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"A Public Spectacle"

Keller, Schiller, and the Civic Festival

1 Introduction

Late in *Der grüne Heinrich* (1879/80), the titular protagonist of Gottfried Keller's novel sits alone in his room and weighs the merits of various ways of living. How are the demands of work and material existence to be balanced with the need to live creatively, authentically? Against the example of a popular can of lentils, which, though useless, briefly made a fortune for its inventors and the workers who manufactured it, Heinrich holds the example of Friedrich Schiller. For Heinrich, Schiller, who succeeded in his artistic calling despite enormous pressure to give up, is the rare human being in whom "life and thought, labor and spirit, are all one and the same activity" (I, 42).[1] Schiller's death from tuberculosis at the age of forty prevented him from aging into the role of cultural patriarch. He remains for Heinrich and for Keller the young poet whose likeness graced the flyleaves of countless editions in countless lending libraries during the springtime of peoples in the 1840s: the handsome young idealist, the defender of freedom and emancipation, the political author par excellence.

What distinguishes Schiller among the cultural figures in Keller's oeuvre is his association not with a particular work but with a medium: that of the civic festival. According to Richard Ruppel, the outdoor festival, or *Festspiel*, was a cultural tool employed by the liberal Swiss government of the 1830s "to produce a sense of national unity in a country that was as yet a patchwork of peoples, languages and cultures" (2010, 159) – a country that would continue to see violent conflagrations until it ratified its constitution in 1848. While the written word cleaved audiences along lines of language and class, the civic festival modeled national unity by putting the people themselves on stage. In this article I will examine Keller's treatment of Schiller and the civic festival in three distinct phases of his career. The first section will focus on the Tell festival in *Der grüne Heinrich*, whose first draft was composed in the late 1840s and early 1850s, when the golden age of Swiss liberalism was still in living memory. The second section will examine Keller's participation in the Schiller Centennial of 1859, now as a known figure in Swiss letters, addressing a national audience.

1 All translations from Keller's works in this essay are mine.

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And the third will consider Keller's settling of accounts with Schiller and the festival in his final novel from 1886, *Martin Salander*, written after two decades as Secretary of the Canton of Zurich.

It will not be my aim here to trace the influence of Schiller's political poetics on Keller's. This task has already been carried out (Reichert 1949; Szabó 2006). Instead, my study of the civic festival will seek to bridge two discussions in the Keller scholarship, one old, one new. The old question is how the formal structure of Keller's poetics express his politics, especially what Georg Lukács calls his commitment to "plebian democracy," a democracy that would represent petty craftsmen and the peasantry as well as the propertied classes (Lukács 1951, 149). Though a handful of penetrating studies have treated this subject over the last decades (Amrein/Herzog 1992; Andermatt 2013; 2016), the peak of interest in the political Keller came during the interwar years amid the first wave of studies that sought to systematize Keller's work into a coherent philosophy (Kriesi 1918; Röffler 1931; Lukács 1951). The new question is the role played by various media, both artistic (painting, literature, drawing) and technical (archiving, framing, collecting, printing) in constituting the fragile reality of Keller's texts (Groddeck 2009: Amrein 2016; Downing 2018).

Against this backdrop, the central contention of my article is that in his treatment of the civic festival the "old" political Keller and the "new" medial Keller are one and the same. Since for Keller and for Switzerland, "the true rule of the people" (VIII, 179) was as yet a nascent ideal, the problem of representation is also a problem of ethics. If true democracy does not yet exist, then its depiction can only be a substitution for the reality of individual life, void of the legitimacy that would be the basis for its instructive power. This problem finds its most rigorous articulation in the passages in Hegel's *Phenomenology* on the combat between "the way of the world" – individual abilities, desires, and experiences – and "virtue," the dissolution of these in submission to a universal law. This is a battle that virtue is fated to lose:

> Virtue, therefore, is defeated by the "way of the world" because virtue's goal is actually the abstract, unreal *essence* [. . .]. Virtue wanted to consist in bringing the good into real existence by sacrificing individuality, but the side of reality is itself nothing else but the side of individuality. [. . .] The "way of the world" was supposed to misuse the good because its use of the good was based on individuality; but individuality is the principle of the *real* world, since it is precisely individuality that is consciousness. (Hegel 1986, 288–289; my translation)

Since reality is experienced by individuals *as* individuals, virtue, as the vision of the universal good (true democracy) is always hollow and abstract, a mere substitution for the richness of individual experience. By what right can a democratic

art ask its readers to sacrifice their gifts, their powers, and their inclinations for a commonality that, because it can never be identical with them, must be false? What is required is a medium that makes this commonality manifest while preserving the wealth of individual experience. For Keller, the civic festival is the medium that solves these two seemingly intractable problems. At the same time, the very posing of the problem reveals, as is so often the case in Keller, a deep ambivalence about the political power of his work and the increasing political mediocrity of his time. This ambivalence, I will conclude, pushes the late Keller to abandon the civic festival entirely and to attempt a new critical basis for his political poetics.

2 Keller and Rousseau: The Tell Festival

In this section I will examine the role played by Schiller and the Tell festival in the 1879/80 edition of *Der grüne Heinrich*.[2] My argument will be twofold. First, I will show that the civic virtue of the festival as a medium lies in its unique ability to produce a representation that is identical with what is represented. And second, by connecting the scene to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's antitheatrical polemic, the *Lettre à M. D'Alambert sur les spectacles*, I will show that the novel's idealization of the festival reveals an anxiety about the civic usefulness of the novel as an essentially solitary medium. This anxiety, I will conclude, is two-sided in its turn, insofar as it contains a reluctance to let go of individual experience for the sake of civic virtue.

When Schiller is first mentioned in *Der grüne Heinrich*, his name is bathed in the roseate glow of Heinrich's childhood. It recalls the time when his father, a master stonemason, was still alive, and his family had not yet been thrown into a state of financial precarity by his untimely death.[3] These happy years also coincide with the republican spirit of the 1820s, the time when, as Heinrich recalls it, "a large number of educated men among the ruling classes of Switzerland, themselves taking up the now clarified ideas of the great Revolution, prepared a fecund and thankful soil for the July days, and carefully nurtured the noble qualities of culture and human dignity" (I, 22). This spirit trickles down Switzerland's social ladder to the Lees, who "belong to the working middle class, which has always

2 Though the scene also occurs in the first version of *Der grüne Heinrich*, the second version places special emphasis on the Tell festivities by deleting Heinrich's recollection of the Bern shooting festival. For this reason, I will work with the second version.

