 Greece Reawakening
Germanic Hellenism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

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Abstract

In 1764 Johann Joachim Winckelmann published his famous work, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, in which he named the dominant characteristics of Greek art to be "noble simplicity and serene greatness." This marked a revolution in German thought in the late 18th century that continued into the nineteenth century. What followed was a period in literature known as classical, but this neo-Hellenism was based on the works of Winckelmann and his followers rather than ancient Greece. This paper explores Germany in the late 18th century through the nineteenth century which led to this artistic idealism of faraway, ancient Greece and in what ways this "tyranny of Greece over Germany" effected some of the key authors of this period. The historical and cultural aspects of Germany in the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century and personal motivations of the authors which led to this artistic idealism of faraway, ancient Greece will be discussed.
1. Introduction

There was something inherently romantic in the German classical movement with its backward-gazing, dreaming eyes focused on a Greece that never was on sea or land.

-E.M. Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany

The great irony of eighteenth and nineteenth century German Hellenism is that much of the writing, many of the ideologies and many of the interpretations produced during the period were not very classical. The German Hellenists were exalting and imitating a Greece that never was, a lost paradise of order serenity, and unity which was based largely on Roman copies of the Greek works and the visions of a few renowned writers. Though only a dream, German Classicism was a powerful dream, rich in individual talents and cultural urges.

German Hellenism, like most literary movements, was a product of its time. Unlike later movements in Germany such as Naturalism, which dealt with hardship by focussing on the problems of the world, the writers of the German classical period employed a sort of philosophical escapism. The classical authors were not revolutionaries; on the contrary, despite their desire for freedom, they were largely anti-revolutionary and cherished order and harmony above all else. Since these attributes were difficult to find in Europe during their lifetime, they constructed their own utopia out of pieces of marble and poetic verse leftover from the golden age of Greece. It was a Greece so idealistic that it could never have stood on land, yet it flourished in the soils on German minds.
2. Historical and Cultural Background

Since the suffering we have endured and the actions we have performed leave an indelible imprint on our face, it is not surprising if every work or achievement which may result from our struggling bears the same imprint.

-Goethe, from Essays on Art and Literature

Eighteenth century Germany was by no means a nation with a strong cultural identity or a stable political environment. After the Thirty Years War (1618-48), Germany was desolated and depopulated. The lack of prosperity created a decrease in trade and thus Germany's position in art centers was lost. The Holy Roman Empire became little more than an anachronistic holdover from the past and the Emperor was merely a title up until the final fall of the empire in 1806. Germany at this time consisted of around 360 separate and practically independent states. As L.A. Willoughby states in his book Classical Age of German Literature 1748-1805, "there disappeared also the last vestige of German patriotism. There existed no consciousness of nationality."

With the foreign military invasions came the baroque influences which according to E. M. Butler, the author of The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, "nearly choked the life out of poetry." The work of the baroque poets was based

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on religious doctrines and the forms derived from Latin and Renaissance rhetoric. The baroque dramas catered to the nobility and aristocracy, the majority of whom still considered their native language and literature inferior to French. This attitude continued even into the time of Goethe, when Friedrich William I said of Goethe, Lessing, Schiller and their contemporaries, "to convince yourself of the bad taste that reigns in Germany, you have only to frequent the theater..."

A strong literary tradition cannot exist without a fluid language and in the eighteenth century very little emphasis was put on the development of the German language. With few exceptions, secondary schools did not teach German as a separate subject until the end of the eighteenth century and German literature was not taught until the beginning of the nineteenth. Latin was the language of education and French the language of nobility, while German was considered simply barbarous. Due to the fragmented development of the language Germany did not possess a strong literary tradition. According to T.J. Reed in the article "The Goethezeit and its Aftermath," Germany thus lacked a literature of which she could be proud (just as she lacked a unified nationhood - the two things are not wholly unconnected) at a time when other countries show not just single major works but thriving literary traditions." This insecurity caused the Germans to try again and again to create a new literature and to some

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degree explains the aesthetic emphasis of movements in the eighteenth century such as the Classical Period.

The early eighteenth century was still greatly influenced by foreign literature as Gottsched took up the work done around a hundred years before by his predecessors in the Renaissance. He questioned neither the classics nor their French interpretations as he went about banning the seventeenth century melodrama, which was taken from the English, and establishing a new German stage based on the French model. For the next forty years French theater dominated the German stage with the principles of the *tragedie classique*: ideale Ferne (remoteness), belle et noble passion (beautiful and noble passion), and above all the idea that theater was only for the nobility. This final notion was exhibited in German drama through the eighteenth century.  

The rococo verse of writers such as Klopstock and Wieland also appeared in the early eighteenth century. The main characteristic of rococo poetry was the tendency to control and subdue emotions. The poets avoided the grand and heroic in their works and when evil or ugliness were mentioned at all, they were presented as humorous. Although the rococo poets offered a pleasing alternative to the harsh baroque literature of the seventeenth century, their themes were very limited and the writing quickly seemed artificial and devoid of real emotion.

