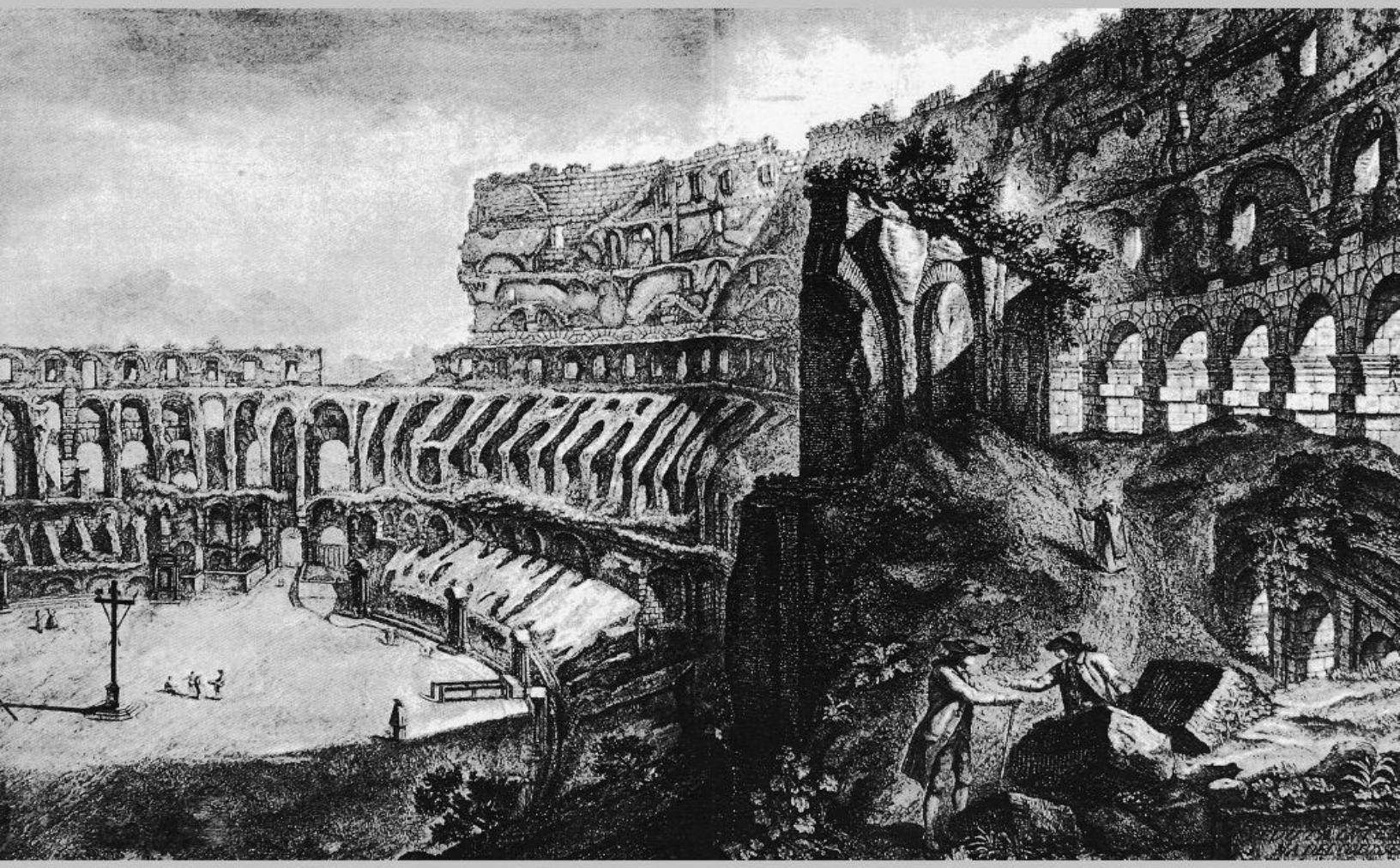
AESCHYLUS



THE LYRICAL DRAMAS OF AESCHYLUS

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The Lyrical Dramas of Aeschylus
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849648299

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PREFACE

The poet who publishes an original work, or the painter who exhibits the product of his own brush, does well, in the general case, to spare himself the trouble of any sort of introductory exposition or explanation; for the public are apt to look upon all such preambles as a sort of forestalling of their own critical rights: besides that a good work of art contains within itself all that is necessary to unfold its own story to an intelligent spectator. A translator, however, is differently situated. In interposing himself between the original author and the public, he occupies the position of an optical artist, who, when he presents to the infirm human eye the instrument that is to enable it to scan the path of the stars, is bound, not merely to guarantee the beauty, but to explain to the intelligent spectator the principle, and to make intelligible the reality of the spectacle. Or, as all similes limp, we may say that a translator stands to the public in the position of the old Colchian sorceress, who having cut a live body in pieces, and submitted it to a new fermentation in a magic pot, engaged to produce it again re-invigorated in all its completeness. The spectators of such a process have a right to know, not only that something—it may be a very beautiful and a very attractive thing—has come out of the cauldron, but also that the identical thing put in has come out without transmutation or transformation. And if there has been transmutation or transformation to any extent, they are entitled to know how far.