3 Schiller is further decoupled from Goethe in that, while Heinrich's encounter with Goethe is a solitary one, his encounter with Schiller is a collective one.

found its roots and renewed itself among the people of the countryside" (I, 23) – a class Heinrich distinguishes from "higher society's" taste for finery by its thoughtful practicality and tireless diligence (I, 19), evident in the numerous reading societies, lending libraries, and public schools established in this period. To make up for their lack of formal education, the circle of craftsmen around Herr Lee read any book they can obtain, above all the works of Schiller, whose classicism they read in the light of the Greek War of Independence. To Heinrich's father and his cohort, Schiller's excellence lies not in his poetic mastery, but rather in the breadth and variety of the Schillerian project, which runs the gamut from his lofty, inaccessible aesthetic writings to the highly readable prose of his histories. Insofar as his dramas depict the struggles of the aristocracy, they do not directly represent the craftsmen's own historical and political situation but are only stand-ins. Yet through their labor and communal effort, they are able to turn these substitutions into true representations:

> Simple and thoroughly practical as they were, they could never find complete enjoyment in dramatic readings in negligee; they wanted to see these great creations before them in the flesh, in living color, and since there was no question of a permanent theater in the Swiss cities of that period, they quickly decided, once again fired by Lee, to act the plays out themselves, as well as they could. The stage and its mechanical devices were admittedly built more quickly than the parts were learned, and some of the men tried to deceive themselves about the importance of their task by driving nails and sawing boards with increased vigor; nonetheless, it cannot be denied that a great deal of the artfulness of expression and of pleasing deportment, which remained with nearly all of these friends, can be counted as the result of these dramatic exercises. (I, 25)

Work and leisure, the world-historical and the everyday, are indistinguishable here. Since the performance of the plays and the construction of the sets to perform them contribute to the making of a national democratic culture, each man who takes part in this collective enterprise is able to step onto the stage of history, where, without knowing it, he picks up the "artfulness of expression" and "pleasing deportment" of Schiller's poetic speech.

These early passages foreshadow the last chapters of the novel's second book, when Heinrich recalls in vivid and colorful detail the town's production of *Wilhelm Tell*. For Heinrich, the day-long performance is one of the most significant events of his youth. It is the setting of his first and most ardent patriotic feelings and of his first disappointing glimpse into the workings of local government. The liberation of these energies and their attachment to the Swiss nation also coincides for Heinrich with a romantic and sexual awakening – it is the date of his first kiss with his cousin Anna and of his first sexual encounter with the sensual widow Judith. The choice of Schiller's work is not accidental. Schiller's last play from 1804 recounts the founding myth of Swiss nationalism:

the struggle of the original three Swiss cantons against Habsburg oppression and their formation into the Swiss confederacy. The performance remembers and repeats the two primal scenes of Swiss democracy. The first, echoing the Book of Genesis, is Tell's shooting of the apple off his son's head in an act of Abraham-like sacrifice redeemed not by faith but – significantly for Keller's association of Schiller with the craftsmen's diligence – by Tell's skill and determination.[4] The second, echoing the *Oresteia*, is an act of comity, the oath on the Rütli meadow, where the elders of Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden liberate themselves from the endless cycle of reprisal and revenge to form the first Swiss state.

In her analysis of Keller's *Am Mythenstein* essay, Ursula Amrein stresses the transmedial character of Keller's imagined alternative Schiller celebration. The scene, which Keller wrote after witnessing the dedication of the Schiller Stone at Lake Lucerne in 1860, blends literature, theater, painting, song, dance, and sculpture into a Gesamtkunstwerk. The text advances a "vision of a national civic festival tailored to Switzerland. In this vision, theater and politics melt into a single work that not only combines various art forms, but also has the effect of forming a community, while contributing to the renewal of theatrical culture" (Amrein 2016, 221–222). This transmedial aspect is notably absent from the mise-en-scène of the Tell performance in *Der grüne Heinrich*. In Heinrich's narration, the civic festival does not blur the boundaries between various artistic media. It is instead a medium all its own – able as no other medium or combination of media to fuse artistic representation and lived reality. For in the "patriotic performance" that Heinrich's fellow citizens have created out of the "uncouth buffoonery" of the Catholic carnival (I, 358), the residents of the town are no longer passive observers but historical agents, the subject-object of history:

> By far the greater part of the throng of actors were, as shepherds, peasants, fishermen, and hunters, to play the people and had to go in their masses from scene to scene, where the action was taking place, carried by those who felt qualified to play a prominent role. Young girls also took their place in the ranks of the people, taking part primarily in the general singing, as the individual female parts were played by boys. (I, 359)

4 The later Schiller's ambivalent relationship to political violence in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* and *Wilhelm Tell* sits awkwardly with Heinrich's recollection of Swiss liberalism as the "clarified" [*erklärte*] – which is to say, nonviolent – form of "the ideas of the Revolution." Keller's recourse to an artistic medium to realize the cause of democracy and national unity can be read as a rejection of revolutionary violence as a political tool and a repudiation of his own participation in the *Sonderbundskrieg*.

