

The Bride of Messina (play)

Schiller

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- SCENE I.
- SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.
- ON THE USE OF THE CHORUS IN TRAGEDY.

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THE BRIDE OF MESSINA

AND

ON THE USE OF THE CHORUS IN TRAGEDY.

By Frederich Schiller

THE BRIDE OF MESSINA

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ISABELLA, Princess of Messina.

DON MANUEL | her Sons.

DON CAESAR |

BEATRICE.

DIEGO, an ancient Servant.

The Bride of Messina (play)

MESSENGERS.

THE ELDERS OF MESSINA, mute.

THE CHORUS, consisting of the Followers of the two Princes.

SCENE I.

A spacious hall, supported on columns, with entrances on both sides;

at the back of the stage a large folding-door leading to a chapel.

DONNA ISABELLA in mourning; the ELDERS OF MESSINA.

ISABELLA.

Forth from my silent chamber's deep recesses,
Gray Fathers of the State, unwillingly
I come; and, shrinking from your gaze, uplift
The veil that shades my widowed brows: the light
And glory of my days is fled forever!
And best in solitude and kindred gloom
To hide these sable weeds, this grief-worn frame,
Beseems the mourner's heart. A mighty voice
Inexorable duty's stern command,
Calls me to light again.

Not twice the moon
Has filled her orb since to the tomb ye bore
My princely spouse, your city's lord, whose arm
Against a world of envious foes around
Hurled fierce defiance! Still his spirit lives
In his heroic sons, their country's pride:
Ye marked how sweetly from their childhood's bloom
They grew in joyous promise to the years
Of manhood's strength; yet in their secret hearts,
From some mysterious root accursed, upsprung
Unmitigable, deadly hate, that spurned
All kindred ties, all youthful, fond affections,
Still ripening with their thoughtful age; not mine
The sweet accord of family bliss; though each
Awoke a mother's rapture; each alike
Smiled at my nourishing breast! for me alone
Yet lives one mutual thought, of children's love;
In these tempestuous souls discovered else
By mortal strife and thirst of fierce revenge.

While yet their father reigned, his stern control

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Tamed their hot spirits, and with iron yoke
To awful justice bowed their stubborn will:
Obedient to his voice, to outward seeming
They calmed their wrathful mood, nor in array
Ere met, of hostile arms; yet unappeased
Sat brooding malice in their bosoms' depths;
They little reek of hidden springs whose power
Can quell the torrent's fury: scarce their sire
In death had closed his eyes, when, as the spark
That long in smouldering embers sullen lay,
Shoots forth a towering flame; so unconfined
Burst the wild storm of brothers' hate triumphant
O'er nature's holiest bands. Ye saw, my friends,
Your country's bleeding wounds, when princely strife
Woke discord's maddening fires, and ranged her sons
In mutual deadly conflict; all around
Was heard the clash of arms, the din of carnage,
And e'en these halls were stained with kindred gore.

Torn was the state with civil rage, this heart
With pangs that mothers feel; alas, unmindful
Of aught but public woes, and pitiless
You sought my widow's chamber there with taunts
And fierce reproaches for your country's ills
From that polluted spring of brother's hate
Derived, invoked a parent's warning voice,
And threatening told of people's discontent
And princes' crimes! Ill-fated land! now wasted
By thy unnatural sons, ere long the prey
Of foeman's sword! Oh, haste, you cried, and end
This strife! bring peace again, or soon Messina
Shall bow to other lords. Your stern decree
Prevailed; this heart, with all a mother's anguish
O'erlabored, owned the weight of public cares.
I flew, and at my children's feet, distracted,
A suppliant lay; till to my prayers and tears
The voice of nature answered in their breasts!

Here in the palace of their sires, unarmed,
In peaceful guise Messina shall behold
The long inveterate foes; this is the day!
E'en now I wait the messenger that brings
The tidings of my sons' approach: be ready
To give your princes joyful welcome home
With reverence such as vassals may beseem.
Bethink ye to fulfil your subject duties,
And leave to better wisdom weightier cares.
Dire was their strife to them, and to the State
Fruitful of ills; yet, in this happy bond
Of peace united, know that they are mighty
To stand against a world in arms, nor less

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Enforce their sovereign will against yourselves.

[The ELDERS retire in silence; she beckons to
an old attendant, who remains.

Diego!

DIEGO.

Honored mistress!

ISABELLA.

Old faithful servant, then true heart, come near me;
Sharer of all a mother's woes, be thine
The sweet communion of her joys: my treasure
Shrined in thy heart, my dear and holy secret
Shall pierce the envious veil, and shine triumphant
To cheerful day; too long by harsh decrees,
Silent and overpowered, affection yet
Shall utterance find in Nature's tones of rapture!
And this imprisoned heart leap to the embrace
Of all it holds most dear, returned to glad
My desolate halls;

So bend thy aged steps
To the old cloistered sanctuary that guards
The darling of my soul, whose innocence
To thy true love (sweet pledge of happier days)!
Trusting I gave, and asked from fortune's storm
A resting place and shrine. Oh, in this hour
Of bliss; the dear reward of all thy cares.
Give to my longing arms my child again!

[Trumpets are heard in the distance.

Haste! be thy footsteps winged with joy I hear
The trumpet's blast, that tells in warlike accents
My sons are near:

[Exit DIEGO. Music is heard in an opposite direction,
and becomes gradually louder.

Messina is awake!
Hark! how the stream of tongues hoarse murmuring

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Rolls on the breeze, 'tis they! my mother's heart
Feels their approach, and beats with mighty throes
Responsive to the loud, resounding march!
They come! they come! my children! oh, my children!

[Exit.

The CHORUS enters.

(It consists of two semi-choruses which enter at the same time from opposite sides, and after marching round the stage range themselves in rows, each on the side by which it entered. One semi-chorus consists of young knights, the other of older ones, each has its peculiar costume and ensigns. When the two choruses stand opposite to each other, the march ceases, and the two leaders speak.) [The first chorus consists of Cajetan, Berengar, Manfred, Tristan, and eight followers of Don Manuel. The second of Bohemund, Roger, Hippolyte, and nine others of the party of Don Caesar.

First Chorus (CAJETAN).

I greet ye, glittering halls

Of olden time

Cradle of kings! Hail! lordly roof,

In pillared majesty sublime!

Sheathed be the sword!

In chains before the portal lies

The fiend with tresses snake-entwined,

Fell Discord! Gently treat the inviolate floor!

The Bride of Messina (play)

Peace to this royal dome!

Thus by the Furies' brood we swore,
And all the dark, avenging Deities!

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND).

I rage! I burn! and scarce refrain
To lift the glittering steel on high,
For, lo! the Gorgon-visaged train
Of the detested foeman nigh:
Shall I my swelling heart control?
To parley deign or still in mortal strife
The tumult of my soul?
Dire sister, guardian of the spot, to thee
Awe-struck I bend the knee,
Nor dare with arms profane thy deep tranquillity!

First Chorus (CAJETAN).

Welcome the peaceful strain!
Together we adore the guardian power
Of these august abodes!
Sacred the hour
To kindred brotherly ties
And reverend, holy sympathies;
Our hearts the genial charm shall own,
And melt awhile at friendship's soothing tone:
But when in yonder plain

The Bride of Messina (play)

We meet then peace away!

Come gleaming arms, and battle's deadly fray!

The whole Chorus.

But when in yonder plain

We meet then peace away!

Come gleaming arms, and battle's deadly fray!

First Chorus (BERENGAR).

I hate thee not nor call thee foe,

My brother! this our native earth,

The land that gave our fathers birth:

Of chief's behest the slave decreed,

The vassal draws the sword at need,

For chieftain's rage we strike the blow,

For stranger lords our kindred blood must flow.

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Hate fires their souls we ask not why;

At honor's call to fight and die,

Boast of the true and brave!

Unworthy of a soldier's name

Who burns not for his chieftain's fame!

The whole Chorus.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Unworthy of a soldier's name

Who burns not for his chieftain's fame!

One of the Chorus (BERENGAR).

Thus spoke within my bosom's core

The thought as hitherward I strayed;

And pensive 'mid the waving store,

I mused, of autumn's yellow glade:

These gifts of nature's bounteous reign,

The teeming earth, and golden grain,

Yon elms, among whose leaves entwine

The tendrils of the clustering vine;

Gay children of our sunny clime,

Region of spring's eternal prime!

Each charm should woo to love and joy,

No cares the dream of bliss annoy,

And pleasure through life's summer day

Speed every laughing hour away.

We rage in blood, oh, dire disgrace!

For this usurping, alien race;

From some far distant land they came,

Beyond the sun's departing flame.

And owned upon our friendly shore

The welcome of our sires of yore.

Alas! their sons in thralldom pine,

The Bride of Messina (play)

The vassals of this stranger line.

A second (MANFRED).

Yes! pleased, on our land, from his azure way,

The sun ever smiles with unclouded ray.

But never, fair isle, shall thy sons repose

'Mid the sweets which the faithless waves enclose.

On their bosom they wafted the corsair bold,

With his dreaded barks to our coast of old.

For thee was thy dower of beauty vain,

'Twas the treasure that lured the spoiler's train.

Oh, ne'er from these smiling vales shall rise

A sword for our vanquished liberties;

'Tis not where the laughing Ceres reigns,

And the jocund lord of the flowery plains:

Where the iron lies hid in the mountain cave,

Is the cradle of empire the home of the brave!

[The folding-doors at the back of the stage are thrown open.

DONNA ISABELLA appears between her sons, DON MANUEL and DON CAESAR.

Both Choruses (CAJETAN).

Lift high the notes of praise!

Behold! where lies the awakening sun,

She comes, and from her queenly brow

Shoots glad, inspiring rays.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Mistress, we bend to thee!

First Chorus.

Fair is the moon amid the starry choir

That twinkle o'er the sky,

Shining in silvery, mild tranquillity;

The mother with her sons more fair!

See! blooming at her side,

She leads the royal, youthful pair;

With gentle grace, and soft, maternal pride,

Attempering sweet their manly fire.

Second Chorus (BERENGAR).

From this fair stem a beauteous tree

With ever-springing boughs shall smile,

And with immortal verdure shade our isle;

Mother of heroes, joy to thee!

Triumphant as the sun thy kingly race

Shall spread from clime to clime,

And give a deathless name to rolling time!

ISABELLA (comes forward with her SONS).
Look down! benignant Queen of Heaven, and still,
This proud tumultuous heart, that in my breast
Swells with a mother's tide of ecstasy,
As blazoned in these noble youths, my image
More perfect shows; Oh, blissful hour! the first
That comprehends the fulness of my joy,
When long-constrained affection dares to pour
In unison of transport from my heart,
Unchecked, a parent's undivided love:
Oh! it was ever one my sons were twain.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Say shall I revel in the dreams of bliss,
And give my soul to Nature's dear emotions?
Is this warm pressure of thy brother's hand
A dagger in thy breast?

[To DON MANUEL.

Or when my eyes
Feed on that brow with love's enraptured gaze,
Is it a wrong to thee?

[To DON CAESAR.

Trembling, I pause,
Lest e'en affection's breath should wake the fires
Of slumbering hate.

[After regarding both with inquiring looks

Speak! In your secret hearts
What purpose dwells? Is it the ancient feud
Unreconciled, that in your father's halls
A moment stilled; beyond the castle gates,
Where sits infuriate war, and champs the bit
Shall rage anew in mortal, bloody conflict?

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Concord or strife the fate's decree

Is bosomed yet in dark futurity!

What comes, we little heed to know,

Prepared for aught the hour may show!

ISABELLA (looking round).
What mean these arms? this warlike, dread array,
That in the palace of your sires portends
Some fearful issue? needs a mother's heart
Outpoured, this rugged witness of her joys?
Say, in these folding arms shall treason hide
The deadly snare? Oh, these rude, pitiless men,
The ministers of your wrath! trust not the show
Of seeming friendship; treachery in their breasts
Lurks to betray, and long-dissembled hate.
Ye are a race of other lands; your sires
Profaned their soil; and ne'er the invader's yoke
Was easy never in the vassal's heart

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Languished the hope of sweet revenge; our sway
Not rooted in a people's love, but owns
Allegiance from their fears; with secret joy
For conquest's ruthless sword, and thraldom's chains
From age to age, they wait the atoning hour
Of princes' downfall; thus their bards awake
The patriot strain, and thus from sire to son
Rehearsed, the old traditionary tale
Beguiles the winter's night. False is the world,
My sons, and light are all the specious ties
By fancy twined: friendship deceitful name!
Its gaudy flowers but deck our summer fortune,
To wither at the first rude breath of autumn!
So happy to whom heaven has given a brother;
The friend by nature signed the true and steadfast!
Nature alone is honest nature only
When all we trusted strews the wintry shore
On her eternal anchor lies at rest,
Nor heeds the tempest's rage.

DON MANUEL.

My mother!

DON CAESAR.

Hear me

ISABELLA (taking their hands).
Be noble, and forget the fancied wrongs
Of boyhood's age: more godlike is forgiveness
Than victory, and in your father's grave
Should sleep the ancient hate: Oh, give your days
Renewed henceforth to peace and holy love!

[She recedes one or two steps, as if to give them space

to approach each other. Both fix their eyes on the ground

without regarding one another.

ISABELLA (after awaiting for some time, with suppressed emotion,

a demonstration on the part of her sons).

I can no more; my prayers my tears are vain:
'Tis well! obey the demon in your hearts!
Fulfil your dread intent, and stain with blood
The holy altars of your household gods;
These halls that gave you birth, the stage where murder
Shall hold his festival of mutual carnage

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Beneath a mother's eye! then, foot to foot,
Close, like the Theban pair, with maddening gripe,
And fold each other in a last embrace!
Each press with vengeful thrust the dagger home,
And Victory! be your shriek of death: nor then
Shall discord rest appeased; the very flame
That lights your funeral pyre shall tower dissevered
In ruddy columns to the skies, and tell
With horrid image thus they lived and died!

[She goes away; the BROTHERS stand as before.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

How have her words with soft control

Resistless calmed the tempest of my soul!

No guilt of kindred blood be mine!

Thus with uplifted hands I prey;

Think, brothers, on the awful day,

And tremble at the wrath divine!

DON CAESAR (without taking his eyes from the ground).
Thou art my elder speak without dishonor
I yield to thee.

DON MANUEL.

One gracious word, an instant,
My tongue is rival in the strife of love!

DON CAESAR.
I am the guiltier weaker

DON MANUEL.

Say not so!
Who doubts thy noble heart, knows thee not well;
The words were prouder, if thy soul were mean.

DON CAESAR.
It burns indignant at the thought of wrong
But thou methinks in passion's fiercest mood,
'Twas aught but scorn that harbored in thy breast.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

DON MANUEL.

Oh! had I known thy spirit thus to peace
Inclined, what thousand griefs had never torn
A mother's heart!

DON CAESAR.

I find thee just and true:
Men spoke thee proud of soul.

DON MANUEL.

The curse of greatness!
Ears ever open to the babblers' tale.

DON CAESAR.

Thou art too proud to meanness I to falsehood!

DON MANUEL.

We are deceived, betrayed!

DON CAESAR.

The sport of frenzy!
DON MANUEL.
And said my mother true, false is the world?

DON CAESAR.

Believe her, false as air.

DON MANUEL.

Give me thy hand!

DON CAESAR.

And thine be ever next my heart!

[They stand clasping each other's hands,

and regard each other in silence.

DON MANUEL.

I gaze
Upon thy brow, and still behold my mother
In some dear lineament.

