

Now I don't propose to argue that if the Canadian poet writes words to music, the people of Canada will erect triumphal arches when they pay visits to their home towns, but I do maintain that the limited circulation for Canadian poetry, due to the small reading population in Canada, can be extended considerably in the case of lyric poets by association with an art which has a much larger following than poetry, namely music. And, moreover, I maintain that this association, if developed with understanding and with sympathy for music, would be for the benefit in quality of the Canadian lyric.

The method of lyric writing practised by Burns is described by the poet himself in a letter to one of his publishers, George Thomson:

"September, 1793.—Until I am complete master of a tune in my own singing (such as it is), I can never compose for it. My way is: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then choose my theme; begin one stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me, that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy, and workings of my bosom; humming every now and then the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, swinging at intervals on the hindlegs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes on. Seriously, this at home is almost invariably my way."

The effect that music had upon the content of his lyrics is indicated by Moore in a letter to Sir John Stevenson, the musician who harmonised his "Irish Melodies."

"The task which you propose to me, of adopting words to these airs, is by no means easy. The Poet, who would follow the various sentiments which they express, must feel and understand that rapid fluctuation of spirits, that unaccountable mixture of gloom and levity, which composes the character of my countrymen, and has deeply tinged their music. If Burns had been an Irishman (and I would willingly give up all our claims upon Ossian for him) his heart would have been proud of such music, and his genius would have made it immortal."

The effect of music on the form of Moore's lyrics is referred to by one of his biographers (Gwynn):