

GOETHE AND THE CLASSICAL IDEAL

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This thesis was written to examine Goethe's efforts to emulate the Greeks and write in their spirit. Works most helpful in the study were Humphry Trevelyan's Goethe and the Greeks, Henry Hatfield's Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, Eliza Butler's The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, and the works of Goethe which show his relationship with the Greeks.

The thesis opens with an examination of the nature and the philosophical implications of Goethe's emulation of the Greeks. Next Johann Winckelmann, the founder of German Classical Hellenism is discussed. Winckelmann was exceedingly important in the founding and development of Goethe's Classical Hellenism, for Winckelmann established a vision of Greece which influenced generations of German poets and scholars. The third chapter examines Goethe's perusal of Greek and Roman literature.

Chapter IV deals with Goethe's conceptions of the Greeks during his youth. Goethe's earliest conceptions of the Greeks were colored not only by Winckelmann's Greek vision but also by the Storm and Stress movement. Goethe's Storm and Stress conception of the Greeks emphasized the violent, titanic forces of ancient Greece. Although Goethe's earlier studies had made the Apollonian aspects of Greek culture overshadow the

Dionysian aspects of Greece, he came after 1789 to realize the importance of the Dionysian. To a great extent, this change was a reaction to the superficial interpretation of the Greeks by Rococo Hellenism and its rejection of the Dionysian element.

The next chapter considers Goethe's interpretation under the inspiration of Charlotte von Stein. Goethe's ideas of this period are a fusion of Charlotte's Christian Pietism, eighteenth century humanism, and Winckelmann's Hellenism. While Charlotte inspired Goethe's poetry, she was unable to satisfy his intellectual, artistic demands. After the episode of Charlotte, Goethe went to Italy in 1786. He travelled there in search of pure Hellenism uncontaminated by Modern Christian and Northern elements. He sought his vision of the Greeks in Italy, since Goethe considered Greece and Rome a single entity. Only after he had reached Rome did he begin to draw distinctions between the two dissimilar cultures of Greece and Rome. In Sicily Goethe read Homer in Greek and discovered that the world Homer described was not a fairyland but reality. Homer described natural man living in an ideal environment. During his second stay in Rome in 1788, Goethe rediscovered the significance of the human form and its relation to the cosmos which the Greeks had known. It was also in Italy that Goethe was freed from the spiritual shackles of Christianity and rediscovered pagan Greek morality and religion. Curiously, Goethe refused an invitation to go to Greece itself.

Chapter VII evaluates the influence of Christine Vulpius

upon Goethe's Classical Hellenism. She infused a strong, vigorous, feminine spirit into Goethe's Hellenism and led it to stand in direct opposition to the masculine Hellenism of Winckelmann. Next, the thesis examines the friendship of Goethe and Schiller in relationship to Goethe's classicism. Schiller offered Goethe inspired friendship. He was one of the few great minds of Europe during Goethe's age who both understood and approved of Goethe's classical aspirations. Following this chapter is an examination of the Hellenic works Goethe wrote under Schiller's inspiration and constructive criticism, such as Hermann and Dorothea. Most of these works are approximations of Hellenism, and are a subtle mixture of the Greek and German Weltanschauungen.

The last chapter, the tenth, presents the conclusions of the thesis. It concludes that Goethe's attempt to emulate the Greeks was only partially successful, although it had numerous fruitful results. Goethe's Classical Hellenism, while it does have some significance for scholarship, was intended for other poets and philosophers. Goethe did rediscover through the Greeks the significance of the human form and its relation to the cosmos. Goethe blazed a trail for the German neo-Hellenic movement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's pursuit of what will be called the Classical Ideal—that is, his attempt to imitate, emulate, and embody the essence of classical Greece. At a cursory glance it appears exceedingly difficult to find any central theme in Goethe's long life, which bridged the world of the Enlightenment and the modern world of the nineteenth century. Thomas Mann, for example, argues that Goethe permitted himself unlimited and indefinable liberty, the liberty of Proteus, which slips away into all forms, demands to know everything, and to exist in every form. Goethe's spiritual evolution contained elements and partial realizations of classicism and romanticism, Christianity and paganism, the ancien régime and Americanism, Protestantism and Catholicism. He fulfilled all of them with a kind of sovereign infidelity which took pleasure in deserting all followers, in confusing the disciples of every belief by exhausting it—and its antithesis as well. His spiritual evolution was something like world sovereignty in the form of irony and the unconcerned betrayal of one belief to the other, a profound indifference that was unwilling to analyze and evaluate. There was in Goethe something impish which avoids precise definition,

a factor of ambiguity, of negation, of all-encompassing doubt.¹

Despite Goethe's chameleon nature, his life must be seen as a spiritual and organic unity. Goethe refused to see himself as a mere dilettante whose impressions, sentiments, and ideas passed over his consciousness like waves over the sea. He selected and gathered whatever his experiences offered him. Goethe harvested from the real depths of his substance, from the sum of his ideas; he formed what he found chaotic, he triumphed over dissonance and transitory contradictions. He arranged in concentric circles his successive acquisitions, thus enlarging the scope of his personality, whose center, the will that remained vital and directed its action, endured, always fixed in place like the common center of rings, even when they were drawn ad infinitum. His power of empathy did not degenerate into the negation of his personality; he was not absorbed by every object and reduced to an indifferent and shapeless fluidity. But he lost himself in a new object of love and emerged from it transfigured, broadened, the master of new aspects and potentialities. He became more personal and solid than ever, as if he had emerged from an invigorating bath of energy, intelligence, and youth.²

Thus Goethe's diverse activities and numerous seemingly

¹Thomas Mann, Last Essays, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 125.

²José E. Rodó, The Motives of Proteus, trans. Angel Flores (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1928), pp. 193-195.

contradictory phases of development must not be viewed as the mere sporadic and disjointed works of a dilettante but as a unified whole.

It is my contention that Goethe's entire life was a constant quest for form, objectivity, youth, harmony, and wholeness. He sought a life of harmony, a life style for modern man that was identical with the Laws of Nature. This endeavor was similar to that of the Enlightenment, but there was one major exception. Instead of abstracting his standards from Reason, Goethe turned instead to the spiritual-organic unity of antiquity—especially the Greeks. Thus Goethe's imitation, emulation, and attempt to embody the essence of Greek civilization was an attempt to discover and attain the Natural Laws governing not only the cosmos but man. Of all the civilizations and peoples of history to which Goethe might have turned, it may be asked why he chose the Greeks. What made them so vital for his life? Perhaps one need look no further than Goethe's observation that "Among all the peoples, the Greeks have dreamed the dream of life most beautifully."³ But true as this statement is, Goethe's reason was far more complex. Goethe saw the Greeks as a people who had created harmony and order out of chaos, channeled their violence and unstable passions into art, and affirmed life with all of its tragedy

³Frederick Ungar, ed. and trans., Goethe's World View Presented in His Reflections and Maxims (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), p. 171.