DON CAESAR.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Her image looks
From thine, and wondrous in my bosom wakes
Affection's springs.

DON MANUEL.

And is it thou? that smile
Benignant on thy face? thy lips that charm
With gracious sounds of love and dear forgiveness?

DON CAESAR.
Is this my brother, this the hated foe?
His mien all gentleness and truth, his voice,
Whose soft prevailing accents breathe of friendship!

[After a pause.

DON MANUEL.
Shall aught divide us?

DON CAESAR.

We are one forever!

[They rush into each other's arms.

First CHORUS (to the Second).

Why stand we thus, and coldly gaze,
While Nature's holy transports burn?
No dear embrace of happier days
The pledge that discord never shall return!
Brothers are they by kindred band;
We own the ties of home and native land.

[Both CHORUSES embrace.

A MESSENGER enters.

Second CHORUS to DON CAESAR (BOHEMUND).
Rejoice, my prince, thy messenger returns

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

And mark that beaming smile! the harbinger
Of happy tidings.

MESSENGER.

Health to me, and health
To this delivered state! Oh sight of bliss,
That lights mine eyes with rapture! I behold
Their hands in sweet accord entwined; the sons
Of my departed lord, the princely pair
Dissevered late by conflict's hottest rage.

DON CAESAR.

Yes, from the flames of hate, a new-born Phoenix,
Our love aspires!

MESSENGER.

I bring another joy;
My staff is green with flourishing shoots.

DON CAESAR (taking him aside).

Oh, tell me
Thy gladsome message.

MESSENGER.

All is happiness
On this auspicious day; long sought, the lost one
Is found.

DON CAESAR.

Discovered! Oh, where is she? Speak!

MESSENGER.

Within Messina's walls she lies concealed.

DON MANUEL (turning to the First SEMI-CHORUS).

A ruddy glow mounts in my brother's cheek,
And pleasure dances in his sparkling eye;
Whate'er the spring, with sympathy of love
My inmost heart partakes his joy.

DON CAESAR (to the MESSENGER).

Come, lead me;
Farewell, Don Manuel; to meet again
Enfolded in a mother's arms! I fly
To cares of utmost need.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

[He is about to depart.

DON MANUEL.

Make no delay;
And happiness attend thee!

DON CAESAR (after a pause of reflection, he returns).

How thy looks
Awake my soul to transport! Yes, my brother,
We shall be friends indeed! This hour is bright
With glad presage of ever-springing love,
That in the enlivening beam shall flourish fair,
Sweet recompense of wasted years!

DON MANUEL.

The blossom
Betokens goodly fruit.

DON CAESAR.

I tear myself
Reluctant from thy arms, but think not less
If thus I break this festal hour my heart
Thrills with a holy joy.

DON MANUEL (with manifest absence of mind).

Obey the moment!
Our lives belong to love.

DON CESAR.

What calls me hence

DON MANUEL.
Enough! thou leav'st thy heart.

DON CAESAR.

No envious secret
Shall part us long; soon the last darkening fold
Shall vanish from my breast.

[Turning to the CHORUS.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Attend! Forever

Stilled is our strife; he is my deadliest foe,
Detested as the gates of hell, who dares
To blow the fires of discord; none may hope
To win my love, that with malicious tales
Encroach upon a brother's ear, and point
With busy zeal of false, officious friendship.
The dart of some rash, angry word, escaped
From passion's heat; it wounds not from the lips,
But, swallowed by suspicion's greedy ear,
Like a rank, poisonous weed, embittered creeps,
And hangs about her with a thousand shoots,
Perplexing nature's ties.

[He embraces his brother again, and goes away

accompanied by the Second CHORUS.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Wondering, my prince,

I gaze, for in thy looks some mystery
Strange—seeming shows: scarce with abstracted mien
And cold thou answered'st, when with earnest heart
Thy brother poured the strain of dear affection.
As in a dream thou stand'st, and lost in thought,
As though dissevered from its earthly frame
Thy spirit roved afar. Not thine the breast
That deaf to nature's voice, ne'er owned the throbs
Of kindred love: nay more like one entranced
In bliss, thou look'st around, and smiles of rapture
Play on thy cheek.

DON MANUEL.

How shall my lips declare

The transports of my swelling heart? My brother
Revels in glad surprise, and from his breast
Instinct with strange new—felt emotions, pours
The tide of joy; but mine no hate came with me,
Forgot the very spring of mutual strife!
High o'er this earthly sphere, on rapture's wings,
My spirit floats; and in the azure sea,
Above beneath no track of envious night
Disturbs the deep serene! I view these halls,
And picture to my thoughts the timid joy
Of my sweet bride, as through the palace gates,
In pride of queenly state, I lead her home.
She loved alone the loving one, the stranger,

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

And little deems that on her beauteous brow
Messina's prince shall 'twine the nuptial wreath.
How sweet, with unexpected pomp of greatness,
To glad the darling of my soul! too long
I brook this dull delay of crowning bliss!
Her beauty's self, that asks no borrowed charm,
Shall shine refulgent, like the diamond's blaze
That wins new lustre from the circling gold!

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Long have I marked thee, prince, with curious eye,
Foreboding of some mystery deep enshrined
Within thy laboring breast. This day, impatient,
Thy lips have burst the seal; and unconstrained
Confess a lover's joy; the gladdening chase,
The Olympian coursers, and the falcon's flight
Can charm no more: soon as the sun declines
Beneath the ruddy west, thou hiest thee quick
To some sequestered path, of mortal eye
Unseen not one of all our faithful train
Companion of thy solitary way.
Say, why so long concealed the blissful flame?
Stranger to fear ill-brooked thy princely heart
One thought unuttered.

DON MANUEL.

Ever on the wing
Is mortal joy; with silence best we guard
The fickle good; but now, so near the goal
Of all my cherished hopes, I dare to speak.
To-morrow's sun shall see her mine! no power
Of hell can make us twain! With timid stealth
No longer will I creep at dusky eve,
To taste the golden fruits of Cupid's tree,
And snatch a fearful, fleeting bliss: to-day
With bright to-morrow shall be one! So smooth
As runs the limpid brook, or silvery sand
That marks the flight of time, our lives shall flow
In continuity of joy!

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Already
Our hearts, my prince, with silent vows have blessed
Thy happy love; and now from every tongue,
For her the royal, beauteous bride should sound
The glad acclaim; so tell what nook unseen,
What deep umbrageous solitude, enshrines
The charmer of thy heart? With magic spells
Almost I deem she mocks our gaze, for oft

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

In eager chase we scour each rustic path
And forest dell; yet not a trace betrayed
The lover's haunts, ne'er were the footsteps marked
Of this mysterious fair.

DON MANUEL.

The spell is broke!
And all shall be revealed: now list my tale:
'Tis five months flown, my father yet controlled
The land, and bowed our necks with iron sway;
Little I knew but the wild joys of arms,
And mimic warfare of the chase;

One day,
Long had we tracked the boar with zealous toil
On yonder woody ridge: it chanced, pursuing
A snow-white hind, far from your train I roved
Amid the forest maze; the timid beast,
Along the windings of the narrow vale,
Through rocky cleft and thick-entangled brake,
Flew onward, scarce a moment lost, nor distant
Beyond a javelin's throw; nearer I came not,
Nor took an aim; when through a garden's gate,
Sudden she vanished: from my horse quick springing,
I followed: lo! the poor scared creature lay
Stretched at the feet of a young, beauteous nun,
That strove with fond caress of her fair hands
To still its throbbing heart: wondering, I gazed;
And motionless my spear, in act to strike,
High poised while she, with her large piteous eyes
For mercy sued and thus we stood in silence
Regarding one another.

How long the pause
I know not time itself forgot; it seemed
Eternity of bliss: her glance of sweetness
Flew to my soul; and quick the subtle flame
Pervaded all my heart:

But what I spoke,
And how this blessed creature answered, none
May ask; it floats upon my thought, a dream
Of childhood's happy dawn! Soon as my sense
Returned, I felt her bosom throb responsive
To mine, then fell melodious on my ear
The sound, as of a convent bell, that called
To vesper song; and, like some shadowy vision
That melts in air, she flitted from my sight,
And was beheld no more.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Thy story thrills
My breast with pious awe! Prince, thou hast robbed
The sanctuary, and for the bride of heaven
Burned with unholy passion! Oh, remember
The cloister's sacred vows!

DON MANUEL.

Thenceforth one path
My footsteps wooed; the fickle train was still
Of young desires new felt my being's aim,
My soul revealed! and as the pilgrim turns
His wistful gaze, where, from the orient sky,
With gracious lustre beams Redemption's star;
So to that brightest point of heaven, her presence,
My hopes and longings centred all. No sun
Sank in the western waves, but smiled farewell
To two united lovers: thus in stillness
Our hearts were twined, the all-seeing air above us
Alone the faithful witness of our joys!
Oh, golden hours! Oh, happy days! nor Heaven
Indignant viewed our bliss; no vows enchained
Her spotless soul; naught but the link which bound it
Eternally to mine!

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Those hallowed walls,
Perchance the calm retreat of tender youth,
No living grave?

DON MANUEL.

In infant innocence
Consigned a holy pledge, ne'er has she left
Her cloistered home.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

But what her royal line?
The noble only spring from noble stem.

DON MANUEL.

A secret to herself, she ne'er has learned
Her name or fatherland.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

And not a trace

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Guides to her being's undiscovered springs?

DON MANUEL.

An old domestic, the sole messenger
Sent by her unknown mother, oft bespeaks her
Of kingly race.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

And hast thou won naught else
From her garrulous age?

DON MANUEL.

Too much I feared to peril
My secret bliss!

Chorus (CAJETAN).

What were his words? What tidings
He bore perchance thou know'st.

DON MANUEL.

Oft he has cheered her
With promise of a happier time, when all
Shall be revealed.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Oh, say betokens aught
The time is near?

DON MANUEL.

Not distant far the day
That to the arms of kindred love once more
Shall give the long forsaken, orphaned maid
Thus with mysterious words the aged man
Has shadowed oft what most I dread for awe
Of change disturbs the soul supremely blest:
Nay, more; but yesterday his message spoke
The end of all my joys this very dawn,
He told, should smile auspicious on her fate,
And light to other scenes no precious hour
Delayed my quick resolves by night I bore her
In secret to Messina.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Rash the deed

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Of sacrilegious spoil! forgive, my prince,
The bold rebuke; thus to unthinking youth
Old age may speak in friendship's warning voice.

DON MANUEL.

Hard by the convent of the Carmelites,
In a sequestered garden's tranquil bound,
And safe from curious eyes, I left her, hastening
To meet my brother: trembling there she counts
The slow-paced hours, nor deems how soon triumphant
In queenly state, high on the throne of fame,
Messina shall behold my timid bride.
For next, encompassed by your knightly train,
With pomp of greatness in the festal show,
Her lover's form shall meet her wondering gaze!
Thus will I lead her to my mother; thus
While countless thousands on her passage wait
Amid the loud acclaim the royal bride
Shall reach my palace gates!

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Command us, prince,
We live but to obey!

DON MANUEL.

I tore myself
Reluctant from her arms; my every thought
Shall still be hers: so come along, my friends,
To where the turbaned merchant spreads his store
Of fabrics golden wrought with curious art;
And all the gathered wealth of eastern climes.
First choose the well-formed sandals meet to guard
And grace her delicate feet; then for her robe
The tissue, pure as Etna's snow that lies
Nearest the sun-light as the wreathy mist
At summer dawn so playful let it float
About her airy limbs. A girdle next,
Purple with gold embroidered o'er, to bind
With witching grace the tunic that confines
Her bosom's swelling charms: of silk the mantle,
Gorgeous with like empurpled hues, and fixed
With clasp of gold remember, too, the bracelets
To gird her beauteous arms; nor leave the treasure
Of ocean's pearly deeps and coral caves.
About her locks entwine a diadem
Of purest gems the ruby's fiery glow
Commingling with the emerald's green. A veil,
From her tiara pendent to her feet,
Like a bright fleecy cloud shall circle round

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Her slender form; and let a myrtle wreath
Crown the enchanting whole!

Chorus (CAJETAN).

We haste, my prince.
Amid the Bazar's glittering rows, to cull
Each rich adornment.

DON MANUEL.

From my stables lead
A palfrey, milk-white as the steeds that draw
The chariot of the sun; purple the housings,
The bridle sparkling o'er with precious gems,
For it shall bear my queen! Yourselves be ready
With trumpet's cheerful clang, in martial train
To lead your mistress home: let two attend me,
The rest await my quick return; and each
Guard well my secret purpose.

[He goes away accompanied by two of the CHORUS.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

The princely strife is o'er, and say,
What sport shall wing the slow-paced hours,
And cheat the tedious day?
With hope and fear's enlivening zest
Disturb the slumber of the breast,
And wake life's dull, untroubled sea
With freshening airs of gay variety.

One of the Chorus (MANFRED).

Lovely is peace! A beauteous boy,
Couched listless by the rivulet's glassy tide,
'Mid nature's tranquil scene,

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

He views the lambs that skip with innocent joy,
And crop the meadow's flowering pride:
Then with his flute's enchanting sound,
He wakes the mountain echoes round,
Or slumbers in the sunset's ruddy sheen,
Lulled by the murmuring melody.
But war for me! my spirit's treasure,
Its, stern delight, and wilder pleasure:
I love the peril and the pain,
And revel in the surge of fortune's boisterous main!

A second (BERENGAR).

Is there not love, and beauty's smile
That lures with soft, resistless wile?
'Tis thrilling hope! 'tis rapturous fear
'Tis heaven upon this mortal sphere;
When at her feet we bend the knee,
And own the glance of kindred ecstasy
For ever on life's checkered way,
'Tis love that tints the darkening hues of care
With soft benignant ray:
The mirthful daughter of the wave,
Celestial Venus ever fair,
Enchants our happy spring with fancy's gleam,
And wakes the airy forms of passion's golden dream.

The Bride of Messina (play)

First (MANFRED).

To the wild woods away!

Quick let us follow in the train

Of her, chaste huntress of the silver bow;

And from the rocks amain

Track through the forest gloom the bounding roe,

The war-god's merry bride,

The chase recalls the battle's fray,

And kindles victory's pride:

Up with the streaks of early morn,

We scour with jocund hearts the misty vale,

Loud echoing to the cheerful horn

Over mountain over dale

And every languid sense repair,

Bathed in the rushing streams of cold, reviving air.

Second (BERENGAR).

Or shall we trust the ever-moving sea,

The azure goddess, blithe and free.

Whose face, the mirror of the cloudless sky,

Lures to her bosom wooingly?

Quick let us build on the dancing waves

A floating castle gay,

And merrily, merrily, swim away!

Who ploughs with venturous keel the brine

The Bride of Messina (play)

Of the ocean crystalline
His bride is fortune, the world his own,
For him a harvest blooms unsown:
Here, like the wind that swift careers
The circling bound of earth and sky,
Flits ever—changeful destiny!
Of airy chance 'tis the sportive reign,
And hope ever broods on the boundless main

A third (CAJETAN).

Nor on the watery waste alone
Of the tumultuous, heaving sea;
On the firm earth that sleeps secure,
Based on the pillars of eternity.
Say, when shall mortal joy endure?
New bodings in my anxious breast,
Waked by this sudden friendship, rise;
Ne'er would I choose my home of rest
On the stilled lava—stream, that cold
Beneath the mountain lies
Not thus was discord's flame controlled
Too deep the rooted hate too long
They brooded in their sullen hearts
O'er unforgotten, treasured wrong. In warning visions oft dismayed,
I read the signs of coming woe;

The Bride of Messina (play)

And now from this mysterious maid

My bosom tells the dreaded ills shall flow:

Unblest, I deem, the bridal chain

Shall knit their secret loves, accursed

With holy cloisters' spoil profane.

