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A Personal Theory of Poetics

by Mary E. Hoss

1903

Submitted to the Department of English of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Master Thesis

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Personal theory of poetics.

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The nature of poetry - relationship.

Universal relation - presupposes universal consciousness.

Relationship from the human standpoint.

The nature of poetry is serious.

The nature of poetry is hopeful.

The nature of poetry is moral.

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The Drama.

A Personal Theory of Poetics.

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The nature of poetry lies in the relationship existing between the particular and the universal, and the feeling arising from the perception of it is more or less poetical according to the clearness of the perception. This idea of relationship has been felt and expressed in various ways. It is seen in the upward tendencies of everything, in the suggestion of something higher which the poet-mind sees. Aristotle calls that higher something Form. Plato, with nearly the same thought, calls it Idea; but, whatever it is termed, it represents a receding goal towards which creation is struggling.

This universal aspiration is not an independent one, each for itself, but the prime relation of the individual to the universal is sustained through an interrelation of all the parts, an interdependence of all nature. Every part is essential, every part is a manifestation of the All-power. Nature thus becomes kin. The tiniest blade of grass which peeped out today, the century oak and the soul of man breathe the same thought of a kindred occult life, a something which permeates everything. The individual is not man alone. If the human organism represents embodied spirit, the little blossom and the great tree may represent

embodied spirit too. Primitive man seized on this thought intuitively. The poets have always felt this sympathetic relationship which the unthinking have regarded in the light of poetical license. It was not an idiotic habit of Lowell's, then, that of celebrating his return home after some absence by going around and shaking hands with the lower branches of his beloved trees. It was but an expression of his recognition of the universal under-current passing through all nature. If it cannot be shown that the trees knew and cared, neither can it be shown that they did not. It is well known that under some hands plants will thrive and blossom as if in response to sympathy. It is not due to a mere intelligent ministering to their wants, but the keener insight is due to sympathy as much as to mere knowledge. This holds good whether in the cultivation of a lily or in the interpretation of the great life-drama in the Divine Comedy.

This opens up the great question of universal consciousness. To the practical mind, the thought is mere fancy, a poetical conceit, but not one to stand the test of reason. Gradually, it is dawning on the human mind that what the inspired poet has suggested, philosophy and science are slowly but surely falling back on as a basis for speculation and investigation. It has become to me the only plausible theory of the universe and the oneness of creative law. The poetic spirit thus enters the vast unknown regions and returns with thoughts that somehow find an echo in

struggling human nature below. Science affecting to scorn such airy visions, toilingly climbs upward only to find now and then the same illuminating thoughts flashing over the circumscribed realm of investigation. In the progressive scientist's mind, there is a fringe of speculation which makes him a poet but which he very warily discloses to his world. Who has not felt the attitude of science towards the question of universal consciousness to be of this character! Philosophy attributes consciousness not only to organic but to inorganic nature. Paulsen makes somewhat intelligible the law of gravity which the scientific world has so long and indefinitely discoursed upon. According to this theory, there is no such thing as dead matter. The constant change taking place precludes the idea of deadness. Aggregation and segregation take place according to an inner choice, a consciousness, a soul life typifying in the smallest particle the great intelligent soul-life centered in man and in God himself.

What is it the poet sees but this universal consciousnes. the lowest of creation revealing the nature of the highest and of the Creator? How else can the lower forms be suggestive of the higher? A poet like Wordsworth reads in the humblest life the Divine life. All nature is instinct with the Divine nature wherever there is a seeing eye and an appreciative heart. Browning says,

"I but open my eyes - and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined, full fronts me, and God is seen God

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod."

Wordsworth who entered into this mystical union as perhaps no other poet has, says,

"And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky and, in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

Beneath the poetical ecstasy is felt the constant repose of verity.

Before we can enter into the nature of poetry we must rid ourselves of the common notion that the poets are not in earnest. They believe what they say. The true artist does nothing for mere effect, but he must always feel the inadequacy of any means of expression. Poetry is not a mere diversion but the expression of living truth. Depth of vision and sincerity of feeling make the man a poet. His most figurative language then

should not be an exaggeration but must at all times be merely suggestive of the loftier things which his soul perceives. Expression never reaches the hight of impression in real art. When the poet makes us see higher and deeper than with our unaided eyes we can behold it is not by any jugglery or optical illusion, but is only a suggestion of the poet's larger vision. A poet himself, Lowell says,

"For I believe the poets; it is they
Who utter wisdom from the central deep,
And listening to the inner flow of things
Speak to the age out of eternity."