Now, with regard to poetical translation, I honestly confess that I consider the reproduction, according to the

German idea of a facsimile in all respects corresponding to the original, an impossible problem. In the alembic of the translator's mind it is not merely that the original elements of the organic whole, being disintegrated, are to be restored, but the elements out of which the restoration is to be made, are altogether different; as if a man should be required to make a counterpart to a silk vesture with cotton twist, or to copy a glowing Venus of Titian in chalk. The reproduction, in such a case, can never be perfect; the copy may be something like—very like—the original, but it is not the same; it may be better in some points, and in some points worse. Just so in language. It is impossible sometimes to translate from one language into another. Greek, for instance, is a language so redundant with rich efflorescence, so tumid with luxuriant growth and overgrowth of all kinds, that our temperate language, unless it allow itself to run into sheer madness, must often refuse to follow it. Like a practised posture-maker or expert ballet-dancer, the old Hellenic dialect can caper gracefully through movements that, if attempted, would twist our English tongue into distortion or dislocation. Æschylus, in particular, was famous, even amongst the Greeks, for the fearless, masculine licence with which he handled the most flexible of all languages. This licence I profess to follow only where I can do so intelligibly and gracefully. The reader must not expect to find, in the guise of the English language, an image of Æschylus in every minute verbal feature, such as its gigantic outline has been sketched by Aristophanes.

Some men of literary note, in the present day, observing the great difficulties with which poetical translators have to contend, especially when using a language of inferior compass, have been of opinion that the task ought not to be attempted at all—that all poetical translations, from Greek at least into English, should be done in prose; and, in confirmation of this opinion, they point to the English translation of the Hebrew Bible as a model. But if, as

Southey says, “a translation is good precisely as it faithfully represents the matter, manner, and spirit of the original,” *Endnote 002* it is difficult to see how this doctrine can be entertained. Poetry is distinguished from prose more by the manner than by the matter; and rhythmical regularity or verse is precisely that quality which distinguishes the manner of poetry from that of prose. In one sense, and in the best sense, Plato and Richter and Jeremy Taylor are poets; in another sense, and in the best sense, Æschylus and Dante and Shakespere are philosophers; but that which a poet as a poet has, and a philosopher as a philosopher has not, is verse; and this element the advocates of a prose translation of poetical works are content to miss out! That the argument from the English translation of the Bible is not applicable to every case, will appear plain to any one who will figure to himself Robert Burns or Horace or Beranger in a prose dress. In the Bible we seek for the simplicity of religious inculcation or devout meditation, and would consider the finest rhythmical decorations out of place. Besides, the style of the Hebrew poetry is eminently simple; and the rhythmical element of language, so far as I can learn, was never highly cultivated by the Jews, whose mission on earth was of a different kind. The Greeks, on the other hand, were eminently a poetical people; the poetry of their drama, though not without its own simplicity, is, in respect of mere linguistic organism, of a highly decorated order; and by nothing is that decoration so marked as by a systematic attention to rhythm. I consider, therefore, that prose translations of the Greek dramatists will never satisfy the just demands of a cultivated taste, for the plain reason that they omit that element which is most characteristic of the manner of the original.

I am persuaded that the demand for prose translations of poets had arisen, in this country, more from a sort of desperate reaction against certain vicious principles of the old English school of translation, than from a serious consideration either of the nature of the thing, or of the

capacity of our noble language. In Germany, I do not find that this notion has ever been entertained; plainly because the German poetical translations did not err, like our English ones, in conspiring, by every sort of fine flourishing and delicate furbishment, to obscure or to blot out what was most characteristic in their originals. The proper problem of an English translator is not how to say a thing as the author would have said it, had he been an Englishman; but how, through the medium of the English language, to make the English reader feel both what he said and how he said it, being a Greek. Now, any one who is familiar with the general run of English rhythmical translations, of which Pope's Iliad is the pattern, must be aware that they have too often been executed under the influence of the former of these principles rather than the latter. In Pope's Homer, and in Sotheby's also, I must add, we find many, perhaps all the finest passages very finely done; but so as Pope or Sotheby might have done themselves in an original poem written at the present day, while that which is most peculiarly Homeric, a certain blunt naturalness and a talkative simplicity, we do not find in these translators at all. The very things which most strike the eye of the accomplished connoisseur, and feed the meditations of the student of human nature, are omitted.

Now, I at once admit that a good prose translation—that is to say, a prose translation done by a poet or a man of poetical culture—of such an author as Homer, is preferable, for many purposes, to a poetical translation so elegantly defaced as that of Pope. A prose translation, also, of any poet, done accurately in a prosaic style by a proser, however much of a parody or a caricature in point of taste, may not be without its use, if in no other way, as a ready check on the free licence of omission or inoculation which rhythmical translators are so fond to usurp. But it is a mistake to suppose, because Pope, under the influence of Louis XIV. and Queen Anne, could not write a good poetical translation of Homer, that therefore such a work is beyond

the compass of the English language. *Endnote 003* I believe that, if Alfred Tennyson were to give the world a translation of the Iliad in the measure of Locksley Hall, he would cut Pope out of the market of the million, even at this eleventh hour. We are, in the present epoch of our literary history, arrived at a very favourable moment for producing good translations. A band of highly-original and richly-furnished minds has just left the stage, leaving us the legacy of a poetical language which, under their hand, received a degree of rhythmical culture, of which it had been before considered incapable. The example of the Germans, also, now no longer confined to the knowledge of a few, stands forth to show us how excellent poetical translations may be made, free, at least, from those faults from which we have suffered. There is no reason why we should despair of producing poetical versions of the Classics which shall be at once graceful as English compositions, and characteristic as productions of the Greek or Roman mind. I, for one, have already passed this judgment on my own attempt, that if I have failed in these pages to bring out what is Greek and what is Æschylean prominently, in combination with force, grace, and clearness of English expression, it is for lack of skill in the workman, not for want of edge in the tool.