and in spite of their deep-seated pessimism.⁴

It is traditional to divide Goethe's life into different phases, in which his classicism dates from his flight to Italy in 1786 until the death of Schiller in 1805—a mere nineteen years.⁵ I shall reject this approach and argue that from Goethe's intellectual awakening in the 1760's until 1786 Goethe was groping for the Classical Ideal, which he did not attain until his Italian journey of 1786-1788, when what I shall call Goethe's Classical Hellenism was born. His Classical Hellenism lasted from 1788 until Goethe finished the final draft of his essay Winckelmann And His Age in 1805. Goethe's period of Classical Hellenism was characterized by a passionate desire to attain the essence of the Greeks in general and Homer in particular. Developing co-existently with Goethe's Classical Hellenism was what I shall call his Weimar Classicism, which one might venture to say is the fruit of Goethe's engagement with the Greeks. When the hard shell of his Classical Hellenism fell away in 1805, Goethe's Weimar Classicism came to the fore. While it did not actively seek a Grecian form, and while it assimilated Oriental cultures (particularly Persian and Chinese) and Medievalism (mostly in the form of a more tolerant understanding of Gothic architecture and the Catholic Church), it remained essentially classical. For Weimar Classicism was

⁴For further discussion see pp. 4-5 and pp. 65-67 below.

⁵Werner Paul Friederich, Philip A. Schelley and Oskar Seidlin, History of German Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1948), pp. 99-101.

characterized by the essential features of classicism, namely: objectivity, a turning towards the external world and rejection of introspection and subjectivity, a quest for Natural Laws, self-limitation, and mastery. It would be erroneous to conclude, however, that after 1805 Goethe is finished with his passionate interest in the Greeks or that they are not uppermost in his mind.⁶

Goethe did not romanticize or sentimentalize the Greeks. He knew that life in ancient Greece had been as savage and banal, as irrational and chaotic as that in any other time or place in the long history of the world. There were savages among the heroes before Troy. But the Greeks had learned to bring order and harmony out of chaos; they had created beauty out of confusion. For Goethe, Helen was the symbol not of the entirety of Greek life but of the highest achievement of the Greeks--the principle of form, or ordered purpose, of self-control and mastery. Wherever in the second half of Faust, Helen's influence is absent, the elemental selfish, aimless, ephemeral forces dominate, and in the end while Helen departs, her spirit of order and rationality lives on in Faust. Nothing could satisfy Faust but unceasing effort to win a measure of order from the chaotic forces of Nature, of which the ocean was a symbol.⁷

⁶Humphry Trevelyan, *Goethe and the Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), pp. 267-268.

⁷Ibid., pp. 282-284.

It swells and surges, rolls and overwhelms
 The desolation of those wasted realms.
 There wave on blind-willed wave, one after one,
 Rules and withdraws—and nothing has been done.
 This could drive me to sheer despair, to sense
 Unpurposed strength of untamed elements!
 My spirit ventures to outfly its sphere: 8
 Here I would fight, achieve my triumph here.

From the moral-aesthetic perspective Goethe sought a Natural Religion and morality. Christianity both in its organized and subjective forms did not greatly appeal to him, for reasons partly intellectual and partly aesthetic. And, far from having an irreligious frame of mind, Goethe, who thought in terms of a Natural Religion, turned to Greek paganism for his morality and artistic inspiration. Goethe found the pagan morality of the Greeks freer and broader than Christian morality; it had a more delicate balance between individualism and altruism.⁹ He referred to himself as an "old pagan"¹⁰ and exclaimed: "We want to remain pagans. Long live paganism!"¹¹ Goethe identified paganism with the naturalness, sensuality, and egoism of the Olympian gods. Throughout his period of Classical Hellenism Goethe savagely attacked all

⁸Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, trans. Charles Passage (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), part 2, act 4, lines 10214-10221.

⁹Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to The Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 69-70.

¹⁰Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethes Gespräche, Flodoard von Biedermann, ed. (Leipzig: F. W. von Biedermann, 1900-1911), 13 vols., 2:354, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (3rd ed.: New York: Random House, 1968), p. 337.

¹¹Ibid., 2:396.

forms of Christianity, especially the sacrosanct figure of Jesus and Christian morality. While his attitude mellowed somewhat during his old age, he still considered himself, not as some liberal Protestant theologians would have it, a liberal Protestant,¹² but a "not-Christian."¹³ Even in his old age Goethe rejected Christian asceticism, self-sacrifice and original sin; thus he rejected the Cross and all it stands for, calling it that "wretched tree of torture, the most repulsive thing under the sun."¹⁴

It may be argued that Goethe's return to the Greeks for the standards of modern civilization is to some degree a romantic, sentimental, or nostalgic return to the past. But Goethe did not wish a return to the past, for he believed that a return to the past was impossible. Thus he wrote:

We should not long nostalgically for the past, for there is none to recover: there are only the elements of past experience perpetually growing and shaping themselves into something new. True longing must always be a creating, the making of a new and better thing.¹⁵

For Goethe the past contained in the present served the poet

¹²Berthold Biermann, ed. and trans., Goethe's World As Seen in Letters and Memoirs (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 261.

¹³Walter Kaufmann, From Shakespeare to Existentialism (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960), p. 94.

¹⁴A. D. Coleridge, ed. and trans., Goethe's Letters to Zelter with Extracts from Those of Zelter to Goethe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), p. 448.

¹⁵David Luke and Robert Pick, eds. and trans., Goethe: Conversations and Encounters (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1966), p. 124.

as material for his inspiration. George Santayana, however, maintained that Goethe's Classical Hellenism was romantic.

He wrote:

How dignified everything was in those heroic days! How noble, serene, and abstracted! How pure the blind eyes of the statues, how chaste the white folds of the marble drapery! Greece was a remote, fascinating vision, the most romantic thing in the history of mankind. The sad, delicious emotion one felt before a ruined temple was as sentimental as anything one could feel before a ruined castle, but more elegant and more choice. It was sentimentality in marble.¹⁶

And Santayana continued by stating that "Goethe was never so romantic as when he was classical."¹⁷ Santayana preferred to call the classicism of the Napoleonic era, which stands between the refined classicism of the eighteenth century and the archaeological classicism of the present day, "romantic classicism."¹⁸

With Santayana's identification of classicism and romanticism it becomes pertinent to make rudimentary distinctions between the two. While each of these terms is often obscure today, they were in Goethe's day clearly and sharply defined. Indeed, it is to Goethe himself that credit must be given for the creation of the classic-romantic dichotomy, though this

¹⁶George Santayana, Three Philosophical Poets (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 175.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 175-176.

polarity was popularized by the Schlegel brothers.¹⁹ For Goethe the classical was objective (turning towards the world of objects), healthy, vigorous, and real, while the romantic was introspective, subjective, formless, and imaginative.