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The use of classical themes in Europe was neither new nor original in the eighteenth century. Allusions to classical myth and literature as well as pure adaptations of classical stories were prevalent in British and French literature for hundreds of years previous to the writings of Winckelmann and German literature followed the vogue. While French literature was considered to be at least the near equal of Greek and Latin, the German writers were largely producing mere reproductions of the French works. Although authors like Gottsched, Klopstock, and Wieland began creating literature written in the German language, which earned some international acclaim, their works were based on French and British models.

Even while the classical themes were popular in German literature, general knowledge of the classics was lacking, especially in the realm of classical Greek literature. The teaching of Greek had become limited to the translation of the New Testament. According to Wolfgang Leppmann in his biography of Winckelmann, "For the Protestant clergy, being able to read the New Testament in the original was a matter of privilege, so much that doubting the excellence of Koine Greek - for example, by comparing it on a philological basis with the language of the great dramatists and historiographers - would have been tantamount to questioning Holy Writ itself." Latin was also a language of the church. For centuries Latin was considered the superior of the two classical languages. This was naturally not believed unanimously among all German writers. Winckelmann's teacher in Berlin, Christian Tobias Damm, had been one of the firsts to proclaim the superiority of Greek literature over the Roman. However, he attempted to use Homer's writings as proof of monotheism, making

the ridiculous claim that the Greek gods presented in the Iliad and the Odyssey were truly mere symbolization of the many aspects of the one God.\textsuperscript{13} While Greek education suffered, Latin flourished.

In a world of political upheaval, national insecurity, and artistic degradation people are reduced to their hope. It was the time to reject the imitation of French and British literature and create a tradition that was German. For the Hellenistic authors salvation was found in the classical period, a place and time very unlike eighteenth century Germany where one could battle with personal demons as well as the modern Zeitgeist.

3. Winckelmann

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) has been viewed as both a visionary and a fanatic. Most likely he was both, but there can be no dispute that his writings on the nature of ancient art and culture were the single most important influence on German literature in the latter half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Winckelmann built a splendid paradise of order, beauty, harmony and all that was missing from eighteenth century Europe and he named it ancient Greece. Furthermore his utopia was based on a real place which had existed and the monuments of which were still standing. It was Winckelmann's Greece, not the Greece archaeologists and scholars have come to know, that inspired Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and numerous other German writers.

The factors contributing to Winckelmann's need for the kindred spirit he thought he found in Greece were largely historical and the result of dissatisfaction with his homeland. At the age of 30 he accepted a position as librarian to Count Bünau at Castle Nöthnitz near Dresden and brought with him a burning hatred for Prussia and complete disgust for the popular baroque which were to influence his works on Greek art and helped to form his personal
views for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{14} He was further influenced by the humanism that spread through Europe during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{15} For Winckelmann there were two main things which created human happiness - freedom and friendship - and in the culture of the Greeks both were represented at their fullest. He was also a product of his personal environment. Winckelmann was born into extreme poverty and the discrepancy between his financial situation and his lofty ambition drove him even further. Although not a very pious man, Winckelmann studied theology at the University of Halle, because that discipline was heavily funded by the state and the church, and he would have otherwise lacked the means to pursue higher education.\textsuperscript{16}

Winckelmann's ideas were for the most part not original and many of them have been discredited. Winckelmann's contributions to art history were more in the line of method and style. He (along with Lessing) was the first to be labeled classic in style rather than theme.\textsuperscript{17} Most importantly Winckelmann brought a fresh approach to art criticism which was based on culture, history and geography of the area. The conclusions he drew about ancient art and culture were used for another fifty years after he wrote.\textsuperscript{18} This ability to analyze an object not only by it's proper place and temporal range, but by a myriad of different contributing factors is still used by archaeologists today, even if knowledge and technology have progressed far beyond what they were in Winckelmann's day.\textsuperscript{19} Even more than his actual conclusions, it was Winckelmann's passion that made

\textsuperscript{17}U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, History of Classical Scholarship. Tr. Alan Harris (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 96.
\textsuperscript{18}See Wolfgang Leppmann, 123.
\textsuperscript{19}See Wolfgang Leppmann, 85.
his writings not only a success, but also an inspiration to his followers. "The novelty of Winckelmann's approach lies in the fact that he not only looked, and invariably looked closer than others, but entered into the spirit of the work..."

