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WILLIAM HYMERS AND THE EDITING OF WILLIAM COLLINS'S POEMS, 1765–1797

Two editions of William Collins's poems, by John Langhorne and Anna Barbauld,¹ with memoirs of the author and explanatory notes on the poetry, were published before 1800. Laying significant foundations for subsequent, important editions of Collins's works, they defined editorial standards and procedures that characterize an ambitious edition-in-the-making that was under way in the 1780s. In the summer of 1783 its editor, William Hymers of Queen's College, Oxford,² 'was circulating *proposals* for an Edition of Collins with Notes (pr. by Cooke & Prince, Oxon) but [. . .] died Curate of (& at) Amphill' in 1785.³ On his death, Hymers left unfinished his edition, for which he had compiled an interleaved octavo volume of notes and commentaries that explained and elucidated Collins's compositions. Scholars of Collins have only rarely mentioned this album, which is held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University,⁴ and no attempt has been made to study the volume and contextualize Hymers's work in the light of the scholarly practice of the two editions that were published in 1765 and 1797.⁵ Yet Hymers's edition-in-progress exemplifies and reflects his own participation in the process of 'canonizing' Collins's oeuvre: he connects the poet with the 'Gothic' and unrefined, vernacular literary past (embodied by Shakespeare

I am grateful to Mary Margaret Stewart for reading an earlier version of this essay and for offering some useful comments. I would also like to thank the anonymous reader for *MLR* who constructively engaged with the article.

¹ *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins; with Memoirs of the Author; and Observations on his Genius and Writings*, ed. by John Langhorne (London: printed for T. Becket and P. A. Dehondt, 1765) [hereafter 'Langhorne'], and *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins; with a Prefatory Essay by Mrs. Barbauld* (London: printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797) [hereafter 'Barbauld'].

² The son of John Hymer (Humber) of Ormesby, Hymers (b. 11 May 1758) entered Queen's College as a battler (paying for his room and tuition, but not for his food) on 17 June 1775, aged seventeen, and took his BA in 1779. The Batells Book shows that he paid to remain a member of the college after his graduation and that, in 1783, he resided at Queen's. He is then referred to as 'Dominus' Hymers, indicating that he had not taken the MA. I am grateful to Michael Riordan, the archivist of Queen's College, for supplying this information. Hymers was reputed to be 'a very good Greek and Latin scholar, particularly clever at versification in both languages, and of amiable manners'. See *Letters of Richard Radcliffe and John James, of Queen's College, Oxford, 1755–83; with Additions, Notes, and Appendices*, ed. by Margaret Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 254, n. 1.

³ *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. by David Fairer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 476, n. 2. I have been unable to trace these proposals. In a letter of July 1783 Joseph Golding writes to John James junior: Hymers 'only stays to publish his proposals for his edition of Collins, after which he goes to reside at Amphill in Bedfordshire, where he intends to settle for life'. See *Letters of Richard Radcliffe and John James*, ed. by Evans, p. 258.

⁴ Osborn c380. Material from this manuscript is cited by permission of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵ *The Works of William Collins*, ed. by Richard Wendorf and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), contains a brief mention of the volume (p. 126).

and Spenser) that late eighteenth-century readers identified especially in his 'Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland', but also emphasizes the 'polite' Miltonic and Popean poetic currency of his verse.⁶ Engaging as a keen reader with the task of making sense of the reception of Collins's works from their first publication to the early 1780s, Hymers had to negotiate his own awareness of their peculiar qualities and the opportunity of embedding them into a narrative of the most recent literary history and aesthetic directions.

The aims of this essay are twofold: after an exposition of the publishing contexts and editorializing of Collins from the 1760s to the late eighteenth century, I shall introduce Hymers's edition-in-the-making and examine in what ways he contextualizes Collins as an original poet of descriptive and allegorical verse. I shall briefly sketch some of the principal statements that Langhorne and Barbauld make regarding Collins and his poetry, and then discuss Hymers's interpretative and contextualizing accounts of the poems to illustrate his 'modern' and appreciative account of the poet's productions that contrasted strikingly with the generally lyrico-sceptic stance of Johnson. Compared with Johnson's description of Collins as preoccupied with allegorical fictions and superstitions, the 'flights of imagination which pass the bounds of nature',⁷ Hymers approaches Collins as a modern classic who, like Gilbert West's Pindar, requires the best available editorial treatment.

Langhorne's and Barbauld's editions defined criteria according to which the Romantics would assess Collins's works, and Hymers's edition-in-the-making offers an insight into a young clergyman's perception (and understanding) of the not necessarily coherent new trends in literary production and historiography, as well as the ways in which he could situate Collins within the two competing narratives of literary progress and decline that Jonathan Brody Kramnick has examined.⁸ Those advocating progress strove to formulate ideals of politeness, regularity, and harmony that clearly improved upon the 'Pindaric' and 'Gothic' lack of control in earlier English writing; others—especially from the 1740s onwards—tried to counteract the commodification of polite literature by encouraging scholarship on oral culture and the sacred impulses in literature that had fallen victim to the secularization which social politeness had introduced into the consumption of literary texts. Langhorne, Hymers, and Barbauld, while cognizant of the conservative narrative

⁶ The 'Ode' was written *c.* 1749 but published in 1788, long after the trend for 'primitive' literature and the fragmentary, as well as the interest in Gaelic or Ossianic productions, had been consolidated in the 1760s. See Sandro Jung, *The Fragmentary Poetic: Eighteenth-Century Uses of an Experimental Mode* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2009), pp. 26–59.

⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), IV, 121.

⁸ In *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

of progress, favour an account that emphasizes and contextualizes Collins's successful mediation of the two models of literary historiography.

The edition of Collins's poetical works by John Langhorne (1735–1779) was the first complete edition providing annotation and commentary. His aims were more ambitious than those of Francis Fawkes and William Woty, who had published Collins's poems in the twelve-volume *Poetical Calendar* (1763).⁹ The *Poetical Calendar* advertised itself as 'Intended as a Supplement to Mr. Dodsley's Collection' and reprinted a large variety of miscellaneous poems from the seventeenth century to the 1760s. With the exception of Collins's poems, the editors did not include any poet's complete works. Not only did they print the majority of poems by Collins in volume XI but volume XII, apart from including two more poems (the Thomson ode and 'To Miss Aurelia'), carried the only biographical notice printed in the *Poetical Calendar* as a whole. It is not clear whether Fawkes and Woty owned the copyright for Collins's poetry (which is unlikely); Langhorne's edition, issued by Thomas Becket in the following year, improved upon the canon of Collins's poetry assembled by Fawkes and Woty, offering, for the first time, extensive observations and a defence of Collins as a man and writer. The single-author edition format that Langhorne chose for Becket and De Hondt offered an affordable text—sold in a range of variant editions from 2s. 6d. to 3s.—to middle-class readers who were actively participating in the revaluation of Collins that had been initiated by the editors of the *Poetical Calendar*. Langhorne had published verse in the late 1750s with H. Payne and W. Cropley, but Ralph Griffiths, editor of the *Monthly Review*, then recommended Langhorne to Becket, who published *Theodosius and Constantia* 'as a trial-piece'.¹⁰ From 1761 to 1768 he was one of Griffiths's main reviewers. Apart from being an aspiring poet and editor, he translated Milton's Italian poems and worked with his brother William on the six-volume edition of Plutarch's *Lives* (Becket and De Hondt, 1770).¹¹

Andrew Millar had purchased the *Odes on Several Allegoric Subjects* 'at a very handsome price'¹² and, according to the Statute of Anne, held the copyright for fourteen years, up until 1760, when Collins had been dead less than

⁹ See Sandro Jung, "In Quest of Mistaken Beauties": Samuel Johnson's "Life of Collins" Reconsidered', *Études anglaises*, 57 (2004), 284–96; Richard Wendorf, "The Making of Johnson's "Life of Collins", *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74 (1980), 95–115; and Mary Margaret Stewart, "William Collins, Samuel Johnson, and the Use of Biographical Details", *SEL: Studies in English Literature*, 28 (1988), 471–82.

