THE RE-APPROPRIATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF A NATIONAL SYMBOL: WILHELM TELL 1789 — 1895

by

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Abstract

Wilhelm Tell, the rugged mountain peasant armed with his crossbow, is the quintessential symbol of Switzerland. He personifies both Switzerland’s ancient liberty and the concept of an armed Swiss citizenry. His likeness is everywhere in modern Switzerland and his symbolic value is clearly understood: patriotism, independence, self-defense. Tell’s status as the preeminent national symbol of Switzerland is, however, relatively new. While enlightened reformers of the eighteenth century cultivated the image of Tell for patriotic purposes, it was, in fact, during the French occupation of Switzerland that Wilhelm Tell emerged as a national symbol. French revolutionary propaganda idolized Tell’s act of tyrannicide, justified the 1798 invasion of Switzerland in Tell’s name, and made Tell the official symbol of the Helvetic Republic.

Tell’s intimate association with the French alienated many Swiss from their traditional hero. During the course of the nineteenth century, however, Tell was re-appropriated and rehabilitated as a suitable national symbol. This paper seeks to understand how this process occurred and how the figurative and symbolic value of Tell was transformed between ancien régime and late nineteenth-century Switzerland. While Tell’s character is generally treated as one-dimensional, his figurative and symbolic form was modified by various pressures and influences, including primarily his French appropriation, Friedrich Schiller’s play, and Swiss historiography. By examining Tell’s various symbolic incarnations, this paper seeks to understand the origins of his character and form as they were ultimately monumentalized in Richard Kissling’s Telldenkmal of 1895. Though Tell’s choice is often treated as a foregone conclusion, this paper is interested in how Tell came to achieve his final symbolic form and how he came to establish himself as the predominant national symbol for Switzerland.
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The Re-appropriation and Transformation of a National Symbol: Wilhelm Tell 1789 — 1895

Introduction

This “prayer” invoking the aid of Wilhelm Tell against the forces of tyranny was published and distributed in the Vaud during the Helvetic Revolution in February, 1798. At a time when large sections of Swiss territory were occupied by French troops, this appeal to an historic and heroic liberator seemed entirely appropriate. Its author was not some Swiss patriot, however, but rather the recently appointed French envoy to Switzerland, Joseph Mengaud. By 1798, Wilhelm Tell, the mythic hero so intimately associated with the independence of the Swiss, had achieved a prominent position in the iconography and propaganda of the French Revolution and Republic. In a remarkable contradiction, French troops, ostensibly acting in defense of the Vaudois and their new Republic, invaded Switzerland to cries of “Vive les descendants de Guillaume Tell.” General Brune’s declaration of war against Bern proclaimed: “Guillaume Tell sort de sa tombée vénérée, il vous crie: Enfants, brisez vos chaînes.”

1For an English translation, please see the Appendix, p. 64. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.
3Labhardt, Patriot, p.99.
The French invasion destroyed ancien régime Switzerland and replaced the old Eidgenossenschaft, its sovereign cantons, overlapping jurisdictions, subject territories and ancient political relationships, with a centralized, rationalized and unitary state, the Helvetic Republic. Switzerland after 1798 found its territory occupied by foreign conquerors, its ancient political structures destroyed and replaced by a largely unpopular, imposed order. And most paradoxically, all of this had been carried out in the name of Switzerland's own most recognizable symbol of national independence, the very embodiment of Swiss liberty, Wilhelm Tell. Both those who supported the new regime and those who called for the Swiss to resist the French occupation employed identical symbolic imagery, their competing claims of “patriotism” both made in reference to Wilhelm Tell.

According to the standard interpretation, Tell’s appropriation by the French and his intimate association with both the foreign occupation of Switzerland and the ill-fated Helvetic Republic caused him to be viewed with a considerable amount of disfavour. While Tell’s loss of official status after the collapse of the Helvetic Republic in 1803 marks the beginnings of this process, Tell’s repudiation was most pronounced after the withdrawal of French troops in 1813. Restoration Switzerland, especially the strongly Catholic and conservative cantons, had little use for the figure of Tell, while other symbols — for example Winkelreid, the hero of Sempach, and the allegorical figure of Helvetia — were promoted in Swiss national iconography. In the standard view, Tell was only redeemed as a national symbol as a result of the Liberal victory in the Sonderbund War and with the adoption in 1848 of a federalist constitution that championed the revolutionary liberal ethos of the era. After 1848, Tell became firmly entrenched, achieving an unassailable symbolic stature that largely survives to this day.5 As Swiss folklorist Regina

5 Although they disagree as to Tell’s popularity during the Mediation Period (1803-1813) both Marcel Beck and Jean-François Bergier share this general interpretation (M. Beck, “Wilhelm Tell: Sage oder Geschichte?”, Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters 36 (1980), pp. 8-9; J.F. Bergier, Wilhelm Tell: Realität und
Bendix notes, "If there is a single symbol that all Swiss, no matter what language they speak, will recognize and associate with the nation, it is William Tell."

The argument for Tell’s repudiation as a result of the French appropriation, however, rests on an unnatural, and rather arbitrary, division between popular and official nationalism. While there is some truth in the general outline above, it maintains its validity only by emphasizing certain facts, such as Tell’s loss of official status in 1803, over the continued and undeniable popularity of Tell among the common people. Furthermore, the argument for Tell’s repudiation is dependent on a misinterpretation of the reasons behind the popular failure of Friedrich Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* on Swiss stages, while completely ignoring the tremendous popularity of Tell in amateur *Volksschauspiele* throughout Switzerland. The above interpretation also fails to explain why 1848 should mark Tell’s resurgence as a national symbol, since the newly formed Swiss nation-state and its symbols were much resented by the inner-cantons. In fact, as this paper demonstrates, the period after 1848 was a confused time in terms of national symbolism and saw Wilhelm Tell nearly vanish from the inner cantons.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Wilhelm Tell had been fully re-appropriated from the French and rehabilitated as a national symbol for Switzerland. This paper is concerned not only with how this process occurred, but also seeks to understand Tell’s symbolic development during this period. While Tell is often depicted as a one-dimensional symbol, taken up at politically opportune moments, this paper seeks to demonstrate how, in fact, numerous versions of Tell existed as his appearance and symbolic value were both manipulated and transformed. To do so, it asks to what extent, and in what regards, various interpretations of Tell — French, ‘official Swiss’ and popular Swiss — differed. How and why did Tell’s symbolic value, and the

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manner in which he was represented, change from the time of the *ancien régime* through the Helvetic Republic to the later nineteenth century? What does Tell’s late nineteenth-century symbolic form owe to these previous representations? While this paper seeks primarily to establish continuities between what would ultimately become the “official” Tell with his French and Helvetic predecessors, it is also interested in determining what other factors contributed to Tell’s development as a national symbol. Finally, this paper challenges the traditional interpretation and argues that Tell’s repudiation during the Restoration era has been overemphasized, while his development as a symbol after 1848 has not received sufficient attention.

The formation of Wilhelm Tell’s character and identity, as they were ultimately set in stone in 1895 with Kissling’s *Telldenkmal*, and the process by which Tell came to reassert himself as the hero of Swiss independence were the result of three main influences. First, Tell’s symbolic value adapted and changed in response to pressures and influences exerted by the French appropriation of the Tell story during the French Revolution and the Helvetic Republic. While the official interpretation of Swiss history that took shape in the second half of the nineteenth century essentially omitted this “shameful” *Franzosenzeit,* it was in fact a centrally important period, not only in the historical development of Switzerland, but also in creating the form and character of Wilhelm Tell that would become the recognized symbol of the Swiss nation. Secondly, Tell was transformed by the European currency the story acquired through Schiller’s profoundly influential work. While *Volkstheater* productions continued to reflect a popular interpretation of the Tell legend, they were deeply influenced, and ultimately entirely replaced, by Schiller’s work. Finally, Tell’s identity, and by extension what it meant to be

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“Swiss”, was shaped largely in accordance with the spirit of historicization that permeated nineteenth-century Switzerland. How Swiss history was to be collectively remembered was largely the result of the official historical narrative constructed after the creation of the new Federal state, or Bundesstaat, in 1848.

The Origins and Development of the Wilhelm Tell Story

The first recorded version of the Tell story, containing the apple-shot, Tell’s escape through his leap onto the Tellsplatte, and the murder of Gessler by ambush in the Hohle Gasse, dates from 1470 or 1471. Contained in the Weisses Buch von Sarnen, a collection of legislative materials from Obwalden to which a brief account of Tell’s deeds had been appended, this version was not known, however, until its discovery in the cantonal Archives in 1854. Until then, the oldest written source of the story was Petermann Etterlin’s Kronica von der loblichen Eydtgnoschaft, published in 1507. Thereafter, numerous chronicles containing versions of the Tell story appear, Josias Simmler’s Respublica Helvetiorum and Aegidius Tschudi’s Chronicon Helveticum being among the best known. It was Tschudi’s work that came to be regarded as the official version, both of the Tell episode and of the closely related revolt against the Austrian Habsburg lords that together make up the Swiss Befreiungssage. Meticulously researched and painstakingly assembled, Tschudi had even managed to date the key events: the Rütli oath on 7 November, 1307, Tell’s apple-shot on 18 November, and the revolt against Habsburg tyranny successfully completed by 1 January, 1308. Tschudi’s version of the story and his seductively

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8The Weisses Buch is believed to be a copy of an older, now lost, chronicle that dates from around 1425. It was presumably copied by the aptly named Obwaldner scribe, Hans Schriber (S. Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten: Von den Anfängen der Tellspiele Altdorf [Altdorf: Gisler, 1991], pp.15-16).

9Beck, “Sage oder Geschichte”, p.2. The Berner Chronik, compiled by Konrad Justinger in 1420, though well acquainted with the events in the forest cantons, makes no mention of Tell (ibid).

10Simmler’s work, published in 1576, remained the standard reference work on Switzerland in Europe down to 1798. Tschudi’s Chronicon, though known among Swiss humanists after 1572, was not widely known until its publication in 1734 (Labhardt, Patriot, pp. 16-20). Please see the Appendix for a list of some of the most important Tell-versions and related critical publications, pp.64-65.
precise dates were faithfully reproduced in histories for centuries, attaining such a degree of certainty as to become entrenched in Swiss historical consciousness. Alongside the “official” chronicles, numerous popular Tellenlieder and Tellenspielen exist, representative of an extensive oral tradition surrounding the Tell story. The Lied von der Entstehung der Eidgenossenschaft dates from 1477, while the Urner Tellenspiel, first staged in 1512, is the oldest known dramatic treatment of the Tell material. Variations of this “alten Urner Tellenspiel” were still being performed in Uri well into the nineteenth century.

What is most notable about these two parallel traditions, is the manner in which Tell’s portrayal differs between the Volkslieder and the chronicles. Tschudi’s Tell, for example, is a simple and pious man, who apologizes for his disobedience in failing to pay homage to the hat:

Lieber Herr. es ist wohl aus Versehen und nicht aus Verachtung geschehen. Wäre ich ein besonnener Mann, so heisse ich nicht der Tell.*

Because of Tschudi’s own piety and deep conservatism (his family belonged to the ruling patrician class of Glarus) Tell’s rebelliousness could simply not be sanctioned. The murder of Gessler is dismissed as an undisciplined act which jeopardizes the careful planning of the Rütli conspirators, and Tell plays no further part in the ensuing liberation. The Tellenlieder and the Volk traditions they represent, however, have no such moral qualms. Tell is portrayed as the courageous scourge of tyrants, and as politically active: in the Urner Tellenspiel he is Uri’s

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11Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten, pp.7-8.
13It has been attributed to Valentin Compar, an Altdorf school teacher (E. Stadler, Friedrich Schillers ‘Wilhelm Tell’ und die Schweiz [Bern: Verlag des schweizerischen Gutenbergmuseums, 1960], p.10).
15“Kind Sir, this surely happened out of oversight and not out of contempt. Were I a level-headed man, they would not call me Tell” (Bergier, Realität und Mythos, p.15).
17Labhardt, Patriot, p.18-19.
18Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, p.46.
representative at the Rütli oath.\textsuperscript{19} Far from Tschudi’s Simplicimus, the popular Tell is a provocateur: “Wilhelm Thell der was ain zornig man, er schnartzt den landtvogt ubel an.”\textsuperscript{20}