The decisive boundaries crossed by the Tell festival are not those that divide literature from theater or theater from painting but the boundaries that divide artistic representation and reality, public and private life, spectator and actor:

> The scenes of the main action were distributed among all of the different locations, each according to its particular character, so that those in costume and the crowds of spectators rippled back and forth festively. (I, 359–360)[5]

> For this was the loveliest thing about the festival, that no one held fast to the limitations of the theater, that one did not wait to be surprised but rather moved around freely and as though out of reality itself and on one's own met in the places where the action was taking place. (I, 366–367)

The props for the performance are taken from the town's cabinet of historical curiosities. These are no longer musealized curios, substitutions for a long-gone era; they are once again living objects in the flow of historical time, representations of the struggle for democracy and nationhood in the present. The boundaries of the stage are broken, and its action is woven into the rhythms of town life. The townspeople break off to go about their business as needed – in one memorable moment, the actor playing Arnold von Melchtal pauses to sell an ox to the local butcher. And where on the page Schiller's lofty versified language is a substitution for real speech, the language of the Tell festival is also made representative of those it depicts. The script for the performance is not that of the original play but the bowdlerized version taught in the local school. "It is a book the people are very familiar with, because it expresses in a wonderful manner their way of thinking and everything they hold to be true," Heinrich says of this decision (I, 359). And later: "The speeches were not delivered theatrically, with theatrical gesture, but more in the manner of a popular assembly [*Volksversammlung*], sonorously, monotonously, and in something of a singsong, because after all it was poetry" (I, 370). In the space of the festival, the life of the town's unremarkable residents becomes identical to that of their national founders and original rulers, and the work of art identical with its subject of representation, the people.

5 These passages also invoke another modality of the civic festival, the procession, whereby the spontaneously gathered crowd would reclaim public space by marching from one symbolic destination to another. In his analysis of accounts by tourists who had come to France to witness the Revolution, Patrick Primavesi writes: "The 'boundaries' of the festival, which could result from a spontaneous gathering, were as fluid as those of the theater [. . .]. [T]he power of the procession, with its appropriation of public spaces on streets and squares, [was] to fix the topography of the revolution" (2008, 200–201).

Unmistakable in these scenes are the political aesthetics of Keller's Swiss countryman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Keller acknowledged this debt in an autobiographical sketch from 1876, while he was revising *Der grüne Heinrich* into its second version. "The description of childhood itself is almost all true," he wrote, "with a touch here and there, albeit a mild one, of Rousseau's confessional severity" (XV, 403). Here Keller is referring to the novel's early chapters, which chronicle his youthful misdeeds with Rousseau's distinctive mixture of shame and wonderment. It is the Tell chapters, however, that truly engage Rousseau, rather than imitate him – particularly his celebration of the folk festival in the 1758 *Lettre sur les spectacles*. Like the Tell performance, Rousseau's panegyric against the public theater identifies the festival's tumult, its singular ability to burst the boundaries of the stage and rush into life itself, as the source of its civic virtue:

> Let us not adopt these exclusive entertainments which close up a small number of people in melancholy fashion in a gloomy cavern, which give them only prisons, lances, soldiers and afflicting messages of inequality to see [. . .] It is in the open air, under the sky, that you ought to gather and give yourself to the sweet sentiment of your happiness [. . .]. (Rousseau 1968, 125)

In this passage, Rousseau's praise of the physiocratic vigor of the outdoor festival evokes an iconic image from another foundational text of civic aesthetics, namely, the cave from Plato's *Republic* (2006, 225–235). For Rousseau, the cave of miserable prisoners enchanted by the flickering shadows, which they accept as substitutions for things themselves, was, in effect, the first theater. Since the shackled prisoners have no hand in conceiving or bringing to life what is on stage, they have no way of distinguishing substitution from representation. The compact between author, performer, and audience is only another form of self-imposed ignorance and passivity – its parallel in public life is a political quietism content to passively accept substitute rulers in lieu of taking up the active work of representation. The festival, by contrast, draws the audience out of the dim light of falsity and into the daylight of truth:

> But what then will be the objects of these entertainments? What will be shown in them? Nothing if you please. With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united. (Rousseau 1968, 126)

Out of doors, the members of the crowd can at last represent themselves to themselves as a united people. In a truly democratic art, the subject, the object, and the medium that unites the two must be identical.

Keller could, of course, have drawn on any number of historical examples for the Tell scene. The specifically Rousseauian influence on *Der grüne Heinrich* lies in the way that the idealization of the festival as the sole truly democratic medium casts a shadow on the political virtue of all other media. All in all, the *Lettre* contains just a single example of successful civic art: Rousseau's memory of a spontaneous celebration that erupted in Geneva upon the arrival of a regiment of soldiers from St. Gervais. In his recollection of the scene, Rousseau remembers how his father, Isaac Rousseau, pointed to the passing soldiers and uttered the phrase so famous that it must be given in the original French: "*Jean-Jacques*, *aime-ton pays!*" (Rousseau 1968, 125). This celebration has no prompting, no script, no plot, no versification. It is the work of no author and has no afterlife as an ossified piece of civic-religious idolatry, like the portrait of George Washington stamped on the American dollar bill. But this scene is relegated to a footnote. The rest of the *Lettre* closely analyzes specific works of French theater (Crébillon, Voltaire, Molière), considering and rejecting the civic value of each playwright in his turn. The core of the *Lettre* is not a plea for the festival but rather the claim that no theater can successfully instruct the citizen. Theater cannot do so because it inflames the passions, which are the enemies of civic virtue. A drama that had no effect on the passions would, in Rousseau's view, cease to be drama:

> A man without passions or who always mastered them could not attract anyone. And it has already been observed that a Stoic in a tragedy would be an insufferable figure. In comedy, he would at most cause laughter. (Rousseau 1968, 37)

It is therefore the paradox of representation, which Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit identified in *Du contrat social*, and not its solution (the civic festival) that is the focus of the *Lettre*: that art can only become a tool of civic instruction, a representation, when it ceases to be art, just as a government can only be truly democratic when it ceases to be a distinct governing body. For the point at which art deviates from reality – the point at which art becomes art – is the point when it becomes a mere substitution for reality, either "a fraud or a perverse lie" (Ankersmit 2002, 278). Thus, the conception of a medium that resolves this paradox doubles as a condemnation of the art of drama, and, by implication, of all other art forms. This condemnation will be felt in the later chapters of *Der grüne Heinrich*. When Heinrich has abandoned Switzerland to pursue a career as a painter, the rosy memory of the Tell festival will darken into a nightmare in which he is hunted by the marksman.

