HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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SCHILLER, FRIEDRICH

Friedrich Schiller. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) was brought up in tightened financial circumstances, the only son of a military doctor—Schiller had five sisters—and obliged to move frequently during his youth. His father, however, favored him and took him along with him, on assignments and missions, and Schiller grew up well educated, with strong gymnasium training in the Classics. In his late teens he seemed destined for the ministry—which appealed to his imagination—but later he shifted these choices toward law and then medicine, finally ending up for a short time, as a military surgeon. (Throughout his brief life Schiller, who died at 45 of tuberculosis, remained fascinated with self-cures for the many ailments that plagued him.) After being fired from that post, he wandered for several years from city to city, relatively poverty stricken. (It is not to be imagined that 'wandered' means he was idle, for among other things, Schiller composed his Europe-awakening play, *The Robbers* (1781), during these years, not to mention several other overnight success dramas.) Thanks to his brilliant productivity during these years of no formal occupation, Schiller found himself offered a Professorship at the University of Jena—with Goethe's assistance—and an annuity which helped him to restore his financial security. In 1794 Schiller received a significant salary to edit a new literary/intellectual journal, *Die Horen*, The Hours, to which he asked Goethe to contribute. That was the beginning of a close friendship between these two masters of 'aesthetic humanism.' In 1799 Schiller moved to Weimar to work more closely with Goethe. Schiller died there in 1805.

Schiller's themes and masterpieces. Schiller remained concerned, throughout his writing, with the theme of freedom, and, as he matured in his self-awareness, in the deep relation between freedom and the aesthetic, as well as the ethical. Despite appearances, the fabric of Schiller's work is more unified and completed than that of Goethe—who was forever undertaking lateral adventures in thought and writing. It should be noted that Schiller was a historian and essayist as well as a dramatist and lyric poet. As a Professor at Jena he wrote a History of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and a profusion of distinguished essays on topics of Greek art and society. (One of the finest, *'How the Ancients depicted Death,'* characterizes the kinds of bas reliefs left by fifth century Athenian sculptors on the tombs of the departed, in the Kerameikos cemetery. Schiller penetrates deeply into the Greek compromise with death obtained by the Hellenes through beauty.) As a lyric poet, Schiller was prone to deal with ideas—especially ethical ideas—but to tweak them, so that the quality of the language forestalled any aridity in the thought. Schiller's dramas, of which we mentioned only *The Robbers*, play boldly over events in German history, targeting clash areas where love, honor, and remorse are thrust into forceful interaction. (It may be said that these plays, like *Intrigue and Love* (1784) and *Wallenstein* (1798), are widely considered among his greatest achievements.)

Schiller and Kant. The culminating thought for Schiller is his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), in which he sums up many of the drivers of his whole body of expression, and especially his relation to the epoch shaping philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), profoundly dissected the interrelation between aesthetic and ethical judgments.(His complex and powerful argument is that the ethical is a far higher category than the aesthetic; which, in a word, is the point Schiller sets out to contest, in his Letters.) In contesting Kant's position, Schiller develops the notion of the aesthetic as the realm of appearance as liberty, a condition in which we can penetrate to the ethical through the realm of the aesthetic.

Reading

Primary source reading

Sharpe, Leslie, *Friedrich Schlller: Drama, Thought, and Politics,* 1991.

Secondary source reading

Martinson, Steven, A Companion to the Works of Friedrich Schiller, 1982.

Further reading

Will, Frederic, *Intelligible Beauty in Aesthetic thought from Winckelmann to Victor Cousin,* l958.

Original language reading

Riedel, Wolfgang, *Der Spaziergang. Aesthetik der Landschaft und Geschichtsphilosophie der Natur bei Schiller*, 1989.

Suggested paper topics

Does it seem a significant part of Schiller's skill set that he was both an academic historian—a scholar—and a creator of powerful dramas? Consider the fact that Schiller's plays—Don Carlos, Wallenstein—are almost entirely devoted to historical themes. Does Schiller write these plays with the eye of a 'scholar' of history, or does he transmute the raw materials of history into a vision we would call art?

As s student of Immanuel Kant, and of the Greek classics—both literature and sculpture—Schiller is deeply concerned to harmonize the claims of both the aesthtic and the moral dimensions of human nature. How does he attempt to do this, through the category of 'freedom'? Is he on the right track? Can the beautiful and the good co exist in the same value system?

Excerpt http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/columbus-2/

Amalia
Angel-fair, Walhalla's charms displaying,
Fairer than all mortal youths was he;
Mild his look, as May-day sunbeams straying
Gently o'er the blue and glassy sea.

And his kisses!--what ecstatic feeling!
Like two flames that lovingly entwine,
Like the harp's soft tones together stealing
Into one sweet harmony divine,--

Soul and soul embraced, commingled, blended,
Lips and cheeks with trembling passion burned,
Heaven and earth, in pristine chaos ended,
Round the blissful lovers madly turn'd.

He is gone--and, ah! with bitter anguish
Vainly now I breathe my mournful sighs;
He is gone--in hopeless grief I languish
Earthly joys I ne'er again can prize!

Columbus
Steer on, bold sailor--Wit may mock thy soul that sees the land,
And hopeless at the helm may droop the weak and weary hand,
Yet ever--ever to the West, for there the coast must lie,
And dim it dawns, and glimmering dawns before thy reason's eye;
Yea, trust the guiding God--and go along the floating grave,
Though hid till now--yet now behold the New World o'er the wave!
With genius Nature ever stands in solemn union still,
And ever what the one foretells the other shall fulfil.