With the idea of universal kinship nothing can be dead and uninteresting. Everything vibrates with the one life. All poetry breathes this spirit and our nature-poets, as Wordsworth and Lowell, suggest it constantly. After the thought once gets possession of us we shall see it reflected in all great poetry.

Under this conception of universal relation comes the all-important one from the human standpoint. It is the human element which characterizes the highest poetry, and is that around which the interest in the universal revolves. The subtleties of the human mind in its action and reaction, according to the dominance of the human will over lower wills called environment, is a theme of never wearying interest. If the in-

dividual is governed by circumstances, we have a representation of the unfailing law of causation and the pathos of fate; if the will controls or madly forces circumstances, we have the god-like qualities of mind-power or the tragedy of a self-imposed fate. The dominance of one or the other constitutes the theme of all great poetry.

A higher perception of universal relation has led from the ancient idea of multiplicity to the modern one of unity. Organization, in an artistic sense, has proceeded from the feudal system to universal empire.

"All are parts of one stupendous whole",

said one who lacked the sympathetic insight which called forth from a greater poet, "All things whate'er they be have an order among themselves, and this is form, which makes the universe resemble God.

The poetical, then, is unified and definite as the everlasting truth which it portrays. The vague and disconnected may be charningly fanciful, but never poetical. In moments of highest inspiration the poet may seem to utter the dreamy and impossible, but as he is a poet his thought is as unified as is the scientist's. It is not always so apparently logical, as in his supreme visions he touches but the mountain peaks of thought, but he is consistent, and from his hights he beholds a far-reaching unity which the scientist can reach only by going beyond

the fact he is investigating. The unity of poetical thought is seen in its development. There is no other manifestation of reality so consistent as poetry has been. Compare the different periods of science, and we find endless contradiction; the same is true of philosophy. But in the leading works of poetry, from Homer down, the central themes are similar. The different ages represent different phases of the same ideal - opposite characteristics, but not contradictory. Different poets have turned the same thought in different lights. It is the persistency of all or the evanescence of all, and both are true and poetical. There is poetry in the dignity of individuality, and higher poetry in the underlying principle of universality. There is outward struggle and inward struggle. Both are attempts to adjust the individual to a higher order,and the law of relationship is emphasized in each case.

The common distinction between poetry and science is based on the notion that while science is exact and law-abiding, poetry is erratic and lawless. Science,with its clear-cut definiteness, thus appeals to the intellect, while poetry, in its sentimental and fanciful garb, appeals to the emotions. But this is only partially true. Science deals with details, and from their close analysis draws general conclusions and establishes law. Poetry without laborious analysis, in the common-places of life reads a deeper meaning, in evanescence sees more than change. Poetry interprets the world in the light of something

higher, science, in its own light. The poet reaches after the unattainable, is constantly trying to measure up to a receding ideal, while the scientist grasps the measure of his thought.

It is aspiration resulting from broader vision which appeals to the emotions. Accomplishment, which does not suggest a greater potential accomplishment, is not inspiring. It is perfect and stops with itself. When the scientist from his advance position sweeps a prophetic eye into the future, feels whither are tending the laws he is discovering, and has a vision of the eternal realm not blocked out by investigation, he is a poet. The little blossom, studied by itself, may serve a narrow scientific purpose, but to be poetical it must be more than a blossom. It becomes symbolic of a life higher than that seen in its own germination and development.

The realms separating poetry from philosophy on the one hand, and science on the other, are largely mythical. These are the three methods of approaching reality. But reality is one, and the soul of man is one. The poet may be both philosopher and scientist, though the philosopher's abstractions must throb with life, and the scientist's theory must become a living truth to pierce to the heart of being. The philosopher and scientist, on the other hand, are poetical when the halo of their individual thought merges into the effulgence of the universal. Notwith-

standing his avowed disbelief in the value of poetry, Plato was at times a poet. The same may be said of Bacon. While Aristotle formulated poetic principles which ruled the literary world for centuries, he rarely lost sight of the merely philosophical in the poetical. Darwin was comprehensive enough for a poet, but his whole scheme was placed on too low a basis. It was as if he had revealed the magnificent body of poetry without the breath of life. His theory of evolution lies at the basis of modern poetry, as it does of science and philosophy. It represents action, change, but in poetry, with an object in view. Darwin laid down the great law of development, but not with the inward principle of change which we call aspiration. Spencer, the representative scientific philosopher, strikes a more poetical key.

