

Schiller's Dancing Vanguard:
From Grace and Dignity to Utopian Freedom

ABSTRACT:

Against caricatures of the poet-philosopher Friedrich Schiller as an unoriginal popularizer of Kant, or a forerunner of totalitarianism, Frederick Beiser reinterprets him as an innovative, classical republican, broadening his analysis to include Schiller's poetry, plays, and essays not widely available in English translation, such as the remarkable essay, "On Grace and Dignity." In that spirit, the present article argues that the latter text, misperceived by Anglophone critics as self-contradictory, is better understood as centering on gender and dance. In brief, grace is a virtuous power of beautiful gestures associated with women, while dignity is a power of sublime gestures associated with men, and the improvised combination thereof is a divinely androgynous power of gesture that I term "stateliness," in a three-step choreography of aesthetic education.

Keywords: Friedrich Schiller; tragedy; androgyny; feminism; dance

The present article reinterprets Friedrich Schiller's central concept of "aesthetic education" as involving a gender-inflected dance toward "utopian freedom." I begin by briefly unpacking both these key phrases. A rough initial definition of "aesthetic education," following Walter Grossman's contribution to the second volume of *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, would be the art-facilitated, harmonious resolution of the twin Kantian drives of rationality and sensuality, resulting in progressively greater moral freedom, cultural evolution, and sociopolitical autonomy.¹ In other words, art uses beauty to lend more rational form to sensuous desires, and to lend more sensuous flexibility to moral theorizing, thereby yielding practitioners of civic virtue in a community of freedom. As for "utopian freedom," the "utopian" modifier derives from the twentieth-century Marxian philosopher Ernst Bloch, who defines it as any aspect of an entity (and especially an artwork) that foreshadows the hoped-for communist

¹ See Walter Grossman, "Schiller's Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 2(1): 1968, 31-41.

revolution, as opposed to the ideological aspects of an entity, which reflect and support the exploitation and alienation of the pre-communist capitalist world.²

One encounters a wide spectrum of reductive interpretations of Schiller, caricaturing him as everything from an unoriginal popularizer of Kant to a forerunner of totalitarianism.³ This, despite Schiller's trenchant critique of Kant that prompted him to revise his moral philosophy, and the repeated condemnations of tyranny that prompted the Nazis to ban his plays *Don Carlos* and *William Tell*.⁴ Against this background, Frederick Beiser's *Schiller as Philosopher* persuasively argues that (a) Schiller's philosophy is both distinct from and superior to Kant, and that (b) "no one" was "more acutely aware of the dangers of conflating" morality and aesthetics than Schiller, which is why he belongs in "the modern republican tradition" of Montesquieu and Rousseau (3, 11).

Part of what makes Beiser's recovery of Schiller compelling, to the point of inspiring a recent (2018) anthology on his philosophy, is that he engages with a much broader range of Schiller's corpus than most Anglophone philosophy scholars, including the essay "On Grace and Dignity" (the only modern English translation of which was out of print until the editors made it available again during my research for this article).⁵ In Beiser's chapter devoted to that essay, he

² For more on Bloch's utopian freedom, see Joshua M. Hall, "Pregnant Materialist Natural Law: Bloch and Spartacus' Priestess of Dionysus," *Idealistic Studies* 52(2): 2022, 111-132.

³ For the latter, see Paul de Man, "Kant and Schiller," *The Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and for a discussion thereof, M. R. Acosta, "Making Other People's Feelings Our Own," in *Who Is This Schiller Now?*, ed. Jeffrey L. High, Nicholas Martin, and Oellers (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 187ff.

⁴ Frederick Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For more on *William Tell* and the Nazis, see <https://www.nytimes.com/1934/12/09/archives/goebbels-adopts-schiller-as-nazi-own-but-theatre-head-edits.html>,

⁵ Frederick Beiser, "Schiller and Pessimism," *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy*, ed. María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey Powell (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018), 83-100. For

notes that Schiller “pairs grace and dignity with the traditional concepts of the beautiful and the sublime,” as the continuation of a classical tradition that explored “*gratias* and *dignitas*, or their equivalent *venustas* and *gravitas*” in relation to “paintings, architecture, sculptures, and forms of speech” (80, 86). It is thus unsurprising that Beiser claims that “Schiller never says but always implies: we act with dignity in cases of *tragedy*” (114). In a chapter devoted to Schiller’s theory of tragedy, Beiser identifies its “central theme” as follows: “the purpose and content of tragedy consists in the self-awareness of freedom,” in the sense of the Kantian sublime (239). So central is the latter, in fact, that Schiller “avers that we would rather see freedom prevail over morality than morality prevail over freedom,” in the sense of the Kantian sublime (251).⁶ Beiser even goes so far as to claim that “There is indeed an important sense in which Schiller’s deepest philosophy comes not from his essays but from his plays and poems,” though Beiser acknowledges that his own book “gives scant attention to his poems or dramatic works” (10).

Fortunately, Beiser later rectifies his neglect of Schiller’s poetry, in his chapter in the abovementioned Schiller anthology. There, he argues that tragedy, for Schiller, “shows us better how to endure life,” and that tragedy’s aim is “to give the spectator an awareness of his power to act upon and change the world” (90). More generally, Schiller thinks that “The highest good consists in the complete realization of all human powers, the harmony of reason and sensibility” (93). In sum, “The world can be made a better place if humans only learn to exercise wisely their greatest power: freedom,” and “The aim of all Schiller’s plays was to affirm this power” (96).

sympathetic interpretations of Schiller that remain untranslated from German into English, see the work of Wolfgang Riedel and Peter-Andre Alt. (I am indebted for this referral to a reviewer of this article).

⁶ More specifically, Beiser explains of the Kantian theory applied in Schiller’s tragedies as follows: “Since the hero suffers and cannot prevent the misfortune befalling him, he shows his limited power as a physical being; but since he, despite the suffering, continues to act on moral principle, he shows his greater powers as a moral being” (259).

Finally from Beiser, and tying this analysis of tragedy back to “On Grace and Dignity,” he claims that the essay’s “task” is an explanation of this ideal of freedom through tragedy.