¹⁰ *European Magazine*, 17 (1790), 164.

¹¹ Langhorne's business relationship with Becket and De Hondt was a successful one, and they published, among other titles, *The Effusions of Friendship and Fancy* (1761), *Solyman and Almena*, 2nd edn (1762; the first edition was published in the same year by H. Payne and W. Cropley), *Genius and Valour* (1764), and *The Enlargement of the Mind* (1765).

¹² Ralph Griffiths's review of Langhorne's edition, *Monthly Review*, 32 (1765), 294.

a year.¹³ Becket, Millar's former apprentice, set up his shop at Tully's Head in January 1760 and was joined in a business partnership by Peter Abraham De Hondt by the end of the year.¹⁴ While Langhorne stated in his 'Memoir' of Collins that the poet, in response to the poor sales of his odes, and 'conceiving a just indignation against a blind and tasteless age, burnt the remaining copies with his own hands' (pp. xi–xii), Ralph Griffiths in his review of Langhorne's edition clarifies that, as soon as Collins inherited funds from his uncle, he reimbursed Millar for the printing costs. It is doubtful, however, whether he bought back the copyright that Millar had acquired when purchasing his odes, especially as Becket and De Hondt appear to have drawn on this copyright to produce their successive editions of Langhorne's poetical works of Collins.

While Collins's odes were most frequently invoked, reprinted, and imitated after 1765, his *Oriental Eclogues* were generally more popular and reprinted even before this date. The second edition of Collins's juvenile *Persian Eclogues* (1742), re-entitled *Oriental Eclogues*, was issued in 1757 and well received by the critics. The author of *Saberna: A Saxon Eclogue* (1778) representatively commended Collins's eclogues as significant models of the genre and as 'finely marked by a softness of expression, and delicacy of description', and expressive of 'our ideas of Eastern simplicity'.¹⁵ Republication in full or in part occurred, among other publications, in the *London Chronicle* (13–15 January 1757), the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 27 (February 1757: 'Eclogue IV'), the *Weekly Amusement* (1764–66), *Anecdotes of Polite Literature* in five volumes (1764), II, 18, and *A Polite Miscellany* (1764). By the early 1790s, the eclogues had been published in Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts* (1791), the *Lady's Poetical Magazine*, 2 (1791), *Roach's Beauties* (1794), and *The English Anthology* (1794). Certainly Collins's most accessible poems, the eclogues found their way into German anthologies of English literature and were translated twice, in 1767 and in 1770.¹⁶ The poet's early patronage piece, *An Epistle: Addressed to Sir Thomas Hanmer*, was reprinted less frequently. It featured, among others, in Dodsley's four-volume *Collection* (1755), IV, 64–70, and *The Beauties of the English Poets*, ed. by Samuel Derrick in four volumes

¹³ Millar entered Collins's *Odes* at Stationers' Inn on 19 December 1746. See page 7 of the volume of 'A Register of the copies of Books beginning the 29th day of September 1746'. I am grateful to Mary Margaret Stewart for communicating this information to me.

¹⁴ See H. R. Plomer, G. H. Bushnell, and E. R. McC. Dix, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who were at Work in England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1726 to 1775* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1968), pp. 20–21.

¹⁵ (London: printed for J. Bew and A. Edwards, 1778), p. vii.

¹⁶ See Sandro Jung, 'Salomon Gessner and Collins's *Oriental Eclogues*', *Neophilologus*, 93 (2009), 369–76. While the 1770 (Zurich) translation (discussed in the article) prints a contextualizing introduction that focuses on the historical development of the pastoral, the 1767 translation—published in the sixth volume of *Brittische Bibliothek* (Leipzig: bey Caspar Fritsch)—also includes an extended critical appreciation of the *Eclogues*.

(1761), II, 23, but did not elicit the praise that Collins's odes or eclogues would.¹⁷

The various reprintings of Collins's poems from the mid-1760s in a range of collections and magazines need to be understood in terms of the contested rights regarding literary property that defined the publishing trade in the 1760s and 1770s. While Collins's *Oriental Eclogues* were reprinted in full or excerpted frequently, Becket—in the case of George Pearch's *Collection of Poems*, which misleadingly advertised itself as a 'continuation' of Dodsley's celebrated anthology and included the poet's works—'claim[ed] a property in Collins's Eclogues and Odes'.¹⁸ By then, Becket's claim to the copyright of *The Seasons* (1730–44), by Collins's friend James Thomson, had been overruled in favour of the Scottish 'piracy' bookseller John Donaldson, who had reprinted Thomson's poem in Edinburgh.¹⁹

As the notion of perpetual copyright was replaced by a notion of copyright limited in duration, the market for cheap reprints of English literary classics, such as *The Seasons*, boomed. In 1770 the Foulis brothers issued, as part of their series of English poets, a volume of the works of Collins alongside the popular love elegies of James Hammond (1710–1742), whose copyright—held until 1756 by the London bookseller G. Hawkins—had also entered the public domain. The conjoining in print of Collins and Hammond in the format of *The Poetical Works of William Collins. To which are Added, Mr. Hammond's Elegies* emphasizes that Hammond's works are 'added' not only to make his poems available but also to complement the readers' experience of reading Collins and Hammond on equal terms as well as Hammond through Collins or vice versa. It is not merely the case that the volume strategically fits together two poets of limited output, but the poets' works through their physical proximity enter a dialogue which, in reception terms, is enacted in readers' minds.²⁰ The pairing of Collins and Hammond was repeated by Samuel Johnson, in volume XLIX of *The Works of the English Poets; with Prefaces, Biographical and Critical* (1779), who also added Thomson to these poets of sentiment. Above all, the selection and grouping of authors in multi-volume editions represent an important procedure for the formation of the canon that would be consolidated with the ambitious series of Charles Cooke and John Bell later in the century.

Langhorne's edition was paradigmatic for successive generations of editors in that he established a pattern for his edition that would be adopted by

¹⁷ For the republication of Collins's *Oriental Eclogues* and *Epistle* see the edition of Wendorf and Ryskamp, pp. 106, 113.

¹⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 45 (1775), 594.

¹⁹ See Sandro Jung, 'Visual Interpretation, Print, and Illustrations of Thomson's *The Seasons*, 1730–1797', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 34.2 (2010), 23–64.

²⁰ See Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 76–78.

most late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors of modern poetry. He scaled down the extensive commentary that characterized biblical scholarship and earlier eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton, and offered a minor but classic near-contemporary poet the features of short biography and commentary that would be elaborated, and supplemented with notes, in nineteenth-century editions of Collins. Importantly, Langhorne's edition is probably the first edition of its kind, clearly contributing to the definition of the canon, and similar editions of the poetical works of, among others, Matthew Prior and Samuel Butler were produced in the 1770s.

Langhorne's enthusiastic response to Collins stimulated a more general reevaluation of the poet and his works, especially when short biographical notices, drawing on Johnson's 'life' but subscribing to Langhorne's assessment of Collins, relativized Johnson's strictures on the poems. In that regard, the series of John Bell's and Charles Cooke's 'British Poets' offered laudatory accounts that cemented Collins's position within the national canon of literary worthies.²¹ Bell's *The Poetical Works of William Collins* (1787, following Bell's volume of 1780, which printed the poems of James Hammond and Collins), for instance, redefined the role of the 'mad' and 'exalted Poet', for:

The gifts of imagination bring the heaviest task upon the vigilance of reason; and to bear those faculties with unerring rectitude or invariable propriety, requires a degree of firmness and of cool attention which doth not always attend the higher gifts of the mind.²²

In contrast to Johnson, Bell's critic argues that regularity and genius are mutually exclusive.²³ The author of the short preface uses a narrative of enthusiasm to encompass the particular genius of Collins, but towards the end of his account also introduces the poet's extensive learning to respond to the two models of literary historiography that Langhorne utilized for his commentary and memoir.