The next question that calls for answer is: it being admitted that a rhythmical translation of a Greek poem is preferable to a prose one, should we content ourselves with a blank rhythm (such as Shelley has used in Queen Mab, and Southey in Thalaba), or should we adopt also the sonorous ornament of rhyme. On this subject, when I first commenced this translation, about twelve years ago, I confess my feelings were strongly against the use of rhyme in translations from the antique; but experience and reflection have taught me considerably to modify, and, in some points of view, altogether to abandon this opinion. With regard to this matter, Southey has expressed himself thus:—“Rhyme is to passages of no inherent merit what

rouge and candle-light are to ordinary faces. Merely ornamental passages, also, are aided by it, as foil sets off paste. But when there is either passion or power, the plainer and more straightforward the language can be made, the better." *Endnote 004* This is the lowest ground on which the plea for rhyme can be put; but even thus, it will be impossible for a discriminating translator to ward off its application to the Greek tragedy. In all poetry written for music, there will occur, even from the best poets, not a few passages on which the mere reader will pronounce, in the language of Horace, that they are comparatively

"Inopes rerum nugaeque canorae."

To these, rhyme is indispensable. Without this, these "trifles" will lose that which alone rendered them tolerable to the ancient ear; they will cease to be "canorous." One must consider at what a disadvantage an ancient composer of "a goat-song" is placed, when the studiously modulated phrase which he adapted to the cheerful chirpings of the lyre, or the tumultuous blasts of the flute, is torn away from that music-watered soil which was its life, and placed dry and bloodless on the desk of a modern reader, beside the thought-pregnant periods of a Coleridge, and the curiously-elaborated stanzas of a Wordsworth. Are we to make him even more blank and disconsolate, by refusing him those tuneful closes of modern rhythmical language, which scarcely our sternest masters of the lyre can afford to disdain? It appears to me that rhyme is so essential an accomplishment of lyrical language, according to English use, that a translator is not doing justice to his author who habitually rejects it. I have accordingly adopted it more or less in every play, except the Prometheus, the calm statuesque massiveness of which seemed to render the common decorations of lyric poetry dispensable. In the Seven against Thebes, I have, in the first two choral chaunts, rhymed only in the closes; and in the opening chorus of the Agamemnon, I have used irregular rhyme. In the Furies, again, I have allowed myself to be borne along

in the most free and luxuriant style of double rhyme of which I was capable, partly, I suppose, because my admiration of that piece stimulated all my energies to their highest pitch; partly, because, there being no question that the lyric metre of the tragedians exhibits the full power of their language, the translator is not doing justice to the work who does not endeavour, as far as may be, to bring out the full power of his. The fact of the matter is, the translator's art is always more or less of the nature of a compromise. If the indulgence of a luxuriant freedom is apt to trench on accuracy, the observance of a strict verbal accuracy is ill compatible with that grace and elasticity of movement without which poetry has no existence. In the present translation, I have been willing to try several styles, if not to suit the humour of different readers, (which, however, were anything but an illegitimate object), at least to satisfy myself what could be done.

I shall now say a word on the principles which I have adopted with regard to the representation of the various Greek metres by corresponding varieties of English verse. I say corresponding or analogous emphatically; for, whatever apish tricks the Germans may have taught their pliant tongue to play, the conservative English ear, "peculiarly intolerant of metrical innovations," *Endnote 005* will not allow itself to be seduced—whether by the arguments of Southey, or the example of Longfellow—from the familiar harmonies of our old Saxon measures Nor, indeed, is this stiffness of native metrical habit, a circumstance at all to be regretted. Every language has its own measures, which are natural and easy to it, as every man has his own way of walking, which he cannot forego for another, without affectation I do not think Goethe's Reineke Fuchs a whit the better, but rather the worse, for being written in the measure of the Odyssey; and the artificial choral versification of Humboldt, Franz, Schoemann, and Muller, in their translations from Æschylus, is, to my ear, mere metrical monstrosity, which