The recourse to Rousseau in *Der grüne Heinrich* consequently reveals the uncertain status of the novel's own utility as a political medium. For while the *Lettre* is a polemical work of cultural criticism, situated beyond the paradox of

representational art, *Der grüne Heinrich* is a novel, situated very much within it. This uncertainty is apparent in the uneasy coda appended to the Tell festival. During the feast that follows, a squabble arises between a timber merchant and the actor playing Tell, still in costume, over the placement of a new highway, which each man wants diverted to run past his business – a premonition of the adult Heinrich's disappointed observation, upon his return to the newly formed Swiss republic, that even in a democracy "each man worked to steer the streams to his own mill" (III, 266). Beneath this petty disagreement lies a conflict between two modalities of civic media. As befits a man who profits from the tearing down of old structures and the building of new ones, the timber merchant holds that permanent objects are incompatible with the march toward freedom. In his view,

> a people that built palaces was only appointing elegant tombstones for itself and could best survive constant change by allowing itself to be carried along under its banner, easily and nimbly; only a people who understood this, who were always armed and ready to march without unnecessary baggage but provided with a well-stocked treasury, whose temple, palace, fortress, and home, all in one, was the light, airy, and yet indestructible traveler's tent of the people's intellectual experience and their principles, which they could take with them and set up in any and every place; only such a people could secure for itself the hope of true permanence, and it would even be able to maintain its geographical home all the longer for it. (I, 378)

Like Socrates, who only permitted in his ideal city martial Dorian songs in times of war and light-hearted Phrygian songs in times of peace (Plato 2006, 86–89), the merchant allows only for the civic value of "rhetoric and song, because they fit in with his traveler's tent, cost nothing, and did not take up any space" (I, 379). He links the medial logic of the song and the festival to a civic ethics. He embraces media that promote collectivity over those that promote individuality; he prefers public utility to beauty. The festival belongs, as a public undertaking, to the world of work, and so promotes the industry that keeps a people virtuous and free. And since the festival leaves no lasting object, it resists the nostalgia that impedes the sweeping away of old social relations to make way for the arrival of true democracy. Tell, meanwhile, asserts the civic virtue of durable media. He lives in the house of his forefathers, which is decorated with remnants of the past and paintings of Swiss history. He links object-oriented forms of civic art to a rival codex of civic virtue: he believes

> that a free citizen should work and take care to arrange for himself an independent income, but no more, and when a free citizen's affairs were going smoothly, then what was becoming in the man was a decorous leisure, sensible conversation over a glass of wine, an edifying contemplation of the past of his country and the future. (I, 380)

Here the connection to the nation is to be found in a shared cultural patrimony, passed down from generation to generation in the art object. The democracy of the future is to be found in a connection to the past. Freedom is to be found not in shared work but in private contemplation – in leisure.

In his reading of the Tell festival, Peter Lindhorst observes that Keller's coda overturns the triadic model of history Schiller employs in *Wilhelm Tell*. This model, itself drawn from Rousseau's *Social Contract*, "can be described, to put it simply, as the depiction of an idyll, the destruction of this idyll, and the coming into being of a higher idyll" (Lindhorst 2003, 11).[6] The historical distance between Keller's modernity and Schiller's classicism is apparent in the absence of the third moment of the triad, the higher idyll. The present of *Der grüne Heinrich* is one of irresolution. The source of this irresolution is the rise of wage labor: "it is not a person, like Geßler, who destroys the village idyll but rather an economic conflict" (Lindhorst 2003, 11). The historical difference points to an irreducible tension in the novel's political poetics: even a successful representation of the people as their own rulers is ultimately a substitution for the real "way of the world," which, as Hegel claimed, is and will always be individual. This tension dovetails with the novel's reluctance to accept its own idealization of the civic festival as the only legitimate form of republican art. The squabble remains unresolved, and the reader is left with a "tetralemna."[7]

On the one hand, the civic festival in *Der grüne Heinrich* succeeds in creating a democratic medium in which the represented truly represent themselves. It does so by rejecting the medium of the individual, physical art object as substitutive – it also rejects it on civic-ethical grounds as being too solitary, too leisurely, and too wedded to the past. In its fundamental collectivity, however, the civic festival loses the chance to win individual experience – pleasure, contemplation, pride of ownership – to the cause of civic virtue. The novel, on the other hand, seeks to appeal to these and to wed them to the cause of democracy. But in doing so, it is stricken with the perpetual anxiety that, however noble its intentions, the visions of democracy it offers can be nothing more than "a perverse lie" and that its desire to leave behind a durable object make it an encumbrance to the march of progress. The novel worries that the solitary contemplation needed to engage it is at bottom nothing more than laziness and

6 This portion of Lindhorst's argument draws, in its turn, on Wolfgang Rohe's (1993, 61–63) analysis of *Wilhelm Tell*.

7 I take this term from Alexander Honold's recent study of Keller's ethics in the *Seldwyla* cycle. Honold defines the "tetralemna," which he borrows from Julia Kristeva, as the intersection of the "either-or" with the "neither-nor" when two contrasting ethical modalities are considered (2008, 15).

selfishness. And in the end neither the civic festival nor the novel can improve the lot of a needy citizen. As Heinrich observes at the festival's end, when the tables are cleared away: "Even this festival would have been a very miserable affair with a hungry belly and an empty purse" (I, 389).

3 Two Schiller Celebrations – *Prolog zur Schillerfeier* and *Das große Schillerfest*

In November 1859, over 440 cities across the world organized a three-day celebration for Schiller's hundredth birthday. As far away as New York, middle-class students, professors, merchants, politicians, and bureaucrats participated in long torch-lit marches in memory of the poet of freedom and universal humanity. In these gatherings, "the German bourgeoisie – and to some extent the working class – affirmed that, more than anyone else, Schiller had voiced the longings and aspirations of the German nation; that he could, consequently, be regarded as the spiritual leader on the road to national unity" (Hohendal 1989, 179–180). Keller had been asked by the actors of the theater in Bern to compose a poem for them to recite as a prologue to the city's festivities. In a letter to Ferdinand Freiligrath the following year, Keller expressed his displeasure with the result, *Prolog zur Schillerfeier in Bern*, which was to be published in a Schiller festival volume edited by Ignaz Troxler (Baechtold 1903, 458). The following year he composed another reflection on the occasion, tellingly titled *Auch ein Schillerfest*, which he appended as a coda to the first edition of his *Der Apotheker von Chamouny* collection in 1882, and later included in his collected poems, its title softened to *Das große Schillerfest*. In this section I will contrast these two poems' depiction of the Schiller centennial.

