

POST-AUGUSTAN NATURE

IN WILLIAM COLLINS'S "ODE TO EVENING" (1746)¹

In recent years scholars have again taken an interest in William Collins (1721-59) who is known primarily for his collection of *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Odes* of 1746 (Jung 2000 and Jung 2003c). Critics have read and contextualised Collins as a so-called pre-Romantic poet (Brown 1991 and Wendorf 1981), focusing on what they identified as a heightened interest in subjectivity. This approach, however, is limiting since it does not address the central question of how specifically Collins differs from such prominent Neo-classical writers as Pope. This essay, for that reason, will examine the notions of nature that are used in Pope's "Windsor Forest" (Davies 1978: 37-52)² and Collins's "Ode to Evening" (Lonsdale 1969: 461-467).³ Although only 33 years elapsed between the publication of Pope's and Collins's poem, there are fundamental differences which confirm Joseph Warton's "Advertisement" statement to his 1746 *Odes on Various Subjects* that by that time poets were ready to "bring back poetry into its right channel" (Warton 1979: 3) and to provide answers to questions that Wordsworth would be dealing with at greater length in *Lyrical Ballads*.

The division of eighteenth-century poetry into poetry for or about the "public" or the "private" spheres has long been accepted. That this division also impacted on poets' notions of Nature, however, has rarely been explored. The public occasion of "Windsor Forest" is acknowledged at the beginning of the poem when Pope's speaker introduces a potential patron who may, Pope hopes, support his work. While Collins is using the sophisticated strategies of the hymnal ode, entailing supplication and prayer, Pope articulates demands rather than petitions:

Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.
GRANVILLE commands: your aid, O Muses, bring!
What Muse for GRANVILLE can refuse to sing? (4-6)

The address of the Muses is rhetorical since Pope considers the imperative of lines 1 and 2 as a standard formula, used in the self-assured sense that the Muse cannot "refuse to sing." While Kurt Schlüter recognises the conventional pastoral persona that Pope introduces in "Windsor Forest", he does not comment on the insistent and demanding tone that denotes authority

rather than the acquiescing willingness of Collins's speaker to deny (more or less) his own subjective identity and desire (Schlüter 1961: 180).

It is a commonplace that Pope's concept of nature is one of an artificially created system, entailing the imitation of natural order, the *natura naturata*.⁴ In "An Essay on Criticism" (1711) he recommends to the poet to

First follow *Nature*, and your judgment frame
 By her just standard, which is still the same:
 Unerring NATURE, still divinely bright,
 One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
 Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
 At once the source, and end, and test of Art. (67-72)

The normative aspect that Pope introduces through the mention of the "just standard" of Nature indicates that although he considers Nature as the "source, and end, and test of Art," what he has in mind is a notion of Nature that is "restrain'd" and "methodiz'd" in accordance with the "RULES of old" (88). His idea of imitating cultivated Nature is linked with the necessity to "dress her charms" (103). This mimetic representation of Nature, however, is selective, focusing on man's authority and sense of order, and the structures that are imposed on the uncultivated and unrestrained appearance of "real" nature. In Collins's ode, on the other hand, the poet sees nature – exemplified by Eve – as *natura naturans*, a creating force that does not require man's correction, but constitutes an independent force which can inspire a select group of men – poets – to realise the essence and spirituality of Goddess Natura (Jung 2006). In one of the few critical utterances of Collins, he defines the goals of poetry, as "[s]uch is the Force of Poets, such the Power of the great Genius, that even Nature is changed and heightened in his Hands" (Collins 1747: 286). Unlike Pope's notion of "nature methodiz'd," however, Collins has no such regularisation of external nature in mind; what he means when he notes that the poet can "change" and "heighten" Nature is that he can select illustrations of natural sublimity, thereby concentrating her sublime appeal in condensed and overwhelming images, a claim that James Thomson would make in the "Preface" to "Winter: A Poem". Importantly, however, Nature must have revealed her essence to the poet first, and this essence is then reworked by means of the poetic imagination.