would read much better if it were broken down into plain prose. *Endnote 006* I have, therefore, not attempted anything of this kind in my translation, except accidentally; that is to say, when the Greek measure happened to be at the same time an English measure, as in the case of the Trochaic Tetrameter, of which the reader will find examples in the conclusion of the Agamemnon, and in various parts of the Persians. This measure, as Aristotle informs us, *Endnote 007* is a remnant of the old energetic triple time to which the sportive Bacchic chorus originally danced; and, as it seems to be used by the tragedians in passages where peculiar energy or elevation is intended, *Endnote 008* I do not think the translator is at liberty to confound it in his version with the common dialogue. With regard to the Iambic dialogue itself, there can be no question that our heroic blank verse of ten syllables, both in point of character and compass, is the natural and adequate representative of the Greek trimeter of twelve. *Endnote 009* The Anapæstic verse occasions more difficulty. The proper nature of this measure, as corresponding to our modern march-time in music, has been pointed out by Muller; *Endnote 010* and in conformity with his views, I have, in my translation, accurately marked the distinction, in the Agamemnon, the Suppliants, and the Persians, between the Anapæstic verses sung by the Chorus to march-time, when entering the Orchestra, and the regular odes or hymns sung after they were arrived at their proper destination round the Thymele. But how are we to render this verse in English? Our own Anapæstic verse, though the same when counted by the fingers, has, if I mistake not, a light, ambling, unsteady air about it, which is quite the reverse of the weighty character of the “equal rhythm,” as the ancients called both it and its counterpart the Dactylic. *Endnote 011* I have, therefore, thought myself safer in using, for this measure, the Trochaic verse of eight syllables, varied with occasional sevens and fives, generally without rhyme, in the Agamemnon with a few rhymes irregularly

interspersed. In the Persians only I have made the experiment, tried also by Connington in the Agamemnon, of rendering the Greek by the common English Anapæsts; the delicate-treading (ἀβροβάται) sons of Susa not seeming to require the same weight and firmness of diction for their sad vaticinations, as the stout-hearted Titan for his words of haughty defiance, and the Herald of the Thunderer for his threats.

With regard to the proper choral odes—the most difficult, and, in my view, the most important part of my task—I have allowed myself a licence, which some may think too large, but which, if I were to do the work over again, I scarcely think I should contract. In very few cases have I given anything like a curious imitation of the original; and, when I have done so—as in the Trochaic Chaunt of the Furies, Vol. I. p. 212, and in the Cretics mingled with Trochees, in the short ode of the Suppliants, Vol. II. p 107 *Endnote 012*—it was more to humour the whim of the moment than from any fixed principle. For, to speak truth, rhyming men will have their whim; and I do not think it politic or judicious to deprive the translator altogether of that rhythmical freedom which is the great delight of the original composer. But another, and the principal reason with me for not attempting a systematic imitation of the choral measures, was, that many of them failed to produce, on my ear, an intelligible musical effect, which I could set myself to reproduce; while, in other cases, though I clearly saw the rhythmical principle on which they were constructed (for I do not speak of the blind jargon of inherited metrical terminology), I saw with equal clearness that in our English poetry written to be read, systematic imitation of ancient metres written on musical principles, and with a view to musical exhibition, is, in the majority of cases, altogether absurd and impertinent. I confined myself, therefore, to the selection of such English metres as to my ear seemed most dramatically to represent the feeling of the original, making a marked contrast everywhere between the rhythmical

movement of joy and sorrow, and always distinguishing carefully between what was piled up with a stable continuity of sublime emotion, and what was ejaculated in a hurried and broken style, where the Dochmiac verse prevails. *Endnote 013*

So much for metres With regard to the more strictly linguistic part of my task, I have only to say that I thought it proper to assume Wellauer's cautiously edited text as a safe general foundation, with the liberty, of course, to deviate from it whenever I saw distinct and clearly made out grounds. The other editions, old and new, which I have used are enumerated in an Appendix at the end of the second volume. There also will be found those Commentaries and Translations which I have consulted on all the difficult passages; my obligations to which are, of course, great, and are here gratefully acknowledged. I desire specially to name, as having been of most service to me, Linwood, Peile, and Paley among the English; Wellauer, Welcker, Müller, and Schoemann among the German scholars. My manner of proceeding with previous English translations was to borrow from them an occasional phrase or hint, only after I had finished and carefully revised my own. But my obligations in respect of poetical diction to my fellow-labourers in the same field are very few, and are for the most part specially acknowledged.

The introductory remarks to each play are intended to supply the English reader with that particular mythological or historical knowledge, and to inspire him with those Hellenic views and feelings, which are necessary to the enjoyment of the different dramas. The appended notes proceed on the principle, generally understood in this country, though apparently neglected in erudite Germany, that translations are made, not for the learned mainly, but for the unlearned. I have, therefore, not assumed even the most common points of mythological and antiquarian lore. Some of the notes, especially those on moral and religious points, have a higher view than mere explanation. They are

intended to stir those human feelings, and suggest those trains of moral reflection without which the most profound scholarship issues only in a multitudinous cracking of empty nut-shells, and a ghastly exhibition of gilded bones. The few notes of a strictly hermeneutical character that are mingled with these, are mere jottings to preserve for my own use, and that of my fellow-students of the Greek text, the grounds of decision which have moved me in some of the more difficult passages, where I have either departed from Wellauer's text, or where something appeared to lie in the various renderings fraught with a more than common poetical significance. In the general case, however, the translation must serve as its own commentary; and, though I do not pretend to have read every thing that has been written on the disputed passages of this most difficult, and, in many places, sadly corrupt author, I hope there is evidence enough in every page of my work to show that I have conscientiously grappled with all real difficulties in any way affecting the meaning of the text, and not leapt to a conclusion merely because it was the most obvious and most convenient one. If here and there I have made a rapid dash, a headlong plunge, or a bold sweep, beyond the rules of a strict philology, it was because these were the only tactics that the desperation of the case allowed. *Endnote 014*

In conclusion, I am glad to take this opportunity of publicly returning my thanks to two gentlemen of well-known literary taste and discernment, who took the trouble to read my sheets as they went through the press, and favour me with their valuable suggestions.