Winckelmann rejected the idea that the Greeks had a monopoly on philosophy, but believed rather that they possessed something more important - aesthetics. For Winckelmann this was about more than just pleasing impressions; the aesthetic properties of Greek art were an educational, moral force, which could cleanse one's soul of imperfections and impurities. It is this characteristic of the Greek sculpture in particular, which led him to make his most famous claim: "The only way for us to become great, if it is even possible, is through the imitation of the ancients." Winckelmann believed that the imitation of the Greeks was a shorter and possibly better path to understanding perfect beauty than the imitation of nature. This is not to say that Winckelmann believed that it was necessary to simply copy Greek art and forms, as the Germans had been doing with the works of the French and the English, but rather they should reproduce the spirit of the Greeks in their own creations.

The overriding qualities of Winckelmann's Greece were "edle Einfalt und stille Grösse" (noble simplicity and quiet grandeur) as he states in his first work Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und

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21See Wolfgang Leppman, 154.
Bildhauerkunst, which was first published in 1755. What this meant to Winckelmann could perhaps be best expressed in his descriptions of the famous Laocoon statue, which interpreted and reinterpreted again and again by his followers:

The depths of the sea are always calm, however wild and stormy the surface; and in the same way the expression in Greek figures reveals greatness and composure of the soul in the throes of whatever passions. This spirit is depicted in Laocoon's face, and not in the face alone, in spite of the most violent sufferings... this pain, I say, nevertheless does not express itself with any violence either in the face, or in the position as a whole... Laocoon suffers; but he suffers like Sophocles Philoctetes; his misery pierces us to the soul; but we should like to be able to bear anguish in the same manner as this great man.

Winckelmann goes on to contrast this supposedly Greek version of the Laocoon (the statue which Winckelmann saw and now stands in the Vatican Museum is now known to be a Roman copy of the Greek original) with the description in Virgil's Aeneid. In the Aeneid Laocoon struggles and screams out in terror as the serpents devour him and his two sons. "While with both hands he fought to break the knots, Drenched in slime, his head-bands black with venom, Sending to heaven his appalling cries... Winckelmann saw this as definitive proof of the Greek superiority over the Romans, because he interpreted this difference in

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portrayals as a testament to the Greeks' ability to endure suffering with calm dignity.\textsuperscript{30}

Winckelmann wrote in his \textit{Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums} (1764), "It is not enough to say that something is beautiful; one should also know to what extent and for what reason it is so."\textsuperscript{31} Beginning with his first work \textit{Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke}, Winckelmann searched for these answers while working from a premise that he continued to develop in all his later works. He believed that the Greek ideal was a direct product of the environment in this one moment of history. Following the ideas of his mentor Montesquieu\textsuperscript{32}, Winckelmann states that the beauty of Greek art was greatly influenced by the extreme beauty of the Greek peoples.\textsuperscript{33} This was a result of the warm, sunny, yet moderate climate of Greece as well as the Greek stress upon athletics, which made for strong, lean bodies.\textsuperscript{34} The ancient art also a product of the freedom the Greeks enjoyed, both politically and mentally. "Finally because there appeared times of complete and freedom in Greece, the art was also more free and more sublime."\textsuperscript{35}

The classical period of Greece for Winckelmann was not so much a historical climax as a hiatus. As Alex Potts states in his book \textit{Flesh and Ideal}, "It seems that


\textsuperscript{34}J. Wincklemann, 10 -11.

\textsuperscript{35}Translation by author from Ludwig Uhlig ed., \textit{Griechenland als Ideal} (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 43.
the ideal can fully come into being only if the forces of history necessary to its formation are briefly suspended.\textsuperscript{36} Winckelmann's praises for the Greeks did not reach to their contemporary neighbors; on the contrary he was repelled by most of it. He found Etruscan art dour and superstitious, an attitude which he claimed was handed down from their descendants.\textsuperscript{37} Egyptian art was also imperfect due to unfortunate natural and social circumstances and he found their culture generally pessimistic and unenthusiastic.\textsuperscript{38}

It is interesting that Winckelmann despite his praise and exaltation of the Laocoon and similar works, he ignored those images, which might contradict his classical ideal. One such work is the Marsyas, which depicts the satyr the work is named for with his hands tied above him to a tree.\textsuperscript{39} In the myth Marsyas is about to be tortured after losing a contest with Apollo, an image that is neither noble nor beautiful.\textsuperscript{40} This ability to disregard those aspects of Greece, which did not adhere to their idealized view, was not only typical Winckelmann, but also German Hellenism as a whole.

\textsuperscript{36} (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994), 19
\textsuperscript{38}See Martin Bernal, Black Athena. vol. 1. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 213.
\textsuperscript{39}See Simon Richter, Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 34.
\textsuperscript{40}See Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, Classical Mythology Ed. 5 (New York: Longman Publishers, 1995), 187-188.
4. Lessing and Herder

But all bodies exist not only in space but also in time. They have continued duration, and in every moment of their duration may assume a different appearance and stand in a different relation. Each of these momentary appearances and relations is the effect of a proceeding and cause of a subsequent action.

