

# *The Danish Help to Schiller*

*How the Danish Marquis de Posa and  
Don Carlos saved Friedrich Schiller*

*- by Tom Gillesberg*



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Should one dutifully read from the script drafted by rank, tradition, family and society – the axioms of the age - or rather attempt to act according to higher principles, in the interest of generations to come?

Our subject today is a true historical event. Friedrich Schiller, through the power of his ideas alone, was able to bring the finest young people of his day to break with petty egoism and act as “Citizens of the great Republic.” Schiller established a movement of youth who in turn, were to inspire not only their fellows but their elders as well, those in whom the flame of truth-seeking still lived.

The following story, and Schiller's great drama Don Carlos, show that the greatest acts an individual can perform, are those that lead to the creation of just international political change. Throughout human history, when confronted with dark ages, mankind was saved because small groups of individuals strove to create a

renaissance. To change a decadent society for the better, simply reviving ancient texts and knowledge will not suffice. There must be a genius living in that day and age, able to express from a higher standpoint, what man can and should be. Such a genius, no matter how frustrating the surrounding circumstances, holds high the flag and changes the present, driven by insight into what the future must hold. While we are fortunate to have Lyndon LaRouche today, two centuries ago, it was Schiller who played that role.

## **The prelude**

In 1791, two members of the Council of State of Denmark, namely the brother-in-law of the acting Regent and the Finance Minister broke with tradition, risked their position of State, and devoted much of their fortune to help a man of controversy named Friedrich Schiller.

This is how it all began.

In the late 1780s, a young and impecunious poet, Jens Baggesen, came up to Copenhagen, and was soon introduced into an influential salon, that of the Finance Minister's wife, Countess Magdalene Charlotte Schimmelmann.

At the Schimmelmann Palace, Baggesen was presented to Prince Friedrich Christian of Augustenborg,

then twenty-six years of age, heir to the Duchy of Augustenborg-Schleswig-Holstein. He was brother-in-law to Crown Prince Friedrich (later Friedrich VI), Regent of Denmark owing to the mental instability of King Christian VII.

Despite his youth, Friedrich Christian was already a man of parts. After studying privately at Augustenborg, he went to Leipzig and studied there for several years. In 1786, he married the Crown Prince's sister and was appointed to the Council of State. He became, in 1788, patron of Copenhagen University.

Friedrich Christian straightaway realized that Baggesen was one whose ability might prove of great use to Denmark. Since, at the time, Baggesen was very poorly in health, the Prince arranged a government allowance of 800 Thalers for a sojourn in Switzerland.

It was there, in 1790, that Baggesen came to read Schiller's *Don Carlos*, the work that made of him a devoted admirer. We read in Baggesen's diary at the time, "Schiller is beyond all doubt the foremost of Shakespeare's sons – a Joseph amongst his fellow playwrights."

*Don Carlos* relates how the Marquis de Posa attempted to bring Don Carlos to quit Spain and fight to free the Netherlands, reminiscent of the many young Europeans who fought in the American war of liberation, to secure a temple of liberty across the Atlantic. His impassioned appeal to King Phillip to grant freedom of thought expressed the aspirations then entertained by all young Europeans, of their own nation becoming as free and forward-looking as the newly-founded United States of America. Although the French Revolution of 1789 had raised great hope of an American miracle in Europe, those hopes were to be dashed within a few short years.

Baggesen took to reading *Don Carlos* in public. He so identified with Schiller's ideas that his lady-love and fu-

ture wife, Sophie von Haller, the granddaughter of the famous writer Haller, saw in him the noble character of the Marquis de Posa.

## The "Schiller Conspiracy"

Wending his way back to Denmark with Sophie, Baggesen stayed for a fortnight at Jena with the son-in-law of the poet Wieland, Professor Reinhold. The latter being a close friend to Schiller, he was able to arrange for Baggesen to visit Schiller twice. Through further conversation with Reinhold, Baggesen came to learn Schiller was in considerable financial distress.

Schiller, though but thirty-one years of age, was in very poor health. Although he had shortly before been appointed Professor at Jena University, and had been granted the title of "Hofrat," the pitiful wage of 200 Thalers per annum represented but one-sixth of what he would have needed, to support himself and his bride Charlotte Von Lengefeld – despite presentations to the student body that were to become immortal, such as: "*Was heisst und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?*" ("*What is the Meaning of Universal History, and to what Purpose must it be studied?*").