No crooked paths to virtue lead;

Ill fruit has ever sprung from evil seed!

BERENGAR.

And thus to sad unhallowed rites
Of an ill-omened nuptial tie,
Too well ye know their father bore
A bride of mournful destiny,
Torn from his sire, whose awful curse has sped
Heaven's vengeance on the impious bed!
This fierce, unnatural rage atones
A parent's crime decreed by fate,
Their mother's offspring, strife and hate!

[The scene changes to a garden opening on the sea.

BEATRICE (steps forward from an alcove. She walks to and fro with an

agitated air, looking round in every direction. Suddenly she

stands still and listens).

No! 'tis not he: 'twas but the playful wind
Rustling the pine-tops. To his ocean bed
The sun declines, and with o'erwearied heart
I count the lagging hours: an icy chill
Creeps through my frame; the very solitude
And awful silence fright my trembling soul!
Where'er I turn naught meets my gaze he leaves me
Forsaken and alone!
And like a rushing stream the city's hum
Floats on the breeze, and dull the mighty sea
Rolls murmuring to the rocks: I shrink to nothing
With horrors compassed round; and like the leaf,
Borne on the autumn blast, am hurried onward
Through boundless space.

Alas! that e'er I left
My peaceful cell no cares, no fond desires
Disturbed my breast, unruffled as the stream

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

That glides in sunshine through the verdant mead:
Nor poor in joys. Now on the mighty surge
Of fortune, tempest-tossed the world enfolds me
With giant arms! Forgot my childhood's ties
I listened to the lover's flattering tale
Listened, and trusted! From the sacred dome
Allured betrayed for sure some hell-born magic
Enchained my frenzied sense I fled with him,
The invader of religion's dread abodes!
Where art thou, my beloved? Haste return
With thy dear presence calm my struggling soul!

[She listens.

Hark! the sweet voice! No! 'twas the echoing surge
That beats upon the shore; alas! he comes not.
More faintly, o'er the distant waves, the sun
Gleams with expiring ray; a deathlike shudder
Creeps to my heart, and sadder, drearier grows
E'en desolation's self.

[She walks to and fro, and then listens again.

Yes! from the thicket shade
A voice resounds! 'tis he! the loved one!
No fond illusion mocks my listening ear.
'Tis louder nearer: to his arms I fly
To his breast!

[She rushes with outstretched arms to the extremity
of the garden. DON CAESAR meets her.

DON CASAR. BEATRICE.

BEATRICE (starting back in horror)
What do I see?

[At the same moment the Chorus comes forward.

DON CAESAR.

Angelic sweetness! fear not.

[To the Chorus.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Retire! your gleaming arms and rude array
Affright the timorous maid.

[To BEATRICE.

Fear nothing! beauty
And virgin shame are sacred in my eyes.

[The Chorus steps aside. He approaches and takes her hand.

Where hast thou been? for sure some envious power
Has hid thee from my gaze: long have I sought thee:
E'en from the hour when 'mid the funeral rites
Of the dead prince, like some angelic vision,
Lit with celestial brightness, on my sight
Thou shonest, no other image in my breast
Waking or dreaming, lives; nor to thyself
Unknown thy potent spells; my glance of fire,
My faltering accents, and my hand that lay
Trembling in thine, bespoke my ecstasy!
Aught else with solemn majesty the rite
And holy place forbade:

The bell proclaimed
The awful sacrifice! With downcast eyes,
And kneeling I adored: soon as I rose,
And caught with eager gaze thy form again,
Sudden it vanished; yet, with mighty magic
Of love enchained, my spirit tracked thy presence;
Nor ever, with unwearied quest, I cease
At palace gates, amid the temple's throng,
In secret paths retired, or public scenes,
Where beauteous innocence perchance might rove,
To mark each passing form in vain; but, guided
By some propitious deity this day
One of my train, with happy vigilance,
Espied thee in the neighboring church.

[BEATRICE, who had stood trembling with averted eyes,

here makes a gesture of terror.

I see thee
Once more; and may the spirit from this frame
Be severed ere we part! Now let me snatch
This glad, auspicious moment, and defy
Or chance, or envious demon's power, to shake
Henceforth my solid bliss; here I proclaim thee,

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Before this listening warlike train my bride,
With pledge of knightly honors!

[He shows her to the Chorus.

Who thou art,
I ask not: thou art mine! But that thy soul
And birth are pure alike one glance informed
My inmost heart; and though thy lot were mean,
And poor thy lowly state, yet would I strain thee
With rapture to my arms: no choice remains,
Thou art my love my wife! Know too, that lifted
On fortune's height, I spurn control; my will
Can raise thee to the pinnacle of greatness
Enough my name I am Don Caesar! None
Is nobler in Messina!

[BEATRICE starts back in amazement. He remarks her agitation,
and after a pause continues.

What a grace
Lives in thy soft surprise and modest silence!
Yes! gentle humbleness is beauty's crown
The beautiful forever hid, and shrinking
From its own lustre: but thy spirit needs
Repose, for aught of strange e'en sudden joy
Is terror-fraught. I leave thee.

[Turning to the Chorus.

From this hour
She is your mistress, and my bride; so teach her
With honors due to entertain the pomp
Of queenly state. I will return with speed,
And lead her home as fits Messina's princess.

[He goes away.

BEATRICE and the Chorus.

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Fair maiden hail to thee

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Thou lovely queen!

Thine is the crown, and thine the victory!

Of heroes to a distant age,

The blooming mother thou shalt shine,

Preserver of this kingly line.

(ROGER).

And thrice I bid thee hail,

Thou happy fair!

Sent in auspicious hour to bless

This favored race the god's peculiar care.

Here twine the immortal wreaths of fame

And evermore, from sire to son,

Rolls on the sceptered sway,

To heirs of old renown, a race of deathless name!

(BOHEMUND).

The household gods exultingly

Thy coming wait;

The ancient, honored sires,

That on the portals frown sedate,

Shall smile for thee!

There blooming Hebe shall thy steps attend;

And golden victory, that sits

By Jove's eternal throne, with waving plumes

The Bride of Messina (play)

For conquest ever spread,
To welcome thee from heaven descend.

(ROGER.)

Ne'er from this queenly, bright array
The crown of beauty fades,
Departing to the realms of day,
Each to the next, as good and fair,
Extends the zone of feminine grace,
And veil of purity:
Oh, happy race!
What vision glads my raptured eye!
Equal in nature's blooming pride,
I see the mother and the virgin bride.

BEATRICE (awaking from her reverie).

Oh, luckless hour!
Alas! ill-fated maid!
Where shall I fly
From these rude warlike men?
Lost and betrayed!
A shudder o'er me came,
When of this race accursed the brothers twain
Their hands embrued with kindred gore,
I heard the dreaded name;
Oft told, their strife and serpent hate

The Bride of Messina (play)

With terror thrilled lay bosom's core:

And now oh, hapless fate!

I tremble, 'mid the rage of discord thrown,

Deserted and alone!

[She runs into the alcove.

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Son of the immortal deities,

And blest is he, the lord of power;

His every joy the world can give;

Of all that mortals prize

He culls the flower.

(ROGER).

For him from ocean's azure caves

The diver bears each pearl of purest ray;

Whate'er from nature's boundless field

Or toil or art has won,

Obsequious at his feet we lay;

His choice is ever free;

We bow to chance, and fortune's blind decree.

(BOHEMUND.)

But this of princes' lot I deem

The crowning treasure, joy supreme

The Bride of Messina (play)

Of love the triumph and the prize,
The beauty, star of neighboring eyes!
She blooms for him alone,
He calls the fairest maid his own.

(ROGER).

Armed for the deadly fray,
The corsair bounds upon the strand,
And drags, amid the gloom of night, away,
The shrieking captive train,
Of wild desires the hapless prey;
But ne'er his lawless hands profane
The gem the peerless flower
Whose charms shall deck the Sultan's bower.

(BOHEMUND.)

Now haste and watch, with curious eye,
These hallowed precincts round,
That no presumptuous foot come nigh
The secret, solitary ground
Guard well the maiden fair,
Your chieftain's brightest jewel owns your care.

[The Chorus withdraws to the background.]

[The scene changes to a chamber in the interior of the palace.]

DONNA ISABELLA between DON MANUEL and DON CAESAR.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA.

The long-expected, festal day is come,
My children's hearts are twined in one, as thus
I fold their hands. Oh, blissful hour, when first
A mother dares to speak in nature's voice,
And no rude presence checks the tide of love.
The clang of arms affrights mine ear no more;
And as the owls, ill-omened brood of night,
From some old, shattered homestead's ruined walls,
Their ancient reign, fly forth a dusky swarm,
Darkening the cheerful day; when absent long,
The dwellers home return with joyous shouts,
To build the pile anew; so Hate departs
With all his grisly train; pale Envy, scowling Malice,
And hollow-eyed Suspicion; from our gates,
Hoarse murmuring, to the realms of night; while Peace,
By Concord and fair Friendship led along,
Comes smiling in his place.

[She pauses.

But not alone

This day of joy to each restores a brother;
It brings a sister! Wonderstruck you gaze!
Yet now the truth, in silence guarded long,
Bursts from my soul. Attend! I have a daughter!
A sister lives, ordained by heaven to bind ye
With ties unknown before.

DON CAESAR.

We have a sister!

What hast thou said, my mother? never told
Her being till this hour!

DON MANUEL.

In childhood's years,

Oft of a sister we have heard, untimely
Snatched in her cradle by remorseless death;
So ran the tale.

ISABELLA.

She lives!

DON CAESAR.

And thou wert silent!

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA.

Hear how the seed was sown in early time,
That now shall ripen to a joyful harvest.
Ye bloomed in boyhood's tender age; e'en then
By mutual, deadly hate, the bitter spring
Of grief to this torn, anxious heart, dissevered;
Oh, may your strife return no more! A vision,
Strange and mysterious, in your father's breast
Woke dire presage: it seemed that from his couch,
With branches intertwined, two laurels grew,
And in the midst a lily all in flames,
That, catching swift the boughs and knotted stems,
Burst forth with crackling rage, and o'er the house
Spread in one mighty sea of fire: perplexed
By this terrific dream, my husband sought
An Arab, skilled to read the stars, and long
The trusted oracle, whose counsels swayed
His inmost purpose: thus the boding sage
Spoke Fate's decrees: if I a daughter bore,
Destruction to his sons and all his race
From her should spring. Soon, by heaven's will, this child
Of dreadful omen saw the light; your sire
Commanded instant in the waves to throw
The new-born innocent; a mother's love
Prevailed, and, aided by a faithful servant,
I snatched the babe from death.

DON CAESAR.

Blest be the hands
The ministers of thy care! Oh, ever rich
Of counsels was a parent's love!

ISABELLA.

But more
Than Nature's mighty voice, a warning dream
Impelled to save my child: while yet unborn
She slumbered in my womb, sleeping I saw
An infant, fair as of celestial kind,
That played upon the grass; soon from the wood
A lion rushed, and from his gory jaws,
Caressing, in the infant's lap let fall
His prey, new-caught; then through the air down swept
An eagle, and with fond caress alike
Dropped from his claws a trembling kid, and both
Cowered at the infant's feet, a gentle pair.
A monk, the saintly guide whose counsels poured
In every earthly need, the balm of heaven
Upon my troubled soul, my dream resolved.
Thus spoke the man of God: a daughter, sent

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

To knit the warring spirits of my sons
In bonds of tender love, should recompense
A mother's pains! Deep in my heart I treasured
His words, and, reckless of the Pagan seer,
Preserved the blessed child, ordained of heaven
To still your growing strife; sweet pledge of hope
And messenger of peace!

DON MANUEL (embracing his brother).

There needs no sister
To join our hearts; she shall but bind them closer.

ISABELLA.

In a lone spot obscure, by stranger hands
Nurtured, the secret flower has grown; to me
Denied the joy to mark each infant charm
And opening grace from that sad hour of parting;
These arms ne'er clasped my child again! her sire,
To jealousy's corroding fears a prey,
And brooding dark suspicion, restless tracked
Each day my steps.

DON CAESAR.

Yet three months flown, my father
Sleeps in the tranquil grave; say, whence delayed
The joyous tidings? Why so long concealed
The maid, nor earlier taught our hearts to glow
With brother's love?

ISABELLA.

The cause, your frenzied hate,
That raging unconfined, e'en on the tomb
Of your scarce buried father, lit the flames
Of mortal strife. What! could I throw my daughter
Betwixt your gleaming blades? Or 'mid the storm
Of passion would ye list a woman's counsels?
Could she, sweet pledge of peace, of all our hopes
The last and holy anchor, 'mid the rage
Of discord find a home? Ye stand as brothers,
So will I give a sister to your arms!
The reconciling angel comes; each hour
I wait my messenger's return; he leads her
From her sequestered cell, to glad once more
A mother's eyes.

DON MANUEL.

Nor her alone this day

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Thy arms shall fold; joy pours through all our gates;
Soon shall the desolate halls be full, the seat
Of every blooming grace. Now hear my secret:
A sister thou hast given; to thee I bring
A daughter; bless thy son! My heart has found
Its lasting shrine: ere this day's sun has set
Don Manuel to thy feet shall lead his bride,
The partner of his days.

ISABELLA.

And to my breast
With transport will I clasp the chosen maid
That makes my first-born happy. Joy shall spring
Where'er she treads, and every flower that blooms
Around the path of life smile in her presence!
May bliss reward the son, that for my brows
Has twined the choicest wreath a mother wears.

DON CAESAR.

Yet give not all the fulness of thy blessing
To him, thy eldest born. If love be blest,
I, too, can give thee joy. I bring a daughter,
Another flower for thy most treasured garland!
The maid that in this ice-cold bosom first
Awoke the rapturous flame! Ere yonder sun
Declines, Don Caesar's bride shall call thee mother.

DON MANUEL.

Almighty Love! thou godlike power for well
We call thee sovereign of the breast! Thy sway
Controls each warring element, and tunes
To soft accord; naught lives but owns thy greatness.
Lo! the rude soul that long defied thee melts
At thy command!

[He embraces DON CAESAR.]

Now I can trust thy heart,
And joyful strain thee to a brother's arms!
I doubt thy faith no more, for thou canst love!

ISABELLA.

Thrice blest the day, when every gloomy care
From my o'erlabored breast has flown. I see
On steadfast columns reared our kingly race,
And with contented spirit track the stream
Of measureless time. In these deserted halls,
Sad in my widow's veil, but yesterday
Childless I roamed; and soon, in youthful charms
Arrayed, three blooming daughters at my side

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Shall stand! Oh, happiest mother! Chief of women,
In bliss supreme; can aught of earthly joy
O'erbalance thine?

But say, of royal stem,
What maidens grace our isle? For ne'er my sons
Would stoop to meaner brides.

DON MANUEL.

Seek not to raise
The veil that hides my bliss; another day
Shall tell thee all. Enough Don Manuel's bride
Is worthy of thy son and thee.

ISABELLA.

Thy sire
Speaks in thy words; thus to himself retired
Forever would he brood o'er counsels dark,
And cloak his secret purpose; your delay
Be short, my son.

[Turning to DON CAESAR.

But thou some royal maid,
Daughter of kings, hath stirred thy soul to love;
So speak her name

DON CAESAR.