In Pope's production, Windsor Forest is described in terms of an enumeration or catalogue of natural objects that are presented successively whereas in Collins's ode, the evening goddess is a representation – with her "gradual dusky veil" – of change. The ode opens by means of an approximation of the "oaten stop" and "pastoral song" (1) to the sounds that are produced in the darkening setting of the scene. The poet clearly emphasises the significance of sound since from the start he hopes to "soothe" Eve's "modest ear" (2). This insistence on the acoustic panorama of the evening landscape also lessens the physical distance between the wandering speaker whom Collins denominates as a devoted pilgrim of Eve and the evening

goddess herself since they are both occupying a dark space of sound in which the clear characteristics of visibility and corporeality are blurred, if not partly dissolved. A major part in the vivid characterisation of Eve (and Nature) lies in Collins's endowing the spirit of the evening "with presence, the ideal finding substantial form through a creative act of language" (Heller 1989: 161). For Collins, allegorical personification does not mean the mere embodiment of the abstract moods or atmosphere the evening is capable of evoking, but he at the same time creates a speaking-partner who, although superior to the poet-speaker, is thought bountiful in her gift of inspiration. Her presence inspires a balance and state of composure that Collins's speaker, in his terrestrial existence, has been unable to find; the speaker is soothed by what Oswald Doughty terms "one transient mood of nature, the peace and the stillness and the rest which descend upon the landscape as evening enfolds it in her twilight veil" (Doughty 1922: 153).

Collins's poem starts less ambitiously, that is, with less prominence of the speaking "I," than the heroic "Windsor Forest"; there is no gradation or development in the tone of "Windsor Forest", and Pope does not as subtly as Collins pay attention to the (perceptible) changes occurring in the natural evening landscape. The complex involvement of Collins's speaker in the poem is pertinently shown in his long and digressive invocation of the evening which eventually culminates in the revelation of his ardent love for Eve. This sentence reveals his attempt at finding a voice that is adequate for the deity he apostrophises. Apart from that, this rather unconventional (hypotactic and parenthetical) syntactic unit of 20 lines offers "an image of Eve as the tutelary goddess of a landscape which is much less attended to than she is herself" (Barrell 1983: 10). A. D. McKillop notes:

Evening lives in her own realm; she at once dominates, pervades, and is immersed in a world whose extent can be variously defined as the theater of natural forces, the cycle of hours and seasons, the perspective of landscape painting, and the meditative poet's vision. (McKillop 1960: 78)

Collins's evening is characterised as "chaste Eve" (2), as "nymph reserved" (5) "maid composed" (15) as well as "meekest Eve" (42). Her chastity and untouchability singles her out as possessing the gift for which Collins is imploring her: inspiration. The repeated possessive pronoun "thy" indicates Eve's role as the possessor, not only of inspirational essence but of authority, too. It is these qualities that Collins hopes to have conveyed on his speaker. Eve, however, does not literally speak to the poet's persona but works through her effect on both the landscape and the "pilgrim." In that respect, the deity preserves her abstract character and enables Collins to produce his poetic prayer which is a "perfect symbolic rendering of the spirit of the Evening" (Woodhouse 1965: 123), highlighting the spiritual qualities to which the poet-speaker is aspiring.

Collins's natural landscape is not characterised by the conventional devices that Pope used in "Windsor Forest", but he introduces the "weak-eyed

bat" (9) and the drowsy beetle. The motion of the "weak-eyed bat" is described in terms of monosyllabic words (except for "leathern") and thereby contributes to highlighting the shortness and abruptness of the way the bat moves in the air. At the same time, the poet endeavours to represent the natural simplicity of the setting through his simple monosyllabic diction. The alliterative "short shrill shriek" (10) is paralleled in the short and irregular "flit[ting]" of the "weak-eyed bat." Anna Laetitia Barbauld comments on Collins's alliteration as an extraordinary instance of "imitative harmony" (Barbauld 1797: xxxi). John Langhorne defines "imitative harmony" as the "resemblance in their [the sounds'] flow to the action they express" (Langhorne 1763: 2: 112). Apart from the onomatopoeic diction that he uses in the "Ode to Evening", Collins presents an image of familiarity rather than Augustan sterility and generality, by noticing the beetle's colliding with the pilgrim in the darkening evening scene, an instance of familiarity that Wordsworth would similarly use in his poetry (Schulze 1956: 225).⁵ H. W. Garrod, interpreting this familiarity against the background of Popean Augustanism, identifies Collins's use of the beetle as an example of "eighteenth-century triviality" (Garrod 1928: 77).