Another Anglophone scholar who considers that essay in relation to Schiller’s tragedies is Alan Menhennet (93). In his essay included with Jane Curran’s new translation, Menhennet notes that “we find the terminology” of Schiller’s essay “prefigured also in *Don Carlos*” (one of his most critically-acclaimed plays), as when “The Queen is rightly described by [the character] Posa as a ‘schöne Seele’ (line 4307; beautiful soul)” (82).⁷ For Menhennet, the central tension in Schiller’s poetic philosophy is that he “was both an idealist who believed passionately in harmony, and a dramatist who responded most deeply of all to the tragic, that great rent in the harmony of the universe” (83). And if tragedy is the genre of the tragic sublime, then “the sentimental idyll” is the genre of beautiful harmony, which Schiller struggles to combine into one play in the “tragic ‘beautiful soul’” (84, 85).

More precisely, and here Menhennet emphasizes the gender that is also central to “On Grace and Dignity,” Schiller was being “driven by the logic of his philosophy to seek a basis within nature for the transcendence of the *merely* human,” and ultimately succeeded with Joan of Arc, the heroine of his *Maid of Orleans* (91). The latter play is therefore, in Menhennet’s view, “Schiller’s idyllic tragedy,” concluding with the heroine’s “idyllic apotheosis,” which is “idyllic” given her “transition of human into god,” but also tragic because the latter required her death (94). In Menhennet’s words, “a virtual angel (an angelic potential) was present in the human Johanna, and its full realization inevitably implies her death as a human being” (98). In other words, an exceptional woman is sacrificed on the altar of humanity’s promised transcendence, in what I am calling a utopian freedom. To clarify, I am not claiming that “On Grace and Dignity”

⁷ Alan Menhennet, “Idealism and Realism in Schiller’s Dramas,” *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in its Cultural Context*, ed. Jane V. Curran and Christopher Fricker (Rochester, NY: Camden, 2005), 81-104.

is primarily about gender, nor that Schiller is a proto-feminist, though he does anticipate some themes of androgyny in feminist philosophy. Rather, I am claiming that gender is one of the essential aspects of the moral figure that Schiller portrays therein, which figure I interpret here as also essentially a dancer.⁸

On the latter note, what is missing from both Beiser and Menhennet's analyses is the qualitatively privileged (albeit quantitatively marginalized) position of dance for Schiller. That is, although he writes very little about dance, its few appearances are situated at crucial points in his thinking, empowering dance to stitch together the seams where critics find his philosophy threatening to unravel. This is part of a more general trend I explore in the history of aesthetics, wherein dance is crucial despite being marginalized (in part because of its being associated with disempowered populations such as female, nonwhite, queer, and poor folks, and nonhuman animals).⁹ More precisely, by "dance" here, I explicitly include both literal and figurative dances, in part because dance (as revealed in everyday language usage) spontaneously transgresses the divide between literal and figurative (among many other binaries, including mind/body, religious/secular, and art/sport). Thus, "dance" here is both a metaphor for freedom achieved through aesthetic education, and also a literal, conventional movement practice.¹⁰ Put in terms of

⁸ For more on the place of androgyny in contemporary feminism and social justice, see Joshua M. Hall, "Bodily-Social Copresence Androgyny: Rehabilitating a Progressive Strategy" *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32(1): 2018, 77-86.

⁹ See, for example, Joshua M. Hall, "Dancing-with: A Theoretical Method for Poetic Social Justice," *Dance and Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Farinas, Craig Hanks, Julie C. Van Camp, and Aili Bresnahan (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 415-425.

¹⁰ To elaborate, I have constructed a phenomenologically based, historically informed new philosophy of dance, called "Figuration," developed as follows. First, I performed a phenomenological analysis of my own decades of dance and choreographic experience to generate a small cluster of concepts that could be considered central aspects of dance. Second, I went back to the canonical philosophers who neglected dance and looked instead for these concepts in their work. I termed these central constructs or aspects of dance "Moves," and named them "posture," "gesture," "grace" and "resilience." Having thus constructed the four Moves, I then applied them to

Schiller's famous example of the Juno Ludovisi sculpture, she is too frozen to maximally illustrate, not only the dynamism of the play impulse, but also the aesthetic education of living, breathing human beings, who cannot escape the necessity of motion for life, making us more like sculptures that dance.

It is to this dancing dimension that Christopher Fricker, alone among Anglophone interpreters of "On Grace and Dignity," rightly attends.¹¹ In an essay accompanying Curran's new translation of the essay, Fricker claims that Schiller influenced the German Romantic Stefan George, one of whose poems extolls the "(sweet gesture of joy) that pertains to the dancer," and negatively contrast the Germans with "the Greeks," who "are graceful and dignified as a people," and who "evoke heroes in dancing, and in which "(dancing and intoxication) gods are created" (113). In conclusion, both George and Schiller, for Fricker, understand and dramatize "graceful personalities as heralds of their respective visions of society" (116, 117). Thus, what aesthetic education requires, for the creation of utopian freedom, is that the entire community learns from its best dancers how to dance.

Building on my previous analyses of grace in Schiller as dance, the present investigation follows (1) Beiser in centering Schiller's tragedy as site of freedom via classical republicanism, (2) Menhennet in affirming gender and the pursuit of an idyllic apotheosis in *The Maid of*

what I term the seven "families" of dance, namely "concert," "folk" "societal," "agonistic," "celestial," and "discursive" dance. By "families" here, I am attempting to channel Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances"; in this sense, there does not exist a unified thing called "dance," but instead a family of phenomena which are meaningfully related through a cluster of shared similarities. It is important to note, however, that this list remains provisional, and open to change as communities of inquiry see fit. For more, see For more, see Joshua M. Hall, *Figuration: A New Philosophy of Dance*, PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA, <http://etd.library.vanderbilt.edu/available/etd-07192012-180322/>.

¹¹ See Christopher Fricker, "The Poet as Herald of Grace and Dignity: The Influence of Schiller's Twin Concepts on Stefan George," *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in its Cultural Context*, ed. Jane V. Curran and Christopher Fricker (Rochester, NY: Camden, 2005), 105-120.

