of the poems. He decides that Collins, compared with his contemporaries, had 'a conspicuous lyrical gift', but that when compared with the poetry of Coleridge, Shelley, or Swinburne 'the music of Collins' lines seems comparatively commonplace and odd', since the verse 'never soars, and it does sometimes stumble and creep'.<sup>1</sup> Bronson finds many faults in Collins' poetry. He thinks that 'not infrequently the style of the odes is commonplace and flat', and attributes this to the fact that Collins' imagination was limited and 'His vision was confined almost wholly to ideal abstractions...round which gathered his thoughts upon art, freedom, nature and the supernatural'.<sup>2</sup> This lack of a grasp on 'concrete reality' explains, for Bronson, Collins' failure to become a popular poet. He finds Collins lacking in 'purely intellectual powers'<sup>3</sup> and limited in his passions, but thinks that he is prevented from being utterly aloof from the rest of humanity by 'The note of tenderness, of delicate pity blended with fancy, which vibrates again and again in Collins' verse and reveals a nature of remarkable purity and sensitiveness'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bronson ed., p.liv.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.lix-lx.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.lx.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.lxi.

Although he likes many of Collins' poems Bronson feels that all are marred by imperfections except 'How sleep the Brave' which, he says, is 'not only exquisite in parts but perfect as a whole, a diamond of small size but of the finest quality and cutting'.<sup>1</sup> He says that in this poem pathos and fancy are perfectly blended, and compares its delicacy with that of a violet.

Bronson finally concluded that Collins' poetry is good in many ways, and that 'its purity of beauty is a lasting delight'.<sup>2</sup> His discussion of Collins' work was the longest and most ambitious so far published, and contains many new and challenging ideas. Bronson's editorial thoroughness is admirable, and extends to the inclusion of an appendix on the structures of the Odes, one listing references to Collins' poetry in the eighteenth century, and a bibliography which attempts to be as complete as possible to the end of the eighteenth century and to cite some locations of the works listed. The poems themselves are meticulously edited; variant readings are given, and the authentic version of the 'Highlands' ode. Bronson demolishes the claim Bell's 'London edition' of the poem made to authenticity, and proves that the Royal Society of Edinburgh text of the poem is the only acceptable one. Bronson is not certain that Collins wrote the song 'Young Damon of the vale is dead' or the lines 'Written on a paper which contained a piece of bride-cake', and he prints them with notes explaining his

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<sup>1</sup> Bronson ed., p.lxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.lxiv.

doubts about their true authorship. So the texts used are accurate, and where any doubts exist they are acknowledged and explained. The book also contains useful explanatory notes and is in every way an admirable edition of Collins' poems.

Thus in the nineteenth century Collins' poetry became more widely known, and its 'romantic' elements made it popular. By the end of the century there was an edition of the poems which, at last, contained accurate versions of all the poems generally attributed to Collins, with an abundance of biographical and explanatory material, and reasoned criticism. This was to remain the best annotated text of Collins' poems until the publication, in 1969, of Roger Lonsdale's definitive edition.

CHAPTER 31901-1920

In the first twenty years of the twentieth century several essays on Collins were printed and there was an important new edition of his poems, edited by Christopher Stone.

The Academy for 8 December 1906 contained an article by C.R. Stone which makes several points typical of the critical opinion of the time. Stone held the view, later shown to be inaccurate, that Collins was ignored in his own lifetime. He maintains that 'The tendency is to ignore the fact that Collins was an extremely human poet and to ascribe his work to spasmodic fits of supernatural and barely sane inspiration'.<sup>1</sup> He then proceeds to refute this somewhat romantic view by showing that Collins made numerous changes in his manuscripts, and was constantly altering and improving them.

After correcting this misunderstanding, Stone attempts to discredit finally the spurious 'London edition' of the 'Highlands' ode, published by J. Bell in May 1788 and, according to its preface, the complete and final version of the poem. The authenticity of this edition was disputed as early as December 1788, in the Monthly Review, but despite this, and despite much subsequent critical disbelief, it was accepted as Collins' finished poem by many of his editors, as I have shown in the previous chapter. In 1906 the Aldine edition of Collins' poems was published and this, reprinted by stereotype plates from W. Moy Thomas' 1858 edition, contains the spurious 'perfect' edition of the 'Highlands' ode.

<sup>1</sup>Academy, vol. LXXI (1906), p.587.

Christopher Stone, however, felt that 'it must be obvious to the meanest intelligence that the thing is a clumsy forgery'.<sup>1</sup> He asserts that the alterations are obviously not in Collins' style, and cites Swinburne's opinion of 'the magnificent Highlands ode, so villainously defaced after [Collins'] death by the most impudent interpolations on record' in support of this view.<sup>2</sup>

Stone continues to discuss the metre and diction of the ode. He points out that the metre is irregular, and ascribes this to carelessness; but makes the interesting observation that 'the sense always runs on naturally just as if the poet had not observed that he was leaving out a line'.<sup>3</sup> He notes that 'double-barrelled' epithets are less common here than in Collins' earlier works, but that negative epithets like 'unwither'd' and 'unown'd' are used more frequently, indicating that Collins' poetic style was changing.

In 1907 Stone published his edition of Collins' poems, which is not annotated but is textually accurate and incorporates the genuine version of the 'Highlands' ode, first published in March 1788 in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. This was to form the basis of the Oxford edition of the Poems of Gray and Collins, first published in 1919, with a second edition in 1927, a third in 1937, and often reprinted. Stone's edition of the poems was reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement of December 5, 1907, in an article written by John Bailey, entitled 'Collins, Gray and Mr Swinburne'.<sup>4</sup> Bailey

<sup>1</sup> Academy, p.587.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Academy, p.587.

<sup>3</sup> Academy, p.588.

<sup>4</sup> Reprinted in Bailey, Poets & poetry, 1911.



does not fully approve of Stone's edition. He praises the prefatory Memoir, but finds that the only new features of the book are its list of editions of Collins' works, some textual variations, and the omission of the 'Lines to Miss Aurelia C - R', now recognised as not written by Collins. He thinks that Stone's remarks are sometimes carelessly obscure, and that the punctuation of some of the poems should have been corrected. Thus Stone's edition of Collins' works did little to supersede W.C. Bronson's edition of 1898.

John Bailey's article shows that he is in many ways in agreement with Christopher Stone's opinions. Like Stone he feels that Collins was neglected in his own lifetime, saying that Collins 'spoke so softly, and so little, that his own generation was scarcely aware that he had spoken at all'. Like Stone, Bailey mentions Swinburne's opinion of Collins, and he compares Collins with Gray in the light of Swinburne's remarks. He feels that both Collins and Gray were unhappy in the poetic milieu of the eighteenth century, and that both escaped from it, in their moments of highest inspiration, into 'truth and poetry'. He recognises that 'there is a music in Collins at his best that is never to be found in Gray', but decides that Gray's superior intellectual powers make him the greater poet since he 'covers far more ground, he says more, he interests more', and he 'could bring to bear so much more mind on the subjects he took for his poems'.<sup>1</sup> Thus Bailey disagrees with Swinburne's assessment of the relative poetic merits of Collins and Gray, anticipating in this the view to be expressed a few years later by H.W. Garrod.

<sup>1</sup>

All foregoing quotations from T.L.S., 5 Dec. 1907.

A second article by Christopher Stone appeared in the Academy for 12 June 1909, on the 'Ode to Evening'. This article again begins by emphasising Collins' neglect by his contemporaries, especially Cowper. However, Stone's main purpose here is to inveigh against Francis Palgrave for including in his anthology The Golden Treasury, published in 1861, only the first, uncorrected version of the 'Ode to Evening'. The poem was first published in Collins' 1746 volume Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects and was reprinted in 1748 in Dodsley's Collection after Collins had made several important changes, particularly in the beginning and end of the poem. Palgrave printed the first version of the ode, although he took one phrase, 'solemn springs' (instead of 'brawling springs') from the corrected version. Stone quite properly deplores this carelessness on Palgrave's part. Thus again he is performing the task of a scholarly crusader, correcting errors and trying to ensure that Collins' poetry is read in the form in which the poet intended that it should be read.

Three essays written after this date share a preoccupation with William Collins' 'romantic' characteristics, seeing him as the herald of a new movement in English poetry. This is an aspect of Collins which can easily be over-emphasized, and Myra Reynolds perhaps gives it undue weight in her book The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry (Chicago, 1909). She examines the poetry written between the times of Pope and Wordsworth, attempting to trace a pattern in the kind of attention that was being paid to the theme of nature. She points out the general lack of interest in the wilder, more irregular aspects of the

natural world, like mountains, the ocean, and storms, in the poetry of the first part of the eighteenth century. She objects to the poetic diction and the use of stock similes, and concludes that 'Not Nature, but man was the supreme interest', and that in particular 'Man in London was the central thought of the age'.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1730 and 1756, however, Myra Reynolds detects a change of emphasis. She feels that in this period poems were written which helped in the evolution of a new attitude to nature, a real and vital love of the outdoor world for its own sake, and that Collins was a leader of this evolutionary movement. Ignoring those characteristics of Collins which show him to be very much a man of his time, she states that:

Collins possesses many of the qualities and defects of the romantic spirit. He made plans almost as comprehensive and visionary as those of Coleridge. His indolence, his wavering, irresolute disposition, his morbid sensitiveness, the intensity of his emotions, his love of liberty, his passion for 'high romance and Gothic diableries', together with his new sense of the mystery of Nature, set him quite apart from the men who were his friends.<sup>2</sup>

Myra Reynolds particularly likes the 'Ode to Evening', because it reflects accurate and minute observation of the natural world. She approves warmly of the personification of Evening, concluding that 'We seldom find in the eighteenth century personifications so high and spiritual, descriptions so essentially poetical, or workmanship so perfect in its simplicity'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds, Myra, The Treatment of nature in English poetry, Chicago, 1909, p.53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.123.

The gradual rise of the 'Romantic movement' appears to surprise Miss Reynolds. She notes that 'before the work of such men as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott there was a great stir of getting ready. The love of Nature was awake in the hearts of men'.<sup>1</sup> To her, Collins is important primarily as an exemplar of this new attitude. Her criticism of his poetry, then, is necessarily onesided and she does not attempt to examine his less 'romantic' characteristics.

Felix Schelling, writing in 1913, felt, like Myra Reynolds, that Collins helped to usher in a new era in English poetry. Schelling's interest is in the English lyric which, he thinks, suffered a gradual decline during the early eighteenth century. He discerns an affinity between Collins and Gray and says that with them the lyrical spirit revives. He notices that Collins was especially influenced by Milton's 'L'Allegro' and 'Comus', and praises 'the limpid clarity of his diction, the chaste restraint of his figures, his fondness for abstractions personified, and for the music of classical proper names'.<sup>2</sup> In these respects Schelling feels that Collins compares very favourably with Milton. Schelling singles out for special praise the 'Dirge in Cymbeline', the 'Ode to Evening', and the 'Ode to Simplicity' as examples of truly lyrical poetry.

J.W. Mackail, a few years later, closely reflected Felix Schelling's opinion of Collins. In a lecture given at the Royal Society of Literature on 21 January 1920 Mackail stated that

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1 Reynolds, pp.364-65.

2 Schelling, Felix E., The English Lyric, 1913. Reprinted N.Y., 1967, p.134.

after the death of Dryden in 1699 the English lyric 'became faint, mannered and almost voiceless'. Then in 1742 Gray wrote his 'Eton Ode' and 'Hymn to Adversity' and began to compose his 'Elegy', and Collins published the 'Persian Eclogues'. Thus 'it is in that year that the re-emergence of the lyric in England may be definitely fixed'.<sup>1</sup>

J.W. Mackail agrees with Myra Reynolds that Collins was a 'born romanticist', but he disagrees with her in not particularly liking the 'Highlands' odes. In this poem Mackail feels that Collins is 'working to a scale a little beyond his compass', and that 'The note is still pure and clear, but it is appreciably weakened'.<sup>2</sup> However, Mackail again echoes Myra Reynolds' opinions when he detects an affinity between Collins and Coleridge. He tells us that

Even the circumstances of their life, as well as their peculiarities of mental temperament, present curious analogies. Both had, and doubtless had to pay for, a remarkable precocity of genius. Both suffered from languor of mood and infirmity of will. Both wrote with seemingly effortless ease, and with fluctuating inspiration. The poetical production of both, or what matters of it, is confined within a space of five or six years.<sup>3</sup>

Mackail, however, does not suggest that Collins is always a 'pre-romantic' poet. He praises the 'Ode written in the beginning of the year 1746', which he considers is 'divine'. He admires the poem's 'exquisite clarity and unequalled

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Mackail, J.W., Studies of English poets, Lond. 1926, p.139. (Reprint of lecture given at Royal Soc. of Lit., 21 Jan. 1920).

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Ibid., p.149.

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Ibid., p.155.

melodiousness', and finds that the poem 'is neither classical nor romantic', since it transcends style. 'It is simply and wholly right'.<sup>1</sup> In this observation Mackail seems to be moving away from the prevailing view that Collins is important as a 'pre-Romantic' or 'early Romantic' poet, towards a consideration of Collins as a poet in his own right, not part of any movement. This view was to gain currency in the next decade.

Like Christopher Stone and John Bailey, J.W. Mackail mentions Swinburne's assessment of Collins' poetry, which, he feels, contains an element of truth, although expressed in an exaggerated manner. He thinks that Collins is never guilty of Gray's occasional 'minute laboriousness of workmanship'<sup>2</sup> but decides that it is idle to pursue the question of which of the two had the finer poetical genius.

Mackail's criticism of Collins gives an interesting indication of the critical climate of the time. He does not attempt a minute analysis of the poems which especially please him, concluding that the 'Ode to Evening' is 'beyond criticism'.<sup>3</sup> Of Collins' poetry in general, Mackail says that 'His wonderful clarity never deserts him. It is a flowing spring, not drops rung out. His greatest felicities always seem his most spontaneous utterances'.<sup>4</sup> This sort of vague but highly enthusiastic criticism is echoed several times during the next decade, and contrasts strikingly with the tone of most modern criticism of Collins.

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1 Mackail, p.146.

2 Ibid., p.151.

3 Ibid., p.148.

4 Ibid., p.151.

Several trends may be distinguished in the criticism of Collins' poetry during the first twenty years of the present century. Swinburne's opinion of Collins was still widely read, and influenced many critics who, like him, tried to compare Collins' poetry with that of Gray. There was a strong tendency to try to place Collins in a neat pre-Romantic niche in the history of English poetry, and to make generalized statements about his poetic excellence: John Bailey, Myra Reynolds, Felix Schelling, and J.W. Mackail all exemplify this approach. But there was also a growing interest in Collins' poetic technique and method of composition. Christopher Stone was in this respect the most important critic of his time, but during the next decade this interest in the technical aspects of Collins' art was to become more widespread.<sup>1</sup>

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A few other critics were also doing bibliographical work on Collins. G.R. Coffman wrote a brief article called 'Collins and Thomson - a suggestion' (Mod. Lang. Notes, vol.31, pp.378-79), drawing attention to similarities between parts of the 'Highlands' ode and parts of The Seasons.