Collins's landscape is a space into which he projects his longing to be heard by Eve. Only in the stillness of the valley is it possible to perceive the sounds that the bat and the beetle produce (Jung 2003a: 151-162). In that respect, Kevin Barry calls the ode a "reciprocation of sounds" (Barry 1987: 45) in which "the eye is replaced by the uncertainties of the ear" (Barry 1987: 46). Collins deliberately distances himself from the tradition of Augustan pictorialism that Pope and Thomson were using, and emphasises the spiritual character of Eve. The term "descriptive" that Collins used in the title of his *Odes* ought to be understood not in pictorial terms but in the sense of Collins's ode being descriptive of the mood that Eve creates through the poet-speaker. Windsor Forest and its "Groves of Eden," on the other hand, "live in description" only and do not possess the liveliness and animation of Collins's landscape with Eve's inspiring and penetrating presence. Nature is not spontaneously perceived but presents itself by means of "display": according to Pope, "the wild heath displays her purple dyes," whilst in Collins's ode, the "heathy scene" (1746: 29) is observed incidentally as the shade of Eve reaches it.

The "folding star" is also related to the Evening, and although the evening is associated with darkness and nightly gloom, there is a striking contrast between the "folding Star" (21) and the evening which consists in the cool light of the "paly cirlet" (22) and the increasing darkness of dusk. The coolness of the light adds yet another sensory experience to the otherwise already synaesthetic experience of the wandering poet-speaker's evening ramble (Jung 2003b: 36-47). The adjective "warning" (22) serves as an indicator of the imminent arrival of Eve's "shadowy car" (28) but it also reminds wanderers such as the speaker to retire to the safety and comfort of a human habitation. This "warning" is thus of a twofold nature, for while it tells man to withdraw from the evening scene, it is a signal to spirits of nature,

The fragrant Hours, and elves
 Who slept in flowers the day,
 And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
 And sheds the freshening dew, and, lovlier still,
 The Pensive Pleasures sweet, (23-27)

to appear and “prepare” Eve’s “shadowy car.” Eve’s car echoes the mythological car of Phoebus. David Daiches speaks of Collins’s relationship to myth and its representation by means of allegorical personifications as lying

somewhere between personification and mythology, suggesting a half-commitment to classical myth which gives just that air of shyness, or tentative moves towards an acceptable poem [...] that represents the stance of the poet from the beginning. (Daiches 1966: 336)

The “fragrant Hours” can only appear in the evening since the heat of the day prevents their “fragrant” perfumes from streaming. Collins integrates mythological figures such as nymphs into the spiritual scene of the evening vale. Samuel Johnson has pointed out that the poet’s “flights of imagination [...] pass the bounds of nature” (Johnson 1953: 2: 314), censuring the poet for his so-called extravagance and obscurity. And it is indeed true that, due to Collins’s combining of various elements from a number of poetic traditions and contexts, “it is possible to detect romantic intent in his work even when the style and the ostensible theme is pseudo-classic” (McKillop 1923: 16). The importance of water not only concerns the effect of the fragrance that is set free but, as Kurt Schlüter has pointed out, nymphs as well as muses are natural spirits and although much more spiritual in later literature, they yet stand for the enlivening element of water (Schlüter 1968: 277). The “darkening vale” (17) is the place to which Evening can retire, and it is also the realm over which she reigns. By contriving his speaker’s meeting and address of Eve to take place in this vale, Collins may have had in mind to regain some part of the privacy that Pope had lost in his public poetry. According to John Barrell, the poet

attempts to recover the range that had been lost to poets, and even proposes versions of an ideal, less complex society for the poet to operate in, where private experience was not separable from public, or not suppressed in favour of an abstract idea of the typical, the representative, the common. (Barrell 1983: 12)

“Windsor Forest” is by no means private in the sense that John Barrell defines the term for the ode of Collins, but it is political and patriotic. It is also public in that the speaker discourses on the evolutionary history of the forest. While there is not any notion of death in the ode, Windsor Forest deals with war and the hunt and describes the “whirring pheasant” deadly wounded and “flutter[ing] [...] in blood,” thereby referring to the chase as a manifestation of pleasure in public rather than a retreat to solitary privacy.

