

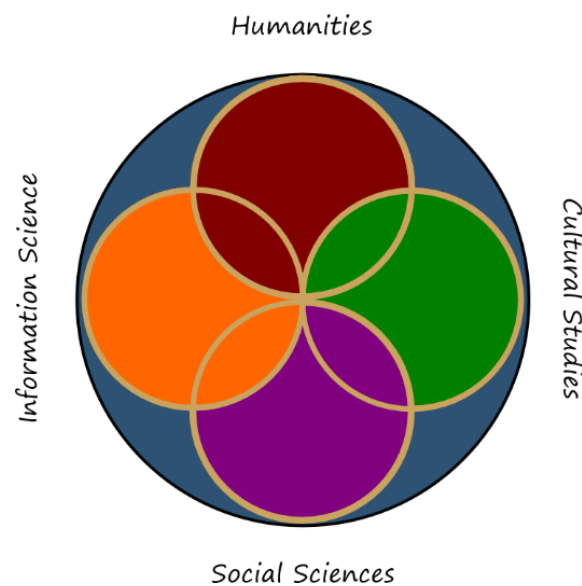
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**William Collins' Odes: an Analytical Study****Dr Khan Ansarullah Shafiullah***Department of English**Mrs KSK College of Arts, Science & Commerce Beed Maharashtra***ABSTRACT**

Collins' odes significant feature is the challenging nature of his poetry. Critics argue that his intricate and highly imaginative language can be difficult for readers to fully grasp. The abundance of allusions and obscure references, drawn from classical mythology and literature, can alienate those not well-versed in these subjects. This complexity might hinder the accessibility of his poetry, limiting its appeal to a broader audience. Some critics contend that Collins struggled with achieving thematic unity in his odes. The poems often move through a series of elaborate and shifting images and emotions without a clear and discernible narrative thread. This lack of a straightforward structure may be seen as a weakness by those who value clarity and coherence in poetry. Another point of critique is the melancholic tone that pervades Collins' work. While melancholy itself is not inherently negative in poetry, some argue that Collins' persistent use of this mood in his odes may result in a certain monotony or predictability in his thematic choices. Despite these criticisms, it is important to note that Collins' poetry has also been praised for its musicality, sensitivity, and the deep emotional resonance it evokes. His odes, such as *Ode to Evening* and *Ode to Fear*, are admired for their vivid descriptions of nature and exploration of the human psyche. This paper aims at an analytical study of the odes by Collins.

Keywords: *discernible narrative, emotional resonance, melancholic beauty*

FULL PAPER

William Collins (1721-1759) was an English poet known for his lyrical and reflective odes. While Collins' work has been celebrated for its melancholic beauty and vivid imagery, it has also faced criticism, often cantered around his perceived lack of coherence and the complexity of his language. The Ode may be defined as "a rhymed (rarely unrhymed) lyric, often in the form of an address, generally dignified or exalted in subject, feeling and style. In the words of M. H. Abrams, the ode "is a long lyric poem in subject, elevated in style, and elaborate in its stanzaic structure." Goss also defines the odd as "\, "Any strain of enthusiastic or exalted lyrical verse directed to a fixed purpose and dealing progressively with a dignified theme." The ode, thus defined, is not specifically differentiated by any common features from other kinds of lyric. Among the Greeks, from whom it originated, the word was used for any kind of lyric, from drinking-songs, love-songs to the lofty 'occasional' poems of Pindar (522-442 B.C.), the great Greek lyric poet. Some of the odes were originally poems sung to music as the chorus danced round the altar in some religious festival.

In English, the Greek ode has been imitated variously. The choice odes of Pindar were imitated by poets like Cowley and Gray. Gray wrote two Pindaric odes - *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* - divided into Strophe, Antistrophe and Epode. The triple movement is explained by the fact that originally the dancers on the stage, while performing the first movement, executed the strophe then. Redressed their steps to their former position in an antistrophe and the late of all, they made a closing movement to complete that section of the poem which is known as epode.

The alternative type of personal' Odes, viz., the Odes of Sappho, a Greek poetess of the 6th century B. C., consisted of a number of regular Stanzas with an elaborate metrical scheme. This type of Ode was imitated by Horace (65-0 B.C.), the Roman poet, and, in English by Andrew Marvell (1621-1679), in his *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* (1650). This is the type which has been more usually followed in shorter Odes, e.g., Keats' *Odes*, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, etc.

After Gray, the Pindaric Ode in full triadic form died a natural death and gave birth to the irregular type of ode without any fixed stanza, form, or rhyme scheme. The title 'Pindaric' has also been dropped since the latter half of the 18th century. The length of line etc., is varied as best suits the author. Some of the famous Odes in English literature are Wordsworth's *Immortality*

Ode, Collins's *Ode to the Passions* and Tennyson's *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. The justification of the irregular stanza or rhyme scheme must be sought in the musical beauty of the internal structure of the majority of the English Odes of the modern type.