ON THE GENIUS AND CHARACTER OF THE GREEK TRAGEDY

“In der Beurtheilung des Hellenischen Alterthums soll der Scharfsinnige nicht aus sich herauszuspinnen suchen, was nur aus der Verbindung mannichfacher Ueberlieferungen gewonnen werden kann.”

—Bockh.

The reader will have observed that the word tragedy, which is generally associated with the works of Æschylus, does not occur either in the general title-page of this translation, or in the special superscriptions of the separate pieces; in the one place the designation “Lyrical Dramas” being substituted, and in the other “Lyrico-dramatic Spectacle.” This change of the common title, by which these productions are known in the book-world, was not made from mere affectation, or the desire of singularity, but from the serious consideration that “the world is governed by names,” and that the word “tragedy” cannot be used in reference to a serious lyrico-dramatic exhibition on the ancient Greek stage, without importing a host of modern associations that will render all healthy sympathy with the Æschylean drama, and all sound criticism, extremely difficult. Names, indeed, are a principal part of the hereditary machinery with which the evil Spirit of Error in the region of thought, as well as in that of action, juggles the plain understandings of men that they become the sport of every quibble, and believe a lie. By means of names the plastic soul of man contrives at first, often crudely enough, to express some part of a great truth, and make it publicly recognised; but when, in the course of natural growth and

progress the thing has been altered, while the word, transmitted from age to age, and itinerant from East to West, remains; then the vocal sign performs its natural functions as a signifier of thought no longer, but is as a mask, which either tells a complete lie, or looks with the one-half of its face a meaning which the other half (seen only by the learned) is sure to contradict. I have, therefore, thought it convenient to do away with this cause of misunderstanding in the threshold: and the purpose of the few remarks that follow is to make plain to the understanding of the most unlearned the reason of the terminology which I have adopted, and guard him yet more fully against the misconceptions which are sure to arise from suffering his chamber of thought to be preoccupied by the echoes of a false nomenclature.

If the modern spectator of a tragedy of Shakespere or Sheridan Knowles comes from the vivid embodiments of a Faucit or a Macready, to the perusal of what are called the "tragedies of *Æ*schylus," and applies the subtle rules of representative art there exemplified, to the extant remains of the early Greek stage, though he will find some things strikingly conceived and grandly expressed, and a general tone of poetic elevation, removed alike from what is trivial, and what is morbid; yet he must certainly be strangely blinded by early classical prepossessions, if he fails to feel that, as a whole, a Greek tragedy, when set against the English composition of the same name, is exceedingly narrow in its conception, meagre in its furniture, monotonous in its character, unskilful in its execution, and not seldom feeble in its effort. No doubt a generous mind will be disposed to look with a kindly and even a reverent sympathy on the inferiority of the infant fathers of that most difficult of all the poetic arts, which has now, in this late age of the world, under the manly British training, exhibited such sturdiness of trunk, such kingliness of stature, and such magnificence of foliage; it may be also, that the novelty and the strangeness of some things in the

Greek tragedy—to those at least who have not had their appetite palled by early Academic appliances—may afford a pleasant compensation for what must appear its glaring improprieties as falling under the category of a known genus of poetic art; still, to the impartial and experienced frequenter of a first-rate modern theatre, the first effect of an acquaintance with the old Greek tragedy is apt to be disappointment. He will wonder what there is in these productions so very remarkable that the select youth of Great Britain should, next to their mother's milk, be made to suck in them, and and them only, as the great intellectual nutriment of the freshfledged soul, till, in the regular course of things, they are fit to be fed on Church and State controversies and Parliamentary reports, and other diet not always of the lightest digestion; and he will be apt to imagine that in this, as in other cases, an over-great reverence for antiquity has made sensible men bow the knee to idols—that learned professors, like other persons, have their hobby-horses, which they are fond of over-riding —and that no sane man should believe more than the half of what is said by a professional trumpeter. All this will be very right in the circumstances, and very true so far. But the frequenter of the modern theatre must consider farther —if he wishes to be just—whether he be not violating one of the great proprieties of nature, in rushing at once from the narrow confined gas-lighted boxes of a modern theatre into the large sweeping sun-beshone tiers of an ancient one. No man goes from a ball-room into a church without a certain decent interval, and, if possible, a few moments of becoming preparation So it is with literary excursions. We must be acclimatized in the new country before we can feel comfortable We must not merely deliver our criticism thus (however common such a style may be)—I expected to find that, I find this; and I am disappointed, but we must ask the deeper and the only valuable question — What ought I to have expected to find, what shall I surely find of good, and beautiful, and true, if my eyes are open, and my free glance

pointed in the right direction? In short, if a man will enjoy and judge a Greek “tragedy,” he must seek to know not what it is in reference to the general idea of tragedy which he brings with him from modern theatrical exhibitions, but what it was to the ancient Greeks, sitting in the open air, on their wooden bench, or on their seat hewn from the native rock, with the merry Bacchic echoes in their ears, long before Aristotle laid down those nice rules of tragic composition which only Shakespere might dare to despise.