He wrote:

Most newer works are romantic, not because they are new, but because they are weak, sickly, and sick, and the works of the Ancients are classical, not because they are ancient, but because they are strong, fresh, happy, and healthy. If we distinguish the classic and the romantic according to such qualities, we shall soon be out of the woods.²⁰

Goethe was not only content to contrast the classical (objective) and romantic (subjective) in literature, but he also applied this dichotomy to entire eras. Thus he observed:

Epochs which are regressive and in the process of dissolution are always subjective, whereas the trend in all progressive epochs is objective. Our present age is a regressive one, for it is subjective. Not only do you see this in poetry, but also in painting and many other things. Every truly excellent endeavor, on the other hand, turns from within towards the world, as you see in all the great epochs which were truly in progression and aspiration, and which were all objective in nature.²¹

Goethe praised such epochs as classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance for their objectivity, ordered form, emphasis on the finite, vigor, and healthiness.

¹⁹Johann Peter Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, trans. by C. Gisela (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 192.

²⁰Ibid., p. 154.

²¹Ibid., p. 72.

The classicist lives in the present. His primary purpose is to distinguish between circumstances which are inalterable and those which can and should be modified or changed, or as Goethe put it, between those which are necessary and those which are accidental. Classical Hellenism is not an escape into a colorful, heroic past; it seeks to utilize Greek myths in order to denote necessary and timeless factors in the present conditions of existence. Man's problem is to discover the proper conditions of his existence and to conform to them.²² The classicist sees the past in the present, as a standard and aid for the realization of his own potentialities. The classicist's objective is to fulfill his own poetic powers, not solipsistically, but through the integration of the past into the present, and in achieving this purpose he creates his own style.²³

Much of Goethe's bitterness towards the romantics was due to the fact that a number of them--particularly Friedrich Schlegel--were lapsed classicists. Indeed, the organ of the Jena School of romantics was called the Athenaeum, and this classical title was a deliberate choice. Friedrich Schlegel sought to do for Greek literature what Winckelmann had done for Greek sculpture. The romantic passion for Greece was, however, both short-lived and sharply divergent from that of

²²Neville Horton Smith, "The Anti-Romanticism of Goethe," Renaissance and Modern Studies 2 (1958): 141.

²³Ibid., pp. 142-143.

the classicists. The Greece of the romantics was used, often quite consciously, for their own purposes. The romantics respected Greece as a treasury of a vivid and colorful culture, not as a civilization embodying timeless Truth.²⁴

While the classical tradition of Winckelmann and Goethe stressed the Apollonian-Olympian aspect of Greek civilization, the romantic stressed the Dionysian. It is to Friedrich Schlegel that the credit must go for discovering the Dionysian side of Greek civilization. For long before Nietzsche, Schlegel intuited a chaotic and enthusiastic aspect in Greek life and literature. This Dionysian interpretation of ancient Greece, emphasized by Nietzsche and followers, was radically to modify the entire interpretation of ancient Greece.²⁵ It was only with Friedrich von Hardenberg ("Novalis," 1772-1801) and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) that the Dionysian perspective of Greece emerged as a basic mood in German poetry. And it was not until the writings of Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1828), Adam Müller (1779-1829), George Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858), Joseph Görres (1776-1848), and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854), that this perspective gained a solid scholarly foundation.²⁶

²⁴Ibid., p. 137.

²⁵Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 169.

²⁶Frederick Hiebel, "The Modern View of Hellas and German Romanticism," The Germanic Review 29 (1954):33.

Even after his contact with the romantics Goethe clung exclusively to the Apollonian aspect of Greek civilization.²⁷ It seems both curious and unfortunate that Goethe, who was able to experience the Apollonian-Olympian aspect of classical Greece, time and time again showed no real understanding or appreciation of its Dionysian aspects.

It appears unlikely that Goethe was ignorant of such influential theories as the Dionysian interpretation of Greek life. Goethe did not need to comprehend the Dionysian element to complement his Apollonian nature; he did not need to seek Dionysianism from without—it was contained within his dominant Apollonian nature. Goethe's "Apollonianism" was a fusion of the rationalistic ordering principle of Apollonianism and the powerful but chaotic force and diversity of Dionysianism. Goethe's Apollonian nature gave form and control to what an observer can see as the Dionysian aspects of that personality.

Yet, the accuracy of Goethe's picture of the Greeks must be assessed. After all, he was neither a Greek scholar, a trained philologist, nor a historian. He lacked the rich findings of modern archaeology and the benefits of modern critical scholarship. And, unfortunately, he made no systematic effort to acquire precise knowledge of antiquity, but contented himself with picking up what he could as he went along. His views were strongly influenced by the prevailing popular conceptions of his time, rather than by certain knowledge of

²⁷Ibid.

the facts. Without a solid foundation of knowledge of classical antiquity, Goethe allowed himself to be pulled first in one direction and then another by such great thinkers on classical antiquity as Winckelmann, Herder, and Lessing.²⁸ It must be kept in mind, however, that Goethe never sought to be a classical scholar, nor did he turn to the Greeks for scholarly edification. He approached the Greeks not as a historian but as a poet.²⁹ Goethe, Nietzsche argues, served his classical ideal of emulating the Greeks only insofar as it served his life.³⁰

The difference between Goethe's Hellenic ideal and the historical Greeks of modern scholarship is not so much the accumulation of information or a different historically conditioned perspective; it is the conflict of basic intentions and presuppositions. The former wishes to be the incarnation of the Hellenic heritage, and the latter wishes to study it and stop there. Indeed, Werner Jaeger lamented that modern scholarship, with its passion for discovering what really happened, has

slipped into regarding classical antiquity

²⁸Humphry Trevelyan, The Popular Background to Goethe's Hellenism (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1934), p. 37.

²⁹For Goethe, the poet was concerned with the universal and timeless while the historian was concerned with the particular and momentary.

³⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, The Use And Abuse of History, in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. by Adrian Collins, 18 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964), 5:3-4.

simply as a piece of history (although a peculiarly interesting piece) and . . . [has] paid little attention to its direct influence on the world to-day.³¹

And he continued by adding:

To feel or not to feel that influence has become a matter of personal perception, and it has been left to personal taste to assess its value. But as this kind of encyclopedic and factual approach to ancient history grew more and more general, few observed that some sort of classical culture still existed in practice while it maintained its position unassailed.³²

Jaeger ended his introductory argument by stating that it is the duty of classical scholarship to re-establish the Classical Ideal on a surer foundation in order to reassess the educational value of classical antiquity.³³

Goethe was quite critical of the philologists of his own day. He was aware that the philologists had failed to bring classical antiquity to life. Eckermann maintained that classical knowledge did not influence personality and character, for "if it did, all philologists and theologians would need be the most excellent people. But this is by no means the case."³⁴ Goethe, however, was convinced that "a noble person . . . will develop gloriously through familiarity and intimate association

³¹Werner Jaeger, Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture, 3 vols., trans. Gilbert Highet (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1, xxviii.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., pp. xxviii-xxix.