The "Prolog," I will argue, is a work of institutionalized political pageantry, written for official festivities organized 'from above' by the local authorities in Bern. It takes the 'beauty'of Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* as a metaphor for the festival itself, a medium in which activities from distinct spheres of life, private as well as public, become representations of civic virtue and national unity. *Schillerfest*, on the other hand, discards the institutional framework of the representation as problematic and emphasizes the radical inclusivity of Schiller's concept of universal humanity, which Keller extends to the lowest and most destitute members of society. The civic festival is no longer concerned with the problem of self-rule; instead, it is a medium in which the granting of dignity and the amelioration of suffering become representations of true democracy in the world-historical sense. I will also engage

each poem's treatment of the Schiller festival as a centennial. Where the "Prolog" deploys the calendar date as a cultural technique for uniting past, present, and future in a single representation, *Schillerfest* rejects historical thinking wholesale as a hollow substitution for the physical needs of bare life. Taken together, the two poems register Keller's increasing distance from the official character of the civic festival and demonstrate an attempt to follow the democratic implications of the festival medium to their radical conclusion.

In her study of Keller's early poems, Regina Hartmann stresses the medial uniqueness of Keller's political poems from 1843/46, that "the poem-notebooks are their own medium, a kind of lyrical diary" (Hartmann 2012, 75).[8] The calendar date attached to each poem anchors its political content in historical time, linking Keller's life and his poetic production to the Sonderbund War against the Catholic cantons of Switzerland, which Keller participated in as a military volunteer. The "Prolog" opens with a reflection on the interpellative power of the date marked by the Schiller centennial ("der Ehrentag") by returning to Schiller's birth, surveying the wars and revolutions that have fallen on that date in the intervening time:

> Leaping over the graves to reach back
> And to return to the elected day,
> Which bore all of this light, this life.
>
> Die Gräber überspringend rückzugreifen
> Und den erwählten Tagen nachzugehen,
> Die all das Leben und das Licht geboren. (IX, 222)

This backward glance from the present to the past is followed, in the next lines, with a forward glance from the past to the present. The poet proceeds to conjure the image of Schiller's Swabian mother nursing the infant Schiller at her breast. An act of historical mercy blinds her to the destiny of the child she holds:

> For if she knew what she held in her hands,
> Her weak heart would have beat confused
> From pride and joy or from horror,
> And the white sustenance would have flowed stormy to the child,
> Sickening the first sweet nourishment.

8 Hartmann's argument draws heavily on Walter Morgenthaler's reading of the same poems (Morgenthaler 2008, 175). The above quote refers to Morgenthaler's methodology as well as to the poems themselves.

Denn wüßten sie, was sie auf Händen tragen,
Schlüge hochverwirrt ihr weiches Herz
Vor Stolz und Wonne oder auch für Grauen
Und stürmisch floss dem Kind die weiße Nahrung,
Das erste süße Mittel widern. (IX, 222)

This glance toward the present is extended toward a glorious future, whose dawn is breaking on the day of the centennial:

But today, when the day has for the hundredth time
Gloriously arrived again and shone a hundredfold,
Today we look with longing at the brilliant man,
Whom this sun has brought to us,
And see his path in the dawn light
Shine over us, a bright reproach
On this fallow field of a transitional time.

Doch heute, wo der Tag sich hundertmal
Ruhmvoll erneut und hundertfältig leuchtet,
Heut schau'n wir sehnsuchtsvoll den lichten Mann,
Den jene Sonne uns heraufgebracht,
Und sehen seine morgenrote Bahn
Mit hellem Vorwurf uns herüberglänzen
Auf dieses Brachfelt einer Zwischenzeit (IX, 223)

Where the medial construction of the Tell festival blended the heroic and the ordinary, the artwork and life, and the rulers and the ruled into a single representation, in the "Prolog," the iterative nature of the date and the festival that occurs on it unite past, present, and future. The image of democracy that emerges is, accordingly, a grandiose one. The festival does not represent self-rule but rather the grand sweep of a historical mission: darkness and daybreak, covenant and fulfillment. Schiller is cast as a deity, standing by the "children and the children of the children" (IX, 223) of the Abraham-like Swiss people until they have learned to satisfy the freedom they crave as the infant Schiller once craved his mother's milk.

Though *Der grüne Heinrich* and the "Prolog" depict Schiller as safely fixed in the cultural firmament of nationalist democracy, his political relevance to the nationalist movements of the forties and fifties had not gone unchallenged. In 1859, Julian Schmidt, coeditor of the influential *Grenzboten* journal, had published a critical evaluation of Schiller's work. Like Keller, Schmidt had harbored revolutionary sympathies in the 1840s; like Keller's, these had cooled into a nationalist liberalism by the 1850s. From this standpoint, Schmidt took Schiller to

task for the poet's fascination with royal power and rejected his entire political vocabulary – the ideal, universal humanity, freedom – as poetic abstraction, mere substitution for the political realities of his time (Schmidt 1859, iii–iv). For Schmidt, the nationalist revolutions had given a real content to these abstractions: trade, parliamentary democracy, military conscription, the struggle for nationhood – these constitute true freedom (1867, 540–541). The following stanzas of the "Prolog" place Schiller in Schmidt's aesthetic-historical framework, seeking to rehabilitate his image as a purveyor of substitution in governance and poetry alike:

> Never are we stirred by that which is unreachable.
> Nor does lazy adoration prompt us
> To make an image and to worship it.
>
> Nie rühret uns, was unerreichbar ist.
> Auch kitzelt uns nicht müßige Verehrung,
> ein Bild zu schaffen und es anzubeten. (IX, 224)

Like Schmidt, the poem attaches a negative connotation to the words *müßig*, *Verehrung*, *anbeten*, and *unerreichbar* – casting poetic and political substitution as self-alienating and self-subjugating idolatry. But where, then, does the civic virtue of Schiller's work and the festival devoted to him lie? What political use do Schiller and the festival serve for a freedom-loving and self-governing people? What is truly representative in his work?