-Lessing, Laocoon

The brand of Hellenism, which Winckelmann started, was continued and developed in the works of both Lessing and Herder. While their influence on the German classical movement itself were not as monumental Winckelmann’s, their voices echo in the later classical works and any discussion of the German Hellenism phenomenon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would be incomplete without them.

"While Winckelmann sacrificed truth to beauty, Lessing sacrificed his life to truth," states E.M. Butler in her book The Tyranny of Greece over Germany. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729-1781) main contribution to the classical movement was a direct reaction to Winckelmann’s ideas. In Laocoon or The Boundaries between Painting and Poetry (1776), Lessing makes clear his bias towards poetry as a form of expression, but goes on to state that both literature and art become unnatural and degrading if they are not separated and the differences between them are not recognized. Unlike Winckelmann, who believed that the Laocoon statue differed from Virgil’s depiction because of Greek superiority, Lessing believed that the nature of the medium made the

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statues silence necessary. Since Virgil was telling a story of action rather than capturing one frozen moment he had an obligation to recount Laocoon's agony. "Noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" were characteristics of art, in this he agreed with Winckelmann, however they did not apply to literature.\(^{42}\)

Whereas Lessing focussed on aesthetics, Johann Friedrich Herder (1744-1803) concentrated on the humanity of Winckelmann's Greece. Inspired by Lessing and at one time both friend and mentor to Goethe, Herder bridges the small gap between Winckelmann's Greece and the Greece of the Goethe governed Classical Period. Herder viewed works of literature as landmarks in the development of human thought and used not only the writing of the Greeks, but also Hebrew, Icelandic, Red Indian and even the old folk-poetry of Germany to follow the spiritual evolution of humankind.\(^{43}\) In Herder's book *Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen: Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, he investigates the rise and fall of nations beginning with the garden of Eden and divides the development of humanity into four stages - childhood, boyhood, youth, and manhood - applying each of these to a specific point in history.\(^{44}\) None of the points of history are interchangeable or recoverable, but the past does influence the future. Herein lies Herder's biggest problem with Winckelmann's idea; although like Winckelmann he agreed that the Greeks were a beautiful culture and in many ways he saw Greece as a lost-paradise, Herder did not believe that imitation of the Greeks was the way to perfection. Since no age could ever reproduce the


\(^{43}\text{See E.M. Butler, 73.}\}

\(^{44}\text{F. McEachran The Life and Philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder \text{ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 34.}\}
circumstances and conditions of another, this goal was not only undesirable, but also impractical.45

Some of Herder’s passages mimic Winckelmann almost to the point of paraphrasing (he even used the same metaphor of the calm sea to describe Greek nature). He also agreed in the inferiority of the Egyptians and the Phoenicians, although he tried to prove again and again that he was not biased in saying this, because these neighbors had influenced Greek culture, they simply had not beautified and perfected it as the Greeks had.46 Herder was however not as convinced of the absolute Greek superiority. He imagined that if one had asked the Egyptians themselves to describe their artwork they might have also used the words "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur." With his Christian perspective, Herder interpreted the Laocoon as a symbol of the suffering of humanity, though he agreed with Winckelmann that the depiction by Virgil did not adequately capture the soul of the dying man. Contrary to Winckelmann he also believed that the Greeks were indeed capable of showing ugliness in their works, but only in a subordinate position to lofty beauty. In the end, Herder was never fully convinced by any of Lessing or Winckelmanns's calls for a rebirth of the ancient Greeks, and he instead preferred the more orthodox view that the gods were merely symbols of the highest types of humanity. As E.M. Butler states, "As a poetically minded man he might grieve for the disappearance of the Greek gods; as a Christian philosopher he had no wish to witness their triumphant return."47

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46See Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism, 88-91.
47E.M. Butler, 79.
5. Goethe

Wenn wir uns dem Altertum gegenüber stellen, und so ernstlich in der Absicht anschauen, uns daran zu bilden, so gewinnen wir die Empfindung als ob wir erst eigentlich zu Menschen würden.

-Goethe, quoted in *Epochen der deutschen Literatur*

After Goethe's death, Heinrich Heine wrote, "One could study the Greek art in his works as if in the works on an ancient."48 In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and for many years to follow Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was considered the German authority on the classics. Goethe's poetry was the manifestation of Winckelmann's hopes for modern art. By his death he had impressed himself as the very image of the Olympian, an image which his contemporaries such as Schiller and Hölderlin were forced to look up to.

