

**“Blut muß ich saufen, es wird vorübergehen!”**

**Herbert Maisch's Propaganda Film *Friedrich Schiller – Triumph eines Genies* (1940)**

Herbert Maisch's 1940 film *Friedrich Schiller - Triumph eines Genies* opens with medium and long shots of soldiers on horseback wearing the uniforms of Württemberg. They lead four shackled prisoners who struggle to remain on their feet, stumbling and running behind the easy gait of the riders who drag them along with ropes. The scene is rapidly cut, yet repetitive, and the four captives are dragged through the film frame several times. While these images clearly emphasize repression and violation, the camera never rests on the faces of the prisoners or the soldiers. These human beings are represented merely as signs, not individuals. The soldiers and the prisoners are symbols of power and the absence thereof, the hierarchy of terror in a totalitarian state. Maisch introduces these images of callousness and violence almost casually, spending little time on detail. No reason for the forced march is given, as if this were of minor importance in a country in which human rights violations are daily occurrences. This opening sequence illustrating oppression and tyranny cuts to a long shot of five well-dressed gentlemen entering an inn or tavern where the first words spoken in the film can be heard:

Gewalt, Zerstörung, Elend und Not, das ist das herrliche Leben, das der Herzog von Württemberg seinem Land bereitet! Ihr hier in Ulm, Ihr lebt im Paradies, aber eine Stunde von hier, da drüben über der Grenze, da ist die Hölle! [...] Aber es muß anders werden und es wird anders werden! Ich spür's in allen Gliedern: ein Gewitter ist im Anzug!

The voice belongs to Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (played by Eugen Klöpfer), who has fled Württemberg, but will be lured back and arrested in Blaubeuren shortly after this proclamation in what Kurt Honolka called “ein fürstliches Gangsterstück”.<sup>1</sup> Enraged by Schubart's revolutionary articles and poems against autocratic rulers in general and the bully of Württemberg in particular, Herzog Karl Eugen had the poet incarcerated at Hohenasperg. By opening his film with Schubart rather than Schiller, Maisch sets the tone of the biopic and also hints

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<sup>1</sup> Kurt Honolka: Schubart. Stuttgart: DVA, 1985, p. 177. Honolka describes the trap set for Schubart by the Duke (p. 176f.) who ordered the Kloster-Oberamtman Scholl to lure Schubart back to Württemberg under false pretenses. Scholl's compliance was, according to Honolka, based entirely on fear.

at its purpose. In this opening sequence, Schubart drinks to the death of the tyrant and proclaims:

Blas Halali zu Mord und Tod,  
Einmal erliegst auch Du!  
Häuf Unrecht nur zu einem Berg von Not!  
Einmal, da stirbst auch Du!  
Hüll Dich in Glanz und falschen Schein,  
Du trügst die Ewigkeiten nicht!  
Nur Flüche, Tränen, Hass sind Dein,  
Und fürchterlich ist das Gericht!

Schubart is introduced as Schiller's "Wegbereiter", as someone, that is, who shares Schiller's understanding of the importance of freedom<sup>2</sup> as basic human need and the source of human dignity, and who is therefore naturally opposed to absolutism. Schubart's letters are evidence to his love and admiration for Schiller, whom he calls "der Starke"<sup>3</sup> and "ein großer Kerl – ich lieb ihn heiß – !"<sup>4</sup> Both poets faced censorship, incarceration and exile; Schubart, however, experienced the power of a totalitarian regime to a greater degree, spending ten years of his life imprisoned at Hohenasperg (1777-1787)<sup>5</sup> while Schiller managed to escape the clutches of his *Landesvater*. Indeed, Herbert Maisch's biopic of Friedrich Schiller (played by Horst Caspar) ends with the poet's escape from Württemberg together with his friend Andreas Streicher on the evening of 22 September 1782. The idea of freedom forms the core of the film, just as it permeated Schiller's understanding of nature, human reason and dignity.

At first glance, the concept of freedom, as it is represented in this film, remains vague and open to interpretation, and it seems that ambiguities are consciously created and employed in order to ensure the compliance of the film with Nazi ideology. *Friedrich Schiller – Triumph eines Genies* can easily be read as a propaganda film in line with the Nazis' general appropriation of the German poet from the beginning of their rise to power. For the title of chapter 8 of the second volume of *Mein Kampf* (first published in 1926), Adolf Hitler chose a quote from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*: "Der Starke ist am mächtigsten allein." From the 1920s onwards, Schiller's works were used (or rather abused) to link Nazi ideology to the revered cultural icon. On 10 November 1934, to mark the 175th anniversary of Schiller's birth, mass spectacles and public celebrations as well as political events

<sup>2</sup> See R. D. Miller: Schiller and the Ideal of Freedom. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart: Briefe. Munich: Beck, 1984, p. 275 (letter to Christian Friedrich Himburg, 2 February 1787).

<sup>4</sup> Schubart: Briefe, p. 168 (letter to his wife Helena, probably June 1782).