The Odes of Collins

Collins is primarily a poet of Odes. He wrote little, but his scanty work consists mostly of odes which constitute his chief title to our remembrance and assure him a high place among some of the finest lyricists of the 18th century. Before Collins published his Odes in 1747, Gray had already written two odes, viz., *Ode on the Spring* and *Ode on a Distant Prospect of the Eton College*. Collins attempted several varieties of the ode and, in his own turn, evolved a new type known as descriptive and allegorical'. In four of his odes, viz., *To Fear*, *To Mercy*, *On the Poetical Character*, and *to Liberty*, he followed the Pindaric form. *The Passions*, an *Ode for Music*, is the only ode of Collins in which he did not follow the rigid verse form of the classical odes. Though professedly following in the main, the tradition of Dryden's famous *Ode -Alexander's Feast*, Collins nevertheless chose a separate measure for each passion. There is more poetry in it than in his model. "It is something of a stunt poem in which the melody and movement are brought into a synthetic conformity with the emotion which they describe. It is a splendid poem for recitation, full of speed and lines of sensuous beauty." Another group of Odes - *To Simplicity*, *To Pity*, *To Peace* and *On the Death of Colonel Ross*, is written in short lines and in various six-line stanza form. Of these odes the *Ode to Simplicity* is perhaps the most regular and carefully constructed ode of Collins, in which he follows the classic simplicity of outline and purity of colour of ancient Greek poetry.

The best-known odes of Collins are *Ode to Evening*, *Ode to Simplicity*, *The Ode Written in the Beginning of 1746*, and *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland*. The *Ode to Evening* is exquisitely romantic in character. It is a fine illustration of the poet's wonderful gift of landscape - painting of natural scenes. According to Cazamian, the *Ode to Evening* is "the most delicately exquisite of eighteenth-century poems, where a pensive colouring, rich in subdued restrained vibrations, spread over the landscape as over the meditative mind that contemplates it, fuses in so harmonious a manner the charm of twilight, the paling lights, the on-coming silence and gloom, all that the hour holds of happy and foreboding intent into one suggestion of a mysterious eloquence".

In the same way, Edmund Blunden appreciates this great ode: "Underlying the whole fabric, the whole intricacy of decoration, there is the inspiration of the English alliance with the spiritual perfection in Nature. Even in hours of wild weather there is the comfort, there the prototype of rest, the secret immortality in whose tide we are all swayed and by whose tide we are purified and saved, the watcher and the humanities and solitudes which he contemplated are all subjects of the quiet rule. That is the culmination of Collins's Ode to Evening."

The Ode to Simplicity is the most perfect and regular of Collins's Odes. Here the poet is seen as an ardent admirer of simplicity. He wants to be taught by Nature to breathe genuine thoughts. Collins was endowed with the supreme gift of simplicity, combined with a kind of austere dignity which are characteristic features of Greek poetry. It is this hunger for simplicity that gave his poetry a grace, beauty, and freshness of its own. The Ode to Simplicity characterises the poet's hankering after the elemental simplicities of life. Although he could not fulfil all that he promised in his ode, it did mark an advance to what may be called an obvious characteristic of romantic poetry, which had its culmination in the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

The *Ode Written in the Beginning of 1746* exhibits a gift of rhythmic music, which marks a welcome departure from the stuffy, artificial atmosphere of the court and the ballroom. It was a time of wars and sacrifice of which Collins had first-hand experience and which he interpreted in his hymns and clergies. This ode was occasioned by the battle of Fontenay. In the words of S. A. Brooke, "It appeals to the eternal verities of melancholy. It appeals to the eternal verities of human nature and is universal in feeling. In this poem Collins reaches pure, natural simplicity, a sweet and tender passion, and with a worthy and human subject, such as, touches the universal heart of man... Coleridge could not have done it better."

The *Ode on the Superstition of the Highlands of Scotland* is important as it is the forerunner of the so-called 'Celtic revival in English literature. The ode is basically a marvellous intuition of the future of poetry. The taste for ruins, for a romantic longing for the past, for the instinctive cults of wonder and of Nature's more awful solemnities for the mysterious — all these are in evidence here. Here Collins just lets his imagination and lyrical fervour play over the myths and legends and over all the creatures of the fairy world, which was so real to his medieval mind - much more real than the actualities of life. In this ode Collins puts in an admirable defence of what was regarded

according to Augustan conception of subject-matter of poetry as 'false themes' and cites the example of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Tasso. By poetic truth, he means fidelity to our emotional apprehension of facts. So, the widest margin may be allowed to every poet for the free play of his imagination so long as his purpose is to delight us by the creation of beauty and by appealing to our innate sense of mystery and to help us to discern the godlike mysteries of God's universe.