Orleans, and (3) Fricker in identifying community dance as a privileged locus for the aesthetic education in pursuit thereof.¹² In brief, grace is a virtuous power of beautiful gestures associated with women, dignity is a power of sublime gestures associated with men, and the improvised combination of these gestures is the divinely androgynous power I term “stateliness,” to connote the flowing procession of grace, the nobility of dignity, and the political connotation of the state. Together, these constitute a three-step choreography to utopian freedom. Put in terms of the twin regal stars of *Mary Stuart*, if grace is Queen Mary’s beautiful flame (or volcano), and dignity is Queen Elizabeth’s mountainous icecap (or avalanche), then stateliness is the chorus’ effervescent waters (or hot springs), like the carbonated Greek wine of Dionysus, fermented by and for the dancing vanguard of the community.

I Choreographic Step One: Feminizing Grace

In this first section, I will flesh out the first of three dancing steps in Schiller’s choreography of aesthetic education. This first step derives from the first half of the essay’s title, “Grace,” and is inflected with a stereotypically feminine gendered component. In essence, grace involves the use of artificial, rational, and voluntary methods to enhance one’s natural beauty (or to compensate for the lack of natural beauty). Most surprising in this account, perhaps, is its brief but vital discussion of the figure of the dancer, as well as its hints of political revolution.

The most vivid difference between the titular powers of “On Grace and Dignity” is that only the former is introduced with an elaborate metaphor from Greek mythology, namely the “girdle” of Venus, which “has the power to impart grace and love to the weather,” whether said

¹² For my initial account of grace in Schiller, see Joshua M. Hall, “Core Aspects of Dance: Schiller and Dewey on Grace,” *Dance Chronicle* 40(1): 2017, 74-98.

wearer is inherently “beautiful” or not (123-124).¹³ This difference already hints at three important features of Schiller’s concept of grace in this essay. First, grace’s connection to beauty (in contrast to dignity’s corresponding connection to sublimity) explains why grace and not dignity can be adequately imaged (as in the Greek myth). Second, this difference between grace and dignity foreshadows Schiller’s later claim that grace is more peripheral and accidental to a human being than is dignity (though Schiller emphasizes that grace is an objective property, not a mere appearance, of the human transformed by grace) (125). Finally, the girdle is a gendered accoutrement, a primarily feminine item of clothing, designed to minimize the waist while accentuating the bust and hips. Thus, Schiller’s enthusiastic application of grace also to men contributes a gender-bending, cross-dressing dimension in that context (that is, a transgression of gender norms, performance, and identity, as vividly manifest in practices such as drag). This in turn recalls the figure of Dionysus, patron god of tragedy, who was typically costumed on stage wearing a traditionally a woman’s garment in that era (namely, a saffron-colored fawnskin pelt).¹⁴

Supporting this gendered interpretation of Venus’ belt, Schiller himself explicitly evokes gender on the essay’s second page. Noting that the Graces, divine dispensers of grace, “were presented as the companions of the fair sex,” Schiller then adds the caveat that they “could also become well-disposed toward a man and be indispensable to him if he wished to make himself pleasing” (124). In other words, though grace is predominantly feminine in the vicious world of the present, grace is necessary for a man working to build a more virtuous future, such as

¹³ Friedrich Schiller, “On Grace and Dignity,” *Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” in its Cultural Context*, ed. Jane V. Curran and Christopher Fricker (Rochester, NY: Camden, 2005), 124-170. Other Anglophone scholars translate Venus’ device as “belt” instead, but that article of clothing, too, minimizes and accentuates the same features.

¹⁴ For more, see Joshua M. Hall, “Dionysus *Lyseus* Reborn: The Revolutionary Philosophy Chorus,” in *Philosophy Today* 66(1): 2022, 57-74.

Schiller himself, who dedicated his entire life to charming the people, especially through his poetry and plays, in his program of aesthetic education.

Telescoping Schiller's long and winding elaboration of grace, it is a species of beauty that is (1) "movable" (not "static"), (2) "accidental" (not "necessary"), (3) "arbitrary" (not determined), (4) morally "expressive" (not morally "dumb"), (5) non-"architectonic," and (6) "placed in" appearances by reason (rather than being "extracted from" those appearances) (126, 127, 130). In sum, grace is a beauty that moves freely, indirectly expressing moral character, independently of structural beauty, as spontaneously attributed to bodies by the mind. In Schiller's political analogy for this last aspect, grace's beauty is "the citizen of two worlds, one *by birth*, the other *through adoption*," and "receives its existence in the sensuous world and *achieves* citizenship in the world of reason" (131). That is, grace is the beautiful aesthetic analogue of naturalized immigrants in the political realm, foreigners to morality yet welcomed into the kingdom of ends, thereby transforming it from a frozen perfection to the warmth of a utopia where the hearth fire burns.

Having thus collected its features, Schiller offers his full definition of grace, namely "beauty of form under freedom's influence, the beauty of those appearances that the person determines" (134). Aware that this definition may seem meaninglessly vague, he acknowledges that the further from free movement a beautiful movement is, the less artful and more natural it is, being more like Venus (beauty) than her girdle (grace). Or, at the other end of this chain, "mind even *constructs* itself a body and the *form* itself must join the *play*, so that grace often eventually turns into architectonic beauty" (135). In Schiller's later, explicitly dancing example thereof, when a dance teacher "dismisses his pupil from school, the rule must already have accomplished its task in him, and does not *need to accompany* him into the world: the work of

the rule must enter nature” (138). Thus, dance education for Schiller is nothing less than what Bloch celebrates (following Marx’s dictum) as the utopian “humanization of the nature world,” which he interprets as technological transformations of the material world that actualize its potentialities to fully support human flourishing.¹⁵

This wholesale reconstruction of the body by grace also implies, however, a disturbing possibility which Schiller acknowledges and labors to foreclose. “Now a person could, through artifice and work,” he writes, “be capable of bringing these accompanying movements under the control of his will and, like an accomplished magician, have any form he pleased fall onto the mirror that reflects his soul in mime” (137). However, this would be both morally problematic (since “everything about such a person is a lie, his whole nature consumed with art), and also practically unsustainable, since when the charlatan’s artifice is (inevitably) exposed, we feel “indifference or even disdain and disgust,” as “our hearts close, and our souls, which surged upwards, now flee backwards” (137, 139). Thus, Schiller concludes, “Grace must always be natural” (137).