<sup>5</sup> He writes to Helena: "Unmöglich kann ich dir einen Begriff von all meinen Leiden machen. Jahre vergehen, und ich ächze vergebens nach Freiheit." Schubart: Briefe, p. 168.

dedicated to the German poet took place all over Germany. According to Georg Ruppelt, these celebrations were intended to inspire a sense of kinship and community among German people with Friedrich Schiller as their irreproachable ally. During the live radio broadcast of the Schiller anniversary celebrations in Marbach, most speakers emphasised Schiller's relevance for the present times and repeatedly pointed to the correlation between the poet's *Weltanschauung* and the ideology of National Socialism.

Die offizielle Rednerliste wies nur einen Namen auf, dessen Träger nicht wenigstens ein Parteiamt innehatte; aber auch der Geheimrat Prof. Dr. Otto von Güntter betonte in seiner Rede wie seine Vor- und Nachredner die Bedeutung Schillers für die nationalsozialistische Gegenwart und wies auf die Übereinstimmung von Schillers Weltanschauung und der des Nationalsozialismus hin.<sup>6</sup>

In the Schiller year 1934, Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi Party's principal ideologist, editor of the rampantly anti-Semitic Nazi paper *Völkischer Beobachter* (from 1921) and author of the infamous *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1930), was put in charge of the spiritual and philosophical education of the Nazi party and its related organizations. Rosenberg had been one of the co-founders of the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*, which originated at the Nazi party rally in 1927 and was formally constituted as the first cultural political organisation of the Nazi party two years later. Its aim was to address the perceived crisis of German culture and convey Nazi ideology to those who could not be reached at the mass rallies. This was to be achieved especially by way of cultural icons deeply rooted in what the majority of the population proudly believed to be intrinsically German. In Schiller, Rosenberg believed to have found the ideal icon and in 1934 the *Völkischer Beobachter* called him one of Third Reich's 'Godfathers' (Ruppelt).

The *Rütlichswur* in Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* became a staple of Nazi gatherings and was performed all over Germany on Schiller's anniversary in 1934. By reducing *Tell* to this grand gesture of resistance, the Nazis exploited Schiller's text to emphasise their own 'struggle' to re-establish Germany as a nation based on her "ew'ge[.] Rechte" (*Wilhelm Tell*, II, 2, line 1278). The *Rütlichswur* thus seemed to justify the Nazis' *Blut und Boden* ideology. The claim, supposedly, cannot be challenged, for it is based on an eternal right of the Germanic Aryan race: "Unser ist durch tausendjährigen Besitz der Boden" (*Wilhelm Tell*, II, 2, l. 1269) Casting their own position as an essentially defensive one, the Nazis maintained that their aim was merely to re-establish a time-honoured natural state against its detractors and corruptors – just like the heroes of *Wilhelm Tell*:

Der alte Urstand der Natur kehrt wieder,  
Wo Mensch dem Menschen gegenübersteht -

<sup>6</sup> Georg Ruppelt: Schiller im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland. Der Versuch einer Gleichschaltung. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979, p. 33-45.

Zum letzten Mittel, wenn kein andres mehr  
Verfangen will, ist ihm das Schwert gegeben -  
Der Güter höchstes dürfen wir verteid'gen  
Gegen Gewalt - Wir stehn vor unser Land,  
Wir stehn vor unsre Weiber, unsre Kinder! (II, 2, 1. 1281-1287)

Other quotations from Schiller's plays and poetry featured time and again in speeches by Hitler, Goebbels and other Nazi officials. *Wilhelm Tell* became the most performed play on German stages and countless speeches during the time begin or end with *Tell* quotes such as: "Ans Vaterland, ans teure, schließ dich an" and especially "Wir wollen sein ein einzig [often misquoted as 'einig'] Volk von Brüdern, in keiner Not uns trennen und Gefahr". *Tell* maintained this status until 1941 when Hitler banned the play from the stage and from the school curriculum because of its depiction of separatist tendencies and tyrannicide.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the Third Reich Schiller's works were published almost annually by several of the leading German publishing houses such as Reclam, Insel, Böhlau and Cotta.<sup>8</sup> The first volume of the *Nationalausgabe (Gedichte in der Reihenfolge ihres Erscheinens 1776-1799)* was published in 1943; it was edited by Julius Petersen and Friedrich Beißner and included a preface by the 'Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung' Bernhard Rust who writes:

'Nationalausgabe' bedeutet heute mehr als wissenschaftliche Hochwertigkeit. Dem deutschen Volke soll damit Werk und Erbe Schillers unverkürzt erschlossen und zugänglich gemacht werden. Wenn dies Werk nunmehr im vierten Jahre des gewaltigsten Krieges, inmitten der stärksten Anspannung der Nation zu erscheinen beginnt, dann liegt darin ein stolzes Bekenntnis unseres Volkes zu seiner edelsten Vergangenheit und ein Zeugnis seines unerschütterlichen Glaubens an seine Zukunft. Es ist von tiefem Sinn, daß gerade Schillers Wesen und Werk in dieser Stunde gegenwärtig gemacht wird.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See the letter by Reichsleiter Martin Bormann to the head of the Reichskanzlei, Reichsminister Lammers: "Der Führer wünscht, daß Schillers Schauspiel *Wilhelm Tell* nicht mehr aufgeführt wird und in der Schule nicht mehr behandelt wird. Ich bitte Sie, hiervon vertraulich Herrn Reichsminister Rust und Herrn Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels zu verständigen." Cited in: Bernhard Zeller (ed.): *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, 1933-1945. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schiller-Nationalmuseum, Marbach am Neckar. Vol. 1. Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1983, p. 420.