Consequently, Schiller took to writing round the clock, in the hope of turning out work that could be published and sold. His health frayed, as his debts mounted.

By the time he returned to Copenhagen, Baggesen had become a disciple of Schiller.

The same could not precisely be said of his patron, Friedrich Christian.

In Baggesen's words:

"The Prince of Augustenborg entertained a prejudice against Schiller and had no notion of his genius. Much effort it cost me to persuade him that he should listen



*The Danish poet Jens Baggesen*



to me read *Don Carlos*. ‘I greatly doubt,’ said he, that we will read quite through the play; however, – since you have placed a wager’ – . Thus began I to read. I had laid down a condition: that under all circumstances he would listen to Act I. He was carried away – I read not only *Don Carlos* to him – but the following day, as I began to read, I found that he had raced through the rest in the night. He has now learnt the finest scenes by heart. He read and re-read everything by Schiller. What could be more natural? What fascinating hours we spent with Don Carlos, the History of the Revolt in the Netherlands and so forth?”

Friedrich Christian, who had wept with joy on hearing of the French Revolution, joined the “Schiller Conspiracy.” Baggesen wrote to Reinhold as follows,

“If this Prince stand not by us, the Posas of our day and those of the coming Century will have to take their plans to the madhouse with them; a soul like his will but seldom be found in nature amongst the millions, and perhaps never amongst the hundreds. – When, though, did ever a citizen of the world truly devoted to the cause of freedom, equality and the general weal, find himself at ease at Court?”

While studying Schiller and particularly his *Don Carlos*, the relationship between the two men changed, to become a friendship between two freedom-loving equals inspired by the discussions of Don Carlos with the Marquis de Posa.

In the summer of 1791, Friedrich Christian travelled to Karlsbad, doubtless hoping to meet Schiller. Although Schiller was to reach Karlsbad only after the Prince had left, the latter did meet with friends of Schiller such as Dora Stock (Körner’s sister-in-law), and discussed Schiller’s ideas and the poet’s strained personal circumstances. Friedrich Christian stopped at Jena on the return journey, only to find that Schiller has just left for Karlsbad. He did, however, meet and converse with

Reinhold on three occasions.

## Mourning Schiller in Hellebæk

In the meanwhile, Baggesen pursued his relations with the Schimmelmans. During an excursion to their summer estate at Hellebæk, Baggesen had been asked

to prepare readings, in the event of rain-storms that would keep the party indoors. But the day before starting out, a rumour reached Copenhagen that Schiller had died. In anguish, Baggesen decided to hold a ceremony at Hellebæk for the poet.

For three full days, the party of six (the Count and Countess, the latter’s brother Schubart and sister-in-law, Baggesen and

Sophie von Haller), read from *Don Carlos* and other plays, recited poetry and discussed Schiller’s ideas through tears of joy and sorrow. At the high point of the celebration, Baggesen performed a music arrangement by Schiller’s friend Körner, of *The Ode to Joy*, adding a verse:

Unser todte Freund soll leben!  
Alle Freunde stimmt ein!  
Und sein Geist soll uns unschweben  
hier in Hellas Himmelhain.

Jede Hand emporgehoben!  
Schwört bei diesem freien Wein:  
Seinem Geiste treu zu sein  
Bis zum Wiedersehn dort oben!

Our departed friend shall live!  
All friends join in kind!  
And his spirit shall surround us  
Here in Hellas’ heavenly shrine.

Everybody raise his hand!  
Swear by this free wine:  
To be faithful to his spirit  
Until we meet again above!



*Marquis de Posa and Don Carlos from G. Verdi’s opera Don Carlos.*

Baggesen then wrote to Reinhold to tell him of the ceremony. Reinhold retorted that Schiller was most certainly not deceased, but very ill, and concerned at the doctors' utter failure to improve his condition. Schiller, said Reinhold, had been greatly moved on learning that far from Germany, individuals of such prominence had been stirred by his ideas.

