

CONCEPT OF “FRIENDSHIP” AS DEPICTED IN SCHILLER’S BALLAD DIE BÜRGSCHAFT

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Friedrich Schiller was born on 10th November 1759 in Marbach (Württemberg) as a son of a military surgeon. He lived in very poor conditions during his childhood and youth. After completing the village school and grammar school **Schiller** came to the Karl’s school in 1773 on the orders of the Duke Karl Eugen. There he started learning medicine from 1776 onwards. 1780 he became a regimental doctor at Stuttgart. After his play *Die Räuber* was staged, he was arrested and he was compelled to stop writing. 1787 he ran away via Leipzig and Dresden to Weimar. He died in Weimar on 9th May 1805. I wish here to deal with the *Ballad Die Bürgschaft*² written by **Schiller**, the most famous German Classicist. [German verb **bürgen** with an accusative preposition *für* means to stand guarantee or to vouch for some one. *Die Bürgschaft*³, a feminine noun means guarantee, *hostage or security*.]

The terms *ballad, classicist and friendship* need more focus in this analysis. We all know famous English saying *a friend in need is a friend in deed*. What feelings and importance are associated with the term *Friendship*, how universal these associations with *Friendship* are, and how relevant these have been even today in this global world, are to be seen in the poem selected for this discussion. At the very outset of the poem both main antagonists are presented in opposition to each other in a very dramatic situation. Dionysus is painted here as a bloodthirsty and violent tyrant. In the old Greece tyrants were dictators, but not as bloodthirsty violent ones as Dionysus of **Schiller**. A simple common man called Damon wants to set the country free from the tyranny of this dictator. The security of the king voids his efforts to attack and drags him to the king. Damon was to be hung till death for his violent attack on the king. Damon appeals for mercy for three days and seeks permission of the king to let the marriage of his

sister be realized before he would be hung. As a guarantee, one of his best friends was supposed to be a hostage with the king. The friend of Damon hands him self over to the king and offers to be ready to be hung in place of Damon, if Damon would fail to return within three days. Damon succeeds in his mission. Damon does not reach the capital short before the sun set of the third day, when his friend, who stayed as the hostage with king in lieu of Damon, was to be hung, as Damon had not returned.

Damon is advised to flee, as his friend in hostage was to be hung. Damon however wants to prove his loyalty to his friend, who had jeopardized his own life for him. He goes to the sight of hanging. He sees his friend hanging on the rope. He asks the hangman to stop the hanging of his friend and reminds that the friend in hostage would be saved, if Damon would return in time till the sun set. As the time fixed was observed by him, he compels the hangman to stop the hanging, though the king had

shown his insincerity by trying to hang Damon’s friend before the sun set of the third day. The king is taken aback to hear and see how loyal the friends to each other remained. Damon’s friend had accepted to endanger his life by offering him self in hostage to the king in place of Damon – and Damon (despite hindrances and problems on the way) had kept his word by returning in time. This act of Damon reflected two qualities namely – he was loyal to his own word and secondly, he honoured the loyalty of his friend – and he did not want his friend to be victimized for his dishonesty. The tyrant is totally touched by this loyalty and friendship – he sets both friends free and offers them to let him join their *treaty of friendship*. This *Ballad* was written by **Schiller** in a typical classicist style in the year 1797-1798, after a gap of some four years before he got acquainted with Goethe in 1794



Friedrich Schiller
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and became his fast friend. The bosom friendship and the reciprocal trust are at the centre of the happening in the poem, which is necessarily a characteristic of Classicism. Harmony and Unity are the two virtues of Classicism. The tyrant happens to distract this harmony and unity. Humanity and self discipline make the sense of security, hostage [*Bürgschaft*]. A drastic change in the opinion, attitude and behaviour of the tyrant is seen. His recognition of their friendship based on mutual trust and his judgement to set them free – not only this, his request to them to let him join their friendship treaty, is a big change in the tyrant, when he becomes a king and not a tyrant.

