

Ode to Evening

One of the finest lyrics of the eighteenth-century, William Collins's *Ode to Evening* is written in unrhymed stanzas. This is a touchstone poem for early romantic poets and is one of the most frequently imitated odes written in the eighteenth century. The poem begins with an invocation to the spirit of Evening to teach the poet to sing a soft strain to it. This Spirit is not just a part of dead nature. Sometimes she appears as pensive Eve. She likes to hear the poet's songs. Her hours are aromatic. Fairies, who sleep in the buds during daytime, come out in the evening and make the atmosphere fragrant. His song should be as soft as the murmur of the streams or the dying winds. The poet says that barring the cry of the bat and the beetle, there is complete calm all around in the evening. He wishes to go to some solitary and barren spot or some ancient ruined building among lonely valleys in the evening to watch its beauty. However, if he is prevented from doing so by "chill, blustering winds or driving rain", he would like to go to a lovely cottage on the mountain side to watch the dark coloured evening gradually descending over the surrounding landscape with the "gradual dusky veil". The poem ends with the poet's conviction that the evening shall continue to inspire fancy (poets), friendship (friends), science (men of learning), and smiling peace (lovers of peace) throughout the seasons of the year.

The poem *Ode to Evening* exemplifies melancholic poetry. The speaker of the poem describes beautiful images of springs, valleys, the sun and the evening star in the first half of the poem, creating an almost dreamlike world. Mentioning the sun which "sits in yon western tent" and evening star "arising shows His paly circlet", the speaker implies a passage of time, from day to night. The speaker then talks of returning to the simplicity of rural life, since he mentions "then lead, calm votaress, where some sheety lake/ Cheers the lone heath, or sometime-hallowed pile/ Or upland fallows gray", with fallows. The speaker of the poem then goes on to talk about longing for the mountain side and villages, which are unspoiled in their natural beauty. This mention of villages calls to mind the simple life of the rural villagers, who all help each other in their small, agricultural community. Collins seems to be telling the reader that perhaps, society needs to return to the simplicity of the rural life in order to fix myriad problems that civilization or urbanization has created. The rural countryside also implies a way of life that allows for more time to enjoy the beauty of nature and reflect upon the meanings of life. It is far better than a fast-paced, material value-driven, power-obsessed way of life that leaves no room for enjoyment of more simple things in life.

Then, the idea of time passing by is further emphasized by the mention of the four seasons by the speaker. The Earth here is personified by Eve, whose hair would be bathed by rain that Spring brings, Summer would bring more sunshine to the nourishment that the Earth already brings, her lap would be filled with Autumn leaves and her robes would be blowing in the Winter wind. Through the mention of the seasons, Collins really illuminates the splendour of nature at this point, although the majestic grandeur of his descriptions of nature remain throughout the poem.

As we can see, the ode manifests the Pre-Romantic elements as the exaltation of rural life, simplicity, stanzaic form, lyrical poetry, a sense of melancholy, the passage of time and seasons, a close relation to nature, and the personification of a time of day. The poem can be perceived as an allegorical ode which develops the georgic topic of time and change in an exquisite blank verse lyric. Collins borrowed the metrical structure and the rhyme less lines of this ode from Milton's translation of Horace. The features mentioned in the analysis of the poem are perfected in the Romantic poetry of the succeeding generations.