³⁴Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, p. 107.

with the lofty natures of Greek and Roman Antiquity."³⁵
 Nietzsche, a philologist of no little talent, holds that
 Goethe's interpretation of the Greeks, though not based on
 philological scholarship, nevertheless enabled Goethe to con-
 tend with modern scholarship. He wrote:

Let it be re-collected how much Goethe knew
 of antiquity: certainly not so much as
 a philologist, and yet sufficient to con-
 tend with it in such a way as to bring
 about fruitful results.³⁶

And again he wrote: "Goethe grasped antiquity in the right
 way, invariably with an emulative soul."³⁷ Friedrich
 Gundolf, one of the most fruitful scholars of the twentieth
 century, maintained that even the errors of the German
 classicists were far more productive than the work of the con-
 ventional philologists; he praises their "creative belief."³⁸

Finally, one must turn to Goethe's knowledge of Greek and
 judge its adequacy. Goethe studied Greek as a boy and drilled
 himself in it by writing letters to himself from imaginary
 friends. He was accustomed to adding Greek postscripts to
 his Latin letters. He read the New Testament in Greek, for
 it was his father's rule that it be recited, translated, and
 explained on Sundays after church. But Goethe dropped the

³⁵Ibid., p. 108.

³⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, We Philologists, in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. by A. M. Ludovici, 18 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964), 8:179.

³⁷Ibid., p. 183.

³⁸Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. x.

study of Greek during his years as a student at Leipzig, and it did not improve from a rudimentary understanding. His study of Latin, however, was pursued diligently, until he thoroughly mastered that language. After 1789 Goethe returned to the study of Greek. That he attained some proficiency is clear, especially in the understanding of word formations and etymologies. He was fond of using Greek words and phrases, and frequently quoted the original Greek. The historical part of Theory of Colors abounds in Greek words and phrases. Frequently also, he compared translations of Greek authors with the original; his own translations from a large number of authors (Homer, the Homeric Hymns, Anacreon, Pindar, Aristotle) demonstrate his ability.³⁹

Goethe had a deep admiration for the Greek language. It seemed to possess all that he thought German lacked. He praised Greek not only for its beauty of form and precision but also for its naturalness, directness, and above all its objectivity:

The Greek language is much more simple and direct, much more suited to the rendering of felicitous aspects of nature in a natural, serene, spirited, aesthetic manner. Its predilection for verbs, especially infinitives and participles, gives a noncommittal flavor to every expression. Nothing is determined, staked

³⁹William Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers As Revealed by His Works, Letters, Diaries, and Conversations (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1916), pp. 8-9.

down, and fixed by words. Their function is merely suggestive, calling up the object to the inner eye.⁴⁰

And yet, in spite of all this, there is no doubt that he never regarded himself as being really proficient. He always depended to a large extent on translations; in fact, in many instances his entire knowledge of many Greek writers was dependent upon some translation. It was natural, therefore, to find him constantly encouraging translators in their work.⁴¹ Thus Goethe remarked to Eckermann:

But as for Greek, Latin, Italian, and Spanish, we can read the most outstanding works of these nations in such good German translations that, unless we have very special purposes, we have no reason to spend much time in the difficult study of these languages.⁴²

It is common for such scholars as Eliza Marian Butler to argue that the Hellenic world view is dead and shall never return.⁴³ But if history is a spiritual unity and not an isolated series of miscellaneous Ages, then the continuity of Hellenic roots, the persistent survival of Hellenism into the modern world, becomes most pertinent. In this spirit Schiller

⁴⁰Hermann J. Weigand, ed. and trans., Wisdom and Experience (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1949), p. 234.

⁴¹Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 9.

⁴²Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, pp. 47-48.

⁴³Eliza Marian Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: a Study of The Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 3-8.

wrote:

Eternally the will varies its aim and its rules, in ever repeated form the cycle of action resolves; but ever youthful, in ever beautiful transformations, pious nature, you honour obediently the old law. Always the same, you maintain, safe in your faithful hands, for the man, what the gambolling child and the youth entrusted to you, all the ages of man in their manifold charges are nourished at the same breast, near and distant generations move as one under the same blue and over the unchanging green, and Homer's sun, O look! still smiles upon us.⁴⁴

It is Walter Pater's considered opinion that the Hellenic world view alone does not remain in the past. He wrote:

The spiritual forces of the past, which have prompted and informed the culture of a succeeding age, live, indeed, within that culture, but with an absorbed, underground life. The Hellenic element alone has not been so absorbed, or content with this underground life, from time to time it has started to the surface; culture has been drawn back to its sources to be clarified and corrected. Hellenism is not merely an absorbed element in our intellectual life; it is a conscious tradition in it.⁴⁵

While Butler wrote: "Greece has profoundly modified the whole trend of modern civilization, imposing her thought, her standards, her literary forms, her imagery, her visions and dreams wherever she is known."⁴⁶ Albert Camus correctly asserted that classical Greece is the very foundation—the

⁴⁴Walter Horace Bruford, Culture and Society in Classical Weimar, 1775-1806 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 349.

⁴⁵Walter Pater, The Renaissance (1873; reprint ed., New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 165.

⁴⁶Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 6.

unshakable foundation of modern civilization, when he wrote:

For the past two thousand years the Greek value has been constantly and persistently slandered. In this regard Marxism took over from Christianity. And for two thousand years the Greek value has resisted to such a degree that, under its ideologies, the twentieth century is more Greek and pagan than Christian and Russian.⁴⁷

The past is part of the present; they are united. Thus Goethe wrote:

Bakis [an ancient Greek seer] reveals to you also the past,
 for even the bygone
 Stays, O blinded world, oft as a riddle to you.
 He who knows the past, knows also the future, for both will
 Join the today without break as a perfection complete.⁴⁸

And, one must account for the past:

He who fails in his accounting
 of three thousand years of history.
 Let him, inept, in darkness mounting
 Live from day to day in mystery.⁴⁹

Goethe's Classical Ideal with its presuppositions—the essential unity of time and civilizations, cosmopolitanism, rationalism, objectivity and an anti-Teutonic outlook—has drawn numerous critics. It is Butler's thesis that literature and creative genius are manifestations and expressions of a particular people and nation and not the creation of an individual who, being a cosmopolitan, transcends all boundaries

⁴⁷ Albert Camus, Notebooks 1942-1951, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Modern Library, 1965), p. 263.

⁴⁸ Harold Jantz, ed. and trans., The Soothsayings of Bakis: Goethe's Tragi-Comic Observations on Life, Time, and History (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 33.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

of time and place. Therefore, she not only severely censored Goethe's Hellenism but also the entire German Hellenic movement as an aberration.⁵⁰ Hatfield observed: "She makes very clear her opinion that it would have been better if the Germans had limited themselves to native themes."⁵¹ Thus Goethe is severely censored on a number of counts. He tried to recapture the essence of Greece--an alien civilization that had fallen never again to be reborn;⁵² he sought to stifle his demon, that is, his irrational, subjective, creative force, by submitting it to the canons of Hellenic artistic standards;⁵³ Goethe negated or sought to negate his own culture, and he heaped scorn upon the Germans, the German language, and Christianity.⁵⁴

It is an almost common assertion that Goethe refused to face life on his own and merely lived off the past. Thus José Ortega y Gasset stated: "This man supported himself on the income of the entire past,"⁵⁵ and "he is the classic to the second power, the classic who in his turn lived by the classics,

⁵⁰Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 334.