<sup>8</sup> Publications included a ten-volume edition by Paul Merker for Reclam and a four-volume edition by Willi Koch for Franke in 1935; Franz Ibler edited the *Sanssouci* edition in eight volumes for the the Büchergilde Gutenberg in 1936; Benno von Wiese published the first volume of a new *Volksausgabe* (Poetry I) in 1937; von Wiese's five-volume *Schillers Werke in Einzelausgaben* was published in 1938.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Zeller: *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, p. 370.

In addition, numerous biographies and studies appeared, such as Hermann Christian Mettin's *Der politische Schiller* (Berlin: Hugo, 1937), Eberhard Kretschmar's *Schiller. Sein Leben in Selbstzeugnissen, Briefen und Berichten* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1938) or Lily Hohenstein's *Schiller. Der Kämpfer - Der Dichter* (Berlin: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1940). In 1939, Norbert Jacques published his novel *Leidenschaft. Ein Schiller-Roman* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag), and in 1940 he edited *Der Junge Eros: Frühe Gedichte von Friedrich von Schiller* (Darmstädter Verlag). It was Norbert Jacques' novel, a biographical narrative that culminates in young Schiller's writing of *Die Räuber*, that provided the literary basis for Herbert Maisch's Schiller film of 1940.

Film-making in the Third Reich was part of the highly influential cultural industry overseen by Joseph Goebbels. As head of the Reichsfilmkammer, he controlled every aspect of film production in the Third Reich, from screenwriting to public performance. Film was considered 'Kulturgut' and every person working in this industry had to submit proof of German citizenship and Aryan ancestry, as Hitler himself emphasized: "Wer am Kulturgut Film mitarbeiten will, [muß] deutscher Staatsbürger und deutschstämmig sein."<sup>10</sup> Goebbels' aim was to produce only films that supported the Nazi agenda, and numerous scholars have convincingly argued that the apparatus of entertainment and manipulation controlled by Goebbels significantly aided in the German public's support for the war and, if perhaps inadvertently, mass murder.<sup>11</sup>

It was typical for filmmakers of the Third Reich to play down the political and ideological implications of their works by explaining feature films that appealed to mass audiences as entirely apolitical enterprises - and to consequently excuse their own responsibility for the atrocities committed during this time as negligible. Herbert Maisch, the director of *Friedrich Schiller - Triumph eines Genies*, hence told the *Marbacher Zeitung*: "Die Aufgabe eines solchen Films liegt nicht in einer [...] kulturpolitischen Mission, er will vielmehr lediglich den Kampf des Genies gegen seine Zeit, die Reaktion, aufzeigen."<sup>12</sup> In the five years prior to his Schiller film, Maisch had established himself as successful and productive director of mostly light-hearted features and melodramas with works such as *Königswalzer* (1935), *Liebeserwachen* (1935/36), *Boccaccio* (1936), *Starke Herzen* (1937) and the *Carmen* adaptation *Andalusische Nächte* (1938). But he had also directed films with

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Zeller: *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, p. 437.

<sup>11</sup> See Mary-Elisabeth O'Brien: *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment. The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004; Francis Courtade: *Geschichte des Films im Dritten Reich*. Munich: Hanser, 1975; Robert C. Reimer: *Cultural History Through a National Socialist Lens. Essays on the Cinema of Nazi Germany*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2002; Eric Rentschler: *The Ministry of Illusion. Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996; Richard Taylor: *Film Propaganda. Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*. New York: Tauris, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Maisch: *Über den Schiller-Film*. In: *Marbacher Zeitung*, 26 August 1940; cited in Zeller: *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, p. 442.

a strong political subplot such as *Menschen ohne Vaterland* (1937) or *D III 88* (1939). When Joseph Goebbels demanded more political films – “Weniger seichte Stoffe. So geht das nicht!” – Maisch was delighted to be offered the exposé of *Rebellen* (as the Schiller film was originally meant to be entitled): “Daß ich nach diesem Stoff begeistert griff, brauchte ich nicht zu versichern.”<sup>13</sup> The director, who was born in Nürtingen in Württemberg, describes the plot as “Eine der interessantesten Episoden in der so reichen Kulturgeschichte meiner engeren Heimat!”<sup>14</sup> The minutes of a Tobis film executive board meeting give evidence of a decidedly political intention behind the Schiller film that lets Maisch’s delight for the project appear as rather naive: “Minister wünscht politische Filme (Bismarck, Ohm Krüger, *Friedrich Schiller*), selbst auf die Gefahr hin, daß Verlust entsteht. Programm 50:50 politische und Unterhaltungsfilme. Reserve an Drehbüchern ist genügend vorhanden.”<sup>15</sup>