I have no art to veil
My thoughts with mystery's garb my spirit free
And open as my brows; which thou wouldst know
Concerned me never. What illumines above
Heaven's flaming orb? Himself! On all the world
He shines, and with his beaming glory tells
From light he sprung: in her pure eyes I gazed,
I looked into her heart of hearts: the brightness
Revealed the pearl. Her race her name my mother,
Ask not of me!

ISABELLA.

My son, explain thy words,
For, like some voice divine, the sudden charm
Has thrall'd thy soul: to deeds of rash emprise
Thy nature prompted, not to fantasies
Of boyish love: tell me, what swayed thy choice?

DON CAESAR.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

My choice? my mother! Is it choice when man
Obeys the might of destiny, that brings
The awful hour? I sought no beauteous bride,
No fond delusion stirred my tranquil breast,
Still as the house of death; for there, unsought,
I found the treasure of my soul. Thou know'st
That, heedless ever of the giddy race,
I looked on beauty's charms with cold disdain,
Nor deemed of womankind there lived another
Like thee whom my idolatrous fancy decked
With heavenly graces:

'Twas the solemn rite
Of my dead father's obsequies; we stood
Amid the countless throng, with strange attire
Hid from each other's glance; for thus ordained
Thy thoughtful care lest with outbursting rage,
E' en by the holy place unawed, our strife
Should mar the funeral pomp.

With sable gauze
The nave was all o'erhung; the altar round
Stood twenty giant saints, uplifting each
A torch; and in the midst reposed on high
The coffin, with o'erspreading pall, that showed,
In white, redemption's sign; thereon were laid
The staff of sovereignty, the princely crown,
The golden spurs of knighthood, and the sword,
With diamond-studded belt:

And all was hushed
In silent prayer, when from the lofty choir,
Unseen, the pealing organ spoke, and loud
From hundred voices burst the choral strain!
Then, 'mid the tide of song, the coffin sank
With the descending floor beneath, forever
Down to the world below: but, wide outspread
Above the yawning grave, the pall upheld
The gauds of earthly state, nor with the corpse
To darkness fell; yet on the seraph wings
Of harmony, the enfranchised spirit soared
To heaven and mercy's throne:

Thus to thy thought,
My mother, I have waked the scene anew,
And say, if aught of passion in my breast
Profaned the solemn hour; yet then the beams
Of mighty love so willed my guiding star
First lit my soul; but how it chanced, myself
I ask in vain.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA.

I would hear all; so end
Thy tale.

DON CAESAR.

What brought her to my side, or whence
She came, I know not: from her presence quick
Some secret all-pervading inward charm
Awoke; 'twas not the magic of a smile,
Nor playful Cupid in her cheeks, nor more,
The form of peerless grace; 'twas beauty's soul,
The speaking virtue, modesty inborn,
That as with magic spells, impalpable
To sense, my being thrall'd. We breathed together
The air of heaven: enough! no utterance asked
Of words, our spiritual converse; in my heart,
Though strange, yet with familiar ties inwrought
She seemed, and instant spake the thought 'tis she!
Or none that lives!

DON MANUEL (interposing with eagerness).

That is the sacred fire
From heaven! the spark of love that on the soul
Bursts like the lightning's flash, and mounts in flame,
When kindred bosoms meet! No choice remains
Who shall resist? What mortal break the band
That heaven has knit? Brother, my blissful fortune
Was echoed in thy tale well thou hast raised
The veil that shadows yet my secret love.

ISABELLA.

Thus destiny has marked the wayward course
Of my two sons: the mighty torrent sweeps
Down from the precipice; with rage he wears
His proper bed, nor heeds the channel traced
By art and prudent care. So to the powers
That darkly sway the fortunes of our house,
Trembling I yield. One pledge of hope remains;
Great as their birth their noble souls.

ISABELLA, DON MANUEL, DON CAESAR.

DIEGO is seen at the door.

ISABELLA.

But see,

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

My faithful messenger returns. Come near me,
Honest Diego. Quick! Where is she? Tell me,
Where is my child? There is no secret here.
Oh, speak! No longer from my eyes conceal her;
Come! we are ready for the height of joy.

[She is about to lead him towards the door.

What means this pause? Thou lingerest thou art dumb
Thy looks are terror—fraught a shudder creeps
Through all my frame declare thy tidings! speak!
Where is she? Where is Beatrice?

[She is about to rush from the chamber.

DON MANUEL (to himself abstractedly).

Beatrice!

DIEGO (holding back the PRINCESS).

Be still!

ISABELLA.
Where is she? Anguish tears my breast!

DIEGO.

She comes not.
I bring no daughter to thy arms.

ISABELLA.

Declare
Thy message! Speak! by all the saints!
What has befallen?

DON MANUEL.

Where is my sister? Tell us,
Thou harbinger of ill!

DIEGO.

The maid is stolen
By corsairs! lost! Oh! that I ne'er had seen
This day of woe!

DON MANUEL.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Compose thyself, my mother!

DON CAESAR.
Be calm; list all this tale.

DIEGO.

At thy command
I sought in haste the well-known path that leads
To the old sanctuary: joy winged my footsteps;
The journey was my last!

DON CAESAR.

Be brief!

DON MANUEL.

Proceed!

DIEGO.
Soon as I trod the convent's court impatient
I ask Where is thy daughter? Terror sate
In every eye; and straight, with horror mute,
I heard the worst.

[ISABELLA sinks, pale and trembling, upon a chair;

DON MANUEL is busied about her.

DON CAESAR.

Say'st thou by pirates stolen?
Who saw the band? what tongue relates the spoil?

DIEGO.
Not far a Moorish galley was descried,
At anchor in the bay

DON CAESAR.

The refuge oft
From tempests' rage; where is the bark?

DIEGO.

At down,
With favoring breeze she stood to sea.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

DON CAESAR.

But never
One prey contents the Moor; say, have they told
Of other spoil?

DIEGO.

A herd that pastured near
Was dragged away.

DON CAESAR.

Yet from the convent's bound
How tear the maid unseen?

DIEGO.

'Tis thought with ladders
They scaled the wall.

DON CAESAR.

Thou knowest what jealous care
Enshrines the bride of Heaven; scarce could their steps
Invade the secret cells.

DIEGO.

Bound by no vows
The maiden roved at will; oft would she seek
Alone the garden's shade. Alas! this day,
Ne'er to return!

DON CAESAR.

Saidst thou the prize of corsairs?
Perchance, at other bidding, she forsook
The sheltering dome

ISABELLA (rising suddenly).

'Twas force! 'twas savage spoil!
Ne'er has my child, reckless of honor's ties
With vile seducer fled! My sons! Awake!
I thought to give a sister to your arms;
I ask a daughter from your swords! Arise!
Avenge this wrong! To arms! Launch every ship!
Scour all our coasts! From sea to sea pursue them!
Oh, bring my daughter! haste!

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

DON CAESAR.

Farewell I fly
To vengeance!

[He goes away.

[DON MANUEL arouses himself from a state of abstraction,
and turns, with an air of agitation, to DIEGO.

DON MANUEL.

Speak! within the convent's walls
When first unseen

DIEGO.

This day at dawn.

DON MANUEL (to ISABELLA).

Her name
Thou say'st is Beatrice?

ISABELLA.

No question! Fly!
DON MANUEL.
Yet tell me

ISABELLA.

Haste! Begone! Why this delay?
Follow thy brother.

DON MANUEL.

I conjure thee speak

ISABELLA (dragging him away).
Behold my tears!

DON MANUEL.

Where was she hid? What region
Concealed my sister?

ISABELLA.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Scarce from curious eyes
In the deep bosom of the earth more safe
My child had been!

DIEGO.

Oh! now a sudden horror
Starts in my breast.

DON MANUEL.

What gives thee fear?

DIEGO.

'Twas I
That guiltless caused this woe!

ISABELLA.

Unhappy man!
What hast thou done?

DIEGO.

To spare thy mother's heart
One anxious pang, my mistress, I concealed
What now my lips shall tell: 'twas on the day
When thy dead husband in the silent tomb
Was laid; from every side the unnumbered throng
Pressed eager to the solemn rites; thy daughter
For e'en amid the cloistered shade was noised
The funeral pomp, urged me, with ceaseless prayers,
To lead her to the festival of Death.
In evil hour I gave consent; and, shrouded
In sable weeds of mourning, she surveyed
Her father's obsequies. With keen reproach
My bosom tells (for through the veil her charms
Resistless shone), 'twas there, perchance, the spoiler
Lurked to betray.

DON MANUEL (to himself).

Thrice happy words! I live!
It was another!

ISABELLA (to DIEGO).

Faithless! Ill betide
Thy treacherous age!

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

DIEGO.

Oh, never have I strayed
From duty's path! My mistress, in her prayers
I heard the voice of Nature; thus from Heaven
Ordained, methought, the secret impulse moves
Of kindred blood, to hallow with her tears
A father's grave: the tender office owned
Thy servant's care, and thus with good intent
I wrought but ill.

DON MANUEL (to himself).

Why stand I thus a prey
To torturing fears! No longer will I bear
The dread suspense –I will know all!

DON CAESAR (who returns).

Forgive me,
I follow thee.

DON MANUEL.

Away! Let no man follow.

[Exit.

DON CAESAR (looking after him in surprise).
What means my brother? Speak

ISABELLA.

In wonder lost
I gaze; some mystery lurks

DON CAESAR.

Thou mark'st, my mother,
My quick return; with eager zeal I flew
At thy command, nor asked one trace to guide
My footsteps to thy daughter. Whence was torn
Thy treasure? Say, what cloistered solitude
Enshrined the beauteous maid?

ISABELLA.

'Tis consecrate
To St. Cecilia; deep in forest shades,
Beyond the woody ridge that slowly climbs

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Toward's Etna's towering throne, it seems a refuge
Of parted souls!

DON CAESAR.

Have courage, trust thy sons;
She shall be thine, though with unwearied quest
O'er every land and sea I track her presence
To earth's extremest bounds: one thought alone
Disturbs, in stranger hands my timorous bride
Waits my return; to thy protecting arms
I give the pledge of all my joy! She comes;
Soon on her faithful bosom thou shalt rest
In sweet oblivion of thy cares.

[Exit.

ISABELLA.

When will the ancient curse be stilled that weighs
Upon our house? Some mocking demon sports
With every new-formed hope, nor envious leaves
One hour of joy. So near the haven smiled
So smooth the treacherous main secure I deemed
My happiness: the storm was lulled; and bright
In evening's lustre gleamed the sunny shore!
Then through the placid air the tempest sweeps,
And bears me to the roaring surge again!

[She goes into the interior of the palace,

followed by DIEGO.

The Scene changes to the Garden.

Both Choruses, afterwards BEATRICE.

The Chorus of DON MANUEL enters in solemn procession,
adorned with garlands, and bearing the bridal ornaments
above mentioned. The Chorus of DON CAESAR opposes their
entrance.

First Chorus (CAJETAN).
Begone!

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Not at thy bidding!

CAJETAN.

Seest thou not
Thy presence irks?

BOHEMUND.

Thou hast it, then, the longer!

CAJETAN.
My place is here! What arm repels me?

BOHEMUND,

Mine!

CAJETAN.
Don Manuel sent me hither.

BOHEMUND.

I obey
My Lord Don Caesar.

CAJETAN.

To the eldest born
Thy master reverence owes.

BOHEMUND.

The world belongs
To him that wins!

CAJETAN.

Unmannered knave, give place!

BOHEMUND.
Our swords be measured first!

CAJETAN.

I find thee ever
A serpent in my path.

BOHEMUND.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Where'er I list
Thus will I meet thee!

CAJETAN.

Say, why cam'st thou hither
To spy?

BOHEMUND.

And thou to question and command?

CAJETAN.
To parley I disdain!

BOHEMUND.

Too much I grace thee
By words!

CAJETAN.

Thy hot, impetuous youth should bow
To reverend age.

BOHEMUND.

Older thou art not braver.

BEATRICE (rushing from her place of concealment).
Alas! What mean these warlike men?

CAJETAN (to BOHEMUND).

I heed not
Thy threats and lofty mien.

BOHEMUND.

I serve a master
Better than thine.

BEATRICE.

Alas! Should he appear!

CAJETAN.
Thou liest! Don Manuel thousandfold excels.

BOHEMUND.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

In every strife the wreath of victory decks
Don Caesar's brows!

BEATRICE.

Now he will come! Already
The hour is past!

CAJETAN.

'Tis peace, or thou shouldst know
My vengeance!

BOHEMUND.

Fear, not peace, thy arm refrains.

BEATRICE.

Oh! Were he thousand miles remote!

CAJETAN.

Thy looks
But move my scorn; the compact I obey.

BOHEMUND.

The coward's ready shield!

CAJETAN.

Come on! I follow.

BOHEMUND.

To arms!

BEATRICE (in the greatest agitation).

Their falchions gleam the strife begins!
Ye heavenly powers, his steps refrain! Some snare
Throw round his feet, that in this hour of dread
He come not: all ye angels, late implored
To give him to my arms, reverse my prayers;
Far, far from hence convey the loved one!

[She runs into the alcove. At the moment when the two

Choruses are about to engage, DON MANUEL appears.

DON MANUEL, the Chorus.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

DON MANUEL.

What do I see!

First Chorus to the Second (CAJETAN, BERENGAR, MANFRED).

Come on! Come on!

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND, ROGER, HIPPOLYTE).

Down with them!

DON MANUEL (stepping between them with drawn sword).

Hold!

CAJETAN.

'Tis the prince!

BOHEMUND.

Be still!

DON MANUEL.

I stretch him dead

Upon this verdant turf that with one glance
Of scorn prolongs the strife, or threats his foe!
Why rage ye thus? What maddening fiend impels
To blow the flames of ancient hate anew,
Forever reconciled? Say, who began
The conflict? Speak

First Chorus (CAJETAN, BERENGAR).

My prince, we stood

Second Chorus (ROGER, BOHEMUND) interrupting them.

They came

DON MANUEL (to the First Chorus).

Speak thou!

First Chorus (CAJETAN).

With wreaths adorned, in festal train,
We bore the bridal gifts; no thought of ill
Disturbed our peaceful way; composed forever
With holy pledge of love we deemed your strife,
And trusting came; when here in rude array

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Of arms encamped they stood, and loud defied us!

DON MANUEL.

Slave! Is no refuge safe? Shall discord thus
Profane the bower of virgin innocence,
The home of sanctity and peace?

[To the Second Chorus.

Retire

Your warlike presence ill beseems; away!
I would be private.

[They hesitate.

In your master's name

I give command; our souls are one, our lips
Declare each other's thoughts; begone!

[To the First Chorus.

Remain!

And guard the entrance.

BOHEMUND.

So! What next? Our masters
Are reconciled; that's plain; and less he wins
Of thanks than peril, that with busy zeal
In princely quarrel stirs; for when of strife
His mightiness aweary feels, of guilt
He throws the red-dyed mantle unconcerned
On his poor follower's luckless head, and stands
Arrayed in virtue's robes! So let them end
E'en as they will their brawls, I hold it best
That we obey.

[Exit Second Chorus. The first withdraws to the

back of the stage; at the same moment BEATRICE rushes

forward, and throws herself into DON MANUEL'S arms.

BEATRICE.

'Tis thou! Ah! cruel one,
Again I see thee clasp thee long appalled,
To thousand ills a prey, trembling I languish
For thy return: no more in thy loved arms
I am at peace, nor think of dangers past,

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Thy breast my shield from every threatening harm.
Quick! Let us fly! they see us not! away!
Nor lose the moment.