In fact, Schiller goes so far as to insist that “the subject must not appear to be *conscious of possessing grace*” (137-138). The key word here, though, is “appear,” because it registers that a graceful person is permitted to be fully aware of their gracefulness, but only provided that true grace is accompanied by sufficient skill in performance. This caveat is crucial for Schiller’s analysis, because otherwise it would be impossible to explain the magic of the divinely-androgynous beings who populate his tragedies, including Queen Mary. For example, her admirer Mortimer, mad with inflamed desire, describes her fiery presence (despite the hardship of her imprisonment) as follows: “Lacking the bare necessities to make / life bearable, you

¹⁵ Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, trans. Dennis J. Schmidt (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1987), x.

radiate light and life” (510). This same power prompts Queen Elizabeth to observe that “Her [Queen Mary’s] influence on people is too powerful / If they came face to face with her, they would / have changed their evidence” in court to free her (522). And it is also the reason that, at the play’s climax, Mary predicts that her “prison will open and my radiant soul / take flight on angel’s wings to eternal freedom” (598).

This caveat (that the true grace of the virtuous does not require their ignorance thereof) is also, and equally, necessary to explain the obvious charisma of the actors and dancers who play the role of such characters in his plays, to whom Schiller turns next. “From this we learn, in passing,” he remarks, “what to think about *imitated* or *trained* instances of grace (which I should like to call grace in the theater or the grace of the dance master),” namely that this dancing grace is “a worthy counterpart” to things like “whalebone corsets,” and that dancing grace “relates to true grace in approximately the same way that *cosmetic beauty* relates to *architectonic beauty*” (138). Note the semantic proximity of “corset” here to (Venus’) “girdle,” which suggests the possibility that (a) dancing grace (as a species of grace) is to grace in general what (b) grace (as a species of beauty) is to beauty in general—namely, dancing grace is even more movable, and noble, than the (already) movable noble beauty of grace. In support of this analogy, on Schiller’s terms, cosmetic beauty (as with the corset) is higher than architectonic beauty, precisely insofar as it is freely chosen and artfully engaged, an example of mind remaking body. Aphoristically put, as the corset binds the figure into an hourglass, so dance burns the calories that remake the human.

Schiller himself, perhaps inferring this implied ennobling of dancing grace (in an observation minimized by his phrase “in passing”), then dedicates the next-longest footnote in the essay thereto. “By this juxtaposition,” the dramaturge hastens to qualify (perhaps anxious not

to offend his actor colleagues), “I am neither detracting from the dancing master’s services to true grace, nor denying the actor his right to claim it” (138). On the contrary, he affirms that “Undeniably, the dancing master comes to the aid of true grace by granting the will mastery over its tools and by removing the obstacles to the play of lively forces that are set by *mass* and *gravity*” (138). However unimposingly and casually put, this claim from Schiller is remarkably affirming of dance. Put as a question: What, for an essay on the sublimity of human dignity, could be more important than “granting the will mastery” over its tools, the bodily powers? Again, given Schiller’s most inspired concept, which I translate (following Hans-Georg Gadamer) as the “dance impulse” (normally translated as the “play impulse”), what could be more important than the play of lively forces?¹⁶ In short, the dance master here is revealed as, albeit counterintuitively, the most powerful and necessary figure in Schiller’s aesthetic education into utopian freedom. What Schiller intended to target with his objection, he clarifies, is not dancing grace, but rather “*imitated* grace,” because he has “no hesitation in rejecting” the latter—both “on the stage and in life” (138).

Returning from the footnote on dance to the main body of the text, one notices that the dancer has apparently not been content to stay in their assigned place in the essay. That is, Schiller claims that the “architectonic part” of a human is “what *nature* plans for them,” whereas “we discover from the mimic part what *they themselves have done* to fulfill this plan” (141). The “miming” here is that of a human who is imitating nature’s causality, dancing the role of a natural being. In short, “The constitution of a human being is therefore only *his* insofar as it is mimic; but *in so far as it is mimic*, it is his” (141). This last point, suggestive of the mime as

¹⁶ More precisely, in his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, this leading figure in the twentieth-century philosophy of language and the school of hermeneutics observes that “the word ‘Spiel’ originally meant ‘dance,’ and is still found in many word forms” (102). See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weisenheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2004.

professional performer, leads Schiller back to dancing theatrical virtuosity (already noted in his long footnote) and its inseparable grace. “An active spirit gains influence over all *physical movement*,” Schiller writes of this virtuoso, “and finally comes indirectly to the point of changing even the set forms of nature, which are not accessible to the will, through the power of sympathetic play” (142). In short, the best humans are always, naturally, dancing.

In preparation for Schiller’s most illuminating political metaphor in this essay, he then paraphrases the previous point, claiming that “the freedom with which nature expresses itself, despite its dependence on the will, is by *permission* of the mind” (145). Briefly stated, “grace is a *favor* granted to the sensuous by the ethical” (145).

When a monarchic state is run in such a way that, although everything proceeds in accordance with the will of one person, the individual citizen can still persuade himself that he is living according to his own lights and simply following his inclinations, one calls this a liberal government (146).

Though this metaphor might seem to suggest that all apparent naturalness or freedom is merely covertly legislated, in his tragedies Schiller consistently depicts monarchial power as constantly fragile and vulnerable to the will of the people. For example, in *Mary Stuart*, Queen Elizabeth complains to her councilors that “only my people’s love preserves my crown”; it was for this reason, she later claims, that when “The mob were pressing me to sign” Queen Mary’s death warrant, Elizabeth merely “followed their will, and signed, under duress” (612-613). Put in terms of the most important political event of Schiller’s life, the Revolution revealed where the true power lies.