This was more than dramatic excess, for Tell in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had a very real association with violent disturbances and peasant rebellion. For example, the leader of an anarchic peasants’ movement in Nidwalden in 1561, Hans Zelger, styled himself the “niuw Wilhelm Tell.” During the Swiss Peasants’ War of 1653, several rebels adopted the costume and symbols of Tell and marched together as the “three Tells.” An attempt was also made to recreate Gessler’s assassination in the Hohle Gasse with a government official from Luzern in his stead.\textsuperscript{21} The graphic depictions from this time tend to reflect Tell’s association with youthful, popular and anarchic rebellion, showing Tell as a young man, often dressed in the garb of a mercenary soldier (Fig.1, Fig.2). These representations also share an obsession with the apple-shot which is depicted almost to the exclusion of any other aspect of the story. In part this is surely due to the fact that it is a most dramatic act and the one that identifies Tell as Tell, but the focus on the apple-shot also suggests that, like Tschudi, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chroniclers were uncomfortable with the story’s denouement (Fig.3, Fig.4). Though recognized and held in considerable esteem throughout “old” Switzerland,\textsuperscript{22} Tell was, to a large extent, the property of rebellious peasants and subjects, while the ruling classes maintained an uneasy and somewhat fearful relationship to him.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19}Labhardt, Patriot, pp.22-3.
\textsuperscript{20}“Wilhelm Tell, he was a thorny man, he told the Governor where to go” (Beck, “Sage oder Geschichte”, p.13).
\textsuperscript{22}Beck, “Sage oder Geschichte”, p.12.
\textsuperscript{23}Labhardt, Patriot, p.45. One exceptional reference is made in 1625 to “Tellische’ Helvetia” (ibid).
Tell in Eighteenth-Century Switzerland

In 1763, Rousseau described the Swiss cantons as "'une grande ville, divisée en treize quartiers'" whose inhabitants all suffered from "'le hemvé' [homesickness]'".24 Indeed, that one hesitates over the phrase "eighteenth-century Switzerland" is indicative of how difficult it is to locate a Swiss Nation prior to 1848. The old Eidgenossenschaft was animated by a "Kantonsseligkeit"; loyalty was foremost to the individual canton.25 Only a loose Federal Diet, attended by diplomatic delegates from its sovereign member states, provided some semblance of national government, however incompetent.26

In 1761, enlightened thinkers founded the Helvetische Gesellschaft as a means to reform Switzerland, primarily in its agricultural and economic practices. While the Helvetische Gesellschaft promoted an "ökonomischer Patriotismus," it also sought to encourage a spirit of national identity.27 Like much of the rest of Europe caught up in a fashionable 'Philhelvetismus', these enlightened thinkers shared Rousseau's enthusiasm for the Alps, the purity of nature, and believed in the innate virtue of its inhabitants. They also thought earnestly about the origins of the Eidgenossenschaft and sought to uncover a meaningful "Nationalbewusstsein" therein.28 That Wilhelm Tell should come to symbolize this movement seemed obvious. As Jean-François Bergier notes, "Ist nicht Wilhelm Tell, selbst Hirte, Jäger und Patriot zugleich, der Inbegriff dieser neuen Zusammenschau von Natur und Vaterland?"29 The Swiss Enlightenment saw in

29"Is not William Tell, himself shepherd, hunter and patriot all at once, the epitome of this new combination of Nature and Fatherland?" (Bergier, Realität und Mythos, p.396).
Tell not a dangerous young rebel, but a man close to nature, possessed of a suitably republican simplicity, fiercely independent, in short, an ideal symbol of Swiss nationality. This new interpretation of Tell emphasized his personal vigour and strength, an alpine Übermensch as in Füssli’s painting (Fig.5). By transforming Tell into an epic hero, and linking Swiss nationality to this Befreiungssage, historians of the ancien régime developed a powerfully integrative myth. Regardless of religious affiliation, language, or social status, the heroic qualities of Tell allowed all Swiss to identify with him and the history of the inner Swiss cantons.

Equally important, however, was Tell’s familial and paternal role, not only figuratively as “Stammvater der Schweiz und ihrer Freiheit,” but also literally. This new interpretation of Tell was portrayed to great acclaim by Antonio Zucchi in a painting from 1768 which introduced Tell’s wife, shown fainting in the foreground, into the iconography of the apple-shot (Fig.6). Alexander Trippel’s Tellenstatuette, created specifically for the Helvetische Gesellschaft in 1782, caused a sensation with its depiction of Tell as a compassionate father, tearfully embracing his son (Fig.7). Salomon Gessner chose to depict a similar post apple-shot scene in a drawing from 1779 (Fig.8).

This new enlightened and patriotic Tell merged with the popular volkstümliche Tell in Lavater’s songbook, the Schweizerlieder. First published in 1768, it became the veritable bible of Swiss patriotism. Its depiction of Tell is heroic and confrontational:

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30 Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, p.46.
32 Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, p.46.
35 The Schweizerlieder were designed with the Volk in mind, for according to Lavater, what poetry was for was “Truth, Virtue and Patriotism” (Labhardt, Patriot, p.50).
While killing Gessler poses no moral dilemma for Tell, he is simultaneously portrayed as the compassionate father, begging to die in his son’s place and weeping bitterly at his fate. Joseph Ignaz Zimmerman, in describing a pilgrimage to the Tellskapelle on the shores of the Lake of Lucerne, illustrates both the importance of Lavater’s songs in patriotic ritual, but also points to the importance of the father-son relationship which the Tell story had come to represent:

_Ich sah wie Kinder seine Schweizerlieder mit wahrer Begeisterung sangen; ich sah die schönsten Augen bey diesen Liedern in Thränzen zerfließen; ich sah Schweizerbauern, denen man diese Lieder sang, die Augen funkeln, die Wangen glühen, die Muskeln schwellen; ich kenne Väter, die mit ihren Söhnen nach Wilhelm Tells Kapele reisten, um dort Lavaters Lied auf Tell hochklingend abzusingen._

Like Lavater, Zimmerman was interested in Tell as a didactic tool, writing a version for the stage in 1777 with the intended goal of awakening patriotic feelings among Switzerland’s youth. For similar reasons, Johann Ludwig am Bühl penned a Tell play, subtitled “_ein schweizerisches Nationalschauspiel_,” in 1792. At the play’s end, am Bühl has the characters declare that the Tellsplatte and Hohle Gasse should become places of pilgrimage for the Swiss:

_“Dahin sollen unsre Söhne wallfahrten, dem Retter ihrer Freiheit danken, und neue Treu und Liebe dem Vaterland schwören.”_ And indeed, such pilgrimages were becoming increasingly

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36 "No, before the upraised Hat, You murderer’s face! No man full of heroism will bend, William Tell will not bend!" (Labhardt, _Patriot_, p.52).  
37 Labhardt, _Patriot_, p.52-3.  
40 Zeller, "Tell-Mythos", p.70.  
41 "Our sons should undertake pilgrimages to these places to thank the saviour of their freedom, and to swear new loyalty and love for the Fatherland" (J.L. am Bühl, _Wilhelm Tell_, Act 5, scene 6, in M. Gsteiger, P. Utz, eds. _Telldramen des 18. Jahrhunderts_ [Bern: Paul Haupt, 1985], p.187).
popular. In 1795, Philippe Bridel’s program for patriotic education included visits to the various Tell chapels: Hohle Gasse, Tellsplatte, and Bürglen.\footnote{Bürigen is the town in Uri where Tell is said to have been born. A chapel has stood on the reported site of his family’s home since at least 1582. The other two are of later origin (K. Iten, ‘Aber den rechten Wilhelm haben wir...’ \textit{Die Geschichte des Altdorfer Telldenkmals} (Altdorf: Gisler, 1995), p.40).} As these pilgrimages to various Tellskapellen attest, Tell had achieved a semi-divine aura. Already in the Second Villmergerkrieg of 1712, soldiers from both the Protestant and Catholic sides had adopted Wilhelm Tell as their patron saint.\footnote{Ernst, \textit{Freiheitssymbol}, p.52.} In certain areas, Tell was being revered by the \textit{Volk} as the saviour of drowning children, a saintly attribute that stayed with him well into the nineteenth century (Fig.9, Fig.10).\footnote{C. Hughes, \textit{Switzerland} (London: Ernest Benn, 1975), p.79. Another story relates how popular belief held that Tell died in battle against the Austrians at Morgarten (Labhardt, \textit{Patriot}, p.93).}

If the common Swiss had an emotional and spiritual connection to the Tell story, if not exactly the patriotic and nationalistic response that the \textit{Helvetische Gesellschaft} was after, other enlightened Swiss took a more critical view. In 1727, Jacob Iselin made the story of Tokko, a thirteenth-century Danish fable that in all its essential points is identical to the Tell story, known in Switzerland.\footnote{Beck, “Sage oder Geschichte”, p.5.} This rather embarrassing similarity became political and ideological dynamite in 1760 with the publication \textit{Guillaume Tell, fable danoise}. The book unleashed a storm of indignation, especially in Uri where it was publicly burned, and engendered a response by Joseph von Balthasar, the \textit{Défense de Guillaume Tell}.\footnote{R. Feller, \textit{E. Bonjour, Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz: Vom Spätmittelalter zur Neuzeit. Band 2} (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1979), p.468.} That those responsible, Gottlieb Emanuel von Haller and Uriel Freudenberger, were not only not from the inner cantons but were also Protestants, led Catholics to see the work as deliberately provocative.\footnote{Freudenberger himself was a priest from Biel (Beck, “Sage oder Geschichte”, p.5).} Only after von Haller was made to recant and defend Tell’s existence in a long speech before assembled officials in Bern was peace finally restored.\footnote{Feller, \textit{Geschichtsschreibung}, p.468.} Swiss historians tend either to treat the incident as an amusing aside.
or to subsume it within the increasing "Tellbegeisterung" of the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{49} The episode, however, is most interesting because it not only illustrates both the emotional and symbolic power of Tell but also reveals his divisive nature in Switzerland, where to question Tell was to revive doctrinal and historic hostilities.

While representations of Tell in pictures, songs, books and debates approached a veritable "Telliadenkaskade,"\textsuperscript{50} and though his name was invoked at every opportunity by those seeking to encourage Swiss patriotism and national identity, this was to a certain extent artificial: "ce nouveau patriotisme était le patriotisme des 'lumières', sans connotation nationaliste."\textsuperscript{51} Tell was not irrelevant to the majority of the population, but his primary associations were not necessarily with Swiss patriotism and nationality.

\textbf{Tell in the Helvetic Revolutions of 1798}

Tell in the late eighteenth century, despite scholarly challenges, was thus being cultivated as a national symbol by a relatively small educated elite, while among the Volk his popularity continued to rest on the traditional associations of Tell with patron saint and anti-authoritarian hero. That Tell symbolized individual liberty and the rejection of lordly dominion was clear,\textsuperscript{52} and the many Swiss who did not enjoy personal liberty began also to use Tell as a representative symbol. Zimmerman’s \textit{Wilhelm Tell}, whose protagonist claimed to be defending not only house and home, but also the universal rights of man, would seem to support this line.\textsuperscript{53} In fact, this kind of explicit appeal to Rousseau and enlightened ideas of individual liberty as justification for Tell’s action was uncommon. More typical is am Bühl’s attempt to clearly define the old rights

\textsuperscript{49}Feller, \textit{Geschichtsschreibung}, p.468; Stadler, ‘Wilhelm Tell’ und die Schweiz, p.10.
\textsuperscript{50}Labhardt, \textit{Patriot}, p.39.
and privileges of the Swiss cantons. Am Bühl has Attinghausen remind Gessler: "wir haben uns freiwillig unter des Reichs Schutz begeben, wir können uns dessen wider entziehen, wann wir wollen".\(^{54}\) The actions of Tell and the Rütli conspirators are not presented as revolutionary, but rather as the justified defense of the "uralten Brief und Siegel."\(^{55}\)

When revolution broke out in Switzerland, Tell assumed an important symbolic role. In Schaffhausen, the revolution was celebrated by singing Lavater's Schweizerlieder, planting liberty trees, and staging plays about Wilhelm Tell.\(^{56}\) In the Vaud, the revolutionaries chose the colour green to symbolize their movement because of its traditional association with Wilhelm Tell: Liberty trees were topped with a green Tellenhut.\(^{57}\) Constitutional delegates met in the church of St. Laurent under a newly erected statue of Tell,\(^{58}\) while in Vevey, people celebrated "la Liberté que Tell donna au peuple vaudois."\(^{59}\)

The Ticino had become a subject territory at about the same time, but unlike the Vaud, which was subject only to Bern, it was governed by the old Eidgenossenschaft in common. The rotating governorship encouraged exploitative rule, leading one observer to comment that the entire system seemed "organised ideally for evil, where the good is impossible."\(^{60}\) Despite centuries of foreign, oppressive, German-speaking rule, when patriots declared the union of the Tessin with the Cisalpine Republic, they were met by a large and hostile crowd that demanded

\(^{54}\) "We freely sought to enter under the protection of the Empire, and we can remove ourselves again at will whenever we wish" (Am Bühl, Wilhelm Tell, Act 4, scene 7, in Gsteiger, Telldramen, p.168).
\(^{55}\) Am Bühl, Wilhelm Tell, Act 1, scene 5, in Gsteiger, Telldramen, p.118.
\(^{56}\) Böning, Freiheit und Gleichheit, p.129.
\(^{57}\) Besides its association with Tell, green was also the colour of the Swiss free fighting forces that had played an important role in the Battle of Grandson, the Burgundian defeat that had brought the Vaud under Bernese control. By choosing green as their emblem, the Vaudois were seeking the restoration of rights which they claimed had been Bern's responsibility to protect, but which it had ignored since the fifteenth century (Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, pp.109-10).
\(^{58}\) Böning, Freiheit und Gleichheit, p.111.
\(^{59}\) Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, p.63.
they be made instead "Liberi e Svizzeri".\textsuperscript{61} Liberty trees topped with Wilhelm Tell caps appeared, and an Italian version of Antoine-Marin Lemierre’s \textit{Guillaume Tell} was staged.\textsuperscript{62} What the Ticinese meant by "Liberi e Svizzeri" was outlined by Annibale Pellegrini: "We demand our sacred rights; we desire Swiss liberty; finally, after centuries of subjugation, we are mature enough to govern ourselves."\textsuperscript{63}