The history of cinematic adaptations of Schiller’s life and works suggested that such a project need not necessarily result in propaganda film with a nationalist German political agenda. George Méliès, one of the most outstanding French pioneers of early silent cinema, adapted Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* as early as 1898. Alice Guy followed with her own adaptation of *Guillaume Tell* only two years later; Lucien Nonguet and Albert Capellani released their versions in 1903 and 1908 respectively. Italy produced its first *Guglielmo Tell* for the screen in 1911, the USA followed in 1913 with J. Searle Dawley and Walter Edwin’s adaptation of *The Robbers* starring Mary Fuller. In Germany, 1913 proved extremely productive with regard to cinematic Schiller adaptations. Phil Jutzi directed *Fiesko*, starring Wilhelm Dieterle; and Friedrich Fehér – best known for playing Francis in Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* – directed and played the lead in both *Kabale und Liebe* and *Die Räuber*. In 1914, Fehér’s adaptation of Schiller’s *Tell* – according to archival records the fourth *Tell* already on German cinema screens – premiered as *Die Befreiung der Schweiz und die Sage von Wilhelm Tell*, in which Fehér plays Gessler and Karl Kienlechner appears as Wilhelm Tell. In 1923, Curt Goetz directed *Schiller – Eine Dichterjugend* and created a new genre in German cinema: the biopic.

In 1934, Hanns Johst – one of the co-founders of the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* and known for his revanchist poetry and nationalist prose<sup>16</sup> – adapted

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Maisch: Helm ab – Vorhang auf. Siebzig Jahre eines ungewöhnlichen Lebens. Emsdetten: Lechte, 1968, p. 289.

<sup>14</sup> Maisch: Helm ab, p. 289.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Gerd Albrecht: Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik. München: Hanser, 1969, p. 143.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Hanns Johst volume of revanchist poetry: Rolandsruf. München: Langen, 1919; or his drama: Schlageter (München: Langen-Müller, 1933), which tells the story of Nazi martyr Albert Leo Schlageter and is dedicated to Adolf Hitler “in liebender Verehrung und unwandelbarer Treue”. In his powerful position as director of the Reichsschrifttumskammer, Johst was responsible for the persecution of all non-Aryan and anti-Nazi literatures.

Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* (together with Hans Curjel, Wilhelm Stöppler and Heinz Paul) and provided the screenplay for a first Schiller film that catered to the Nazis’ desire to appropriate the German poet for their nationalist agenda: *Wilhelm Tell – Das Freiheitsdrama eines Volkes*. This film, under the direction of Heinz Paul, was a German-Swiss co-production and starred Conrad Veidt as Gessler. Numerous members of the crew of the film had either already joined the NSDAP or fully supported the reading of Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* as a proto-fascist text: director Heinz Paul was in the SA, Hans Marr who played Tell was an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazi party, Emmy Sonnemann (Frau Tell) was Hermann Goering’s lover and later became his wife. In total, three of Schiller’s plays were turned into Third Reich films in big budget and high profile productions: *Wilhelm Tell*, *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* and, indirectly in Maisch’s biopic, *Die Räuber*. *Das Mädchen Johanna* was adapted for the screen by Gerhard Menzel and directed by Gustav Ucicky, starring Gustav Gründgens, Heinrich George, Erich Ponto, Veit Harlan, Angela Salloker and many more A-list actors of the time. The film, which premiered in 1935, is a cynical, rather depressing take on the power-hungry few and the weakness of the masses. Johanna is clearly depicted as a victim.

As in the other two productions, *Friedrich Schiller – Der Triumph eines Genies* flaunted an all-star cast which included the young and famous theatre actor Horst Caspar as Friedrich, Hannelore Schroth as his love interest Laura, Heinrich George as Herzog Karl Eugen von Württemberg, *Caligari*’s Lil Dagover as gentle and benevolent Reichsgräfin Franziska von Hohenheim and Paul Dahlke as Feldwebel Rieß. Bernhard Minetti stars as Franz Moor in the premiere of the play in Mannheim towards the end of the diegesis. The script was written by Walter Wassermann and C. H. Diller (the pen name of actress Lotte Neumann) based on an idea by Hans Josef Cremers and the novel *Leidenschaft* and exposé *Der Tyrann* by Norbert Jacques.<sup>17</sup> The original title of the film was to be *Rebellen*, but according to Herbert Maisch, the title and the last word of the film had to be cut from the original script:

Man forderte statt der ‘Rebellen’ den schulmeisterlichen Titel ‘Friedrich Schiller, der Triumph des Genies’ und glaubte damit blind und vermessen, daß nun alle Welt Schiller mit dem zum Genie propagierten Hitler parallelisiere und nicht mit dem Diktator Carl Eugen. Man verlangte nur, daß das letzte Wort des Films, das Wort ‘Freiheit’ gestrichen werde, das der aus Württemberg Fiehende hinter der Grenze seinem Freunde Streicher im Wagen zuhaucht. Sonst konnte der Film passieren. Er war ‘künstlerisch besonders wertvoll’!<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Norbert Jacques (1880-1954) has a place in film history mainly due to his creation of Dr Mabuse. His novel *Dr Mabuse der Spieler* was published in 1921 and 1922 (and soon turned into a film script by Thea von Harbou). Fritz Lang directed the first Dr Mabuse film 1922 *Dr Mabuse der Spieler* in 1922, then followed *Das Testament des Dr Mabuse* in 1933 and *Die Tausend Augen des Dr Mabuse* in 1960.