Langhorne's edition of Collins drew on an emerging literary historiography of vernacular rather than classical authors. Drawing implicitly on such a ground-breaking work as Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Mr. Pope* (volume 1, 1756), he did not need to contextualize Collins primarily in terms of the classics. Rather, he read Collins's poems as manifestations of an oral poetics focusing on harmony and skilfully deployed classical forms and conventions. The hybrid mixture of past and present literary tenets made it possible for Collins to be appreciated as an original vernacular poet. While reviews were appreciative of the edition and of Langhorne's editorial skill,

²¹ See Thomas Bonnell, 'Johnson's Prefaces and Bell's Connected System of Biography', in id., *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry, 1765–1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 134–68.

²² *The Poetical Works of William Collins* (London: printed for J. Bell, 1787), pp. vi, v.

²³ See *The Poetical Works of William Collins*, p. vi.

commending specifically his ‘new’ and ‘ingenious’ ‘thoughts on the origins of allegorical poetry’,²⁴ it was recognized that, in addition to ‘many judicious criticisms’, ‘the ingenious author has endeavoured to obviate the invidious reflections of the world’.²⁵ These ‘reflections’ would certainly have concerned statements regarding Collins’s idleness and extravagance, characteristics that admiring critics from Langhorne to Dyce and beyond sought to mediate by rewriting the life of Collins in terms of the poet’s inability to master the social pressures on misunderstood genius. In fact, Langhorne was successful in partly refashioning the image of Collins that Johnson had drawn in his ‘character’ for the *Poetical Calendar*; while, in 1757, James Grainger in his review of the *Oriental Eclogues* had done the ‘neglected author of Odes on several Subjects, descriptive and allegorical’ a service by judging ‘the images wild, the language correct, and the versification harmonious’,²⁶ Langhorne—drawing on James Hampton and Johnson’s ‘Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Collins’,²⁷ prioritized some aspects over others and eliminated the largely moralizing conservative critique of the poet; Langhorne was keen that readers’ attitudes towards the sentimentalized figure of ‘poor Collins’ should change. He embedded Collins in a myth of unjustly neglected worth and madness that, in its sensational import, would especially appeal to readers fascinated with the mythified lives of Smart and Chatterton. Langhorne’s sympathetic account of Collins paved the way for the recognition that Collins’s works would receive in the 1780s and 1790s, especially when William Hayley, who has also been associated with Hymers’s edition-in-the-making, negotiated the erection of a monument designed by John Flaxman in Collins’s native Chichester.²⁸ Langhorne’s edition was issued in three different formats in 1765 and reprinted in 1771, 1776, and 1781. In 1784 Joseph Wenman reproduced Langhorne’s ‘Observations’ without acknowledging their author. The number of editions of Langhorne’s poetical works of Collins offers evidence of readers’ continued engagement with the poet’s productions; as a

²⁴ *Monthly Review*, 32 (1765), 293–98 (p. 297).

²⁵ *Critical Review*, 19 (1765), 214–15 (pp. 215, 214). The edition was also reviewed in the *Candid Review*, 1 (1765), 302–07.

²⁶ *Monthly Review*, 16 (1757), 486–89 (pp. 489, 487).

²⁷ Initially published in volume XII of the *Poetical Calendar*, the account was republished in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 33 (1764), 33–34, and the *Monthly Review*, 30 (1764), 121–23. It was also republished, in March 1765, in the *British Magazine*.

²⁸ Following his activities in the late 1780s to promote interest in Collins and to erect his monument in Chichester Cathedral, in 1796 Hayley corresponded with William Roscoe and revealed his ongoing interest in the poet. He stated: ‘one of my early companions informed me that an elder brother of his (intimate with Collins) had heard him read a preliminary discourse of great merit, which he intended to prefix to the work in question [history of Leo X]’. See Henry Roscoe, *The Life of William Roscoe* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Company, 1833), p. 225, note. I have been unable to identify Hayley’s ‘early companion’. The card catalogue at the Beinecke Library has a note stating that Hymers’s album also features manuscript annotation in a second hand, possibly Hayley’s.

result, early Romantics such as Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith carefully imitated Collins, appropriating him as a poet of mood to their own desire to place themselves within a tradition of pure poetry.²⁹

The first biographical sketch of Collins in the *Poetical Calendar* set the elegiac tone of lament that would preoccupy Johnson for his revised and expanded account of Collins in 1781. Even then, however, the poet's mental disorder is related to his excessive imagination, for the 'powers of this gentleman's imagination were unfortunately so great, that he lost his reason, at a time of life when common minds possess it in its greatest perfection'.³⁰ The myth of Collins's madness—that depression of mind which enchains the faculties without destroying them³¹—spun in the memoir of the *Poetical Calendar* (and encompassed by Johnson's denominating his late friend 'poor Collins') was carefully rewritten by Langhorne.

When Barbauld produced her prefatory essay on Collins's poems, she re-read the productions as infused with 'tenderness, tinged with melancholy', terming the poet 'delicate and sentimental'³² and assigning his malady to his condition as a struggling and anxious writer, rather than to the 'dissipation' that Johnson mentioned in his 'Life of Collins'. Barbauld's edition for Cadell and Davies followed her edition of Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, for which she had received 10 guineas.³³ Cadell and Davies published these works as part of their series of 'Elegant Pocket Editions'. The edition included four full-page copper-engraved plates by Thomas Stothard, illustrating, among others, 'Ode to Mercy' and 'The Passions', thereby clearly distinguishing itself from Langhorne's and Johnson's editions, which did not carry illustrative engravings. Even before working on the preface, Barbauld had attentively read Collins's odes; in 1773 she published her debut collection of *Poems* which contained imitations of Collins, including 'Ode to Spring', 'To Wisdom', and 'Hymn to Content'.³⁴ By the time she produced her essay on Collins's poems, she had adopted a more conservative, Johnsonian stance, especially regarding the need for rhyme in poetry (to which notion she had not subscribed in her highly successful *Poems*, published more than twenty years earlier). However, in her account she is 'pleading for understanding', offering a sympathetic approach to Collins's assumed 'idleness'.³⁵ In her defence of

²⁹ See Sandro Jung, 'Wordsworth and Collins', *ANQ*, 22 (2009), 19–24. For Collins's reception during the Romantic period see Edward Gay Ainsworth, *Poor Collins: His Life, his Art and his Influence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1937).

³⁰ *The Scots Magazine*, 26 (1764), 439.

³¹ Johnson, p. 122.

³² Barbauld, p. xli. Robert Potter, *An Inquiry into Some Passages in Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets: Particularly his Observations on Lyric Poetry, and the Odes of Gray* (London: printed for J. Dodsley, 1783), p. 15, also characterizes Collins's poems with the phrase 'tender melancholy'.

³³ William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 366.

³⁴ See McCarthy, pp. 109, 367.

³⁵ See McCarthy, p. 368.