In appealing to the myths and traditional liberties of Switzerland, the Ticinese and Vaudois were claiming equal membership in the Swiss confederation. But what “Swiss liberty” itself actually meant was so varied as to almost escape definition.\textsuperscript{64} It surely meant independence from foreign control and a preference for republicanism over monarchism, but it was ambiguous on issues of individual freedom and equality.\textsuperscript{65} For the social elites who constituted the \textit{Helvetische Gesellschaft}, hierarchical relations were just as much a part of the “\textit{historisch begründete Rechtsverhältnisse}” as those legal principles which guaranteed Swiss freedom.\textsuperscript{66} The Thurgau seemed to agree, demanding only the rights owed as a full member of the \textit{Eidgenossenschaft}.\textsuperscript{67} Other former subject territories illustrated to what extent they conceived of their revolutions along “\textit{urschweizerische}” lines by modeling their new governments after the \textit{Landesgemeinde} cantons,\textsuperscript{68} and by giving their new political leaders the old title of “\textit{Landamman}”.\textsuperscript{69} Only In Sargans, it seems, were revolutionary demands for equality made not only in reference to the old Swiss rights, but were linked to the inherent rights of man found in

\textsuperscript{61}Steinberg, \textit{Why Switzerland}, p.12.  
\textsuperscript{63}Steinberg, \textit{Why Switzerland}, p.12.  
\textsuperscript{64}Im Hof, \textit{Helvetische Gesellschaft}, p.119.  
\textsuperscript{65}Im Hof, \textit{Helvetische Gesellschaft}, p.122.  
\textsuperscript{66}Böning, \textit{Freiheit und Gleichheit} , p.48.  
\textsuperscript{68}Im Hof, “Ancien Régime”, p.779.  
\textsuperscript{69}Im Hof, “Nationale Identität der Schweiz”, p.922.
Nature.\textsuperscript{70} "Swiss liberty", however, tended to stress an interpretation of the Befreiungssage that emphasized "naitonale Unabhängigkeit" rather than the attainment of "naturrechtlichen Freiheit".\textsuperscript{71}

Yet Wilhelm Tell, in a fundamental way, represented both of these interpretations, and they ultimately clashed during the Swiss revolutions. The defeated governors of the Vaud were outraged to hear that the revolutionaries had installed a portrait of Tell in their headquarters, sneering "als ob zwischen ihm und den Aufrührern eine Gemeinschaft wäre." Conversely, revolutionary prisoners were shocked to see Tell’s portrait hanging in the Zürich courthouse.\textsuperscript{72}

Wilhelm Tell was a symbol of revolution in Switzerland before French intervention, but what he represented varied considerably. He certainly symbolized the traditions and myths of Switzerland, her old rights and independence, and a sense of historical rootedness. But Tell also represented a revolutionary new order that based its claims for social justice in the natural rights of man. Into this confused milieu strode the French with their own conception of Wilhelm Tell.

\textit{Tell in the French Revolution}

Switzerland occupied an important place in the mental universe of eighteenth-century European thought. It came to be seen as a place where theoretical ideals became reality, a modern exemplar of what enlightened society could be.\textsuperscript{73} Goethe remarked of Switzerland: "Die öffentlichen Angelegenheiten sehen in diesem Lande wunderlich aus."\textsuperscript{74} In France, due in large part to the influence of Rousseau and Voltaire, there was a great deal of interest in literary works

\textsuperscript{70}Frei, \textit{Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins}, p.42.
\textsuperscript{71}Frei \textit{Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins}, p.102.
\textsuperscript{72}"As though between him and these upstarts a commonality existed" (Ebert, \textit{Freiheitsbaum}, p.48).
\textsuperscript{74}"The public affairs of this land appear to be wondrous", \textit{Reise in der Schweiz}, 1797 (Böning, \textit{Freiheit und Gleichheit}, p.1).
on Switzerland, ranging from historical and political dictionaries to popular travel accounts.\textsuperscript{75} Roland de la Platière, in his 1780 \textit{Lettres écrites de Suisse}, described Switzerland as follows:

\begin{quote}
S’il est encore sur la terre un pays où l’homme avec la simplicité de la nature ait conservé la dignité de son être, où la liberté vivement sentie ne soit point une chimère, où l’on retrouve la Grèce civile et politique sage et heureuse, un pays enfin que la philosophie puisse contempler avec quelque émotion, c’est la Suisse.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

The story of Tell had been known in France since at least 1584, when it was included in André Thevet’s \textit{Les vrais Portraits et vies des hommes illustres}.\textsuperscript{77} The first dramatic re-working of the material, outside the \textit{Volksschauspiele} tradition, was by Samuel Henzi in 1762. His \textit{Grisler, ou l’Ambition punie}, was a classic French tragedy that had, as the title suggests, the Austrian \textit{Landvogt} as its protagonist.\textsuperscript{78} A Swiss living in exile in Paris, Henzi saw in the Tell material an opportunity to advance his demands for an expanded and liberalized franchise in oligarchic Bern. Reform-minded, but still decidedly patrician, Henzi portrayed a Swiss revolution from above, whose main actor was not the dangerous and far too democratic Tell, but the Austrian governor who ultimately realizes his error and grants the Swiss their independence.\textsuperscript{79}

The most important French version of the Tell story, however, was Antoine-Marin Lemierre’s \textit{Guillaume Tell}. It differed markedly from Henzi’s in the depiction of the Swiss liberation movement. Unlike the conservative Henzi, Lemierre has Tell speak of “\textit{les droits de nature}” and present himself to Gessler on equal terms as “\textit{un citoyen}.”\textsuperscript{80}

At its premiere on 17 December 1766, Lemierre’s play was rather laconically received. It enjoyed only moderate success, being

\textsuperscript{75}R. Darnton, “Sounding the Literary Market in Pre-revolutionary France”, \textit{Eighteenth-Century Studies} 17 (1984), pp.480-82.
\textsuperscript{77}Thevet’s sources, in turn, had been Swiss soldiers in French employ (Labhardt, \textit{Patriot}, pp.75-6).
\textsuperscript{78}Henzi was very liberal with the material, exchanging Tell’s son for a grown daughter so as to inject a love-plot into the drama: she was the object of Gessler’s son’s unrequited affection (S. Henzi, \textit{Grisler, ou l’Ambition Punie}, Act 3, scene 4 ).
\textsuperscript{80}Ernst, \textit{Freiheitssymbol}, p.75.
staged seventeen times between 1766 and 1787, and what little enthusiasm it did generate was attributed to the sizeable Swiss community in Paris. The coming of the Revolution, however, made Lemierre's play a huge success and a staple of French repertoire.

That French revolutionaries should find in Tell a kindred spirit is not surprising. Tell had previously found widespread popularity in the American Revolution among the Sons of Liberty. In France, it was initially the Rütli oath that resonated, providing a comparison to the Tennis-court Oath of June 1789, and later with other oath-taking ceremonies which became central to revolutionary ritual. The Tell story also gained wide currency, but the French interpretation introduced significant changes. The apple-shot, for example, was imputed with a new motive: by endangering his son, Tell knew he could unite the people against tyranny and demonstrate that oppression could be overcome. After Louis XVI had been executed, Tell was looked upon, like Brutus, as providing historical precedence and justification for tyrannicide (Fig. 11). Indeed, it was precisely the aspect of the Tell story with which Swiss chroniclers felt most uncomfortable that the French chose to emphasize. In terms of iconographic representation, Tell was almost exclusively portrayed as the killer of tyrants (Fig. 12, Fig. 13).

Tell was most popular among the radical Jacobins, assuming a central place in their pantheon of heros, considered along with Rousseau and Brutus among those “foreigners worthy

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86 Ernst, *Freiheitssymbol*, p.91-5.
of being Frenchmen” (Fig. 14). Tell was most visible at the height of the Terror, when Lemierre’s play, now subtitled “les Sans-Culottes Suisses,” and Michel Jean Sedaine’s Tell opera were among the most popular dramatic productions. This popularity was largely artificial, as Tell productions were among the “official” plays whose performance was legislated as a means to educate the populace in suitable republican virtues. Once France was at war with Habsburg Austria, the references to Tell became more pointed. There are reports of people baptizing themselves “Guillaume Tell” as a “déclaration de guerre éternelle contre cette ambitieuse et perfide maison d’Autriche.”

At the same time, the old view of Switzerland as the idyllic land of liberty began to fade. Swiss exiles in France who formed the Club helvetique, agitated against the patrician aristocracies in a vocabulary that used the current Tell imagery, portraying Switzerland as a place where “les modernes Gesslers... despotisent les descendants de Guillaume Tell.” This language began to appear in Jacobin speech and helped to alter the French conception of Switzerland.

According to Robespierre:

La Suisse est réduite à la misère et ne recouvre plus l'énergie que son antique pauvreté lui avait donnée... Les descendants de Guillaume Tell succomberaient sous les efforts de tyrans humiliés et vaincus par leurs aieux. Comment oseraient-ils invoquer seulement les vertus de leurs frères et le nom sacré de la liberté, si la République française avait été détruite. sous leurs yeux?...
The French invasion of Switzerland, undertaken primarily for strategic military and financial reasons, could thus be portrayed as an altruistic crusade to restore to the “Kinder Tells” their ancient liberty. This French affection was not lost on the artist who composed the official letterhead for the French army in Switzerland, which shows a rather irritable and dejected Wilhelm Tell reluctantly greeting Liberty at the head of a French army (Fig. 15).

**Tell in the Helvetic Republic 1798 — 1803**

The French-promulgated Constitution of the Helvetic Republic of 12 April 1798 declared “a unitary and indivisible Republic.” The French introduced legal equality, established uniform codes of law, and liberated the subjects of Ticino, Vaud, Thurgau and Aargau. “Enlightened, rational, benevolent, [and] centralized,” the Helvetic Republic was, nonetheless, also a puppet of the French. Tell’s status as the official symbol of the Republic did not alter the fact that he remained a contested symbol in revolutionary Switzerland, but it gave the debate somewhat clearer distinctions (Figs. 16-17). Those who supported both the Republic and French intervention, a minority of Swiss, rallied behind the “official” Helvetic Tell. Those responsible for drafting the Constitution of the Republic of Léman, for example, considered themselves the “würdigen Nachkommen Wilhelm Tells.” For them, Tell’s symbolism was clear: “[In Tell] verdichteten sich...die beiden grossen politischen Aufgaben der Zeit, Revolution und Nationalstreben, zu einem einzigen, klar fasslichen Bild.”

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96 Im Hof, “Ancien Régime”, p.770. The money looted by the French from the Bernese treasury went towards financing Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign (Bonjour, *Short History*, p.221).
100 Böning, *Freiheit und Gleichheit*, p.171.
101 In Tell, the two greatest political questions of the time, revolution and national aspiration, were compressed into a single, clearly understood symbol” (Frei, *Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins*, p.51).
Tell, however, was anything but a clearly understood symbol, for he was simultaneously the most prominent symbol of Swiss resistance to the French occupation and the Helvetic Republic. Fierce resistance to the French in Nidwalden had been encouraged by Paul Styger, a Capuchin priest, who urged his parishioners to revolt against the godless French in the name of Christ and Wilhelm Tell.\textsuperscript{102} It did not take long for counter-revolutionaries to equate the French liberty tree and cap with the Gessler hat as a new symbol of tyranny.\textsuperscript{103} In an imaginary dialogue between “the old and new Gessler,” the Landvogt ultimately admits to the French superintendent Rapinat, “Ich gebe mich überwunden! Ihr seid grössere, unentlich grössere Tyrannen, als ich jemals war.”\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, as Balthasar Anton Dunker’s painting “Tell s’oppose au dragon de la Révolution” from 1798 makes clear, Tell was the undisputed leader of anti-revolutionary forces in Switzerland (Fig. 18).