<sup>18</sup> Maisch: Helm ab, p. 294.

Herbert Maisch's instincts for the direction of the film were artful but, more importantly, compassionate. In his 1968 autobiography with the unfortunate, yet revealing title *Helm ab – Vorhang auf*, Maisch declares his utter astonishment at the Nazi officials' favourable response to the film, which was labelled "staatspolitisch und künstlerisch wertvoll", which meant that the film had the added benefit of being exempt from tax. Interestingly, Maisch omits "staatspolitisch" from his post-war account cited above.

All of this begs the question as to the appropriate understanding of the film: is it merely an 'interesting episode from cultural history'; or is the "Kampf des Genies gegen seine Zeit" to be read as a protest against tyranny and repression of artistic genius at the time of its production; or does the representation of Germany's 'Godfather' indeed amount to a "staatspolitisch" effective propaganda vehicle? Critics of the film are divided regarding this biopic. Erwin Leiser's documentary film *Deutschland, erwache!* (1968) interprets Maisch's representation of Schiller clearly as that of a predecessor to Adolf Hitler. In his view, the director is at pains to foreground Schiller as a dazzling *Übermensch* who stands, by implication, above the law. Leiser's interpretation is partly based on Maisch's own description of Goebbels' minimal intervention during the making of the film and the director's naïve co-operation with the Nazis. Nevertheless, in hindsight, it is difficult to believe that even a 1940s audience would identify Schiller with their self-proclaimed *Führer* Adolf Hitler. A closer look at the cinematography of the film might shed light on some of the veiled intentions of the film-maker.

The narrative focus on Maisch's biopic is on a young Schiller, whose passion for the art of writing, for poetry and philosophy clashes with his forced education at the Hohe Karlsschule, the military academy in Stuttgart and the Duke of Württemberg's pet project. In the film, the Duke represents ultimate authority, but at the same time wishes to take on a paternal role for the promising boys and young men who are being trained to be the next generation of officers, doctors and lawyers. The academy's structure is based on discipline and order, military drill and categorical obedience. Predictably, there is no question of free speech or constructive criticism; open conversations are suppressed, books that do not pertain to the course of studies prescribed by the Duke himself are confiscated, and on the whole young minds are silenced and abused. In this atmosphere a desperate Schiller begins to resist and secretly writes his first drama *Die Räuber*. After its anonymous publication, Schiller attends a hugely successful premiere in Mannheim. Upon his return, he courageously faces the Duke and demands "Freiheit dem Geist, Freiheit dem Volk!" It comes as no surprise that after this incident any reconciliation with the Duke fails and a prison sentence seems inevitable. Schiller chooses exile over prison and flees Württemberg. The film ends with his carriage crossing the border and traveling into the sunset – a conclusion that provides a thematic frame in that it links back to the figure of Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart who dominated the opening sequence.

There are many similarities regarding the narrative and the cinematography of Maisch's 1940 film and the silent movie of 1923, *Schiller – Eine Dichterjugend*, directed by Curt Goetz. A number of scenes are almost identical in composition and mise-en-scène. Compared to *Friedrich Schiller – Der Triumph eines Genies*, Goetz's film lacks pathos; his depiction of Schiller (played by Theodor Loos) foregrounds the fragile physical constitution of the poet and portrays his illness as a result of the stress associated with the emotional encounter with his imprisoned hero Schubart on Hohenasperg. Maisch, in contrast, chooses to ignore biographical evidence and represents Schiller as the picture of health. Horst Caspar is tall and very attractive if ascetic in appearance. Maisch's Schiller writes rather than rests, defies the Academy's rules, lies to his superiors in order to protect his work, and seems increasingly like an *Übermensch* full of pathos and will to triumph. Horst Caspar portrays a strong, attractive, decisive leader. In comparison to Götz's Schiller, Maisch's poet has undergone a transformation from the immature, weak genius to a truly visionary, if sensitive superhero. It is the poet rather than the Duke who possesses true authority. This is emphasised in most scenes that feature both Schiller and Herzog Karl Eugen by the fact that it is Schiller who is regularly foregrounded and who dominates the film frame. Horst Caspar's Schiller personifies greatness embodied by his tall and beautiful outward appearance. The conflict with the ruler only arises due to the Duke's efforts to contain and confine the poet's genius. Freedom from suppression becomes Schiller's main goal and drive. In hindsight, however, it may be tempting to interpret Schiller's strive for independence and liberation from a tyrannical ruler as the film-maker's plea for an end to Hitler's dictatorial regime. Yet the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* wrote in 1940: "Die Vision, die Friedrich Schiller mit ahnungsvoller Gewißheit erfüllte, war die, daß es etwas Größeres gebe als die verrotteten Zustände seiner Zeit. [...] Und dieses Ideal, an das er glaubte, für das er kämpfte, hieß: ein Deutschland, ein Volk, ein Vaterland."<sup>19</sup>