Perhaps thinking here of the Revolution’s aftermath of Terror, Schiller proceeds to paint a truly horrific portrait of why nature “ought never to be permitted to use force against the mind

if beautiful, moral expression is to occur, for wherever nature *reigns* alone, humanity disappears” (146). For, “when a human, prey to desire, lets natural impulse rule him unrestrainedly,” Schiller writes, then “Brutishness alone speaks from his blurry, fading eyes, from his lecherous, open mouth, from his choked, quaking voice, from his short, rapid breathing, from his trembling limbs, from the whole of his languishing frame” (147). Returning to Schiller’s political metaphor, the latter state is “like a wild *ochlocracy*,” that “more brutal despotism of the lower classes” (148).

One should by no means infer from this, however, that Schiller is opposed to the lower classes per se, nor to their political empowerment, nor even their use of extralegal violence to overthrow an unjust, upper-class tyrant. The most vivid example of his affirmation of the latter is his final, and most popular play, namely *William Tell*, which, in his words, “he felt would stir the people up,” since they “were extremely interested in such folk affairs, for Swiss freedom was being discussed more and more since freedom in general had disappeared” (48).¹⁷ And for evidence of his success therein, one needs look no further than the Philippines, where Jose Rizal translated *William Tell* into his Indigenous language of Tagalog, as part of his successful campaign to apply Schiller’s corpus to the cause of decolonization and independence. But such empowerment of the people, stoking the flames of revolution without incinerating the world in terror, requires a second, cooling, calming step in Schiller’s dance of aesthetic education.¹⁸

Reviewing this first section, I would emphasize the importance here of tension and balance, most obviously between nature and artifice, and between the body and the mind. For

¹⁷ Roger E. Mitchell and Joyce P. Mitchell, “Schiller’s *William Tell*: A Folkloristic Perspective,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 83(327): 1970, 44-52.

¹⁸ For more, see Ramon Guillermo, *Translation and Revolution: A Study of Jose Rizal’s Guillermo Tell* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2010).

one thing, this balanced tension already suggests the question of power, and implies that the political extrapolation of this analysis will also involve a balanced tension. For another thing, despite the clear predominance of the feminine in this first half of Schiller's analysis, its internal tensions already suggest where he will go next in the essay, and thereby that a simplistic dichotomous analysis of female versus male will be inadequate. In other words, a degree of complexity and even androgyny is already intimated before the second step is taken.

II. Choreographic Step Two: Masculinizing Dignity

In this section, I will flesh out the second of three steps in Schiller's choreography of aesthetic education. This second step derives from the second term of the essay's title, "Dignity," and is distinctly inflected with a stereotypically masculine gendered component. In essence, it involves the use of artificial, rational, and voluntary methods to enhance one's natural self-respect (or to compensate for the lack thereof). Most surprising in this account, perhaps, is the inequality between grace and dignity, with only the former being inherently virtuous, while the latter is merely a necessary vice for those of us unfortunate enough to be living before the perfected world of utopian freedom.

It is on the abovementioned note of the combustive power of the body and the masses that Schiller first deploys grace's companion term, "*dignity*." "Just as *freedom* lies in the centre between anarchy and the suppression of law," he writes, "we now find *beauty* in the middle between *dignity*, that is to say, the expression of the dominant mind, and *lust*, as the expression of dominant impulse" (148). What this suggests, in part, is that (a) while there must be law, that law must also be imperceptible (anesthetic?) to the citizens, and that (b) while grace (as a species of beauty) is an Aristotelian virtue, dignity is on the contrary an Aristotelian vice. This, in turn,

implies that grace and dignity are not on equal footing after all, which is why I have consistently referred to grace as a “virtuous power,” but to dignity and stateliness as merely “powers.” In other words, it is only in today’s vicious world that the latter two (dignity and stateliness) can be justified, whereas in Schiller’s futural utopia there is only room for the virtue of grace.

Elaborating on this point, Schiller writes that “The human being is not destined to perform individual ethical actions but to be an ethical being” (149). In short, “*Virtue* is prescribed for him, rather than virtues, and virtue is nothing other than ‘an inclination to duty’” (149). More poetically put, “humans not only *may*, but *should* combine enjoyment with duty; they should obey their reason with joy” (149). This is so, for Schiller, because “nature gave the human being notice of his obligation not to separate what it had bound together and, even in the purest expressions of his divine part, not to neglect the sensuous, and not to base the triumph of the one on the subjugation of the other” (150). Again, this imperative also has a moral foundation, since only “*when it has become his nature*, is the ethical spirit secure,” for “The enemy who has merely been laid low can get up again, but the one who has been *reconciled* has been truly overcome” (150).

Though this warlike metaphor might seem, initially, to recommend an insidious conquest and exploitation of nature (in an allegedly benevolent dictatorship over the body), I would suggest that Schiller (as a dramatist, master of conflict) is engaging here in a kind of counter-manipulation of his privileged audience. By this I mean giving that audience the impression that Schiller endorses the manipulation of nature and the body, while secretly trusting that when those forces are tapped into, then the material, bodily, and desirous powers of nature will melt the icy dagger of the monarchical mind. For example, in the play *The Maid of Orleans*, it is Joan of Arc’s doomed love for the English lord Lionel that inspires her to compassion, where she had

previously slaughtered enemies without mercy (provoking one enemy to call her an “invincible goddess of terror”), because she is possessed by a divine spirit that literally swings her sword arm (663, 669). In other words, by attempting to manipulate nature, one ends up deferring to nature at least in part, yielding a healthier flexibility in place of the rigidity of moral absolutism. In short, energetic fluidity rather than ice-cold immobility.

In support of the latter interpretation, consider Schiller’s subsequent, passionate paean to the natural, which begins with a first question. “Just because the moral weakling would like to introduce a certain *laxity* into the law of reason,” he asks, “to make it a toy for his own convenience, does this mean that a *rigidity* has to set in, transforming the most powerful expression of moral freedom into a merely honorable kind of servitude?” (151). That is, good feelings, too, exist, as do honorable impulses. Thus, to recoil puritanically too far from feeling is to fall into the opposite vice of moral rigor mortis. Even servitude to the highest, namely the moral law, remains a form of slavery. Schiller then supports this point with an anecdote. “A person does not make a good impression on me,” he writes, “if he can trust the voice of impulse so little as to feel obliged to test its tone against that of moral principles; one respects him more highly if he confidently trusts it and is not in danger of being misled by it,” because doing so “shows that in him both principles are already in that harmony that seals perfected humanity” (152). This perfected humanity, Schiller concludes—thereby introducing the most famous and controversial concept in the essay—“is understood as the beautiful soul” (152).