The word *Ballad* emerges from the French *Balada* that originates from the Italian *Ballata*, which is derived from the Latin verb *Balare* – meaning to dance. Originally it meant a dancing song. The mixture of lyric, narrative and dramatic elements had made the *Ballad* a very popular form. *Schiller's Ballads* are an effort to bridge the gap between a common man and an educated man through the generally human and clear presentations of the stuff. Ballad is normally a Poesie with a serious theme. Mostly a conflict of a human being with his fellow human beings or with the nature is depicted in the Ballad. Schiller deals with the theme *Friendship and Loyalty* in the *Ballad Die Bürgschaft* – To keep his word, Danton has to develop super human powers. Even the king attains the higher levels of being a human by respecting the ideal behaviour of Damon. *Schiller's Ballads* aimed at the enrichment of the Genre. The Genre *Ballad* belongs to the period of *Weimarer Classicism [Weimarer Klassik]*, which is basically the main phase from 1794 to 1805, the years

of friendship and collective work of *Goethe* and *Schiller*. Goethe and Schiller in opposition to their choice of antique Genres had opted for a popular form of expression to their philosophy. The year 1797 is called the *Year of Ballads [Balladenjahr]*, when *Schiller* wrote most of his famous *Ballads*. *Schiller* took an impetus for this *Ballad* from his friend *Goethe*. The storming of the Bastille was on nine years before the completion of *Bürgschaft*, Ludwig the XVI was beheaded five years ago. Four years had passed since the Execution of Danton and Robespierre. The French Revolution had failed according to *Schiller*. According to him only the aesthetic upbringing of a human being would enable the rational order of the state. *Schiller's* Letter about the aesthetic education of human beings (1795) tries to depict the element of Beauty and the question of the function of art in the framework of cultural development of mankind especially in the post era of French Revolution.

For Schiller revolutionary social and political changes can take place, only if human beings have found their harmony. Schiller wanted self determination of human beings to take place through an education that brings forth the reception of art based on phantasy and rational thinking.

In the same manner the *Ballad* begins here with a futile revolutionary effort, the futile violent attack on the Dictator, whose viciousness is predominantly depicted in the *Ballad*. The arrested assassin himself describes this as a criminal striving on his part.

Let us read here the original *German Ballad* entitled *Die Bürgschaft by Schiller*⁴ and its English Translation available⁵

German original

Zu Dionys dem Tyrannen schlich
Damos, den Dolch im Gewande,
Ihn schlugen die Häscher in Bande.
Was wolltest du mit dem Dolche, sprich!
Entgegnet ihm finster der Wütherich.
"Die Stadt vom Tyrannen befreien!"
Das sollst du am Kreuze bereuen.
Ich bin, spricht jener, zu sterben bereit,
Und bitte nicht um mein Leben,
Doch willst du Gnade mir geben,
Ich flehe dich um drey Tage Zeit,
Bis ich die Schwester dem Gatten gefreit,
Ich lasse den Freund dir als Bürgen,
Ihn magst du, entrinn ich, erwürgen.
Da lächelt der König mit arger List,
Und spricht nach kurzem Bedenken:
Drey Tage will ich dir schenken.
Doch wisse! Wenn sie verstrichen die Frist,
Eh du zurück mir gegeben bist,
So muß er statt deiner erblassen,

English Translation

The tyrant Dionys to seek,
Stern Moerus with his poniard crept;
The watchful guard upon him swept;
The grim king marked his changeless cheek:
"What wouldst thou with thy poinard? Speak!"
"The city from the tyrant free!"
"The death-cross shall thy guerdon be."
"I am prepared for death, nor pray,"
Replied that haughty man, "to live;
Enough, if thou one grace wilt give
For three brief suns the death delay
To wed my sister - leagues away;
I boast one friend whose life for mine,
If I should fail the cross, is thine."
The tyrant mused, - and smiled, - and said
With gloomy craft, "So let it be; Three days I will vouchsafe to thee.
But mark - if, when the time be sped,
Thou fail'st - thy surety dies instead.
His life shall buy thine own release;