⁵¹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. ix.

⁵²Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 334.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 131, 154.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 118-126.

⁵⁵José Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanizing of Art and other Writings on Art and Culture, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p. 127.

the prototype of the spiritual heir."⁵⁶ Robertson limited his castigation by identifying Goethe's loss of creativity and individuality with the birth of his Classical Hellenism:

Rather might we say that the Goethe who believed that he had at last entered into the Holy of Holies of the artist's calling [in Italy], ceased from now on to be a creative artist at all.⁵⁷

To such criticism, which was not uncommon during his own day, Goethe often responded with an epigram such as:

I should be glad to break free of tradition and be original right through; but that is a big undertaking and leads to much vexation of spirit. As a genuine earth-native I should regard it as a supreme point of honour, if I were not so strangely a tradition myself.⁵⁸

It cannot, however, be denied that Goethe's Hellenism, as well as the entire German Hellenic movement, contains a number of anti-Teutonic elements. While such scholars as Butler and Robertson lament Goethe's abandonment of Germanic themes for those of classical antiquity, Goethe was only too glad to desert his Northern heritage. Thus he said to Eckermann in his old age:

in writing Werther and Faust I had to search my own heart, for what has been handed down is not worth much. I got involved with devils and witches only

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷John George Robertson, Goethe (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1927), p. 138.

⁵⁸David Luke, ed. and trans., Goethe (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 293.

once: I was glad when I had consumed my northern patrimony and turned to the tables of the Greeks.⁵⁹

On numerous occasions Goethe was severely critical of the inability of the German public to appreciate his Hellenism. Butler was horrified by Goethe's condemnation of the aesthetic judgment of the Germans:

On the average the Germans are law-abiding, decent people, but they haven't the slightest suspicion of what constitutes the originality, invention, character, unity and education of a work of art. That means, in brief, that they have no taste. And this is generally understood.⁶⁰

Goethe with all of his classicism blamed much of his difficulty upon the inadequacies of the German language.⁶¹ According to Butler, Goethe experienced the greatest difficulty in "demanding of his instrument what it was never formed to produce, the classical hexameter and pentameter."⁶² And "when he felt dissatisfied with the result he blamed the language and not his own strange aberration from it."⁶³ Goethe found the German language insufficient upon purely aesthetic grounds when compared to Greek or Latin:

⁵⁹Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, p. 77.

⁶⁰Ludwig Lewisohn, ed. and trans., Goethe: the Story of a Man, Being the Life of Johann Wolfgang Goethe as Told in His Own Words and the Words of His Contemporaries (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Co., 1949), pp. 372-373.

⁶¹Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 125.

⁶²Ibid., p. 126.

⁶³Ibid.

Give me in place of der Schwanz another word, O
 Priapus;
 for as a German I have problems enough as a poet.
 Greek I could call you phallos, which would sound
 noble and splendid;
 and in Latin there is mentula, still a good word:
 Mentula comes from mens, while der Schwanz is
 something behind,
 and behind was for me never a real delight.⁶⁴

Besides finding German insufficient upon aesthetic grounds,
 Goethe lamented its technical inadequacies:

I have tried many things; I have drawn, engraved
 in copper, painted in oil, even moulded a
 number of things in clay; but sporadically,
 and without learning or achieving anything.
 Only one talent I have brought near to
 mastery: the writing of German. And thus,
 a poor poet, Alas! in this most miserable
 medium I now waste my life and my art.⁶⁵

And, in general, Goethe blamed German for his shortcomings as
 a poet:

What then did fate intend to make of me? May be
 'tis presumption to ask: for mostly it has
 small intentions with most of us. A poet
 perhaps; and the plan might have answered
 Had not the language proved an insurmountable fence.⁶⁶

This thesis seeks to examine Goethe's pursuit of the
 Classical Ideal—that is, his attempt to recapture and embody
 the spirit of classical Greece. Goethe thought that the
 Greeks had discovered the Laws of Nature, which regulated not
 only man but the entire cosmos and tried to live according to
 them. Goethe sought to learn objectivity, clarity, form,

⁶⁴Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans., Twenty German Poets:
a Bilingual Collection (New York: Modern Library, 1962), p. 35.

⁶⁵Luke, ed. and trans., Goethe, p. 115.

⁶⁶Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 125.

harmony, and self-mastery from the Greeks. It was not Goethe's intention to return to the Golden Age of classical Greece. He did, however, believe that it was possible for a modern man to rediscover and embody the Laws of Nature by studying the Greeks. Goethe's admiration for the Greeks is not romantic. The romantics were not interested in Greece as a repository of timeless Truth but as an exotic, colorful civilization. Goethe sought to understand the Greeks from the perspective of a poet, for he was neither a philologist nor a historian.

CHAPTER II

THE SPELL OF WINCKELMANN

It was Johann Joachim Winckelmann who founded the German Neo-Hellenic movement. Indeed, Hatfield wrote:

Few men have had a greater impact on the culture of their native country than did Winckelmann. The Greek revival which he initiated profoundly altered the course of German literature; many of its greatest writers from Lessing to our own times would have written differently without his precept and example.¹

And John Ives Sewall maintained:

His [Winckelmann's] critical estimates, however, have become part of our folklore; the man in the street who has never heard of Winckelmann will nevertheless quote him if asked to express an opinion about art. No other art historian has had a comparable influence upon European taste.²

His style, as well as his ideas, was considered classic in more than one sense of the word. His virtual cult of classical simplicity and grandeur influenced music (Christoph Gluck's operas) as well as literature, sculpture, architecture and painting. Indeed, it influenced the entire course of Western taste. He is regarded as the founder of

¹Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 5.

²John Ives Sewall, A History of Western Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. 49.

classical archaeology and a pioneer of nineteenth century historicism. After he settled in Rome in 1755, his fame became as much a European as a German phenomenon; and, by means of translations, articles in journals, and the enthusiastic reports of visitors returned from Rome, it rapidly spread over Western Europe. Perhaps the most outstanding thing about his influence was its duration. The initial, unreflective vogue of Winckelmann soon subsided, but the impact of his central concepts has persisted—with modifications, of course—into the present day.³

In 1755 he published his first work, Reflections on the Imitation of the Greek Works of Painting and Sculpture, an enthusiastic essay of just over fifty pages,⁴ which Herder hailed as "the first fragrant blossom of Winckelmann's youth."⁵ This work contained his central doctrines: the absolute validity of Greek art, its essential qualities of "noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur,"⁶ and the necessity of imitating the Greeks.⁷ Indeed, Winckelmann proclaimed as

³Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 5-6.

⁴Wolfgang Leppmann, Winckelmann, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 113.

⁵Ibid., p. 126.

⁶Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, ed. Joseph Eiselein, 12 vols. (Donauöschingen, Germany: n. p., 1825-1829), 1:30 f., quoted in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 7.