It goes without saying that the nature of poetry is serious. In the beginnings of art there is indeed a disposition to make of it a means of mere diversion. Art for art's sake is the cry, until the sportive race-child becomes more mature, and turns art itself to the highest and most serious uses of life. It is not difficult to see the deepening and broadening character of poetry in its history. From the luxuries of life to the necessaries has been its course - from romance, sentiment suited to wealth, leisure, and moonlight musings, to the everyday problems of life

in the trying glare of full noon-day. But at no time has the theme of true poetry been light and trivial. If we get down deep enough we shall find that the basis of any work of art is a serious one. It may not be of the character of Paradise Lost or Faust, but impressiveness requires earnestness. This is true of comedy as well, where it is not so apparent. If the artist has no deeper insight than what comedy represents on the surface, he fails. Beneath the incongruous he must perceive the eternally congruous. By holding up in a ludicrous light the follies and foibles of time or class, he emphasizes the enduring qualities of which these are perversions.

But while poetry is serious with the grand seriousness of worth, it is at all times hopeful. The only legitimate excuse for comedy is that it possesses the element of hope. The inconsistencies, incongruities, are not essential. They may be laughed out of existence. No poetry can wholly shut out hope and be high poetry. Where then would come in the aspiration? Not even tragedy is wholly pessimistic; no work of art should be. Some of Wagner's operas are, especially Die Götter dämmerung in which Wodin, in weariness of soul, ends the world, and then in greater despair, kills himself. This was Wagner influenced by Schopenhaur's philosophy, which advocates the negation of the will. There would be in such an annihilation of the ideal no effect such as Aristotle means by Katharsis. As I understand

this term, it means the purification of the emotions by bringing to naught hopes of a lower nature, by exalting the ideal in personal sacrifice. Tragedy involves struggle, but not of a hopeless, unprofitable kind. No Katharsis of the emotions would result from beholding persons kill each other for no possible motive but to see the blood flow. A bull-fight has in it nothing exalting - especially if the bulls are killed. There is a kind of poetry which takes on the nature of the bull-fight. It represents a desperate, profitless struggle. Here is a poem of this kind on the folly of the dearest and most universal desire of the human heart, that for immortality. Instead of a suggestion of something higher, this life-struggle is vain, ending only in deepest disappointment and blank deapair.

"The hollow sea-shell which for years hath stood
On dusty shelves, when held against the ear
Proclaims its stormy parent; and we hear
The faint, far murmur of the breaking flood.
We hear the sea. The sea? It is the blood
In our own veins, impetuous and near,
And pulses keeping pace with hope and fear,
And with our feelings ever shifting mood.

Lo! in my heart, I hear as in a shell,
The murmur of a world beyond the grave,
Distinct, distinct, though faint and far it be.
Thou fool! this echo is a cheat as well -
The hum of earthly instincts; and we crave
A world as unreal as the shell-heard sea."

This poem is a most artistic expression of doubt and negation, but to me it lacks the highest element of poetry. In great tragedy the mind by suffering is elevated to a higher range. As the hero grows through suffering, the audience gains in breadth of mental grasp and in intensity of feeling. This intellectual and moral gain constitutes the Katharsis. The individual dies, but it is for an ideal which continues and grows. Here is the element of hope. The death of the individual is not the end, as in the poem above. It is not Wodin ending all in suicide, but Wodin sacrificing himself for a principle, which will reveal a higher deity, a new and deeper view of life and its import.

To say that poetry is moral in nature is now to offer a truism. Its morality and unity are alike inherent. Every work of art is a world in itself, unified, complete, but moving in unison with countless others according to one central principle - a microcosm indeed, but in perfect harmony with the surrounding microcosm. Order is the root of both unity and

morality. Immorality precludes the idea of unity in variety, but gives rise to endless conflict or final self-destruction. The individual in harmony with humanity, and humanity with nature is the order. The individual is not a law unto himself. The poet lives and prospers only by being in harmony with the whole - by being moral.

