



The Poetry of William Collins: "Always mistrust a subordinate who never finds fault with his superior."

William Collins

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William Collins was born on 25 December 1721 in Chichester, Sussex. William was educated at Winchester and Magdalen College Oxford and whilst there in 1742 published the Persian Eclogues. After graduating in 1743 and unable to obtain a fellowship he decided on a literary career. In 1747 he published his collection of Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects on which his subsequent reputation was to rest. These poems are laced with strong emotive descriptions and a personal relationship to the subject allowed by the ode form. At the time they gained little notice which was dominated by the Augustan Poets. Depressed by this lack of success he began to sink further into the abyss and this decline was further fuelled by the influence of alcohol. By 1754 he had sunk into insanity and was confined to McDonald's Madhouse in Chelsea. From there he moved to the care of a married elder sister in Chichester until his death on June 12th 1759. He was buried in St Andrew's Church. Following his death, his poems were issued in a collected edition by John Langhorne (1765) and slowly gained more recognition, although never without criticism. Now he is very highly regarded and ranked only behind Alexander Pope and Thomas Gray in the pantheon of 18th Century Poets. His lyrical odes mark a turn away from the Augustan poetry of Pope's generation and towards the Romantic era of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley which would soon follow.

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