Ha! Thy looks affright me!
Thy sullen, cold reserve! Thou tear'st thyself
Impatient from my circling arms, I know thee
No more! Is this Don Manuel? My beloved?
My husband?

DON MANUEL.

Beatrice!

BEATRICE.

No words! The moment
Is precious! Haste.

DON MANUEL.

Yet tell me

BEATRICE.

Quick! Away!
Ere those fierce men return.

DON MANUEL.

Be calm, for naught
Shall trouble thee of ill.

BEATRICE.

Oh, fly! alas,
Thou know'st them not!

DON MANUEL.

Protected by this arm
Canst thou fear aught?

BEATRICE.

Oh, trust me; mighty men
Are here!

DON MANUEL.

Beloved! mightier none than I!

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

BEATRICE.

And wouldst thou brave this warlike host alone?

DON MANUEL.

Alone! the men thou fear'st

BEATRICE.

Thou know'st them not,
Nor whom they serve.

DON MANUEL.

Myself! I am their lord!

BEATRICE.

Thou art a shudder creeps through all my frame!

DON MANUEL.

Far other than I seemed; learn at last
To know me, Beatrice. Not the poor knight
Am I, the stranger and unknown, that loving
Taught thee to love; but what I am my race
My power

BEATRICE.

And art thou not Don Manuel? Speak
Who art thou?

DON MANUEL.

Chief of all that bear the name,
I am Don Manuel, Prince of Messina!

BEATRICE.

Art thou Don Manuel, Don Caesar's brother?

DON MANUEL.

Don Caesar is my brother.

BEATRICE.

Is thy brother!

DON MANUEL.

What means this terror? Know'st thou, then, Don Caesar?
None other of my race?

BEATRICE.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Art thou Don Manuel,
That with thy brother liv'st in bitter strife
Of long inveterate hate?

DON MANUEL.

This very sun
Smiled on our glad accord! Yes, we are brothers!
Brothers in heart!

BEATRICE.

And reconciled? This day?

DON MANUEL.
What stirs this wild disorder? Hast thou known
Aught but our name? Say, hast thou told me all?
Is there no secret? Hast thou naught concealed?
Nothing disguised?

BEATRICE.

Thy words are dark; explain,
What shall I tell thee?

DON MANUEL.

Of thy mother naught
Hast thou e'er told; who is she? If in words
I paint her, bring her to thy sight

BEATRICE.

Thou know'st her!
And thou wert silent!

DON MANUEL.

If I know thy mother,
Horrors betide us both!

BEATRICE.

Oh, she is gracious
As the sun's orient beam! Yes! I behold her;
Fond memory wakes; and from my bosom's depths
Her godlike presence rises to my view!
I see around her snowy neck descend
The tresses of her raven hair, that shade
The form of sculptured loveliness; I see

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

The pale, high-thoughted brow; the darkening glance
Of her large lustrous orbs; I hear the tones
Of soul-fraught sweetness!

DON MANUEL.

'Tis herself!

BEATRICE.

This day,
Perchance had give me to her arms, and knit
Our souls in everlasting love; such bliss
I have renounced, yes! I have lost a mother
For thee!

DON MANUEL.

Console thyself, Messina's princess
Henceforth shall call thee daughter; to her feet
I lead thee; come she waits. What hast thou said?

BEATRICE.

Thy mother and Don Caesar's? Never! never!

DON MANUEL.

Thou shudderest! Whence this horror? Hast thou known
My mother? Speak

BEATRICE.

O grief! O dire misfortune!
Alas! that e'er I live to see this day!

DON MANUEL.

What troubles thee? Thou know'st me, thou hast found,
In the poor stranger knight, Messina's prince!

BEATRICE.

Give me the dear unknown again! With him
On earth's remotest wilds I could be blest!

DON CAESAR (behind the scene).

Away! What rabble throng is here?

BEATRICE.

That voice!
Oh heavens! Where shall I fly!

DON MANUEL.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Know'st thou that voice?
No! thou hast never heard it; to thine ear
'Tis strange

BEATRICE.

Oh, come delay not

DON MANUEL.

Wherefore I fly?
It is my brother's voice! He seeks me how
He tracked my steps

BEATRICE.

By all the holy saints!
Brave not his wrath! oh quit this place avoid him
Meet not thy brother here!

DON MANUEL.

My soul! thy fears
Confound; thou hear'st me not; our strife is o'er.
Yes! we are reconciled.

BEATRICE.

Protect me, heaven,
In this dread hour!

DON MANUEL.

A sudden dire presage
Starts in my breast I shudder at the thought:
If it be true! Oh, horror! Could she know
That voice! Wert thou my tongue denies to utter
The words of fearful import Beatrice!
Say, wert thou present at the funeral rites
Of my dead sire?

BEATRICE.

Alas!

DON MANUEL.

Thou wert!

BEATRICE.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Forgive me!

DON MANUEL.
Unhappy woman!

BEATRICE.

I was present!

DON MANUEL.

Horror!

BEATRICE.
Some mighty impulse urged me to the scene
Oh, be not angry to thyself I owned
The ardent fond desire; with darkening brow
Thou listened'st to my prayer, and I was silent,
But what misguiding inauspicious star
Allured, I know not; from my inmost soul
The wish, the dear emotion spoke; and vain
Aught else: Diego gave consent oh, pardon me!
I disobeyed thee.

[She advances towards him imploringly; at the same moment

DON CAESAR enters, accompanied by the whole Chorus.

BOTH BROTHERS, BOTH CHORUSES, BEATRICE.

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND) to DON CAESAR.

Thou heliev'st us not
Believe thine eyes!

DON CAESAR (rushes forward furiously, and at the sight of his brother
starts back with horror).

Some hell-born magic cheats
My senses; in her arms! Envenomed snake!
Is this thy love? For this thy treacherous heart
Could lure with guise of friendship! Oh, from heaven
Breathed my immortal hate! Down, down to hell,
Thou soul of falsehood!

[He stabs him, DON MANUEL falls.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

DON MANUEL.

Beatrice! my brother!
I die!

[Dies. BEATRICE sinks lifeless at his side.

First Chorus (CAJETAN).
Help! Help! To arms! Avenge with blood
The bloody deed!

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND).

The fortune of the day
Is ours! The strife forever stilled: Messina
Obeyes one lord.

First Chorus (CAJETAN, BERENGAR, MANFRED).

Revenge! The murderer
Shall die! Quick, offer to your master's shade
Appeasing sacrifice!

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND, ROGER, HIPPOLYTE).

My prince! fear nothing,
Thy friends are true.

DON CAESAR (steps between them, looking around).

Be still! The foe is slain
That practised on my trusting, honest heart
With snares of brother's love. Oh, direful shows
The deed of death! But righteous heaven hath judged.

First Chorus (CAJETAN).
Alas to thee, Messina! Woe forever!
Sad city! From thy blood-stained walls this deed
Of nameless horror taints the skies; ill fare
Thy mothers and thy children, youth and age,
And offspring yet, unborn!

DON CAESAR.

Too late your grief
Here give your help.

[Pointing to BEATRICE.

SCENE I.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Call her to life, and quick
Depart this scene of terror and of death.
I must away and seek my sister: Hence!
Conduct her to my mother
And tell her that her son, Don Caesar, sends her!

[Exit.

[The senseless BEATRICE is placed on a litter and
carried away by the Second Chorus. The First Chorus
remains with the body, round which the boys who bear
the bridal presents range themselves in a semicircle.

Chorus (CAJETAN).

List, how with dreaded mystery
Was signed to my prophetic soul,
Of kindred blood the dire decree:
Hither with noiseless, giant stride
I saw the hideous fiend of terror glide!
'Tis past! I strive not to control
My shuddering awe so swift of ill
The Fates the warning sign fulfil.
Lo! to my sense dismayed,
Sudden the deed of death has shown
Whate'er my boding fears portrayed.
The visioned thought was pain;
The present horror curdles every vein

One of the Chorus (MANFRED).

The Bride of Messina (play)

Sound, sound the plaint of woe!

Beautiful youth!

Outstretched and pale he lies,

Untimely cropped in early bloom;

The heavy night of death has sealed his eyes;

In this glad hour of nuptial joy,

Snatched by relentless doom,

He sleeps while echoing to the sky,

Of sorrow bursts the loud, despairing cry!

A second (CAJETAN).

We come, we come, in festal pride,

To greet the beauteous bride;

Behold! the nuptial gifts, the rich attire

The banquet waits, the guests are there;

They bid thee to the solemn rite

Of hymen quick repair.

Thou hear'st them not the sportive lyre,

The frolic dance, shall ne'er invite;

Nor wake thee from thy lowly bed,

For deep the slumber of the dead!

The whole Chorus.

No more the echoing horn shall cheer

Nor bride with tones of sweetness charm his ear.

The Bride of Messina (play)

On the cold earth he lies,
In death's eternal slumber closed his eyes.

A third (CAJETAN).

What are the hopes, and fond desires

Of mortals' transitory race?

This day, with harmony of voice and soul,

Ye woke the long-extinguished fires

Of brothers' love yon flaming orb

Lit with his earliest beams your dear embrace

At eve, upon the gory sand

Thou liest a reeking corpse!

Stretched by a brother's murderous hand.

Vain projects, treacherous hopes,

Child of the fleeting hour are thine;

Fond man! thou rear'st on dust each bold design,

Chorus (BERENGAR).

To thy mother I will bear

The burden of unutterable woe!

Quick shall yon cypress, blooming fair,

Bend to the axe's murderous blow

Then twine the mournful bier!

For ne'er with verdant life the tree shall smile

That grew on death's devoted soil;

Ne'er in the breeze the branches play,

The Bride of Messina (play)

Nor shade the wanderer in the noontide ray;
'Twas marked to bear the fruits of doom,
Cursed to the service of the tomb.

First (CAJETAN).

Woe to the murderer! Woe
That sped exulting in his pride,
Behold! the parched earth drinks the crimson tide.
Down, down it flows, unceasingly,
To the dim caverned halls below,
Where throned in kindred gloom the sister train,
Of Themis progeny severe,
Brood in their songless, silent reign!
Stern minister of wrath's decree,
They catch in swarthy cups thy streaming gore,
And pledge with horrid rites for vengeance evermore.

Second (BERENGAR).

Though swift of deed the traces fade
From earth, before the enlivening ray;
As o'er the brow the transient shade
Of thought, the hues of fancy flit away:
Yet in the mystic womb unseen,
Of the dark ruling hours that sway
Our mortal lot, whate'er has been,

The Bride of Messina (play)

With new creative germ defies decay.

The blooming field is time

For nature's ever-teeming shoot,

And all is seed, and all is fruit.

[The Chorus goes away, bearing the corpse of DON MANUEL on a bier.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The stage is lighted from above by a single large lamp.

DONNA ISABELLA and DIEGO advance to the front.

ISABELLA.

As yet no joyful tidings, not a trace
Found of the lost one!

DIEGO.

Nothing have we heard,
My mistress; yet o'er every track, unwearied,
Thy sons pursue. Ere long the rescued maid
Shall smile at dangers past.

ISABELLA.

Alas! Diego,
My heart is sad; 'twas I that caused this woe!

DIEGO.

Vex not thy anxious bosom; naught escaped
Thy thoughtful care.

ISABELLA.

Oh! had I earlier shown
The hidden treasure!

DIEGO.

Prudent were thy counsels,
Wisely thou left'st her in retirement's shade;

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

So, trust in heaven.

ISABELLA.

Alas! no joy is perfect
Without this chance of ill my bliss were pure.

DIEGO.

Thy happiness is but delayed; enjoy
The concord of thy sons.

ISABELLA.

The sight was rapture
Supreme, when, locked in one another's arms,
They glowed with brothers' love.

DIEGO.

And in the heart
It burns; for ne'er their princely souls have stooped
To mean disguise.

ISABELLA.

Now, too, their bosoms wake
To gentler thoughts, and own their softening sway
Of love. No more their hot, impetuous youth
Revels in liberty untamed, and spurns
Restraint of law, attempered passion's self,
With modest, chaste reserve.

To thee, Diego,
I will unfold my secret heart; this hour
Of feeling's opening bloom, expected long,
Wakes boding fears: thou know'st to sudden rage
Love stirs tumultuous breasts; and if this flame
With jealousy should rouse the slumbering fires
Of ancient hate I shudder at the thought!
If these discordant souls perchance have thrilled
In fatal unison! Enough; the clouds
That black with thundering menace o'er me hung
Are past; some angel sped them tranquil by,
And my enfranchised spirit breathes again.

DIEGO.

Rejoice, my mistress; for thy gentle sense
And soft, prevailing art more weal have wrought
Than all thy husband's power. Be praise to thee
And thy auspicious star!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA.

Yes, fortune smiled;
Nor light the task, so long with apt disguise
To veil the cherished secret of my heart,
And cheat my ever-jealous lord: more hard
To stifle mighty nature's pleading voice,
That, like a prisoned fire, forever strove
To rend its confines.

DIEGO.

All shall yet be well;
Fortune, propitious to our hopes, gave pledge
Of bliss that time will show.

ISABELLA.

I praise not yet
My natal star, while darkening o'er my fate
This mystery hangs: too well the dire mischance
Tells of the fiend whose never-slumbering rage
Pursues our house. Now list what I have done,
And praise or blame me as thou wilt; from thee
My bosom guards no secret: ill I brook
This dull repose, while swift o'er land and sea
My sons unwearied, track their sister's flight,
Yes, I have sought; heaven counsels oft, when vain
All mortal aid.

DIEGO.

What I may know, my mistress,
Declare.

ISABELLA.

On Etna's solitary height
A reverend hermit dwells, benamed of old
The mountain seer, who to the realms of light
More near abiding than the toilsome race
Of mortals here below, with purer air
Has cleansed each earthly, grosser sense away;
And from the lofty peak of gathered years,
As from his mountain home, with downward glance
Surveys the crooked paths of worldly strife.
To him are known the fortunes of our house;
Oft has the holy sage besought response
From heaven, and many a curse with earnest prayer
Averted: thither at my bidding flew,
On wings of youthful haste, a messenger,

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

To ask some tidings of my child: each hour
I wait his homeward footsteps.

DIEGO.

If mine eyes
Deceive me not, he comes; and well his speed
Has earned thy praise.

MESSENGER, ISABELLA, DIEGO.

ISABELLA (to MESSENGER).

Now speak, and nothing hide
Of weal or woe; be truth upon thy lips!
What tidings bear'st thou from the mountain seer?

MESSENGER.

His answer: Quick! retrace thy steps; the lost one
Is found.

ISABELLA.

Auspicious tongue! Celestial sounds
Of peace and joy! thus ever to my vows.
Thrice honored sage, thy kindly message spoke!
But say, which heaven-directed brother traced
My daughter?

MESSENGER.

'Twas thy eldest born that found
The deep-secluded maid.

ISABELLA.

Is it Don Manuel
That gives her to my arms? Oh, he was ever
The child of blessing! Tell me, hast thou borne
My offering to the aged man? the tapers
To burn before his saint? for gifts, the prize
Of worldly hearts, the man of God disdains.

MESSENGER.

He took the torches from my hands in silence
And stepping to the altar where the lamp
Burned to his saint illumed them at his fire,
And instant set in flames the hermit cell,
Where he has honored God these ninety years!

ISABELLA.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

What hast thou said? What horrors fright my soul?

MESSENGER.

And three times shrieking Woe! with downward course,
He fled; but silent with uplifted arm
Beckoned me not to follow, nor regard him
So hither I have hastened, terror–sped.

ISABELLA.