What is most striking, however, is that regardless of political or ideological affiliation — French army letterhead, Dunker’s painting, the official seals of the Helvetic Republic — the portrayal of Tell seems remarkably consistent. Depictions of Tell as a father-figure were popular before the revolution, and for anti-revolutionaries the image symbolized many of the same things: the old Swiss liberty, paternalism, but also respect for divinely imposed natural hierarchy. While the imagery of the French revolution centered on fraternity, Tell in the Helvetic Republic was still very often represented with his son in what was essentially a conservative image.\textsuperscript{105} The reason given for this inconsistency is that depictions of Tell as an older father, rather than as a young warrior or rebel, were considered more prudent in a land occupied by foreign troops.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{102} Frei, Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins, p.103. The revolt was brutally quelled by Gen. Schauenburg in September, 1798 (Hughes, Switzerland, p.96).
\textsuperscript{103} Frei, Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins, p.103. A favourite counter-revolutionary song was “Nein vor dem aufgesteckten Hut” (Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, p.57).
\textsuperscript{104} “I give myself up! You are greater, immensely greater, tyrants that I ever was” (Ernst, Freiheitsymbol, p.103).
\textsuperscript{105} Hunt, Politics, Culture, and Class, pp.31-2.
\textsuperscript{106} Kutter, Peter Ochs statt Wilhelm Tell, p.36.
But what commentators fail to realize is that this depiction of Tell reveals a fundamental difference between the manner in which Tell was both employed and interpreted in France and in the Helvetic Republic. The French portrayals of Tell distinguish themselves by emphasizing the assassination of Gessler; the letter-head showing Tell with his son is, in fact, quite unusual. The Helvetic Republic, however, did not interpret Tell primarily as a tyrant killer, but looked back to his role as patriot and father as portrayed in the iconography of the *Helvetische Gesellschaft*. Thus the official signet of the Republic was taken from Alexander Trippel’s statuette (Fig. 19).

The French appropriation of the figure of Wilhelm Tell during the Helvetic Republic, however, blurred and confused these distinctions. Speaking to the Helvetic Senate, Joseph Lüthi pointed to a different interpretation of Swiss history, one that emphasized the non-violent fight against tyranny: "*Walter Fürst, Stauffacher, Melchtal waren die Befreier unseres Vaterlandes — nicht Tell, der Tyrannenmörder; sie haben die gestürzten Tyrannen über die Grenzen geführt, ohne ihnen ein Haar zu krümmen.*"¹⁰⁷ Lüthi, for one, had come to equate Tell with the French tyrant killer and his attempt to promote a version of the *Befreiungssage* purged of this tainted Tell foreshadowed the "official" repudiation of Tell that followed the collapse of French rule in Switzerland. Among the common people, however, the tumult of the Helvetic and French Revolutions allowed for a return of the "volkstümliche" Tell. That Tell was still primarily associated with the anarchy and violence of peasant rebellion was demonstrated by an armed mob, led by a man dressed in the garb of Wilhelm Tell and carrying a young child on his shoulders, which attacked an estate outside Winterthur in March of 1798.¹⁰⁸ And in the messianism of the Nidwaldners there are surely echoes of an older, popular understanding of Tell.

¹⁰⁷ "Walter Fürst, Stauffacher, Melchtal were the liberators of the Fatherland — not Tell, the tyrant-murderer; they escorted the overthrown tyrants over the borders without so much as touching a hair on their heads" (Frei, *Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins*, p. 53). Fürst, Stauffacher and Melchtal were the three representatives who took the oath at the Rütli meadow.
¹⁰⁸ Frei, *Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins*, p. 52.
as a patron-saint.

During the Helvetic Republic, Tell's image became increasingly definitive and omnipresent. The pervasiveness of Tell's image led Thaddäus Müller, responsible for education in Luzern, to request some other patriotic visage for the classroom, perhaps Nicklaus von Flüe, "da Wilhelm Tell zu gemein geworden ist." But could Tell be considered a national symbol? To a certain extent, and despite his multiple connotations, he was: Tell was the central iconographic figure in a unitary Swiss state that sought to forge historical links to a national past. The nationalistic propaganda engendered by both the Helvetic and French Revolutions, and the opposition generated by the Helvetic Republic, were in fact largely responsible for laying the foundations of a sense of Swiss national identity. And in relation to later political developments in Switzerland, it was the Tell of the Helvetic Republic that could first truly be said to have symbolized a system of representative democracy. At the same time, however, the Tell of the Helvetic Republic was seen as a foreign imposition: according to Bergier, "verstohlen und in Begleitung der französischen Armeen... seine Einreise mit ausländischen Papieren bescherte [sic] dem Heimkehrenden nicht eben den herzlichsten Empfang." More significant, and what Bergier fails to notice, is that this was not simply Wilhelm Tell in the company of the French, but this was a considerably different incarnation of the Tell myth.

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109 Nicklaus von Flüe is famous for having negotiated a compromise at the 1481 Agreement of Stans, seen as an important step in the development of Swiss national unity (Hughes, Switzerland, p.86). By "gemein", Müller either means that Tell has become too common, or too vulgar and contemptible (Ernst, Freiheitssymbol, pp.107-8). For a humorous account of Tell's omni-presence during the Helvetic Republic, please see the poem by Balthasar Anton Dunker in the Appendix, p.65.


111 Ernst, Freiheitssymbol, p. 105.

112 "Furtively and in the company of French armies...his entry with foreign papers did not exactly secure the home-comer the warmest reception" (Bergier, Realität und Mythos, pp.397-98).
**Restoration and Repudiation? Tell from 1804 to 1847**

Despite a sizeable and genuine desire for reform and for new political structures, the Helvetic Republic was never popular. While most Swiss were not as directly hostile to its institutions and their French guarantors as were the people of Nidwalden, the majority opposed its existence. The situation was so chaotic that Napoleon intervened directly in Swiss political affairs, returning the cantons to their former sovereignty through the Mediation Act of 1803. For this, Napoleon was hailed in the inner cantons as the reincarnation of Wilhelm Tell, and in a speech before the cantonal assembly of Unterwalden, Napoleon virtually claimed the title for himself: “*Le titre de restaurateur de la liberté des enfants de Tell m’est plus précieux que la plus belle victoire.*” In 1803, the Republic of Wallis celebrated its restored independence by staging open-air Tell productions. While Switzerland was generally quiet after the Mediation, not everyone saw Napoleon’s actions as entirely liberating as Wallis had, and Tell could still serve as a potent symbol of rebuke towards the acquiescent Swiss:

> Wo wohnen denn die Telle,  
> Wo die Winkelriede,  
> Deren Preis so helle  
> Klingt im alten Liede?  

With the demise of the Helvetic Republic in 1803-4, Tell disappeared as a national symbol, replaced on the seal of the newly renamed “*Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft*” by the image of a medieval Swiss soldier (Fig.20). Tell’s status in Switzerland after the Act of

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113 Böning, “Populäre politische Aufklärung”, p.738.  
118 Bonjour, *Schweiz und Europa*, pp.13-14. The short-lived Helvetic Tricolour also disappeared and was not replaced until a new national flag was adopted in 1840 (Kohn, *Nationalism and Liberty*, p.58).
Mediation is not clearly understood, and historians differ in their assessments. According to different interpretations, Tell’s removal from the official seal either is indicative of a general rebuke of Tell’s historical character or actually corresponds with a period of resurgent popularity for Wilhelm Tell. Others maintain that Tell’s repudiation is more correctly placed in the period between the 1813 Restoration and the 1848 Federal Constitution. Coming to some conclusions about how Tell was interpreted in Switzerland after the final French troops left Switzerland in 1813 seems important in trying to find out where the Swiss national symbol originates, and for understanding the source of his later tremendous popularity in the 1890s.

Certainly, the forces of conservative restoration which swept Europe after the fall of Napoleon were felt strongly in Switzerland. Bern demanded a return to the status quo, including the subservient status of the Vaud and Aargau, while Schwyz was seeking compliance with the 1315 Pact of Brunnen. Officially, the new heroes of Switzerland were the Swiss soldiers who died defending the French monarchy at the Tuileries, their virtue and fidelity monumentalized in Luzern’s “Löwendenkmal” (Fig. 21). Restoration-era school texts from the inner Swiss cantons were carefully purged of revolutionary imagery, so that even Tell’s deeds were presented as the rash acts of a “hot-head” which endangered the careful plans laid at the Rütli — echoes of Aegidius Tschudi. When the philosophy professor Ignaz Troxler published material in the early 1820s praising the Swiss “Tyranenmörder,” he lost his academic post.

Tell may indeed have lost his “halo,” but he was hardly repudiated. The many historians who hold the view that Tell only returned to national prominence after 1848 can only

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121 Kohn, Nationalism and Liberty, p.55.
122 Bergier, Realität und Mythos, p.399.
123 Frei, Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins, p.243.
do so by ignoring much contradictory evidence. Geneva, for example, welcomed the arrival of Swiss troops in 1814 with the song, "Enfants de Tell, soyez les bienvenus." On Easter Monday 1819, for the first time since the collapse of the ancien régime, Tell and his son resumed their places in the traditional parade through Bern. The first steamship in Switzerland, which began operating on Lac Léman in 1823, was christened the “Guillaume Tell”. And if Ignaz Troxler lost his job because of his views, this did not prevent him from resuming his leadership of patriotic pilgrimages to the Tellskapelle in the Hohle Gasse. Pilgrimages to these chapels seem to have continued since the 1790s, and appear to have been a popular undertaking well into the 1830s (Fig.22). Tell was also ‘officially’ visible, gracing the Constitution of 1815, although he shared the task of national iconography with Winkelried and Helvetia (Fig.23).

To what did Tell owe his continued popularity? For one, the Mediation period took a decidedly nostalgic stance towards the Swiss past which included Tell, the Rütli oath and the entire Befreiungssage. Friedrich Schiller understood this well when he wrote: “Jetzt besonders ist von der schweizerischen Freiheit desto mehr die Rede, weil sie aus der Welt verschwunden ist.” It was this nostalgia that lay behind the tremendous popularity of Johannes von Müller’s Geschichten der Schweizer, though its erudition and masterful style certainly helped. What Müller did with his history was nothing less than “create the myth of the Swiss” by writing an epic history that told the story of a “freedom-loving people battling to preserve its birthright.

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128 Stadler, Schillers Wilhelm Tell, p.41.
131 “Now especially is Swiss freedom the topic of discussion, since she has disappeared out of this world” (Berchtold, “Tell im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert”, p.177).
against external aggression. Müller’s was the first history to treat Switzerland as a “Nation”, with its own Volk, spirit and character, and this image both delighted and provided consolation for those living under the French occupation. While Tell graced the cover of a 1795 French edition, he at first played only a modest role in Müller’s history: the first edition of 1780 includes only the story of the hat, while the 1786 edition adds an account of Tell’s arrest (Fig. 24). Even so, Friedrich Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell would be “unthinkable” without Müller, not only because Schiller relied on it extensively as an historical source but also because it provided Schiller with the necessary heroic depiction of Tell and Switzerland. The influence was reciprocal: after Müller saw Schiller’s Tell on stage in Weimar, he included the apple-shot in the 1806 edition. Schiller’s play would do more than modify one historian’s interpretation of the past. Its tremendous influence was largely responsible for the continued, and in fact greatly expanded, popularity of the material, but Schiller’s depiction was also centrally important in creating the subsequent image and interpretation of Tell. Because of its centrally important role, it is necessary to return to the origins of Schiller’s influential work.

Friedrich Schiller’s “Wilhelm Tell”

Schiller was horrified at the excesses of the French Revolution, and Tell was largely conceived as a counter-revolutionary response. In order to clearly distance Tell from his French revolutionary context, Schiller had to solve the problematic relationship between political oppression and assassination. Schiller did so by absenting Tell from the Rütli oath, through Tell’s long monologue in the Hohle Gasse, where he debates the morality of his act (IV.iii) and with the

133 Feller, Geschichtsschreibung, pp. 563-4.
134 Bonjour, Short History, p. 238.
135 Craig, “Johannes von Müller”, p. 1490.
136 Feller, Geschichtsschreibung, p. 564.
Parricida scene (V.ii). The comparison between Tell’s murder, committed in defense of his family, and Parricida’s, committed for personal gain, was for Schiller “der Schlußstein des Ganzen. Tells Mordtat wird durch ihn allein moralisch und poetisch aufgelöst.” While Schiller’s Tell is altruistic, physically imposing and independent, he is also “naively passive, irresolute [and] solitary.” Asked by Stauffacher to join their revolutionary group, Tell’s answer is decidedly unheroic: “Die einz’ge Tat ist jetzt Geduld und Schweigen...Beim Schiffbruch hilft der einzelne sich leichter” and “Ein jeder zählt nur sicher auf sich selbst”. This is not the hero of Goethe’s planned Tell epic: “einen urkräftigen...kindlich-unbewuβten Heldenmenschen, der als Lastträger der Kantone durchwandert, überall gekannt und geliebt ist”, nor is this the “Herculean” Tell of the Jacobin biographies. By depicting Tell as caught in a difficult moral struggle, and by distancing him from the political aspirations of the Rütli conspirators, Schiller was rejecting not only the gleeful tyrant-killer of the French, but also the traditional volkstümliche Tell of the Swiss, for whom the killing of Gessler posed no moral qualms and was interpreted as a singularly heroic deed.