Let us inquire, therefore, setting aside alike Shaksperian examples and Aristotelian canons, what the τραγῳδία, or “tragedy,” was to the ancient Greeks. Nor have we far to seek. The name, when the modern paint is rubbed off, declares its own history; and we find that the main idea of the old word τραῳδία—as, by the way, the only idea of the modern word τραγουδι *Endnote 015*—is a song. Of the second part of this word, we have preserved the root in our English words ode, melody, monody, thenody, and the other half of the word means goat; whether that descriptive addition to the principal substantive came from the circumstance that the song was originally sung by persons habited like goats, *Endnote 016* or from other circumstances connected with the worship of Dionysus, to whom this animal was sacred, is of no importance for our present purpose. The main fact to which we have to direct attention, is that the word tragedy, when analysed, bears upon its face, and in the living Greek tongue proclaims loudly to the present hour, that the essential character of this species of poetry—when the name was originally given to it—was lyrical, and not at all dramatic or tragic, in the modern sense of these words. A drama, in modern language, means an action represented by acting persons; and a tragedy is such a represented action, having a sad issue; but neither of these elements belonged to the original Greek tragedy, as inherited from his rude predecessors by Æschylus, nor (as we shall immediately show) do they form the prominent or characteristic part of that exhibition, as transmitted by him

to his successors. With regard to the origin of the Greek "goat-song," and its condition previous to the age of Æschylus, there is but one uncontradicted voice of tradition on the subject; the curious discussions and investigations of the learned affecting only certain minute points of detail in the progress, which have no interest for the general student. That tradition is to the effect that the Greek lyrical drama, as we find it in the extant works of Æschylus, arose out of the Dithyrambic hymns sung at the sacred festivals of the ancient Hellenes in honour of their god Dionysus, or, as he is vulgarly called, Bacchus; hymns which were first extemporized under the influence of the stimulating juice of the grape, *Endnote 017* and then sung by a regularly trained Chorus, under the direction of the famous Methymnean minstrel, Arion. *Endnote 018* The simplest form which such hymns, under such conditions, could assume, was that of a circular dance by a band of choristers round the statue or the altar of the god in whose honour the hymn was sung. This is not a matter peculiar to Greece, but to be found at all times, and all over the world, wherever there are men who are not mere brutes. So in the description of the religious practices of the ancient Mexicans, our erudite poet Southey has the following beautiful passage, picturing a sacred choral dance round the altar of sacrifice:—

Round the choral band
The circling nobles gay, with gorgeous plumes,
And gems which sparkled to the midnight fire,
Moved in the solemn dance, each in his hand,
In measured movements, lifts the feathery shield,
And shakes a rattling ball to measured sounds;
With quicker steps, the inferior chiefs without,

Equal in number, but in just array,
The spreading radii of the mystic wheel
Revolved; and outermost, the youths roll round,
In motions rapid as their quickened blood.

Now, according to the general tradition of old Greek commentators and lexicographers, the Dithyramb or Bacchic Hymn was also called a Circular Hymn, *Endnote 019* an expression which a celebrated Byzantine writer has interpreted to mean "a hymn sung by a chorus standing in a ring round the altar." *Endnote 020* It is, no doubt, true that the phrase χορὸς κύκλιος, or circular chorus, does not necessarily mean a chorus of this description; the term, as has been ingeniously observed, *Endnote 021* like our own word roundelay, and the German Rund-gesang, being capable of an equally natural application to a hymn composed of parts, that run back to the point from which they started, and form, as it were, a circle of melody. But, whatever etymologists may make of the word, the fact that there were hymns sung by the ancient Greeks in chorus round the altars of their gods is not denied; and seems, indeed, so natural and obvious, that we shall assume it as the first form of the "goat-song," in which form it continued up to a period which it is impossible to define; the only certainty being that, whereas, in olden times, it was composed of fifty men, it was afterwards diminished to twelve or fifteen, and arranged in the form of a military company in regular rank and file. *Endnote 022* Such a chorus, therefore, was the grand central trunk out of which the Attic tragedy branched and bloomed to such fair luxuriance of verbal melody. We shall now trace, if we can, the natural steps of progress.

Let us suppose that the Leader of a Chorus, trained to sing hymns in honour of the gods, is going to make them sing publicly a hymn in honour of Ζεύς κέσιος—Jove, in his benign character as the friend of the friendless, and the protector of suppliants. Instead of a vague general supplication in the abstract style to which we are accustomed in our forms of prayer, what could be more natural than for a susceptible and lively Greek to conceive the persons of the Chorus as engaged in some particular

act of supplication, well known in the sacred traditions of the people, whose worship he was leading, and to put words in their mouths suitable to such a situation? This done, we have at once drama, according to the etymological meaning of the word; that is to say, a represented action. The Chorus represents certain persons, we shall say, the daughters of Danaus, fugitives from their native Libya, arrived on the stranger coast of Argolis, and in the act of presenting their supplications to their great celestial protector. Such an exhibition, if we will not permit it to be called by the substantive name of drama, is, at all events, a dramatized hymn; an ode so essentially dramatic in its character, that it requires but the addition of a single person besides the Chorus to form a complete action; for an action, like a colloquy, is necessarily between two parties—meditation, not action, being the natural business of a solitary man. Now, the single person whose presence is required to turn this dramatized hymn into a proper lyrical drama is already given. The Leader of the Chorus, or the person to whom the singing band belonged, and who superintended its exhibitions, is such a person. He has only, in the case supposed, to take upon himself the character of the person, the king of the Argives, to whom the supplication is made, to indicate, by word or gesture, the feelings with which he receives their address, and finally to accept or reject their suit; this makes a complete action, and a lyrical drama already exists in all essentials, exactly such as we read the skeleton of it at the present hour, in the Suppliants of Æschylus. To go a step beyond this, and add (as has been done in our play) another actor to represent the party pursuing the fugitives, is only to bring the situation already existing to a more violent issue, and not essentially to alter the character of the exhibition. Much less will the mere appendage of a guide or director to the main body of the Chorus, in the shape of a father, brother, or other accessory character, change the general effect of the spectacle. The great central mass which