⁷Ibid.

his major theme the now famous paradox: "The only way for us to become great, and, if possible, imitable, lies in the imitation of the Greeks."⁸ By "imitation" [Nachahmung], a rather ambiguous word, Winckelmann usually means something like creation in the Greek spirit rather than mere slavish copying. After Edward Young, an English poet, and Johann Hamman, an erratic German philosopher, coined the slogan of "original genius," the very word imitation became anathema to the literary avant-garde.

Today this doctrine of the calmness and nobility of Greek art is regarded as at best a truism. It, however, struck its own age with the force of a divine revelation. Winckelmann became a national hero overnight, and with the publication of his History of Ancient Art (1764), a European hero shortly thereafter. Excepting Frederick the Great, he was the most famous German between Leibniz and Goethe.

There had already been a modest revival of interest in classical antiquity primarily centered at the Universities of Göttingen and Leipzig under such scholars as Johann Gesner (1691-1761), Johann Christ (1700-1756), and Johann Ernesti (1707-1781). Similarly, excavations were begun at Herculaneum in 1738 and Pompeii in 1748. And not to be overlooked was the growing respectability of aesthetics in the universities. Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) had laid the foundations for the study of aesthetics in Germany; his Aesthetica appeared

⁸Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:8, cited in Wolfgang Leppmann, Winckelmann (New York, 1970), p. 113.

from 1750-1758, during the first decade of the publication of Winckelmann's works.

At a cursory glance Winckelmann appears merely to have reinforced a trend already in process. This interpretation, however, fails to take into account his enthusiastic, even fanatic devotion to his cause, his propagandistic skill, and his powerful and eloquent style. It is even more significant to observe that Winckelmann desired, not primarily the revival of humanistic studies, but the rebirth of classical Greece itself. None of his predecessors or contemporaries had conceived of so broad, so sweeping an ambition.⁹

Winckelmann's thesis lacks much originality and is severely limited. In itself, of course, the summons to imitate classical models is one of the oldest of critical commands, for Horace wrote: "Pore over the Greek models night and day."¹⁰ Before 1755 Montesquieu had already spoken of "le grand et le simple" as characteristic of ancient art. And furthermore, Winckelmann's knowledge of classical art, during his early career in Dresden, was extremely sketchy, based only on inferior engravings, gems, and an unsatisfactory view of some copies of ancient statues packed away in a shed at Dresden. Even in Rome he was never able to see the great original works of the fifth century. Such products of the Hellenistic age

⁹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 7-9.

¹⁰Horace, Ars Poetica 1.268.

such as the Laocoön and the Apollo Belvedere, which were the source of Winckelmann's highest inspiration, seem poor examples to support his thesis.¹¹

Still, the fact remains that Winckelmann did describe one important aspect of Greek art persuasively and perhaps exhaustively. This is no doubt due to the fact that his interpretation of Greek art was based primarily upon his intimate knowledge of Greek literature. He simply read into Greek art the concepts that he had derived from his favorite writers: Homer, Sophocles, and Plato. And while Winckelmann's vision of Greece was a partial and slanted one, it nevertheless was based upon real knowledge, however limited, and empathy.¹²

Though Winckelmann had read Greek literature with great depth and to a great extent and possessed an excellent command of languages, he had little philological training. Languages and literary texts interested him less as subjects in themselves than as bridges to the understanding of classical antiquity, and eventually as confirmation of the visual evidence of Greek art. His understanding of the Greeks depended, therefore, upon his studies of Greek literature. He admired Greek writers for their plasticity and stance of "this is what I saw."¹³

¹¹Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 126.

¹²Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 9-10.

¹³Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 64.

As Herder pointed out, the fundamentals of Winckelmann's thesis were already lucidly expressed in the Reflections on Imitation. Later he refined numerous points revising his opinions about matters of detail, some of them important, and assigning greater value to historical development. Generally speaking, however, while he greatly expanded his historical knowledge and perfected his style during his thirteen years in Italy, Winckelmann did not revise or alter the essential content of his thesis.¹⁴

Winckelmann's central thesis was clearly and lyrically expressed in his famous description of the Laocoön. The qualities of that statue were viewed as the distillation of Greek art, and therefore the essence of beauty itself. Thus Winckelmann wrote:

The most significant characteristic of the Greek masterpieces, finally, is a noble simplicity and a tranquil grandeur [eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Grösse]. As the depths of the sea always remain calm, no matter how the surface may rage, just so does the expression of the Greek figures indicate among all passions a great and resolute soul.

Such a soul is portrayed in the face of the Laocoön, despite . . . the most violent suffering. The pain which appears in all the muscles and sinews of the body . . . nevertheless is not made manifest by any expression of fury . . . Unlike Vergil's Laocoön, he raises no horrible cry . . . Laocoön suffers, but he suffers like Sophocles Philoctetes: his misery . . . touches

¹⁴Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 11.

our very souls, but we would wish to be able to bear misery like this great man.¹⁵

The image of the sea, calm in its depths no matter how the surface may rage, reappeared time and time again throughout Winckelmann's works. It was rarely that a raging surface was mentioned in these images, and the sea was not represented as utterly calm; Winckelmann's classicism sought to control, not to eliminate, the passions. Raphael was Winckelmann's prime illustration of successful imitation—not copying—the Greeks because he created in the Greek spirit. Winckelmann portrayed Raphael's Sistine Madonna in terms similar to those with which he had described the Laocoön, although he noted it had a sense of Christian purity lacking in the Greeks or Romans:¹⁶

See the Madonna, with a face expressive of innocence and yet with a more than feminine grandeur, in an attitude of blissful repose, with that tranquility [Stille] which prevailed in the ancients' representation of these divinities. How grand and noble is the entire contour of this figure!¹⁷

It is interesting to observe in Winckelmann's evocation of the Laocoön the inextricable interlacing of moral and aesthetic judgment. Laocoön was the essence of Stoic virtue; the Madonna

¹⁵Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:30 f., quoted in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 11.

¹⁶Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:30 f., quoted in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 12.

expressed classic serenity rather than Christian compassion.¹⁸

Some scholars, notably Hatfield, think that Winckelmann's interpretation of the Greeks contains a number of romantic traits. Hatfield believed that Winckelmann's interpretation of the Greeks is much closer to Friedrich Hölderlin and the young Friedrich Schlegel than to the German exponents of French eighteenth-century classicism, such as Johann Gottsched (1700-1766). He cited Winckelmann's empathetic, enthusiastic critical method, his historicism, his aesthetic Platonism, and his yearning for a vanished Golden Age. And, if one wishes to raise the Faustian spectre, he conjured up the story of a poor Prussian school teacher who sold his soul, by converting to Catholicism, in order to gain a prominent position in Rome and thus to continue his study of the Greeks. All of these points separately amount to little, but taken together offer an impressive unity for the argument of Winckelmann's romanticism.¹⁹

Winckelmann combines fixed aesthetic norms with a feeling for beauty and controlled imagination. His description of the Belvedere Torso amounts to a prose poem. But he would not have accepted Wilhelm Wackenroder's (1774-1798) purely emotional approach to works of art.²⁰ Thus he was able to state, "it is

¹⁸Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 12.