Without a moral basis there could be no art. An epitome of all art in its struggles to raise the individual above its own circumscribed condition into the higher realms of broader liberty is found in the Divine Comedy. The divine order is suggested, the confusion arising from conflicting individual wills is given, the elimination of one after another of contradictory qualities, and lastly the universal harmony of the complete adjustment of the individual to the universal is supremely felt. In the whole realm of literature, I believe there is not another such complete development of the central theme of all poetry as is found in the Divine Comedy.

The artistic scheme of Paradise Lost is a contradiction. It unduly exalts and idealizes the principle of evil, and gives it a development, a unity, not in harmony with its nature. Sin is a negation, and, as Dante represents it, self-destructive. Evil must enter any representation of life, but not as something magnificent and triumphant. Yet in this poem the good is only

the white back-ground to bring out more boldly the strength of black evil.

The spirit of poetry is necessarily worshipful. The struggle to get in harmony with universal order, the constant aspiration for something beyond that attained, are the very essence of worship. The poet may not deign to conform to conventional forms of worship, he may appear a scoffer, but if he is a poet, he is something besides an iconoclast; some ideal of perfection he must have. By his fierce aversion to his fellow-men Byron showed himself to be consciously out of common harmony. His error was in holding that by breaking away from familiar scenes and conventional life he could change his own rebellious nature. Shelley's atheism was due to the narrow creeds of his day and in reference to them, but at the shrine of his own deity he was a devout worshipper. In the light of modern religious belief he is not a scoffer. His is the religion of nature, the pagan worship with the altruism of the nineteenth century. Prometheus is a savior who would save the race from the sorrows of this world, from being crushed under the wheels of Juggernaut. The Christ would draw all men unto a higher ideal, even by means of the afflictions of life. One has in mind the heavy hand of tyranny, the dwarfing effect of ignorance and superstition; the other feels the deadening power of sin and the joy of the spir-

itual life. But Prometheus has the altruistic spirit. Self-sacrificing he moans,

"I would fain
Be what it is my destiny to be,
The savior and the strength of suffering man
Or sink into the original gulf of things."

Poetry is in nature both moral and spiritual, that is, it is good; it is an expression of enduring relationship, it is true. But what are the good and the true but the beautiful? Supreme beauty lies in supreme proportion and symmetry. No one yet has said of untruth that it is beautiful in proportion to its falsity. Evil has never yet appealed to any sane person's aesthetic sense. Morality is harmony, symmetry, beauty; immorality is discord, disproportion, the ugly. Evil is indeed a strong factor in literary aesthetics, as the ugly is in any art, not for its own sake, but to serve as a background, a foil, to bring out more strikingly the symmetry and beauty of the good.

The element of beauty has a wide range, according to the extent of vision, from the merely pretty, almost fanciful, to the sublime. The beauty of the flitting butterfly is lightly felt, but when the transformation of this creature of a day typifies the aspirations of the human soul in its supreme longings,

the mind sees in it the sublime. The pretty waywardness of the innocent child in its selfish inclinations may be beautiful, but the magnanimous subordination of self for the higher good of the many becomes sublime. The beauty of self-sacrifice is sublime, because the law of spiritual relationship is made evident in its far-reaching import.

To the scientist and the philosopher the abstract truth of their systems constitutes beauty. And it is so. Keats was right when he said truth is beauty, beauty is truth. Whether clothed or naked, truth is proportion, beauty. But only the anatomist can appreciate the beauty of the symmetrical skeleton, the philosopher, the abstract thought. To the poet the symmetrical thought comes clothed in correspondingly beautiful form. It has more than the philosopher's truth. Not by a system of speculation, but by intuition, does the poet see all about him, not unrelated facts from which to deduce laws and principles, but symbols of something higher. All things, all thoughts are handmaidens for the expression of greater truths. In the facility with which the visible and lower lends itself to express the invisible and higher, is seen the unfailing law of universal relationship. The poet's art lies in using the common facts of experience to suggest the less obvious, but more vital truths of life. Everything in the material and the spiritual universe

lies at his feet. There is no lack of material.

The prime qualification of the poet is the ability to see similarity. Aristotle well emphasizes the importance of metaphor in poetic expression. Take any suggestive poem, and strike out all use of simile, and what is left? In the exuberance of poetic imagination Burns likens fleeting pleasure to the bloom of the poppy, the snowfall in the river, the borealis race, and the rain-bow's form. A philosopher might discourse at length on the evanescence of pleasure without making the vivid impression of those few lines of Burns. By the use of likeness the poet mirrors his thought in various ways, and the multiplied reflections can but add vividness. The poet thus interprets nature as ~~as~~ an experience, not as mere knowledge. He does not direct attention to illustrations with a pointer, as speakers often use maps and charts, but his illustrations spring up as blossoming plants in a favorable soil.