At this point, Baggesen and Friedrich Christian came to a decision – Schiller must be saved. If none of Schiller's countrymen would step forward, others would. Indeed, Friedrich Christian suggested that Schiller come to Denmark and be properly attended until he had recovered his health.

To the Prince's mind, once Schiller had recovered and was residing in Denmark, what could not be accomplished? The Prince had himself experienced the great power of Schiller's ideas. What if Schiller were to become the intellectual focus for all of Denmark? What better way to change the country's absolute monarchy into a manifestation of the higher principles imbedded in the American Constitution.

In Friedrich Christian's own words, from a letter to his sister:

"I shall copy out Schiller's poem [The Artist]... I have these eight days awaited a reply to the invitation sent him to travel to Denmark and here look to his health in undisturbed peace."

## Realizing the plan

Although the Prince very much desired Schiller's presence in Denmark, he nonetheless wrote to him,

"We are not so petty as to stipulate that you change your place of residence. That is a matter for your own free will. Our wish is to welcome here a teacher to

Mankind, a wish that must not, however, take precedence over other considerations."

Despite Friedrich Christian's august rank, he was richer in wisdom, than in gold. At the time, a meritorious but impecunious citizen of Denmark might hope to enjoy the patronage of the Danish state. This was

out of the question for Schiller. Not only was he not a citizen of Denmark - above all, he was deemed a dangerous revolutionary, since, in the wake of the French Revolution, free spirits like Schiller were considered a threat to absolute monarchy. Indeed, it was not until 1817 that *Maria Stuart* - the first of Schiller's plays to be performed in Denmark - could be performed here at all. *The Robbers* was first performed in 1823 and *Don Carlos*, in 1831.

Friedrich Christian, although a devoted servant to the Danish state, lacked a personal fortune. The assistance of others besides himself and Baggesen was needed. The pair lighted on the one wealthy individual they deemed morally qualified: Count Heinrich Ernst Schimmelmann. The question remained as to how Schimmelmann might be

brought to agree.

Friedrich Christian wrote to Baggesen:

"After much thought, I conclude that it would be best, dear Baggesen, that you speak on Schiller's behalf at Schimmelmann's. ...Schiller were best assured an income such, that he need but to work moderately each day to make a proper living. At the outset, I do not see how I might propose a public position to him, nor can the State under those circumstances contribute; whatever may be forthcoming must be from private citizens. Would Schimmelmann agree to contribute for a number of years? That is the question to which I await a reply."

Baggesen worked on Schimmelmann hammer and



Prince Friedrich Christian of Augustenborg



tongs, but in a letter to Friedrich Christian dated November 11th, complained that he had raised Schiller's circumstances with the Schimmelmans no less than twenty times. All he had got for answer was that times were hard:

"I've been on the lookout for a suitable day where at least half might be spent alone with Schimmelman, so as to make an attempt in the matter. Expect nothing from the lady [the Countess]. As she sees it, any and every needy man somewhere in the surroundings should rather be helped first."

Not only was the Countess opposed to any financial aid to Schiller, but the Count, being Finance Minister, feared political controversy. A determined Baggesen nevertheless eventually succeeded in persuading Schimmelman to fund half of what Schiller would need. The condition was that Schimmelman's identity not be disclosed. On the 27th of November 1791, Friedrich Christian and Count Schimmelman sent the following to Schiller.

"To Schiller:

"Noble soul! Two friends, whose bond is their sense of being citizens of the world, take the liberty of writing you. Although not yet acquainted, we both love and honor you. We both admire the heights to which your genius reaches, many recent works of which bear the stamp of a most sublime purpose. In these works, they find a trend of thought, a mind, an enthusiasm, that has tied the knot of friendship and through reading, are wont to see the author himself as a friend. They mourned at news of your death, nor were their tears the least abundant amongst those of so many good men who know and love you.

"Let the keen interest that you have instilled in us, O noble and admirable man, refute all charge that we have lacked decorum, and importuned you!

Do not mistake our letter's purpose! It has been drafted with reverence, with a diffidence inspired by your own sensitivity. We would fear the latter, save that we know that a line has been traced before the virtue of a noble and educated soul that may not be crossed without neglecting Reason.

Your health, shaken by work and great effort, requires, we are told, a period of full repose to be restored, if the peril that has threatened your life is to recede.