¹⁹Henry Caraway Hatfield, "Winckelmann: The Romantic Element," The Germanic Review 28 (1953):283-284.

not enough to say that something is beautiful; one should also know to what extent and for what reason it is so."²¹

Christoph Wieland (1733-1813) was, at first, highly suspicious of what he considered Winckelmann's excessive enthusiasm and refused to accept the Greeks as the absolute norm of perfection.²² Wieland, however, later discovered that Winckelmann's enthusiasm was not "a fervid condition of the soul, caused by objects which either do not exist in nature, or at least are not what the intoxicated soul thinks them to be," but is "the effect of direct contemplation of the beautiful and good."²³ He concluded that this type of enthusiasm is the soul of man's true life, not a fever.²⁴ Pater held that: "Within its severe limits Winckelmann's enthusiasm burnt like lava."²⁵ Indeed, Pater was able to refer to Winckelmann's "passionate coldness."²⁶ "You know," said

²⁰Ibid., p. 285.

²¹Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:227, quoted in Wolfgang Leppmann, Winckelmann (New York, 1970), p. 161.

²²William H. Clark, "Wieland Contra Winckelmann?", The Germanic Review 34 (1959):13.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Walter Pater, The Renaissance (1873; reprint ed., New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 154.

²⁶Ibid., p. 191.

Lavater, speaking of Winckelmann's countenance, "that I consider ardor and indifference by no means incompatible in the same character."²⁷ Winckelmann believed that "Beauty is felt through the senses but understood by the mind."²⁸ Increasingly he sought empathetic identification with the art work observed. To contain his empathy, he stressed intense, concentrated contemplation; he insisted on the importance of really "seeing."

It was Winckelmann's belief that the art lover should be intelligent and well read, but not learned,²⁹ because "from Plato's time down to ours, works that deal with general concepts of beauty are . . . devoid of sense, useless, and trivial in content."³⁰ It was the company of men of good taste, rather than the study and the library, that conditioned the suitable atmosphere for the cultivation of this faculty. Since Winckelmann believed that one thinks in the manner in which he was formed, the typical art lover was likely to be a refined person and a creature of leisure. While sensibility to beauty is an inherent trait that cannot be acquired through study, it still needed to be brought out and cultivated, a

²⁷Ibid., p. 154.

²⁸Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 14.

²⁹Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 226.

³⁰Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:240, quoted in Wolfgang Leppmann, Winckelmann (New York, 1970), p. 226.

process that is incompatible with working for a living.³¹

While Winckelmann is accused of historicism, in actuality his thought contains little of it. His theory of cultural development, which was largely adopted from Montesquieu, is arrestingly casual: art rose, flourished, and degenerated because of such specific reasons as political freedom, climate, and nationality. It is highly doubtful that Winckelmann had any notion of the doctrine of historical laws.³²

Winckelmann believed that art should overshadow its subject, the form of Nature; it should summon a supreme beauty which had the essence of an absolute standard. There was only one Good, one Truth, and thus only one Beauty. The purity and elevation of this objective perfection could only be attained by the artist if he presented his ideal vision in a way which had the universal validity of the essential. A form which was so perfect that it was extracted from any accidental and clouded reality was also lifted above the flux of time. It stood in an atmosphere of divine perfection and eternity, bearing its measure and its value in itself.³³ Thus Winckelmann wrote in his History of Ancient Art: "The highest beauty is in God, and the conception of human beauty grows to be perfect in proportion as it can be thought of as appropriate to and in

³¹Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 227.

³²Hatfield, "Winckelmann," pp. 285-286.

³³Karl Viëtor, Goethe the Thinker, trans. Bayard Morgan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 177.

agreement with the highest being."³⁴

In his lyrical passages Winckelmann laid the foundation, perhaps unintentionally, for a new mythology which would fuse Hellenic values with eighteenth century Humanität. In such passages as his evocation of the Belvedere Torso, he combined description, empathy, and mythological references to produce a prose poem. Thinking that the mutilated fragment was a torso of Hercules, he felt free to weave myths and homilies associated with Hercules into his interpretation. Using the first person, like a teacher addressing a class, he spoke directly to the reader:³⁵ "Now I shall conduct you to the much-lauded, never sufficiently praised Torso."³⁶ He warned the reader that at first glance he might see merely a malformed piece of marble. Soon, however, one is made to "see" the flank of the Torso; again the image of the ocean is employed.³⁷

As, when the sea begins to stir, the surface, quiet before, now misty and disturbed, rises with the waves playing—one is devoured by the next, and again rolled forth by it: just as gently here one muscle swells up and flows into the second; and a third, which rises between them and seems to strengthen their move-

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 17-18.

³⁶Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:227, quoted in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 18.

³⁷Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 18.

ment, loses itself in them: and our glance,
as it were, is consumed with it.³⁸

Next Winckelmann turned, as he so often did, to the moral implications of the work of art.

In the calm and tranquility of the body is revealed the great, resolute spirit, the man who exposed himself to the greatest dangers from love of justice, who achieved safety for the lands and for their inhabitants, calm.³⁹

At the end of the essay the mutilated marble becomes a god, just as Hercules himself became one of the Olympians:

a loftier spirit seems to have entered his mortal parts and to have taken their place. It is no longer the body which must yet face the struggle against monsters and breakers of the piece; it is that body which was purged of the dross of humanity on the mountains of Oeta.⁴⁰

At this point Winckelmann anticipated the twentieth-century paganism of Stefan George; the body is purged of its humanity and made divine, the divine is made flesh.⁴¹

Winckelmann most certainly had a classic bent to his personality. He believed that the ideal amateur must be possessed of noble character, innate aesthetic sensitivity,

³⁸Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:229, quoted in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 18.

³⁹Ibid., 1:231.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1:232.

⁴¹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 18.

tranquility inherent in the work he was contemplating. He certainly had a sense of Fate which recalled the classical. He believed in what amounts to a virtual cult of freedom for a leisurely, cultured elite. Rejecting Christian humility, he openly expressed the just pride of the Aristotelian "great-souled man." Winckelmann believed that the highest morality consisted in performing actions for their own sake; he held that Christianity, with its system of rewards and punishments, had discouraged that highest of values—heroic friendship between men.⁴² Winckelmann was greatly influenced by the great writers of the Enlightenment: he was not only a late-born brother of Phidias and Plato but also of his own age as well. His extensive reading of the authors of the French and English Enlightenments must not be neglected. Winckelmann was well versed in Voltaire, Bayle, Montesquieu, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke.⁴³

Though Winckelmann had been raised a Lutheran, he was not a believer even in his youth.⁴⁴ His attitude toward religion was extremely rational: "No man can be bound by obligations that transcend all reason."⁴⁵ His recorded opinions on

⁴²Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Briefe, eds. Walther Rehm and Hans Diepolder, 4 vols. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1952-1957), 1:284, and 3:169, cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 16.

⁴³Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 6.