102

Collins's invocation of Eve aims to establish a personal relationship, an intimacy, with the deity. The version of the "Ode to Evening" that Robert Dodsley included in his *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1748) is more impersonal than the original 1746 version. The respective passage of the original version of the ode is poetically preferable, and it also clearly shows the speaker's implicatedness in the scene:

Then let me rove some wild and heathy scene,
 Or find some Ruin 'midst its dreary Dells,
 Whose Walls more awful nod
 By thy religious Gleams. (29-32)

The verb "rove" is highly poetic with the transitive construction that ensues (Jung 2005), and "rove" also implies that the speaker roams around through the country to be in close contact with nature, especially with Eve. The "religious Gleams" of the moon further heighten the atmospheric mood that Eve's presence inspires not only in Collins's speaker but also in the way these gleams of spirituality reverberate in the natural landscape.

The changeability and instability of the weather as a strikingly uncontrollable natural phenomenon enforces the sublime character of the deity, especially since the speaker's "willing feet" (34) are prepared to encounter the "chill blustering winds or driving rain" (33). The "hamlets brown" (37) are not representations of man-made settlements, but they ought to be understood in the context of the nostalgic and sentimental image of Auburn that Oliver Goldsmith paints in "The Deserted Village". The brownness of the hamlets is on the one hand due to the material out of which the houses are built but, secondly, the dwindling light of Eve also draws a veil over the whole village community and thereby creates the impression of innumerable tones of brownness. "The gradual dusky veil" (40) makes churches and towers appear as "dim-discovered spires" (37). The coolness and freshness of which the elves and Hours are so much in need to diffuse their fragrance, are also characteristic of the Evening in that her "dewy fingers draw / The gradual dusky veil" which harmonises and allusively combines all objects, irrespective of their man-made or natural origin. Collins's technique of evoking the atmosphere of the evening is achieved by the so-called "brown landscape" that came to be of great significance for Wordsworth.⁶

The ode concludes with a reinforced expression of the speaker's adoration of Eve, the result of an invocation that has been expressive more of the wish for proximity with Eve rather than a real or experienced intimacy. However, unlike the speaker of "Windsor Forest", Collins does not declaim his admiration of Eve but modestly utters his respect and reverence:

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves,
 Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,
 Affrights thy shrinking train,
 And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
 Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipped Health,
 Thy gentlest influence own,
 And hymn thy favourite name! (45-52)

Collins's literary-historical position within the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century is unique since he aimed to depict as irrational a theme as the mood created cathartically through the poet-speaker in an age in which the dominance of reason and rational thought was an ideal that Johnson, as late as the early 1780s, celebrated in the *Lives of the Poets*. Collins shares an interest in contemporary debates of originality and the imagination. The inclusion of Fancy in Eve's train is expressive of the central significance that he attributes to the creative forces of Fancy whom he understands as a metonymical representation of Nature. He deliberately chooses a rhymeless metre, using a more "natural" form of expression and breaking with the laboured and polished perfection of the Augustan couplet. The conclusion of his ode introduces the metonymical use of Eve, for in the last line, the speaker refers to Eve's "favourite name" which I have elsewhere discussed as an identification of Eve with Goddess Natura (Jung 2006). Collins's understanding of Nature is closely connected with his handling of form. It has been noted by various early critics of Collins's ode that the blankverse he uses was ill-suited for as lyrical a piece as his "Ode to Evening". However, Langhorne, a critic who produced the first enthusiastic edition of Collins's poems in 1765, speaks of the metre as imitative of Horace rhymeless "Ode to Pyrrha", which had also been translated by Milton. According to Langhorne, the

ode bears the nearest resemblance to that mixt kind of asclepiad and pherecratic verse; and that resemblance in some degree reconciles us to the want of rhyme, while it reminds us of those great masters of antiquity, whose works had no need of this whimsical jingle of sounds. (Langhorne 1765: 170)