Oh, I am tossed amid the surge again
Of doubt and anxious fears; thy tale appals
With ominous sounds of ill. My daughter found
Thou sayest; and by my eldest born, Don Manuel?
The tidings ne'er shall bless, that heralded
This deed of woe!

MESSENGER.

My mistress! look around
Behold the hermit's message to thine eyes
Fulfilled. Some charm deludes my sense, or hither
Thy daughter comes, girt by the warlike train
Of thy two sons!

[BEATRICE is carried in by the Second Chorus on a litter,
and placed in the front of the stage. She is still without
perception, and motionless.

ISABELLA, DIEGO, MESSENGER, BEATRICE.

Chorus (BOHEMUND, ROGER, HIPPOLYTE, and the other nine followers
of DON CAESAR.)

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Here at thy feet we lay
The maid, obedient to our lord's command:
'Twas thus he spoke Conduct her to my mother;
And tell her that her son, Don Caesar, sends her!

ISABELLA (is advancing towards her with outstretched arms, and starts

back in horror).
Heavens! she is motionless and pale!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

She lives,
She will awake, but give her time to rouse
From the dread shock that holds each sense enthralled.

ISABELLA.

My daughter! Child of all my cares and pains!
And is it thus I see thee once again?
Thus thou returnest to thy father's halls!
Oh, let my breath relume thy vital spark;
Yes! I will strain thee to a mother's arms
And hold thee fast till from the frost of death
Released thy life-warm current throbs again.

[To the Chorus.

Where hast thou found her? Speak! What dire mischance
Has caused this sight of woe?

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

My lips are dumb!
Ask not of me: thy son will tell thee all
Don Caesar for 'tis he that sends her.

ISABELLA

'Tell me
Would'st thou not say Don Manuel?

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

'Tis Don Caesar
That sends her to thee.

ISABELLA (to the MESSENGER).

How declared the Seer?
Speak! Was it not Don Manuel?

MESSENGER.

'Twas he!
Thy elder born.

ISABELLA.

Be blessings on his head
Which e'er it be; to him I owe a daughter,

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Alas! that in this blissful hour, so long
Expected, long implored, some envious fiend
Should mar my joy! Oh, I must stem the tide
Of nature's transport! In her childhood's home
I see my daughter; me she knows not heeds not
Nor answers to a mother's voice of love
Ope, ye dear eyelids hands be warm and heave
Thou lifeless bosom with responsive throbs
To mine! 'Tis she! Diego, look! 'tis Beatrice!
The long-concealed the lost the rescued one!
Before the world I claim her for my own!

Chorus (BOHEMUND).
New signs of terror to my boding soul
Are pictured; in amazement lost I stand!
What light shall pierce this gloom of mystery?

ISABELLA (to the Chorus, who exhibit marks of confusion and
embarrassment).

Oh, ye hard hearts! Ye rude unpitying men!
A mother's transport from your breast of steel
Rebounds, as from the rocks the heaving surge!
I look around your train, nor mark one glance
Of soft regard. Where are my sons? Oh, tell me
Why come they not, and from their beaming eyes
Speak comfort to my soul? For here environed
I stand amid the desert's raging brood,
Or monsters of the deep!

DIEGO.

She opes her eyes!
She moves! She lives!

ISABELLA.

She lives! On me be thrown
Her earliest glance!

DIEGO.

See! They are closed again
She shudders!

ISABELLA (to the Chorus).

Quick! Retire your aspect frights her.

[Chorus steps back.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

RORER.

Well pleased I shun her sight.

DIEGO.

With outstretched eyes,
And wonderstruck, she seems to measure thee.

BEATRICE.

Not strange those lineaments where am I?

ISABELLA.

Slowly
Her sense returns.

DIEGO.

Behold! upon her knees
She sinks.

BEATRICE.

Oh, angel visage of my mother!

ISABELLA.

Child of my heart!

BEATRICE.

See! kneeling at thy feet
The guilty one!

ISABELLA.

I hold thee in my arms!
Enough forgotten all!

DIEGO.

Look in my face,
Canst thou remember me?

BEATRICE.

The reverend brows
Of honest old Diego!

ISABELLA.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Faithful guardian
Of thy young years.

BEATRICE.

And am I once again
With kindred?

ISABELLA.

Naught but death shall part us more!

BEATRICE.
Will thou ne'er send me to the stranger?

ISABELLA.

Never!
Fate is appeased.

BEATRICE.

And am I next thy heart?
And was it all a dream a hideous dream?
My mother! at my feet he fell! I know not
What brought me hither yet 'tis well. Oh, bliss!
That I am safe in thy protecting arms;
They would have ta'en me to the princess, mother
Sooner to death!

ISABELLA.

My daughter, calm thy fears;
Messina's princess

BEATRICE.

Name her not again!
At that ill-omened sound the chill of death
Creeps through my trembling frame.

ISABELLA.

My child! but hear me

BEATRICE.
She has two sons by mortal hate dissevered,
Don Manuel and Don Caesar

ISABELLA.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

'Tis myself!
Behold thy mother!

BEATRICE.

Have I heard thee? Speak!

ISABELLA.
I am thy mother, and Messina's princess!

BEATRICE.
Art thou Don Manuel's and Don Caesar's mother?

ISABELLA.
And thine! They are thy brethren whom thou namest.

BEATRICE.
Oh, gleam of horrid light!

ISABELLA.

What troubles thee?
Say, whence this strange emotion?

BEATRICE.

Yes! 'twas they!
Now I remember all; no dream deceived me,
They met 'tis fearful truth! Unhappy men!
Where have ye hid him?

[She rushes towards the Chorus; they turn away from her.

A funeral march is heard in the distance.

CHORUS.

Horror! Horror!

ISABELLA.

Hid!
Speak who is hid? and what is true? Ye stand
In silent dull amaze as though ye fathomed
Her words of mystery! In your faltering tones
Your brows I read of horrors yet unknown,
That would refrain my tongue! What is it? Tell me!
I will know all! Why fix ye on the door
That awe-struck gaze? What mournful music sounds?

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

[The march is heard nearer.

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

It comes! it comes! and all shall be declared
With terrible voice. My mistress! steel thy heart,
Be firm, and bear with courage what awaits thee
For more than women's soul thy destined griefs
Demand.

ISABELLA.

What comes? and what awaits me? Hark
With fearful tones the death-wail smites mine ear
It echoes through the house! Where are my sons?

[The first Semi-chorus brings in the body of DON MANUEL

on a bier, which is placed at the side of the stage.

A black pall is spread over it.

ISABELLA, BEATRICE, DIEGO.

Both Choruses.

First Chorus (CAJETAN).

With sorrow in his train,
From street to street the King of Terror glides;
With stealthy foot, and slow,
He creeps where'er the fleeting race
Of man abides
In turn at every gate
Is heard the dreaded knock of fate,
The message of unutterable woe!

BERENGAR.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

When, in the sere
And autumn leaves decayed,
The mournful forest tells how quickly fade
The glories of the year!
When in the silent tomb oppressed,
Frail man, with weight of days,
Sinks to his tranquil rest;
Contented nature but obeys
Her everlasting law,
The general doom awakes no shuddering awe!
But, mortals, oh! prepare
For mightier ills; with ruthless hand
Fell murder cuts the holy band
The kindred tie: insatiate death,
With unrelenting rage,
Bears to his bark the flower of blooming age!

CAJETAN.

When clouds athwart the lowering sky
Are driven when bursts with hollow moan
The thunder's peal our trembling bosoms own
The might of awful destiny!
Yet oft the lightning's glare
Darts sudden through the cloudless air:
Then in thy short delusive day

The Bride of Messina (play)

Of bliss, oh! dread the treacherous snare;
Nor prize the fleeting goods in vain,
The flowers that bloom but to decay!
Nor wealth, nor joy, nor aught but pain,
Was e'er to mortal's lot secure:
Our first best lesson to endure!

ISABELLA.
What shall I hear? What horrors lurk beneath
This funeral pall?

[She steps towards the bier, but suddenly pauses,
and stands irresolute.

Some strange, mysterious dread
Enthrals my sense. I would approach, and sudden
The ice-cold grasp of terror holds me back!

[To BEATRICE, who has thrown herself between her and the bier.

Whate'er it be, I will unveil

[On raising the pall she discovers the body of DON MANUEL.

Eternal Powers! it is my son!

[She stands in mute horror. BEATRICE sinks to the ground
with a shriek of anguish near the bier.

CHORUS.
Unhappy mother! 'tis thy son. Thy lips
Have uttered what my faltering tongue denied.

ISABELLA.
My soul! My Manuel! Oh, eternal grief!
And is it thus I see thee? Thus thy life
Has bought thy sister from the spoiler's rage?
Where was thy brother? Could no arm be found

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

To shield thee? Oh, be cursed the hand that dug
These gory wounds! A curse on her that bore
The murderer of my son! Ten thousand curses
On all their race!

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe!

ISABELLA.

And is it thus
Ye keep your word, ye gods? Is this your truth?
Alas for him that trusts with honest heart
Your soothing wiles! Why have I hoped and trembled?
And this the issue of my prayers! Attend,
Ye terror-stricken witnesses, that feed
Your gaze upon my anguish; learn to know
How warning visions cheat, and boding seers
But mock our credulous hopes; let none believe
The voice of heaven!

When in my teeming womb
This daughter lay, her father, in a dream
Saw from his nuptial couch two laurels grow,
And in the midst a lily all in flames,
That, catching swift the boughs and knotted stems
Burst forth with crackling rage, and o'er the house
Spread in one mighty sea of fire. Perplexed
By this terrific dream my husband sought
The counsels of the mystic art, and thus
Pronounced the sage: If I a daughter bore,
The murderess of his sons, the destined spring
Of ruin to our house, the baleful child
Should see the light.

Chorus (CAJETAN and BOHEMUND).

What hast thou said, my mistress?
Woe! Woe!

ISABELLA.

For this her ruthless father spoke
The dire behest of death. I rescued her,
The innocent, the doomed one; from my arms
The babe was torn; to stay the curse of heaven,
And save my sons, the mother gave her child;
And now by robber hands her brother falls;
My child is guiltless. Oh, she slew him not!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

CHORUS.
Woe! Woe!

ISABELLA.
No trust the fabling readers of the stars
Have e'er deserved. Hear how another spoke
With comfort to my soul, and him I deemed
Inspired to voice the secrets of the skies!
My daughter should unite in love the hearts
Of my dissevered sons; and thus their tales
Of curse and blessing on her head proclaim
Each other's falsehood. No, she ne'er has brought
A curse, the innocent; nor time was given
The blessed promise to fulfil; their tongues
Were false alike; their boasted art is vain;
With trick of words they cheat our credulous ears,
Or are themselves deceived! Naught ye may know
Of dark futurity, the sable streams
Of hell the fountain of your hidden lore,
Or yon bright spring of everlasting light!

First Chorus (CAJETAN).

Woe! Woe! thy tongue refrain!

Oh, pause, nor thus with impious rage

The might of heaven profane;

The holy oracles are wise

Expect with awe thy coming destinies!

ISABELLA.
My tongue shall speak as prompts my swelling heart;
My griefs shall cry to heaven. Why do we lift
Our suppliant hands, and at the sacred shrines
Kneel to adore? Good, easy dupes! What win we
From faith and pious awe? to touch with prayers
The tenants of yon azure realms on high,
Were hard as with an arrow's point to pierce
The silvery moon. Hid is the womb of time,
Impregnable to mortal glance, and deaf
The adamantine walls of heaven rebound
The voice of anguish: Oh, 'tis one, whate'er
The flight of birds the aspect of the stars!
The book of nature is a maze a dream
The sage's art and every sign a falsehood!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND).

Woe! Woe! Ill-fated woman, stay

Thy maddening blasphemies;

Thou but disown'st, with purblind eyes,

The flaming orb of day!

Confess the gods, they dwell on high

They circle thee with awful majesty!

All the Knights.

Confess the gods they dwell on high

They circle thee with awful majesty!

BEATRICE.

Why hast thou saved thy daughter, and defied
The curse of heaven, that marked me in thy womb
The child of woe? Short-sighted mother! vain
Thy little arts to cheat the doom declared
By the all-wise interpreters, that knit
The far and near; and, with prophetic ken,
See the late harvest spring in times unborn.
Oh, thou hast brought destruction on thy race,
Withholding from the avenging gods their prey;
Threefold, with new embittered rage, they ask
The direful penalty; no thanks thy boon
Of life deserves the fatal gift was sorrow!

Second Chorus (BERENGAR) looking towards the door
with signs of agitation.

Hark to the sound of dread!

The rattling, brazen din I hear!

Of hell-born snakes the hissing tones are near!

Yes 'tis the furies' tread!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

CAJETAN.

In crumbling ruin wide,

Fall, fall, thou roof, and sink, thou trembling floor

That bear'st the dread, unearthly stride!

Ye sable damps arise!

Mount from the abyss in smoky spray,

And pall the brightness of the day!

Vanish, ye guardian powers!

They come! The avenging deities

DON CAESAR, ISABELLA, BEATRICE. The Chorus.

[On the entrance of DON CAESAR the Chorus station themselves
before him imploringly. He remains standing alone in the
centre of the stage.]

BEATRICE.
Alas! 'tis he

ISABELLA (stepping to meet him).

My Caesar! Oh, my son!
And is it thus I meet the? Look! Behold!
The crime of hand accursed!

[She leads him to the corpse.]

First Chorus (CAJETAN, BERENGAR).

Break forth once more

Ye wounds! Flow, flow, in swarthy flood,

Thou streaming gore!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA.

Shuddering with earnest gaze, and motionless,
Thou stand'st. yes! there my hopes repose, and all
That earth has of thy brother; in the bud
Nipped is your concord's tender flower, nor ever
With beauteous fruit shall glad a mother's eyes,

DON CAESAR.

Be comforted; thy sons, with honest heart,
To peace aspired, but heaven's decree was blood!

ISABELLA.

I know thou lovedst him well; I saw between ye,
With joy, the bands old Nature sweetly twined;
Thou wouldst have borne him in thy heart of hearts
With rich atonement of long wasted years!
But see fell murder thwarts thy dear design,
And naught remains but vengeance!

DON CAESAR.

Come, my mother,
This is no place for thee. Oh, haste and leave
This sight of woe.

[He endeavors to drag her away.]

ISABELLA (throwing herself into his arms).

Thou livest! I have a son!

BEATRICE.

Alas! my mother!

DON CAESAR.

On this faithful bosom
Weep out thy pains; nor lost thy son, his love
Shall dwell immortal in thy Caesar's breast.

First Chorus (CAJETAN, BERENGAR, MANFRED).

Break forth, ye wounds!

Dumb witness! the truth proclaim;

Flow fast, thou gory stream!

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA (clasping the hands of DON CAESAR and BEATRICE).
My children!

DON CAESAR.

Oh, 'tis ecstasy! my mother,
To see her in thy arms! henceforth in love
A daughter sister

ISABELLA (interrupting him).

Thou hast kept thy word.
My son; to thee I owe the rescued one;
Yes, thou hast sent her

DON CAESAR (in astonishment).

Whom, my mother, sayst thou,
That I have sent?

ISABELLA.

She stands before thine eyes
Thy sister.

DON CAESAR.

She! My sister?

ISABELLA.

Ay, What other?

DON CAESAR.

My sister!

ISABELLA.

Thou hast sent her to me!

DON CAESAR.

Horror!
His sister, too!

CHORUS.

Woe! woe!

BEATRICE.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Alas! my mother!

ISABELLA.
Speak! I am all amaze!