In the expression of poetry rhythm is an essential. Just why this is would be hard to say, but the fact remains that impassioned expression is rhythmical. Carlyle quotes Coleridge as saying that whenever you find a sentence musically worded, of true rhythm and melody in the words, there is something deep and good in the meaning too; and Carlyle adds, "Body and soul, word and idea, go strangely together here as elsewhere. It is

only when the heart of him is rapt into true passion of melody, and the very tones of him, according to Coleridge's remark, becomes musical by the greatness, depth and music of his thoughts, that we can give him right to rhyme and sing.

My own theory is that the whole universe is constructed on rhythmical principles. The vibrations of light, heat and sound are examples of the measured impulse. Earth, sea and sky are filled with a music too ethereal for mortal ears. The poet-heart, which beats in closer unison with the heart of the universe, catches the rhythmical motions, and sings in measures. This may sound extravagant, undoubtedly does, but true it is that the more intense the poetic impulse, the more musical the expression. The uninspired passages are the rough ones. When Browning rises to his greatest hights he becomes both clear and musical. His impassioned lyrics are models of music and sweetness. It is in his protracted efforts that the interest flags, and harshness creeps in. Whitman, while he had poetical conceptions, lacked poetical fervor. Consider any poet, and the law holds good - where the poetical spirit is most intense the verse is most rhythmical, and the fact remains that whoever feels deeply enough feels rhythmically. This intensity may be dependent on the intellect, as well as on the emotions. When Dante reached the summit of vision, and became so incorporated into the Divine

nature that he was no longer a spectator, but beheld and entered into the universal love as a part of it, his rich and rhythmical verse is expressive of the soul's highest eloquence.

The element of rhythm draws a sharp line of demarkation between prose and poetry. In itself it may not mean so much, but it is an external form significant of an internal distinction. The nature of the content determines whether it is prose or poetry, while the form of expression is in harmony with that nature. There are poetic passages in prose, but a sustained, unified poetic conception naturally and necessarily falls into rhythm. The poetic thought, as the informing spiritual principle, calls for the most perfect expression possible.

Rhyme is a modification of rhythm. Instead of the regular recurrence of accent, it is the recurrence of sound. Alliteration is another modification. Whatever the form of recurrence, it is as natural to spontaneous poetic expression as air is to music. A philosophic mind may be able to discern in this the economy of nature, mind conveying to mind its deepest emotion with the least resistance, for as true as that deep feeling falls into rhythm, so true is it that rhythmic expression strikes deeper and more direct than does the unrhythmic.

There is rhythm and rhythm, from the regular monotonous recurrence in Mother Goose, which in its utter simplicity

pleases the childish ear without taxing the intellect, to the rhythmic variety of the rich measures of Tennyson. In physical nature there are simple undulations and compound undulations, corresponding in music and poetry to the central theme in its few simple notes and the theme with all its wonderful variations. Rhythm, definite enough to be constantly felt, the mind wants, but, prolonged without the secondary rhythms, becomes monotonous according to the capacity for appreciating unity in variety.

In the art of poetry we take cognizance of little beyond the primary rhythms; The secondary are manifold and easily escape detection. I doubt if the poet himself is always conscious of his exquisite variations. Instinctively the poetic thought crystallizes into the almost microscopic forms of poetic expression. Alliteration has been much decried, and justly so in its more obvious use. With the mark of effort it becomes as artificial as forced rhymes or padded measures. But in the close study of any artistic poetry, as Tennyson's, where the verse seems perfectly wedded to the thought, subtle variations in rhythm come to light, forms of alliteration which will elude any hasty analysis. They are undertones, hardly recognized by the ear most finely attuned, and then are more hardly pointed out. The use of the recurrence of sound, not in the same line,

not always in succeeding lines, but brought in in such a manner as to carry out exquisite rhythms and at the same time subtly add to the various shades of thought, of simile and metaphor, of the like and the unlike, is something marvelous in Tennyson. And there is nothing artificial in such alliteration. It seems to be due to poetic instinct rather than poetic effort.