In his film, Herbert Maisch introduces the audience to the main character on a day of celebrations: it is the Reichsgräfin's birthday and graduation day at the Hohe Karlsschule. To celebrate both occasions, soldiers march through Stuttgart, while smiling and cheering masses line the streets. As if the title *Triumph eines Genies* would not suffice to remind the audience of Hitler's arrival in Nuremberg for the Party Rally in 1934 and Riefenstahl's portrayal of the *Führer* as saviour and Messiah, Maisch's sequence of marching soldiers displays an uncanny resemblance to a number of scenes in the first part of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*. Even the march played by the Duke's military band is reminiscent of the tunes accompanying Riefenstahl's highly effective images of marching soldiers and cheering masses on the first day of the Nazi Party Rally in 1934; it comes as no surprise that Herbert Windt composed both the score for *Triumph des Willens* and

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Francis Courtade and Pierre Cadars: *Geschichte des Films im Dritten Reich*. München: Heyne, 1975, p. 99. See also Zeller: *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, p. 446.

for *Friedrich Schiller – Triumph eines Genies*. Maisch also employs filmic techniques similar to Riefenstahl's by cutting from different angle shots of the soldiers to close-ups of laughing and joking individuals. This sequence is also similar aurally, when the sound of cheers melts with the music of the marching band. While Leni Riefenstahl's images cut time and again to medium shots of the *Führer*, Maisch's depiction of marching soldiers, musicians and graduates experiences a similar interruption when Schiller breaks the ranks to run to the window of his adored Laura and hand her a love poem. But although Schiller is singled out, there are no low angle shots to imply dominance or power.

Schiller is clearly the superior individual in Maisch's film. The Duke is called everything from a tyrant to a "goldener Bulle", and when he visually enters the narrative for the first time, we see him in the centre of the film frame, fat and sweaty, waddling along a magnificently decorated corridor. The camera only draws back once its focus is on Karl Eugen's big belly and his rather unattractive upper body fills the frame. Throughout the film, he is portrayed as an authoritarian, decadent pig. After Schiller's cursing of the Duke during his visit of the imprisoned and desperate Schubart, Maisch cuts from a profile shot of Schiller to a marble sculpture of a sitting male nude whose classical beauty resembles that of the poet. The sculpture is located in the Duke's dining room at Schloss Solitude towards the left of the film frame, while on the right the shadow of a singing and drinking Duke dances on the wall. His physical attributes and behaviour mirror the dictatorship portrayed. Karl Eugen is thus shown as merely a shadow of a ruler while Schiller is depicted as clearly superior in every way.

Maisch's Schiller film became one of the cornerstones of the Goebbels' *Propaganda Aktion* in 1941 and 1942, when it was shown across the Reich and at the war front in mobile cinemas ("Tonbildwagen") together with anti-Semitic film such as *Jud Süß*.<sup>20</sup> In 1941, 835 such mobile cinemas were in commission; they were sent into remote communities for propaganda purposes.<sup>21</sup> Entertainment became increasingly important, especially once the military crisis on the Eastern front became apparent and the wider German public began to be directly affected by the war. *Unterhaltungsfilm* for mass audiences was considered of utmost importance by the propaganda ministry, or, as Goebbels himself put it: "Die gute Laune ist ein Kriegsartikel!"<sup>22</sup> Apart from cheering up the German public, Goebbels also knew

<sup>20</sup> Erläuterungen zur Propaganda-Aktion 1941/42. In: Politischer Informationsdienst, Gauleitung der NSDAP. Salzburg: Gaupropagandaamt 1, 1941, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> The Nazi Government invested more than 2,3 million Reichsmark in order to reach rural communities by screening films and newsreels with clear propaganda purposes. See Curt Belling: *Der Film in Staat und Partei*. Berlin: Der Film, 1936, p. 90; Gerhard Stahr: *Volksgemeinschaft vor der Leinwand*. Berlin: Theissen, 2001, p. 75; Bernd Kleinhans: *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Kino. Lichtspiel in der braunen Provinz*. Köln: PapyRossa, 2003, p. 165f.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Felix Moeller: *Der Filmminister: Goebbels und der Film im Dritten Reich*. Berlin: Henschel, 1998, p. 264.

that big budget productions were financially unsustainable at this time of war. Entertaining feature films could be effective and cheap.