The play premiered at Weimar on 17 March, 1804, and was an immediate success. Of its Swiss premiere in Luzern on 4 November, however, one critic wrote:

Die Begeisterung der Innerschweizer hielt sich freilich in grenzen. Zwar führte man sich geschmeichelt, dass Schiller über die ruhmvollen Anfänge des eigenen Staates ein

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139a “...the keystone of the whole play. Only through the comparison is Tell’s murderous act both morally and poetically resolved” (Hoppe, “Schiller’s Schauspiel ‘Wilhelm Tell’, p.142). After having killed Gessler, Tell encounters the fugitive Parricida who has murdered his uncle the King because of an alleged injustice. Parricida expects to find sympathy with Tell but is instead rebuked. Tell defends his action as morally just because it was done to defend the safety of his family, while he condemns Parricida’s act because it was committed solely in the interests of selfish gain (Schiller, Wilhelm Tell, Act 5, scene 2).
141 “The only deed now is patience and silence...In a shipwreck, it’s every man for himself”, “You can only really rely on yourself”, Act 1, scene 3 (F. Schiller, Wilhelm Tell [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990], p.19).
142 An archetypal strongman...childishly-innocent hero, bearing the load as he wanders through the cantons, known and loved by all” (D.B. Richards, “Tell in the Dock: Forensic Rhetoric in the Monologue and Parricida- scene in Wilhelm Tell”, German Quarterly 48 [1975], p.484).
143 Labhardt, Patriot, p.123.
Other reviews were equally unimpressed. The journal Isis called one 1805 production “mittelmaßig” while scathingly reviewing another, asking whether the whole thing would not have gone better without the protagonist. Subsequently, there are few reports of professional productions of Schiller’s play in Switzerland until the favourable review of its premiere in Uri on 29 May, 1823. In 1834, however, the Zürich Theatre dropped Tell from its schedule after only three poorly attended performances. While there was already a certain recognition that this was a “national” play, professional performances of Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell tended to attract few patrons and generally received poor reviews. This was not, however, due to a repudiation of the Tell material as some sources suggest. The unpopularity of Tell was largely due to the underdeveloped nature of Swiss theatre culture, especially in Protestant Switzerland, with the result that unprofessional performances by second-rate traveling troupes were common. The other reason is that these troupes were mostly German. Said one critic: “Von norddeutschen Stimmen gesprochen, klingen des Dichters Verse dem Schweizer Ohr fremd und kalt.”

While Schiller’s Tell had a difficult start in Switzerland professionally, amateur, student,
and open-air *Volksschauspiele* productions of *Tell* were becoming increasingly popular. Already in the 1790s a French observer at the popular *Tell* festival in Arth, canton Schwyz, reported: "il n’y a que le Suisse qui puisse comprendre l’émotion profonde que causa ce drame national, et encore, le Suisse des montagnes..." Student theatre troupes in Luzern and Bern were regularly putting on *Tell* performances to favourable reviews. Open-air productions in 1806 in Rain (Luzern) and Boswil (Aargau) were well attended, but it is unclear whether these were stagings of Schiller’s play or not. It is apparent, however, that by the 1820s Schiller’s version was gaining a pre-eminent position, and that taking part in such a *Volksschauspiel* had become an important patriotic undertaking. The crowds who came to watch were more than just an audience, for as the action moved from scene to scene, often over quite large distances as at Küsnacht, the spectators would become increasingly involved, singing and dancing until at the climactic moment, “Das Volk spielt plötzlich mit, und die dramatische Fiction verwandelt sich in eine fröhliche, aber darum nicht minder imposante Wirklichkeit” (Fig.25).

That Schiller’s play should resonate with the *Volk* was not accidental. Based on popular folklore, and subtitled a “Volksstück”, it was deliberately “couched in a style guaranteed to appeal to the common people.” This appeal gradually increased over the course of the nineteenth century to the point that to put on a production of *Tell* meant Schiller’s *Tell*. At shooting-club festivals, important patriotic gatherings in Switzerland, emotional songs by Lavater and patriotic speeches were accompanied by re-enactments of the apple-shot according to

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154 Stadler, *Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell*, pp.37-41. The Tell staged in Rain, for example, could either be Schiller’s or Zimmerman’s, but from the sources, it is not clear which (ibid).
155 Mettler, *’Tell’ und die Schweiz*, p.204.
Schiller. Graphic depictions also began to be determined by Schiller’s version, illustrating scenes otherwise unknown in the Tell cycle, including the rescue of Baumgarten (Fig.26) and the meeting of Tell and Gessler on the mountain path (Fig.27). The connection became so axiomatic that in the 1890s, when a group in Altdorf began planning to stage an annual Tell festival, it was never questioned that it would be Schiller’s version on the stage.\(^{159}\)

As the play gained international popularity, *Wilhelm Tell* began to determine how people came to view Switzerland.\(^ {160}\) The preface to an 1854 American edition states:

> In truth there are but few productions of genius which give so faithful a picture of what they pretend to delineate: for whether on the mountain top, on the stormy lake, or in the narrow defile, not a word is uttered, not a sound is heard, that could destroy the illusion; whoever has seen a good performance of Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* has been in Switzerland.\(^ {161}\)

The Swiss themselves, however, had not been immediately convinced. At the play’s Weimar premiere, Hegel was in the audience and happened to overhear a comment that the characters “weren’t authentic Swiss.”\(^ {162}\) As Schiller’s interpretation of the Tell story increasingly replaced all other versions, however, the Swiss understanding of Tell and of themselves, through a kind of osmosis, came to be increasingly formed by Schiller’s play.\(^ {163}\) Schiller’s genius was not merely that he had created a picture of Switzerland wherein the Swiss came to recognize themselves, but rather that the Swiss began to model themselves after the picture of Switzerland that Schiller had created.\(^ {164}\)

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\(^ {158}\) This example comes from a Schützenverein festival in Kreins (Luzern) in 1828 (Stadler, *Schillers ‘Wilhelm Tell’*, p.45).

\(^ {159}\) Fryberg, *Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten*, p.36.

\(^ {160}\) The scale of the popularity of *Wilhelm Tell* is amazing. In 1903, statistics on the theatre showed that *Tell* averaged 232 performances a year on German stages, twice as many as popular repertory pieces, while plays by Goethe and Lessing averaged around 10 per year. *Wilhelm Tell* has been called “Quite possibly...the longest-running play in dramatic history” (C.E. Passage, Friedrich Schiller (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975), pp.177-78).


\(^ {162}\) Steinberg, *Why Switzerland*, p.16

\(^ {163}\) Mettler, ‘*Tell’ und die Schweiz’, p.206.

Schiller’s depiction of the Rütli oath scene, from Act two, scene two, for example, has the representatives from the three cantons swear “Wir wollen sein ein einzig Volk von Brüdern...Eher den Tod, als in der Knechtschaft leben.” This sentiment reflected Schiller’s own political views rather than conventional Swiss political vocabulary, for traditionally, the Swiss have rejected the concept of fraternity and other such “natural” analogies for their political associations because of their inherent inequality. Instead, they chose the oath as the equalizing principle, hence the Eidgenossenschaft. So popular has this passage and its attendant notion of fraternity become, however, and so close has the connection between Schiller’s Tell and Swiss conceptions of national identity grown, that while many Swiss can recite the Rütli oath verbatim, most are unaware that this is Schiller’s invention, and is not contained somewhere in the 1291 Bundesbrief.

The Swiss did not, however, take Schiller’s Tell simply at face value. Not only did performances of Schiller’s play incorporate many of the traits of the Volkschauspiele tradition, but significant changes were made to the text. Most importantly, the Parricida scene, Schiller’s “Schlußstein,” was, and still is, usually omitted from Swiss performances. What Schiller had intended with the Parricida scene was to provide moral commentary on Tell’s killing of Gessler, without which the play might be interpreted, mistakenly, as a glorification of political assassination. By omitting the scene, the Swiss were in essence saying that since the murder of Gessler was already understood as just, Tell’s actions did not require such an elaborate defense,

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165 "We want to be a single nation of brothers...We would prefer death to living in subjugation" (Schiller, Wilhelm Tell, p.51).
166 Head, “William Tell and his Comrades”, p.553. Eidgenossenschaft translates rather clumsily as “Comrade-ship of the oath”.
170 Sharpe, Schiller and the Historical Character, p.160.
and the play could indeed be staged as a celebratory pageant. In a fitting sense, this is exactly what Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* was about. For no one who sees the play can logically argue that Swiss liberty has come about because of Wilhelm Tell. Of far greater importance is the Rütli conspiracy, in which Tell refuses to participate, while it is, in fact, the murder of König Albrecht by the pariah Parricida that actually frees the Swiss. But what Schiller wanted to show with his play was the process through which history was transformed into myth. The final scene shows Tell being hailed by the people as liberator. His crossbow already enshrined in the museum, we witness the heroization of Tell: standing mute and apart, Tell has already become a statue.\(^{171}\) By refusing to contemplate the moral ambiguity of Tell’s actions, the real Swiss mirror the actions of their dramatic counterparts. In 1895, the process described in the final scene of Schiller’s play would be completed by the erection of a statue to glorify the memory of Tell.

**Wilhelm Tell and the Construction of Swiss National Identity**

The modern state of Switzerland was born of the *Sonderbund* civil war of 1847-48. In essence, it was the last confessional war in Switzerland, pitting Catholic Conservative cantons, which wanted to maintain cantonal sovereignty, against Protestant Liberal or ‘Radical’ cantons, which desired a new centralized, federal constitution. While the actual scale of fighting was relatively minor, with 104 dead, the civil war had prolonged effects. Down to the early 1970s, election and referendum results regularly reflected the *Sonderbund* divisions.\(^{172}\)

Just as long lasting was the portrayal of Swiss history and national identity that was necessitated by the civil war. The problem which faced the newly unified Swiss state after the war was that it could not celebrate this, its actual origin, since it came at the expense of its fellow

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\(^{171}\) Sharpe, *Schiller and the Historical Character*, pp.164-69.

\(^{172}\) Hughes, *Switzerland*, pp.102-4. The *Sonderbund*, or “special alliance”, was formed by the cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, along with Luzern, Zug, Fribourg, Valais and Appenzell Inner-Rhodes.
citizens.\textsuperscript{172} Switzerland, unlike the United States, could not root its sense of nation-ness in an oppositional framework against a foreign power. And while the United States could mythologize Washington and Jefferson as founding fathers, the Swiss could not memorialize the leaders of 1847-48 without antagonizing many of their fellow citizens. Furthermore, in creating a Swiss nation-state, difficult questions about Swiss identity were raised. What would be the national language? What was Swiss culture? Did a Swiss \textit{Volk} really exist, or was Switzerland an artificial amalgam of Italian, German and French “nationalities”?\textsuperscript{174} The solution after 1848 was to root Switzerland’s sense of national identity in the military victories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and in the collective and mythic past of the \textit{Befreiungssage}, as had been done previously by historians of the \textit{ancien régime}.\textsuperscript{175} By doing so, the period between 1798 and 1848 was entirely omitted from the Swiss historical narrative, and the failed attempt at national unity under the Helvetic Republic was dismissed.\textsuperscript{176} But turning to the symbols of the past was no longer so simple, the intervening period of disruption could not easily be ignored. And while 1848 is typically referred to as the moment of Tell’s return to national prominence, the multiplicity and confusion in terms of national iconography after 1848, between Helvetia, Winkelried and Tell, betrayed a continued sense of resentment and disunity.

Switzerland after 1848 was conspicuous for its countless commemorative festivals, anniversary celebrations and monument dedications, all undertaken in an attempt to affirm a sense of Swiss identity, not only in Switzerland itself, but \textit{vis à vis} powerful nationalistic movements in Germany, Italy, Austria and France.\textsuperscript{177} In 1851, Zürich staged an elaborate national celebration to commemorate the 500th anniversary of its membership in the \textit{Eidgenossenschaft},

\begin{itemize}
\item Kästli, \textit{Geschichte des Nationalstaats}, p.379.
\item Steinberg, \textit{Why Switzerland}, pp.51-2.
\item Kästli, \textit{Geschichte des Nationalstaats}, p.379.
\item Kästli, \textit{Geschichte des Nationalstaats}, p.378.
\item Im Hof, “Identität der Schweiz”, p.918.
\end{itemize}
and while the embittered inner cantons refused to attend, celebrations in this
"gedächtnisfreudigen Zeit" continued unabated.\textsuperscript{178} Famous battles like Morat, Sempach, and
Laupen, were marked with commemorative festivals, while monuments were erected to honour
the Swiss who died in 1798 fighting the French at Neuenegg in 1866, and Grauholz in 1886.\textsuperscript{179}

While the nationalistic speeches of federal politicians continued to make reference to
Wilhelm Tell,\textsuperscript{180} he was not the first choice in terms of national representation. Unlike the
\textit{Bundesverfassung} of 1815, that of 1848 did not include Tell among its national symbols (Fig.28).
Designs for the new Swiss currency reflect how the allegorical figure of Helvetia was being
promoted as a new symbol for Switzerland (Fig.29). Helvetia was especially popular in the
nationalistic and militaristic rhetoric surrounding the Neuenburg crisis when war with Prussia
seemed imminent (Fig.30).\textsuperscript{181} Flanked by Winkelried and Tell, the newest member of this Swiss
triumvirate was largely the product of a European fashion for feminized national allegories, and
had her counterparts in figures like Britannia, Germania and the French Marianne. Helvetia,
however, never found favour in the inner cantons where she was associated not only with the
defeat of 1848, but with French depictions of Liberty, and thus with the unhappy occupation
during the Helvetic Republic.\textsuperscript{182} A further attempt to heal the wounds of 1847 was made with the
unveiling of a national Winkelried monument in Stans, canton Nidwalden, in 1865. Hailed as the
"größte schweizerische Nationalheld," the choice illustrates to what extent many Swiss
continued to feel uncomfortable with Wilhelm Tell as a national symbol.\textsuperscript{183} Tell, in turn, would

\begin{itemize}
\item[G. Kreis, \textit{Der Mythos von 1291: Zur Entstehung des schweizerischen Nationalfeiertags} (Basel: F.
Reinhardt, 1991), p.32. For a list of some of the anniversary celebrations please see the Appendix, p.67.
\item[179] Their respective dates are: Morat, 1476, Sempach, 1386, and Laupen, 1339. Kreis, \textit{Der Mythos von
1291}, pp.28-32; J. Stüssi-Lauterburg, "Militärische Aspekte der Suche nach einer schweizerischen Identität", \textit{Auf
dem Weg zu einer schweizerischen Identität}, p.96.
\item[Bergier, \textit{Realität und Mythos}, p.400.
\item[Kreis, \textit{Helvetia}, pp.98ff.
\item[Kreis, \textit{Helvetia}, pp.18-20.
\item[Frei, \textit{Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins}, p.254.]
\end{itemize}
have to wait until 1895 for his national monument.