strikes the eye, and fills ear and heart with its harmonious appeals, remains still what it was, even before the leader of the band took a part in the lyric exhibition. The dramatized lyric, and the lyrical drama, differ from one another only according to the simile already used, as a tree with two or three branches differs from a tree with a simple stem. The main body and stamina are the same in each. The Song is the soul of both.

The academic student, who is familiar with these matters, is aware that what has been here constructed hypothetically, as a natural result of the circumstances, is the real historical account of the origin and progress of the Greek tragedy, as it is shortly given in a well-known passage of Diogenes Laertius. “In the oldest times,” says that biographer of the philosophers, “the Chorus alone went through the dramatic exhibition (διεδραματζεν) in tragedy; afterwards Thespis, to give rest to the Chorus, added one actor distinct from the singers; then Æschylus added a second, and Sophocles a third; which gave to tragedy its complete development.” *Endnote 023* The reason mentioned here for the addition of the first actor by Thespis, is a very probable one. The convenience or ease of the singers contributed, along with the lively wit of the Greeks, and a due regard for the entertainment of the spectators, to raise the dramatized ode, step by step, into the lyrical drama.

In the above account, two secondary circumstances connected with this transition, have not been mentioned The first is, that the jocund and sometimes boisterous hymn, in honour of the wine-god, should have passed into the lyrical representation of an action generally not at all connected with the worship or history of that divinity; and, secondly, that this action should have changed its tone from light to grave, from jocular to sad, and become, in fact, what we, in the popular language of modern times, call tragic. Now, for the first of these circumstances, I know nothing that can be said in the way of historical philosophy,

except that man is fond of variety, that the Greek genius was fertile, and that accident often plays strange tricks with the usages and institutions of mortal men. For the other point, there can be no doubt that the worship of the god of physical and animal joy, being violent in its character, had its ebb as well as its flow, its broad-gleaming sunshine not without the cloud, its wail as well as its rejoicing. Whether Dionysus meant the sun, or only wine, which is the produce of the solar heat, or both, it is plain that his worshippers would have to lament his departure, at least as often as they hailed his advent; and, in this natural alternation, a foundation was laid for the separation of the original Dithyrambic Chorus into a wild, sportive element, represented by the Aristophanic comedy, and a deeply serious, meditative element represented by tragedy But we must beware, in reference to Æschylus at least, of supposing that the lyrical drama, as exhibited by him, however solemn and awe-inspiring, was necessarily sad, or, as we say, tragic in its issue. Aristotle indeed, in his famous treatise, lays down the doctrine that the main object of tragic composition is to excite pity and terror, and that Euripides, “though in other respects he manages badly, is in this respect the most tragic of the tragedians, that the most of his pieces end unfortunately.” *Endnote 024* But there is not the slightest reason, in the nature of things, why a solemn dramatic representation, any more than a high-toned epical narrative, should end unfortunately. The Hindoo drama, for one, never does; *Endnote 025* and, in the case of our poet, it is plain that the great trilogy, of which the Orestes is the middle piece, is constructed upon the principle of leading the sympathizing spectator through scenes of pity and terror, as stations in a journey, but finally to a goal of moral peace and harmonious reconciliation. That the great trilogy of the Prometheus, of which only one part remains, had an equally fortunate termination, is not to be doubted. Here, therefore, we see another impertinence in that modern word tragedy, which, in the

superscriptions of these plays, I have been so careful to eschew.

We shall now examine one or two of the Æschylean pieces by a simple arithmetical process, and see how essentially the lyrical element predominates in their construction. Taking Wellauer's edition, and turning up the Suppliants, I find that that play, consisting altogether of 1055 lines, is opened by a continuous lyric strain of 172 lines. Then we have dialogue, in part of which the Chorus uses lyric measures to the extent of 22 lines Then follows a short choral song of only 20 lines. The next Chorus comprises 76 lines, and the next 70. After this follows another dialogue, in which the Chorus, being in great mental agitation, use, according to the uniform practice of Æschylus, lyric measures to the extent altogether of 20 verses. Then follows another regular choral hymn of 47 lines. After that a violent lyrical altercation between the Chorus and a new actor, to the amount of 74 lines, in the most impassioned lyrical rhythm. Then follow 14 lines of anapæsts; and the whole concludes with a grand lyrical finale of 65 lines: altogether 580—considerably more than the half of the piece by bare arithmetic, and equal to two-thirds of it fully, if we consider how much more time the singing, with the musical accompaniments, must have occupied than the simple declamation. No more distinct proof could be required how essentially the account of Diogenes Laertius is right; how true it is that the choral part of the Æschylean drama is both its body and its soul, while the dialogic part, to use the technical language of Aristotle's days, was, in fact, only an ἐπεισόδιον (from which our English word Episode) or thing thrown in between the main choral acts of the representation, for the sake of variety to the spectators, and, as the writer says, of rest to the singers. We thus see, also, what an incorrect and indefinite idea of the Æschylean drama Aristotle had when he says—so far as we can gather his meaning—that "Æschylus first added a second actor; he also abridged the chorus, and made the