CHAPTER 41921-1930

During these years criticism of Collins' poetry increased considerably in volume. The first book-length study of Collins was published, and there was a new edition of his poems. There was also a great deal of bibliographical work.

Collins formed the subject of a leading article in the Times Literary Supplement for 29 December 1921, written by John Middleton Murry.<sup>1</sup> The writer discusses the 'Dirge in Cymbeline', and concludes that Collins' poetry 'indicates that he was a man preoccupied with his art' and that 'the activity of his mind seems to have been wholly focussed upon poetic achievement, and his sensibility to have been determined chiefly by his hopes and fears as a poet'. Murry believes that Collins was a very self-conscious poet who lived exclusively through his art, instead of cultivating the life of the senses. Thus he regards Collins as 'an example of the triumphs and dangers of the pursuit of style' which is perilous when it leads to the emotional coldness of some of Collins' poems, but triumphant when it allows him to write the 'Ode to Evening'. When he discusses this poem Murry becomes vague but enthusiastic, echoing the tone of J.W. Mackail's comments of a few years earlier, and describing it as 'a perfect and a great poem'. Thus the tone of this essay is fairly typical of the tone of much critical writing of the early part of the twentieth century.

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Reprinted in Countries of the mind, 1st series, Lond., 1931.



In the years following this three critics, A.D. McKillop, H.O. White, and A.S.P. Woodhouse, were engaged in some valuable bibliographical work on Collins. McKillop felt that the poem 'Young Damon of the vale is dead' may not have been written by Collins, and suggested that the real author may have been the minor poet Henry Headley.<sup>1</sup> He later drew attention to the lost poem 'An epistle to the editor of Fairfax his translation of Tasso', expressing the hope that this and other lost poems by Collins may come to light some day.<sup>2</sup>

In 1922 H.O. White was engaged in a study of Collins and his contemporary critics, and he wrote two letters on this subject to the Times Literary Supplement of 5 January and 12 January 1922. The first letter lists printed references to Collins in his own lifetime, proving that Christopher Smart, Oliver Goldsmith, and John Gilbert Cooper, among many others, referred in print to Collins. White concludes that this evidence 'does not testify to a widespread popularity, nor even to a general recognition of Collins by the arbiters of literary good taste', since 'the allusions are tardy and desultory'. But despite their nature, the number of allusions to Collins printed in his own lifetime prove that previous critics were incorrect in their insistence that Collins was ignored by his contemporaries.

In his second letter to the Times Literary Supplement White quotes the 'Ode to Horror' published in The Student 1751, vol.2. This poem, subtitled 'In the Allegoric, Descriptive,

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Mod. Lang. Notes, vol.37 (1922), p.181 and vol.38 (1923), pp.184-85.

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T.L.S., 6 December 1928, 'A lost poem by Collins'.

Alliterative, Epithetical, Fantastic, Hyperbolic, and Diabolical style of our Modern Ode-Wrights and Monody-Mongers', ridicules the poetry of Collins, Mason, and the Wartons, and contains several direct allusions to Collins' poetry. White feels that its effectiveness depends on 'the general resemblance of subject-matter, tone, tricks of style, phrasing, and versification'. It can be inferred from this that Collins' verse must have been familiar to readers of The Student in 1751, for otherwise the 'Ode to Horror' would have seemed pointless to them. Thus again White provides proof that Collins' poetry was by no means unknown to his contemporaries, although it may have been disliked or misunderstood by many of them.

White was also engaged in research into the events of Collins' life. In 1930 he published an article on 'William Collins and Miss Bundy',<sup>1</sup> inspired by an error in an article by Emile Montégut in his Heures de lecture d'un critique (Paris, 1891). Montégut had implied that Collins lived with Miss Bundy in an irregular liaison, and this misunderstanding led White to make enquiries about Miss Bundy, tracing Collins' association with the lady and her mother.

The third critic engaged in bibliographical or biographical work on Collins at this time was A.S.P. Woodhouse. In 1928 he suggested a previously unknown source for Collins' 'Highlands' ode in a work by Martin Martin called A late voyage to St.Kilda, the remotest of all the Hebrides or Western Isles of Scotland

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<sup>1</sup>

R.E.S., vol.6 (1930), pp.437-42.

(Lond., 1698).<sup>1</sup> Like H.O. White, Woodhouse was also engaged in a study of Collins' critical reputation in the eighteenth century, and compiled a list of early references to Collins which show that 'The current has set strongly against the romantic legend of Collins as a neglected genius'.<sup>2</sup>

While this bibliographical interest in Collins was growing there existed a group of critics who followed such writers as Myra Reynolds, John Bailey, Felix Schelling, and J.W. Mackail in seeing Collins as essentially a 'romantic' poet. The chief exponents of this view were now A.D. McKillop and Thomas Quayle. McKillop in 1923 wrote an article called 'The romanticism of William Collins' in which he states categorically that 'by common consent, William Collins is reckoned among those writers who prepared the way for a full romantic revival'.<sup>3</sup> He feels that the 'Ode to Evening', 'How Sleep the Brave', 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson' and 'Ode on the Popular Superstitions' are exquisitely simple poems, and are certainly forerunners of the Romantic movement. Collins' other poems, to McKillop, reveal that although 'hedged about by the conventional ideas of his time' in both the form and content of his poetry Collins, 'by despairing of his calling...often becomes a romantic poet'. McKillop bases this conclusion largely on an examination of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character', which he describes as 'the apotheosis of the idea of inspiration'. However McKillop decides that in this poem 'Collins does not feel that he

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1 'Collins and Martin Martin', T.L.S., 20 December 1928.

2 T.L.S., 16 October 1930, correspondence.

3 Studies in Philosophy, vol.XX (1923), pp.1-16.

possesses the essence of poetry' and instead 'feels that the primal rapture of poetry is beyond the reach of any modern'.

Romantic despair is not the only affinity which McKillop finds between Collins and the great Romantic poets. Like some of them Collins 'uses the idea of the lost glories of Greek poetry in a romantic way', although McKillop warns that this was not particularly unusual in Collins' time. Another link between Collins and the Romantics is provided by McKillop's idea that 'The real subject of Collins' odes is...the concept of poetry'. He feels that 'Simplicity, Fear, Pity, and the rest are only ancillary to an idea of inspiration which is conceived and intensely desired, but never fully realized'. McKillop, then, saw Collins as a romantic, prevented from giving full rein to his romanticism by the conventions of his time. He is a perceptive critic but is prevented from being entirely fair to Collins by his desire to fit him into a romantic pattern.

Another critic who, writing in the 1920s, saw Collins largely as a precursor of the Romantic movement is Thomas Quayle. He describes Collins as one of 'the two great poets in whom the Romantic movement was for the first time adequately exemplified', the other being Thomas Gray.<sup>1</sup> He too notes Collins' love of the ancient Greeks, and makes the observation that

Collins was pure classical and not neo-classical; he had gone directly back to the 'gods of Hellas' for his inspiration, and his verse had a Hellenic austerity and beauty which could make little or no appeal to his own age. At the same time it was

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Quayle, Thomas, Poetic diction, Lond., 1924, p.116.

permeated through and through with new and striking qualities of feeling and emotion....The Odes were then, we may say, classical in form and romantic in essence.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Quayle feels that Collins' poetry represents a turning-point in the history of English poetry. He links Collins with Gray and Goldsmith, saluting them as 'heralds of the Romantic dawn' and seeing them as 'struggling to set themselves free from the "classical toils" and striving to give expression to the new ideas and ideals that were ultimately to surge and sing themselves to victory'.<sup>2</sup>

Like Myra Reynolds, Thomas Quayle seems to feel a great sense of relief when he can see a Romantic trend arising. He seems unable to appreciate those qualities of Collins which make him a great poet of his time, and prefers to examine only the romantic elements which appeal to him so strongly. This failure to appreciate the great 'Augustan' poets of the eighteenth century and to greet with delight any 'romantic' tendencies discernible in such poets as Collins, Gray and Goldsmith gives a clear indication of one prevailing view of literary history at this time.

Interest in Collins was stimulated in 1924 by the publication of Iolo Williams' Seven XVIIIth Century bibliographies which includes a bibliography of first editions of Collins' works, and an introductory essay on his poetry. The bibliography, although not intended to be exhaustive, is useful, and enables Williams to give his reasons for attributing

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<sup>1</sup> Quayle, p.100.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.196.

to Collins 'A Song Imitated from the Midsummer Night's Dream of Shakespeare, Act II, Scene V'. This poem was written by Thomas Warton according to Chalmer's British Poets of 1810, and Iolo Williams admits this. However he feels that the poem is so much in Collins' style that only he could have written it. Very few subsequent critics have agreed with this judgement.

In the essay which precedes the bibliography Williams tells us that the 'skill to complain', to borrow Langhorne's phrase, is what makes Collins' poetry great. He agrees with most other critics in praising highly the 'Ode to Evening' for 'the skill with which it cheats the ear almost into believing that the verses are in rhyme' as well as for what he calls 'its absolute qualities of poetry'.<sup>1</sup> Again the tone of the criticism is vague but enthusiastic, and far less precise than might be expected of one capable of such rigorous bibliographical research.

Interest in Collins was further stimulated in the same year, 1924, by the British Museum's acquisition of a four-page letter in Collins' handwriting to his friend John Gilbert Cooper. The letter was printed in the London Mercury for December 1924, in an article by E.H.W. Meyerstein. This article prompted some discussion of Collins' letters, and H.O. White published an essay on 'The letters of William Collins' in 1927.<sup>2</sup> White wonders why only two of Collins' letters have survived, although he was probably a prolific letter-writer.

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<sup>1</sup>

Williams, Iolo A., Seven XVIIth Century Bibliographies, Lond. 1924, p.106.

<sup>2</sup>

R.E.S., vol.3, (1927), pp.12-21.

He discusses the two extant letters, to Cooper and Dr Hayes, and shows how they throw some light on the chronology and circumstances of Collins' life.

Oliver Elton's work A survey of English Literature 1730-1780 (Lond., 1928) includes an essay on Collins which combines conventional ideas with several new and important insights. Like Myra Reynolds and J.W. Mackail, Elton finds a similarity between Collins and Coleridge, since they both made many ambitious literary plans which they failed to carry out. He believes that Gray, the Wartons and Collins formed a sort of group without realising it, for 'they were all votaries of the Greek ode, or of the Horatian, or of the youthful poetry of Milton'.<sup>1</sup> He differs from many of the earlier critics in deciding that Collins 'was not ignored either in his generation or the next', but maintains that he was not popular, since his was 'the note of the song-thrush', which was not audible to his contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> Elton believes, however, that Collins was very much a man of his time, exemplifying in his poetry, especially in the 'Dirge in Cymbeline' and 'How sleep the brave', the typical 'dependence of the eighteenth-century muse on recovery rather than on discovery'.<sup>3</sup>

As Christopher Stone had done, Elton discusses the changes Collins made to the 'Ode to Evening' when it was published in Dodsley's Collection of 1748. Like Stone he feels that Collins

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<sup>1</sup> Elton, vol.2, p.38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.44-45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.50.

took a great deal of trouble over the poem, and believes that the alterations are all for the better. He discusses the 'Highlands' ode and likes the poem, noting that its irregular seventeen or eighteen line stanza seems to be Collins' own discovery. So Elton sees Collins as sometimes an innovator, and as a man writing in a way which could not always appeal to his contemporaries because of its novelty. While partly echoing the opinions of previous critics, Elton paves the way for a re-appraisal of Collins as a poet who had other virtues besides exemplifying certain 'romantic' characteristics.

H.W. Garrod's book Collins, the first full-length critical study of the poet, was published in 1928. Garrod wrote his book largely to counteract the effects of Swinburne's excessive praise, and the tone is established by the Preface, in which Garrod refers to Collins as 'a poet who is certainly not among the great poets of the world'.<sup>1</sup>

Garrod sees Collins, together with the Wartons, as a poet whose romanticism did not go far enough, saying that it represents 'a direction of taste followed with a good deal less of fanatical devotion than sorts with a genuine revolutionary temper'.<sup>2</sup> However Collins' chief disability is seen as his immaturity; his work 'is that of a young man of twenty-five, defective both in sentiment and experience'. Of Collins' poetry the glory resides, not in its perfections, but in its potentialities'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Garrod, H.W., Collins, 1928, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.30

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.36



Garrod finds 'a too shrilling quality'<sup>1</sup> in many of Collins' works and, unlike Stone and Elton, feels that 'so indolent was Collins that you may doubt often that he re-read what he wrote'.<sup>2</sup> He sees this 'indolence' as the reason for the 'unintelligibility' of many of Collins' lines. It is difficult to understand how Garrod could hold this view after the work done by Christopher Stone in the first decade of the century on Collins' method of writing poetry.

Not only does Garrod feel that some of the Odes, particularly 'To Simplicity', have been overrated; he even dislikes the arrangement of the 1746 volume, and finds that the 'Ode to Evening' is not 'pure in its excellence'.<sup>3</sup> He thinks that what purity of diction the poem possesses derives from Milton, but dislikes the picture of the 'Bright-hair'd Sun' sitting in a Tent of which the skirts overhang his bed.' He also dislikes 'the tiresome "Pilgrim" of the last line who is only, in plain English, a man out for a walk'.<sup>4</sup>

However, he cannot find fault with 'How Sleep the Brave' and admits that he would not wish away any part of it. But he feels that the rest of Collins' poetry is marred by 'a defect of sentiment and mystery'.<sup>5</sup> He cannot understand why the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson' is such a good poem when the sense of personal involvement is so carefully hidden. Garrod admits that this perplexes him, and concludes that

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1 Garrod, p.44.

2 Ibid., p.45.

3 Ibid., p.71

4 Ibid., p.78.

5 Ibid., p.105.

although it has many faults 'This poem has some fundamental rightness of life that will always plead for it against all the critics'.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of his book Garrod reiterates his view that 'The more I read of Collins' poetry the more impressed I am, not with its greatness, but with its interestingness'.<sup>2</sup> He quotes Hazlitt's qualified praise of Collins' poetry as an example of good and balanced criticism.

Garrod's critical standards were to a great extent formed by his love of the great Romantic poets, and he would perhaps have enjoyed Collins' poetry more if it had been more 'romantic'. Before publishing his volume on Collins Garrod had, in 1926, published a study of Keats. In this he stated that Keats' real effectiveness lies 'in the exercise of the five senses'. He felt too that the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth 'stands essentially in the exercise of the five senses, in the life of the sensations'.<sup>3</sup> So Collins, who was not a sensualist in his poetry, inevitably disappoints him.