In fact, after 1848, Tell was conspicuously absent in the inner cantons. On the eve of the Sonderbund War, Wilhelm Tell had been an important icon among the Radicals who distributed a Schweizer Bilderkalender graced with depictions of the apple-shot. Conversely, by signing an alliance with Austria, the Sonderbund had lost recourse to much of the inspirational force of the old Befreiungssage, and could do very little with the figure of Tell. It was not until 1859, when Schiller’s 100th birthday was celebrated by performing the oath-scene on the Rütli, that Tell began to reappear in any significant form in inner-Switzerland. A year later, the Mythenstein was transformed into a monument to Schiller, bearing the inscription: Dem Sänger Tells/ F. Schiller/ die Urkantone 1859.

Reservations about Wilhelm Tell’s status in the mid-nineteenth century were also due to renewed historical attacks on his existence. After Balthasar’s Défense de Guillaume Tell and Johannes von Müller’s works had considerably rehabilitated Tell in the eyes of historians, Joseph Eutych Kopp launched an assault in 1835 which ultimately destroyed Tell’s historical credibility. Kopp belonged to a group of conservative historians in Switzerland who viewed the Helvetic Republic and the historical trend towards centralization, especially as this was depicted by Johannes von Müller, as the grave errors of Swiss history. In his Urkunden zur Geschichte der eidgenössischen Bünde, Kopp went further than any other historian, rejecting for a lack of documentary evidence not only the historical existence of Tell, but also the Rütli oath and the revolt against Austria, dismissing the entire Befreiungssage as fable. For his trouble,

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185 Bergier, Realität und Mythos, p.400.
186 Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten, p.44.
187 Bergier, Realität und Mythos, p.402.
189 Im Hof, “Nationale Identität”, p.920.
190 Feller, Geschichtsschreibung, p.676.
Kopp was burned in effigy on the Rütli.\textsuperscript{191}

Of course, Kopp had not been the first. Doubts about Wilhelm Tell’s historical existence had been around since at least 1607, when François Guilliman privately admitted that the story was in all likelihood legendary, though he retained the episode in his \textit{De rebus Helvetiorum}.\textsuperscript{192} By the eighteenth century, many other historians were apprehensive about the validity of the Tell story.\textsuperscript{193} In 1768, Alexander von Wattenwyl set about writing a history of the Swiss that would rely entirely on historic documents. Ultimately, Wattenwyl’s plan failed, and he supported much of his \textit{Histoire de la Confédération helvétique} with various chronicles. Remarkably, while he was the first to see in the recently discovered \textit{Bundesbrief} of 1291 the founding charter of the Confederation, Wattenwyl retained the traditional \textit{Befreiungssage}, complete with the entire Tell episode.\textsuperscript{194} Guilliman and Wattenwyl are but two examples of a persistent tension in Swiss historiography between “Quellenkritik” and “patriotischem Wunsch” that goes back, at least, to Aegidius Tschudi.\textsuperscript{195}

Tschudi’s work dominated Swiss historiography because it was both well researched and scholarly in its approach, while it managed to retain Tell and the \textit{Befreiungssage}. The \textit{Chronicon} set the pattern: “Der Mythos von der Entstehung der Eidgenossenschaft wurde nicht aus der gelehrten Geschichtsschreibung verbannt, sondern in sie integriert.”\textsuperscript{196} This co-existence of history and myth explains how Johann Gleser could defend the historicity of Tell even though his

\textsuperscript{192}Beck, \textit{Sage oder Geschichte}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{193}Jakob Christoph Beck, in his \textit{Introductio in historiam patriam Helvetiorum} from 1744, omitted the apple-shot from his history, while Bernard von Tschamer went further, excising Tell completely from the \textit{Befreiungssage} in his \textit{Histoire der Eydgenossen}, of 1756-58. Others, like Johann Füssli, in the \textit{Staats- und Erdbeschreibung der schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft}, from 1770-72, kept the story, but ascribed it little importance (Feller, \textit{Geschichtsschreibung}, pp.450-78).
\textsuperscript{194}Feller, \textit{Geschichtsschreibung}, p.463. The 1291 \textit{Bundesbrief} had been rediscovered in 1758 (Fryberg, \textit{Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten}, p.10).
\textsuperscript{195}“Source criticism” and “patriotic desire” (Capitani, “Die Suche nach dem Gemeinsamen Nenner”, p.26).
\textsuperscript{196}“The founding myth of the Confederation was not dismissed from learned historiography, but rather integrated into it” (Stettler, “700 Jahre Eidgenossenschaft”, p.875).
German translation of the *Bundesbrief* in 1760 was central in dismantling the myth. Many nineteenth-century historians, even when they admired Kopp's research, defended Tell and the *Befreiungssage* in the name of the 'spirit' of the times. Jacob Burckhardt's defense is typical: "Tell hat existiert und mit diesem Namen. Er hat durch irgendeine mutige Handlung teilgenommen an der Befreiung und die allgemeine Bewunderung auf sich gezogen."

The historical debate surrounding Tell and the entire *Befreiungssage* failed to provide a definitive answer about the origins of the *Eidgenossenschaft*, and since the Tell saga and the 1291 *Bundesbrief* did not explicitly contradict one another, the average person was content to look upon the old myths as providing the answers which historians and academics could not. A letter to the *Urner Wochenblatt* made the plea:

*Altar und Herz des Schweizerbundes sind dem Schweizervolke: das stille Gelände am See, der Markt zu Altdorf, die Tellsplatte, die hohle Gasse. Wir brauchen nicht erst andere zu suchen und die Gelehrten darüber entscheiden zu lassen, ob der Bundesbrief von 1291 in Brunnen oder in Schwyz verfasst sei. Wir wollen sie nicht entscheiden lassen, die Sterne des Rütti im Wintermonat 1307 und die Feuer der flammenden Burgen am Neujahrsmorgen 1308.*

A revolt against oppressive Austrian lords was more easily understood than the medieval Imperial legal concept of *Reichsunmittelbarkeit*. More importantly, it was much more heroic, and thus retained its popularity among the *Volk*, and importantly, among school teachers and politicians.

It became increasingly difficult, however, to reconcile the two foundation narratives. The *Bundesbrief* of 1291, as it came increasingly to be accepted as the original founding charter, had

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197 Feller, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p.481.
198 This was Jean Joseph Hisely's solution in his *Recherches critiques sur l'Histoire de Guillaume Tell*, 1843 (Feller, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p.690).
199 "Tell did exist, and with that name. He participated in the liberation with some brave action and thereby attracted universal admiration and wonder" (Feller, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p.690).
the distinct advantage of authenticity and legality. While the discovery of the *Weisses Buch von Sarnen* in 1854 gave renewed hope to the defenders of Tell, no mere chronicle could compete in a historiographical climate which prized legal and constitutional documentation.  

Even those historians like Burckhardt who defended Tell undermined his identity. Strictly speaking, Burckhardt's Tell, without the apple-shot, is no longer Tell. In December 1889, the Federal Council tabled a motion to recognize 1 August, 1291 as the founding moment of the *Eidgenossenschaft*. At the same time, however, discarding the traditional myths about the founding of Switzerland threatened an already weak sense of national identity and robbed Swiss history of much of its heroic nature, precisely those aspects which patriotic historians since the eighteenth century had emphasized in order to foster a sense of "Swissness". The question was whether "es möglich [war], auf die Sage zu verzichten, ohne die nationale Bedeutung der Gründungsgeschichte zu schmälern?"  

The government of Schwyz tried to solve the problem by planning an elaborate celebration in 1891 to mark the 600th anniversary of the founding of the *Eidgenossenschaft*, whose grandeur was intended to cause Tschudi's chronology, and especially the years 1307 and 1308, to be eclipsed in popular conceptions of Swiss history. The pageant lasted 4 hours and included 960 actors, 400 singers and an audience of around 14,000. What unfolded before them was the dramatic recreation of key moments in Swiss history: the 1315 Brunnen Bund, the battle of Morat, and the *Stanser Verkommnis* of 1481. Tell and Winkelried were also included, though as silent side-shows between the Acts. The effect was dramatic: according to the *Urner*  

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204 Fryberg, *Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten*, p.16; Im Hof, "Nationale Identität", p.917.  
205 Fryberg, *Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten*, p.17.  
206 Was it possible to dismiss the legendary, without also reducing in national importance the history of its foundation" (Capitani, "Die Suche nach dem Gemeinsamen Nenner", p.27).  
207 Fryberg, *Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten*, p.31.  
208 The Brunnen Bund of 1315 was looked upon as the founding document of the *Eidgenossenschaft* before the 1291 *Bundesbrief* was found.
Wochehblatt, "Tausende schämten sich der Thrän'en nicht. Wenn da sein Herz nicht höher
schlug, der war kein Schweizer oder er trug einen Stein in der Brust."209

There was only one problem as far as the people from Uri were concerned. The traditional
Befreiungssage placed the origins of the Confederation on the Rütli in November, 1307, whereas
the Brunnen Bund of 1315 was concluded in Schwyz. While no one knew where the Bundesbrief
had been sealed, the pageant opened with the league of 1291 being sworn in front of the church
in Schwyz (Fig.31). Uri, distraught at being usurped in its traditional role of "Wiege der
Eidgenossenschaft," sought to regain its former prestige by turning to its most famous citizen,
Wilhelm Tell.210

Richard Kissling's Telldenkmal and the Creation of a National Symbol

To suggest that Tell had been completely absent in Uri between 1848 and 1892 is an
overstatement, but not much of one. Apart from the Schiller commemorations of 1859 and 1860,
and the renovation of the Tellskapelle on Lake Lucerne in 1876-77,211 there is little evidence that
the image of Tell was being officially cultivated. Remarkably, there is no record of a professional
theatre troupe staging a single production of a Tell play in Uri between 1823 and 1897. And
while Volksschauspiele versions remained popular in Switzerland throughout the nineteenth
century, the decision to mount a Tell festival in Altdorf appears to have been largely influenced
by this wider popularity, rather than from any keener sense of connection to the material.212 The
temptation is to interpret this paucity in Tell iconography in the inner cantons after 1848 as the
result of an official repudiation, and to a certain extent this is true. However, Tell's absence was

209. Thousands were not ashamed to cry. If this did not make ones heart beat stronger, then they were not
Swiss, or else carry a stone in their breast" (Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten, p.31).
210Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten, p.33.
211Frei, Die Förderung des schweizerischen Nationalbewusstseins, p.252.
212Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten, pp.42-45.
also due to a particularly Swiss sense of patriotism which combined a kind of geographic
memorialization with a general disdain for monuments. An earlier plan to erect a memorial on
the Rütli, for example, met with the following response:

*So lange Eydsgenossen so dachten wie bis anhin — da jener Rechtschaffene, wenn er das
ersternal am Grütlin vorbeischifft, aussteigt und ehrerbietig den Platz besichtigt, wo der
Bund beschworen ward, der zur Freiheit Helvetiens den Grund gelegt, und auch in der
Folge jedesmal, wenn er vorüberfährt, die Ahnen segnet, Gott danket, der Freiheit sich
freuet und sich frei fühlt — so brauche es kein steinernes Denkmal. Und wenn, was sie
nicht hoffeten, ihre Söhne oder Enkel diese Empfindungen einst verlieren sollten, würde
ein solches Denkmal...wenig nützen.*

In Switzerland, patriotic and nationalistic memorialization is closely connected to the natural
world and to specific geographic sites concentrated around the Lake of Lucerne: the *Tellplatte*,
*Hohle Gasse*, and preeminently, the Rütli meadow. Together, these places form a *nationalen
Erlebnisraum,* or an *erfahrbaren, patriotischen Raum — einen historischen sakralen Ort.*

If cultural frames require a "sacred center" in order to provide members of its society with their
"sense of place," Switzerland, to a far greater extent than almost anywhere else, can point to an
actual physical place as its "sacred center." While Manfred Hettling argues that during the
nineteenth century popular interpretations increasingly fused Tell and the Rütli together, in fact,
this was a much older practice that goes back, at least, to the *Tellenlieder* of the sixteenth
century. Difficult to quantify or even locate, this abstract yet strong and persistent emotional
connection between Tell and the common people was revealed following the unveiling of the
Altdorf *Telldenkmal.*

The competition to design a *Telldenkmal*, which opened in 1892, was meant to provide

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213 Although, as noted earlier, the Swiss too fell in with the European wide monument craze of the late
nineteenth-century (E. Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe 1870 - 1914", *The Invention of Tradition*,
p.275).

