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Expression in music and literature

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Expression in Music and Literature.
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Analysis

Introduction.

Term "Expression" defined

I. Art as a medium of ideas
   1. Relation of nature to art
   2. Relation of literature to art
   3. Relation of music to art.

II. Thought and emotion in
   1. Literature
   2. Music

   distinguished from literature

III. Music the chief art medium for expressing

   emotions shown by
   1. Its direct appeal to the heart and to the
      human spirit illustrated by
      a) Folk song as an expression of the
         people and their characteristics
      b) A motive in any music, its function
         being to express a phase of feeling
         thus producing
            1.) melody
            2.) harmony.
   2. Its power to further awaken the feelings
of every day experience.

IV. The emotional element in literature

1.) The appeal is the writer's feeling illustrated by
   a) Lyric poetry
   b) Every principle form of literary art
      for example
      1.) Greek literature
      2.) Greek dance

V. The thought element in

1.) Music as shown in
   a) the Pastoral Symphonies of
      1.) Handel
      2.) Beethoven.
   b) landscape painting in
      1.) Mendelssohn
      2.) Wagner

2.) Literature as shown in
   a) poetry
      1.) Tennyson's "Princess"
   b) landscape painting
      1.) Ruskin
VI. Outcome of musical expression yet unknown as shown by

1.) Various musicians
   a) Debussy
   b) McDowell
   c) Strauss

VII. The value of these representative arts in Life are

1.) Educational
2.) Spiritual

Conclusion.
Expression in Music and Literature.

The subject of art is a favorite one. Perhaps because art occupies a much larger place in the world than is generally realized. And the ways in which it enters into and modifies the appearance of the things that surround us are countless. But though the material and methods of the various arts may differ, their essence and aim must be the same, that of expression. And in the arts of music and literature we find expression. Expression is often called "the soul of music" but expression in itself has no existence. It is only an agent being called into life when there is something to be expressed.

In the "Evolution of the Art of Music" Parry says that the arts of music and literature are the outcome of the instinctive desire to convey impressions and joys to others and to represent in the most attractive and permanent forms the ideas, thoughts, circumstances, scenes, or emotions which have powerfully stirred the artist's own nature. And as people look to nature to aid them in presenting their ideas, it may be said that it is nature, which supplies art with this
most vital and essential requirement, standing in the position of a kindly benefactress. So that art acts as a medium of ideas and is the flower of civilization dealing with the expression of elevated thought.

In the material arts ideas are conveyed through visible and tangible objects but music and literature may be called immaterial arts since they are transmitted more directly from mind to mind. Music developed later than the other arts perhaps on account of its immaterial character, but it began with direct expression. For music formulates the direct expression of man's innermost feelings and sensibilities. In fact music is the expression of what is in man, which the history of the development of music teaches. As music deals with the most evanescent material it is the most ideal of the fine arts and has been called the flower of art in power and expressiveness for its thrill pervades all nature.

Not only is music the language of the emotions but it also expresses thought. For both must go together in music, simply because emotion can not be
expressed without thought and thought without emotion is too cold and positive to fulfil the art object of music.

Since all art deals with the expression of elevated thought and literature is the best expression of the best thought reduced to writing, literature is a variety of fine art co-ordinate with music. In fact literature is really a shining vision which no one can truly describe. But literature seeks primarily to express exact thought. For it can only describe emotions which the intellect apprehends and represents the real with the ideal shining through it. While music expresses thought and emotion which may be vague and indefinable. That is "Music distinguishes itself from literature by its exemption from intervening causes and by the natural expression through which feeling void of ideas is portrayed. Where the idea is not sufficient, where no picture can be given to the eye, music takes up the resigned function of representation and is more successful than any other artistic means." *

So we find that music is the chief art medium for

expressing emotions. In fact it is the art object of music to appeal to the heart as well as to the mind to portray emotions clothed in musical thought and to express musical thought conceived by the emotions. So that music realizes its high office in speaking most directly and most touchingly to the human spirit.