Doch dir ist die Strafe erlassen.
 Und er kommt zum Freunde:
 "der König gebeut,
 Daß ich am Kreuze mit dem Leben
 Bezahle das frevelnde Streben,
 Doch will er mir gönnen drey Tage Zeit,
 Bis ich die Schwester dem Gatten gefreit,
 So bleib du dem König zum Pfande,
 Bis ich komme, zu lösen die Bande.
 Und schweigend umarmt ihn der treue Freund,
 Und liefert sich aus dem Tyrannen,
 Der andere ziehet von dannen.
 Und ehe das dritte Morgenroth scheint,
 Hat er schnell mit dem Gatten
 die Schwester vereint,
 Eilt heim mit sorgender Seele,
 Damit er die Frist nicht verfehle.
 Da gießt unendlicher Regen herab,
 Von den Bergen stürzen die Quellen,
 Und die Bäche, die Ströme schwellen.
 Und er kommt an's Ufer mit wanderndem Stab,
 Da reisset die Brücke der Strudel hinab,
 Und donnernd sprengen die Wogen
 Des Gewölbes krachenden Bogen.
 Und trostlos irt er an Ufers Rand,
 Wie weit er auch spähet und blicket
 Und die Stimme, die rufende, schicket;
 Da stößet kein Nachen vom sichern Strand,
 Der ihn setze an das gewünschte Land,
 Kein Schiffer lenket die Fähre, Und der wilde Strom wird zum
 Meere.
 Da sinkt er ans Ufer und weint und fleht,
 Die Hände zum Zeus erhoben:
 O hemme des Stromes Toben!
 Es eilen die Stunden, im Mittag steht
 Die Sonne und wenn sie niedergeht,
 Und ich kann die Stadt nicht erreichen,
 So muß der Freund mir erleichen.
 Doch wachsend erneut sich des Stromes Wuth,
 Und Welle auf Welle zerrinnet,
 Und Stunde an Stunde entrinnet,
 Da treibet die Angst ihn, da faßt er sich Muth
 Und wirft sich hinein in die brausende Flut,
 Und theilt mit gewaltigen Armen Den Strom, und ein Gott hat
 Erbarmen.
 Und gewinnt das Ufer und eilet fort,
 Und danket dem rettenden Gotte,
 Da stürzt die raubende Rotte Hervor aus des Waldes
 nächtllichem Ort,
 Den Pfad ihm sperrend, und schnaubet Mord
 Und hemmet des Wanderers Eile Mit drohend geschwungener
 Keule.
 Was wollt ihr? ruft er für Schrecken bleich.
 Ich habe nichts als mein Leben,
 Das muß ich dem Könige geben!
 Und entreißt die Keule dem nächsten gleich:
 Um des Freundes Willen erbarmet euch!
 Und drey, mit gewaltigen Streichen,
 Erlegt er, die andern entweichen.
 Und die Sonne versendet glühenden Brand
 Und von der unendlichen Mühe Ermattet sinken die Knie:
 O hast du mich gnädig aus Räubershand,
 Aus dem Strom mich gerettet ans heilige Land,
 Und soll hier verschmachend verderben,
 Und der Freund mir, der liebende, sterben!
 Und horch! da sprudelt es silberhell
 Ganz nahe, wie rieselndes Rauschen,
 Und stille hält er zu lauschen,

Thy guilt atoned, my wrath shall cease."
 He sought his friend - "The king's decree
 Ordains my life the cross upon
 Shall pay the deed I would have done;
 Yet grants three days' delay to me,
 My sister's marriage-rites to see;
 If thou, the hostage, wilt remain
 Till I - set free - return again!"
 His friend embraced - No word he said.,
 But silent to the tyrant strode - The other went upon his road.
 Ere the third sun in heaven was red,
 The rite was o'er, the sister wed;
 And back, with anxious heart unquailing,
 He hastes to hold the pledge unailing.
 Down the great rains unending bore,
 Down from the hills the torrents rushed,
 In one broad stream the brooklets gushed
 The wanderer halts beside the shore,
 The bridge was swept the tides before -
 The shattered arches o'er and under
 Went the tumultuous waves in thunder.
 Dismayed he takes his idle stand -
 Dismayed, he strays and shouts around,
 His voice awakes no answering sound.
 No boat will leave the sheltering strand,
 To bear him to the wished-for land;
 No boatman will Death's pilot be,
 The wild stream gathers to a sea!
 Sunk by the banks, awhile he weeps,
 Then raised his arms to Jove, and cried,
 "Stay thou, oh stay the maddening tide,
 Midway behold the swift sun sweeps,
 And, ere he sinks adown the deeps,
 If I should fail, his beams will see
 My friend's last anguish - slain for me!
 More fierce it runs, more broad it flows,
 And wave on wave succeeds and dies
 And hour on hour remorseless tries,
 Despair at last to daring grows - Amidst the flood his form he
 throws,
 With vigorous arms the roaring waves
 Cleaves - and a God that pities, saves.
 He wins the bank - he scours the strand?
 He thanks the God in breathless prayer;
 When from the forest's gloomy lair,
 With ragged club in ruthless hand,
 And breathing murder - rushed the band
 That find, in woods, their savage den,
 And savage prey in wandering men.
 "What," cried he, pale with generous fear;
 "What think to gain ye by the strife?
 All I bear with me is my life -
 I take it to the king!" - and here
 He snatched the club from him most near:
 And thrice he smote, and thrice his blows
 Dealt death - before him fly the foes!
 The sun is glowing as a brand;
 And faint before the parching heat,
 The strength forsakes the feeble feet:
 "Thou hast saved me from the robbers' hand,
 Through wild floods given the blessed land;
 And shall the weak limbs fail me now?
 And he! - Divine one, nerve me, thou!
 Hark! like some gracious murmur by,
 Babbles low music, silver-clear - The wanderer holds his breath
 to hear;
 And from the rock, before his eye,
 Laughs forth the spring delightedly;