Although he claims in his autobiography not to have become part of Goebbels' "Kriegs-Propaganda-Maschine",<sup>23</sup> Maisch directed a film in line with the political goals of Goebbels' propaganda apparatus, and opportunistically advanced his career by working hand in hand with the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, it is likely that Maisch did not share his employers' belief in *Blut und Boden* ideology, for he included veiled messages that could easily be interpreted as referring to his own situation and his personal opinion regarding the Nazi state. The cinematographic parallels between Curt Götz's 1923 Schiller film and Maisch's take on the topic mentioned earlier provide an example for this analysis. One almost identical scene shows the pupils as they sneak out of their bedroom at night to meet in their secret hiding place. In Goetz's version they run up the stairs to a small room where they are soon discovered. In Maisch's film, the criticism goes underground: the 'rebels' listen to Schiller reading from Act V of *Die Räuber* while hiding in a basement where, however, they are spied on by the Duke and one of his officers. They overhear Pastor Moser's words to Karl Moor: "Nun glaubt Ihr wohl, Gott werde es zugeben, daß ein einziger Mensch in seiner Welt wie ein Wüthrich hause und das Oberste zu unters kehre? Glaubt Ihr wohl, diese Neunhundertundneunundneunzig seien nur zum Verderben, nur zu Puppen Eures satanischen Spieles da? Oh, glaubt das nicht!" (*Die Räuber* V, 1)<sup>24</sup> This very part of *Die Räuber* is evoked again towards the end of the film at the premiere of Schiller's play in Mannheim. But why did Maisch choose to present the same scene twice, a scene, furthermore, that was not actually performed in Mannheim in January of 1782 when only a shortened and somewhat less provocative version of Act V was staged? In his autobiography, Maisch voices his astonishment regarding the fact that both this "Fälschung" and the cheers of the audiences in Berlin's cinemas that regularly accompanied this scene seemed to remain unnoticed by Goebbels and his watchdogs. Similarly, Maisch claims to be puzzled by the fact that the Nazi censors did not object to Schubart's portrayal at the beginning of the film. Clearly, thus, he considered such elements of his work to possess a quality that had the potential to subvert the conformist or affirmative character of the film.

Heinrich George's acting style could also be read as an indicator for his director's distance to the system. George, who was hugely successful as an actor both during the Weimar era and also during the Third Reich, appeared in a number of Nazi propaganda films such as *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933), *Jud Süß* (1940) and *Kolberg* (1945). However, his portrayal of the Duke in a number of scenes hints at the fact that Adolf Hitler's alter ego on screen might not be the genius Schiller at all, but rather the tyrant Karl Eugen. When the Duke delivers an angry early morning

<sup>23</sup> Maisch: *Helm ab*, p. 267: "Zum Glück ist es mir erspart geblieben, in diese Kriegs-Propaganda-Maschine eingespannt zu werden."

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schiller: *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1, Munich: Hanser, 1965, p. 605.

speech to the students of his academy, George blatantly copies Hitler in manner and style: He shouts clearly articulated phrases, pausing regularly for emphasis and effect, openly mimicing Hitler's screaming proclamations: "Es hat mich heut nacht nicht schlafen lassen: – es soll in meinem Lande Rebellen geben!! – In meinem Lande gibt es keine Rebellen!! – Und sollte es einen geben, – dann werde ich ihn so lange in Ketten legen, bis ihm der letzte Atemzug des Widerstandes und des Ungehorsams ausgetrieben ist!!" Afterwards, Karl Eugen walks past the rows of students in uniform in a sequence of shots that imitates Leni Riefenstahl's depiction of Adolf Hitler and the Wehrmacht soldiers who line the streets of Nuremberg during the Party Rally.

The film is rife with ambiguities. During this time of repression, any participation in filmmaking meant working hand in hand with Hitler's henchmen. Maisch's choices regarding the particular passage of *Die Räuber* or the inclusion of Schubart to such a prominent degree would be peculiar if the film were nothing but a vehicle of Nazi propaganda. As early as 1933, Joseph Goebbels announced his intention to bring film in line with Nazi ideology. Any opposition was to be annihilated: "Wir denken gar nicht daran, auch nur im entferntesten zu dulden, daß jene Ideen, die im neuen Deutschland mit Stumpf und Stiel ausgerottet werden, irgendwie getarnt oder offen wieder ihren Einzug halten."<sup>25</sup> It seems, though, that Herbert Maisch was still able to include veiled messages in his film. Perhaps Peter Hoefler can shed light on how this film was actually understood by its audiences. He had seen Maisch's film first in Germany in 1941 and then, again, during his time in an American prisoner of war camp in 1945. After attending the YMCA screening of the film in the camp, Hoefler writes in the POW journal *Der Ruf*: "1940 sahen wir diesen Film nach seiner Uraufführung zum ersten Mal und bejahten ihn damals als das Hohe-Lied der Freiheit. Wie aber konnte es einer 1940 wagen, zwar getarnt, aber doch eindeutig, gegen Tyrannei, Diktatur, gegen die Staatsidee aufzutreten? [...] Wie reimt sich das?"<sup>26</sup> Hoefler answers this question with reference to Goebbels' propaganda strategies or, as he calls them, "die Hohe Schule Goebbelsscher Propaganda":

Wenn man einen Film mit dem geschichtlichen Schiller zu zeigen wagte, dann konnte sicher vieles über den geistigen Terror der Nazis nur Gerede sein! – Ja, sie empfahlen diesen Film in der Presse. Keinen Zweifel konnte es mehr an der Duldsamkeit der Führung geben.

Das wollten sie dich und ihre Gegner glauben machen. Sie ließen dich einmal ungestraft vor Zeugen 'Freiheit!' rufen, um alle 'inoffiziellen' Fälle zu tarnen, die aus dem gleichen Grund im Konzentrationslager endeten. Nur wer die

<sup>25</sup> Goebbels in a speech he delivered on the 28 March 1933 in Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin. Quoted in Bernd Kleinhans: *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Kino*, p. 31f.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Hoefler: *Freiheit, die ich meine...!* Ein Wort zum Schiller-Film. In: *Der Ruf* (Zeitung der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in USA) 18 (1 December 1945), in: Bernhard Zeller (ed.): *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, p. 446f.