Schiller defines “the beautiful soul” as the state wherein “the ethical sense has at last so taken control of all a person’s feelings that it can leave affect to guide the will without hesitation and is never in danger of standing in contradiction of its decisions” (152). In short, this beautiful soul is the “noble” who worships the moral law so intensely that they have burned away all their

individuality. If this sacrifice seems too extreme for Schiller (given, as Beiser rightly insists, his “supreme spiritual, intellectual and moral value—freedom”), that impression is strengthened by the following caveat (Beiser 2005, 15). Schiller insists that “this beauty of character, the ripest fruit of humanity, is only an idea that they can vigilantly strive to live up to, yet, despite all efforts, can never fully attain” (154). That is, even under the most oppressive sexist regimes, or the most sweltering infernos, the cool head of freedom and its ice-hard resistance can never be fully evaporated. For example, in *Mary Stuart*, Queen Elizabeth challenges her minister as follows: “Strong souls and / stomachs dwell / in women. In my presence, sir, do not / let me hear about ‘the weaker sex’” (533).

This gendered inflection also makes the rest of Schiller’s description of the beautiful soul comprehensible, as in the following examples. First, “the actions of a beautiful soul are not themselves ethical, but the character as a whole is so,” like that of a woman whom patriarchal forces have melted down into the shape of a charming (to them) automaton (152). Second, “One cannot give the beautiful soul credit for any action,” as one tends not to give women credit under patriarchy, “since satisfying an impulse is never considered creditable”—she is just as nature and the patriarchy made her (152). And third, the beautiful soul “has no other merit besides being,” and “never knows about the beauty of its actions,” which suggests the figure of the white woman as ultimate trophy of social capital, superheated and bent into a caricature of its re-shapers (152).

In support of this gendered interpretation, Schiller explicitly invokes gender on the next page, at the climax and close of the essay’s first section. “As a general rule,” he claims, “one finds more grace among *women*,” which he attributes to women’s physical form’s possessing more “flexible ability to receive impression and to be set in motion,” and women’s character’s “moral harmony of feelings” (in both cases, he concludes, “nature was more favorable toward

woman than toward man”) (153). Moreover, “The contribution that the soul must make to grace can also be more easily fulfilled in a woman than a man,” insofar as her “character seldom reaches the highest idea of ethical purity and seldom goes beyond acts of *affection*” (154). And finally from the essay’s first titled section, “Grace will thus become the expression of women’s virtue, and very often might be missing from manly virtue” (154).

The second section of Schiller’s essay, “Dignity,” begins ambiguously: “As grace is the expression of a beautiful soul, *dignity* is the expression of a superior mentality” (154). Put as a question: is dignity “superior” to lesser mentalities, or is it superior to the beautiful soul? The latter alternative aligns with my gender-inflected reading thus far, and is further supported by Schiller’s claim on the next page, regarding the stereotypically masculinized “nobility” of the will, that “The will *alone* already elevates the human above animal nature; the *moral* will elevates him to divinity” (154). There are also several more moments in this passage that are coded as masculine, the cumulative effect of which is overwhelming.

First, Schiller invokes the masculinized figure of the “the most strong-willed Stoic” (154). Second, he claims, regarding dignity’s obligations, that “the will is obliged to hold nature back until reason has spoken,” and that “whenever nature is the *initiator*” of an impulse, then “the will must deny nature immediate causality” (157). For “Only by crushing the power of desire,” he elaborates, can human beings “display their independence and prove themselves to be moral beings,” thus invoking several masculine terms in the context of the domination of a feminine-connoting nature (157). Finally on this point, Schiller’s first example of dignity is also decidedly male. “But while his veins swell, his muscles become cramped and taut, his voice cracks, his chest is thrust out, and his lower body pressed in,” Schiller writes of the Stoic hero, “his intentional movements are gentle, the facial features relaxed, and eyes and brow serene”

(159). What this illustrates, in a phrase, is “*repose* [Beiser’s translation] *in suffering*, in which dignity actually consists” (160). “Repose,” which recalls the centrality of posing and posturing in dance, is also helpful as a reminder that the Stoic’s masculine comportment is not a natural strength or coldness, but rather an artful, habituated condition, a painful chilling of one’s fire.

Elaborating on this warlike dignity, Schiller observes that “*moral beauty*” is sacrificed therein, but in exchange for “*moral greatness*” (158). More precisely, “The *beautiful* soul, then, must, in emotion, change into a *sublime* soul, and this is the foolproof test to distinguish it from a *good heart* or from *virtue born from temperament*” (158). In other words, when tested, the beautiful soul is either (a) unmasked as a being (usually a woman) whose apparent virtue is merely affectionate inclination, or (b) transformed into a being (usually a man) who sacrifices that virtue of grace on the altar of freedom. In this way, in Schiller’s words, “the beautiful soul becomes heroic and elevates itself to pure intelligence” (158). Note the warning flag represented here by the latter phrase, for “purity” is hostile to Schiller’s ideal of balance and admixture of the sensuous and intellectual. For example, consider she whom Todd Kontje calls “the excessively ‘masculine’ Elizabeth” in *Mary Stuart*, who remarks of her subjects that “they think / that I am just a woman, though I thought / I had ruled them like a man, and like a King” (Kontje 90; Schiller 527).¹⁹

Having thus fleshed out his feminized and masculinized gestural archetypes, Schiller aptly pivots to the topic of love. For starters, “the lover demands dignity in the object of his passion,” Schiller argues, since dignity “alone guarantees that it was *not out of need* that he was chosen, but *freely*—that he is not *desired as a thing*, but *esteemed as a person*” (162). Lingering with these relational power dynamics, “One demands grace from a person who places

¹⁹ Todd Kontje, “Staging the Sublime: Schiller’s ‘Maria Stuart’ as Ironic Tragedy, *Modern Language Studies* 22(2): 1992, 88-101.

obligations, and dignity from someone who is placed under an obligation” (162). Relatedly, “One should criticize a mistake with grace,” when one is occupying a more powerful position, “and confess [a mistake] with dignity,” when occupying a weaker position (162). More generally, “If the strong wishes to be loved,” Schiller concludes, then “he must temper his superiority with grace,” while “If the weak wants respect, he must supplement his impotence with dignity” (162-163). In other words, since one will never find perfect equality in this vicious world, one should balance one’s dominant power (grace or dignity) with its counterbalancing power.