Alone your conditions and circumstances of fortune prevent you from taking repose. Would you grant us the joy of helping you to enjoy such repose? For the next three years we would present you with a yearly gift of a thousand Thalers.

Do accept this proposal, noble soul! Nor should you allow our titles to discourage you. What those titles are worth we know, and feel pride only in that we are men, citizens of a great Republic, the frontiers of which extend beyond any single generation, beyond even the frontiers of this earth. Here stand before you men, brothers, not idle greatness relying upon wealth merely to indulge a rather more elevated form of arrogance.



*Finance Minister Count Ernst Schimmelman*

It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to enjoy that rest. With us, your mind's needs will find nourishment, this being the capital of a Government, a great trading centre with estimable libraries. Admiration and friendship will surround you on every side to make your stay in Denmark pleasant, since many besides ourselves know and love you here. Once you be restored to health, should you wish to enter the service of the State, that wish may readily be required.

We are not, however, so petty as to stipulate a change in your place of residence. Decide freely what you would do. Our desire is to preserve a great teacher, to which all other considerations take second place. "

Copenhagen, 27th November 1791 Friedrich Christian P. z. S. Holstein. Ernst Schimmelman"



*Friedrich Schiller*

Prince Friedrich Christian and Count Schimmelmann offered Schiller an allowance of 1,000 Thalers yearly, for three years. All they asked of him, was to restore his health, while spending the allowance and employing his time as he saw fit. They further invited him to live at Copenhagen, promising a properly remunerated official position once those three years had lapsed

In a letter to Jens Baggesen penned three days after he had received that gracious offer, Schiller wrote,

„Jena, 16th December 1791.

„Dear and precious friend, how shall I describe the sentiments provoked by your letter?

„Startled, stunned even by its tenor as I am, do not expect me to write quite coherently. My heart alone shall speak, assisted all-too-feeblely by a head yet in thrall to illness. A heart such as yours I cannot better reward for its affectionate interest in my own mind's destiny, than if I take the proud pleasure arising through the noble and extraordinary act of your remarkable friends, and heighten it to the sweetest joy, by the conviction that its benevolent purpose will be entirely fulfilled.

„Yes dear friend, I do, in all gratitude, accept the proposal made by Prince H. and Count S. – not because all second thoughts have been quite swept aside by the gentle manner of its tendering, but because a commitment has been asked of me that prevails over other concerns.

“To me, the highest and most fundamental duty is to be and to achieve what I can be and can achieve, given the measure of strength allotted me. External circumstances have, to date, made this utterly impossible, and only a far-off and uncertain future affords fairer hopes.

“Your generous assistance, noble friends, places me of a sudden in a position to bring forth what lies within me, and make myself into what I can become – what choice do I then have? That the excellent Prince, who has spontaneously resolved to improve that in which fate has left me lacking, through the noble manner of his dealing, have used such tact in respect of whatever might have hindered my decision, that he have acted to as to preclude the improvement in my circumstances leading to strife within myself, serves to increase my thankfulness: joy not only in the fulfillment of my most ardent wishes, but in the benefactor's heart.

“A morally beautiful act, which is this letter's object, stemming from their class, does not acquire value through success; even were its purpose to fail utterly, it would be no less than what it was. However, when such a deed, flowing from a high-minded soul, becomes at once the necessary link in a chain of destinies, when such a deed alone is lacking for something good to occur, when through such an act - the birth of freedom - a troubled destiny is decided, as though long before intended to that effect by Providence, then it will be amongst the loveliest occurrences that a sensitive heart may imagine. How very much that is, I shall and must tell you.