Garrod's book Collins was reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement by an unnamed reviewer, in the Modern Language Review by Oliver Elton, and in the Review of English Studies by H.O. White. All these critics agree that Garrod's book is useful but in some ways harsh or over-fastidious. The Times Literary Supplement reviewer sees it as 'an antidote to those who are all for Collins, or who may have read Swinburne's

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1  
Garrod, p.111.

2  
Ibid., p.118.

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Garrod, H.W., Keats, Oxf., 1929, pp.29-30.

eulogy of him without allowances for Swinburne's rhapsodizing'. He concludes that 'the "coldness" of Professor Garrod's pages has the essential value of stimulating the curious appreciation of a poet so scantily revealed hitherto'.<sup>1</sup>

Elton too sees Garrod's work as an antidote to Swinburne, but points out that Swinburne after all 'did bring out the great virtue of Collins, his lyrical intensity and felicity'. He perceives that Garrod sometimes 'seems to be almost afraid of liking his poet too much', but admires his minute and critical method of appraising the poems.<sup>2</sup>

H.O. White finds the book 'challenging' but disagrees with Garrod, thinking that Collins' obscurities of diction 'did not proceed in the main from carelessness, but rather from taking too much care'. He again censures the severity of Garrod's attitude, but feels that his work nevertheless 'remains a valuable and stimulating contribution to the study of Collins'.<sup>3</sup>

The year after Garrod's book was published a new edition of Collins' poetry appeared, edited and with an introductory study by the poet Edmund Blunden. In the prefatory study Blunden states his great admiration for Collins. Unlike almost all previous critics Blunden feels that Collins' 'special mark is the intellectual command of his poetry, which never coldly shuts out the notion of human simplicity'. He also admires Collins' daring in using 'the most remote and massive forms of civilization, or of myth' for his creative purposes. He admits

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<sup>1</sup> T.L.S., 1929, p.95.

<sup>2</sup> Mod. Lang. Review, vol.24 (1929), pp.356-58.

<sup>3</sup> Review of Eng. Studies, vol.VI (1930), pp.236-40.

that Collins' syntax is often confused, and that his transitions are sometimes too abrupt to be readily followed; but he excuses these faults by describing them as 'the marks of a sincere inspiration and a devoted energy', or as 'obscurities with a heart of fire, enigmas arising from a wealth of meaning'.<sup>1</sup>

Blunden's edition of the poems is of no textual importance. There are many minor inaccuracies, and John Bell's spurious 'London edition' of the 'Highlands' ode is given. The book was intended to be a beautiful object, and is very attractively bound and printed, but it was never reissued, and is now something of a collector's item. A Times Literary Supplement reviewer is reminded, by the tone of Blunden's remarks, of J.W. Mackail's tribute to Collins.<sup>2</sup> The reviewer feels that Blunden's enthusiasm is often extravagant, and that 'Mr. Blunden is, in details, rather hasty and casual: disinclined to think before he speaks'. He criticized 'the unbusinesslike failure to supply page or line references in the notes', and concludes that the strength of the edition lies in the beauty of the book itself. Blunden had included some 'poems of doubtful authenticity' and the reviewer is not at all convinced by his attempts to attribute them to Collins.

Blunden admitted that this criticism of his book was justified, excusing himself on the grounds that it was 'planned for comfortable and not highly technical reading'.<sup>3</sup> Thus there was still no edition of Collins' poetry to supersede

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Poems of William Collins, ed. Edmund Blunden, Lond., 1929, pp. 36-37.

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T.L.S., 18 July 1929

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Ibid., 25 July 1929, correspondence.

W.C. Bronson's volume of 1898 but since that date there had been an enormous increase in critical writing on Collins' poetry. At the end of the 1920s many critics expressed a strong interest in Collins. There was still a tendency to consider that his importance was mainly as a 'pre-Romantic', but there was also a growing awareness of Collins' merits as a poet very much influenced by the conventions and ideas of his own time.

The Canadian critic A.S.F. Woodhouse published a long article on 'Collins and the creative imagination' in 1931.<sup>1</sup> His main contention is that the Victorians held a theory of the creative imagination and its importance to poetry, and that Collins in his poems demonstrated the validity of this theory and extended its scope. Woodhouse begins by analysing the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'. He argues that in this poem God's act of creation is an action of his divine imagination, since Fancy, the 'joy'd enthusiast' of the poem, cooperates in the act of creation. Thus 'God imagined the world, and it sprung into being'.<sup>2</sup> The poetic gift is the gift of Fancy, and so it enables the poet, if he is given, to see visions. But the Victorian view of the imagination is not limited to the act of creation. Woodhouse also discusses the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' and the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in English Literature of the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1931, pp. 59-130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

CHAPTER 51931-1940

No important edition of Collins' works was published during the years 1931 to 1940, although in 1937 the third edition of the Oxford Poems of Gray and Collins was issued, with Christopher Stone's edition of the poems of Collins newly revised by Austin Lane Poole and Frederick Page. This decade, however, is notable because all the important works on Collins were published at this time by North American authors, while previously nearly all twentieth century criticism of Collins had originated in England.

The Canadian critic A.S.P. Woodhouse published a long article on 'Collins and the creative imagination' in 1931.<sup>1</sup> His main contention is that the Wartons held a theory of the creative imagination and its importance to poetry, and that Collins in his poems demonstrated the validity of this theory and extended its scope. Woodhouse begins by analyzing the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'. He argues that in this poem God's act of creation is an action of his divine imagination, since Fancy, the 'lov'd enthusiast' of the poem, cooperates in the act of creation. Thus 'God imagined the world, and it sprung into being'.<sup>2</sup> The magic girdle is the gift of Fancy, and so it enables the poet, to whom it is given, to see visions. But the girdle, the symbol of poetic imagination, was produced at the same time as the world was being created, and Woodhouse

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Studies in English by members of University College Toronto, Toronto, 1931, pp.59-130.

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Ibid., p.62.

infers from this that 'the activity of the poetic imagination is, in some sort, a counterpart of the divine act of creation, that the poet, too, is a creator'.<sup>1</sup> So, Woodhouse believes, the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' expresses Collins' belief in the importance of the imagination, and in its creativity.

Woodhouse then examines various theories of the imagination, especially those expressed by Joseph Warton. He argues that since Warton and Collins were friends and had thought of publishing their odes jointly, and since Collins' poetry exemplifies many of Warton's ideas, it is likely that Warton's theories were shared by Collins. He believes that for both young poets 'the function of the imagination is to create a romantic world of intenser experience, to supply scenes of ideal grandeur, beauty, wonder, terror'.<sup>2</sup> The pictorial element of this imaginative power is important and Woodhouse points out that, for Collins, the 'allegorical' often becomes the 'descriptive', since he introduces many personified figures, but describes them so vividly that they assume a pictorial quality. Woodhouse notices that Collins' poems are full of pictorial effects, and that his odes 'abound in bright visual images, residing in a single word or phrase',<sup>3</sup> like the phrase 'pavilioned plains',<sup>4</sup> which suggests a vivid picture in only two words.

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<sup>1</sup> Studies in English, p.66.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.90-91.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.100

<sup>4</sup> 'Ode to Liberty', line 105.

Collins' odes are, Woodhouse says, imaginative in the sense that they are full of visual images; but they are imaginative in a different sense because they deal with 'invented' material, 'they depict things out of nature and must create the objects which they describe'.<sup>1</sup> Collins creates in his poems ideal worlds of wonder and terror, of beauty and tranquillity.

In Collins' imaginary worlds Woodhouse detects several typically romantic elements like the rather 'gothic' ruin of the first version of the 'Ode to Evening', and the 'fairy hands' of 'How sleep the Brave'. Contrasting Collins' imagined world with the real world with which the Neo-classical poets had been preoccupied, Woodhouse decides that the novelty of Collins' imaginary world 'marks it as romantic and Collins' imagination as the romantic or idyllic order'.<sup>2</sup> Woodhouse admits that Collins' imagination was 'strangely lacking in sustained power', especially when 'in the Pindaric odes, he is reaching out for an intenser experience of romantic passion, wonder and terror'.<sup>3</sup> But he maintains that 'for Collins and the Wartons alike the creative imagination means a way to a more varied and intenser experience',<sup>4</sup> and that this desire for emotional intensity and pursuit of it differs fundamentally from the 'reserved or even repressive' attitude which Woodhouse feels is characteristic of the Augustan poets.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Studies in English, p.101.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.127.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.127.



Finally, then, Woodhouse feels that because of his belief in and use of the powers of the creative imagination, Collins differed in his approach to poetry from his predecessors. This recognition of Collins' belief in the importance of the creative imagination represents a major advance in the study of his poetry, and was to be developed further by C.F. Chapin in the next decade.<sup>1</sup> But Woodhouse is led to reflect that 'Sometimes one is tempted to think of Collins as the first of the Romantics',<sup>2</sup> and he later grew to believe that Collins' emphasis on the creative imagination was not a truly romantic characteristic. Woodhouse's later views, expressed in a paper on 'The poetry of Collins reconsidered', will be discussed in a later chapter.<sup>3</sup>

The most extensive study of Collins published during the 1930s is Edward Gay Ainsworth's Poor Collins (New York, 1937). Subtitled 'His life, his art, and his influence', the book attempts to examine comprehensively all these topics, and to a great extent it succeeds. However some of Ainsworth's surmises on the events of Collins life, such as his account of the poet's inheritance of £2,000 from his uncle, Colonel Martin, have since been shown to be based on incomplete evidence.<sup>4</sup> So the first, biographical part of Ainsworth's study, while presenting a picture of Collins' life which is accurate in most of its details, is not completely authoritative. The second

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See Chapter 7 below.

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Studies in English, p.130.

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See Chapter 8 below.

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See P.L. Carver, The life of a poet, Lond., 1967, pp.55-56.

part of the book is much more important, and deals with Collins' poetic art.

In this central part of his book Ainsworth discusses Collins' feelings about the arts; his treatment of the natural world; his relationship with the rest of mankind; his reaction to contemporary events; and his poetic ideals, methods, failures, and achievements. Ainsworth shows that Collins loved painting and sculpture, often referring to them directly, and, even when not actually mentioning the visual arts, often giving the poems themselves a picturesque or statuesque quality.

In discussing Collins' feelings for his fellow-men Ainsworth attempts to prove that the poems lack 'understanding of and insight into human character'; and he attributes this to Collins' 'introspective and visionary temper', further hampered by his decision to write odes which were 'descriptive and allegorical rather than personal'.<sup>1</sup> To Ainsworth it seems that Collins showed an intellectual interest in the conditions of ordinary men but never felt an emotional involvement with them. Thus, Ainsworth says, the description of the man drowned by the kelpie in the 'Highlands' ode evokes in the reader a feeling of horror at the dreadful appearance of the corpse, rather than of pity. This indicates that Collins' ability to visualize events described in his poetry forces him to become emotionally detached from it, as his artistic pleasure in the composition of the scene predominates over his sympathy with its participants. Ainsworth finds a similar limitation in Collins' reactions to the political events, the wars and rebellions of

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All foregoing quotations from Ainsworth, p.58.

his age. He observes that 'Collins has left us no intimate account of how the events moved and touched him personally, such a record, for example, as Wordsworth gives us in The Prelude. He is, rather, content to refer to them allegorically and to allude to persons and events indirectly'.<sup>1</sup> So, to Ainsworth, all of Collins' reactions to the inhabitants and events of the world around him are distanced by his 'visionary and introspective' habits of mind before being communicated to us in his poems.

When he turns to a discussion of Collins' 'aspirations and shortcomings' Ainsworth develops his theory that Collins can feel enthusiasm, but not passion. He attributes this inability to feel strongly to Collins' youth and limited knowledge of life, and to his naturally retiring disposition, and thinks that the poet himself was aware of it. In 'The Manners' Collins expresses his intention of retiring from the world of thought to the world of reality, hoping to learn the power of feeling, but, as Ainsworth says, 'the poem represents only a realization of a defect and the remedy, not an actual reformation'.<sup>2</sup> So Collins never realised the ambition revealed in the poem and this, to Ainsworth, is his greatest shortcoming as a poet.

Although he does not describe Collins as an early Romantic poet Ainsworth sees him as part of a new movement in poetry. Like Woodhouse Ainsworth describes how Collins and Joseph Warton broke away from the tradition of moralizing in poetry to write instead 'descriptive and allegorical' odes. Ainsworth, again

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<sup>1</sup> Ainsworth, p.66.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.83.

echoing Woodhouse, also remarks that, like Thomson, the Wartons, and, to some extent, Gray, Collins was committed to the idea of poetic inspiration. An examination of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' suggests to Ainsworth that Collins saw the gift of poetry as 'a magic girdle' representing 'true and full poetic inspiration which is granted to few of the choicest spirits, perhaps to but one'. The poet thus chosen is 'divinely favoured' and is 'both poet and prophet'. Having defined what Collins understood by the word 'poet' Ainsworth goes on to explain the union between God and Fancy which is described in the poem. He believes that 'God' in this poem represents 'Thought' and that the 'rich-hair'd Youth of Morn', the result of the union between Thought and Fancy, is the poet. Collins' statement that God (or 'Thought') was in 'some divine mood' when retiring with Fancy suggests to Ainsworth that 'Collins felt that the creation of the poet, the union of Thought and Fancy, was a more divine act than the birth of the world, the result only of Thought'.<sup>1</sup>

Ainsworth's explanation of the meaning of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' is ingenious but not convincing. E.L. Brooks has argued plausibly that the poem does not state that any sexual or quasi-sexual union took place between God and Fancy.<sup>2</sup> He points out that God 'sate' with Fancy, and did not 'lie' with her and that, when they were thus seated together, God wove the cestus of poetry while Fancy merely sang as she watched God at work. If this explanation of the activities

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All foregoing quotations from Ainsworth, p.98.

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See Chapter 7 below.

of God and Fancy is accepted, Ainsworth's interpretation of the poem is seen to be based on a radical misunderstanding of what it actually says.

Ainsworth makes a further mistake by assuming that the 'rich hair'd Youth of Morn' who, he imagines, sprang from the union of God and Fancy, is the poet. It seems more logical to identify the youth as the sun, especially since the poem tells us that the youth was born together with all his 'subject life'. All of creation is dependent on the sun, but it is difficult to ascertain what is meant by 'subject life' if the 'youth' represents the poet. Thus the poem can be explained quite simply by saying that it describes the creation of life by God, exercising his imaginative powers. The sun, the 'rich hair'd Youth of Morn', may be further identified with Apollo as the god of poetry. Thus the poet is, in a sense, the result of God's creative and imaginative powers, but only in a metaphorical sense, and not as a result of a quasi-sexual union between God and Fancy.<sup>1</sup>

In a useful chapter on personification Ainsworth emphasizes Collins' extraordinary ability to visualize people and scenes. He admires the way in which Collins suggests a picture without delineating it in detail, and finds the shadowy personifications of hope and fear in the odes addressed to them indicative of Collins' usual way of expressing himself, and of his high powers of imagination. But he feels that occasionally in the 'Odes' 'the personification amounts to no more than the presence of a

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For further discussion of the meaning of this poem see below, Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

capital letter'.<sup>1</sup> He regrets that Collins did not carry out the ambitious schemes on which he embarked, but agrees with Mrs Barbauld that Collins deserves his honourable rank among 'those of our poets who are more distinguished by excellence than by bulk'.<sup>2</sup>

The third part of Poor Collins is devoted to an examination of the sources from which Collins obtained his material and the writers who influenced him. Ainsworth's conclusions here are sound, although he omits to mention a few minor influences. Finally Ainsworth gives us an account of 'the rise of Collins' literary reputation', in which he traces the critical reception of Collins' work during the eighteenth century, and his influence on the Romantic poets.