The heterometrical form of the "Ode to Evening" has always been contrasted with the polished isometrical form of Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard". Collins's rhythmically as well as formally freer production is subtle and at the same time articulates his poetics of simplicity and Nature. Langhorne's judgment of the ode reflects the common view of appreciation that Collins's contemporaries accorded the ode, for the "imagery and enthusiasm it contains could not fail of rendering it delightful" (Langhorne 1765: 171). It is the originality of the "Ode to Evening", that justifies the modern scholar's speaking of "the Collins of eternity" (Ward 1952: 143) whose poetry, since the mid-1760s, has always succeeded in being revived and re-appreciated. It must be borne in mind, however, that Collins is a poet in a transitional period and that he therefore attempts to fuse the Augustan tradition with which he was most familiar with his original use of sources as well as poetic experiments which culminated in the novelty of poems such as "Ode to Evening" and "Ode

to Simplicity". Undoubtedly, he is Augustan in many ways, such as his use of epithets of the poetic diction of the age; at the same time, however, he succeeds in his attempt at creating an intimacy between the speaking subject and Eve, a characteristic often identified with Wordsworthian Romanticism and subjectivity (Riese 1968: 12). On the basis of my analysis of Collins's ode it appears that James Sutherland's contention that the poet "widened the range of eighteenth-century sensibility, but [...] accepted without much protest the contemporary poetic idiom and continued to work contentedly within the tradition" (Sutherland 1948: 159) has to be reconsidered. Collins clearly must be understood as a "major poet" (Humphreys 1957: 89) who enriched the poetry of his time through his slender but undoubtedly influential and original collection of *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects*. Throughout his brief life Collins desired to shape the "image of a Poet's heart, / How bright, how solemn, how serene" (Wordsworth 1921: 46, ll. 11-12) and to fulfil and realise his own expectations and hopes as a truly inspired "Runic bard" (Lonsdale 1969: 504, l. 41).

1 I would like to thank Professors Fritz Willy Schulze and Kurt Schlüter for detailed discussions of Collins's ode. Professor Frederick Burwick read an earlier version of this article and made helpful comments on it.

2 All references are to this edition, and line numbers are given parenthetically in the text.

3 All references are to this edition, and line numbers are given parenthetically in the text.

4 The programmatic passage in Pope's poem reads:

Not Chaos-like together crush'd and bruis'd,
But, as the world, harmoniously confus'd:
Where order in variety we see,
And where, tho' all things differ, all agree.

5 F. W. Schulze has convincingly argued that "the outstanding line of the "Ode to Evening" ["the weak-eyed bat"] has affected Wordsworth's "Dirge" [...] and] reverberates in *The glow-worm there shall cheer the gloom.*"

6 Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" (lines 10-18) provides a very positive meaning of brownness and shade:

Pleasant to him who on the soft cool moss
Extends his careless limbs beside the root
Of some huge oak whose aged branches make
A twilight of their own, a dewy shade
Where the wren warbles while the dreaming man,
Half-conscious of that soothing melody,
With side-long eye looks out upon the scene,
By those impending branches made more soft,
More soft and distant.

See also the preface of the following edition of Schulze (1952: 1-28).

REFERENCES

- Barbauld, A. L. 1797. *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins With a Prefatory Essay by Mrs. Barbauld*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies.
- Barrell, J. 1983. The public figure and the private eye: William Collins' "Ode to Evening". In S. Kappeler and N. Bryson (eds). *Teaching the Text*. London: Routledge, 1-17.