„“From the infancy of my mind to the time of writing, I have struggled against Fate, and since I learnt to prize freedom of spirit, I have been condemned to do without. Ten years ago, an imprudent move cut off forever any means of existence other than my pen. I took up the profession before ever I had tested its rigours or foreseen its hazards. Before I had the knowledge and



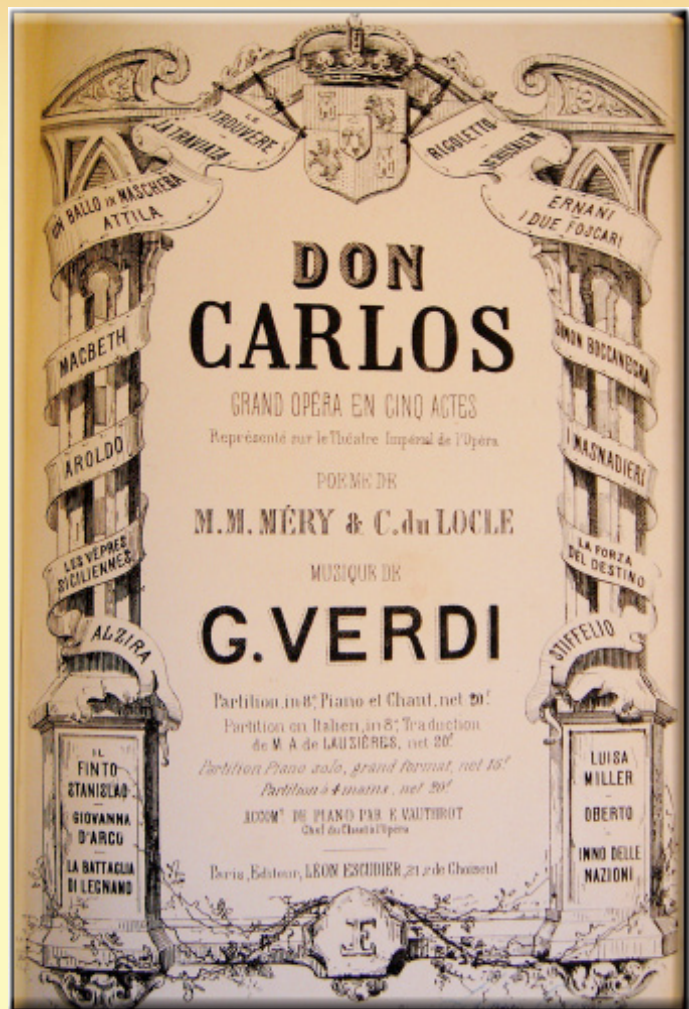
maturity of mind, I was seized by the need to follow that path.

“Although so feeling, so refusing to cage my ideal of a writer’s duties within the narrow limits in which I found myself, I do consider to have been a blessing from heaven, opening before me the prospect of progress, nevertheless the circumstances were such that my misfortunes thereby greatly increased. Immature, and beneath the ideals that lived within me, I saw what I had brought into the world. Though sensing the potential of accomplishment, I was compelled to rush before the public with unripe fruit, playing against my will the role of a teacher, whilst I so needed to be taught. Under such unpropitious circumstances, I felt all the more keenly how much potential fate had crushed in me. The masterpieces of other writers gave rise to melancholy, as I relinquished all hope of enjoying that happy leisure where the fruits of genius ripen. What would I not have given for two or three quiet years, free, not to work as a writer, but to study, bring forth concepts and fulfill my ideals!

“In this our German literary world, meeting the rigorous demands of art whilst acquiring the needful patronage are two things incompatible. For a decade I have attempted to do so, but only to some slight extent has that been possible, and it has cost me my health. The fact that interest in my efficacy, some of the lovely flowers of life strewn in my path by fate, had hid that loss to me until early in this year – perhaps you know how? – I awoke from my slumbers. At a moment when life began to reveal its great value to me, as I was about to tie a tender and eternal band between reason and fantasy, as I undertook tasks in the areas of art, Death approached. Although the danger passed, I awoke to a new life, with diminished strength and less hope of winning the next round of the battle against fate.

“That is when the letters from Denmark reached me.

“Dear friend, I pray you forgive these long personal explanations, designed to allow you to imagine what impression the magnanimous proposal of the Prince and Count S. has produced. Through it, I see at once the opportunity to accomplish the plan that my imagination sketched out in happier hours. Today I acquire that freedom of spirit so long and ardently desired, the entirely free choice made by virtue. In acquiring leisure, I may perhaps thereby regain health; if not, at least my illness will not, in future, be fed by a gloomy soul. I can look into a brighter future – and should it prove that my self-expectations were but fond illusions, whereby oppressed pride seeks revenge on fate, I shall at least be



*Verdi's opera Don Carlos based on Schiller's drama.*

most diligent in attempting to justify the hopes placed in me by two excellent citizens of our century. Since my lot will not allow me to do good in your own manner, let me attempt to do so in the only way granted me – and let the seeds so sown grow to lovely flowers for mankind!”

