

BOOKS

Intellectual Honesty, Religious Bias

This book, which bills itself as the “first general study of Friedrich Schiller’s works to appear in English for over forty years,” contains some useful insights, owing to the author’s admiration for Schiller and her intellectual honesty, but is nonetheless flawed by her own academic and religious biases.

The book rebukes many misconceptions about Schiller, for example, that he was a Kantian. Sharpe writes: “From strict Kantianism he distanced himself quite specifically as early as in *On Grace and Dignity*. . . . Schiller constantly strove to overcome Kant’s dualism of nature and freedom, searching to express through Kantian terminology ideas which exceed its scope.”

Additionally, in her treatment of the play *Wilhelm Tell*, after quoting Schiller, who wrote that the central idea of the play is “How self-help can be necessary and just in a strictly defined case,” she insightfully points out that “the play can be and has been seen as a reply to Kant’s absolute denial of the right of rebellion.”

The book also correctly emphasizes the fact that Schiller’s work is philosophically in the “Christian and Platonic” tradition. The author points out that in his *Philosophy of Physiology*, Schiller begins by asserting that “man’s purpose is to strive toward the greatness of his Creator, to encompass the world with the same vision as the Creator.” The author also references the *Philosophical Letters*, where she says “we read that the universe emanates from God’s mind, that love binds creation together, and that all created things are destined to emulate the Creator.”

Politically, the book correctly reports Schiller’s disillusionment with the French Revolution and his sympathy for the American Revolution. Sharpe stresses that after the failure of the French Revolution “he loses confidence neither in reason nor in the

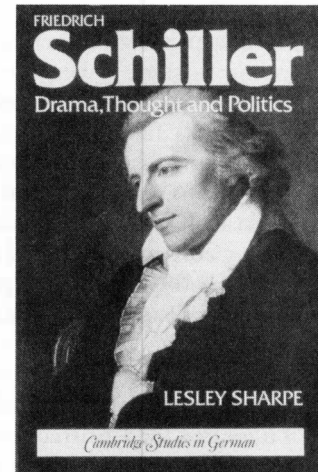
notion of man’s inalienable rights. This faith may in fact be due to the continuing impact of the American Revolution.” The book then correctly points out that the failure of the French Revolution prompted Schiller to look at the failure of the Enlightenment as a whole. And finally, the author correctly points out that through his friend Wilhelm von Humboldt, Schiller’s notion of the necessity of aesthetical education to achieve true political freedom, was directly incorporated into the Prussian educational reforms of the newly emerging German nation.

Academic Authorities

Unfortunately, despite these positive reflections of an appreciation of Schiller’s work, the book is flawed by a perceived need to propitiate British academic authorities and to counter the “long tradition of adoration of Schiller in Germany, with the attendant distortion of his works in the cause of nationalism.” This results in a lukewarm, emotionally detached critique, which the author characterizes as follows: “I have tried in this study to stress Schiller’s restlessness. . . . If I have succeeded in this, Schiller should have emerged as an extremely difficult poet to pin down.”

At the very end of the book the author suggests that in the context of the current political upheaval in Europe, Schiller illuminates the “difficulty” of the tasks of “shaping a political future and restoring congruence between the moral and the political realms” and “the nature of the choices they demand.” But because she has portrayed his aesthetical writings as only partially successful, “leaving ambiguities which are hard to explain away,” her book has the effect of blunting the answers Schiller offers.

The fact is that Schiller is not difficult to pin down. Rather, it is the author’s own attempt to impose established academic and religious



Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thought and Politics

by Lesley Sharpe
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categories on Schiller’s work, which causes her the difficulty, which she erroneously ascribes to Schiller.

Sharpe reports that Schiller, in his *Letters on Don Carlos*, portrays the character Posa as an idealist who falls into despotism. Nonetheless, she rejects Schiller’s own analysis and argues: “In spite of Schiller’s seeming ambivalence toward Posa . . . he is vindicated.” She even goes so far as to say, “Schiller was less than just to Posa and to the play he had written.”

In her assessment of *The Virgin of Orleans*, she uncritically embraces the critics by writing, “in spite of the enthusiasm with which it was received . . . the play has consistently struck many critics as a failure.”

Perhaps the greatest weakness is the book’s treatment of Schiller’s poetry. The translations Sharpe uses of Schiller’s poems are primarily by the Isis worshipping British imperialist, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who consistently violates Schiller’s texts in order to make Schiller’s poems reflect his own diametrically opposed views. (One example among many: in the last line of Schiller’s poem, “The Power of Song,” Bulwer-Lytton deliberately mistranslates the word “nature” into “Great Mother.”)