The answer comes in the following stanza, which contains an anaphoric listing of "beauty's" services to the nation. Unlike beauty that is "full of vanity / And in self-love decks itself in peacock feathers," which is the same beauty that "nourishes the despot" (IX, 226–227), this beauty:

> [. . .] purifies the priest's word to pure love,
> It perfectly brightens the councilor's mind,
> It makes the warrior's weapons sharp and gleaming,
> It ennobles the hard labor of the workman,
> Elevates the merchant above the danger
> Of burying his heart in his treasures,
> And protects, as from the rust of raw greed,
> Against the womanly unnerving of the senses;
> And even from passion, which never dies,
> It draws out the venom that leads to destruction.
> Around all of them, it winds an enchanted band
> That makes us equal in the nobler sense of the word,
> Valuable and capable of the goal of freedom.

Sie klärt des Priesters Wort zur reinen Liebe,
Sie hellt dem Ratsmann trefflich den Verstand,
Sie macht des Kriegers waffenscharf und glanzend,
Dem Werkmann adelt sie die harte Arbeite,
Erhebt den Kaufmann über die Gefahr,
Sein Herz in seinen Schätzen zu begraben,
Und schützt, wie vor dem Rost des rohen Geizes,
Vor weiblicher Entnervungseinen Sinn;
Und selbst der Leidenschaft, die nimmer stirbt,
Nimmt sie das Gift, das zum Verderben führt.
Um alle windet sie ein Zauberband,
Das gleich uns macht im edleren Sinn des Wortes,
Wertvoll und Fähig zu der Freiheit Zwecken. (IX, 226)

Schiller's beauty is not an aesthetic effect. It is a metonym for the festival in his honor: a representative medium in which instances of private self-interest become representations of civic virtue, and in which ostensibly distinct spheres of life, like religion, war, commerce, and politics, represent the same national struggle for self-determination. Like the festival, which physically draws these spheres together into one common gathering, beauty erases the boundary that divides public and private, leisure and labor, individual and collective for the Swiss citizen "so that his work succeeds in a festive manner and so that the festival becomes for him the most beautiful work" (IX, 225).

Though Keller disavowed the "Prologue," the poem is a useful contrast to the depiction of the Schiller centennial in *Schillerfest*. Notably, the latter poem has no date. While Keller had written the *Apotheker* collection to satirize Heinrich Heine's "political capriciousness," after failing to publish the volume, he set it aside for twenty years. As Philipp Theisohn has observed, this was a common practice for Keller, who frequently reworked the substance as well as the form of his poems, making them difficult to place historically or biographically (2016, 173). But given the jaundice of the later Keller's political outlook, the reluctance to link the poem to the national Schiller festivities is better explained, as Ursula Amrein writes of the *Mythenstein* essay, by his "vehement self-distancing from the institutionalization of a Swiss national theater" – and one might add, from the cultural trappings of Swiss liberalism entirely (2016, 221). The events of the poem take place on a snowy and rainy November day, in the season of destitution and privation, far away from the sweep of historical time. In lieu of trade and commerce, the poem focuses on the barest struggle for survival. A destitute woman, heavy with child, forages for dry firewood in the mountains. Walking along the forest path, she encounters a familiar Kellerian type, the hardy Amazon. She, too, is pregnant: "Big and strong, expecting / Heavy wood upon her head."

She asks the distraught stranger what is troubling her. The first woman replies that her husband was recently killed felling wood and that she is now struggling to provide for her children:

> "Life must come to life,
> And it presses and increases,
> And your heart is sick to death!
>
> Like an animal on the wild heath,
> I seem, with no God,
> With no God and with no stars
> To wander starving, reproducing."
>
> "Leben soll zu Leben kommen
> Und das drängt sich und das mengt sich
> Und das Herz ist krank zum Tode!
>
> Wie ein Tier auf wilder Heide
> Schein' ich mir, das ohne Gott,
> Ohne Gott und ohne Sterne
> Hungernd irrt und sich vermehrt." (X, 153)

These lines provide a stark counterpoint not only to the silent, dignified motherhood of the "Prolog," but also to its masculine images of trade, war, and politics as the pillars of national life. Like "beauty" and "universal humanity," these too are exposed as mere substitutions for the true work that assures the survival of the nation, the domestic labor of the mother, who sees to it that her children do not starve. *Schillerfest* shrinks the expansive sweep of historical time to the needs of a body, which survives one meal at a time, knowing neither past nor future.

The rest of the poem makes use of a tripartite structure like the one Lindhorst identified in *Wilhelm Tell*: it first depicts a personal appeal, then the festival, and finally the union of the two together. Consolation and comfort become the highest civic good. At first, the woman's lament is answered by a percussive blast of vernacular German from the Amazon: "Hey! What's troubling you, you stupid woman?" (X, 153). She explains that she, too, must fend for her children alone. Her husband is still alive, unfortunately. She drove him from their home for eating the food meant for her children, who show no gratitude or awareness of the duress she must endure to provide for them. They batter her and bite her; she boxes their ears. Nonetheless she is braced, invigorated by her awareness of her body. She luxuriates in her own strength: "Happily we build our vault / Out into the distant land" (X, 153). This appeal fails, however. The first woman

protests that she lacks her interlocutor's strength and perseverance, and bursts into tears. At this moment the clouds part and both women witness a great crowd passing by in the valley below. The gathering is implied to be, though not explicitly identified as, the Schiller centennial. Indeed, Schiller's name is not mentioned, since neither woman can read, and so they have no idea who Schiller is:

> Long, flowing trains of citizens
> Could be seen moving down below,
> And the silk of richly made banners
> Flew out in front.
>
> Lang hinwallende Bürgerzuge
> Sah man schimmernd sich d'rinbewegen
> Und es wehte die fliegende Seide
> Reichgebildeter Banner voran. (X, 154)

Over the howling of the wind a single voice calls out:

> "Joy, beautiful spark of the gods!"
> Rang across the ringing storm;
> It was no church song and no war song;
> But the bells rang from the tower.
>
> "Freude, schöner Götterfunken!"
> Halle herüber der klingende Sturm;
> War kein Kirchenlied und kein Kriegslied;
> Doch die Glocken schallten vom Turm. (X, 377)