The lyric is the first and most spontaneous form of poetical expression. It is as natural to the aspiring human soul as coos and cries are to the babe. The development of the lyric is full of pathos. Even its most joyous outbursts have an undertone of sadness suggestive of the limitations of human knowledge and the great unknown pressing around life. Lyrical poetry possesses more pathos than do later developments, which pass through the analysis of the intellect. The minor is peculiar to the lyric. The bacchanalian songs may endure for a night, but the minor strains return with the morning. The race-child catches the key of surrounding nature. The restless plashing of the waves, the soughing of the wind in grass and trees, only the reasoning mind can feel a deep and abiding gladness in changing nature. Primitive man feels the sadness, the appalling uncertainty of all. To show that the race caught its lyric tones from nature we need but consider the variety in lyric development, corresponding to differences in surrounding nature. The sterner and more serious forms

of nature make a deeper and more lasting impression than do the lighter and more cheerful. The mountain inhabitant has a feeling for his native land not felt by the dweller on earth's levels. The poetical expressions of northern peoples are decided and have a character of their own surpassing those of the mild south. The deep, dark forests of solemn pines, the gloomy tundras, the long dark winters, and the various severe features of life in the north, give rise to the saddest minor. Even in songs of worship the minor dominates, in which the soul can best express its deepest yearnings.

The lyric is fragmentary. It has unity, to be sure, but a unity which can be included in a larger unity still within ordinary mental grasp. As the race advanced, its lyrics gradually centered about some object of highest interest, and took on shape and purpose.

The epic, then, is the result of this aggregation of lyrics. Nor does this theory argue any lack of close epic unity. Beneath the lyric impulse sprang up the feeling of purpose. The scattered songs centered around the chief action of the chief hero and the mind was creative which seized on this fragmentary material as nuclei, and gave to the world unity of form and purpose.

A national epic cannot be the work of one mind, but must be the outgrowth of many. The author of such a poem is a

creative compiler. An epic hero is an exponent of national union, and his character has developed in accordance with the national ideal. The circumstances making possible the development of such a hero are peculiar. There must have been a marked onward movement in national development to afford opportunity for patriotic action on his part. He has endeared himself to the people by realizing their ideal. But the period must be half-shrouded in the semi-mythical in order that the ideal may be carried out. The virtues are thus magnified while the accompanying weak qualities are lost sight of. The creative mind can thus carry out the higher tendencies of which the fullest development is thwarted by the circumstances of real life. Nor does this argue that the epic hero must be absolutely faultless, but that the faults he possesses must be of the character humanity loves to condone. As this paper is designed for private reading, the case of Admiral Dewey can be used in illustration. His brilliant Manilla expedition would work admirably into an epic. The remoteness of the location, the bold daring of the undertaking, and the overwhelming success of it, could not be surpassed as epic material. If, with this his valor and masterly ability, had been shown passion, arrogance, and, in barbarous times, even cruelty, such manifestation would not have detracted from his glory, but the weakness he displayed after his return to this country, so deeply deplored and openly ridiculed by the American public, would never be tolerated in an epic hero.

Is then a national epic possible in this age and civilization? Can we yet have an American epic? The probability is that we shall not, at least for some time to come. It is not that our nation has not ideals nor that they have been lowered, but that the public eye is keener and the mind more alert. In the fierce glare of historical research hidden and selfish motives for seemingly magnanimous action are brought to light, and strange inconsistencies are found in the strongest characters. The marvelous is so analyzed and explained in all its details that the element of wonder is greatly modified. As history is changing from biography to sociology, so literary interest is centering around the class instead of the individual. The people are too individualized, have too many ideals to fix on any individual as representing the nation. A monarchical form of government, being more unified, is more favorable to epic development. The many must be a mass controlled by the will of one, the hero.

There was a time when Washington might have represented an epic hero. Had there been a hiatus in history after the revolutionary period, the unification of the colonies and the successful struggle for independence could be the subject of an epic with Washington, the military leader, as hero. But unbiassed research has brought out that the mother country had a few just claims, and that the colonists were not always wholly blameless. Inves-

tigation,too, has revealed that Washington, worthy as he was, is not altogether the ideal hero, in that he does not stand for the principles this government in its constitution represents. In principle Jefferson comes nearer being the typical hero. Perhaps in the whole history of this country no one measures up to the stature of an epic hero more nearly than does Abraham Lincoln. Had it been given him to play the part of Grant in the field, as well as his own, and had the emancipated race been removed to some remote country, there to develop according to its own nature, while the north and the south had been re-united in the closest national ties, the conditions would be given for an epic and an epic hero. The leader's tragic end would add the desired final touch. It would be Beowulf killing the fiery dragon at the sacrifice of his own life.