Schiller signed off, deploring the fact that his health was too feeble to fulfill Baggesen’s wish that he travel to Copenhagen. He intended to spend the summer at Karlsbad, and fulfill his duties at the University as well. He also expressed his wish to come to Copenhagen soon, in order to meet his benefactors.

On 19th December 1791, Schiller wrote to Friedrich Christian and Count Schimmellmann, accepting their proposal:

“...At a moment when the sequel to a most aggressive illness had cast shadows upon my soul and led me to anticipate a grim sad future, you have, like two benevolent spirits, stretched a hand to me from out the clouds. The proposal you so generously make goes far beyond my boldest imagining. And the manner in which you choose to make it, frees me from all fear that I might be

unworthy of your generosity should I accept its manifestation. It would shame me even to consider that anything might underpin such a proposal, other than the beautiful humanity that gave rise to it, and the moral purpose it intends to serve. Just as you give in pure nobility, I may, I daresay, receive. Your intention is to foster the Good; should I feel any awkwardness at all, it would stem from the thought that you might err in the instrument you have chosen. What moves you to this, however, is what justifies me in my own eyes, and allows me to appear before you quite free in my sentiments, despite the bonds of so great an indebtedness. That debt shall be repaid not to you

but to mankind, the altar upon which we jointly lay your gift and my thanks. I know, worshipful Sirs, that only the persuasion that I have understood you will content you, which is why alone I take the liberty of expressing this.

“The sympathy towards me that so fond a benevolence reflects, through your noble resolution, the preference shown me, over so many others, in looking to me as the instrument for your elevated purpose, the generosity with which you have descended to contemplate the petty needs of a citizen of the world unknown to you, compel a personal sense of duty towards you, and add to the respect and admiration I entertain, a sentiment of great amity. How proud I am that you deem me one of your league, sanctified by the noblest of all purposes, a league bonded by enthusiasm for the good, the great and the beautiful. But how much loftier is the enthusiasm expressed in deeds, than that compelled to limit itself to arousing others to deeds!

“To arm truth and virtue with winged strength and thereby, to hold hearts in thrall, is the best the philosopher and the artist may expect – how much better it is, to embody the ideal of both, through a well-conducted life. Here, allow me to respond through Fiesko’s words, where he puts paid to the artist’s pride: You have done

that which I could merely portray.

“... The opportunity for one who owes you so great a debt to stand before you in person will be the outcome of your generous support, thanks to which I may gradually return to health, and bear the rigours of the journey, with a change in circumstances of life and climate.



*Schiller's study*

At present, the sickness has returned, depriving me of even the simplest joys in life, while its symptoms will fade but as very slowly as they appeared. Amongst the many privations to which this condemns me, the least is not that it puts off the happy day when a living gaze and

presence will attach me with a thousand bonds to two hearts, hearts that, from an invisible distance have, like the Godhead, come to gladden me, and like the Godhead, cannot directly be reached by thanks. Living in anticipation of so happy a future moment, expected with hopes and dreams, will till then be his fondest occupation.

Yours in obligation and in eternal gratitude, Fridr. Schiller”

Schiller kept to that commitment. Although, over the five years that he drew their pension, the state of medicine in his day did not allow him to fully recover his bodily strength, his intellectual and spiritual powers were nevertheless restored.

As it happened, although Schiller never travelled to Denmark, he did however write a remarkable series of letters to Friedrich Christian, while he and his wife, the crown prince’s sister, lived at the royal palace Christiansborg, which circulated very widely among Denmark’s elite. Shortly thereafter, Schiller reworked and published them under the title *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Mankind*, one of the most influential texts on aesthetics ever written. Schiller’s letters became a well-spring of inspiration for the country’s Golden Age.



Further aspects of the matters Schiller discussed in his letters to Friedrich Christian are reflected in essays such as *Ueber die Gefahr ästhetischer Sitten, Von den nothwendigen Grenzen des Schönen, besonders im Vortrag philosophischer Wahrheiten, Ueber das Erhabene (On the Sublime), Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst* and *Ueber das Naive (On the Naive)*.