- Barry, K. 1987. *Language, Music and the Sign. A Study in Aesthetics, Poetics and Poetic Practice from Collins to Coleridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, M. 1991. *Preromanticism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Collins, W. 1747. Of the Essential Excellencies in Poetry. *The Museum, or, the Literary and Historical Register* 32, 286.
- Daiches, D. 1966. Collins: "Ode to Evening". In O. Williams (ed). *Master Poems of the English Language*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Davis, H. (ed). 1978. *Alexander Pope. Complete Poetical Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Doughty, O. 1922. *English Lyric in the Age of Reason*. London: Daniel O'Connor.
- Garrod, H. W. 1928. *Collins*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Heller, D. C. 1989. *The Evolution of the Poet's Task in the Later Eighteenth Century: A Study of Gray, Collins and Cowper*. University of Washington. Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Humphreys, A. R. 1957. The Literary Scene. In B. Ford (ed). *The Pelican Guide to English Literature. From Dryden to Johnson*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 51-96.
- Johnson, S. 1953. *Lives of the English Poets*. A. L. Hind (ed). London: Dent.
- Jung, S. 2000. *William Collins and 'The Poetical Character': Originality, Original Genius and the Poems of William Collins*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Jung, S. 2003a. 'Silence' in Early Eighteenth-Century Poetry: Finch, Akenside, Collins. *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 131, 151-162.
- Jung, S. 2003b. 'Sweetness' in the Poetry of William Collins. *English Language Notes* 41:3, 36-47.
- Jung, S. (ed). 2003c. *William Collins: New Perspectives* [special issue of *Trivium* 33].
- Jung, S. 2005. William Collins and 'to rove'. *The Explicator*, forthcoming.
- Jung, S. 2006. William Collins and 'Goddess Natura'. *English Language Notes* 45:1, forthcoming.
- Langhorne, J. 1763. *The Effusions of Friendship and Fancy*. London: T. Beckett and P. A. De Hondt.
- Langhorne, J. (ed). 1765. *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins with Memoirs of the Author and Observations on His Genius and Writings*. London: T. Beckett and P. A. De Hondt.
- Lonsdale, R. (ed). 1969. *The Poems of Gray, Collins, Goldsmith*. London and New York: Longman.
- McKillop, A. D. 1923. The Romanticism of William Collins. *Studies in Philology* 20, 16.
- McKillop, A. D. 1960. Collins' "Ode to Evening": Background and Structure. *Tennessee Studies in Language and Literature* 5, 78.
- Riese, T. A. 1968. Über den literaturgeschichtlichen Begriff Romantik. In T. A. Riese and D. Riesner (eds). *Versdichtung der englischen Romantik*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

- Schlüter, K. 1961. Pope's "Windsor Forest", Ein Ortsgedicht in pastoraler Gestaltung. *Anglia* 79, 180.
- Schlüter, K. 1968. William Collins: "Ode to Evening". In K. H. Göller. *Die englische Lyrik. Von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart*. Düsseldorf: August Bagel.
- Schulze, F. W. (ed). 1952. *W. Wordsworth / S. T. Coleridge. Lyrical Ballads. Historisch-kritisch herausgegeben von F. W. Schulze*. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Schulze, F. W. 1965. Wordsworthian and Coleridgian Texts (1784-1822). Mostly Unidentified or Displaced. In F. W. Schulze and G. Dietrich (eds). *Strena Anglica. Otto Ritter zum 80. Geburtstag*. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Sutherland, J. R. 1948. *A Preface to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ward, A. W. and A. R. Waller (eds). 1952. *The Cambridge History of English Literature. The Age of Johnson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Warton, J. 1979. *Odes on Various Subjects (1746)*. New York: The Augustan Reprint Society.
- Wendorf, R. 1981. *William Collins and Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*. Minnesota: Minneapolis University Press.
- Woodhouse, A. S. P. 1965. The Poetry of Collins Reconsidered. In F. W. Hilles and H. Bloom (eds). *From Sensibility to Romanticism. Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 93-138.

SUMMARY

POST-AUGUSTAN NATURE IN WILLIAM COLLINS'S ODE TO EVENING (1746)

For years "Nature" has been used as a key-term to categorise eighteenth-century poetry. The traditional dichotomy of Augustan "nature methodiz'd" and the Romantic guiding Nature of Wordsworth has come under stress and seen as more problematic than previously assumed. My article analyses the complex notion of nature that William Collins uses in his *Ode to Evening* of 1746. In this ode he addresses Eve (a metonymical representation of Nature) as a divine, active as well as spiritual force whose intimacy he is craving. Rather than Pope's subdued, harmonised and regularised nature of "display," Collins uses stylistic devices such as onomatopoeia and internal rhyme, and covers the landscape with a "gradual dusky veil" which blurs the definite character and outline of Augustan *natura naturata* in favour of a more allusive, anti-pictorial and synaesthetic atmospheric environment of Eve/Nature in which visuality and sight are secondary.