214 Ernst, *Freiheitssymbol*, p.71. For a translation, please see the Appendix, p. 67.

215 "A place of national experience", "a tangible patriotic space — a historical and sacred spot" (M.

216 Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, p.87.

217 Hettling, "Das Denkmal als Fetisch", p.51.
physical form to this abstract concept, to personify the national and patriotic emotion that surrounded the Rütli. The selection committee seemed quite sure about what kind of representation it was after: the finalists all portray virtually identical images of Tell together with his son (Figs.32-33). Ultimately, Richard Kissling’s entry was chosen the winner. Kissling’s Tell is the protective father, shouldering his crossbow, and though somewhat older with a grizzled and full beard, he is still physically imposing. Kissling’s Telldenkmal quickly achieved the status of a Swiss Nationaldenkmal, becoming one of the most “attractive” and popular tourist sites in a country that did not lack in attractive tourist sites. Kissling’s depiction of Tell became the definitive version, fixing his likeness for the next one hundred years. After 1895, posters, stamps, currency, even cartoons, all bore Kissling’s image of Tell (Figs.34-35). While Swiss historians tend to treat this memorialization of Tell as inevitable, as though all Kissling had done was to finally get around to recording Tell’s likeness, how did Kissling arrive at this particular depiction of Tell? What did it owe to Tell’s symbolic and figurative past, and why did this particular image resonate so strongly with the Swiss?

There is, surprisingly, very little discussion concerning the symbolism of Kissling’s Tell, as though Tell’s form as rendered in the Denkmal was predetermined, as if everyone already knew what Tell looked like, making any discussion as to its origins redundant. There is a certain truth to this, for in comparing post-Schiller depictions of Tell, for example the paintings by Kolbach and Schauer (Figs.26-27) the similarities are striking. Schiller’s characterization of Tell dominated the nineteenth century and still informs how people imagine and understand the figure of Tell today. And while Kissling’s depiction of Tell seems to fit seamlessly within this well established Tell iconography, his Telldenkmal was to some extent quite novel and deserves

\(^{218}\)Hettling, “Das Denkmal als Fetisch”, p.53.
\(^{219}\)Iten, “Aber den rechten Wilhelm haben wir... “, p.28.
\(^{220}\)Fryberg, Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten, pp.35-6.
further comment.

Unlike the traditional representations of Tell in the Volsschauspiele, Tell is not dressed in the garb of a mercenary soldier, but in that of a mountain peasant.\(^{221}\) This depiction of Tell as "Bürger" is very much reflective of the times, as it was only in 1874 that the franchise was extended to a majority of Swiss males.\(^{222}\) But it also looks back to Lemierre's Tell who styled himself "citoyen" and to the Tell of the Helvetic Republic, where he first symbolized a wide franchise and a system of representative democracy.\(^{223}\) Tell as mountain peasant also harkens back to his idealization during the ancien régime, and his imposing physical presence is akin to Füssli's alpine Superman. As in the past, the connection between Tell's physical strength and the independence of the Swiss is strongly implied. While Kissling's Tell has been interpreted as being representative only of "Unabhängigkeit ...Waffengerassel und Kraftprotzentum,"\(^{224}\) he certainly also represents "Widerstandsrechts gegen Unmenschlichkeit und Gewalt," as he did both in the Helvetic Republic and in French iconography.\(^{225}\) Kissling's Tell as the armed defender of human rights also finds resonance with the Tell of the Enlightenment, especially as portrayed in Zimmermann's dramatic rendition.

That Kissling's Tell is armed with his crossbow, perhaps necessary for symbolic cognition, should not be accepted as inevitable. While the weapon reaffirms Tell as the free mountain huntsman, its presence also suggests that the Swiss are comfortable with its use. This is not Schiller's Tell who returns from the Hohle Gasse and is ultimately left on stage without his weapon.\(^{226}\) What the crossbow suggests is that Tell's interpretation as tyrant-killer, typically

\(^{221}\) Mettler, 'Tell' und die Schweiz, p.206.
\(^{222}\) Hettling, "Das Denkmal als Fetisch", p.54.
\(^{223}\) Ernst, Freiheitssymbol, p.105.
\(^{224}\) "Independence...saber-rattling and physical intimidation", according to Peter Bichsel in 1967 (Kreis, Myhtos, pp.16-17).
\(^{225}\) "The right of self-defense against inhumanity and violence" (Im Hof, "Nationale Identität", p.929).
\(^{226}\) Act 5, scene 2, Schiller, Wilhelm Tell, p.107.
brushed aside as a "temporäre Erscheinung" that passed away with the end of the French occupation, continued as part of the popular interpretation of Tell. What is usually portrayed as a French perversion of Tell, was in reality only an explicit depiction of what remains latent in Swiss interpretations. That volkstümliche versions of Tell shared this interpretation with the French ones is illustrated by the editorial changes associated with stagings of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* in Switzerland. This resonance between certain French and Swiss interpretations explains why Tell may have been officially repudiated at times, but never lost his popular appeal.

The argument is also made that Tell must be armed for only in such a depiction can he be truly considered the national symbol of Switzerland:

*The hardy mountaineer, who defies the Habsburgs and by his skill as a Bowman thwarts their designs, who will not do obeisance to anybody, became for the Swiss and for others what the Confederation meant.*

If this is true, why were depictions of Tell as a father-figure so dominant in the 1892 competition? Would not a more explicit scene of defiance, the famous apple-shot perhaps, or another more heroic image of Tell have been more appropriate? Kissling's decision, and that of the other sculptors, to depict Tell as a protective father reflects to what extent this interpretation had become virtually axiomatic after its first sensational depictions by Trippel and Gesner in the late eighteenth century. The popularity of this image of Tell as a father was sustained during the Helvetic Republic because it enabled the Swiss to differentiate their Tell symbolism from that of the French. The father imagery thus ensured Tell's continued popularity during the occupation as it resonated in both conservative and patriotic circles. The image of Tell as a protective father-figure certainly also found favour in patriarchal Swiss politics and society. This connection between fathers and sons was made explicit in the *Denkmal* itself, while in time it also became a

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227 The interpretation of Tell the tyrant-killer as "temporary phenomenon" is from Labhardt, *Patriot*, p.148.
228 Steinberg, *Why Switzerland*, p.28.
pilgrimage site for fathers and their sons to visit the “mythischen Vater der Eidgenossen.” Just as Zimmermann and am Buhl had recommended that fathers take their sons to visit the scenes of Tell’s deeds, identical claims were made after 1895 about the Altdorf Telldenkmal. The Urner Landamman Muheim said in a speech in May, 1895, “Ihr Väter, geht auch mit Eueren Kindern hin zum Tell und erzählt ihnen von seinen Taten.”

Kissling’s Denkmal thus also fit into the much older practice of treating Tell as a semi-divine figure and the sites of his deeds as holy. While this reverence for Tell certainly predated the French appropriation, French revolutionary symbolism and secular ritual went much further in its use of Tell’s image. While the Swiss tended to see Tell as a patron-saint or a saviour of children, Mengaud substituted him for God in his “prayer” from 1798. The French Revolution both radicalized Tell’s image and increased his visibility in the Helvetic Republic, both as its official symbol, and in counter-revolutionary reaction. It was this combination of French pressure and the nationalistic propaganda which the occupation generated that first made Tell into a national symbol for Switzerland.

Kissling’s monument could thus tap into an older tradition of Tell as a national symbol, and in the climate of the late nineteenth century this was both increasingly more desirable and plausible. By 1895 the distrust of Tell had largely passed, and as the Sonderbund War receded from memory and a greater sense of Swiss national identity began to be felt among the inner cantons, Tell’s connection to the Federalists was no longer resented. Once Uri itself had a good reason to erect such a monument, the old negative connotations surrounding Tell were quietly forgotten. Perhaps most importantly, the historical debates of the nineteenth century, by

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229 Hettling, “Das Denkmal als Fetisch”, p.53.
230 Kissling, “Denkmal”.
231 Ebert, Freiheitsbaum, p.61.
undermining Tell’s historical existence had done him a great service in terms of his symbolic value. The pageant celebrating the unveiling of Kissling’s *Denkmal* contained a long exchange between History and Myth, in which Schiller makes a brief appearance, and which ended with History having to admit: “*Auf einem Blatt, worauf ich nie gesucht:/ In Volkesseele fand ich dich [Tell] gebucht.*” Freed from the confines of historical reality, Tell as “fable” was a much more malleable symbol, and seemed less implicated in the actions previously undertaken in his name. The Urner themselves were less willing to admit this: in an attempt to root their mythic hero in the history of Switzerland, they chiseled the date 1307 into the base of the monument for all future generations to see.

Proving the myth of Wilhelm Tell to have been in all likelihood untrue came at a time of dramatic change in Uri. Industrialization was bringing foreign workers, the old traditions of the *Landesgemeinde* were no longer the same after the *Bund* of 1848, and the unthinkable achievement of tunneling through the Gotthard massif had been only recently been accomplished.

In this period of great upheaval, there arose a powerful sense of nostalgia:

> *Mochte sich in ihren Augen auch alles verändern, einer blieb, wenn man so will, stets der alte: Wilhelm Tell. Dies symbolisiert aufs vortrefflichste das von Richard Kissling geshaffene Denkmal.*

At the celebration to unveil Kissling’s monument, a speaker proclaimed: “*Man sei gekommen, um die alte Zeit zu suchen, zu sehen und zu feiern, und wir sahen sie, geistig und wirklich. Tell! Du bist kein Wahngebilde.*”

Wilhelm Tell, as he was depicted by Richard Kissling, and as he was thus inherited by the

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232“Upon a page where I never searched/ In the people’s souls I found you [Tell] printed” (Iten, “*Aber den rechten Wilhelm haben wir...*”, p.286).

233Fryberg, *Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten*, p.35.

234“Though it seemed in their eyes that everything would change, one thing would always remain, if you will, of the old: Wilhelm Tell. That, more than anything, is what Richard Kissling’s Tell monument symbolized” (Fryberg, *Bretter, die die Schweiz bedeuten*, pp.96-98).

235“One came, to search for the old times, to see and to celebrate, and we saw them, spiritual and real. Tell! You are not an illusion!” (Hettling, “*Das Denkmal als Fetisch*”, p.54).
Swiss, was shaped by all the same influences which had shaped Switzerland, most dramatically
the Enlightenment, the Helvetic and French Revolutions, the Helvetic Republic and the 1848
Federal Constitution. He had also been shaped by the reworking of the dramatic material, most
notably by Schiller, or perhaps more accurately, by Schiller as interpreted by the Swiss
Volksschauspiele tradition. Finally, both a certain historical aesthetic and a strong sense of
nostalgia determined Tell’s final character and identity.

Ultimately, however, what enabled Tell to become such a powerful national symbol was
the very slenderness of Tell’s quasi-historical and heroic existence. Beyond the famous exploits
of the apple-shot, the daring escape, and the murder of Gessler, virtually nothing else is known
that might impose limits or restrict potential interpretations of his character. Because there is so
little that is solid about Tell, he was able to survive these appropriations and manipulations by
such varied groups and for such diverse causes. Indeed, perhaps the very fixedness which
Kissling’s Telldenkmal has imposed on Tell is partly responsible for his slow decline during the
twentieth century in terms of national importance. To a far greater extent than in any other period
of his mythic existence, Wilhelm Tell is no longer so easily adaptable, and can no longer
accommodate the many disparate views and meanings which his figure has incorporated from the
time of his murky origins in the Swiss fourteenth century down to the close of the nineteenth.
Appendix A: Illustrations

1. First known graphic representation of Tell’s apple-shot. Anonymous woodcut from the Etterlin Chronicle, 1507. (Stadler, Schiller’s ‘Wilhelm Tell’, p.11).

2. Stained glass window showing the apple-shot, 1563 (Dettwiler, 
Das hierdt blic%

3. The apple-shot from Stumpf's Chronika der loblichen Eidgenossenschaft, 1548 (Stadler, Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell', p.12).