His *Ode to Liberty* strikes the national note, born out of a burning passion for liberty. His love of Nature made him an admirer of Thomson and the result was his *Ode on the Death of Thomson*. The note of sadness and melancholy typical of the poets of the churchyard school is struck in the *Dirge in Cymbeline*, and *Ode to Pity*.

Characteristics

The Odes of Collins evidence, the poet's departure from classicism. Though a minor poet, Collins had an experimental mind. After the publication of *Persian Eclogues* in 1742, he began experimenting on old verse forms to free himself from the trammels of classicism. By the middle of the century the academic revolt against classical school had begun to take shape. Collins too took up the challenge, particularly in his *Ode to Evening*. Though he could not completely free himself from contemporary classical vogue, yet his odes reveal that his poetic eye was fixed on something afar. It goes greatly to his credit that, while remaining within the limitations of his classical modes of ancient Greece and Rome, his poetry could show his imaginative power - his lyricism and the note of pure song. The dominant impression of his odes is undoubtedly the romantic temper in subject and treatment and also in style. In the words of Saintsbury, "The Collins of the Odes, at his best, is the poet of all time in general and no time in particular, the Collins of the *Eclogues* is everywhere the poetaster of the 18th century."

The odes also reveal the poet's unique gift for emotional idealisation of scenes of Nature which strike a new note in the 18th century reflective poetry. It is the picture of the poet playing on "his airy harp" in the twilight-it is the sense of mystery, sadness and wonder at the beauty of Nature which is presented and conveyed to us in the few unrhymed stanzas of the most exquisite lyric of the century, viz., *Ode to Evening*. The whole thing is conceived in a pensive mood. It is significant also that of all the times of the day, the poet is in love with the evening when all Nature is hushed into silence. The *Ode to Evening* is also a fine illustration of the poet's wonderful gift of landscape-painting of natural scenes.

Melancholy such as that we notice in Collins — is nourished upon a yearning regret for the vanished glories of the past - a return to the beliefs of other days-an interest in old legends, and in old-fashioned superstitions of the past, in fairy, hands', 'harp', 'fairy valleys' etc. Johnson wrote: "He loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters- the grandeur of wildness and the novelty of extravagance, were always desired by him, but not always attained." All these new notes in Augustan reflective poetry are discerned in Collins's Ode to the Passions, Ode to Evening, Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands. The elegiac note in almost all Collins's poems has already been noticed. This note of melancholy is not an affectation or the fashion of the school poets who found pleasure in nocturnal churchyard meditation but engendered partly by his own sad and disturbed life his physical and mental ill-health as well as a somewhat melancholic attitude to life which became a characteristic feature of Romantic poetry.

Natural simplicity is another feature of Collins's Odes. It imparts! grace and freshness, colours his mood and sentiment and touches his heart. It brings us closer to the common emotions which form the stuff of the life of the man of the country. It takes his poetry out of the stuffy atmosphere of the coffee-house into the open-air life of the common man where the basic problems of life, death and the brevity of human glory have to be faced squarely. The vocabulary of his Ode to Simplicity is no doubt laboured in the style of Augustans, 'it is sufficiently spiritualised by an inner youthfulness of spirit to rejoin Romanticism in its moments of soberness.' His style in his odes is steeped in literary reminiscences but these is a spontaneous grace besides natural creative and sincere self-expression in the utterance. It is often made up of a charming handful of images culled from his favourite poets — above all from Milton.

Thus, Collins is seen at his best in his odes. What Phelps said about his *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highland* may be applied to Collins's odes in general. Phelps says, "The ode has always ranked among Collins's most important work. The poem is in subject, treatment and style distinctly Romantic; and it struck a new note in English verse. This is true of all the odes of Collins in one way or the other. Patterson has rightly observed: "But at his best he (Collins) is very good, the beautiful unrhymed nocturne *Ode to Evening*, the *Dirge in Cymbeline*, *How Sleep the Brave* and parts of the odes *To Liberty* and *The Passions*, are in the very front rank of English poetry."

In conclusion, while William Collins' odes have been lauded for their poetic beauty and exploration of complex emotions, they have not been

without criticism. The challenging language, perceived lack of thematic unity, and a predominant melancholic tone have been points of contention among critics and readers alike. Nonetheless, Collins remains an important figure in 18th-century English poetry, contributing to the development of the Romantic literary tradition.

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