

**THE BRIDE OF MESSINA: A
TRAGEDY, WITH CHORUSES. TO
WHICH IS PREFIXED AN ESSAY
ON THE TRAGICAL CHORUS.
WITH OTHER POEMS, PP. 1-168**

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THE
BRIDE OF MESSINA:

A Tragedy, with Choruses,

By SCHILLER.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED
AN ESSAY ON THE TRAGICAL CHORUS.

TRANSLATED BY
ADAM LODGE, ESQ., M.A.

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PREFACE.

THIS version, having been favourably received, has been revised for the present and third edition, the second in which it appears in a separate form.

It was observed by the Translator that the original Tragedy, one of the latest productions of the Author, was remarkable in the literature of Germany as the declared illustration of his matured opinions on dramatic composition. In an able article in the "Examiner" the objection was made that "this was scarcely correct." "The Bride of Messina," said the critic, "was ushered into the world by a masterly preface from Schiller, in which he vindicated the use of the ancient Chorus in modern tragedy; but the work was designedly put forth as an experiment, and manifestly so regarded by the poet. In that character it may be said not only to have failed, but to have had its failure acknowledged by Schiller himself. When, in the following year, he gave the world his magni-

ficient tragedy of 'William Tell'—the last of all his writings, perhaps the greatest, and certainly in every respect but the genius common to both, the very opposite to this 'Bride of Messina'—he gave with it a 'matured opinion on dramatic composition,' worth a thousand prefaces.

"The causes of the failure of the 'Bride of Messina' were discriminated by William Schlegel. They arose from the utter incompatibility of the agencies employed. In the attempt to exhibit a modern subject in an antique garb, truth of feeling as well as of costume was brought into question, and the result was neither truly ideal nor truly natural, and as little mythological as historical."

With the greatest deference to the authority of the distinguished writer, whose approbation of this essay could not but suffice to recompense any labour that might have been bestowed upon it, I am unable to acquiesce in the conclusion which he has founded on a comparative estimate of the two last dramas of Schiller. No allusion to any change of views in this respect occurs in his correspondence, during the interval referred to; and, as he was not altogether exempted from the necessity of compliance with requisitions made to him

as a writer for the stage, none is to be inferred from the dissimilarity to its predecessor in some of the main characteristics of dramatic writing, exhibited in "William Tell." The latter play was undertaken on the solicitation of Iffland, the Berlin manager, himself a dramatist of the unideal school, and the greatest master of the "Comédie larmoyante," so attractive at that period in Germany and elsewhere. Herr Iffland recommends the enterprise in a strictly managerial spirit, writing, he says, "as a tradesman" (als ein Kaufmann), and urging the substantial arguments usual in such transactions. In a letter to Humboldt, August 19, 1803, the poet confides to his friend that "the subject is repulsive to him," adding that "having been assured in the strongest manner of its aptitude for theatrical effect, he will not allow his disgust to prevent him from bringing the work to an end."

The objection of A. W. Schlegel, as cited by the "Examiner," is somewhat indefinite; and, so far as it may be understood to deprecate the introduction of the ancient Chorus in modern Tragedy—scarcely to be reconciled with a critical dogma enunciated by the same writer, namely,

that "in all Art and Poetry, the Fancy lays claim to be considered as an independent power, governed by its own laws." To attribute to the Chorus an intrinsic and exceptional compatibility with the old Tragedy, an essential unfitness to the new, belongs to that confusion of ideas which deduces principles rather from what has been established by usage, than from the nature of things. It might be said with equal reason that the metric dialogue was suitable only to the ancient drama; one and the other being alike removed from the sphere of reality. The notion of a Chorus, that is, of a company of persons whose business is to moralize in lyric verse on the events passing before them, can no more be entertained in any relation to the actual or the possible, with reference to the Greece of the heroic period, than to Messina in the middle age. Its relation is to Poetry alone; it is an instrument of Art, the product of Imagination acting according to its own laws; and is, therefore, congenial to the poetical drama, whatever may be the era poetically represented.

Independently of its lyrical accessories, the Tragedy before us is not in a strict sense in the antique form, neither is that form considered by

Schiller to be a condition to their employment. He tells us in his preface that while the "Old Chorus, applied to the French drama, would, present it in its poverty, and reduce it to nothing, the same accompaniment would impart to Shakespeare's Tragedy its true significance." Whatever may be the value of this observation, it is not to be supposed that the writer intended to attribute to Shakespeare's Tragedies anything in common with the antique form, however they may be characterized by the antique spirit, in all that relates to that ideality of poetical colouring, which, in the Greek Tragedy, is made to invest the subject and characters.

The principles which this drama was designed to exemplify, including the absolute predominance of the Ideal (namely, as exhibited in a work in which the subject would be contemplated from a poetical point of view alone, and treated accordingly) are intimated in his critical and æsthetical writings of much earlier date; and, as they are enforced in the preface with all the weight and earnestness of a philosophical conviction, and with a glow of eloquence which such a conviction could alone inspire (to cite his own