Reviewing this second section, I emphasize the figure of the Stoic, and the tragic dimension of the necessity for painful self-discipline while living under a vicious regime. It is well-known that Stoicism emerged and flourished during a period of great political chaos, instability, and unpredictability in the ancient Greco-Roman world. And for many, it is only against this sociopolitical background that one might be able to justify Stoicism’s coldness, indifference to happiness, and willingness to advocate self-harm.²⁰ Moreover, when juxtaposed to the gendered inflection of this section, this thought raises a question: is stereotypical masculinity to some degree—at least in its most extreme, “pure,” anti-feminine performances—inherently the product of a vicious world? And if so, then might there be an inherent tendency, in a world of utopian freedom, toward a more virtuous androgyny? For one step in this direction, I now turn to my concluding section.

²⁰ For more on this subject, see Joshua M. Hall, “A Divinely-Tolerant Political Ethics: Dancing with Aurelius,” *Epoché: A Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20(2): 2016, 327-348.

III. Choreographic Step Three: Androgynous Stateliness

In this final section, I complete the last step in Schiller's choreography of aesthetic education. Unlike the first two, this third step is not announced with a noun in the essay's title, but instead arguably implied by the connecting conjunction "and." That is, this third step is what happens when feminized grace and masculine dignity enter into relationship. But we should not assume that this new whole will be reducible to the mere sum of its parts, nor that the two partners in this dance will remain un-transfigured by their relationship. Nor should we assume, most importantly for my analysis here, that these terms correspond to actual (cisgendered) women and men. Instead, they may apply, more vitally, to aspects within any individual.

Returning to the abovementioned process of externally balancing or harmonizing unequal powers between lovers, Schiller then turns to the related process of uniting them within the self. Here, the limitations of dignity become clearer, prompting Schiller to perform the third choreographed gesture in his graceful-dignified-stately aesthetic education. "Since grace and dignity express themselves in different areas," he claims, "they are not mutually exclusive in the same person and not even in the same condition of a person" (163). On the contrary, Schiller continues, "it is only from grace that dignity acquires recognition and only from dignity that grace acquires value" (163). This yields the new power that I have termed "stateliness." Two examples thereof might be Queen Mary from *Mary Stuart* (but only after her climactic confrontation with Queen Elizabeth, in her preparation for her own death) and Joan of Arc from *The Maid of Orleans* (but only after she has fallen for Lionel and then rededicated herself to her cause as a complete human being). In the former case, Mary was originally merely graceful (in her rise to power) and then subsequently merely sublime (defying Elizabeth for the throne). In the latter case, Joan was originally merely sublime (when slaughtering mercilessly as a French

god's avenging angel). And in both cases, the women's stateliness represents their peak energetic flexibility, or effervescent fluidity—immediately followed by their tragic death, and transfiguration into angels.

When grace and dignity are thus combined in stateliness, the person's (a) grace shows that they have normal emotions, and that they can be spontaneously joyful when not suffering; and their (b) dignity shows that they are willing and able to suffer when principle requires. In Schiller's words, "If grace, supported by architectonic beauty, and dignity, supported by strength, are *united* in the same person, he stands there, justified in the world of spirit and affirmed in appearance" (163). Schiller then elaborates this point with a legal metaphor. "The two legislations" (namely, the natural/aesthetic and the rational/moral) "are in such close contact" in stateliness "that their boundaries flow together" (163). In other words, the two lawmakers become one, merging their regimes, in the person of the divinely chivalric being, empowered thereby to legislate for a naturally rational and beautifully moral republic.

For example, when the Earl of Leicester is observing Queen Mary's promenade to her execution, her former lover describes her as follows: "She goes, transfigured, half a saint already" (609). It is precisely the "half" of this "half a saint" that suggests that Mary here is not making the first (merely graceful) or second (merely dignified) gesture of Schiller's aesthetic education, but rather the final (stately) one, because the first is not saintly (but humanly beautiful), and the second is fully (not partially) saintly. Nevertheless, as Mary's tragic example vividly illustrates, the fatal flaw in this stately embodiment, is that today's oppressively vicious world will not tolerate feminine persons (of whatever gender) affirming their freedom. More precisely, when such persons make this attempt in isolation under today's oppressive conditions (especially if they are femme), the result is what Judith Butler calls an unlivable life, by which

she means a life that is vulnerable and precarious to an extreme degree, due to lack of material and/or social infrastructure (i.e., the resources that support life and make it intelligible and recognizable to oneself and others).²¹ For this reason, a conflict often arises within the stately person between their grace and their dignity, fighting to preserve themselves individually if they cannot sustainably harmonize with their world.

Exploring these internal tensions and conflicts, Schiller claims that dignity is “inseparable” from “the feeling that is called *respect*” (in the Kantian sense of being humbled before the law), while grace is inseparable from “*love*” (165). Where respect “bows before its object,” Schiller elaborates, love “inclines toward its object” (165). And whereas for respect, “the object is reason and the subject, [is] sensuous nature,” for love, “the object is sensuous and the subject is moral nature” (165-166). This means that love is the moral being seeking sensuous being, and that respect is the sensuous being trembling before moral being. Put differently, if love is the condescension (in the etymological sense) of the immortal, then respect is the self-loathing of the mortal. With this remarkable implication, Schiller mirrors the dance that most femmes in our society are socialized and coercively pressured to perform when stateliness proves unsustainable (namely, choosing freedom-sacrificing cishet romantic love, instead of happiness-sacrificing Stoic isolation). Said mirroring occurs in Schiller’s five-part apotheosizing of the love that he has thus connected to grace.