In the history of music we find the folk music played a large part in the scheme of life. For they were the first essays made by man to express his feelings. And a large proportion of the tunes came into existence in connection with poems and ballads which told some story or tragic event of local interest. We also find in the folk music of the different countries the racial differences very strongly shown. This we should expect since the influence of climate has an enormous influence on national character. The German folk music is sweet, wholesome and expresses a quiet sentiment. In the Spanish folk music we have a soft poetic element expressed. The Russian folk music has tenderness and expressiveness but its mood is one of hopeless melancholy.
In our English folk music we also find a good deal of expression such as gaiety, humour, tenderness and playfulness. It rather breathes the genuine love of country of freedom of action and of heartiness. Probably the most human, the most varied, the most poetical and the most imaginative folk music in the world is the Irish folk music which is particularly rich in tunes which imply considerable sympathetic sensitiveness and express natural idealism.

In comparing the folk music of these nations we find the songs are entirely distinct from each other and to a remarkable degree express the characteristics of the people who produced them. At the time these earliest songs were written books were printed in Latin so that the vocabulary of the people was limited and very naturally they used the song as a medium of expression for their feelings of joy and sorrow.

As music in all its branches is the expression of the spirit of humanity so it is that the music of any age is the best expression of the spirit of that age. And since music began with song we may say it originated with the elements of natural
speech. And while words in literature imitate the essence of things music imitates color and sound. In musical expression the motive is usually contained in the first two measures. And as its chief function is to express or represent a phase of feeling this motive may be called the "seed thought" or germ for future musical development. So it is the motive, which renders it possible for musical form to represent movements of thought or of mental feeling. Thus we may learn that harmony was developed from melody for the purpose of giving greater prominence and intelligibility to the words used in connection with the music. And the significance in music is determined by the character of that which is there described as the motive. For the music speaks to us in harmonies and melodies, they are its words and we can translate them in ideas of our own. Here we find lies the power of music for it awakens definite ideas and emotions in the listener. And very often its meaning lies hidden in those deep mysterious springs of every day experience.

In literature we find primarily the feeling of the writer expressed but it is expressed in a form that arouses similar feeling in those who hear and
in those who read it. Just as the folk song was a natural medium for expression in music we find the lyric is the most natural form of art in literature. And in poetry like music we find both melody and harmony. As the lyric was the best expression of the spirit of the people so may every principle form of the literary art be traced directly back to the life of the people. Particularly is this true in Greek literature which is one of the foremost complete and harmonious literary expressions of a race. Their dance also was a serious and intelligent expression of thought and feeling. So it may be said that the literature grew out of popular experience and both the arts, literature and music are an expression of popular life.

Expression in reference to music must be taken in its widest sense. For there must be music for all types of mind and all varieties of nature. And there is an infinite variety of moods which admit of being expressed. Some periods in musical history are characterized by special cultivation of principles of form and others by special efforts in the direction of expression. But the essence of musical
progress from Beethoven onwards lies in the development of infinite varieties of expression. And this tendency to use art for expression naturally led Beethoven to identify his work with some definite idea or subject. Beethoven embodied his feelings about the fields and brooks and woods and birds he loved so well in his pastoral symphony. In this symphony the effects produced by the violins are intended to depict "the rustling of leaves stirred by a gentle breeze on a summer's day and the buzz and soft hum of insects." In literature this same is shown in Tennyson's Princess when he speaks of

"The moan of doves, in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

Another example of Beethoven's musical expression is found in his "Lebewohl" Sonata which embodies his ideal musical sense of friends parting, of absence and of the joyous coming together again. It was Bach who foreshadowed the musical expression of every kind of human feeling, but self-dependent instrumental art on the grandest and broadest lines, found its first perfect revelation in the hands of Beethoven in the highest phase of true and noble characteristic expression.
Landscape painting in music is perhaps best illustrated by Mendelssohn whose richness is unequalled. He transposes the external beauty of things into music as no one else does. He is able, conscientious and clever. Yet in spite of all these gifts he fails to move us to the depths of the soul. For in his music we find the thought element rather than the emotional side expressed. For example, the lovely Andante in his Italian Symphony with its wandering accompaniment is supposed to suggest Pilgrims thronging to Rome, and it can conjure up the notion of the ghosts of the gladiators and the martyred Christians haunting the ruins of the Coliseum.