Out of the epic grew the drama. The element of struggle, so essential to the epic, is here accentuated, making the drama in more perfect harmony with the active nature of advanced civilization. Aristotle well calls the drama an imitation. It is the expression of expression. The hearer becomes almost a participant in the action; at least he is brought face to face with the action. The struggle is not of the past to be related, but takes place now. The present tense is a wonderful factor in adding vividness and impressiveness. I have heard intelligent persons

say that the most stirring battles of times long past are not so impressive as those of recent times, where the slain might yet be living. Events taking place in our presence, or whose influence reaches up to the present, mean more than those belonging wholly to the past.

The drama is the highest developed and most condensed form of poetic representation of action. The extraneous or merely incidental are discarded, and the most opportune moment of action so seized upon that the highest essentials are expressed, and minor essentials suggested. In this respect the Greek drama shows a more perfect art than does the modern drama. Its central plot is simpler without the several secondary plots. The closer unity does not depend on unity of time and place, but on action. As many as three of Sophocles' dramas could be made into one modern one without being markedly complex according to our standard. That the center of action would necessarily be shifted in such a combination is inevitable. The pure simplicity of the Greek drama stands for more perfect art; the complexity of the modern may excel in interest. In the Greek drama the characters reveal themselves in action, while in the modern they are lost sight of in a maze of reflection. Compare one of the best of Browning's dramas, Paracelsus, or The Soul's Tragedy, with a classic drama. We are forced to the conclusion that we cannot depart far from the elemental without losing

in universality, which is the chief artistic value. Butcher says, "Not disordered emotion, or perplexity of motive, makes a character poetical, but power of will or power of love." But power of will or power of love will express itself in action, while disorder and perplexity become reflective and indecisive. Analysis and psychology enter largely into the modern drama. Ibsen comes near being a mental anatomist and a soul dissector.

But modern life is felt to be complex, and the literature which interprets it has become likewise. The question is whether that complexity is vital and essential, or something superinduced. My opinion is that while the literary public accepts the psychologic puzzles in literature as possessing high human interest, it would more readily respond to the simple and natural, if only there were a mind poetical and courageous enough to produce it. I believe further that there is already perceptible a turn in favor of simplicity. The unmeasured depths of Hamlet's character will always be a matter of interest and speculation, but the mazy perplexities of the weakly poetical character, so engrossing for two decades or more, are losing their hold on literary attention. Speculation is giving place to action, the complicated fad to enduring simplicity. It is the law of life. The mind wearies of simplicity, however perfect, and finds recreation

in the fad, however confused. It really serves as the factor of the ugly in art. From rich, harmonious, furnishings in soft, restful shades the accommodating furnisher rushes in with bright, glaring colors and fantastic arrangement, and the public eye is pleased. The reign of the fad is short, and the reaction sudden, but it has served its purpose. How doubly reposeful does the simple and unobtrusive become. The literary world has wearied of mere literary conundrums, and the first step in the reaction may be seen in the change from the pronouncedly psychologic novel to the simpler historic one. The drama is following in the same lines. Instead of characters standing out to reflect in our presence, they will walk forth to act, and their action will be the key to their reflection.

At present the comic spirit predominates. Society is too artificial, life too luxurious, pleasure too satisfying, for the tragic to be agreeable. Perhaps there never was a time before when the desire to be amused was so widespread and prevailing. The large place "the funny man" fills in all periodicals indicates the demand for entertainment. Artificiality has always fostered the comic spirit. At present the finest material for comedy is afforded by the striking inconsistencies of social life in the light of republican principles. But the spirit of comedy is unconsciously philosophic. It is easier to laugh folly out of existence than to

argue it out.

That the drama will continue to be the highest form of poetic expression I have no doubt. That it will be more serious than at present I believe, whether in comedy or tragedy. But But what we are tending to in the nature of poetry is the philosophically religious. The poetry of Markham and Moody is suggestive of the tendency. The spirit of altruism inevitably leads upward.

May E. Haas.

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