

Transitional Poets/Pre-Romantic Poets/Precursors of the Romantic Poets

(Part-2)

[BA (Hons.), Part-1, Paper-1]

Mr. Subrata Kumar Das
Head, Dept. of English
VSJ College, Rajnagar
subrata.hcu@gmail.com

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William Collins' fame rests on odes *On Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects*, which covers *Odes to Pity, Fear, simplicity, Liberty*, 'How Sleep the Brave' and, above all, *Ode to Evening*. The logic of these odes, except *Ode to Evening*, 'How Sleep the Brave' and *The Passions*, is uncertain, the grammar too goes astray, and the poems sometimes tail off into flatness. But what attracts in Collins is his delicate sense of beauty, especially in *Ode to Evening*, where a succession of distinct images and scenes lead to a delicate evocation of the landscape. The exotic appeal of his earliest *Persian Eclogues*, collection of escapist schoolboy verse, reappears in the posthumously published *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands*. The wild Scotland of the poem is both 'Fantasy's land...where still, 'tis said, the fairy people meet' and a landscape filtered from various sources.

The poets of the Graveyard School-Thomas Grey, Edward Young and Robert Blair being central among them-wrote sombre, melancholic, reflective and moral poems chiefly on human mortality. Young's *Night Thoughts* is an account of his broodings over his sorrow, his thoughts on mortality and immortality, in a carefully wrought gloomy context of night. Blair's *The Grave* is a dramatic evocation of the horrors of corruption and the solitude of

death. The most enduringly famous, fluent and diversified of all 'graveyard' poems is Grey's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1750). The poem moves with ease from contemplation of the landscape to a consideration of 'the short and simple annals of the poor'. The alternation between generalised abstractions and individual examples and the deep personal feelings make it one of the most celebrated pre-Romantic poems. Grey's *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* are rhetorically grand. Whereas the first traces a genealogy of the English verse, the second sustains a high note of heroic denunciation in the bitter prophecy of the bard.

George Crabbe's *The Village*, which evokes the poor and bleak life of the Suffolk coastal region, earned for him the reputation of being the poet of poverty and misery. John Dyer's *Grongar Hill* succeeds in achieving the mark of truth in describing the landscape. Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, the controversial James Macpherson's Ossian poems and Thomas Chatterton's pretentious Rowley poems succeeded in evoking the past. All these scattered attempts, along with the major pre-Romantics of the above, led on, with the French Revolution as the impetus, to the effusive Romanticism of the *Lyrical Ballads*.