In his earlier writings, Goethe used the Greek mythology for ornamentation. Any pagan undertones were of no ideological significance, however they represent a conviction, which was to last Goethe his life - the morality of the ancients was generally saner and more enlightened than Christianity. This idea appears in his Germanic as well as his Hellenic works. During his *Sturm und Drang* period Goethe criticized the modern trend of "Grecizing." However it was the trend itself, not the Greeks he rejected.49

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Following Winckelmann's lead and influenced by the works of Herder and especially Lessing, Goethe's classical poetry embodies the Hellenistic ideal, a world of form, order, and closure, very unlike the volatile environment he lived within. It was a world "disintegrating beneath an ever increasing burden of knowledge and culture."\(^{50}\) It was also a time of political upheaval best characterized by the French Revolution (1789), which had considerable influence over Goethe's ideas and all of Germany. Though he was not surprised by the onset of the revolution in France, Goethe felt hatred and contempt toward the French revolutionaries. He wrote to a friend while visiting the camp at Longwy, "You will have heard of the mad events in Paris; it all grows more and more crazy, so that at last both parties will thank the Powers which restore tranquility, whatever the price."\(^{51}\) By this time (c. 1785) Goethe had lost his *Sturm und Drang*\(^{52}\) conventions of flouting conventions and longed for classical order and harmony, for intellect over emotion.\(^{53}\)

In the years directly before Goethe's Italian journey, his writings became far more Christian and conventional even when the subjects were decidedly classical, as in the case of *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Wilhelm Meister*. This is the result of a variety of factors including his responsibilities as statesmen at that time and his liaison with Charlotte von Stein.\(^{54}\) In *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787), Goethe, like the heroine,


\(^{52}\)For more information on the *Sturm und Drang* period see L.A. Willoughby, *The Classical Age of German Literature 1748-1805* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 66-89.


attempts "Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchen"\textsuperscript{55} (to search for the land of the Greeks with the soul. Many aspects of this drama are the same ones that Winckelmann cherished - quiet, calm, pure, noble. Goethe's representation of this story differs in many ways from that told by the Greek Euripides. In order to create the Greece he wanted Goethe worked from the "tranquil" classical statues and Winckelmann's interpretations and disregarded the uncontrollable torment, which effects the characters in Euripedes' version. It was as if Goethe dispelled the savage gods, which had no place in the neo-Hellenistic Greece, by allowing Iphigenie to escape from the curse of her ancestors.\textsuperscript{56} Goethe himself later said that Iphigenie auf Tauris was the product of insufficient knowledge about the Greeks, and if had he known more, it would have never been written.\textsuperscript{57}

Goethe was never a very accomplished classical scholar, although he read Greek avidly and recognized kindred spirits in authors such as Homer and Aeschylus. Goethe, along with Schiller, delighted in the "natural, free verse" of Pindar, unaware of the elaborate meters the poet used.\textsuperscript{58} It is often said that Goethe's classical life was a constant struggle between his intellectual desire for order and the pressures of his creative "daimon". In this respect Goethe is often viewed as a human battle ground between the classical and Faustian aspects of his being.\textsuperscript{59} Goethe himself confessed to a daimonic element, which at times pushed him against his will.\textsuperscript{60} His writing can be seen as the reflection of this

\textsuperscript{57}E.M. Butler, 130.
\textsuperscript{58}See Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 71.
\textsuperscript{59}See Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism, 95.
internal struggle. For the Greeks there was no separation between nature and mankind, but Goethe did not have the comfort of such a worldview. This fragmented world was responsible for the dualism he found within himself. Goethe saw around him the disjointed, the Faustian, yet longed for the unity he found in the ancients. His classical works served as an aesthetic construct of the harmony that was missing from the modern world.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1786 Goethe fled to Italy following his "daimon" without telling any of his closest friends. Whatever his reasons, it seems that Goethe's trip to the South did much to inspire him and relieve the gloominess of the North. Many of Goethe's convictions that remained with him most of his life were founded during this voyage. He immersed himself in Winckelmann's writings and was touched by Winckelmann's recounts of his experiences in Rome.\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{Italian Journey} portrays Goethe's varied interests in everything from science and art to life in Italy. In Paestum he visited the Doric temples and found them at first too austere. He found the landscapes of Sicily more typically classical. Inspired by the Odyssey, Goethe made plans to write the drama \textit{Nausikaa}, which other than a few lines and sketches, was never finished.\textsuperscript{63} The statues of the Olympians became more than symbols in Goethe's mind and exercised considerable influence over his thoughts as actualities. He remarked once, "These noble figures were a sort of esoteric anecdote whenever the weak, the false, the


\textsuperscript{62Henry Hatfield Aesthetic Paganism, 96; E.M. Butler, 108.}

\textsuperscript{63Henry Hatfield Aesthetic Paganism, 99. E.M. Butler, 112.}
mannered threatened to get power over me." For Goethe, the Greek gods were forces much like nature personified by human imagination. The only natural form was the classical and herein lie the problem with the modern world: "They represented existence, we usually the effect; they described the ghastly, we in a ghastly way; they the agreeable, we agreeably..."