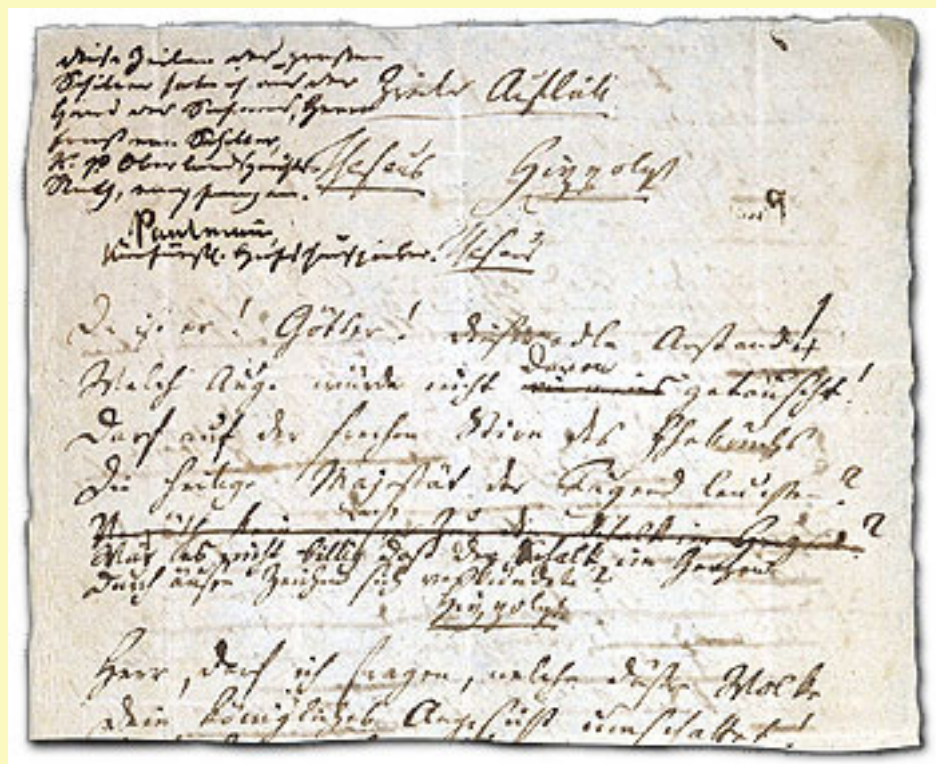
In late 1791, Schiller wrote to Körner: “at last I enjoy the leisure to learn, to rally and to labour for Eternity.”

Though sickness continued to torment him, Schiller nevertheless lived until 1805, another fourteen years, and wrote several superb plays: *Wallenstein, Maria Stuart, Die Jungfrau von Orleans (The Virgin of Orleans)* and *Wilhelm Tell*, ballads such as *Der Taucher (The Diver)* and *Die Kräniche des Ibykus (The Cranes of Ibykus)*, as well as scores of other poetical works.

How much poorer humanity would have been without them.

## Footnotes:

1. Schiller und der Herzog von Augustenburg in Briefen. Mit Erläuterungen von Hans Schulz. Jena, 1905. p. 6.
2. Ibid. p. 9-10.
3. Ibid. p.10.
4. Ibid p. 10.
5. Ibid p. 18.
6. Briefwechsel des Herzogs Friedrich Christian zu Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg mit König Friedrich VI von Dänemark. Herausgegeben von Hans Schulz, Leipzig, 1908. p.34
7. Timoleon und Immanuel. Dokumente einer Freundschaft. Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Christian zu Schleswig-Holstein und Jens Baggesen. Herausgegeben von Hans Schulz. Leipzig, 1910. p. 69.
8. Ibid. p. 70.
9. Schiller's close friend Körner, unaware of the fact that the benefactors' names were not to be disclosed, revealed them. Friedrich Christian was thus startled to read of his proposal to Schiller just as the latter accepted it. Schiller wrote to Baggesen, asking him to extend his apologies. Fortunately, on learning of two noblemen springing to Schiller's aid, the public reacted most favourably.



From Schiller's manuscript of *The Virgin of Orleans*

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