Ainsworth, then, does far more than examine Collins' poetry: he examines also his life, the works that influenced him, and the influence he had on later poets. The critical part of the book makes few surprising statements, but presents a more balanced and complete view of Collins' poetry than any previously published. Ainsworth makes no extravagant claims for his subject, but sees him as a poet of limited emotional range; as a young man who did not live enough to fulfil his ambitions; and as part of a new movement on poetry towards naturalism and away from didacticism. Thus Ainsworth does much to clarify Collins' achievements for us and to promote a fuller understanding of his poetry.

Ainsworth's book received generally favourable reviews. The Times Literary Supplement reviewer<sup>3</sup> praises it as a work of

<sup>1</sup> Ainsworth, p.113.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Barbauld, quoted by Ainsworth, p.115.

<sup>3</sup> T.L.S., 3 April 1937, p.252.

reference as well as of criticism, since the extensive footnotes provide much useful information, such as the number of musical settings of Collins' poems. Geoffrey Tillotson, writing in the Modern Language Review (volume 32, 1937, pp.616-17), is less enthusiastic. He feels that Ainsworth makes 'Collins' important historical position clearer than it has yet been made' and attempts 'with some success an estimate of the "non-historical" Collins, that part of him which would have been the same in any age'. But he feels that when Ainsworth states that Collins' personifications sometimes depend only on the use of a capital letter he fails to take account of the liberal use of capital letters common in eighteenth century writing and printing. Thus Tillotson feels that some of Collins' capitalized abstract nouns are not intended to be personifications. He also regrets Ainsworth's failure to cite English verse translations of Homer and the Latin poets as sources of Collins' diction. But, with these minor reservations, Tillotson approves of Poor Collins.

Another American, George N. Schuster, commented at length on Collins' poetry, in a chapter on 'Collins, Gray, and the return of the imagination'.<sup>1</sup> He sees Collins as a poet who used the verse-patterns of his time but who marked, in his language and in his ideals, a break from conventional poetry. Schuster tentatively suggests that Collins 'grouped the classical figurines of Rome in the attitudes of Greek art; and that the act of doing so was...a "romantic" deed'.<sup>2</sup> So Collins,

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<sup>1</sup> George N. Schuster, The English ode from Milton to Keats, Mass., 1940, pp.186-213.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.193.

while retaining many elements of the more conventional sort of poetry, was part of the movement away from it. Schuster thinks that Collins was himself confused because 'old and new are not perfectly fused in the poet's own mind',<sup>1</sup> and that most of the defects of the Odes, particularly their occasionally unsuitable epithets, are the result of this confusion. Like Woodhouse and Ainsworth, Schuster emphasizes Collins' strong pictorial sense and his conception, revealed in the 'Ode on the Poetical Character', of the poet as a sort of divine genius, and Schuster feels that these are 'romantic' attributes.

Since Schuster appears to delight in tracing 'romantic' elements in Collins' poetry it is perhaps inevitable that, of all the poems, he should prefer the 'Highlands' ode. However he admires it as a technically competent piece of writing as well as a manifestation of the romantic ideal, and considers it 'a landmark in the history' of the Pindaric ode.<sup>2</sup> He feels that it narrowly misses a place among the best six or so odes in the English language and declares, with some exaggeration, that 'Here the epithets converge under the spell of strange, rich music to form a prelude to Keats and all modern verse'.<sup>3</sup> He thinks that the poem could be divided to form 'almost a sonnet-sequence',<sup>4</sup> and that this series of near divisions prevents it from becoming monotonous. Thus Schuster's obvious enthusiasm for Collins' poems leads him to make grandiose claims in a

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1 Schuster, p.193.

2 Ibid., p.204.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.



manner somewhat reminiscent of Langhorne's in the eighteenth century and Swinburne's in the nineteenth. But he gives us a very useful analysis of the verse-forms of Collins' odes and, from this technical viewpoint, his chapter makes an important contribution to the study of Collins' poetry.

Another useful aid in the technical analysis of the poems was provided, in 1939, by B.E. Booth and C.E. Jones in their Concordance of the poetical works of William Collins (Berkeley, 1939); and this, too, is an American publication. However English critics were not silent on the subject of William Collins during the 1930s. C.V. Deane in his book Aspects of eighteenth century nature poetry (Oxford, 1935) has much to say about the poetic diction used by most eighteenth century poets to some degree. He contends that use of the diction produces 'an effect of fluency rather than of restraint' and 'generally imparts an easy movement to verse'.<sup>1</sup> Deane proceeds to discuss Collins as a poet writing within this tradition but, with Akenside, Gray, and the Wartons, sounding 'a new note of lyrical intimacy'.<sup>2</sup> The view of Collins presented in this book is necessarily rather one-sided, since Deane's concern is with nature poetry, and so he discusses only those of Collins' poems which deal with the natural world. But his opinions are nevertheless useful, and merit examination.

Like most other critics of this decade Deane sees Collins as a precursor of the romantic movement, and feels that his poetry is expressive of a general return to what is natural in

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<sup>1</sup> Deane, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.1.

landscape gardening, landscape painting, and literature. He emphasizes the pictorial qualities of Collins' poetry and, as many other critics had done, compares it with various paintings. Deane admits that the poems have already been compared with works by Corot, Cozens, and Claude, and himself draws a comparison with the work of Girtin, an English water-colourist who, like Collins, 'combined topographical description with lyrical impressionism'.<sup>1</sup>

Deane makes a further contribution to the study of the pictorial elements of Collins' work when he discusses his inborn and peculiar gift for significantly visualizing abstract conceptions...together with an almost mythological instinct for personifying properties of nature'.<sup>2</sup> Here Deane has pinpointed the ability to make the abstract seem concrete and visible which is central to Collins' method of writing poetry. He distinguishes another important element of Collins' poetic technique, his ability to suggest a scene without actually describing it, when he says that

there is little 'landscape' in the ordinary sense in the 'Ode to Evening', hardly any scenery in the Highland's Ode, and nothing pictorial in 'How sleep the Brave'. Yet in all of them the feeling of a free and delicate response to the beauty of nature is unmistakable.<sup>3</sup>

Although he is primarily interested in Collins as a nature-poet, Deane's perceptive observations on Collins' poetic technique makes his brief study of the poet a valuable one.

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<sup>1</sup> Deane, p.78.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.77.

An essay expressing very different views was published by F.R. Leavis in 1936. In this essay, on 'English poetry in the eighteenth century',<sup>1</sup> Leavis expresses the belief that the major poets of the period are Crabbe and Johnson, since theirs is the only poetry 'bearing a serious relation to the life of its time'. He regards Collins, Gray, Cowper, Dyer and Lady Winchelsea as 'romantic precursors' and considers their poetry to be 'a by-line' which is 'literary and conventional in the worst sense of the terms'. Leavis dismisses most of Collins' poems, including 'How sleep the Brave', as 'warblings' in the strain of 'pretty elegiac sentiment'. He admits that the 'Ode to Evening' is a good poem, although he judges it to be rather 'a success of taste, of literary sense, than of creative talent'. Like John Middleton Murry in the previous decade Leavis feels that Collins' poetry conveys little emotion but displays a mastery of style; but unlike Murry he does not value this formal perfection. He dislikes the tradition of poetic diction, and dismisses Collins' poetry as 'a monument to the uncertainty and debility of taste fostered by the tradition'.

C.V. Deane has demonstrated that the tradition of poetic diction often enhanced the poet's freedom rather than diminishing it.<sup>2</sup> More recently Oliver F. Sigworth has shown that the diction is often most appropriate. He examines Collins' use of the word 'heathy' in the 'Ode to Evening' and concludes that, since Collins did not wish to indicate any particular heath, but merely indicate the kind of scene he meant,

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<sup>1</sup> Scrutiny, vol.5 (June 1936), pp.13-31.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion above of Deane, Aspects of 18th century nature poetry.

the phrase 'heathy scene' 'is perspicuous and concise, fulfilling with economy its purpose in the poem; it is, in effect, a kind of scientific-poetic language'.<sup>1</sup> Leavis, in his condemnation of poetic diction in general and Collins' use of it in particular, fails to realise that the diction could provide the poet with a very precise way of indicating his meaning. Use of poetic diction does not necessarily imply 'uncertainty and debility of taste'.

Several other writers referred to Collins' works during the 1930s. Cecil A. Moore's English poetry of the eighteenth century (New York, 1935) includes some of Collins' poems and an introductory article stating the rather outdated view that Collins was misunderstood by his contemporaries, since his 'delicate music and ethereal beauty' were too great for popular appreciation.<sup>2</sup> P.L. Carver in 1939 published an article on 'Collins and Alexander Carlyle', speculating on the possible relationship between some of Collins' poems and some by Carlyle.<sup>3</sup> Dyson and Butt, in a brief comment on Collins' poetry, reiterate the view, by this time commonly accepted, that his 'emotional range is limited [and] he is careless, casual and raw, but there is no more genuine lyrical gift than his'.<sup>4</sup> But these opinions are of minor importance; the North American critics Woodhouse and Ainsworth produced the most valuable works on Collins in this decade, and their views were to exert a profound influence on later criticism of Collins' poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Sigworth, O.F., William Collins, N.Y., 1965, p.79.

<sup>2</sup> Moore, p.576.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. of Eng. Studies, vol.25 (1939), pp.35-44.

<sup>4</sup> Dyson, H.V.D. and Butt, J., Augustans & Romantics 1689-1830, Lond. (1940), p.71.

CHAPTER 61941-1950

During the troubled years 1941-1950 there was not much criticism of Collins' poems, and the critics who did write about them usually confined themselves to short articles discussing specific poems or poetic techniques, rather than writing at length about Collins' works in their entirety. Several attempts were made to discover the meaning or significance of certain poems, or to place them within a historical framework.

René Wellek, who was engaged in a survey of the continuity of English literature, examines the early poem 'Verses humbly address'd to Sir Thomas Hanmer'.<sup>1</sup> The poem is written in rhymed couplets and, as couplets were extremely popular in early eighteenth-century poetry, it is in this sense conventional. But Wellek links it with an earlier kind of poetry, the traditional literary history presented as a verse-catalogue of the English poets. So Wellek shows that at this early stage in his poetical career Collins was not an innovator: the form of his poem is typical of his age, and its theme is a traditional one, found in English poetry for several centuries. Wellek's comments on Collins are brief, but illuminating.

J.M.S. Tompkins too is interested in revealing Collins as a man of his time. In an article about the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson' Miss Tompkins tries to establish the meaning and associations the word 'druid' would have had for Collins'

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Wellek, R., The rise of English literary history, N. Carolina, 1941, pp.133-34.

contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> She feels that this word, which often puzzles modern readers, must have been intended by Collins to be unambiguous, and 'to tell us at once under what aspect the dead poet is to be lamented'.<sup>2</sup> Tompkins believes that, by using the word 'druid' to describe Thomson, Collins meant us to realise that he was 'a poet-priest of nature'.<sup>3</sup> This meaning, she claims, is established by Collins' further descriptions of Thomson as a 'woodland pilgrim', 'sweet bard', and 'meek Nature's child'; and by the human aspect of the streams, woods, and meadows, which join with the 'maids and youths', the 'hinds and shepherd-girls', to lament the poet's death. Miss Tompkins then lists some other characteristics of the druids, and concludes that, in the eighteenth century, they were thought of as 'not only priests of nature but philosophers probing her secrets, metaphysicians, enlightened educators of youth, and ardent patriots'.<sup>4</sup> Tompkins thinks that all these aspects of the druid are implicit in Collins' application of the word to Thomson, and she assembles evidence from the poetry of the Wartons and of Thomson himself to support her argument. She concludes that Collins was justified in describing Thomson as a druid, since he epitomised in his poetry and in his ideals almost all the attributes which the eighteenth century reader would associate with the word 'druid'.

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<sup>1</sup> R.E.S., vol.22 (1946), pp.1-16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Tompkins' essay defines very clearly the meaning and implications of the word 'druid' for Collins and his contemporaries, and represents an important advance in our understanding of the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson'. Leone Vivante is less successful in his analysis of the concept of 'simplicity' in the 'Ode to Simplicity'. Vivante is a philosopher, and in the introduction to his book English poetry and its contribution to the knowledge of a creative principle (London, 1950) he tells us that 'all literary value is also a philosophical achievement; that there is no trace of beauty which is not a reflection - and a discovery - of the intrinsic nature of inner being'.<sup>1</sup> He is concerned with aesthetic problems, and feels that the concept of simplicity expressed by Collins can help to solve some of these problems. Collins said that only simplicity can 'raise the meeting soul',<sup>2</sup> and Vivante tells us that simplicity has this power because

Thought forms itself in and through a moment of infinite opening. But in its higher expressions, when thought originates in a richer objective multiplicity, and discovers itself, its deep identity, in and through its manifold conditions and sources - in the world of mental presentments - then a strong simplicity, instinct with eternity, is revealed, underlying and dominating the richness of forms.<sup>3</sup>

So Vivante sees simplicity as 'the supreme value, akin to love's, even one with it'.<sup>4</sup> It is the creative principle, and he admires Collins' prescience in realising this. Vivante's

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<sup>1</sup> Vivante, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> 'Ode to Simplicity', line 48.

<sup>3</sup> Vivante, pp.83-84.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.84.

philosophical argument is at times obscure, and his analysis of the meaning of the 'Ode to Simplicity', intended to clarify the poem's aesthetic position, is rather confused, since the meanings of the philosophical terms are implied and not defined.

A different approach to Collins' work is suggested by S. Musgrove who, in 1943, advanced the hypothesis that the whole collection of 'Odes' published in 1746 is, in effect, a poem about the nature of the true poet.<sup>1</sup> Musgrove sees Collins as a leader, with the Wartons, of a 'pre-romantic' movement, with the 'Odes' serving as a manifesto of this movement, just as the Lyrical Ballads and their 'Preface' together formed a Romantic manifesto.