Goethe returned to Italy two more times. Before his second trip in 1787, he finished several plays including *Egmont* and *Tasso* and worked on *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust*. This period in Italy was not a creative time for Goethe in the realm of literature. He busied himself with painting and scientific observation. In 1795 he published the *Roman Elegies*, a collection of poems diametrically opposite in style to *Iphigenie's* stoic classicism. This was Goethe's first attempt to write objectively like a Greek and the poems were obviously inspired by his stay in Italy. "Here on classical soil now I stand, inspired and elated/ Past and present speak plain charm me as never before (Roman Elegy V)"

In 1790 Goethe was in Italy again. While the Elegies focus on glorifying the beautiful the *Venetian Epigrams* reveal disappointment he experienced during this time. This disillusionment is largely a result of the French Revolution; Goethe found the masses beneath him and the aristocracy too dull. The contentment that he felt during his first visit to Italy was lost, and may have never been regained had he not met the acquaintance of another poet who could understand and share his pains.

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65Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism, 103.
"You have provided me with a second youth and have turned me once more into the poet I had practically ceased to be." Goethe wrote to Schiller in 1798, five years after they started the friendship that was possibly the salvation of Goethe's poetic career. Through Schiller Goethe realized that in attempting to recreate Greece and bring order to the modern day world, his ideas had become abstract and he must now return to emotion. After years of basing his Greek ideals on Roman models, he began studying the works of the Greeks to learn exactly how they were written. During this period he finished *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* and wrote *Hermann und Dorothea*, which was to be a model of classical form against the revolutionary disorder of the day. Goethe blamed his difficulties on the Christian pedantry of the period. The poem "Bride of Corinth" illustrates these sentiments in its obvious criticism of Christian asceticism.

In 1799 Goethe turned one last time to Winckelmann and his works. He decided that a literary monument should be erected to his processor and began making sketches for *Winckelmann and his Age* (1805). When this eulogy was finally published, he began to complain that he wanted to be done with Winckelmann and all his works and he later repeated this phrase. The sun had set on Goethe's dream of a new golden age. As E.M. Butler states, "There was nothing for it now but to make the best of the world he lived in; for the hope that it could be refashioned by pouring the spirit of modern life into a classical mould was dead." Goethe would not be the last to break under the pressure of Winckelmann's potent vision.

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6. Schiller

Wo jetzt nur, wie unsre Weisen sagen,
Seelenlos ein Feuerball sich dreht,
Lenkte damals seinen goldnen Wagen
Helios in stiller Majestät.

- Schiller, "Die Götter Griechenlandes"

In the mind of Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) Greece and Goethe were linked inextricably. Schiller's Hellenistic period blossomed during his relationship with the great Olympian. Goethe and Greece together formed the standard, which Schiller time and again would feel pressured to live up to. Greece had very little importance at all in Schiller's works up until the mid 1780's and even then the forms were heavily influenced by Wieland and Ovid and more rococo than classical. 71 Had it not been for the influence of Goethe it is very unlikely that Schiller would have ever delved into Winckelmann's Greece.

While Winckelmann's influence is still clear in the ideas of Schiller, by the time Schiller fully entered into the realm of Germanic Hellenism, he received the vision as it had been filtered through the minds of Lessing, Herder, Goethe among others. Schiller followed many of Winckelmann's descriptions including that of the Laocoon proclaiming Greek art as the representation of ideal suffering and beauty, however he does not specifically name the author or the statue.72 He found the main characteristics of Greek art to be severe beauty and stern moral

72See Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, 127.
dignity. This idea was to form one of Schiller's main aesthetic philosophies, in which he claimed that the problems of the modern world would be solved with the help of aesthetic education. The Greeks were to be the great educators. In his collection of letters titled Über die aesthetische Erziehung des Menshen (1795) Schiller describes this relationship between the ancient and the modern. "The Greeks shame us not only through their simplicity; they are also are companions, often our model of excellence, with which we bring comfort to the abnormality of our customs." He also appreciated the humanity of the Greeks as seen in the athletic emphasis of the Greek games in contrast to the later, gory gladiatorial games. He held the Greek deities above the Oriental gods, believing that anthropomorphism was indicative of Humanität. Yet Schiller was constantly torn between the optimistic and the tragic in his explanations of the world and the idealized Greece of Winckelmann would never fully satisfy him.

"Schöne Wesen aus dem Fabelland... Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben, Muss im Leben untergehen." (Lovely beings from a fabled land... what shall live immortal in song must perish in life). This line from Schiller's poem "Die Götter Griechenlandes" shows in short his view on the Greeks. Although it is undeniable that the world has become bleak and gloomy, the gods of Greece were never real to Schiller and their return was impossible. In his collection of letters titled Über die aesthetische Erziehung des Menshen (1795) Schiller states that the Greeks lost their unity and harmony as knowledge increased and this he, like Goethe, believed was also the problem with the modern world.