Collins, Barbauld outlines the ideal condition for ‘the undisturbed exercise of the [poet’s] faculties’ and notes that he ‘requires long intervals of ease and leisure; his imagination should be fed with novelty, and his ear soothed by praise’.³⁶ Formally, both Langhorne and Barbauld emphasize the harmony of Collins’s verse and thereby contrast strikingly with Johnson’s verdict that the poet’s ‘diction was harsh, unskilfully laboured, and injudiciously selected’, as well as occasionally characterized by ‘obscurity’.³⁷ In fact, Barbauld redefines Burkean obscurity as a quality that best encompassed Collins’s genius, for his poetry ‘deals in splendid imagery, bold fiction, and allegorical personages. It is necessarily obscure to a certain degree; because, having to do chiefly with ideas generated within the mind, it cannot be at all comprehended by any whose intellect has not been exercised in similar contemplations.’³⁸ Implicitly, she reveals herself to be a qualified judge of this kind of obscure poetry, as—at least in her 1773 *Poems*—she strove to produce sublime verse herself.³⁹

Hymers’s volume reveals a textual approach that relies heavily on the identification of both classical and modern sources, and a large number of intertextual references are listed in the pages of the manuscript. It represents a record of Hymers’s own reading as well as the ways in which other readers had responded to Collins. The interleaved album comprises a copy of the 1781 duodecimo edition of Collins’s works that reproduced Langhorne’s commentary.⁴⁰ He copiously annotated the pages of Langhorne’s edition with comments that clearly engage with Langhorne’s textual criticism (Figures 1 and 2). At times, he crosses out sections from Langhorne’s ‘Observations’, at others he supplements them with comments of his own. Hymers also adds queries about which he intended to consult John Ragsdale, one of Collins’s London acquaintances.⁴¹ In July 1783 Ragsdale had provided Hymers with information on Collins, such as the poet’s producing some of his poems at his house, of which both Langhorne and Johnson, writing his ‘life’ of Collins for the *Lives of the English Poets*, had not been aware.⁴² Besides drawing on Ragsdale’s recollections of Collins, Hymers also corresponded with Thomas Warton, the brother of Joseph Warton, Collins’s Winchester College schoolfellow, who in 1782–83 furnished him with further biographical information. Towards the end of 1782 Thomas Warton communicated to Hymers that his brother had then in his possession ‘a few fragments of some other Odes, but

³⁶ Barbauld, pp. xlix, viii.

³⁷ Johnson, iv, 122. See also Sandro Jung, ‘A Poet with a “bad Ear”? Reflections on the Harmony of William Collins’s *Ode to Evening*’, *English Studies*, 88 (2007), 288–97.

³⁸ Barbauld, p. iv.

³⁹ See Steven Shankman, ‘Anna Barbauld, William Collins, and the Rhetoric of the Sublime’, *Hellas*, 7 (1996), 159–67. ⁴⁰ (London: Printed for T. Evans, 1781).

⁴¹ ‘Mr. Ragsdale will inform me—Many of the Odes were written at his house’ (fol. 17^r).

⁴² John Ragsdale, ‘Particulars of Mr. William Collins’, *Monthly Magazine*, 21 (1806), 498. The text of this account was a letter, dated July 1783, which Ragsdale had sent to Hymers.

too loose and imperfect for publication, yet containing traces of high imagery'.⁴³ In the same letter Warton also mentioned 'an *Ode to Mr. John Hume*' (the 'Popular Superstitions' ode), detailing some of the striking images such as 'a beautiful description of the Spectre of a Man drowned in the Night'; and he referred to the now lost poem 'The Bell of Aragon'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he recalled manuscript variants of Collins's poems—such as the manuscript of the 'Ode on the Death of Colonel Ross', 'with many interlineations and alterations'.⁴⁵

After Hymers's death, the Rev. Alexander Dyce, a Collins enthusiast, who owned the copy of Collins's *Persian Eclogues* that the author had inscribed to Joseph Warton,⁴⁶ and edited Collins's poetical works, mentioned Hymers's undertaking in the preface to his edition, and it is possible that he drew on Hymers's edition-in-progress for his own editorial work.⁴⁷ Hymers's notes offer an insight into the ways in which a near-contemporary of Collins with scholarly ambitions responded to the poet's language, ideas, use of earlier literary models, and tropes. He does not discuss the 'fragments' that Joseph Warton had in his possession but shows an awareness of variants of Collins poems that had been published in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* and the *Museum*, the periodical that Mark Akenside edited for Dodsley.⁴⁸ Nor does he extensively discuss the *Oriental Eclogues* or the *Epistle to Hanmer*, although he annotated the former poem in the copy of Langhorne's edition that he had bound into the album.

⁴³ *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. by Fairer, p. 470. See also J. S. Cunningham, 'Thomas Warton and William Collins: A Footnote', *Durham University Journal*, 46 (1953), 22–24; and *William Collins: Drafts and Fragments of Verse*, ed. by J. S. Cunningham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

⁴⁴ *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. by Fairer, p. 469. See also Claire Lamont, 'William Collins's "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland": A Newly Recovered Manuscript', *Review of English Studies*, 19 (1968), 137–47.

⁴⁵ *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. by Fairer, p. 470.

⁴⁶ This copy (Dyce M8vo 23450) is now in the Dyce collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁴⁷ *The Poetical Works of William Collins*, ed. by Alexander Dyce (London: William Pickering, 1827), p. 24. Today, the Forster Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum holds a copy of the 1765 edition of Collins's poetical works with the manuscript annotations of two editors of Collins's poems, John Mitford and Thomas Park (shelfmark: Forster 1865).

⁴⁸ See James E. Tierney, 'The Museum, the "Super-Excellent Magazine"', *SEL: Studies in English Literature*, 13 (1973), 503–15. Tierney states that Dodsley's 'literary periodical' 'reflects the tastes of the times' (p. 506) and 'The Museum's poetry was always original' (p. 505). In fact, Dodsley largely included only those poems for which he held the copyright—as he would do in his *Collection*. On the different variant states see *The Poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Harlow: Longman, 1969), p. 455. Poems by Collins had been published in Thomas Warton's anthology *The Union* (1753) and the second edition of Dodsley's *Collection* (I, 327–32). Dodsley included variants of three odes that had been published in Collins's *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects*: 'Ode to a Lady' (pp. 327–29; previously published in the *Museum*, 1, 215–17), 'Ode. Written in the Same Year' (p. 330), and 'Ode to Evening' (pp. 331–32). See also Michael F. Suarez, SJ, 'Trafficking in the Muse: Dodsley's *Collection of Poems* and the Question of Canon', in *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. by Alvaro Ribeiro, SJ, and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 297–313.