Zensur des nationalsozialistischen Staates kannte, witterte die Absicht und die Tendenzen, die zur Herstellung dieses Schillerfilms geführt haben.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this to some extent plausible explanation, Herbert Maisch's film and his role as a film-maker remain utterly ambivalent. On the one hand, this is a film about Schiller and his *Räuber* and, therefore, about the individual's rebellion against a hostile society, in which "Liebe, Kraft, Echtheit, Freiheit, Schönheit, Ahnung zugleich blockiert und vereitelt werden", as Ernst Bloch put it in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the veiling of true intentions generates much of the energy of this film, one could even argue that its true intentions are concealed in these very elements.<sup>29</sup> With this strategy of veiling his true intentions, Maisch has thus adopted a very Schillerian technique. Rüdiger Safranski identifies masquerade and the challenge to unveil as inherent elements of the aesthetics of a number of Schiller's plays; referring to *Fiesko* he writes: "Wer die Maske liebt, dem bereitet auch die Demaskierung, die Enthüllung, der Augenblick der Wahrheit ein besonderes Vergnügen. Den Dramatiker Schiller fasziniert die Vorstellung, daß sich hinter einem Inkognito plötzlich die Riesengröße eines Genies zeigt."<sup>30</sup> A pleasurable tension can be derived from this type of masquerade, which is only resolved in the unveiling of the genius at the end of the narrative. In Herbert Maisch's film, the audience has to abandon this pleasure. Here, we have the one-dimensional portrayal of Friedrich Schiller as genius, as seeker of freedom and bearer of truth from the very outset. At the same time, though, the director's reference to Schubart was, I would like to suggest, Maisch's way of introducing a *Doppelgänger*, a writer, who experienced tyranny and understood the critical artist's dilemma. In opening the film with Schubart, Maisch does not refer as much to censorship than to the humiliating experience of *self-censorship*, when a threat is enough to curb a polemic and to turn criticism into praise. In 1774, Schubart wrote in his *Deutsche Chronik* (the newspaper he had founded in Augsburg the same year):

Glaubs wohl, Hunger, Schmach, öffentliche Schande erwarten den, der's wagt, frei von der Brust zu schreiben. Wenn in den Stunden der Begeisterung uns die Freiheit einen kühnen Gedanken zuschickt, und er mit dem Flammenblicke und dem fliegenden Haare ans Pult tritt; so schleicht gleich die kalte Behutsamkeit auf den Zehen herbei, und führt ihn ganz langsam wieder zum Zimmer hinaus.

<sup>27</sup> Hoefler: *Freiheit, die ich meine...!* In: Zeller: *Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten*, p. 447f.

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Bloch: *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1959, p. 1145.

<sup>29</sup> For context see Oskar Seidlin: *Schiller's 'trägerische Zeichen'*. Die Funktion der Briefe in seinen frühen Dramen. In: Klaus L. Berghahn and Reinhold Grimm (eds.): *Schiller. Zur Theorie und Praxis der Dramen*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972, p. 178-205.

<sup>30</sup> Rüdiger Safranski: *Schiller oder Die Erfindung des Deutschen Idealismus*. München: Hanser, 2004, p. 154.

Wenn man die verschiedenen Zeitungen, Tagebücher, [...] aus allen Provinzen Deutschlands sammelte; so sollte man glauben, Deutschland würde von lauter Göttern, Seraphims und Cherubims beherrscht. Mein Fürst ist ein Gott! Welche Policey! Welche menschenfreundliche Anstalten! spricht der Lobredner auf der Kanzel und im Rednerstuhle - Und unten steht der Patriot, macht zwei Fäuste in seine Tasche, beißt die Zähne zusammen, und Tränen rieslen in seinen Bart.<sup>31</sup>

The representation of the poet Schubart in Herbert Maisch's *Friedrich Schiller* film indicates the director's efforts to create his own *Doppelgänger* or alter ego on the cinema screen. Herbert Maisch clenched his fists, bit his teeth, and remained in this liminal space between rebellion and submission. He continued his work for the Nazi regime until its collapse in 1945. Was theirs "der schreckliche Bund, den nur Verzweiflung eingeht" (*Die Räuber* III, 2)? Herbert Maisch, clearly an opportunist, evidently made a pact with the powers that were and directed two out of the three films on subjects identified by Goebbels as perfect for propaganda purposes: Bismarck, Schiller and Ohm Krüger. The anti-British film about *Ohm Krüger* (1941) can be read as a justification of genocide. Perhaps he thought – much like Karl Mohr – "Blut muß ich saufen, es wird vorübergehen!" (*Die Räuber* V, 2) Alas, Schubart's passion at the beginning of the Schiller film also contains an invitation to acknowledge the other, critical dimension of his work.

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<sup>31</sup> Schubart, In: Deutsche Chronik 77 (22 Dezember 1774). Cf. [www.phf.uni-rostock.de/institute/igerman/forschung/litkritik/Medien/McDeutscheChronik.htm](http://www.phf.uni-rostock.de/institute/igerman/forschung/litkritik/Medien/McDeutscheChronik.htm).