Religious Bias

The key to Sharpe's own difficulty in understanding Schiller is her persistent effort to portray Schiller as anti-Catholic, despite having correctly identified him as a Christian. This is related to her erroneous portrayal of Schiller as an Enlightenment thinker, despite having correctly identified his rejection of the anti-Christian Enlightenment outlook of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Kant.

In both the *Philosophical Letters* and the *Kallias* correspondence, Schiller explicitly identifies the Christian commandment to love one another as the basis of his concept of beauty and of political freedom. By failing to comprehend this fact, Sharpe for example portrays the vision of the world espoused in *Don Carlos* by Posa as "Rousseauistic" rather than Christian, and argues that "history, viewed from the perspective of the Enlightenment, has vindicated his [Posa's] beliefs."

Although it is undeniable that Schiller, who was raised as a Protestant Christian and in his youth considered becoming a minister, was favorable to certain legitimate features of the Reformation, he was not uncritical of it, nor was he an anti-Catholic zealot. For Schiller, who in the *Kallias* letters bases his entire theory of aesthetics on the Good Samaritan parable of Christian love, the world cannot be reduced to a conflict of Protestantism versus Catholicism. Sharpe, however, would have him do precisely this.

For example, in the play *Mary Stuart*, Mary takes the sacraments of reconciliation and communion before being unjustly executed. Schiller had insisted on the retention of this scene and Sharpe recognizes that through it Schiller portrays the atonement Mary achieves through God's forgiveness. And yet Sharpe's anti-Catholic bias compels her to argue that "in no sense does he seek to glamorize the Catholic faith. Elsewhere in the play the Catholic church is presented as power-hungry and hypocritical. . . ."

Sharpe's bias also leads her to suggest that "the problem" with Schiller's treatment of Joan of Arc in *The Virgin of Orleans*, who is inspired by the Vir-

gin Mary, is that the heroine herself is a "curious mixture of Christian and Pagan."

Nor is she able to fully appreciate the ending of *Wilhelm Tell*. After first wishing that Schiller had devised a way of avoiding Tell's murder of the tyrant Gessler, she reluctantly recognizes that Tell's action is justified by natural law, i.e., "there is a limit to a tyrant's power." She also recognizes that, as Schiller himself wrote, Tell's murder is "resolved morally and poetically" by the contrast of his motives with those of Parricida, who killed the Emperor for personal reasons. But her anti-Catholic bias prevents her from even considering the importance Schiller attributes here, as in *Mary Stuart*, to atonement with God through the repentance and absolution of sins. In response to Parricida's plea to him for help at the end of the play,

Tell says:

Hear, what God grants my heart—
To Italy and to Saint Peter's city,
There cast yourself at the Pope's feet, confess
To him your guilt and thus redeem your soul.

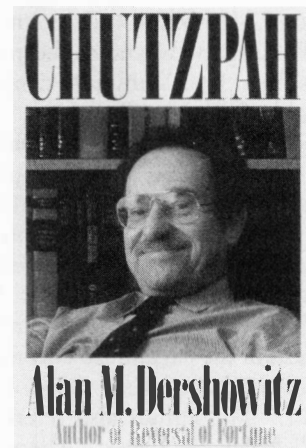
Thus, although less crude than other British academic treatments of Schiller, and offering many isolated insights, this book continues the British tradition of cultural subversion by means of distortion. In light of the positive role played by the Catholic Church in the fight for freedom in Europe and throughout the world today, the attempt to characterize Schiller as anti-Catholic is particularly destructive.

—William F. Wertz, Jr.

The Anti-Defamation League Organizes Jews Against Judaism

Over the last twenty-five years, Edgar Bronfman's World Jewish Congress and the B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League have been on a rampage to eliminate all positive elements of Jewish tradition. For the most part, this campaign has not directly attacked Jewish theology, but has consisted of appeals to defend Jews and the Jewish state against anti-Semitism, terrorism, and former Nazis, or to revive the ethnic, rather than religious, traditions of Judaism. In his 1991 book *Chutzpah*, the Anti-Defamation League's favorite "civil rights" lawyer, Alan Dershowitz, opens a frontal assault against the Jewish religion and the Jewish idea of a universal creator God, which he declares to be enemies of the Jewish people.

Despite the superficiality and glaring inconsistencies of his arguments, Dershowitz ought to be taken as a serious representative of the New World Order's Jewish policy. He was personally a protégé of super-spook Arthur Goldberg, one of the founders



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of what is today called Project Democracy. During World War II, Goldberg headed the Office of Strategic Services espionage organization's effort to set up the international network of Anglo-American-controlled trade unions