DON CASAR.

Be cursed the day
When I was born!

ISABELLA.

Eternal powers!

DON CAESAR.

Accursed
The womb that bore me; cursed the secret arts,
The spring of all this woe; instant to crush thee,
Though the dread thunder swept ne'er should this arm
Refrain the bolts of death: I slew my brother!
Hear it and tremble! in her arms I found him;
She was my love, my chosen bride; and he
My brother in her arms! Thou hast heard all!
If it be true oh, if she be my sister
And his! then I have done a deed that mocks
The power of sacrifice and prayers to ope
The gates of mercy to my soul!

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

The tidings on thy heart dismayed
Have burst, and naught remains; behold!
'Tis come, nor long delayed,
Whate'er the warning seers foretold:
They spoke the message from on high,
Their lips proclaimed resistless destiny!
The mortal shall the curse fulfil
Who seeks to turn predestined ill.

ISABELLA.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

The gods have done their worst; if they be true
Or false, 'tis one for nothing they can add
To this the measure of their rage is full.
Why should I tremble that have naught to fear?
My darling son lies murdered, and the living
I call my son no more. Oh! I have borne
And nourished at my breast a basilisk
That stung my best-beloved child. My daughter, haste,
And leave this house of horrors I devote it
To the avenging fiends! In an evil hour
'Twas crime that brought me hither, and of crime
The victim I depart. Unwillingly
I came in sorrow I have lived despairing
I quit these halls; on me, the innocent,
Descends this weight of woe! Enough 'tis shown
That Heaven is just, and oracles are true!

[Exit, followed by DIEGO.

BEATRICE, DON CAESAR, the Chorus.

DON CAESAR (detaining BEATRICE).
My sister, wouldst thou leave me? On this head
A mother's curse may fall a brother's blood
Cry with accusing voice to heaven all nature
Invoke eternal vengeance on my soul
But thou oh! curse me not I cannot bear it!

[BEATRICE points with averted eyes to the body.

I have not slain thy lover! 'twas thy brother,
And mine that fell beneath my sword; and near
As the departed one, the living owns
The ties of blood: remember, too, 'tis I
That most a sister's pity need for pure
His spirit winged its flight, and I am guilty!

[BEATRICE bursts into an agony of tears.

Weep! I will blend my tears with thine nay, more,
I will avenge thy brother; but the lover
Weep not for him thy passionate, yearning tears
My inmost heart. Oh! from the boundless depths
Of our affliction, let me gather this,
The last and only comfort but to know
That we are dear alike. One lot fulfilled
Has made our rights and wretchedness the same;

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Entangled in one snare we fall together,
Three hapless victims of unpitying fate,
And share the mournful privilege of tears.
But when I think that for the lover more
Than for the brother bursts thy sorrow's tide,
Then rage and envy mingle with my pain,
And hope's last balm forsakes my withering soul?
Nor joyful, as beseems, can I requite
This inured shade: yet after him content
To mercy's throne my contrite spirit shall fly,
Sped by this hand if dying I may know
That in one urn our ashes shall repose,
With pious office of a sister's care.

[He throws his arms around her with passionate tenderness.

I loved thee, as I ne'er had loved before,
When thou wert strange; and that I bear the curse
Of brother's blood, 'tis but because I loved thee
With measureless transport: love was all my guilt,
But now thou art my sister, and I claim
Soft pity's tribute.

[He regards her with inquiring glances, and an air of
painful suspense then turns away with vehemence.

No! in this dread presence
I cannot bear these tears my courage flies
And doubt distracts my soul. Go, weep in secret
Leave me in error's maze but never, never,
Behold me more: I will not look again
On thee, nor on thy mother. Oh! how passion
Laid bare her secret heart! She never loved me!
She mourned her best-loved son that was her cry
Of grief and naught was mine but show of fondness!
And thou art false as she! make no disguise
Recoil with horror from my sight this form
Shall never shock thee more begone forever!

[Exit.

[She stands irresolute in a tumult of conflicting
passions then tears herself from the spot.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Chorus (CAJETAN).

Happy the man his lot I prize
That far from pomps and turmoil vain,
Childlike on nature's bosom lies
Amid the stillness of the plain.
My heart is sad in the princely hall,
When from the towering pride of state,
I see with headlong ruin fall,
How swift! the good and great!
And he from fortune's storm at rest
Smiles, in the quiet haven laid
Who, timely warned, has owned how blest
The refuge of the cloistered shade;
To honor's race has bade farewell,
Its idle joys and empty shows;
Insatiate wishes learned to quell,
And lulled in wisdom's calm repose:
No more shall passion's maddening brood
Impel the busy scenes to try,
Nor on his peaceful cell intrude
The form of sad humanity!
'Mid crowds and strife each mortal ill
Abides' the grisly train of woe
Shuns like the pest the breezy hill,
To haunt the smoky marts below.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

BERENGAR, BOHEMUND, and MANFRED.

On the mountains is freedom! the breath of decay

Never sullies the fresh flowing air;

Oh, Nature is perfect wherever we stray;

'Tis man that deforms it with care.

The whole Chorus repeats.

On the mountains is freedom, etc., etc.

DON CAESAR, the Chorus.

DON CAESAR (more collected).

I use the princely rights 'tis the last time
To give this body to the ground, and pay
Fit honors to the dead. So mark, my friends,
My bosom's firm resolve, and quick fulfil
Your lord's behest. Fresh in your memory lives
The mournful pomp, when to the tomb ye bore
So late my royal sire; scarce in these halls
Are stilled the echoes of the funeral wail;
Another corpse succeeds, and in the grave
Weighs down its fellow—dust almost our torch
With borrowed lustre from the last, may pierce
The monumental gloom; and on the stair,
Blends in one throng confused two mourning trains.
Then in the sacred royal dome that guards
The ashes of my sire, prepare with speed
The funeral rites; unseen of mortal eye,
And noiseless be your task let all be graced,
As then, with circumstances of kingly state.

BOHEMUND.

My prince, it shall be quickly done; for still
Upreared, the gorgeous catafalque recalls
The dread solemnity; no hand disturbed
The edifice of death.

DON CAESAR.

The yawning grave
Amid the haunts of life? No goodly sign

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Was this: the rites fulfilled, why lingered yet
The trappings of the funeral show?

BOHEMUND.

Your strife
With fresh embittered hate o'er all Messina
Woke discord's maddening flames, and from the deed
Our cares withdrew so resolute remained,
And closed the sanctuary.

DON CAESAR.

Make no delay;
This very night fulfil your task, for well
Beseeems the midnight gloom! To-morrow's sun
Shall find this palace cleansed of every stain,
And light a happier race.

[Exit the Second Chorus, with the body of DON MANUEL.]

CAJETAN.

Shall I invite
The brotherhood of monks, with rights ordained
By holy church of old, to celebrate
The office of departed souls, and hymn
The buried one to everlasting rest?

DON CAESAR.

Their strains above my tomb shall sound for ever
Amid the torches' blaze no solemn rites
Beseeem the day when gory murder scares
Heaven's pardoning grace.

CAJETAN.

Oh, let not wild despair
Tempt thee to impious, rash resolve. My prince
No mortal arm shall e'er avenge this deed;
And penance calms, with soft, atoning power,
The wrath on high.

DON CAESAR.

If for eternal justice
Earth has no minister, myself shall wield
The avenging sword; though heaven, with gracious ear,
Inclines to sinners' prayers, with blood alone
Atoned is murder's guilt.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

CAJETAN.

To stem the tide
Of dire misfortune, that with maddening rage
Bursts o'er your house, were nobler than to pile
Accumulated woe.

DON CAESAR.

The curse of old
Shall die with me! Death self-imposed alone
Can break the chain of fate.

CAJETAN.

Thou owest thyself
A sovereign to this orphaned land, by thee
Robbed of its other lord!

DON CAESAR.

The avenging gods
Demand their prey some other deity
May guard the living!

CAJETAN.

Wide as e'er the sun
In glory beams, the realm of hope extends;
But oh remember! nothing may we gain
From Death!

DON CAESAR.

Remember thou thy vassal's duty;
Remember and be silent! Leave to me
To follow, as I list, the spirit of power
That leads me to the goal. No happy one
May look into my breast: but if thy prince
Owns not a subject's homage, dread at least
The murderer! the accursed! and to the head
Of the unhappy sacred to the gods
Give honors due. The pangs that rend my soul
What I have suffered what I feel have left
No place for earthly thoughts!

DONNA ISABELLA, DON CAESAR, The Chorus.

ISABELLA (enters with hesitating steps, and looks irresolutely

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

towards DON CAESAR; at last she approaches, and addresses

him with collected tones).

I thought mine eyes should ne'er behold thee more;
Thus I had vowed despairing! Oh, my son!
How quickly all a mother's strong resolves
Melt into air! 'Twas but the cry of rage
That stifled nature's pleading voice; but now
What tidings of mysterious import call me
From the desolate chambers of my sorrow?
Shall I believe it? Is it true? one day
Robs me of both my sons?

Chorus.

Behold! with willing steps and free,

Thy son prepares to tread

The paths of dark eternity

The silent mansions of the dead.

My prayers are vain; but thou, with power confessed,

Of nature's holiest passion, storm his breast!

ISABELLA.

I call the curses back that in the frenzy
Of blind despair on thy beloved head
I poured. A mother may not curse the child
That from her nourishing breast drew life, and gave
Sweet recompense for all her travail past;
Heaven would not hear the impious vows; they fell
With quick rebound, and heavy with my tears
Down from the flaming vault!

Live! live! my son!

For I may rather bear to look on thee
The murderer of one child than weep for both!

DON CAESAR.

Heedless and vain, my mother, are thy prayers
For me and for thyself; I have no place
Among the living: if thine eyes may brook
The murderer's sight abhorred I could not bear
The mute reproach of thy eternal sorrow.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

ISABELLA.

Silent or loud, my son, reproach shall never
Disturb thy breast ne'er in these halls shall sound
The voice of wailing, gently on my tears
My griefs shall flow away: the sport alike
Of pitiless fate together we will mourn,
And veil the deed of blood.

DON CAESAR (with a faltering voice, and taking her hand).

Thus it shall be,
My mother thus with silent, gentle woe
Thy grief shall fade: but when one common tomb
The murderer and his victim closes round
When o'er our dust one monumental stone
Is rolled the curse shall cease thy love no more
Unequal bless thy sons: the precious tears
Thine eyes of beauty weep shall sanctify
Alike our memories. Yes! In death are quenched
The fires of rage; and hatred owns subdued,
The mighty reconciler. Pity bends
An angel form above the funeral urn,
With weeping, dear embrace. Then to the tomb
Stay not my passage: Oh, forbid me not,
Thus with atoning sacrifice to quell
The curse of heaven.

ISABELLA.

All Christendom is rich
In shrines of mercy, where the troubled heart
May find repose. Oh! many a heavy burden
Have sinners in Loretto's mansion laid;
And Heaven's peculiar blessing breathes around
The grave that has redeemed the world! The prayers
Of the devout are precious fraught with store
Of grace, they win forgiveness from the skies;
And on the soil by gory murder stained
Shall rise the purifying fane.

DON CAESAR.

We pluck
The arrow from the wound but the torn heart
Shall ne'er be healed. Let him who can, drag on
A weary life of penance and of pain,
To cleanse the spot of everlasting guilt;
I would not live the victim of despair;
No! I must meet with beaming eye the smile
Of happy ones, and breathe erect the air
Of liberty and joy. While yet alike

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

We shared thy love, then o'er my days of youth
Pale envy cast his withering shade; and now,
Think'st thou my heart could brook the dearer ties
That bind thee in thy sorrow to the dead?
Death, in his undecaying palace throned,
To the pure diamond of perfect virtue
Sublimes the mortal, and with chastening fire
Each gathered stain of frail humanity
Purges and burns away: high as the stars
Tower o'er this earthly sphere, he soars above me;
And as by ancient hate dissevered long,
Brethren and equal denizens we lived,
So now my restless soul with envy pines,
That he has won from me the glorious prize
Of immortality, and like a god
In memory marches on to times unborn!

ISABELLA.

My Sons! Why have I called you to Messina
To find for each a grave? I brought ye hither
To calm your strife to peace. Lo! Fate has turned
My hopes to blank despair.

DON CAESAR.

Whate'er was spoke,
My mother, is fulfilled! Blame not the end
By Heaven ordained. We trod our father's halls
With hopes of peace; and reconciled forever,
Together we shall sleep in death.

ISABELLA.

My son,
Live for thy mother! In the stranger's land,
Say, wouldst thou leave me friendless and alone,
To cruel scorn a prey no filial arm
To shield my helpless age?

DON CAESAR.

When all the world
With heartless taunts pursues thee, to our grave
For refuge fly, my mother, and invoke
Thy sons' divinity we shall be gods!
And we will hear thy prayers: and as the twins
Of heaven, a beaming star of comfort shine
To the tossed shipman we will hover near thee
With present help, and soothe thy troubled soul!

ISABELLA.

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Live for thy mother, live, my son
Must I lose all?

[She throws her arms about him with passionate emotion.

He gently disengages himself, and turning his face away
extends to her his hand.

DON CAESAR.

Farewell!

ISABELLA.

I can no more;
Too well my tortured bosom owns how weak
A mother's prayers: a mightier voice shall sound
Resistless on thy heart.

[She goes towards the entrance of the scene.

My daughter, come.
A brother calls him to the realms of night;
Perchance with golden hues of earthly joy
The sister, the beloved, may gently lure
The wanderer to life again.

[BEATRICE appears at the entrance of the scene.

DONNA ISABELLA, DON CAESAR, and the Chorus.

DON CAESAR (on seeing her, covers his face with his hands).

My mother!
What hast thou done?

ISABELLA (leading BEATRICE forwards).

A mother's prayers are vain!
Kneel at his feet conjure him melt his heart!
Oh, bid him live!

DON CAESAR.

Deceitful mother, thus

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Thou triest thy son! And wouldst thou stir my soul
Again to passion's strife, and make the sun
Beloved once more, now when I tread the paths
Of everlasting night? See where he stands
Angel of life! and wondrous beautiful,
Shakes from his plenteous horn the fragrant store
Of golden fruits and flowers, that breathe around
Divinest airs of joy; my heart awakes
In the warm sunbeam hope returns, and life
Thrills in my breast anew.

ISABELLA (to BEATRICE).

Thou wilt prevail!
Or none! Implore him that he live, nor rob
The staff and comfort of our days.

BEATRICE.

The loved one
A sacrifice demands. Oh, let me die
To soothe a brother's shade! Yes, I will be
The victim! Ere I saw the light forewarned
To death, I live a wrong to heaven! The curse
Pursues me still: 'twas I that slew thy son
I waked the slumbering furies of their strife
Be mine the atoning blood!

CAJETAN.

Ill-fated mother!
Impatient all thy children haste to doom,
And leave thee on the desolate waste alone
Of joyous life.

BEATRICE.

Oh, spare thy precious days
For nature's band. Thy mother needs a son;
My brother, live for her! Light were the pang
To lose a daughter but a moment shown,
Then snatched away!

DON CAESAR (with deep emotion).

'Tis one to live or die,
Blest with a sister's love!

BEATRICE.

Say, dost thou envy

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

Thy brother's ashes?

DON CAESAR.

In thy grief he lives
A hallowed life! my doom is death forever!

BEATRICE.
My brother!

DON CAESAR.

Sister! are thy tears for me?

BEATRICE.
Live for our mother!

DON CAESAR (dropping her hand, and stepping back).

For our mother?