Musgrove divides the 'Odes' into three sections. The odes to Pity, Fear, Simplicity, the Poetical Character, the Manners, and the Passions are seen as 'psychological' poems; the odes to Mercy, Liberty, Peace, to a Lady, and 'How sleep the Brave' as 'political' poems; and the 'Ode to Evening' is in a separate class. Musgrove feels that the 'psychological' poems describe 'the personal qualities which the Poet, to be a true Poet, must possess'; the 'political' poems reveal 'the essential conditions for the Poet's development, which must exist in his society or nation'; and that the 'Ode to Evening' 'deals with the poet's relation to Nature'.<sup>2</sup> To support his hypothesis Musgrove examines each of the 'Odes' separately, but his examination of each one is brief, and his conclusions sometimes are reached only by distorting the poem's meaning. Musgrove

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Notes and Queries, vol.185, pp.214-17 and 253-55, 9 and 23 October 1943.

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N.Q., 185, p.216.



accepts Garrod's reading of 'tho' for 'thou' in line 45 of 'The Manners', and this emendation, which is not based on any textual evidence, changes the meaning of the line, to imply that Collins himself, and not Humour, claims to have been 'nurs'd' by the Passions. Thus Musgrove believes that Collins in this poem expresses the conviction that he, like all true poets, must be conversant with all aspects of life whether serious or humourous, although he wished only to write lyrical poetry on serious subjects. The poem does not say this, and so Musgrove's interpretation of its meaning, based on a misreading, is invalid.

Musgrove is again guilty of distorting Collins' words when he discusses the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'. Here Musgrove states flatly that 'Poetry, Collins says in the finest image of his writing, is the child of God and Imagination, or "Fancy"'.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of this poem is not so clear as Musgrove would like us to think, and Collins does not say that in any literal sense poetry is the child of God and Imagination.<sup>2</sup> Musgrove has again imposed on the poem his own meaning, and his conclusions cannot be accepted. However Musgrove emphasized that his essays merely suggest a hypothesis. There is some truth in his suggestion that many of the 'Odes' are concerned with poetic theory, although the statement that all the 'Odes' form a single poem about the nature of the poet is an exaggeration.

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N.Q., p.254.

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For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of this poem see preceding chapter.

Other critics during the 1940s examined specific aspects of Collins' poetic technique. Earl R. Wasserman, in a study of 'The inherent values of eighteenth century personification', tries to ascertain the reason for the popularity of prosopopoeia in the eighteenth century, and in doing so discusses some of Collins' poems.<sup>1</sup> Wasserman contends that, to eighteenth-century readers of poetry, personification was 'one of the most energetic activities of the imagination and the passions, and therefore...an aspect of the rhetorical sublime'.<sup>2</sup> At its best, it represented the spontaneous expression of a passion so intense that it was not subject to a normal degree of rational control. This delighted response to personification is not normally felt by modern readers, and Wasserman regrets our failure in this respect. Wasserman's essay is helpful in revealing the reasons for Collins' frequent use of prosopopoeia, which often acts as a barrier to the reader's enjoyment of his poetry.

One of the most interesting analyses of Collins' poetry made during this decade is to be found in Wylie Sypher's article 'The "Morceau de Fantaisie" in verse: a new approach to Collins'.<sup>3</sup> Sypher, like many previous critics, compares Collins' poetry with the visual arts, but he does so in a new way. He feels that the 'strangeness' of Collins' poetry springs from his 'highly plastic visions', which are 'fantastic' in their effect.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PMLA, vol.65 (1950), pp.453-63.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.440.

<sup>3</sup> University of Toronto Quarterly, vol.15 (1945), pp.65-69.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.65.

Sypher re-states the widely accepted view that Collins' personifications have a statuesque quality, sees them as a haphazard group of sculpture 'animated by the gestures of melodrama' and defines the effect as 'a plastic fantasy of approximate and dynamic order'.<sup>1</sup> He associates Collins' poetic style with the 'rococo' style of painting which became common between 1730 and 1750, and which in England manifested itself as the 'genre pittoresque', an almost baroque and fantastic kind of art. Sypher concludes that Collins' verse 'represents a comparable rococo development in poetry - the "morceau de fantaisie", half plastic, half visionary'.<sup>2</sup> He feels that the phrase 'genre pittoresque' describes Collins' poetry more usefully than the word 'romantic', and so reveals Collins as a participant in a developing tradition within the visual as well as the literary arts.

There were several less important general discussions of Collins' poetry during the 1940s. H.J.C. Grierson and J.C. Smith, in A critical history of English poetry (1947) inform their readers that Collins lacks passion and is not a great lyrical poet. His most attractive quality, to them, is 'a delicate sense of beauty which is always present even if it only occasionally finds quite adequate expression'.<sup>3</sup> They consider that his importance lies in his rôle as a Romantic precursor. But their view of Collins' importance was not shared by most of their contemporary critics, as an examination of the other works discussed in this chapter will show.

<sup>1</sup> University of Toronto Quarterly, 15, pp.65,66.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>3</sup> Grierson and Smith, p.224.

A.D. McKillop, in his book English literature from Dryden to Burns (New York, 1948) expresses a rather different opinion. He believes that Collins at his best is 'the greatest English lyricist of the mid-century', and praises his artistic skill.<sup>1</sup> But he echoes Grierson and Smith's opinion that Collins is interesting as a romantic precursor when he remarks that in the 'Highlands' ode Collins turned to 'a richly romantic vein of poetry' which shows that he was 'on the verge of a new and significant period in his work'.<sup>2</sup>

John Butt who, with Dyson, had commented on Collins in the previous decade, now stresses his indebtedness to Milton. In The Augustan age (London, 1950) he says that Collins obviously owed some of his stanza poems to Milton's example, but that the mood and theme of Collins' poetry also derived to a great extent from his study of Milton's imagery. Butt only devotes a few pages to his remarks on Collins' poetry, and so his views are not developed very fully.

Finally Raymond D. Havens, in an essay on 'Discontinuity in literary development: the case of English Romanticism', indicated Collins' place in the evolution of the Romantic movement.<sup>3</sup> He argues very cogently that there was no steady development from the 'Augustan' and 'pre-romantic' poetry of the eighteenth century to the 'Romantic' poetry of the nineteenth. He feels that 'there seems to be continuity between eighteenth and nineteenth century romanticism only in the attention given

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<sup>1</sup> McKillop, p.218.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.220.

<sup>3</sup> S.P., vol.47 (1950), pp.102-11.

to external nature and the preference for freer, more varied verse forms', and reminds us that these characteristics are not necessarily or exclusively connected with romanticism'.<sup>1</sup>

Havens perceives a difference in quality as well as in kind between the works of the 'Pre-romantic' poets like Collins, Smart and Chatterton, and those of Blake, Coleridge, Keats and the other great 'Romantic' poets. He feels that the 'Pre-romantics lacked vigour, determination, and passion, and had a slighter poetic talent. He concludes that the part these poets played in the development of the Romantic movement consisted in their willingness to try out new verse-forms, ideas, and techniques, and by doing so bequeathing to their greater successors the means to write a new kind of poetry. But the evolution from one kind of poetry to the other was not, Havens insists, a steady progression. Collins' relationship to the Romantic poets is thus seen to be rather more distant than his relationship to the poets of his own time. Havens, like most of the other critics who wrote about Collins' poetry during the 1940s, has helped to enlarge our understanding of its place in the history of English poetry.

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S.P., vol.47, p.107.

CHAPTER 71951-60

The year of 1956 saw the publication at Oxford of J.S. Cunningham's William Collins, Drafts and fragments of verse. This collection represents the first autograph manuscripts of Collins' poems to be found. It adds four almost complete stanzaic poems, part of an ode for music, and five drafts of epistolary poems in couplet form to the small Collins canon. There is also a fragment of verse written partly by Collins, a Latin oration written as a school exercise, and a transcript of Swift's poem 'On the Day of Judgement'. All of these 'drafts and fragments' were found by Cunningham among the Warton papers in the library of Trinity College, Oxford.

Cunningham finds it difficult to date any of the fragmentary poems assembled here, but suggests that the stanzas 'To Simplicity' may be an early draft of the 'Ode to Simplicity', and that the 'Fragment of an ode for music' may be part of the lost or unfinished 'Ode on the music of the Greek theatre' to which Collins referred in his letter to Hayes of 8 November 1750. It may further be assumed that the poems in couplet form belong to an early stage of Collins' poetic career, since we know of no poems in epistolary couplets in his more mature period. The 'drafts and fragments', however, tantalisingly incomplete though they are, reveal glimpses of Collins' preoccupations with music and painting, and allow us to trace the development of some of the ideas expressed in the completed 'Odes'. Surprisingly, the publication of these incomplete poems does not seem to have occasioned much

immediate excitement in literary circles, and most of the people who wrote about Collins during the later 1950s do not even mention the book.

Several critics during this decade traced classical influences in Collins' work. J.A.K. Thomson feels that Collins' poetry has much in common with Greek poetic art, and that many of his odes are written within the Pindaric tradition.<sup>1</sup> But he thinks that Collins' best poems, like the 'Ode to Evening', are written in the Horatian tradition. The form of the 'Ode to Evening' is derived from Milton's translation of Horace's 'Pyrrha' ode, and to this extent the poem is obviously Horatian. But less obviously, Thomson feels that in the 'Ode to Evening', in the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson', and in the 'Dirge on Cymbeline', Collins 'has been able to give his verse some of that curiosa felicitas - that natural-seeming grace which is the result of art - that was anciently attributed to Horace'.<sup>2</sup> These three poems with 'How sleep the Brave' are probably those most popular with modern readers of Collins' poems, are thus seen to be related to each other by their Horatian characteristics.

Another classical influence on Collins' poetry, that of Longinus, is pointed out by Norman Maclean in his essay 'From occasion to image: theories of the lyric in the eighteenth century'.<sup>3</sup> Maclean demonstrates the popularity and influence

<sup>1</sup> Thomson, Classical influences on English poetry, London, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.151.

<sup>3</sup> In Crane, R.S., ed. Critics and criticism ancient and modern, Chicago, 1952, pp.408-62.

in the eighteenth century of Longinus' ideas, and particularly his concept of sublimity and, in doing so, shows that Collins' 'descriptive and allegorical' odes were in many ways conventional. He outlines the chief characteristics of the typical allegorical or descriptive ode, and shows that Collins' odes were structurally correct. The mood of Collins' odes too was conventional in that the sublime was usually suggested in some way and Maclean reminds us, even in the 'Ode to Evening' which at first does not seem to stress the concept of sublimity, 'wild and "awful" aspects of the object are used structurally to indicate a choice of aspects in natural objects and of moods aroused by them'.<sup>1</sup> Odes written in the eighteenth century usually involved a progression from specific objects to some great concept felt to be inherent in them and in this respect too Maclean finds the 'Ode to Evening' a conventional poem, since 'Fancy, Friendship, Science, Smiling Peace' are introduced into the poem as qualities inherent in the idea of evening. Thus, Maclean suggests, Collins' poetry depended heavily for its structure and moods on the eighteenth century interpretation of Longinus' critical views.

Several critics discussed in detail Collins' personified abstractions. Rachel Trickett emphasises the importance of the pictorial element in the personified abstractions of many eighteenth-century poems, and supports Maclean's contention that in many respects Collins' poems were conventional in the

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<sup>1</sup> Crane, R.S., ed.



devices they employed.<sup>1</sup> Chester F. Chapin examines the subject at greater length in his book Personification in eighteenth century poetry (New York, 1955). In this book Chapin supports A.S.P. Woodhouse's contention of the importance to Collins and the Wartons of the creative imagination. He further feels that, to Collins, the main function of the poetic imagination was its power to evoke visions, and explains the meaning of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' by equating 'Young Fancy' with the poetic imagination, which can create 'visions wild'. Chapin believes that Collins in this poem referred to the praeternatural elements in the poetry of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton to prove that poets in the past had made contact with the spirit world, although later poets could not make this very difficult contact. Chapin, then, interprets the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' as meaning that the poet's visions are divinely inspired, that Heaven and Fancy are the parents of true poetry, and that the poet is an intermediary between the spirit-world of visions and the real world of experience.

Chapin reinforces his argument by a discussion of the 'Ode to Fear'. In this poem, he says, Fancy must lift the veil before the inhabitants of the spirit-world can be seen, because 'the imagination must assume predominance over the rational faculty'.<sup>2</sup> The resulting personifications are to be recognised as the products of strong feeling as well as of vivid imagination, and they are to be seen as real persons, visitors 'from the spirit-world of the imagination'.<sup>3</sup>

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'The Auguston Pantheon: mythology & personification in 18th century poetry', in Essays & Studies, 1953, pp.71-86.

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Chapin, p.49.

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Ibid.

The Goddess Evening seems to Chapin to be Collins' most perfect evocation of a visitor from this other world. He sees her as an ever-changing figure, merging with the changing landscape, and insists that she is 'actually a figure of vision' who must be accepted as real by readers of the poem.<sup>1</sup> Chapin believes that Collins' personified abstractions 'reflect moments of visionary exultation' and that his best poetry was the product of imagination or fancy.<sup>2</sup>

Chapin does not believe that Collins' poetry is typical of his age. He feels that most of Collins' poems lack the formal perfection which we associate with the best neo-classical verse and so are not conventional in their form. He also feels that the mood of Collins' poetry differs from that of his contemporaries, since his emphasis on the importance of the creative imagination serves to set him apart from other poets, except the Wartons. Collins then is seen as a poet relying to some extent on the conventions of his time, but emphasizing the liberating powers of the imagination, instead of insisting on the neo-classical correctness of form. Chapin offers little evidence to support his claim that, except in the 'Ode to Evening', Collins' poetry 'lacks the near-perfection of form... which is rightly esteemed a virtue of the best neo-classic verse,<sup>3</sup> and in this he is at variance with the many critics who have commented on Collins' formal virtuosity.<sup>4</sup> The force

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1 Chapin, p.75.

2 Ibid., p.133.

3 Ibid., p.77.

4 E.g. Murry (1921), Leavis (1936), Schuster (1940).

of his argument that Collins differed greatly from most of his contemporary poets is thus weakened. However, Chapin's insistence on Collins' belief in the importance of the creative imagination remains a cogent reinforcement of the work previously done by Woodhouse on this subject.

Another poet interested in Collins' personifications is Jean Hagstrum who, like Chapin, links Collins with the Wartons. In a chapter on Collins in his book The sister arts (Chicago, 1958) Hagstrum states that Collins 'reflected the aesthetic position of the 1740's, specifically that of the Warton circle, which made as one of its central requirements the imaginative creation of pictorial personification'.<sup>1</sup> He then briefly examines the structure of Collins' odes and concludes that they are usually presented as prayers, and that their mood is predominantly one of religious devotion. Hagstrum also finds a prayer-like form and mood in 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', although he does not fully justify this contention. However, he attributes the mood as well as the form of Collins' poems to Milton's example, but finds that in Collins' poems the mood of religious awe is more pervasively present than in Milton's.