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73See Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 128-129
75See Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism 131.
In the poem "Die Künstler" Schiller allows the Greeks their importance an exemplary culture, but he questions their place in the development mankind. Though Schiller found the Greeks to be the authority in every other branch of art, he questioned their superiority in the realm of tragedy. He criticized Greek tragedy for its use of divine intervention. Neither the religion nor the philosophy of the ancients had allowed them to conquer tragic emotion; this was to be the domain of the moderns. In his earlier attempts at tragedy, Schiller discovered that rendering this type of blind fate was difficult in a modern work and moreover humiliating for humanity. Yet his studies convinced him that fate was the main characteristic in tragedy. He found that the modern nemesis of guilt could be used in place of the ancient fate, but Schiller had trouble completely reconciling the ancient tragedy and its counterpart in the modern world and this fueled many of his dramatic productions as well as the essay "The Art of Tragedy." 78

This struggle between Schiller and the Greeks is responsible for the essay "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung" (1795/1796) and most of his philosophy. This work, which was largely inspired by his friendship with Goethe, outlines the differences between the ancient poetry, which he viewed as naive, and the modern, the sentimental. "They experience naturally; we experience the natural.... Our sense of nature is like the feelings some one who is ill has towards health."79 Schiller had come to see the Greek tragedians as naive and, unlike Goethe and Winckelmann, he viewed this as a weakness:

78See E.M. Butler, 178-180, 189-197.
79Translation by author from Griechenland als Ideal. ed. Ludwig Uhlig (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 120.
In that the naive poet follows simply nature and feeling and limits himself to the imitation of reality, he can only have a single relation to the matter at hand... The other (the sentimental poet) contemplates the impression... The sentimental poet therefore always handles two conflicting images and feelings - the reality as a boundary and the idea as something infinite.\(^8\)

Though he sincerely praised Greek poetry, he also saw the harshness and coldness of its tone. His take on Winckelmann's "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" was the "bold simplicity and quiet innocence" which the moderns were to strive towards.\(^8\) The harmony which mankind lacked could not be achieved through imitation, but rather man must boldly strive to surpass both ancient and modern.

In a letter to Goethe written as early as 1794 Schiller already saw some of the problems of Goethe recreating Greece. Despite Goethe's "Greek spirit", he was from the north and therefore was forced to recreate Greece from within.\(^8\) In his later years Schiller had more or less surrendered any hope or desire of imitating the ancients. Though he praised the simpleness of Winckelmann's pantheon and their world far away from conflict and sorrow, they remained for Schiller an unattainable ideal. An ideal which he suffered with resentment, because he never could live up to it.

\(^8\)Translation by author from Griechenland als Ideal. ed. Ludwig Uhlig (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 128-129.

\(^8\)Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 132.

\(^8\)See Henry Hatfield, 132-133
7. Hölderlin

Aber Freund! Wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter.
Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.

-Hölderlin, "Brot und Wein"

In the annals of German literature Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) is often lost in the shadow of Goethe and Schiller and yet he was perhaps the most intense and passionate of the Hellenistic writers. Though he tried to free himself from the Greeks, fearing for his creative originality and his mind, Hölderlin was caught in the spell of the Greeks until his mental demise with a religiousness the other authors would find difficult to comprehend. Hölderlin lived for his dreams and when he was forced to give up his dreams, he died.

Goethe and Schiller themselves openly rejected Hölderlin’s works and though he had written a great deal, Hölderlin spent most of his life in poverty.83 He was most likely the superior of both authors in his classical scholarship. His dissertation was titled "A History of Art under the Greeks", which was a slightly less sophisticated reproduction of Winckelmann’s work.84 This quote from his novel Hyperion (1797), which takes place in post-classical Greece, about the origins of Greek culture also, seems to be a response to the works of Winckelmann and Herder. "One man says that the climate created it; another says it was the art and the philosophy; another, the religion and the form of government. But whoever tells me that the climate is responsible for all of this,

84E.M. Butler, 208.
Hölderlin was raised under Christianity, but at the university he began to follow the idea of Kant which led to the study of Schiller and Plato. He was in fact so influenced by Schiller's work that it amounted to an obsession. This obsession proved detrimental to Hölderlin, because despite their short lived intimacy, during which Hölderlin ceased to write, Schiller was less than supportive of his admirer. What's more, Schiller had rejected Hölderlin's most important belief - the return of the Greek gods.

Whether or not Hölderlin was by definition polytheistic depends on who is telling his story. He was raised Christian and pressured by a devout mother to keep that faith, and in many ways he did. At the same time the Greek gods were more than symbols to Hölderlin. In the poem "Die scheinheiligen Dichter" he criticizes those poets who used the Greek pantheon as mere ornamentation in their writing. "You cold hypocrites, do not speak from the gods! / You have knowledge! You don't believe in Helios..." The reason it is difficult to classify Hölderlin as either Christian or pagan is that he himself could not have made such a decision. Indeed he devoted most of his life and many of his poems attempting to reconcile the two contrasting beliefs.