First, “Love alone is a free emotion,” he writes, “because its pure source flows from the seat of freedom, from our divine nature” (166). Second, love is also “absolute greatness itself, that finds itself imitated in grace and beauty and affirmed in the ethical” (166). Third, love is “the legislator himself, the *God* in us, who plays with his own image in the world of sense”

²¹ For more, see Joshua M. Hall, “Judith Butler and a Pedagogy of Dancing Resilience,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 54(3): 2020, 1-16.

(166). Fourth, love “is a descent,” while respect “is an upward climb,” from which Schiller infers that “a bad man cannot love anything” (for there is nothing beneath him); whereas “Pure intellect,” which includes the sublime soul, “can only love, not respect” (166). Finally, and despite all the prior praise, Schiller concludes by acknowledging a major ambivalence within love, insofar as the latter “is at the same time the most magnanimous and the most selfish thing in nature” (166). From this final note of dissonance, this trace of imperfection, one might suspect that love is not in fact Schiller’s ultimate ideal, but rather a compromise or backstep in retreat from unlivable stateliness.

Faced with this tragic flaw in love, Schiller (as usual) pivots flexibly (dancingly) to a different strategy. If the fullest version of grace and dignity are incompatible in our vicious world, then perhaps modified versions, or degrees of those powers, might still be compatible, in a stopgap measure until the free utopian future. More precisely, Schiller dilates both grace and dignity into their own new spectra, which allows him to (a) plot the two powers in relation to each other, and (b) consider the implications of possessing different degrees of grace and dignity independently of their relationship. Beginning with (a), and with dignity, “where it comes closest to grace and beauty,” Schiller claims, it “becomes *noble*, and, where it borders on the fearful, becomes *grandeur*” (168). In other words, the next best thing to stateliness, if one favors grace over dignity, is “nobility,” which is like stateliness but weighted more in favor of grace. (That Schiller does not present a corresponding account of grace suggests, on my reading, that this weighting is preferable).

Turning to (b), “The highest grade of grace is the *enchanting*; the highest grade of dignity is *majesty*” (168). Elaborating on maximal grace (enchantment), “It is as if we lose ourselves in the enchanting, and flow over into the object” (168). This, I emphasize, recalls Schiller’s prior

discussion of the “magician,” who can at least temporarily make false grace seem the true, which suggests that the highest degree of grace (contra his earlier claim) is in fact indistinguishable from magic. If so, then the true magician is, not the maximally deceptive falsely graceful person, but rather then maximally virtuous, truly graceful one.

Shifting from maximal grace to maximal dignity, majesty “presents us with a law that requires us to look into ourselves,” wherein we “look down at the ground before the presence of God and forget everything outside ourselves, and feel nothing but the heavy burden of our own existence” (168). Of the person who “can represent this” majesty for us, Schiller asserts that “our minds will bow before him,” as long as there is not “the slightest trace of *human guilt*” visible in him (168). However, I interpolate, since no one is without guilt, this condition of zero guilt is an impossible one in real life. That is, none can represent majesty forever, and therefore none will ever deserve our obeisance (168). Because of the enormous power to be gained from even appearing to represent that majesty, however, the world has no shortage of counterfeit majesties.

In spirited defiance of these imposters, Schiller insists that “there is only one path, imitation of the attitudes whose expression [grace and dignity] are” (168). “Anything else,” he concludes, “is *mimicry* and will soon become evident as such, through exaggeration” (168). The argumentative problem here, though, is that Schiller earlier affirms mimicry (as I noted above) to the point of equating a human’s degree of mimicry with their degree of humanity. Compounding this problem here at the end of the essay, moreover, Schiller classifies “ceremony” among the results of such “affected dignity,” even though the essay’s final paragraph claims that “Nevertheless, there is also a *ceremony*, in the good sense that art can use” (169, 170). Finally on this point, Schiller explicitly connects this good (bad) ceremony, exactly like the good (bad)

theatrical grace, to dance. He does so, more specifically, in a long footnote that closes the essay and its second section (just like the previous long footnote closed the first section).

To wit, just like the dancing master's grace is indispensable to grace per se, so ceremony "supports the impression of the great and sublime to no small extent," Schiller writes, "and is therefore used in religious customs and mysteries with great success"—including in the form of "choral music" and "a ceremony of the eye, namely *splendor*" (169). These, I interpolate, are prominent in religious and theatrical dance. Aptly, therefore, this conclusion is anticipated by another long paragraph on the previous page dedicated to dance. More precisely, two pejorative types of dancers, the "*clumsy*" and the "*affected*," illustrate how, on the one foot, true grace "*simply yields and accommodates*," but on the other foot, false grace "*flows away*" (169).

Overall, then, the dance will not be kept out, which means that false enchantment and false majesty cannot be categorically excluded either, without comprising the magic of their true analogues. And this is indeed fortunate, because if the immediate, isolated pursuit of stateliness leads to tragic gendered injustice, then the historical, collective pursuit of stateliness by the dancing chorus of the community, as both represented and enacted by the virtuous theater, is the vanguard for Schiller's utopian freedom, yet to come. For reasons of space, I defer an elaboration thereof to a future project.

I will now, by way of conclusion, review this final section. The ideal, hypothetical, hopeful, utopian result of aesthetic education would be the state of stateliness. In the actual world prior to that political freedom, however, such stateliness is condemned to brief manifestations that terminate in deathly transfigurations into sainthood or angelhood, as exemplified by Queen Mary and Joan of Arc. More realistic for now, and perhaps a necessary actualizing figure for that eventual freedom, are the following three figures: (1) the maximally-dignified "majesty," (2) the

most gracefully-dignified “noble,” and (3) the maximally-graceful “enchanter.” I have arranged them in this order to reflect a progression of increasing virtue (given grace’s abovementioned status as a pure virtue, and dignity’s status as necessary vice). Of these three figures, Schiller dramatizes the first most vividly as Queen Elizabeth, and the second as William Tell, national hero of the republic of Switzerland. But the third figure is not dramatized *within* Schiller’s plays at all, because it is instead the dramatizer himself. The dance of the dramatist, whose artistic stage transfigures the real-life vice of the enchanter into virtue. Magical Schiller, philosopher-playwright, aesthetically educating us into utopian freedom.

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