Hagstrum next calls our attention to another of Collins' qualities, the pictorialism of his writing. He sees Milton's 'Comus' as the precedent for this quality which, rather oddly, he thinks has been insufficiently recognised, and so he proceeds to examine it. Hagstrum traces a development in Collins' picture-making ability from the early 'Persian Eclogues', in which he tried to present his figures as lively pictures but

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Hagstrum, p.268.

did not fully succeed, to the 'Odes' in which Hagstrum finds that there is 'an increase in animation [and] the personification is pictorially more vivid and iconically clear'.<sup>1</sup>

Collins' method of presenting his personifications is, Hagstrum says, variable. Sometimes, as in 'How sleep the Brave', his method of revealing a scene or a group of personifications is suggestive rather than detailed. At other times, as in 'The Passions', Collins' personifications remind Hagstrum of 'splendid Renaissance and seventeenth century pictorial allegories in which lively mythological or allegorical personages were placed in appropriate landscapes'.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the 'Ode to Evening' in its pictorial methods reminds him of the paintings of Guido Reni. Hagstrum concludes that Collins was influenced by Guido Reni most of all, since painter and poet were each capable of combining melodrama and delicacy. Other influences, Hagstrum says, were provided by paintings of the high Renaissance and the seventeenth century, and by Greek and Roman sculptures. Several more names have now been added to the list of painters and other artists whose works resemble Collins' poems to some extent, or may have influenced Collins' method of depicting a scene.<sup>3</sup> Hagstrum finally sees Collins as drawing 'a gradual dusky veil over the real world so that we may not be too long diverted from our exploration of the "World of Soul"

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<sup>1</sup> Hagstrum, p.275.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.276.

<sup>3</sup> See remarks on, e.g. Swinburne and Deane, above, and Sypher supra.

and "the dim-discover'd Tracts of Mind", like Evening herself.<sup>1</sup>

Alan Dugald McKillop too was interested in the 'Ode to Evening' and in 1960 wrote an article on 'Collins' Ode to Evening - background and structure'.<sup>2</sup> McKillop here examines the poem 'Ye genii who in secret state' from Drafts and Fragments to see if it throws any light on the 'Ode to Evening', and concludes that the painters Rysdael, Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorrain, mentioned in the fragmentary poem, are those who influenced Collins' method of presenting the scene and goddess in the 'Ode to Evening'. Thus another list of painters who influenced Collins has been compiled although this time the painters were named by Collins himself, and so it may be assumed that they were in fact important to him.

McKillop reiterates the opinion expressed by Chapin and Hagstrum that the goddess Evening is a mobile, ever-changing figure, closely identified with the natural phenomena of evening and its changing light. He divides the poem into three parts, of roughly twenty lines each, and shows how they describe the progress of Evening and her train, the movements of the spectator, and the succession of the seasons. But for McKillop the poem is marred by the 'troop of abstractions in the last stanza',<sup>3</sup> and he quotes Norman Maclean's opinion, with which he agrees, that they are assembled 'in the quest for an elevated and abstracted ending'.<sup>4</sup> McKillop's reading of the poem is

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<sup>1</sup> Hagstrum, p.286.

<sup>2</sup> Tennessee studies in Lit., V (1960), pp.73-83.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Maclean, quoted by McKillop.

persuasive, although he relies too heavily on one phrase of Maclean's criticism of the 'Ode to Evening', his 'troop of abstractions', and does not mention Maclean's qualifying statement that the abstractions are assembled at the end of the poem because they are qualities felt to be inherent in the concept of evening.<sup>1</sup>

E.M.W. Tillyard does much to elucidate the meaning of another of Collins' poems, the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson', in an article in the Review of English Literature (vol. 1, 1960, pp.30-38). Tillyard's explanation of the poem's meaning owes much to Tompkins' essay written in 1946,<sup>2</sup> since he too is anxious to discover precisely what Collins meant by the word 'druid'. He concludes that it means, primarily, 'bard', and that through the traditional association between druids and oak-trees Collins hints at Thomson's eminence as a poet of the natural world.

Tillyard examines the poem verse by verse, to find its meaning. He concludes that Thomson is revealed as a national figure, who should be honoured by educated Britons as well as by simple country-folk. He shows that the poem is carefully structured and involves a double progression, in the journey of the boat down the river and in the implied progress of the advancing twilight. There is also a development of sentiment from formal grieving to a simpler sadness, so that the poem's structure parallels the development of feeling which the poem expresses.

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1 Maclean above cit. p.444.

2 See previous chapter.

As well as seeking to discover the meaning of the poem as a whole, Tillyard attempts to explain various possibly ambiguous words. The 'pointed clay' of the final stanza has puzzled many of the poem's readers and Tillyard suggests that 'pointed' is a latinism, and means the indication of the body's resting place. Other readers have, however, suggested other meanings.<sup>1</sup> Some of Tillyard's conclusions are disputable, but his argument generally remains convincing. He has done much to reveal the complex structure of this apparently simple poem, and to consolidate the work previously done by Tompkins to make its meaning clear.

In 1956 E.L. Brooks tried to establish the meaning of the controversial lines 23 to 50 of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.<sup>2</sup> Many critics had believed that in this poem Collins describes a kind of marriage between God and Fancy, and a resulting birth of the Poet.<sup>3</sup> Brooks looks closely at the actual words used by Collins, and concludes that the poem does not describe such a union, but describes instead how God is engaged in weaving the cestus of poetry while Fancy merely sits near him and sings her inspirational songs. God then gives the cestus to Fancy to dispose of, and she gives it to Milton. The 'youth' mentioned in the poem, and often thought to represent the poet, is instead, Brooks contends, the sun, as the reference

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E.g. Alexander Henderson, R.E.L., vol. 1 (1960), p.65, suggested that 'pointed' refers to the tomb's brickwork, which is 'pointed' with mortar. O.F. Sigworth, William Collins, p.138, prefers the O.E.D. definition of 'pointed': 'having the quality of penetrating or piercing the sensations, feeling or mind'.

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College English, vol.17 (1956), pp.403-4.

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See comments in previous chapters on Mrs. Barbauld, Edmund Blunden, Ainsworth. See also Northrop Frye, below, next chapter.

to his 'subject-life' implies. Brooks hopes that his analysis of the meaning of this passage will relieve Collins 'of charges of irreverence and audacity' since 'God, a spirit, is not represented as procreating in animal fashion'.<sup>1</sup> Brooks' careful reading of the controversial passage is plausible and the meaning advanced by him is, I think, more acceptable than that suggested by such previous critics as Blunden and Ainsworth.

Two other critics writing in the 1950s, although concerned with eighteenth-century poetry in general rather than with Collins in particular, do much to advance our appreciation of Collins' place among the poets of his own time. Bernard Groom, in his book The diction of poetry from Spenser to Bridges (Toronto, 1955) discusses the high incidence of periphrastic phrases in Pope's early work, and their popularity during the eighteenth century. He feels that they were popular largely because they accorded well with eighteenth-century theories of deism, and implies that Collins' occasional use of such phrases reveals him as a poet sharing many of the religious concepts of his time. He further attributes the novelties of diction of the 'Highlands' ode to the general 'Spenserian revival', and believes that Collins shared both the mood and the diction of the mid-eighteenth century. He shared its mood, Groom says, because with Thomson, Gray, Shenstone, the Wartons, Young and Blair, he was 'susceptible to the charms of pensive (and at times funereal) melancholy'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks, p.404.

<sup>2</sup> Groom, p.145.



Northrop Frye also attempts to establish Collins in his proper historical context, and to do so coins a new phrase to describe Collins' age. In his essay 'Towards defining an age of sensibility' (E.L.H., June 1956, pp.144-52)<sup>1</sup> he rejects the term 'pre-romantic' to describe the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century, on the grounds that the poets concerned did not know that the Romantics were to succeed them, and in any case they probably would not have regarded the later poetry as a fulfillment of their own. Frye instead prefers to talk of an 'Age of Sensibility'. He is aware of the existence of two views of literature, 'the Aristotelian and the Longinian, the aesthetic and the psychological, the view of literature as product and the view of literature as process'.<sup>2</sup> The Augustans, Frye says, had a strong sense of literature as a finished product, and such a view caused them to prefer a regularly recurring metre and a sense of continually fulfilled expectation: hence rhymed couplets were popular. But the 'poets of sensibility', Smart, Chatterton, Burns, and Blake as well as Collins, were more interested in the poetic process. Their poetry therefore is distinguished by a lesser degree of metrical regularity and, because subconscious associations are freely made, it becomes 'hypnotically repetitive, oracular, incantatory, dreamlike and in the original sense of the word charming'.<sup>3</sup> Poems of this kind tend to be brief, and so the lyric becomes generally popular. This view, I feel, can only

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1 Reprinted in Eighteenth Century English Lit., ed. J.L. Clifford, New York, 1959.

2 Ibid., p.312.

3 Ibid., p.314.

be accepted with some reservations, since Smart's best-known poems are 'oracular' and 'incantatory', but are certainly not brief.

Frye also suggests that 'Where there is a strong sense of literature as an aesthetic product, there is also a strong sense of detachment from the spectator', but that 'where there is a sense of literature as process, pity and fear become states of mind without objects, moods which are common to the work of art and the reader, and which bind them together psychologically instead of separating them aesthetically'.<sup>1</sup> One manifestation of this generalized sense of pity without an object is, Frye says, the kind of imaginative sympathy with the superstitions of the countryside that is found in Collins' poetry.

Collins then is seen, not as a pre-Romantic or post-Augustan poet, but as one writing within the conventions of an 'Age of Sensibility', whose poets were concerned with literature as a continuing process rather than as a finished product. Frye has provided a new label for Collins and his contemporary poets and, in doing so, has made a useful distinction between their kind of poetry and that of their immediate predecessors. Thus by the end of the 1950s Collins was being considered as a leading exponent of an altogether different kind of poetry, and the style of his odes and the conventions he employed were being examined in their relationship to this newly-recognised poetic movement. Collins was now seen to be more closely akin to the Wartons in his theory and practice than to Gray, with whom he was, previously, often compared and, since 1960, this new approach to the poetry of Collins has been widely adopted.

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<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth Century English Lit., p.316.

CHAPTER 81961-67

In the first seven years of the last decade many critics, including Raymond Havens, Harold Bloom, Merle Brown, Patricia Spacks, Ricardo Quintana and Earl Wasserman wrote at some length about William Collins, indicating that his popularity, at least as the subject of learned essays, is still increasing. Moreover Geoffrey Tillotson published his Augustan studies (London, 1961), which includes three chapters on poetic diction, and John Arthos published his monumental work The language of natural description in eighteenth century poetry (New York, 1966). These works together describe the stock diction of the eighteenth century and the extent of its use by various poets, define its usefulness, analyse its components, clarify the reasons for its previous popularity and its present unpopularity, and, in general, examine all aspects of the diction. Although neither Tillotson nor Arthos was writing about Collins the influence of their works on any subsequent attempt to analyse his diction must be considerable. But for the student of Collins' poetry there were three important events during these years. The first was the publication in 1965 of A.S.P. Woodhouse's long essay 'The poetry of Collins reconsidered', which reveals how Woodhouse, after many years of consideration, has come to regard Collins' poetry. In the same year Oliver Sigworth's book William Collins appeared, and provided a good introduction to Collins' poetry for the general reader. Finally, in 1967, P.L. Carver's long-awaited book The life of a poet was published. This work, the culmination of many

years of research, includes critical opinion as well as being the definitive biography of Collins.

Several of Collins' poems were, during this period, subjected to critical scrutiny. The 'Ode on the Poetical Character', for example, was discussed by Havens, Bloom, Wasserman, and Spacks. R.D. Havens in his book The influence of Milton on English poetry (New York, 1961) describes Collins as 'the most inspired and possibly the most nearly romantic poet produced in the first eighty years of the century'.<sup>1</sup> His opinion of Collins differs from that of many other modern critics in this respect, but he is by no means alone in his analysis of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' in which, he believes, an apparently blasphemous courtship between God and Fancy is described. Havens proposed a new reason for Collins' inclusion of this event in his poem: he notes that the ode is structurally modelled on 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', and thinks that, since Milton gave an account in his poems of the wooing of Mirth and Melancholy, Collins felt obliged to describe a similar courtship. Havens also suggests other ways in which Collins was influenced by Milton, and discovers the 'Allegro' structure in the first 'Oriental Eclogue' and 'the Manners', and the 'Nativity Ode' stanza used in an altered form in the 'Ode to Simplicity'.

A second critic who interprets the relationship between God and Fancy in the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' as a sexual union is Harold Bloom. Bloom does not consider Collins as a romantic poet, but feels that he is allied to Keats, Blake

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Havens, p.454.

and Wordsworth by 'One of the great traditions of English poetry, the prophetic and Protestant line of Spenser and Milton'.<sup>1</sup> He believes that Collins, in his most intensely poetic moments, transfigures the matter of common perception, achieving a 'fade-out or fluid dissolving of the imagination', and that this 'fade-out' causes the confusion of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.<sup>2</sup> He attempts to remove this confusion by insisting that the poem suggests 'that the poet is born from a quasi-sexual union of God and Imagination',<sup>3</sup> and sees further sexual activity in the episode in which the girdle of poetry is bestowed. In this episode, he claims, 'the beauty of [Spenser's] Florimel becomes transformed into the bright world of Fancy by a consummation analogous to sexual completion'.<sup>4</sup> Bloom does not explain this analogy, although he cites such expressions as 'loins'<sup>5</sup> and 'feel...her flame'<sup>6</sup> in an attempt to show that the diction of the poem makes the sexual nature of the gift apparent.

Bloom, I consider, reads into the poem meanings and implications which it cannot support. He applauds Collins as a man courageous enough to break away from the traditional idea of God as a man and sole creator of the world. But in the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' Collins says only that God exercised his divine imagination to bring about the creation, and Bloom's

<sup>1</sup> Bloom, H., The visionary company, London, 1962, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>5</sup> 'Poetical Character', line 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., line 22.

interpretation of the poem can only be sustained by a distortion of it. Bloom sees Fancy as a logical descendant of a long arcane tradition, stemming from the cabala and including neo-platonism, gnosticism and mysticism among its manifestations. He also sees the poet, the child of God and Fancy, as a traditional figure, saying that 'When we encounter a youth of the sun who incarnates a rebirth of poetry, and whose early existence is in an earthly paradise, then we encounter a myth of the birth of Ore, or rebirth of Apollo, whether we find him in Collins or Coleridge or Blake or Keats or Shelley'.<sup>1</sup>

Bloom's book is primarily concerned with the great Romantic poets and, I feel, he presents a distorted picture of Collins in his attempt to fit him into the framework of the book.

Earl R. Wasserman also wrote about the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to ascertain the part Fancy plays in the poem, Wasserman searches for biblical sources for her, and decides that she is modelled on 'the female figure of Wisdom pictured in Proverbs and the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon'.<sup>3</sup> Thus Fancy is more than human imagination and, to Wasserman, she is 'related to human fancy as God's Wisdom is to man's'.<sup>4</sup> The poem as Wasserman interprets it then means that God's own creative Wisdom, which he enthrones beside him, effects the creation. The sun is the 'youth' called into creation by God's Wisdom, and Wasserman does not believe, with Bloom

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1 Bloom, p.8.