Und sieh, aus dem Felsen, geschwätzig, schnell,
 Springt murmelnd hervor ein lebendiger Quell,
 Und freudig bückt er sich nieder,
 Und erfrischt die brennenden Glieder.
 Und die Sonne blickt durch der Zweige Grün,
 Und mahlt auf den glänzenden Matten
 Der Bäume gigantische Schatten,
 Und zwey Wanderer sieht er die Straße ziehn,

Now the sweet waves he bends him o'er,
 And the sweet waves his strength restore.
 Through the green boughs the sun gleams dying,
 O'er fields that drink the rosy beam,
 The trees' huge shadows giant seem.
 Two strangers on the road are hieing;
 And as they fleet beside him are flying
 These muttered words his ear dismay:

Footnote

1 My views here are a result of my readings in and on this poem for a long time, as I have dealt with this poem in the frame work of the courses I have been teaching. 2 The ballad is set in Ancient Greek polis of Syracuse. After a failed attempt by Moerus to kill the tyrant Dionysius, he is sentenced to death. However, he is granted a delay in order to consign his sister to her designated husband. Moerus' friend remains with Dionysius to guarantee Moerus' return. To the astonishment Dionysius, after many obstacles, Moerus returns to save his friend. Ashamed by this deed, Dionysius admits the moral value of fidelity and asks to be considered as a friend in their midst. 3 It would be interestingly important to know that apart from Schiller's 1798 written Ballad with the title *Die Bürgschaft (The Hostage)* which we are discussing in this paper, *Die Bürgschaft (The Pledge)* is an opera written in 1932 in three acts by Kurt Weill. Caspar Neher wrote the German libretto after the parable *Der afrikanische Rechtspruch (The African Verdict)* by Johann Gottfried Herder. Composed from August to October 1931, it was premiered on 10 March 1932 at the Städtische Oper in Berlin, Germany. The opera dates from the years immediately prior to Weill's emigration to the United States. Representing "the summation of Weill's career as an opera composer in Europe,"[1] it provides insight into the compositional path Weill might have followed had he stayed in Europe. *Die Bürgschaft* is an opera of broad ambition and scope, far more somber in tone than Weill's prior works for the stage. The work is in part the result of Weill's growing distance from Brecht during work on *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, leading the composer to turn to Neher, his longtime collaborator as a stage director, for the libretto. *Die Bürgschaft* is, further, a product of its political climate, dubbed by Weill an opera that "attempts to adopt a position on matters that concern us all," and one of multiple Weill stage works of this period "addressing the problem of moral responsibility within a crumbling culture given over to greed, power, and inhumanity." As Weill wrote in reaction to a review of the opera's premiere, "the job of opera today consists in reaching out beyond the fate of private individuals towards universality." In addition to its sobriety and political undertones, *Die Bürgschaft* is a musical turning point for Weill. Weill characterized it as "a return to real music-making." Multiple scholars have noted its departure from the "number opera" formula of works such as *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in exchange for a more continuous sound, as well as a minimizing of satire and irony. Certain of these scholars have also noted influences ranging from Handel and Verdi in its oratorio-like features to a detached and unemotional character indebted to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. *Die Bürgschaft* concerns the rise to power of a money-driven dictatorship, bringing with it greed and destruction. The plot bears clear parallels with the rise of Nazism in Germany at the time, but as suggested above it also acts as a larger social parable dealing with man's role in society. Indeed, the source for Herder's tale *Der afrikanische Rechtspruch*, on which Neher's libretto was based, is the "Bava Metzia" section of the Talmud. Interpreted accordingly, the social parable of *Die Bürgschaft* is the covenant of rabbinical teaching: the bonds between men, between men and their community, and between forces within the community of men such as the law, the state, and the government. [source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_B%C3%BCrgschaft_\(opera\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_B%C3%BCrgschaft_(opera))]

4 In the original version, written in 1798 and published in 1799, the main character is named Moerus. In 1804 Schiller re-worked the ballad and changed the name of Moerus to Damon. It was translated into English in 1902. 5 Courtesy to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_B%C3%BCrgschaft for the texts of English translation & The original poem

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