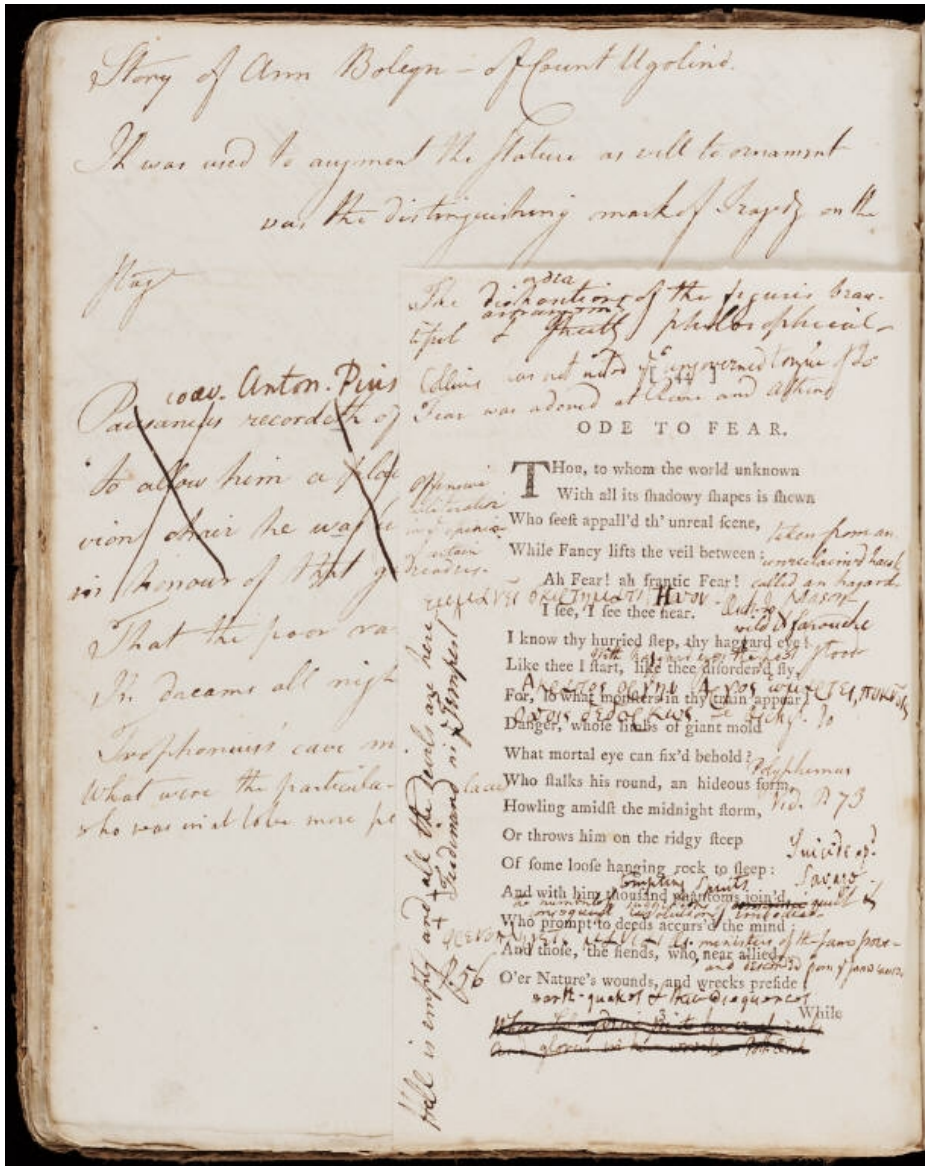


FIG. 1. Page from an interleaved copy of *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins* (1765); Osborn c380. Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University

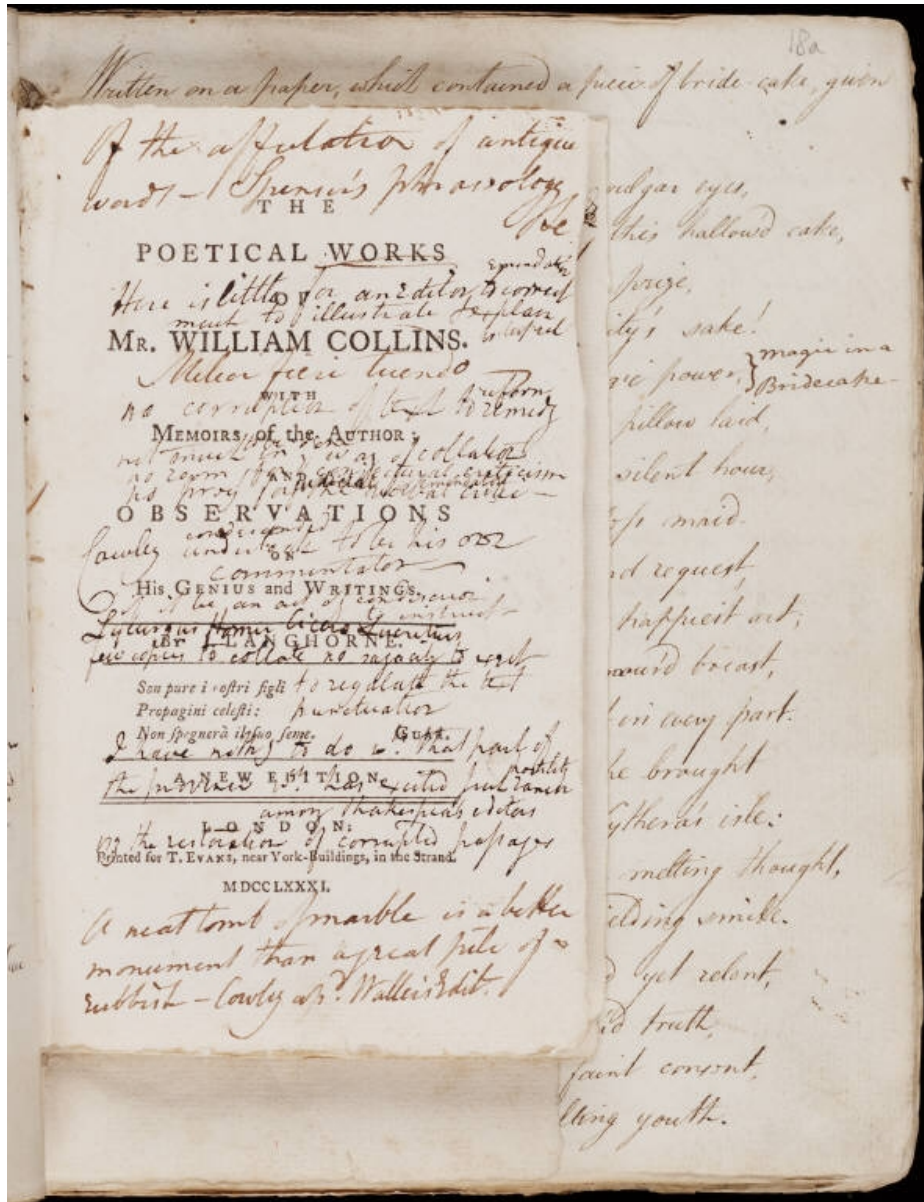


FIG. 2. Page from an interleaved copy of *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins* (1765); Osborn c380. Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University

Hymers's interleaved manuscript volume deserves to be examined in the light of new concerns with what constituted the proper language of poetry, the formation of a canon of vernacular early eighteenth-century poetry, and the fields of philological and biographical scholarship that were emerging in the last two decades of the century. The many new editions of Thomson's *The Seasons* that were published in the last three decades of the century frequently included, from 1777 to 1793, explanatory notes, biographical prefaces, or extended discussions of the poem and its language by such authors as George Wright, John Aikin, Robert Heron, and Percival Stockdale, and responded to the central concern with the definition of the nature of modern poetry and how it should be understood. The number of these essays testifies to the process of defining mid-century poetics, and they were in part inspired by Samuel Johnson's recent *Lives of the English Poets*, in which he had offered conservative accounts of the poetry of his contemporaries that did not often advance the narrative of progress found in the scholarship of the Warton brothers.

Hymers's edition may be best understood in the context of Thomas Warton's edition of Milton's minor poems, under way from early 1783 and published in 1785. As Hymers was in touch with Warton regarding Collins, it is likely that he would have been aware of the Milton edition-in-progress and would have reflected a similar late eighteenth-century approach—although not as fully developed as Warton's—to discussing aesthetic directions and models of poetic production. Warton set out to read Milton as a poet using both classical literary models and 'the Gothic library', and his general procedure is remarkably similar to the one that Hymers adopted in his manuscript album; the function of Warton's annotation is explained in detail in the preface:

The chief purpose of the Notes is to explain our author's allusions, to illustrate or to vindicate his beauties, to point out his imitations both of others and of himself, to elucidate his obsolete diction, and by the adduction and juxtaposition of parallels universally gleaned both from his poetry and prose, to ascertain his favourite words, and to shew the peculiarities of his phraseology.⁴⁹

L. C. Martin has termed Warton's edition 'a model of discriminating taste aided by extensive learning', observing that it should be 'valued because it illustrates the condition of English scholarship and taste, and the relations between the two, at an important stage in English poetic history'.⁵⁰ Martin comments that Warton

⁴⁹ John Milton, *Poems upon Several Occasions, English, Italian, and Latin, with Translations; with Notes Critical and Explanatory, and Other Illustrations, by Thomas Warton* (London: printed for James Dodsley, 1785), pp. xx, xix.

⁵⁰ L. C. Martin, 'Thomas Warton and the Early Poems of Milton' (Warton Lecture on English Poetry), *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1934; repr. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1977), pp. 26, 28. I am grateful to David Fairer for information on Warton's edition.

admired the early poems of Milton with an enthusiasm depending in part upon their incompatibilities with the ruling taste of his time; he was attracted by their romantic glamour and subtly emotive evocations, the qualities which a little later, by analogy with some other romantic performances, were to encourage the notion that in Milton whatever is, is right. But Warton was very far indeed from pleading that Milton is above reproach [. . .]. He maintained [. . .] a double alliance.⁵¹

This 'double alliance' is characteristic of Hymers as well and distinguishes him from critics such as Dr Johnson and John Langhorne, the latter of whom had not attempted the ambitious editorial treatment that Hymers projected.