2 E.L.H., vol.34 (1967), pp.92-115.

3 Ibid., p.95.

4 Ibid., p.97.

and Havens, that a quasi-sexual union and subsequent birth of the poet is described in the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.

Wasserman distinguishes two acts of creation in the poem. The first, brought about by God 'with Thought',<sup>1</sup> is, he believes, 'an account of the eternal conception of the universe as Ideas in God's mind, not as material realities', and the second is the creation of the material universe as a copy of the ideal pattern.<sup>2</sup> This Neoplatonic account of the creation explains why Collins refers to Heaven and Fancy as 'kindred pow'rs',<sup>3</sup> and gives us some insight into Collins' theory of poetry since Collins' ideal poet, Wasserman believes, would create his poetry by translating into words visions from this Neoplatonic other world. Such poems as the 'Ode to Evening' and the 'Ode to Pity', in which these visions are given expression, are then, Wasserman feels, more readily understood.

Wasserman reminds us that the poem is about the 'Poetical Character', not poetry or the poetic process, and concludes that Collins describes Milton as the only true, divinely-inspired poet, although he does not exclude the possibility that other prophetic poetry may be written in the future. But Collins believes that there is another group of poets, inspired, like Spenser, by the 'Elfin Queen',<sup>4</sup> rather than by Fancy, and that Waller is a poet of this kind. Thus Wasserman provides an explanation of Collins' poetic theory through his examination of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.

<sup>1</sup> 'Poetical Character', line 25.

<sup>2</sup> E.L.H., vol.34, p.98.

<sup>3</sup> 'Poetical Character', line 74.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., line 4.

Patricia Spacks is another critic who discusses this poem.<sup>1</sup> She agrees that the ode describes several visions, and that its poetry, founded on the power of metaphysical vision, is closely related to the divine. She believes that it is dominated by images, which are used in a new way: they 'are not simply an end in themselves; they are the sources of illumination, provide the guiding principle of the poem', and they exist 'not to move the reader so much as to focus and clarify the emotions of the writer'.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs Spacks agrees with Harold Bloom that the poem is confused, and she attributes the confusion to careless rhetoric, weak syntax, and too great a profusion of adjectives. These, she feels, are Collins' weaknesses, and his strength resides in the vividness of his images. Unlike the critics previously mentioned she is more interested in the poem's structure and imagery than in its overall meaning. But her comments nevertheless reinforce the interpretation of the poem, now gaining general acceptance, as a work describing in visionary terms the idea of the divinely-inspired poet, interpreting visions from an ideal world through his heaven-bestowed power of imagination.

The 'Ode on the Poetical Character' was not the only poem by Collins to be discussed during the 1960s: the 'Ode to Evening' also attracted many commentators, among whom Merle E. Brown is prominent. In an essay published in 1961 Merle Brown examines the poem in an attempt to find the logic underlying

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<sup>1</sup> Spacks, P.M., The poetry of vision, Harvard, 1967, pp.66-89.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.71.



its structure, and discovers that, although the poem at first appears discursive and illogical, there is in fact a closely-constructed logic governing it.<sup>1</sup> The poem, she asserts, relates how the poet is taught by Eve to make a poem that will please her, and is itself that poem. Collins' telling of this reveals that he has captured Evening's beauty, which was the subject of her lesson, and thus, Brown concludes 'the essence of Evening and the essence of Poetry, as Collins imagined them in the "Ode to Evening", are identical'.<sup>2</sup> This conclusion is supported by the fact that evening is suspended, like poetry itself, between action and contemplation, between day and night, and by the fact that Collins often associates poetry with evening, as he does in the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' and the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson'.

The goddess Eve, according to Brown, is identical with Evening, like her constantly and subtly changing and, in the same way, the poet constantly changes, sometimes being present and sometimes absent, sometimes asking for help, but proving by the excellence of his poem that help has been granted already. Thus, Brown says, he is not a finite person but 'is essentially identical with his muse, Eve, just as the essence of poetry and the essence of evening are the same in this ode'.<sup>3</sup> The poet and goddess are, to Merle Brown, inextricable from the scene they describe and personify, and she sees the entire poem as an exercise in balance and antithesis. She shows how apparent

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<sup>1</sup> Essays in Criticism, vol.11 (1961), pp.136-53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.138.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.145.

confusion and real harmony, harsh and gentle sounds, lightness and darkness, the wildness of nature and the orderliness of human habitation, are reconciled. But Miss Brown sometimes overstates her case, as when she claims that

Collins is even able to use grammatical looseness in order to reconcile the discordant qualities. The fact that it is not clear whether the beetle or the pilgrim is "born in heedless Hum" is one of the subtlest moments in the poem.<sup>1</sup>

This effect seems to me to be probably accidental, since Collins' syntax, as is shown in the long opening sentence of the 'Ode to Evening' as well as in most of his other poems, is often confused. Thus any happy effects occasionally gained through syntactical weakness cannot confidently be attributed to a deliberate intention. But although Merle Brown has somewhat exaggerated the extent in which Collins reconciled opposites in the 'Ode to Evening' her analysis of the poem's logic is, in general, both convincing and novel.

R.D. Havens, who does not believe Collins to be a truly lyrical poet because he is contemplative rather than emotional and prefers the abstract to the concrete, nevertheless speaks highly of the 'Ode to Evening'. He believes it to be 'hardly surpassed in all English literature' as a meditative lyric, and marvels at its rare combination of classical restraint and a tenderly natural style.<sup>2</sup> Havens' admiration of the poem is shared by many other critics of the period, including C. Day Lewis, who describes it as 'an exquisitely wrought poem'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Essays in Criticism, vol.11, p.148.

<sup>2</sup> Havens, R.D., The influence of Milton on English poetry, p.561.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, C. Day., The lyric impulse, London, 1965, p.112.

The 'Ode on the Poetical Character', although widely admired is, as I have shown, admired by two different groups of critics who interpret it in radically different ways and are almost, in effect, praising two different poems. But the 'Ode to Evening' causes far less controversy, and is liked by most commentators for broadly similar reasons.

Several other poems by Collins were discussed by Patricia M. Spacks in two books, The insistence of horror (Harvard, 1962) and The poetry of vision (above cit.) She believes that in the 'Ode to Fear' Collins recognises the necessity to submit his mind to the power of fear, in order to gain the power of vision, and that by the end of the poem 'Collins' imagined visions have led him to an almost religious awe of the power of imagination and emotion'.<sup>1</sup> Like Merle Brown and, in the previous decade, Chester Chapin, she emphasises Collins' belief in the power of visions.

In an interesting comment on the 'Highlands' ode Mrs Spacks suggests that Collins here tried to distance himself from the world of the supernatural by suggesting it as a possible subject for another poet to use, because he was half afraid that 'participation in the realm of the supernatural...produces "dreary dreams", causes the "drooping" of the participants, and is somehow related to madness'.<sup>2</sup> But she thinks that he could not prevent himself from becoming emotionally involved in the superstitions he describes, and that the poem is filled with vivid pictures of both natural and imaginary scenes, and is

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<sup>1</sup> Spacks, P.M., Poetry of vision, p.77.

<sup>2</sup> Insistence of horror, p.74.

concerned with emotional reactions to these scenes. In Mrs Spacks' opinion Collins is a visionary who projects himself imaginatively into the subject-matter of his poems and voluntarily lets it act upon his emotions, although he is aware of the dangers involved in so doing. She does not agree with those critics like Edmund Gosse and Charles Hunter Ross who find Collins' poetry cold and lacking in emotional intensity, and has shown that, in the 'Ode to Fear' and the 'Highlands' ode at least, there is great intensity of emotion.

In 1963 Ricardo Quintana developed further Musgrove's theory that the Odes are all thematically related,<sup>1</sup> in an article on 'The scheme of Collins' Odes on Several...Subjects'.<sup>2</sup> He does not agree with Musgrove that they are poems about the nature of the true poet, but believes them to be about the different poetic 'kinds'. He notes that Collins in the 'Epistle to Hanmer' mentions five different kinds of literary art: Greek tragedy, Graeco-Roman comedy, love poetry, Provençal and Italian poetry, and French drama; and discusses the descriptions and imagery which characterize each type, and the effect each produces. Further, the 'Highlands' ode is a poem about poetry, and specifically about the kind of poetry John Home might write. With this evidence that Collins was interested in the 'kinds', Quintana discovers that six of the Odes can be interpreted as poems concerned with one kind of poetry. Thus the odes to Pity and Fear 'concern themselves with tragic drama', the 'Ode to Simplicity' 'has pastoral

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See chapter 2, above.

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Restoration and Eighteenth Century Literature, ed. Carroll Camden, Chicago, 1963, pp.371-80.

poetry steadily in view', 'The Manners' is concerned with 'moral and social poetry, akin to comedy in the sphere of drama', and 'The Passions' 'is not only an ode for music, but an ode about music'.<sup>1</sup> The 'Ode on the Poetical Character' is a poem about Milton and, Quintana suggests, about the kind of sublime poetry which Milton wrote.

Quintana agrees with Garrod's view that the other odes, apart from the 'Ode to Evening', form a series of patriotic poems. But he maintains that even in these poems 'Collins used his art...for exploring the resources of poetry, and for expressing the hopes and desires of a civilised community'.<sup>2</sup> Thus all the Odes share a common preoccupation: they are not about the poet, or about Collins himself, but are about the 'different kinds of poetry, their different kinds of imagery, their different effects'.<sup>3</sup> Quintana has accepted Musgrove's hypothesis that the Odes form a continuous poem on one subject, but has re-defined that subject.

One major study of Collins' poetry published during the 1960s is A.S.P. Woodhouse's essay on 'The poetry of Collins reconsidered'.<sup>4</sup> Woodhouse had, in 1931, published an essay on 'Collins and the creative imagination' (see Chapter 5, above), and now, in 1965, this seems 'in several respects defective' to Woodhouse, because 'it left out essential elements in the background of Collins' poetry; it did not penetrate sufficiently

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<sup>1</sup> Restoration and Eighteenth Century Literature, p.375.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.380.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> From sensibility to romanticism, ed. F.W. Hilles and H. Bloom, New York, 1965, pp.93-138.

deeply into his artistry, and it failed to differentiate him decisively from his nearest relations, the Wartons'.<sup>1</sup>

Woodhouse now sees Collins as a poet inhabiting simultaneously two different worlds. He was influenced by the early eighteenth century 'poets of reason' who regarded poetry as a social utterance rather than as an expression of individual emotion, and this influence is apparent to Woodhouse in Collins' earliest poetry. But he believes that, particularly when writing his later poems, Collins was also influenced by an emerging 'world' of Pre-romanticism dominated by the Wartons and James Thomson. Woodhouse finds evidence to support this opinion when he examines the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' and repeats his original conclusion that in this ode Collins reveals a belief, shared with the Wartons, in the power of the creative imagination. Woodhouse believes that the 'cest' is a symbol of the poetic imagination and that Fancy, the personification of God's divine imagination, was the faculty through which God created the world. Fancy is not a separate person but an attribute of God, and through exercising his imagination in this way God called into being the sun and all living things. The poem ends in praise of Milton and in a repudiation of the sort of Neoclassical poetry written by Waller. Woodhouse still sees this poem as an explicit statement of Collins' poetic creed, and maintains that in it Collins treats his abstractions as embodiments of a platonic archetype originating in heaven, since Fancy and Heaven are described as 'kindred powr's'.<sup>2</sup>

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From sensibility to romanticism, p.93n.

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'Ode on the Poetical Character', line 74.

Woodhouse re-states opinions held by many critics of the 1960s. He agrees with Quintana's view that the odes to Pity and Fear deal with the passions essential to tragedy and so have some literary reference. He mentions the close relationship of painting and poetry defined by Horace's phrase 'ut pictura poesis' but believes, like Wasserman, that in the eighteenth century personification was not primarily visual in effect, and was instead a popular figure of speech intended to communicate strong emotion. He discusses some of Collins' personified figures, and calls attention to their great difference from the personifications of other mid-century poetry. He points out that sometimes, as in the personification of Pity, 'the effect is not merely visual, but visionary',<sup>1</sup> and in this anticipates the remark later made by Patricia Spacks that, for Collins, 'visions are - or can be - more significant than vision'.<sup>2</sup>

But Woodhouse does not simply repeat generally accepted opinions. He emphasises Collins' importance as an innovator, showing that in the early 'Oriental Eclogues' Collins contrasts the idyllic countryside characteristic of pastoral poetry with the hostility of the desert and the horrors of war, thus broadening the emotional scope of the eclogue form. He was an innovator in his belief in the importance of the creative imagination and the prophetic rôle of the poet; in the visionary quality of many of his personified figures, such as Pity, Danger, Peace, and Mercy; and in his ability, best shown

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1 From sensibility to romanticism, p.122.

2 Poetry of vision, p.78.

in 'How sleep the Brave', to evoke an impression of a scene without actually describing the scene or any of the figures in it. Collins was also an innovator in the way he used the Pindaric ode, subtly varying it so that a sense of classical restraint could be imposed by the form, while the content and language, as in the odes to Liberty and Fear and on the Poetical Character, could simultaneously create an impression of movement and excitement. But Collins' greatest discovery, according to Woodhouse, is his belief that the poetic imagination 'bears a relation to truth, and can seize on and present the "idea" of things - of pity, of fear, of liberty, of evening; what you will'.<sup>1</sup> In this way, Woodhouse believes, Collins' personifications become true symbols, and in this respect he differed from his contemporaries and had something in common with the Romantics.

In this essay Woodhouse modifies the opinion that he formerly held that, because Collins shares several characteristics with the Romantics, 'one is almost tempted to think of him as the first Romantic poet'.<sup>2</sup> He now believes that 'The "Superstitions Ode" suggests indeed a whole new field of romantic poetry which Collins did not live to explore; but the Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects remain his substantial achievement and the one most characteristic of his genius'.<sup>3</sup> Woodhouse has resisted the temptation to regard Collins' published poems in the light of possible romantic

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1 From sensibility to romanticism, p.123.

2 Studies in English by members of University College Toronto, p.130.

3 From sensibility to romanticism, p.126.



characteristics which his future poems, if he had lived to write them, might have displayed. Thus Woodhouse has reached a juster view of Collins' achievement and place among his contemporaries than he had in 1931 when he published his earlier essay on Collins.

In 1965 Oliver F. Sigworth published his book William Collins (New York), only the third book, after the works of Garrod and Ainsworth, to be devoted solely to a critical account of the poet. Sigworth states that 'The aim of this little book is to be a guide to the appreciation of the poetry of William Collins',<sup>1</sup> and it serves as a good introduction to Collins' works, as well as giving a careful account of the main events of his life. The biographical parts of the book rely heavily on the evidence discovered by P.L. Carver, and published in a series of articles which appeared in Notes and Queries during 1939. Thus Sigworth's information is accurate, although he sometimes suggests a different interpretation of the facts than does Carver.

