English Literature Summer Assignment

Read and annotate the following poem, then answer this question:

How does Collins present books and the act of reading in the poem ‘Books’?

You should aim to include embedded, analysed quotations and use literary terminology where appropriate.

Please hand in your annotated copy of the poem with your completed essay.

 Books

From the heart of this dark, evacuated campus

I can hear the library humming in the night,

a choir of authors murmuring inside their books

along the unlit, alphabetical shelves,

Giovani Potani next to Pope, Dumas next to his son,

each one stitched into his own private coat,

together forming a low, gigantic chord of language.

I picture a figure in the act of reading,

shoes on a desk, head tilted into the wind of a book,

a man in two worlds, holding the rope of his tie

as the suicide of lovers saturates a page,

or lighting a cigarette in the middle of a theorem.

He moves from paragraph to paragraph

as if touring a house of endless, panelled rooms.

I hear the voice of my mother reading to me

from a chair facing the bed, books about horses and dogs,

and inside her voice lie other distant sounds,

the horrors of a stable ablaze in the night,

a bark that is moving towards the brink of speech.

I watch myself building bookshelves in college,

walls within walls, as rain soaks New England,

or standing in a bookstore in a trench coat.

I see all of us reading ourselves away from ourselves,

straining in circles of light to find more light

until the line of words becomes a trail of crumbs

that we follow across a page of fresh snow.

When evening is shadowing the forest

and small birds flutter down to consume the crumbs,

we have to listen hard to hear the voices

of the boy and his sister receding into the woods.

Billy Collins