The following section considers Hymers's edition and discusses selected notes on and interpretation of Collins's poems, as well as the ways in which the editor responded to textual and ideational obscurities by working within the traditions established by Johnson and Langhorne. Ultimately, the objective is to offer an introduction to Hymers's volume and to recognize its literary-historical significance both for textual editing of poetry in the late eighteenth century and for the reception of Collins's poems specifically. In his edition-in-progress Hymers does not attempt to negotiate Collins's illness, but he offers the sympathetic approach to the poems that Langhorne had used in his 'Observations'. Hymers's commentary, notes, and queries are primarily textual, and his analytical apparatus is more ambitious than Langhorne's, thereby denominating his work as a scholarly edition but also reflecting the growing institutionalization of literary scholarship, changes in editorial practice, and the redefinition and politics of the edition.⁵² He sets out his editorial objectives by stating that 'Each Ode I ~~design~~ intend to preface with an argument ^(or brief analysis,) similar to those of Mr. West' (fol. 25^r).⁵³ Gilbert West had published his translations of the *Odes of Pindar* with Robert Dodsley in 1749; the edition included a detailed dissertation on the Olympic Games, prefatory arguments giving thematic summaries and contextualizing information, the individual translations of each ode following the argument, and a large number of explanatory notes. One of West's declared aims in the preface was to contribute to the understanding of the ode as a genre; later critics praising Collins's odes repeatedly return to West's discussion to understand the poems' 'proud irregularity of greatness'.⁵⁴ In fact, Robert Potter, a late eighteenth-century critic of Johnson quoted by Hymers, argues that 'Collins was the first of our poets that reached its [the ode's] excellence', while Langhorne insists that he was 'capable of every degree of excellence

⁵¹ Martin, p. 27.

⁵² See Marcus Walsh, 'Literary Scholarship and the Life of Editing', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 191–216.

⁵³ I shall reproduce superscripts, alternative readings (in brackets), and eliminations as they appear in the manuscript album.

⁵⁴ Potter, p. 14.

in lyric poetry'.⁵⁵ Most late eighteenth-century responses to Collins situate him within an alternative tradition of the lyric that differs significantly from Johnson's narrative in the *Lives*. Readers from John Aikin to Anna Barbauld discussed Collins's contribution to the lyric in terms of his characteristic use of personification, and his poems served as models for imitations to a whole generation of Romantic poets who commended Collins in their productions, excerpted lines for their fiction, and laboured to define him, as William Hazlitt did, as a poet who 'had that true *vivida vis*, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry'.⁵⁶

Hymers's initial acknowledgement that the 'genius of Collins was cramped by imitation' (fol. 24^r) prefaces the extended lists of intertexts that he identifies throughout the volume. Apart from a range of Greek authors, Hymers excerpts extensive passages from the *Spectator* and Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*, which he probably intended for illustrative purposes to exemplify and explain the uses of figures of speech and ideas. He establishes the kind of map of textual sources and echoes that would inform Roger Lonsdale's editorial practice of annotation in the excellent 1969 edition of the poems of Collins, Gray, and Goldsmith.⁵⁷ In his attempt to fashion Collins as a learned and polite poet, Hymers linked his subject's immersion in classic modern (that is, early eighteenth-century) popular texts with those consumed by Collins's middle-class readers. Specifically, as Kramnick has pointed out, the *Spectator* served as a model of politeness, and Hymers's repeated references to the periodical indicate that he used Addison to anchor his reading of Collins as a polite poet; for his reading of the poet as reworking an alternative tradition, however, he refers to authors such as the Warton brothers and Thomas Percy, thus apparently making a seamless connection with the two competing literary-historiographical models of progress and decline.

Hymers's most finished section, containing a preface, extended commentary, and ample annotation on the pages of Langhorne's edition, is the one that he dedicates to the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'. He relates Collins's personification Fancy to Venus, who 'by investing a favourite with her girdle could communicate a portion of her own charms' (fol. 56^v). His comments offer information on the mythological frameworks that Collins constructs and reveal Hymers as a sensitive reader capable of insightful practical criticism. In addition, he references the depiction of the creation of the cestus of Venus in Homer's *Iliad*, Book XIV, and does not comment, as most succeeding readers would, on Collins's misreading of Spenser.⁵⁸ Instead, he defines the magical

⁵⁵ Potter, p. 15; Langhorne, p. 137. See Herbert J. Wright, 'Robert Potter as a Critic of Dr. Johnson', *Review of English Studies*, 12 (1936), 305–21.

⁵⁶ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on English Poets: The Spirit of the Age* (London: Dent, 1910), p. 115.

⁵⁷ Above, n. 48.

⁵⁸ Collins's 'Ode on the Poetical Character' has been the subject of a large number of articles,

qualities of the cestus and its power to inspire love and control the ‘effects of the passion’. He glosses line 21 (‘The cest of amplest power is given’)—‘From the magic virtue of this Cestus the poet derives that divine enthusiasm which constitutes the essence of the poetical character’—implicitly connecting love, inspiration, and creativity. From his ideational discussion of the poem’s myth, he moves on to comment on the structure and often difficult syntax that Collins uses, and observes that the sentence introducing Fancy’s ‘cest of amplest power’ is ‘too long and complicated, a fault that Collins is too frequently guilty of. The same fault occurs towards the conclusion of the Ode’ (fol. 35^v). In other instances, he highlights obscurities that he glosses elaborately. Hymers interprets the speaker’s vision of Eden at the end of the ode as ‘a day dream’ (fols 36^r–37^r), linking the dream with Collins’s desire for inspiration, yet at the same time acknowledging its impossibility. The editor’s (fairly finished) ‘Preface’ to the ode, given here, represents a contextualizing headnote in the manner of West and characterizes the poem in terms of its occasion and subject-matter:

As the three preceding Odes were written in consequence of a Design the Poet had of writing Tragedy; so this seems to have been composed at a time when (his imagination heated by Milton) he had entertained the like resolution of attempting sacred Poetry—we have indeed an intimation of this towards the conclusion of the ode [. . .]. The complexion of it is sacred, both in its sentiment & imagery. He does not represent Fancy such as she is thought to be by the generality of Poets; but makes her that (divine) heavenly Being whom the Almighty himself is delighted to converse with, and who bore a principal part in the formation of the universe. He calls her divinest name, and attributes to her the Cest of amplest power which was prepared and bathed in Heaven. This description of the manner in which this cest was form’d, is truly sacred and sublime. The divine perfections are only admitted to be present on the occasion, and likewise those blissful spirits who reside in heaven [. . .]. A charm of [. . .] hallowed virtue could only be given to a poet who wrote on sacred thoughts and therefore to enjoy the privilege of wearing it, it is necessary that he sh^d attempt—as Milton—to wear her magic girdle, & desires to follow his steps to the place where he rested (?) for that inspiration, but recollecting himself, he is conscious of the difficulty of the task, and of his being entirely capable to undertake it. (fols 41^v–42^r)

Hymers’s reading of Fancy as a ‘heavenly Being’ recognizes the sacred, mystic, and mythological nature of the deity and reflects his attempt—in his

and has been discussed extensively. See, for example, Sandro Jung, ‘William Collins, Grace and the “cest of amplest power”’, *Neophilologus*, 91 (2007), 539–54; John Sitter, ‘William Collins, “Ode on the Poetical Character”’, in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (Maiden: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 265–76; Earl R. Wasserman, ‘Collins’ “Ode on the Poetical Character”’, *ELH*, 34 (1967), 92–115; Heidi van de Veire, ‘The Ordering of Vision in Collins’s “Ode on the Poetical Character”’, *Essays in Literature*, 15 (1988), 165–75. In his rendering of the *Iliad*, Alexander Pope discusses the different uses of the cestus that Homer and Spenser make. See his ‘Observations on the Fourteenth Book’, in *The ‘Iliad’ of Homer*, trans. by Alexander Pope, 6 vols (London: printed for T. J., 1719), IV, 54–56.

interpretation—at encompassing both a pseudo-classic mythology and the introduction of the Creator. He does not regard these two mythologies as mutually exclusive, as Barbauld would, but—rather uncritically—seems to read Fancy as an emanation of God’s own creativity. While Fancy is constructed as having (or having had) primordial and unmediated access to God and his creation, she has to serve the poet as a means to overcome the boundaries of rational thinking and human limitations to access the shades of inspiration. Again, Hymers links love and creativity when he glosses line 69 (‘From Waller’s myrtle shade retiring’) by stating that the ‘The Poet had free access to the “myrtle Shades” of Waller, but he was not permitted to enter the hallowed Bower of Milton’ (fol. 40^r). Waller’s amoric poetry is thereby contrasted with the sublime poetry of Milton; access to the sublime realm of Milton will be possible only through an epiphanic encounter between deity and Collins’s speaker, which is a recurrent topos in the poet’s odes.

