

**THE ATTITUDE OF GOETHE
AND SCHILLER TOWARD
FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA**

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The attitude of Goethe and Schiller toward French classic drama by Paul Emerson Titsworth

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PAUL EMERSON TITSWORTH

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PREFACE

It is here a pleasure and a privilege to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor A. R. Hohlfeld, of the University of Wisconsin, for his never failing interest and helpful guidance in the preparation of this thesis. Professors E. C. L. C. Roedder and H. B. Lathrop, likewise of Wisconsin, have been kind enough to read it in manuscript and to make a number of helpful suggestions. I am also under obligation to the library authorities of Wisconsin and Cornell whom I have always found ready to lend all assistance in their power. Finally, I wish to thank the editors of the Journal for their kindness, and my sister, Helen, for her aid in the preparation of the manuscript for the printers.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. This ensures transparency and allows for easy verification of the data.

In the second section, the author outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze the data. This includes both primary and secondary data collection techniques. The primary data was gathered through direct observation and interviews, while secondary data was obtained from existing reports and databases.

The third section provides a detailed description of the data analysis process. This involves identifying patterns, trends, and correlations within the data set. Statistical tools and software were used to facilitate this process, ensuring that the results are both accurate and reliable.

Finally, the document concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications. It highlights the key insights gained from the study and offers recommendations for future research and practice. The author notes that while the current study provides valuable information, there are still several areas that require further investigation.

THE ATTITUDE OF GOETHE AND SCHILLER TOWARD THE FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA

INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century in Germany witnessed the slow break-up of a literary despotism and the establishment of the principles of a literary democracy which stood for the right to expression of individual—as opposed to collective—experience in suitably flexible forms. Seventeenth century France had bequeathed to Germany, along with social and political ideals, the mistaken notion that there was a set of rules—nearly rigid—by which all literary production was to be regulated. The brilliant literature of the French classic period had impressed the Germans, prostrate as they were from the after-effects of the Thirty Years' War, and it was only natural that they should turn to the sister nation for guidance. For more than a century, Germany's literary men sought to assimilate the rules of French composition vainly hoping to bring forth a literature comparable to that of the French.

With the opening of the eighteenth century, however, a rival entered the field, which was destined to put French ideals to flight: this was the literature of England. While the French type represented, in general, the formal intellectual elements of literary composition, the English ideal emphasized thought and feeling. These two ideals fought for supremacy long and bitterly, first in the strife between Gottsched on the one hand, and Bodmer and Breitingen on the other, later between Gottsched and Lessing. With the publication in 1767 of Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, the battle came to be waged most hotly in and about the drama. It was a question of who best represented the spirit of the ancient theater and the theories of Aristotle; Corneille, Boileau, Racine, and Voltaire, or Shakespeare? Lessing laid about him so stoutly with his criticism of the French ideals that he routed them from their position of domination in German letters, and victory came to rest with the freer, more virile, and more profound spirit of English literature. This movement reached its conclusion in the Storm and Stress

Titsworth

upheaval, which was simply an attempt to picture forth a world then newly discovered to modern German literature—that of feeling. When once the Germans had found their bearings, they struck out for themselves to seek their own destiny, and it was no longer a question of the rule of either English or French taste in Germany.

In the throes of the Storm and Stress movement, both Goethe and Schiller were born to German letters. Unlike the lesser men of the same period, they recovered their balance and gained a point of view which blended the formal and rationalistic elements characteristic of the French literature and the emotional and contemplative traits of the English. The struggle, then, between form and content, between collective and individual experience culminated in them.

It is the province of this investigation, in the light of what has been said above, to inquire into their attitude toward the French classic drama. This I have attempted to do by a study of what they said directly of it, and by inquiring into their attitude toward dramatic principles in general which are hostile or friendly to those espoused by the French. The deeper and more subtle question of the indirect influence of French drama and dramaturgy upon their own literary practice, of which they said nothing—and of which they themselves were beyond a doubt largely unaware—I have no more than touched upon here and there: the adequate consideration of such a problem does not fall within the range of this investigation.