Sigworth discusses 'The poetry and the age', providing information on the eighteenth century preoccupation with poetic 'kinds', and showing that Collins, like the Wartons, relied heavily on the convention of the age but rebelled against the prevalence of didactic or moralistic poetry. He discusses the concept of the sublime 'Pindarick' ode, spelt thus by Sigworth 'to indicate the eighteenth century conception of a particular kind of poetry, one which bore certain relationships to the works of Pindar, but which, soon after it was first

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Sigworth, Preface.

popularized in the seventeenth century, came to have an independent life'.<sup>1</sup> He also explains the popularity of prosopopoeia, reaffirming Wasserman's contention that this figure was regarded as a powerful way of expressing and communicating excitement. He also mentions the fondness of the eighteenth century for 'the language of generality',<sup>2</sup> for ideas expressed as universal truths, and, as part of this language, for 'poetic diction'. Thus Sigworth provides a good background to the understanding of Collins' poetry, explaining the reasons for many of the poetic practices which tend to alienate the modern reader from Collins' poetry.

When Sigworth goes on to talk briefly about Collins' poems he makes few novel or surprising assertions, but provides an analysis based on current critical opinion and enriched by his study of the Drafts and Fragments. He agrees with most modern critics that the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' provides a key to our understanding of Collins' poetry. He avoids the controversy over the episode of God wooing Fancy in a metaphorical or literal sense by not mentioning it, but believes the youth subsequently born to be 'both Apollo as the sun and Apollo as the god of poetry', so that 'his subject life is both the life subject to, dependent upon him as the sun, and the subject of his art', and adds that 'The act of poetic creation is thus doubly connected with God's act of creating the material universe'.<sup>3</sup> To Sigworth, apparently,

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<sup>1</sup> Sigworth, p.65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.107.

the meaning of the poem, that 'the weaving of the girdle of poetry is a product of the act of divine imagination by which the world was created'<sup>1</sup> is clear, although he confesses himself puzzled by a few obscurities arising from confused syntax. He admires the poem, and believes that it closely approximates to a 'sublime Pindarick'.

Sigworth's favourite poems seem to be the 'Ode to Evening' and 'How sleep the Brave' and, to a lesser extent, the 'Ode to Liberty' and 'The Passions'. When he discusses 'How sleep the Brave' he reverts to a kind of criticism reminiscent of Langhorne's, telling us that 'One cannot analyze perfection any more than one could analyze a miracle'.<sup>2</sup> However, he manages to convey some useful information about the date of the poem and the events which led to its composition.

When he discusses individual poems Sigworth usually indicates the general critical concensus of opinion, and then reveals if and in what way his own opinions differ from this norm. Thus, perhaps thinking about Merle Brown's essay, he tells us that the 'Ode to Evening' has recently been considered a complex poem, but that he believes it to be a simple one 'whose great values are mostly on the surface...where Collins intended them to be',<sup>3</sup> and offers the pertinent reminder that Collins was 'a mid-eighteenth-century poet and therefore intended his verse to mean what it seemed to mean, and not what it seems to us to mean'.<sup>4</sup> Sigworth denies that the 'Ode

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1 Sigworth, p.107.

2 Ibid., p.109.

3 Ibid., p.117.

4 Ibid., p.120.

to Evening' reveals Collins as a romantic, saying that in this poem Collins asks nature to teach him a lesson, but the lesson is intended to improve his poetic art, not to enlarge his soul. The 'nature' of Collins' poem, then, can hardly be interpreted as a Wordsworthian sort of 'nature'. Sigworth looks at the fragment beginning 'Ye genii who in secret state' and finds evidence to support this view, since here Collins compares the natural world with scenes depicted by his favourite painters, and praises nature in terms of art.

Sigworth paraphrases the poems to see if they are capable of being understood, and finds minor obscurities in most of them. One poem, the 'Ode to Peace' fails these tests completely, since, Sigworth complains, it shows a picture which 'is not clear, or, if it is clear, it is ludicrous'.<sup>1</sup> But, in general, he feels that Collins is a good poet. He rules that 'The first requisite for the poet is that he have mastered his language, his technique; the second, that he feel intensely and see clearly', and concludes that Collins fulfils these requirements.<sup>2</sup>

As Ainsworth had done, Sigworth next tries to discover Collins' sources, but decides that 'it would be profitless to repeat the work Mr. Ainsworth has already so industriously performed',<sup>3</sup> although he suggests a few classical influences which Ainsworth, he feels, under-emphasized. Again following the scheme of Ainsworth's book he then considers Collins in

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<sup>1</sup> Sigworth, p.113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.146.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.153.

relation to Gray, the growth of his fame, and his influence on the Romantic poets, believing on the last point that 'many of the parallels and supposed influences which Mr. Ainsworth has pointed out are rather strained'.<sup>1</sup> He concludes by saying that, 'like the very greatest poets' Collins 'saw the world in a way which nobody had ever quite seen it before and has never quite seen it since, and left us a record of this vision'.<sup>2</sup> Sigworth realises that the reader's personal taste will determine the extent of his liking for Collins' poetry, but believes that all must recognise that the 'Ode to Evening', 'How sleep the Brave' and, perhaps, the 'Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson' are among the finest lyrics in the English language.

Sigworth's book succeeds in its purpose of providing a guide to the appreciation of Collins' poetry. It tells us about his life and the poetic conventions of his age, and explains the meaning of most of his poems quite adequately. Moreover, it provides an excellent bibliography. It clearly invites comparison with the books about Collins previously written by Garrod and Ainsworth and, I believe, the comparison is favourable to Sigworth. When Garrod wrote his book he believed Collins' poetry to be overstated, and his book is so clearly intended to redress this imbalance that it sometimes suffers from a lack of complete objectivity. Ainsworth's book is written from a less biased viewpoint, but is now rather out of date, and some of his conclusions have recently been proved no longer tenable. Sigworth's book, as well as succeeding in the

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1 Sigworth, p.159.

2 Ibid., p.164.

aims stated in its preface, provides a valuable service in bringing much of Ainsworth's study up to date.

Finally, in 1967, P.L. Carver's biography The life of a poet was published in London. Carver, as he relates in the preface, had been interested in Collins for many years, and in 1939 had contributed a series of articles about various incidents in the poet's life to Notes and Queries. His book incorporates some factual information from this series of brief articles, and much more, which was the result of more recent research. Carver has taken great pains to establish his facts, scrutinising old wills, parish registers, and many private letters, and he is meticulous in citing indisputable evidence for all the facts he has assembled. He has written a biography of Collins which must be definitive unless new evidence is discovered and, in addition, provides astute criticism of the poems, and interesting speculation concerning the dates and circumstances of their composition.

Carver propounds an ingenious new hypothesis to account for the ambiguity and confusion of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character', suggesting that the creation described in the poem may not be the same as the creation described in the Old Testament. Collins may have been thinking of the creation story told by Ovid in the Metamorphoses, or of the story of Zeus who fell in love with Chthonie, the basic earth, and presented her with a wedding-garment, as Pherecydes, a minor Greek writer, described. Carver cannot prove that Collins was familiar with this story, but offers evidence suggesting that he might have known it. This theory, Carver admits, does not account for the entrance into the poem of the 'youth', whom

Carver feels can only be Apollo. He suggests that Collins may be confusing Apollo in his role as the sun-god and Apollo as the patron of poets, and feels that in writing this part of the poem Collins may have been influenced by one of Horace's odes. Carver expends a great deal of effort in his attempt to re-interpret the 'Ode on the Poetical Character' as a poem influenced heavily by half-remembered classical writings, and in doing so, to acquit Collins of the charge of blasphemy levelled against him by Mrs Barbauld.

Carver has closely studied the Drafts and fragments and attempts to date some of them. Cunningham had suggested that the fragment 'To Simplicity' was an early version of the 'Ode to Simplicity',<sup>1</sup> but Carver disagrees. He believes that the fragmentary poem is a later reworking of the ideas expressed in the 'Ode to Simplicity', and thinks that it 'is in every way positively superior' to the printed ode, being free from its obscurities.<sup>2</sup> He thinks that it was probably written between 1751 and 1754, when Collins, who had been ill, was living at Chichester.

Like Cunningham, Carver believes that the 'Lines on Restoration drama' may be connected with the 'Epistle to Hanmer', and he advances a theory to account for this apparent connection. He notes that there is a change in the tone of the 'Epistle to Hanmer' after line 112, and suggests that Collins may originally have written these first lines, followed by the 'Lines of Restoration drama', as a poem surveying the progress

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Roger Lonsdale, in his edition of The poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith (London, 1969) agrees with Cunningham, saying (p.523) 'The stanzas "To Simplicity" clearly precede the printed ode on the same subject'.

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Carver, p.168.

of drama throughout history. Then, Carver thinks, Collins may have decided to praise Hanmer's edition of Shakespeare in an attempt to secure the patronage of this influential man and, to this end, may have rewritten the second part of the poem, incorporating a tribute to Hanmer. Carver admits that 'this is mere conjecture',<sup>1</sup> but nevertheless the theory is an attractive one.

Carver performs another piece of literary detective-work when he constructs a hypothesis to account for the obvious resemblance between two poems which were perhaps written by Alexander Carlyle, and Collins' 'How sleep the Brave' and 'Ode to Evening'. Carver believes that two poems, 'An ode to the memory of Colonel Gardiner' and 'An ode to evening', both 'in imitation of Milton', which were published anonymously in the British Magazine for February 1947, were written by Carlyle. But the anonymous odes contain many words and phrases of Collins' two poems and Carver speculates that, since Carlyle was a man of undisputed personal integrity, he would not have copied a few lines and phrases from Collins' poems without even acknowledging them. He believes instead that Collins and Carlyle probably met in London in 1746, and collaborated in writing the 'Ode to the memory of Colonel Gardiner' and the 'Ode to Evening, in imitation of Milton'. Subsequently Collins may have taken the lines which he contributed to the poems, and re-shaped and enlarged them into 'How sleep the Brave' and his 'Ode to Evening'. Meanwhile Alexander Carlyle, feeling that Collins' contributions to his

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Carver, p.28.



two poems were of minor importance, may have published them without mentioning Collins' part-authorship or, indeed, his own. This theory may represent the truth about the four poems, but it depends too much on supposition and too little on factual evidence to be accepted. Carlyle may have published the poems which Carver attributes to him, he may have met Collins, and the two may have collaborated. But Carver, as he freely admits, cannot prove any of this.

One of Carver's theories which is supported by rather more evidence is that Collins' first published poem was 'an ingenious trifle in rhymed couplets entitled "Hercules"'.<sup>1</sup> This appeared anonymously in the Gentleman's Magazine for January 1738, and was attributed to Collins by the editor of The Crypt who printed it in 1828 from, he claimed, a manuscript formerly in the possession of the Wartons, signed 'Collins' and dated 1747. Carver believes that the manuscript owned by the editor of The Crypt was a letter transcript of a poem written by Collins when he was still a schoolboy at Winchester. Carver has demonstrated that Collins at the age of sixteen may have written this poem, but has not conclusively proved that he did.

All the factual evidence presented by Carver in this book has been meticulously verified, and he has revealed all the main events of Collins' life, as far as they can be ascertained. We now know, for example, that Dr Johnson's story of Collins' inheriting £2,000 from his uncle, Colonel Martin, is highly unlikely to be true, since Carver shows that Colonel Martin

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Carver, p.15.

was not at all a rich man, and could hardly have left such a large estate. But where Carver departs from the facts and speculates about possibilities his conclusions are open to dispute. However he always acknowledges his departures from the evidence, and his book is an interesting one, suggesting many challenging possibilities as well as presenting a great deal of established and carefully documented fact.

By 1967, then, there existed a large body of critical writing about Collins' poetry. During his lifetime Collins was not a well-known or popular poet, but soon after his death his works became more widely known and appreciated, and they have become steadily better-known during the subsequent years. An edition of the poems has always been in print since the last decade of the eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> and the literary critics have always maintained an interest in them. Numerous editions of Collins' poems are currently available, and there are scholarly articles to ensure that the perennial debate about the meaning of the poems and their merit will continue. Sigworth's book provides a good introduction to Collins, and Carver's book reveals all that is known about the circumstances of his life. From the time of his death in 1759 Collins' poetry has never been neglected, and today he holds an established position in the history of English poetry as a writer whose output was small, but whose lyrical poetry is, at its best, among the finest in the English language.

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See Sigworth, p.159n.

List of books used:PRIMARY SOURCESA Collection of Poems By Several Hands

In 3 vols. London, printed for R. Dodsley.  
2nd ed. 1748.

Vol. 1 includes revised version of 'Ode to Evening',  
'Ode to a Lady' and 'How sleep the Brave'.

Vol. 4, 1755, adds 'Epistle to Hanmer' and 'Song  
from...Cymbeline'.

Reprinted 1763, 1765, 1767, 1783.

The Union, or select Scots and English poems

Edinburgh, 1753.

p.39, Revised version of 'Ode to Evening'.

The Poetical Calendar

Written and selected by Francis Fawkes and William  
Woty. 1763.

Vol. 11, (November) contains the 'Eclogues', 'Odes',  
'Epistle to Hanmer' and 'Song from...Cymbeline'.

Vol. 12 (December) includes 'Ode on the death of Mr  
Thomson' and Johnson's 'Memoir'.

The Poetical Works of Mr William Collins,

with Memoirs of the Author; and Observations on his  
genius and writings, by J. Langhorne.

London. Becket & Dehondt, 1765.

Reprinted 1771, 1776, 1781.

The poetical works of Mr William Collins

To which are added Mr Hammond's Elegies.

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The poetical works of William Collins

Glasgow, printed by Andrew Foulis, 1787.

Poetical works of Mr William Collins

[Ed.] with a Prefatory Essay by Mrs [Anna Lactitia]  
Barbauld.

London. Cadell and Davies, 1797.

Poetical works of William Collins

With the life of the author by Dr Johnson;  
observations on his writings by Dr Langhorne;  
and biographical and critical notes...by the  
Reverend Alexander Dyce.

London. Pickering, 1827 and 1828.

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Sir Egerton Brydges. [With Langhorne's  
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ed. with a memoir by Christopher Stone.  
 London. Humphrey Milford, 1907, reprinted 1937.

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 (Haselwood Books).

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ed. Christopher Stone & Austin Lane Poole.  
 Oxford University Press, 1917. Frequently reprinted.  
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 Frederick Page.

William Collins, Drafts and Fragments of Verse

ed. J.S. Cunningham. Oxford, 1956.

Selected poems of Thomas Gray and William Collins

ed. Arthur Johnston.  
 London. Edward Arnold, 1967 (Arnold's English texts).

The poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith

ed. Roger Lonsdale.  
 London. Longmans, 1969. (Longman's Annotated English  
 Poets).

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