The preface is the only fairly completed attempt to produce a coherent account of a poem that goes beyond the large number of jotted-down comments and references that dominate the volume. It also goes beyond the shorter discussions that Langhorne offered in his edition and anticipates the detailed readings that Richard Edgeworth provided in *Poetry Explained for the Use of Young People* (1802), where he introduced Collins’s ‘Ode to Fear’.⁵⁹ Unlike Barbauld’s readings, Hymers’s notes—despite his position as a clergyman—do not overtly aim to inculcate Christian morality through his interpretations. He does not share her rejection of the poem’s religion or creation myth.⁶⁰ Rather, he evaluates the poem on its own mythopoeic terms.

Hymers discusses the odes in the order in which they occurred in Langhorne’s edition but devotes little commentary to the odes to Fear and Pity. Citing Addison’s *Spectator*, No. 397, he states that ‘Pity is nothing else but Love softened by a degree of Sorrow’ (fol. 28^r). He also references John Hughes’s depiction of the grotto of Pity from *Spectator*, No. 501, and defines ‘enthusiast’ and ‘enthusiastic’, terms that Collins relates to the inspired poet. He holds that the poet’s ‘enfeebling lute’ is the ‘instrument of *Indolence*’ and that the lute is ‘a woman’s instrument, weak, feeble, soft’. The editor relates his general contextualizations of Collins’s divinities to classical traditions, repeatedly introducing the mythic figure of Venus as a connecting figure between some of the odes. He briefly states in a note: ‘Venus’ lutes good—mellowness (which is the most excellent satisfaction from a lute): the Athenians encompassed the

⁵⁹ See also Sandro Jung, ‘William Collins’s *Ode to Evening* and R. L. Edgeworth’, *Notes & Queries*, 49 (2002), 386–88.

⁶⁰ Barbauld’s religious strictures also extend to Collins’s ‘Ode to Mr. Thomson’. She explains: ‘To the sanguinary and superstitious Druid, whose rites were wrapped up in mystery, it was peculiarly improper to compare a Poet whose religion was simple as truth, sublime as nature, and liberal as the spirit of philosophy’ (Barbauld, p. xliii).

funeral monument with garlands of parsley and myrtle'. By linking the odes through his discussions of motifs, ideas, or mythic emanations of *Natura*, he implicitly identifies an order and structuring principle underlying Collins's odes.⁶¹

He comprehends Pity in terms of the double role of priest and 'prayist' (not in the *OED*), arguing that 'Both the one and the other receive and transmit the communications of their respective divinities' (fol. 67^r). Collins's poet-speaker as praying creator figure desiring inspiration is likely to combine the two aspects of priest and prayist. In his formal readings of the odes, especially the 'Ode to Fear', Hymers implicitly refers to the essay on the ode that West prefixed to his edition of Pindar:

This division of the Ode ought to be intitled Strophe. The excellent translator of Pindar in retaining the names of Strophe & Antistrophe did it, he informs us, on purpose to imprint more strongly on the mind of the English reader, the exact regularity observed by Pindar in the structures of his odes. (fol. 71^r)

He provides a number of detailed glosses for individual lines from the ode and offers information that contextualizes Collins's poetry as spiritual and abstract, what Barbauld terms the embodiment of 'the fleeting forms of the mind'.⁶² Hymers is interested in the representational technique that the poet employs to give shape to the inanimate and queries whether Collins succeeds in fashioning 'an exact language of the inanimate' and whether 'his sentiments [are] acknowledged by every breast' (fol. 73^v). His microtextual examination of the odes devotes special attention to figures of speech and ideas that later editors of Collins's poetical works did not explicate. Explaining the poet's phrase 'pebbled bed', for instance, he states that 'G. Agricola reports of a certain kind of spirits, that converse in minerals', thereby offering contextual evidence for his reading of the spiritual character of Collins's mythic world in which nature, in all its emanations, is suffused with life and spiritual essence.

Possibly responding to Johnson's charge regarding Collins's obscurity, Hymers undertakes a detailed explication of ambiguous syntax and allusions, puns, or figures of speech.⁶³ In his view, the 'Ode to Liberty' deserves extensive commentary, not primarily because of its ideational make-up, but

⁶¹ See Ricardo Quintana, 'The Scheme of Collins's *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects*', in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: Essays in Honor of Alan Dugald McKillop*, ed. by Carroll Camden (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), pp. 371–80.

⁶² Barbauld, p. vii. Hymers glosses 'While Vengeance in the hurried air' in the following terms: 'Collins, as usual, improves upon his author [Horace]—The exposed & bare arm is more forcible, than the gloomy dismal more right-hand turn and when we discern it impending in the hurried air, looks more terrible' (fol. 72^r).

⁶³ Apart from his macrotextual reading of the ode, Hymers also adds a useful note on the meaning of the stork, remarking that it 'was in the number of Egyptian deities and had divine honour also at Thebes'.

because of its syntactic obscurity.⁶⁴ It is characterized as representing three distinct classical styles, the Doric, Phrygian, and Lydian.⁶⁵ Referring to Johannes Winkelmann as his authority, he reads Liberty as one of the conditions for the thriving and ‘prosperity of art’, a progress also traced in the ‘Ode to Simplicity’, where Collins centrally outlines his notion of *haplotes*. In his attempt to render the complex meaning of Liberty, Hymers identifies a range of references that are linked with free, republican countries. He complains, however, that Collins does not describe the goddess of Liberty in more serious terms, for ‘Collins would have Liberty a general Mistress—There is something frivolous, affected & incoherent in this conception. Let us hear, how the ancients arrayed and characterized such a personage’ (fol. 51^v). He objects to the erotic impulse in some of Collins’s hymnal prayers—means of approximation between speaker and deity—and does not appreciate the complex mythopoeic structure that Collins constructs out of a fusion of traditional myths and secular impulses for privacy and intimacy.

While his mythopoeic readings of the odes published in *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* highlight the spiritual and pseudo-classical qualities of the deities, Hymers is alert to the possibility of contextualizing the ‘Ode on the Death of Mr. Thomson’ in terms of both the antiquity of national, bardic identity and the elegance of early eighteenth-century poetry. Discussing the ode, he points out that ‘The Druidical is a genuine ancient British Character’, thereby implicitly denominating Thomson as a patriotic British poet. Hymers also relates the mythical figure of the druid to the close rapport that he is assumed, by the Romantics, to have entertained with nature. He thereby fashions an image of Collins’s friend Thomson as the poet-priest of Nature.⁶⁶ The editor also notes that ‘Collins hath employed several of Thomson’s words, combinations and phrases in the present ode’ (fol. 82^r). Not only has Collins succeeded in placing himself in the genealogy of the most

⁶⁴ He glosses ‘Where Orcas howls, his wolfish mountains rounding’: ‘The participle rounding in the sentence depends upon wild waves, and not upon Orcas. The meaning of the sentence is, that the waves (~~or waters~~) of the ocean did not then flow towards the Baltic through the English channel, as they do now, but **round** the promontory of Preas, there being no other passage for them till Britain was parted from the Continent. Wolfish mountains may signify either wild & savage, or barking like wolves with the continuing dashing of the waves;—but the former I take to be the better sense, if the epithet do not, as I conjecture, include both’ (fol. 49^r). He further comments: ‘Orcas, independent of its wolves, is surrounded with objects of terror and desolation—the frequency of hurricanes, the distraction and concourse of tide-gates, the violence and height of the surges—the thunder and the lightning so prevalent in winter—the eddies, the whirlpools, amazing and terrifying to inexperienced seamen’ (fol. 49^v).