BEATRICE (hiding her head in his breast).

Live
For her and for thy sister!

Chorus (BOHEMUND).

She has won!
Resistless are her prayers. Despairing mother,
Awake to hope again his choice is made!
Thy son shall live!

[At this moment an anthem is heard. The folding doors
are thrown open, and in the church is seen the catafalque
erected, and the coffin surrounded with candlesticks.

DON CAESAR (turning to the coffin).

I will not rob thee, brother!
The sacrifice is thine: Hark! from the tomb,
Mightier than mother's tears, or sister's love,
Thy voice resistless cries: my arms enfold
A treasure, potent with celestial joys,
To deck this earthly sphere, and make a lot
Worthy the gods! but shall I live in bliss,
While in the tomb thy sainted innocence
Sleeps unavenged? Thou, Ruler of our days,

SCENE The hall of pillars. It is night.

The Bride of Messina (play)

All just all wise let not the world behold
Thy partial care! I saw her tears! enough
They flowed for me! I am content: my brother!
I come!

[He stabs himself with a dagger, and falls dead
at his sister's feet. She throws herself into her
mother's arms.

Chorus, CAJETAN (after a deep silence).

In dread amaze I stand, nor know
If I should mourn his fate. One truth revealed
Speaks in my breast; no good supreme is life;
But all of earthly ills the chief is Guilt!

THE END

ON THE USE OF THE CHORUS IN TRAGEDY.

A poetical work must vindicate itself: if the execution be defective, little aid can be derived from commentaries.

On these grounds I might safely leave the chorus to be its own advocate, if we had ever seen it presented in an appropriate manner. But it must be remembered that a dramatic composition first assumes the character of a whole by means of representation on the stage. The poet supplies only the words, to which, in a lyrical tragedy, music and rhythmical motion are essential accessories. It follows, then, that if the chorus is deprived of accompaniments appealing so powerfully to the senses, it will appear a superfluity in the economy of the drama a mere hinderance to the development of the plot destructive to the illusion of the scene, and wearisome to the spectators.

To do justice to the chorus, more especially if our aims in poetry be of a grand and elevated character, we must transport ourselves from the actual to a possible stage. It is the privilege of art to furnish for itself whatever is requisite, and the accidental deficiency of auxiliaries ought not to confine the plastic imagination of the poet. He aspires to whatever is most dignified, he labors to realize the ideal in his own mind though in the execution of his purpose he must needs accommodate himself to circumstances.

The assertion so commonly made that the public degrades art is not well founded. It is the artist that brings the public to the level of his own conceptions; and, in every age in which art has gone to decay, it has fallen through its professors. The people need feeling alone, and feeling they possess. They take their station before the curtain

The Bride of Messina (play)

with an unvoiced longing, with a multifarious capacity. They bring with them an aptitude for what is highest they derive the greatest pleasure from what is judicious and true; and if, with these powers of appreciation, they deign to be satisfied with inferior productions, still, if they have once tasted what is excellent, they will in the end insist on having it supplied to them.

It is sometimes objected that the poet may labor according to an ideal that the critic may judge from ideas, but that mere executive art is subject to contingencies, and depends for effect on the occasion. Managers will be obstinate; actors are bent on display the audience is inattentive and unruly. Their object is relaxation, and they are disappointed if mental exertion be required, when they expected only amusement. But if the theatre be made instrumental towards higher objects, the diversion, of the spectator will not be increased, but ennobled. It will be a diversion, but a poetical one. All art is dedicated to pleasure, and there can be no higher and worthier end than to make men happy. The true art is that which provides the highest degree of pleasure; and this consists in the abandonment of the spirit to the free play of all its faculties.

Every one expects from the imaginative arts a certain emancipation from the bounds of reality: we are willing to give a scope to fancy, and recreate ourselves with the possible. The man who expects it the least will nevertheless forget his ordinary pursuits, his everyday existence and individuality, and experience delight from uncommon incidents: if he be of a serious turn of mind he will acknowledge on the stage that moral government of the world which he fails to discover in real life. But he is, at the same time, perfectly aware that all is an empty show, and that in a true sense he is feeding only on dreams. When he returns from the theatre to the world of realities, he is again compressed within its narrow bounds; he is its denizen as before for it remains what it was, and in him nothing has been changed. What, then, has he gained beyond a momentary illusive pleasure which vanished with the occasion?

It is because a passing recreation is alone desired that a mere show of truth is thought sufficient. I mean that probability or vraisemblance which is so highly esteemed, but which the commonest workers are able to substitute for the true.

Art has for its object not merely to afford a transient pleasure, to excite to a momentary dream of liberty; its aim is to make us absolutely free; and this it accomplishes by awakening, exercising, and perfecting in us a power to remove to an objective distance the sensible world; (which otherwise only burdens us as rugged matter, and presses us down with a brute influence;) to transform it into the free working of our spirit, and thus acquire a dominion over the material by means of ideas. For the very reason also that true art requires somewhat of the objective and real, it is not satisfied with a show of truth. It rears its ideal edifice on truth itself on the solid and deep foundations of nature.

But how art can be at once altogether ideal, yet in the strictest sense real; how it can entirely leave the actual, and yet harmonize with nature, is a problem to the multitude; and hence the distorted views which prevail in regard to poetical and plastic works; for to ordinary judgments these two requisites seem to counteract each other.

It is commonly supposed that one may be attained by the sacrifice of the other; the result is a failure to arrive at either. One to whom nature has given a true sensibility, but denied the plastic imaginative power, will be a faithful painter of the real; he will adapt casual appearances, but never catch the spirit of nature. He will only reproduce to us the matter of the world, which, not being our own work, the product of our creative spirit, can never have the beneficent operation of art, of which the essence is freedom. Serious indeed, but unpleasing, is the cast of thought with which such an artist and poet dismisses us; we feel ourselves painfully thrust back into the narrow sphere of reality by means of the very art which ought to have emancipated us. On the other hand, a writer endowed with a lively fancy, but destitute of warmth and individuality of feeling, will not concern himself in the least about truth; he will sport with the stuff of the world, and endeavor to surprise by whimsical combinations; and as his whole performance is nothing but foam and glitter, he will, it is true, engage the attention for a time, but build up and confirm nothing in the understanding. His playfulness is, like the gravity of the other, thoroughly unpoetical. To

The Bride of Messina (play)

string together at will fantastical images is not to travel into the realm of the ideal; and the imitative reproduction of the actual cannot be called the representation of nature. Both requisites stand so little in contradiction to each other that they are rather one and the same thing; that art is only true inasmuch as it altogether forsakes the actual, and becomes purely ideal. Nature herself is an idea of the mind, and is never presented to the senses. She lies under the veil of appearances, but is herself never apparent. To the art of the ideal alone is lent, or rather absolutely given, the privilege to grasp the spirit of the all and bind it in a corporeal form.

Yet, in truth, even art cannot present it to the senses, but by means of her creative power to the imaginative faculty alone; and it is thus that she becomes more true than all reality, and more real than all experience. It follows from these premises that the artist can use no single element taken from reality as he finds it that his work must be ideal in all its parts, if it be designed to have, as it were, an intrinsic reality, and to harmonize with nature.

What is true of art and poetry, in the abstract, holds good as to their various kinds; and we may apply what has been advanced to the subject of tragedy. In this department it is still necessary to controvert the ordinary notion of the natural, with which poetry is altogether incompatible. A certain ideality has been allowed in painting, though, I fear, on grounds rather conventional than intrinsic; but in dramatic works what is desired is allusion, which, if it could be accomplished by means of the actual, would be, at best, a paltry deception. All the externals of a theatrical representation are opposed to this notion; all is merely a symbol of the real. The day itself in a theatre is an artificial one; the metrical dialogue is itself ideal; yet the conduct of the play must forsooth be real, and the general effect sacrificed to a part. Thus the French, who have utterly misconceived the spirit of the ancients, adopted on their stage the unities of time and place in the most common and empirical sense; as though there were any place but the bare ideal one, or any other time than the mere sequence of the incidents.

By the introduction of a metrical dialogue an important progress has been made towards the poetical tragedy. A few lyrical dramas have been successful on the stage, and poetry, by its own living energy, has triumphed over prevailing prejudices. But so long as these erroneous views are entertained little has been done for it is not enough barely to tolerate as a poetical license that which is, in truth, the essence of all poetry. The introduction of the chorus would be the last and decisive step; and if it only served this end, namely, to declare open and honorable warfare against naturalism in art, it would be for us a living wall which tragedy had drawn around herself, to guard her from contact with the world of reality, and maintain her own ideal soil, her poetical freedom.

It is well-known that the Greek tragedy had its origin in the chorus; and though in process of time it became independent, still it may be said that poetically, and in spirit, the chorus was the source of its existence, and that without these persevering supporters and witnesses of the incident a totally different order of poetry would have grown out of the drama. The abolition of the chorus, and the debasement of this sensibly powerful organ into the characterless substitute of a confidant, is by no means such an improvement in the tragedy as the French, and their imitators, would have it supposed to be.

The old tragedy, which at first only concerned itself with gods, heroes and kings introduced the chorus as an essential accompaniment. The poets found it in nature, and for that reason employed it. It grew out of the poetical aspect of real life. In the new tragedy it becomes an organ of art, which aids in making the poetry prominent. The modern poet no longer finds the chorus in nature; he must needs create and introduce it poetically; that is, he must resolve on such an adaption of his story as will admit of its retrocession to those primitive times and to that simple form of life.

The chorus thus renders more substantial service to the modern dramatist than to the old poet and for this reason, that it transforms the commonplace actual world into the old poetical one; that it enables him to dispense with all that is repugnant to poetry, and conducts him back to the most simple, original, and genuine motives of action. The palaces of kings are in these days closed courts of justice have been transferred from the gates of cities to the interior of buildings; writing has narrowed the province of speech; the people itself the sensibly living

The Bride of Messina (play)

mass when it does not operate as brute force, has become a part of the civil polity, and thereby an abstract idea in our minds; the deities have returned within the bosoms of mankind. The poet must reopen the palaces he must place courts of justice beneath the canopy of heaven restore the gods, reproduce every extreme which the artificial frame of actual life has abolished throw aside every factitious influence on the mind or condition of man which impedes the manifestation of his inward nature and primitive character, as the statuary rejects modern costume: and of all external circumstances adopts nothing but what is palpable in the highest of forms that of humanity.

But precisely as the painter throws around his figures draperies of ample volume, to fill up the space of his picture richly and gracefully, to arrange its several parts in harmonious masses, to give due play to color, which charms and refreshes the eye and at once to envelop human forms in a spiritual veil, and make them visible so the tragic poet inlays and entwines his rigidly contracted plot and the strong outlines of his characters with a tissue of lyrical magnificence, in which, as in flowing robes of purple, they move freely and nobly, with a sustained dignity and exalted repose.

In a higher organization, the material, or the elementary, need not be visible; the chemical color vanishes in the finer tints of the imaginative one. The material, however, has its peculiar effect, and may be included in an artistical composition. But it must deserve its place by animation, fulness and harmony, and give value to the ideal forms which it surrounds instead of stifling them by its weight.

In respect of the pictorial art, this is obvious to ordinary apprehension, yet in poetry likewise, and in the tragical kind, which is our immediate subject, the same doctrine holds good. Whatever fascinates the senses alone is mere matter, and the rude element of a work of art: if it takes the lead it will inevitably destroy the poetical which lies at the exact medium between the ideal and the sensible. But man is so constituted that he is ever impatient to pass from what is fanciful to what is common; and reflection must, therefore, have its place even in tragedy. But to merit this place it must, by means of delivery, recover what it wants in actual life; for if the two elements of poetry, the ideal and the sensible, do not operate with an inward mutuality, they must at least act as allies or poetry is out of the question. If the balance be not intrinsically perfect, the equipoise can only be maintained by an agitation of both scales.

This is what the chorus effects in tragedy. It is in itself, not an individual but a general conception; yet it is represented by a palpable body which appeals to the senses with an imposing grandeur. It forsakes the contracted sphere of the incidents to dilate itself over the past and the future, over distant times and nations, and general humanity, to deduce the grand results of life, and pronounce the lessons of wisdom. But all this it does with the full power of fancy with a bold lyrical freedom which ascends, as with godlike step, to the topmost height of worldly things; and it effects it in conjunction with the whole sensible influence of melody and rhythm, in tones and movements.

The chorus thus exercises a purifying influence on tragic poetry, insomuch as it keeps reflection apart from the incidents, and by this separation arms it with a poetical vigor, as the painter, by means of a rich drapery, changes the ordinary poverty of costume into a charm and ornament.

But as the painter finds himself obliged to strengthen the tone of color of the living subject, in order to counterbalance the material influences so the lyrical effusions of the chorus impose upon the poet the necessity of a proportionate elevation of his general diction. It is the chorus alone which entitles the poet to employ this fulness of tone, which at once charms the senses, pervades the spirit, and expands the mind. This one giant form on his canvas obliges him to mount all his figures on the cothurnus, and thus impart a tragical grandeur to his picture. If the chorus be taken away, the diction of the tragedy must generally be lowered, or what is now great and majestic will appear forced and overstrained. The old chorus introduced into the French tragedy would present it in all its poverty, and reduce it to nothing; yet, without doubt, the same accompaniment would impart to Shakspeare's tragedy its true significance.

The Bride of Messina (play)

As the chorus gives life to the language so also it gives repose to the action; but it is that beautiful and lofty repose which is the characteristic of a true work of art. For the mind of the spectator ought to maintain its freedom through the most impassioned scenes; it should not be the mere prey of impressions, but calmly and severely detach itself from the emotions which it suffers. The commonplace objection made to the chorus, that it disturbs the illusion, and blunts the edge of the feelings, is what constitutes its highest recommendation; for it is this blind force of the affections which the true artist deprecates this illusion is what he disdains to excite. If the strokes which tragedy inflicts on our bosoms followed without respite, the passion would overpower the action. We should mix ourselves with the subject-matter, and no longer stand above it. It is by holding asunder the different parts, and stepping between the passions with its composing views, that the chorus restores to us our freedom, which would else be lost in the tempest. The characters of the drama need this intermission in order to collect themselves; for they are no real beings who obey the impulse of the moment, and merely represent individuals but ideal persons and representatives of their species, who enunciate the deep things of humanity.

Thus much on my attempt to revive the old chorus on the tragic stage. It is true that choruses are not unknown to modern tragedy; but the chorus of the Greek drama, as I have employed it the chorus, as a single ideal person, furthering and accompanying the whole plot if of an entirely distinct character; and when, in discussion on the Greek tragedy, I hear mention made of choruses, I generally suspect the speaker's ignorance of his subject. In my view the chorus has never been reproduced since the decline of the old tragedy.

I have divided it into two parts, and represented it in contest with itself; but this occurs where it acts as a real person, and as an unthinking multitude. As chorus and an ideal person it is always one and entire. I have also several times dispensed with its presence on the stage. For this liberty I have the example of Aeschylus, the creator of tragedy, and Sophocles, the greatest master of his art.

Another license it may be more difficult to excuse. I have blended together the Christian religion and the pagan mythology, and introduced recollections of the Moorish superstition. But the scene of the drama is Messina where these three religions either exercised a living influence, or appealed to the senses in monumental remains. Besides, I consider it a privilege of poetry to deal with different religions as a collective whole. In which everything that bears an individual character, and expresses a peculiar mode of feeling, has its place. Religion itself, the idea of a Divine Power, lies under the veil of all religions; and it must be permitted to the poet to represent it in the form which appears the most appropriate to his subject.