The idea of Greece's golden age was unbearable, unless there was hope of her return. This was what Schiller had taken away from him and it was returned by his love of a woman named Susette Gontard. Susette, who is represented by the character Diotima in Hölderlin's novel Hyperion, was a married woman who made Hölderlin's acquaintance when he came to tutor for her children in 1795.

The two were never lovers in the physical sense, but through their intimacy and Susette's inspiration Hölderlin regained his vision of Greece reborn in all her glory.\footnote{E.M Butler, The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany (1935. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 117-120.}

In many poems Hölderlin depicts the ultimate god as nature, a deity caught between the Christian god and Homer's "father of gods and men." Hölderlin's Greek pantheon was closely linked to nature, but they were not simply symbolization for aspects of nature; the gods were aware.\footnote{E. M. Butler, 148-149.} He did not believe that men could become divine. This is seen in the story Empedokles. When the main character of the novel thinks himself a god, he exhibits hubris and therefore receives punishment.\footnote{See E.M. Butler, 148; Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 154.} In the novel Hyperion the heroes greatest sin is not believing in the rebirth of Greece, and this expresses the author's own belief. Though Hölderlin did not believe one man alone could bring back the gods, he also thought that he was acting as an instrument of their return and that he would witness their second-coming before his death.\footnote{See E.M. Butler, 223; Henry Hatfield, 153.}

About the time that Hölderlin had ended relationships with both Schiller and Diotima and was spiritually alone, his relationship with his mother became more stressful. Though she pressured him about his Christianity and had hoped that he would join the clergy, the stress came mostly from Hölderlin's internal struggle. The Greek gods were Hölderlin's best kept secret from his mother and he hoped and often believed that their religions were ultimately one and the
same. Among the poems which illustrate this internal struggle the one titled "Brot und Wein" stands out. This attempt to reconcile the two belief systems is a strange mix of Christian and Greek elements, although the Greeks are still dominant. Whether or not such a synthesis worked even in Hölderlin's mind becomes clear in a later poem "The Only One." "I saw in the middle of the spirits, the ancients, the heroes, the gods. Why do you stay away? And now my soul is full of sorrow... But I know it is my own fault! Because, oh Christ, I am too dependent on you." Hölderlin has in at least some way given up on the Greek gods.

Hölderlin's last poem "Patmos" marks the end of Hölderlin's hope and the beginning of his death. The last several years of Hölderlin's life he was plagued by dementia praecox (schizophrenia). Though his spiritual conflict was probably largely a symptom of his disease, it almost appears as if the inability to reconcile the Christian and Olympian deities drove him insane. The poem begins "So near and so hard to grasp is God" and echoes his sorrowful surrender of ever seeing the return of the Greek gods or the image of the Christian god. For a long time after the illness took hold, he was pacified only by Homer and the family hired someone to read to him. He spoke at times in a garbled mixture of German, Latin and Greek and the only subjects he appeared to discuss coherently were Oedipus and the Greeks. Later he became irritated with his lost love of the Greeks and the very mention of all things classical was forbidden. As E.M. Butler says, "His spirit, when called upon to renounce the dream by which it

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93 Friedrich Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke. ed. Paul Stapf (Berlin: Der Tempel-Verlag, 1956), 327
94 Friedrich Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke, 328.
lived, renounced the dream and died. With Hölderlin vanished Winckelmann's Greece. He was the last of the German Hellenists to experience this tradition first-hand through acquaintances with the other authors. More importantly he was the last whose writing was about more than nostalgia; he was the last to believe.

96E.M. Butler, 238.
Conclusion

Thus the Greeks, the most humane men of ancient times, have a trait of cruelty, a tigerish lust to annihilate.

-Nietzsche, Homer's Contest

Winckelmann's vision of Greece inspired the passionate, sentimental Classical Period in German literature, but to what end? Lessing and Herder benefited from Winckelmann's gift and furthered their own careers through the development of his ideas. On the other hand, Goethe, Schiller, and Hölderlin all suffered under the strength and glory of this ideal, which they could never bring into being. These authors are only a sample of those who fell under the spell of the Grecian utopia, and while this particular strain of German Hellenism may have ended with Hölderlin, Winckelmann's voice echoes in the works of Heinrich Heine, Heinrich Schliemann, and Friedrich Nietzsche to name a few.

Whatever the personal effects, the German Classical period was a prosperous time for German literature. It marked the beginning of a national literary tradition in Germany, which was not merely a shadow of French or British works. Was Greece then truly Germany's tyrant, as some have said, or her salvation? There is a common theme in the lives of all of these authors; they were dissatisfied with themselves or, more accurately, it was not enough for them to be German in a time when such a national identity was hard to define. There is no other explanation for creating a national literature out of the ruins of a foreign past. So they escaped to the far off Mediterranean and, by their definitions alone, they instead became Greek.
Selected Bibliography