⁶⁵ His definitions follow: ‘1. The Dorick *mode* was a mixture of impossible gravity and mirth, invented by Thamycias of Thrace; 2. The Phrygian *mode* was adapted to the kindling of rage; invented by Marsyas the Phrygian; 3. The Lydian mode or tone was proper for funeral songs; invented, according to Pliny, by Amphin.’

⁶⁶ ‘The name of druid imports Priest of the groves; and their verdant cathedrals are never omitted’ (fol. 51^r).

important vernacular English poets, but he has gone beyond Thomson in that he has fused both the literary present and the past and is therefore, in the 1780s, an appropriate poet to figure in the new historiography of mid-century literature.

Among the questions of style and language, as well as literary actuality, that Hymers raises, he interrogates the particular kind of descriptiveness used in the odes: 'Have his descriptions always some peculiarities gathered by contemplating things as they really exist?' (fol. 112^v). He partially responds to the question by drawing on John Gilbert Cooper's statements regarding personified characters.⁶⁷ In *Letters concerning Taste* Cooper had attended to the neglect that Collins's odes had experienced; he commended the 'Ode to Evening' for being 'animated by proper Allegorical Personages, and coloured highly with incidental Expression', noting that it 'warms the Breast with a sympathetic Glow of retired Thoughtfulness'.⁶⁸ Hymers repeatedly traces Collins's descriptions back to Greek models. In his critique of the 'Ode to Evening', for instance, he likens Collins's power of description to Homer's, insisting that 'The dewy-fingered Eve of Collins will not be disgraced by a contrast with the rosy-fingered Morn of Homer'. His discussion of style further considers questions of form that he had already addressed in his notes to the 'Ode to Fear'. In that regard, Hymers characterizes the 'Ode to Simplicity' in terms of its use of the tail-rhyme stanza, thereby going beyond Langhorne's note that Collins deploys the 'measure of the ancient ballad', which results in 'an air of simplicity not altogether unaffecting'.⁶⁹ According to Hymers, the 'measure of Milton omits the disproportioned couplet at the close of each phrase. I believe not a ballad occurs in all Percy's collection; conceived in this measure.—I examined 2 vol. for this purpose and found none' (fol. 92^v).

Hymers was clearly familiar with the publishing history of Collins's odes and the (published) variants of the poems, and it is possible that he had gleaned further information from the Wartons regarding Collins's unpublished drafts and fragments. He briefly discusses the poet's 'Dirge' and observes: 'This Poem is called in Dodsley's Collection a Song from Shakespear's Cymbeline &c which, if not absurd, is certainly unhappy, and justly superseded by the present title' (fol. 80^r). In his brief discussion of the poem, he also references 'Percy's Ballads Vol. 3. P. 176' (fol. 81^r). Other critics he consults include James Beattie and Hugh Blair, as well as Collins's friend John Gilbert Cooper. Beattie and Blair serve as authorities to support his argument that Collins's use of personification is proper and that rhyme is generally needed

⁶⁷ See fol. 113^v.

⁶⁸ John Gilbert Cooper, *Letters concerning Taste, and Essays on Similar and Other Subjects* (London: printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), p. 47.

⁶⁹ Langhorne, p. 155. See also Sandro Jung, 'William Collins's "Ode to Simplicity" and the Tail-Rhyme Stanza', *ANQ*, 20.4 (2007), 23–29.

for lyric poetry. The second half of the album includes a large number of quotations from mid- to late eighteenth-century criticism on poetry that he most probably wanted to integrate into the final version of the edition. In his notes he compares Gray with Collins, commenting on their use of Milton, and has transcribed quotations from ‘Criticisms of Gr. El.’ (fol. 56^v)—John Young’s *A Criticism on the ‘Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard’* (1783).⁷⁰ He also examines the hypotextual transposition process informing Collins’s reading of Milton: ‘The beetle of Collins and Gray is the “grey-fly” of Milton that in the pensive man’s ear “winds his sultry horn”. Collins has changed the epithet into sullen by a happy misremembrance’ (fol. 56^r). Largely following Johnson, he considers Gray ‘a copyist’ ‘of Thomson, of Pope, of Collins’, identifying him as ‘deficient in general view—[and] determined by particular objects’. In discussing the originality of Collins’s poems, Hymers uses the by then conventional juxtaposition of Collins and Gray. While Gray was repeatedly criticized for his imitativeness in the 1780s, a trend emerged in literary historiography that not only privileged Collins against Gray, but by the mid-nineteenth century culminated in such strictures as Algernon Swinburne’s, who observed that ‘as a lyric poet Gray was not worthy to unloose the latches of his [Collins’s] shoes’.⁷¹

Hymers’s edition-in-the-making does not include any discussion of the poet’s juvenile *Persian Eclogues*—although he lightly annotates the text in Langhorne’s edition; he briefly deals with the ‘Epistle to Hanmer’, Collins’s patronage poem that he produced while at Oxford University, and jots down notes for further information that he aims to obtain.⁷² His work is primarily focused on the odes, and the commentaries demonstrate that he has extensively examined Langhorne’s criticism, familiarizing himself at the same time with very recent literary criticism, such as Potter’s. Hymers goes further than Langhorne and Barbauld in his stylistic analyses of Collins’s poems and demonstrates a new philological concern that the Warton brothers applied and promoted in their criticism.⁷³ His ambition was to produce a scho-

⁷⁰ John Young, *A Criticism on the ‘Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard’. Being a Continuation of Dr. J—n’s Criticism on the Poems of Gray* (London: printed for G. Wilkie, 1783), p. 16.

⁷¹ Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Algernon Swinburne Collection, GEN MSS 303, Series III, vol. 6, folder 118, fol. 2^r. Cited by permission of the library.

⁷² On fol. 79^v, for instance, he queries: ‘Sir Thomas Hanmer died May 7 1746—A mural monument at Hanmer, the principal seat of the family—Pennt. North Wales P. 219. Did Pope die before the publication of this poem? [Pope died May 3d. 1744. The epistle is dated Oxf. Dec. 3. 1743]’ (the bracketed text was added in different ink).

⁷³ On one occasion Hymers notes: ‘Is the participle whitening active or neuter? Does it imply making white or growing white? Or is it nothing more than white extended to suit (comply with) the measure? If it should appear to be active, it will mean whitening the landscape or giving the face of the country a white appearance similar to that described by Lucretius’ (fol. 21^r). In another place he identifies striking features in Collins’s poetry, such as his favourite use of ‘he the’ (fol. 34^r) constructions.

larly edition on the scale and model of West's; unlike his model, however, Hymers contextualized Collins in terms of two narratives of literary historiography. His notes—and especially his 'Preface' to the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'—reveal him as a reader of Collins's mythopoetics; he interprets the poet's productions as products of a past vernacular tradition of obscurity *and* a recent tradition of politeness. Deliberately transforming, through criticism, some of Collins's obscurities into manifestations of poetic achievement, Hymers—like Langhorne before and Barbauld after him—comprehends Collins as a poet of genius. It is likely that he agreed with Langhorne's lament that an enthusiastic poet is destined to suffer, thereby inscribing Collins's mental disease with a quality of genius that the Romantics favoured. Unlike Barbauld, however, Hymers does not indicate an attempt at embedding the poet in a moralizing narrative. Hymers's Collins is a learned poet—familiar with the classics, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope—who had the gift of amalgamating poetic traditions and creating original, mythic poetry.