dialogue the principal part of tragedy." *Endnote 026* The last article, so far as the play of the Suppliants is concerned, is simply not true. Let us make trial of another play. The Agamemnon, which, for many reasons, is one of the best for testing the mature genius of the bard, contains about 1600 lines; and, without troubling the reader with details, it will be found that about the half of this number is written in lyric measures. When we consider, further, that the most splendid imaginative pictures, and the wildest bursts of passion, all the interest, the doubt, and the anxiety, the fear, the terror, the surprise, and the final issue, are, according to the practice of Æschylus, regularly thrown into lyric measures, we shall be convinced that Aristotle (if we rightly apprehend him) was altogether mistaken when he led the moderns to imagine that the father of tragedy had really given such a preponderance to the dialogic element, that the lyric part is to be looked on, in his productions, as in any way subordinate. Unless it be the Prometheus, I do not know a single extant play of Æschylus in which the lyric element occupies a position which, in actual representation, would justify the dictum of the Stagyrite. And even in this play, let it be observed, how grandly the poet makes his anapæsts swell and billow with sonorous thunder in the finale; as if to make amends for the somewhat prolix epic recitals with which he had occupied the spectator, and to prove that a Greek tragedy could never be true to itself, unless it left upon the ear, in its last echoes, the permanent impression of its original character as a Song

Three observations strike me, that may conveniently be stated as corollaries from the above remarks. First, That those translators have erred who, whether from carelessness, or from ignorance, or from a desire to accommodate the ancient tragedy as much as possible to the modern, have given an undue predominance to blank verse in their versions, making it appear as if the spoken part of the Æschylean tragedy bore a much larger

proportion, than it really does, to the sung. Second, Those critics have erred who, applying the principles of modern theatrical criticism to the chaunted parts of the ancient lyrical drama, have found many parts dull or wearisome, extravagant, and even ridiculous, which, there can be no doubt, with their proper musical accompaniment, were the most impressive, and the most popular parts of the representation. Third, We err altogether, when we judge of the excellence of an ancient Greek drama as a composition, by its effect on us when reading it. The Suppliants, for instance, is generally considered a stupid play; because it wants grand contrasts of character and striking dramatic situations, and contains so much of mere reiterated supplication. But this reiteration, though wearisome to us who read the text-book of the lost opera, was, in all probability, that on which the ravished ears of the devout ancient auditors dwelt with most voluptuous delight. In general, without re-creating some musical accompaniment, and dwelling with ear and heart on the frequent variations of the lyric burden of the piece, a man is utterly incapable of passing any sane judgment on an Æschylean drama. Such a piece may contain in abundance everything that the auditors desired and enjoyed, and yet be very stupid now to us who merely read and criticise.

The fact of the matter is, that the marshalled band of singers, however satisfactory to an ancient audience, who looked principally for musical excitement in their tragedies, and not for an interesting plot, was not at all calculated for allowing a dramatic genius to bring out those tragic situations in which the modern reader delights; but rather stood directly in the way of such an effect The fine development of character under the influence of various delicate situations, and in collision with different persons, all acting their part in some complex knot of various-coloured life, could not be exhibited in a performance where a band of singers on whom the eye of the spectators principally rested, and who formed the great attraction for

the masses, *Endnote 027* constantly occupied the central ground, and constantly interfered with every thing that was either said or done, whether it was convenient for them to do so or not. For a perfect tragedy, as conceived scientifically by Aristotle, and executed with a grand practical instinct by Shakespere, the Chorus was, in the very nature of the thing, an incumbrance and an impediment. It was only very seldom that the persons of that body could form such an important part of the action, and come forward with such a startling dramatic effect as in the Eumenides. Too often they were obliged to hang round the action as an atmosphere, or look at it as spectators; spectators either impartial altogether, and then too wise for dramatic sympathy, or half-partial, and then, by indecision of utterance, often making themselves ridiculous, as in a noted scene of the Agamemnon (Vol I p. 79), or contemptible, as in the Antigone *Endnote 028* The proper position of the Chorus in a regularly constructed drama, is, like the witches in Macbeth, to form a mysterious musical background (not a fore-ground, as in the Greek tragedy), or to circle, as in the opera of Masaniello, the principal character with a band of associates naturally situated to assist and cheer him on to his grand enterprise. But the Greek Chorus, even in the time of Sophocles and Euripides, who enlarged the spoken part, was too independent, too stationary, too central a nucleus of the representation, not to impede the movements of the acting persons who performed the principal parts. As a form of art, therefore, the Greek tragedy, so soon as it attempted to assume the scientific ground so acutely seized on by the subtle analysis of Aristotle, was necessarily clumsy and incongruous. The lyric element, which was always the most popular element, refused to be incorporated with the acting element, and yet could not be altogether displaced, a position of scenic affairs which has strangely perplexed not a few modern critics, looking for a dramatic plot with all the dramatic