This festival breaks with the Tell festival and the centennial of the "Prolog" in three decisive ways. First, it notably does away with the collective character of the festival. Its scope is reduced to that of the individual life and the interpersonal concern of one human being for another. Collective experience is rejected as an abstraction; Schiller's message is carried by a single voice. Second, in lieu of freedom or beauty, here joy is the decisive concept in Schiller's aesthetic-political vocabulary. Freedom and beauty are rejected as intangible, and joy is embraced as immediately palpable. What is more, joy requires no religious or political representative. Even the lowest citizen can seize it for herself or grant it to another. And third, *Schillerfest* breaks the operative barrier that separates the dignified human life of those who belong to society from the subhuman, animal life of those at its margins. The Tell festival brought together rulers and ruled in a single representation; the Schiller centennial the present

and the past as well as the distinct spheres of national life. In the *Schillerfest*, meanwhile, the festival unites the individual struggle for survival and dignity with humanity's world-historical struggle to be free. The poem closes with the women staring with amazement at the procession. Nonetheless, they are included, and in the spirit of inclusion, the cheerful woman invites her destitute friend to a household meal with her swarming children:

> I have bread and wine at home
> Nuts for the young brood
> And at the happy mother's feast
> Let us take good courage.
>
> Brot und Wein hab' ich im Hause,
> Nüsse für die junge Brut
> Und beim frohen Mütterschmause
> Fassen wir einen guten Mut. (X, 157)

This final image suggests that the suffering of a democracy's most destitute members is the yardstick by which the world-historical progress toward freedom must be measured. It therefore heightens the paradox of representation that the Tell festival and Schiller centennial sought to resolve. By scaling its picture of life down to the barest animal existence, it rejects not only aesthetic representation but all forms of collectivity – nationhood, history, governance, patrimony – as substitutions for individual need and individual happiness. A truly democratic art is one that affords a tangible, interpersonal experience of dignity to those most in need of it, especially those barred from participation in culture and politics. The golden light of the festival, its commitment to a truly universal humanity, reveals, then, the limitations of an institutionalized democratic culture, preparing the way for the wholesale rejection of the festival in *Martin Salander*.

4 False Notes – *Martin Salander*

As the only work of Keller's not to have been conceived during his sojourn in Berlin, *Martin Salander*, his final novel, has the distinction of being the most "Swiss" of his works. It is also the most biting of Keller's novels and novellas, striking for the bitterness with which its portrait of 1870s Switzerland looks back on Schiller as the cultural icon of Swiss democracy and the civic festival as its privileged medium. In this final section, I will show that *Martin Salander* discards

the representation-substitution problematic entirely. The novel regards as fraudulent all attempts by a fractious, individualistic society to represent itself as a unified, self-governing democracy. The civic festival is nothing more than mere pageantry, while the prestige attached to a career in national government – which, despite a century of festivals, is still a substitutive body beholden to no one's interests but its own – attracts hucksters and social climbers. Ultimately, the novel rejects the democratic impulse itself as rooted in the same desire for progress and advancement as the greed plaguing the country's public life. In place of the paradox of representation, which the civic festival was to solve, *Martin Salander* experiments with renunciation as the highest civic virtue – a complete withdrawal from public life and a curbing of the passions stirred by public art.

From its outset, *Martin Salander* distinguishes itself from Keller's earlier treatment of the civic festival with its emphasis on song. As a civic medium, the Tell festival positioned itself alongside and in contrast to public theater. The political-cultural reference point for the festival in *Salander*, however, is the *Wettgesang*, or singing competition. In choral song, the individual and the collective are brought together as they are in true democracy. This display of public harmony was the centerpiece of the imagined Schiller celebration in *Am Mythenstein*:

> The great festival song rises up to an expression of the purest passion and rapture. It enthralls the thousands of men, boys, and girls singing by heart; a light, rhythmic movement surges as if by magic over the crowd [. . .]; one procession presses in closely on another in colorful confusion, which resolves itself, without anyone seeing it, into order. (XV, 196)

This celebration would be impossible in the Switzerland of *Martin Salander* – the novel's numerous visual and linguistic puns on the theme of music depict a nation incapable of harmony. During a walk with his son Arnold, Salander bemoans the populace's apathy at the ballot box and, playing on the double sense of *Stimme* as voice and vote, notes the degraded state of public song:

> Singing could be heard from the alleys and the wine houses; it was the old songs, of which the people, just as ever, knew only the first verses and maybe the last: when someone broke out into a verse from the middle, the other droned along [. . .]. Every hundred steps a man begged alms with a concertina or an empty coat-sleeve, while his arm lay on his back. (VIII, 77)

The festival is here an ossified piece of civic idolatry, whose jarring dissonance succeeds only in representing the disunity of the Swiss republic. The festive spirit remains, but its political power and historic significance have atrophied.

At first, the cause of this atrophy seems to be the nation's newfound wealth. It seems the figure of Schiller, once the lodestar of Switzerland's political aspirations,

is now yet another piece of cultural capital seized on by Münsterberg's upwardly mobile middle class – like the gaudy gravestones in the city's cemetery, attesting for all eternity to the philistinism and covetousness of their occupants. In the novel's third chapter, Salander's wife, Marie, serves a bottle of wine to a professor who grandiloquently proclaims it to be a "Schiller prickling the stage of my tongue as it performs its play" and consumes it in front of her starving children (VIII, 31). In Salander's account of his financial ruin, however, Keller offers a bleaker view of Schiller and the public culture he once represented. Speaking with his friend Möhni Wighart, Salander recalls how, at a meeting of a society for the recitation of Schiller's poetry in the 1850s, his old colleague from the *Lehrseminar*, Louis Wohlwend stood up to declaim *Die Bürgschaft*. This ballad, composed in 1798, recounts the legend of Damon and Pythias and the Pythagorean ideal of friendship, the willingness of one friend to offer his life for another. The huckster Wohlwend takes advantage of the patriotic feeling that the poem engenders in Salander and asks him to stand as guarantor (*Bürgschaft*) for a loan. He subsequently disappears with the money, ruining Salander. The fact that the theft takes place at the peak of liberalism's cultural and political power suggests that neither Schiller nor the festivals established in his name ever had any civic effect at all. The reason for this is that both Wohlwend's greed and the Schiller society's democratic striving spring, in fact, from the same impulse, "a general wanting to move upward" (Zuberbühler 2008, 90). The longing for true self-rule has not been usurped by the new materialism. Rather, the one is and always was the "dummy," the "caricature" of the other (Zuberbühler 2008, 90 and 97).