The overtures "Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage" and the "Hebrides" show much vigor and inspiration in their nature painting. The attractive harmonies enable us to see the waves surging amongst the rocks and to hear the cries of the sea-birds. In the beautiful Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" the fairies come tripping before us in dozens. And in his "Spring Song" there is a general joyousness of theme.
In literature we also find some beautiful landscape painting. This perhaps may best be illustrated by Ruskin who was in love with nature and was a master of prose. Take for example his picture of the Campagna of Rome.

'Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on earth than the solitary extent of the Campagna of Rome under evening light. Let the reader imagine himself for the moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, tread he never so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep. Scattered blocks of black stone, four-square remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert,
veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose
rents the red light rests, like dying fire on de-
filed altars; the blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts
itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet
sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly
along the promontories of the Apennines. From the
plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts,
pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shad-
owy and countless troops of funeral mourners, pass-
ing from a nation’s grave.”

In this fine description we have a magnificent piece
of word painting. And in Ruskin’s prose we find
the eye of the landscape painter and the voice of
the lyric poet are both blended in perfection.

In connection with the subject of landscape
painting in music and literature we must consider
Wagner. For though he is not pre-eminently a master
of musical landscape he has ranged freely over the
whole field of human consciousness. He has looked
outward upon the created earth as well as into the
heart of man. He has pictured woods, meadows and
streams and has written of griefs, joys and aspira-
tions. And we find many aspects depicted in his
*Preface to the second edition of Modern Painters 1843.
music that are not merely vivid and graphic in their pictorial quality but they are deeply poetical and often of superlative beauty. In fact Schumann's poetic titles find their developed and perfected counterparts in the "leading motives" of Wagner's music dramas, in which the intimate and essential relation between music, poetry and action made it possible for concise and characteristic phrases to be associated with and to actually represent not only mental and physical characteristics of persons but also material objects and even abstract and metaphysical ideas and qualities.

Take for example "The Ring of the Nibelung."

In the first twelve bars of "Das Rheingold" Wagner has clearly expressed the situation in the music. The depths of the Rhine, the swaying waters and the darkness are all there. So that the music is the exact equivalent of the central idea of the situation. In "Siegfried" which is a fairy tale in music the dragon nonsense is humorous. And Wagner's exquisite descriptive music such as the forest scene in Siegfried and the shooting dancing flames of fire which he vividly depicts in the Incantation
Scene in "Die Walkure" can only be described as marvellous in its pictorial quality. And no less wonderful than the veracity of these pictures is the unerring color-sense that gives that "inevitable" quality to his music. There is scarcely an emotion of which human nature is capable that does not find expression in this "encyclopaedic" score and what expression. For each emotion, each situation he seems to have found the one expression that was inevitable for it, from the grandeur of the Valhalla music to the horror of Alberich's and Hagen's, from the lyric rapture of Siegmund and Sieglinda to the poignant simplicity of the dialogue between Siegmund and Brynhild. And to attempt to show by mere description the almost incredible heights and depths of expression to which Wagner attains in music would be but a vain task. There is nothing like it in art, nothing to equal the marvellous results Wagner obtained.

