

The History Of English Lyric Poetry

Prof. Theodore W. Hunt

Before taking up the special study of the Lyric as expressed in English Verse, it will conduce to clearness to note in brief The Origin and General Characteristics of Lyric Poetry, and the various forms which it has assumed in literary history.

Lyric Verse, as the name implies, was verse originally sung to the lyre, when bards and minstrels sang and played the songs which they composed. The oldest type of standard verse, as, also, the most natural, spontaneous, and simple, it claims, in this respect, a kind of priority over all competing forms. Though not especially illustrating some of the qualities of the epic, such as moral sublimity and vastness of outlook, nor some of the qualities of the dramatic, such as tragic intensity and general scenic effect, it possesses features of a high order peculiarly its own, and embraces an area of literary and emotional movement not so fully covered by any other forms.

Origin Of Lyric Verse

Its origin may be said to lie within the human heart itself, its common and special experiences, its expressible and inexpressible emotional life, so that it would not be aside from the truth to define Lyric Verse, as The Metrical Expression of Human Feeling, The Metrical Expression of Thought through the Emotions as a Medium.

Some Of Its Characteristics

1. It is an eminently Subjective type of verse, as distinct both from epic and dramatic, expressing the innermost sen-

BSac 63:252 (Oct 1906) p. 689

sibilities of the poet himself. Instead of following the plan of the epist as a narrator of events, or that of the dramatist in representing the thoughts and experiences of others, the lyric records the ever-changing life of the lyrist himself as a man, both in his individual character and as related to the nations or the race.

The lyric is the interpreter of the world within, its desires and hopes and fears and loves and hates. Lyric Verse is thus essentially realistic, as the drama from its imitative character cannot be, and the epic from its historic and descriptive character cannot be,—a form of verse in which the author can never act by deputy, but only in the way of a heart-to-heart interview, immediate and personal. Hence, its unwonted vitality and currency; so that what is popularly called literature and life, nowhere finds a more fitting example. It is literature in living forms.

2. The lyric may be said to exhibit the possible and actual union of the Subjective and Objective, so that emotion shall never become an end in itself, but terminate, at length, on some external and worthy object, which object, indeed, has furnished the occasion for...

You must have a subscription and be logged in to read the entire article.

[Click here to subscribe](#)

visitor : : uid: ()