

# Schiller it's not

by Marianna Wertz

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## Schiller

by T.J. Reed

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*Schiller*, a new release in the "Past Masters" series published by Oxford Paperbacks, seems to have been purposely timed to intersect—and destroy—the international ferment around the Poet of Freedom launched by the revolutions of 1989-90. While purportedly an academic account of Schiller's writings, the book is actually an attempt to slander Schiller as the forerunner of both Hitler and Marx!

Past Masters, according to the book jacket, is "a series of concise, lucid, authoritative introductions to the thought of leading intellectual figures of the past whose ideas still influence the way we think today." Among the other "past masters" whose works have been so introduced, are Aquinas, Aristotle, Augustine, Bach, Cervantes, Chaucer, Dante, Homer, Leibniz, Thomas More, Muhammad, Plato, Shakespeare, and even Jesus Christ (!), as well as the entire panoply of British utilitarians.

More accurately, Past Masters is one of Oxford University's vehicles for dictating what it is politically correct to think about the leading intellectual figures of the past, from Oxford's standpoint—i.e., the standpoint of the British Empire.

The author of *Schiller* is T.J. Reed, Taylor Professor of the German Language and Literature at the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of The Queen's College. As it is truly said, man can't serve two masters at once: Reed can't serve the revolutionary Schiller and the Queen at the same time. Nor does he.

Schiller, the great poet of freedom, whose writings have inspired revolutions against absolutism around the world, is described in this work as "a legendary rebel against princely absolutism, a historian devoted to the Enlightenment programme of human progress. . . ." The so-called Enlightenment was supported by the feudal oligarchy of Europe, especially the British oligarchy, as a means for subverting the international, republican nation-building process of which the American Revolution was a critical part, by separating rational thought from emotion, and spreading the disease of Romanticism. Since Schiller was the most incisive critic of precisely this outlook in the works of the Enlightenment's most important German purveyor, Immanuel Kant, to call

Schiller a devotee of the Enlightenment is like calling George Washington a fairy queen!

## To subvert the German revolution

If we consider what Britain's response was to the great revolution that took place in Germany in 1989, when this book was first being published, we can get a clearer idea *why* it was published then. Great Britain, under Margaret Thatcher's iron fist, did everything within its power to prevent a unified and strengthened German republic from coming into being—short of openly siding with the KGB. Recall the insulting editorials in the London Tory press, denouncing Chancellor Helmut Kohl, depicting the Germans as Nazis, whose only motive in seeking a unified Germany was the historic quest for *Lebensraum*. It seemed that Kohl might soon be depicted as a supporter of Lyndon LaRouche, so vile were the British denunciations of him.

This book, appearing as it did during the year of German unification, could have had no other purpose but to prevent that unification, by undermining the *sole possible basis* for it, as Helga Zepp-LaRouche has identified that: German classical culture. Schiller's Ode to Joy, set so magnificently by Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony, became the National Anthem of the reunified Germany. An entire nation joined in its singing, over and over again, as the *joy* in being reunified and being free of communism, swept the nation.

Reed uses this book to mislocate Schiller's influence, what he calls his "legacy," and thereby to subvert the influence of his writings in what must be an emerging classical renaissance in Western Europe, if the newly made revolutions are to survive.

Says Reed: "Not much German practice, historically, has matched the best of German thought and feeling. It is true that Schiller's and Goethe's 'high-minded conspiracy' was eventually successful to the extent that the public came to accept them and their works as the classics of the national literature. But, as in any culture, this was no guarantee that the substance of their work—its humane ideals, its ethical discriminations—would be absorbed. To begin with, Goethe's and Schiller's achievement answered above all the cruder needs of German self-esteem after centuries in which Germany had lagged behind the other cultures of Europe, France especially. Now there was a German national literature. . . ."

"But there is something wrong with the idea of 'possessing' culture. It shuts up the energies of art and thought in a showcase. It spawns what Nietzsche called the 'culture-philistine'. . . . The result is in every sense a monumental misunderstanding. . . . [C]elebrations for the hundredth anniversary of Schiller's birth turned into a political demonstration on a scale unprecedented in Germany. . . . But when masses acclaim (or revile) a writer, it is always doubtful how many have read him and how well. The centenary misuse of Schiller's authority, though still relatively mild, was a first step towards the propaganda of the Nazi era, 'Schiller as a

## Schiller's 'Rütli Oath' and the Swiss nation

A great example of Schiller's work as an ecumenical thinker and world citizen is the play *William Tell*, which became the Swiss national drama. While the figure of Tell, who shot an apple off his son's head and became his country's liberator, is legendary, the subject of Schiller's play goes back to an actual event which occurred on Aug. 1, 1291. Switzerland is celebrating the 700th anniversary of that event this year, as the birthday of the nation.