In fact the art of musical expression is really just beginning to find itself. And we are witnessing the outcome of that relationship between mystical imagination and infinitely adaptive and compliant nature which in Literature, resulted in
such various poetry as Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and Whitman. Other musicians whose musical expression we may mention are Debussy in whose music we find radiance rather than light and McDowell who has given us the quality of Celtic magic and Keat's delight in the sheer actuality and presence of the natural world. In fact he has transcribed nature in a way which Mathew Arnold has called magical. While Wagner by his genius and perfect sincerity has shown the very sickness of the soul for his 'Tristan and Isolde' is almost sick music. But Wagner himself has said that "the art of sound music is the conscious language of feeling of that full overflowing love which ennobles the sensual and realizes the spiritual."

And very often in music the consciousness of the moving or emotional influence is so strong that as contrasted with it, the mind is hardly aware of its own ideas. Yet in music every emotion finds its perfect expression and it is the soul's subtlest and most expressive language. And there is a true relationship between thought and feeling in the sphere of music.

Another example picturing the lyrical and
humorous expression in music is Strauss' tone poem, Symphonia Domestica which depicts a day in family life and includes the themes of husband, wife and child. Both Richard Strauss and Wagner have each wonderfully enriched the purely musical means of expression and have immeasurably extended the range of ideas deemed appropriate for such expression pushing outward in every direction the boundaries of music as an expressional art.

But literature can not become as universal as music in the sense of abandoning local types and color. "The measure of its artistic power will be the vigor and vitality with which on the one hand it realizes individuals and on the other, makes them significant of universal truth." * But literature enables us the better to think and to feel. It is a great educator and revealer of life. Good literature awakens within us the diviner mind and rouses us to a consciousness of what is best in others and in ourselves. Literature unites men and elevates them also, the elevating impulse being imaginative sentiment. And to-day we believe in

* "Short Studies in Literature" by H. W. Mabie.
the utility of the ideal and beautiful. We are all seeking truth and literature is a vehicle of truth. Literature artistically speaking gives grace and expression to the familiar homely things of daily life. The writer by finding expression in his work is fulfilling his own impulse of idealization. He produces rich imagery and genuine emotion which constitute human delight. These glimpses of this vital relation of literature to life and of its scope and meaning as an expression of the spirit of man in the terms of art we find here and there, in the great minds of the past. And as Life is exhaustless and forever renews itself so literature will renew its freshness, power, and beauty and Art and nature will move together to the very end." *

Cardinal Newman says that "the object of literature in education is to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to comprehend and digest its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, address and expression." And as literature teaches us to know the truth, it gives

* Short Studies in Literature by H. W. Mabie.
systematic training of the imagination and stability and substance to character. The truth thus taught is a guide in daily living. In this sense "Truth is beauty, beauty is truth."

Just as good literature is an educator and guide in daily life, so is music. For its function is to restore, deepen, enlarge, intensify and express. It gives us confidence in and respect for human nature. And as D'Israeli says "Music teaches most exquisitely the art of development."

Not only is music the most plastic and intense of the fine arts but it is most earnest for as Goethe says "Music raises and ennobles whatever it expresses." The cultivation of the artistic sense is not only strengthening to the mind, but it is also stimulating to the spirit. It enlarges the sphere of human emotion, bringing to consciousness new and undreamed of moods, emotions and enjoyments and so becomes refining and enriching.

And while music is the most subtle form of expression it is always an expression of those great fundamental emotions that are common to the soul of man in all times and places making it most human. Both the music of the concert room and the
theatre and the music of the home belong to our everyday life and reflect its characteristics.

Berlioz has said that "Poetry and music are the two wings of the soul." And in all times they have been regarded as a means of rising beyond the limitations of material conditions into the free world of spirit. Some one has said that music washed away from the soul the dust of every day life. But whether we express self for enjoyment or otherwise from an impulse to communicate, or to know the truth of life nine out of every ten are happier, healthier and more normal if we express ourselves in some way. For the mission of art be it song or story is to sweeten, mellow and strengthen us. "Expression is life, repression is death" says the sage.
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