The discussion has been divided into five chapters: chapters one and three take up for Goethe and Schiller respectively their general attitude toward the French classic drama both in its theory and in its concrete form; chapters two and four deal with their estimate of the individual dramatists and their works; chapter five, the conclusion, compares the opinion of the two men and attempts to arrive at some general conclusions concerning their contributions to the history of human ideals.*

*As sources for this study, I have used for Goethe the Weimar ed., Weimar, 1887-1909 (in four sections; I. literary works; II. scientific; III. dairies; IV. letters), the revised ed. of conversations by Flodoard v.

Goethe, Schiller and the French Classic Drama

I

GOETHE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FRENCH CLASSIC DRAMA IN GENERAL

Goethe's attitude toward the French classic drama is, at bottom, his attitude toward various kinds of art in general. Pseudo-classicist, realist, classicist, and romanticist as he was in turn, it is natural to expect in his development a varying appreciation of the drama of the classic period of French literature. The following periods, differing widely from each other as regards his estimate of the dramatic productions of this age, stand out in his life. (a) the Frankfurt-Leipzig period, 1759-1770; this was a time when French influence most dominated Goethe: (b) the Storm and Stress period, 1770-1775, which began with his residence in Strassburg and acquaintance with Herder, and in which he protested vigorously against hampering limitations of form: (c) the period of silence, 1775-1799, which had no definite boundaries, for it grew gradually out of period (b) and shaded into period (d). This period marked a decided allegiance to classic Greek ideals but in it Goethe did not express any direct, important criticism of the classic art of the French. (d) The period of truest appreciation of French classic drama, 1799-1832. This period opened in the midst of Goethe's activity as director of the Weimar stage where he was endeavoring to institute a reform of the German theater.

Frankfurt-Leipzig Period, 1759-1770. In these years, Goethe was completely under the influence of French ideals. This was very natural, for his native city of Frankfurt was a cosmopolitan center in Goethe's time. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* gives a good idea of the various influences at work on the unusually receptive lad. French ideals of culture were not strangers in this city. The French themselves, their language,

Biedermann, Leipzig, 1911, and the ed. of *Urmeister* by Maync, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1911; for Schiller, the hist.-critical ed. by Goedeke, Stuttgart, 1867-1876, the ed. of his letters by Jonas, Stuttgart, Leipzig, and Berlin, n. d., and of his conversations by Petersen, Leipzig, 1911. I have examined all their writings—including paralipomena and text-readings—except the purely scientific works of Goethe found in sec. II. of Weimar ed.

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their literature, and their theater were early known to and loved by him. He spoke French with servants, with the French soldiers quartered at his father's house during the occupation of Frankfurt (1759-1763), and he visited assiduously the French plays given in 1759 by a French troupe accompanying the army.¹ His delight in the French theater became a passion that grew with every play he saw, although, returning late home to meals, he often had to content himself with what was left on the table and at the same time to meet the strong disapproval of his father who thought his attendance at the plays a waste of time.²

The foreign troupe played comedy much oftener than tragedy. Goethe says that he understood it poorly. That was undoubtedly because of the witticisms in a foreign tongue, the very intimate relation of comedy to the life from which it springs, the merely suggested situations, and the rapidity of the action. On the other hand, the measured movement, the regularity of accent of the alexandrines, and the use of more general expressions made tragedy much easier of comprehension. The repertory of the troupe contained pieces of such authors as Molière, Destouches, Marivaux, La Chaussée, and perhaps also of Voltaire.³ And while there is no direct evidence that the masterpieces of Corneille and Racine were attempted on the stage, it seems probable from the fact that the young Goethe—as will be seen later—took to reading these writers with zeal. He was much impressed with the *Hypermnestre* of Lemierre, a philosophic tragedy, not exactly of the traditional classic type, which was characterized by rapidity of action, considerable pathos, and a rather nervous style. Of all the pieces which he saw, however, the half-allegoric, half-mythological dramas in the style of Piron appealed to him most.⁴ The play stirred him to a wider acquaintance with French literature. He studied Racine and read his dramas

¹ *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, I. Teil, 3. Buch; Weimarer Ausgabe, Abteilung I, Bd. 26, 141f.

² *D. u. W.*, I, 3; *W.*, I, 26, 166.

³ *Ibid.*, 143; also Rosset, *Histoire des relations littéraires entre la France et l'Allemagne*, 532 (footnote).

⁴ *D. u. W.*, I, 3; *W.*, I, 26, 167.