Schiller—who never went to Switzerland—evoked the *Bundesbrief* of 1291, in which the leaders of three Forest Cantons, Unterwalden, Schwyz, and Uri, bordering Lake Lucerne in the heart of Switzerland, defied the oppressive foreign governors appointed to judge them by the Austrian Hapsburg emperors and swore an oath of mutual defense at Rütli. He also studied, both for *William Tell* and his 1803 poem, "The Count of Hapsburg," the 16th century *Helvetic Chronicle* of A. Tschudi.

The Forest Cantons were a stronghold of Catholicism in the period Schiller wrote, as they remain today, though Switzerland gave birth to two of the four major Protestant currents, Calvinism and Zwinglianism. Tschudi himself had been a Zwingli disciple but reconverted and became a fierce critic of the Reformation. Although a Protestant,

Schiller in his play and poem about Swiss history showed a deep and sympathetic grasp of the relation of the Swiss concept of political freedom to the Catholic faith.

He also showed his ability to probe the complexity of historic processes. The poem recounts the devotion of Rudolf of Hapsburg to the Eucharist, as the reason he merited election as Holy Roman Emperor in 1273. Yet by 1291, the high taxes and cruelty of the Hapsburg-appointed governors provoked a rebellion that culminated in the Rütli Oath and the "Tell" drama. Although the Swiss patriots detest Rudolf in Schiller's play, when Rudolf is killed and his murderer flees to William Tell, Tell rejects him and orders him to Rome: "You must away to Italy and to St. Peter's City. There cast yourself at the Pope's feet, confess to him your guilt and thus redeem your soul." It is a priest, Rösselmann, who says "let us swear the Oath of this new league" at Rütli, and who devises a subterfuge to allow citizens to avoid disobeying the arbitrary order of the governor, Gessler to bow to his hat—by placing the Host nearby. (Catholics are required to bow before the Host.)

Schiller recast the original Rütli Oath, which was still feudal in context, as a stirring appeal for the inalienable human right to freedom against tyranny. This became the motto of Lyndon LaRouche's call for "A Worldwide Anti-Bolshevik Resistance Struggle" in November 1988, on the eve of the revolutions in China and eastern Europe. —N. Hamerman

comrade in arms of Hitler' (an actual book title of 1932). Culture and prestige are always at risk from political piracy."

Not content with introducing Hitler as an, albeit confused, follower of Schiller, Reed continues:

"Though Marx is usually read as a sequel to Hegel, his much more concrete concept of alienation goes back directly to Schiller. Even where his argument seems purely economic, there are sometimes echoes of Schiller's aesthetic humanism."

And then there's Nietzsche, the intellectual author of fascism. "There are other beneficiaries yet. The young Nietzsche owes more to Schiller than he likes to admit: the fundamental human drives evoked in *The Birth of Tragedy*—the creative upthrust of the dionysian and the cool shaping power of the apolline—pose a Schillerian problem of integrating antithetical forces."

In addition, according to Reed, Freud, Jung, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Thomas Mann all find their intellectual roots in Schiller!

What message does this send to the young, enthusiastic revolutionaries of 1989? It says, simply put, that Schiller was a communist! Indeed, the East German regime claimed Schiller for its own, even as they were repressing every liber-

ty for which he gave his life.

Perhaps the real giveaway occurs not in the analytical conclusion of the book, from which we quoted above, but from Reed's lengthy description of Schiller's writings, which takes up most of the book.

As most Schiller aficionados would, I believe, agree, the highpoint of Schiller's dramatic writing occurs in his *Don Carlos*, in the scene between Posa and King Philip, where the King turns to Posa for direction, and Posa, enunciating all the ideals of the republican revolutionary, tells him to "Restore mankind's / Long-lost nobility" and that he, Posa, "cannot be the servant of a prince."

In describing the scene, Reed says, "Philip, prompt and simplistic as a McCarthy committee sniffing out Communist subversives, exclaims 'You are a Protestant.'" Posa is a communist! The revolutions against absolutism are communist! If you follow Schiller, you are following communism!

Fortunately, the revolutionaries of 1989 didn't listen to Great Britain. They broke from the real communists and embraced the real Schiller. Now the only question is, will they have the *culture* to keep the British from coming in through the side door—the door marked "free enterprise"?