Salander is, then, a man out of time, the last citizen of Switzerland who remembers and still subscribes to this long-gone civic culture. Accordingly, he attempts to heal this national disunity with a civic festival. This event, the weddings between the Salander daughters and the corrupt, social-climbing twins Isidor and Julian, arrives in the novel's eleventh chapter. Incensed by a letter from Arnold, who is absent from the festivities, in which he scoffs at the notion of progress so cherished by Salander, he vows to turn his daughters' weddings into a celebration of political unity and civic pride – a *Festspiel*, like the Tell festival and the Schiller centennial. The figure of Schiller is subtly invoked in the weddings' choice of music, the overture to Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, played by a military marching band. Indeed, he is invoked too subtly, played at such an unobtrusive volume that "none of the people at the tables, neither as they ate, nor in the pleasant murmuring of the individual groups of neighbors were disturbed" (VIII, 171–172). But the weddings fail in their attempt to unify public and private life, religion and free-thinking, old liberalism and new democracy. The same discordant singing that greeted Salander upon his return to Switzerland sounds throughout the celebration:

> Two choruses of schoolchildren greeted the guests, each conducted by its own school master with a yellow pitch pipe, which also served him as a baton. They lacked rhythm in the broader sense, because instead of coming together as *one* chorus, they had set themselves up as though they wanted to sing the *Song of the Pinzgau Pilgrimage* against one another. (VIII, 169)

What unity the festival does manage to produce is disingenuous and cloying. A pastor heaps hollow praise on the Salander and the Weidelich families, though he knows neither, "twisting all points of view with his heavy adulation" (VIII, 174). In the final accounting, Salander's attempt at creating aesthetic, political, and interpersonal unity yields only hollow substitution for the divisions among his guests – empty words and vapid civic iconography.

What possibilities remain for the civic festival as a political medium in *Martin Salander*? With the spontaneous performance by the two tramps at Salander's wedding, which unwittingly exposes Isidor and Julian, and with the trial at which the twins are punished for their malfeasance, Keller suggests the possibility of a critical festival that forces the populace to recognize its own faults – "a public spectacle," as the narrator approvingly calls the latter proceedings (VIII, 318). Such a festival would give up the capacity for representation that made the Tell and Schiller festivals unique and would devote itself instead to attacking the "frauds and perverse lies" perpetrated by those in power. With the figure of Arnold Salander, however, the novel takes a more extreme position: an ethic of rejection and renunciation that seeks to curb the striving impulse, the "caprice," from which all aesthetic and political media originate. As the young Salander puts it when, at the novel's end, he refuses to participate in the family business: "I want to fight caprice, as long as I can; if it triumphs, well and good, I will go along, then it is all the same to me" (VIII, 341). When Salander presses Arnold to begin visiting political clubs, observing votes, and listening to lectures explaining Switzerland's laws, Arnold refuses once more. He vows to remain informed, which he considers the fulfillment "of my obligations as a citizen." But he will not take part. He will observe those who do, and he will know them by their works:

> If he had to take part, as they say, he would, if it had to be, but until then he wanted to observe the factual events and consider the fruits that came of them; from them he would come to know the people that made them happen better than he would from their speeches, but the parties he would know through these people as well as by the newspaper articles they write. He did not want the usual influences to affect him and so did not want to go to where they were exchanged; only in this way would he feel free and finally in the position to tell one and all what he believed to be true. (VIII, 348)

Just as Rousseau rejected the theater, Arnold's profession of political faith rejects the entire discourse of republican democracy, and with it, the civic festival, as too passionate. Where there is passion, there is "influence"; where there is "influence," there can be no freedom. In the place of the passions loosed by the festival, Arnold adheres to a stringent, critical continence and to the renunciation of all political images, representation and substitution alike. He vows to limit his attention only to what is and refuses to bring about what ought to be. For fear of misusing his freedom, he promises never to exercise it.

Martin Salander closes, appropriately, with a generational changing of the guard. Wohlwend is routed, the Weidelich twins' crimes brought to light, the Salander daughters divorced with their reputations and fortunes intact, Marie Salander's emotional wisdom finally acknowledged, and the Swiss republic safely in the hands of Arnold and his young friends. The young men hold a dinner at the Salander home where, as an *éminence grise*, he is the guest of honor. At last, there is harmonious singing. Satisfied that the civically virtuous will always stand up to steward Switzerland, Salander is able to go to sleep – to die – and take with him the era of Schiller and the civic festival. But what has the recitation of Schiller's poetry, the festivals undertaken in his spirit, and the centennial honoring him brought Switzerland, a democracy in name only, where those in political office are able to enrich themselves while those they rule are too disinterested to exercise their own political rights? In lieu of the perpetual squabbles and differences in viewpoint that animate *Der grüne Heinrich*, the Switzerland of *Martin Salander* has hardened into a disinterested, ideological consensus, indistinguishable from apathy – hence the abundance of indistinguishable twins in the novel, including and especially the two political parties themselves.

5 Conclusion

In this essay I have traced the topos of the civic festival from the start of Keller's career to its end in three festivals devoted to Schiller: the Tell festival, the Schiller centennial, and the Salander-Weidelich wedding. The unique medial logic of the festival, a performance with no stage and no actors, woven into life itself, as it were, taken together with its unique historical position in the history of Switzerland, affords it a privileged position in Keller's oeuvre as the ideal toward which all other media strive and before which they must fall short. For Keller the festival stood as a tantalizing solution to the problem of democracy: can the people truly represent themselves? It also solved the crisis of legitimacy in democratic art: can a depiction of true democracy, as the equal collective existence of individuals,

ever be anything more than an image of utopia, superfluous in the struggle for equality and freedom? At the same time, the dialogic character of Keller's work always set this ideal in tension with an acknowledgment of its limits – its emphasis on collective over individual experience; its exclusion of marginal members of society; and ultimately, its hollow utopian character.

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