4. Tellschuss-Vignette by Conrad Meyer, second half of the seventeenth century (Stadler, Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell', p.18).

5. "Le Saut de Tell", Tell as Superman? Engraving by Charles Guttenberg, around 1785, after a lost painting by Johann Heinrich Füssli (Stunzi. Quell Tell?, p.75).


16. Design proposals for the seal of the Helvetic Republic. Note especially number 8, where Liberty is waking a sleeping Tell, and number 15 (Ebert, *Freiheitsbaum*, p.55).


19. Signet of the Helvetic Republic, after the Tellenstatuette by Alexander Trippel (Im Hof, Helvetische Gesellschaft, fig.44).

Das Vollziehungs-Direktorium
der einen und untheilbaren helvetischen Republic.
20. Seal of the *Eidgenossenschaft*, 1803-1815
(Mühlemann, *Wappen und Fahnen*, p.27).

21. The *Löwendenkmal* (Photo by the author).

22. A visit to the *Tellkapelle* on Lake Lucerne, 1834. An anonymous copy of
an original painting by Ludwig Vogel
(Stunzi, *Quell Tell*?, p.246).


27. Another Schiller inspired rendition, “C’est moi, seigneur bailli” by Gustav Schauer, mid nineteenth century (Stunzi, Quell Tell?, p.139).

29. Currency designs from 1850 (Kreis, Helvetia, p.129).

31. 1291 or 1307? Rütli or Schwyz? Arguing the origins of the Swiss Confederation (Kreis, Mythos von 1291, p.48-9).

Vaterländischen Gruß und biedern Handfläsch

den Vertretern der Eidgenossenschaft, welche diesen Anlass in Stieren stantern, um vormals mit dem Umerländchen aus Rütli zu feiern. Gruß ihnen und Willkommen, den ehrenbaren Gebrüdern DÖLLER, Herrn Kollegen BÜCHNER

und Herrn Kollegen ZÜGEB, die heute in Hüllen des historischen Unternehmens, dessen Mütter Ehrbarkeit

ist es, die Ehre der Schwyz und der Elster Freiheit zu se. Die Ehre ihres Mutters, die heute nicht wahr

kommen, daß sie heute und morgen auf gut aufgewölbten Boden und unter einem Volke welch, dieses

Vaterlandskinder wurden, wo es und ihrer jetzigen Welt, mögen die Träume der unsterblichen Freiheit

wirklich sein von heute und morgen in die Hinternde zurückgehen.

Gruß und Handfläsch auch den Mitbürgherischen von Urt und der Urtförde, welche vormals in

patriotischer Huldigung die historische Sache des Urt belassen, dankbar ehrfurcht der großen und bedeutenden

Zeit der Übers 500 Jahren.

Gruß und Handfläsch auch dir, lieber Urt, der du weisentlich bist, den Ehrenring pflichtig erhal-

ten, Galerie heller im Kinde Deiner Hauptstädte und dieser Stadt im Stolz der Erinnerung des hoch-

stolzen und heiligen Volkers Deiner Verherrlichen, der den Fundament liegt für eine ähnliche und gutes Volks-

land. Wir umhassen treue und freie unsterbliche Freiheit.

Die Urt und Urtförde — Das Eidgenossenschaft!
32. Tell enshrined as Father figure. Second through fourth place entries in the 1892 Altdorf Telldenkmal competition. Statues, left to right, by Robert Dorer, Raimondo Pereda, and Gustave Siber (Stunzi, Quell Tell?, p.274).

33. Richard Kissling’s winning entry and the face of all Tells to come (Stunzi, Quell Tell?, p.275).
Appendix B

1. Translation of Joseph Mengaud’s “Vaterunser eines ächten und freyen Schweizers” (p.1)

William Tell, you who are the founder of our freedom; your name is revered as holy in Switzerland; Your will is done today with us, just as when once you triumphed over your tyrants. Give us this day your courage and your bravery, and forgive us our past fearfulness, that we with so little courage watched how again and again we had our freedoms stolen from us, just as we forgive all our governors and leaders, who alone are to blame for our lost freedom; — and allow us in future to no longer be oppressed, but rather free us forever from all forms of slavery. And then yours will remain the honour and the glory, and for all Swiss freedom and equality. Amen.

2. Versions of the Tell Story and Related Critical Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. 1477</td>
<td>Das Lied von der Entstehung der Eidgenossenschaft</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1480-99</td>
<td>3 or 4 “Tellenlieds” known from this period</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1507</td>
<td>Kronica von der loblichen Eydtgnoschaft</td>
<td>Petermann Etterlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1512/1540</td>
<td>Urner Tellenspiel</td>
<td>Valentin Compar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1545</td>
<td>Das neue Tellenspiel</td>
<td>Jakob Ruf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1548</td>
<td>Chronika der loblichen Eidgenossenschaft</td>
<td>J. Stumpf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1576</td>
<td>Respublica Helvetiorum</td>
<td>J. Simmler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-10</td>
<td>Tellenlied</td>
<td>H. Muheim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1653</td>
<td>Neu Wilhelm Tellenlied</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>Ein schön new Lied: von Wilhelm Tell</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701</td>
<td>Chianzun da Wilhelm il Telle</td>
<td>H. Muheim(^{236})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1712</td>
<td>Ein schön neues Lied</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1734-36</td>
<td>Chronicon Helveticum</td>
<td>Aegidius Tschudi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>Guillaume Tell, fable Danoise</td>
<td>U. Freudenberger(^{237})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>Défense de Guillaume Tell</td>
<td>J.F. von Balthasar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>Grisler, ou, L’Ambition punie</td>
<td>Samuel Henzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766-67</td>
<td>Guillaume Tell</td>
<td>A.M. Lemierre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Gessler oder das erlegte Raubtier</td>
<td>J.J. Bodmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777-79</td>
<td>Wilhelm Tell: Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen</td>
<td>J.I. Zimmerman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>Geschichten der Schweizer</td>
<td>Johannes von Müller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782-84</td>
<td>Guglielmo Tell</td>
<td>G.F. Soave(^{238})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>Guillaume Tell (opera)</td>
<td>Michel Jean Sedaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1792</td>
<td>Wilhelm Tell, ein schweizerisches Nationalschauspiel</td>
<td>J.L. am Bühl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1792</td>
<td>Helvetic Liberty [or, The Lass of the Lakes] (London)</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{236}\) First Rätoromanisch version of Tell story.

\(^{237}\) Published anonymously, the work was put together by Uriel Freudenberger and G.E. von Haller.

\(^{238}\) First Italian version of Tell story.
1802  William Tell, or Switzerland Delivered  J.P.C. de Florian  
1804  Wilhelm Tell  Veit Weber  
1804  Wilhelm Tell  Friedrich Schiller  
1808  William Tell: A Tragedy in Five Acts  Eugenius Roche  
1825  William Tell. A Play in Five Acts  J.S. Knowles  
1825  Guillaume Tell  Pixerécourt  
1829  Guillaume Tell: Opera en quatre actes  G. Rossini  
1835  Urkunden zur Geschichte der eidgenössischen Bünde  J.E. Kopp  
1856  Das Weisses Buch von Sarnen  Hans Schriber (?)  

3. Translation of Zimmerman’s Tellskapelle journey (p.10)  

I saw how children sang their Swiss songs with genuine enthusiasm; I saw the loveliest  
eyes made to flow with tears by these songs; I saw Swiss farmers, when one sang them these  
songs, their eyes sparkled, their cheeks glowed, their muscles swelled; I know fathers, who travel  
with their sons to William Tell’s chapel, there to fervently sing Lavater’s song to Tell.  

4. Poem by Balthasar Anton Dunker:  

Was musst du guter Wilhelm Tell  
Nicht alles Dir gefallen lassen,  
Seitdem der Franken Trommelfell  
So laut ertönt auf unsern Gassen!  
Dort prangt ein Viertelpfund Tabak  
Mit Deinem Bild; hier liegt ein Sack  
Den seines Herren Firma zieret,  
Wozu man einen Tell skizziret.  
Dort über jenem Kaffeehaus  
Siehst Du besonders artig aus;  

Ja guter Tell! Du bist gewesen;  
Es ist gedruckt, man kann es lesen.  
In Stein gehau’n, in Holz geschnitzt,  
Gemalt, gemeisselt, eingekritzit,  
Gepunkt, gegraben, angestrichen,  
Bald nagelneu und bald verblichen,  
Sieht man Dein Bild und sieht es gern,  
In Bern, in Uri und Luzern....


What must you, good William Tell  
Put up with  
Since the French drums  
So loudly sounded in our streets!  
There a quarter pound of tobacco is stamped  
with your picture; here lies a sack  
On which to adorn the company  
A Tell has been sketched  
There above that coffee house  
You look particularly good;  

...  

Yes, my good Tell, you did exist;  
It is printed, one can read it.  
In stone sculpted, in wood carved,  
Painted, chiseled, engraved,  
Dotted, entrenched, painted,  
Almost brand new and almost faded,  
One sees your image and sees it happily,  
In Bern, in Uri and Luzern...
5. Translation of the review of the Swiss premiere of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (p.27-8)

The enthusiasm of the inner Swiss held itself admittedly in bounds. Though one felt flattered that Schiller should have written a play about the glorious beginnings of one's own state, one also expected that Tell would have stood front and centre in the action. But actually, he moved closer to its edges, and did not even swear at the Rütli. As well, one knew very little about where to begin with the aristocratic lovers Rudenz and Berta, that despite their best efforts just did not fit into the patriotic picture of many true Swiss.

6. Professional Theatre Productions of Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* in Switzerland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Nationality of Troupe</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Nov 1804</td>
<td>Luzern</td>
<td>German (Dresden)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>St. Gallen</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 May 1811</td>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>German (Freiburg)</td>
<td>Reviewer upset that Rütli scene was omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 June 1823</td>
<td>Altdorf</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Favourably received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Aug 1831</td>
<td>Luzern</td>
<td>German (Strasbourg)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>German (Augsburg)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Basel</td>
<td>German (Berlin)</td>
<td>Favourable review of Ferdinand Esslair as Tell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834/35</td>
<td>Zürich</td>
<td>German (Augsburg)</td>
<td>Wilhelm Kunst favourably reviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835/36</td>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>German (Augsburg)</td>
<td><em>Tell</em> only staged three times due to poor attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836/38</td>
<td>Zürich</td>
<td>Google (Augsburg)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837/43</td>
<td>Zürich</td>
<td>Stadttheater Zürich</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Basel</td>
<td>German (Freiburg)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Basel</td>
<td>German (Freiburg)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Wilhelm Kunst again draws a crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Jan 1857</td>
<td>Bern</td>
<td>Swiss (Thurgau)</td>
<td>Favourable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Jan 1857</td>
<td>Zürich</td>
<td>German, Austrian</td>
<td>Well received, Switzerland on war-footing against Prussia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Source: Stadler, *Schillers 'Wilhelm Tell' und die Schweiz*, pp.34-37; Fryberg, *Bretter die die Schweiz bedeuten*, p.44.
7. Festivals and Anniversary Celebrations in Switzerland:

1852 Glarus and Zug, 500 years membership in the *Eidgenossenschaft*
1853 Bern, 500 years membership in the *Eidgenossenschaft*
1859 *Mythenstein* monument to Friedrich Schiller
1864 Battle of St. Jakob commemorated (1444)
1864 Geneva, 50 years membership in the Swiss Confederation
1865 Winkelried monument unveiled in Stans
1866 Monument to the Battle of Neuenegg (French invasion of 1798)
1876 Battle of Morat commemorated (1476)
1876 Extensive renovations to the *Tellskapelle* on the Vierwaldstättersee
1881 400th Anniversary of the “Stanser Verkommnis” celebrated
1886 Battle of Sempach commemorated (1386)
1886 Monument to the Battle of Grauholz (French defeat of Bern in 1798)
1888 Battle of Näfels commemorated (1388)
1889 Battle of Laupen commemorated (1339)
1891 600th Anniversary of the founding of the *Eidgenossenschaft* celebrated
1895 Kissling’s *Telldenkmal* unveiled in Altdorf

8. Translation from the *Urner Wochenblatt* (p.37)

Altar and heart of Switzerland are for the Swiss people: the peaceful country by the lake, the market in Altdorf, the *Tellspalte*, the *Hohle Gasse*. We don't need to search out others and let academics decide whether the *Bundesbrief* of 1291 was drawn up in Brunnen or in Schwyz. We don't want to let them decide, the stars above the Rütli in the winter months of 1307 and the flames of the burning castles on New Years day, 1308.

9. Translation of the response to the Rütli monument proposal (p.40)

So long as members of the *Eidgenossenschaft* continue to think as they so today — when every upright man, as he passes the Rütli by boat for the first time, disembarks and respectfully observes the place where the League was sworn that laid the foundations of Helvetia's liberty, and that every time thereafter when he should pass by, he blesses his forefathers, thanks God, rejoices in his freedom and feels himself free — then we have no need of a stone monument. And if, what is not to be hoped, their sons of grandsons should loose this feeling, then such a monument...would help very little.

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