⁴⁴Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 83.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 84.

religious matters wavered between skepticism and a type of eighteenth-century rational religion, and many of his remarks indicate a naturally pagan disposition.⁴⁶ Goethe, in his essay Winckelmann And His Age (1805), devoted an entire section to the pagan elements of Winckelmann's nature writing: "This pagan point of view prevades Winckelmann's deeds and writing."⁴⁷ Winckelmann turned to Homer as a Christian turns to the Bible—to be consoled and guided.⁴⁸ During his youth as a school teacher in Prussia he was caught reading Homer in church.⁴⁹ Madame de Staël (1766-1817) wrote:

There had been known before him learned men who might be consulted like books; but no one had, if I may say so, made himself a pagan for the purpose of penetrating antiquity. In the words of Charlotte Corday before the Convention 'One is always a poor executant of conceptions not one's own.'⁵⁰

There is abundant evidence in Winckelmann's works that his conception of the Greeks is rather idealized and synthetic. His Greeks combine a heroism reminiscent of the Stoics with a

⁴⁶Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 7.

⁴⁷Kuno Francke, ed., The German Classics, trans. George Kriehn, Vol. 2: Goethe (Albany, New York: J. B. Lyon Co., Publishers, 1913), 337.

⁴⁸Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in Modern German Literature, p. 6.

⁴⁹Eliza Marian Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: a Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 17.

⁵⁰Pater, The Renaissance, p. 158.

joyfulness in life similar to the Epicureans. Their lives were simpler, and despite their high degree of cultivation, more natural than the lives of people during Winckelmann's own era. They were more humane, and freedom, friendship, and beauty dominated their lives. Their bodies were more developed and beautiful and their thoughts more lofty and manly. Winckelmann's Greeks were the most joyful of peoples. Blessed with a sunny moderate climate, uninhibited by bourgeois conventions, free of the scourge of the more unpleasant diseases, they could devote themselves to art, athletics, and leisure. The Greeks were free in politics as well as in social customs; it was perhaps the latter freedom which impressed Winckelmann more. For it was not only praiseworthy and healthy that Athenian youths and young Spartan women exercised naked or only lightly clad; it offered Greek artists an opportunity to study the nude. To Winckelmann and his school the representation of the nude human body was the highest aim of art. Above all, the Greeks were the aesthetic people. They held contests in beauty, and parents tried consciously to produce beautiful children. Not content with the empirical beauty by which they were so abundantly surrounded, Greek artists abstracted ideal forms of human perfection.⁵¹

And yet, his appreciation of the Greeks was highly selective and prejudiced; it was far from all-embracing.

⁵¹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in Modern German Literature, pp. 12-13.

He had serious reservations about Aeschylus, whom he considered too rough; and although he was very fond of Aristophanes, he ignored the colorful, vulgar, and obscene aspects of Greek civilization. Also most noticeably lacking was any hint of the Dionysian aspect of Greek culture.⁵²

Like Goethe, Winckelmann felt that the natural was never violent. Just as he thought that calm was more beautiful than a storm, Winckelmann considered the broadest generality or essential superior to the particular expression. Beauty had an ennobling effect rather than an ethical purpose. Winckelmann was repelled by the radical dualism of the Christian distinction between God and humanity. Above all, it was in his implied acceptance of Greek sensuality and this-worldliness that the pagan element figured most decisively. His fondness for Italy seemed to have been based partly on similar considerations.⁵³

Much of the charm of Winckelmann's Hellenic myth lies in its utopian quality. Like numerous other utopias, Winckelmann's contains a large amount of polemic directed against his own age.⁵⁴ Thus he opposes a young Spartan, "begotten by a hero, of a heroine," with "a young Sybarite of our own time."⁵⁵

⁵²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁵³Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁵Winckelmann, Sämtliche Werke, 1:10, quoted in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 21.

Winckelmann once compared the Homeric heroes with "the swift-footed Red Indian."⁵⁶ And, when Benjamin West, a young American painter, visited Rome in the eighteenth century Winckelmann was most pleased when West, on being shown the Apollo Belvedere, exclaimed:⁵⁷ "My God, a young Mohawk warrior."⁵⁸ It confirmed Winckelmann's belief that the Greeks had discovered the archetype of man. Indeed, as Goethe pointed out, the cults of Rousseau and Greece reinforced each other throughout the eighteenth century: the Greeks were the symbol of naturalness and youthful vitality.⁵⁹ Much of the style and content of Reflections on the Imitation can be explained as a revolt against the canons of baroque art. Winckelmann detested its ornateness and monumentality, its emphasis on movement and on the startling effects of light and space, its use of one material to stimulate another, its emphasis on the supernatural, its passion for subjectivism, and its ecstatic and enraptured states of the mind.⁶⁰ He also stressed the unity of political freedom and artistic creativity.⁶¹ "This entire history [the History of Ancient Art] illustrates the fact that the arts

⁵⁶Ibid., 1:11.

⁵⁷Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 211.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 128.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 293.

owe their development to liberty."⁶² In his praise of the political freedom of the Greeks, there seems also to be an implied protest against the German political scene. References to Prussian tyranny abound in Winckelmann's letters.⁶³ Indeed, he writes that he "shuddered from head to toe to think of Prussian despotism and of the royal slave driver [Frederick the Great], who will yet make that land, cursed by Nature and covered by Lybian sands, into an object of universal detestation."⁶⁴

Hatfield argued that Winckelmann created a sort of romantic idyll, an eclectic mythology and utopia, designed for those with some classical taste and education. He believed that the analogy to Rousseau is obvious since Diderot noted in his Salon on 1765 that the "charming enthusiast" Winckelmann resembled Rousseau and Don Quixote.⁶⁵

Overall, I maintain that it would be both inaccurate and unproductive to consider Winckelmann a romantic, pre-romantic, or even a transitional figure. Even Hatfield observed that Winckelmann's classical elements are vigorous and dominant, and not easily explained away. Winckelmann stressed imitation of the Greeks with a strong belief that the artist should be

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 21.

⁶⁴Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 246.

⁶⁵Hatfield, "Winckelmann," p. 287.

learned and intellectual. Winckelmann's conception of beauty was essentially Platonic; he had a great appreciation for contour and line, but little appreciation for color, or for anything which did not conform to his laws of beauty. His humanistic emphasis on the nude human body was certainly classical. And finally, if he had any glimpse of the Dionysian side of Greek life, it was completely suppressed.⁶⁶

There was, however, a great paradox and limitation of Winckelmann's perspective of the Greeks which lay in the unresolved conflict between his historical sense and his doctrine of imitation. The modern world was the heir, perhaps the unworthy heir, of the vanished past. In his History of Ancient Art Winckelmann, with an almost Spenglerian fatalism, argued that each culture originated by necessity, rose to beauty, and then having reached the stage of the superfluous, began to decline.⁶⁷ At the conclusion of the History of Ancient Art, Winckelmann compared his attitude to the emotions of a woman standing on the seashore, following with her eyes the ship of her departing lover:

I could not forbear following the fate of these works as far as my eyes reached, although the ruin of ancient art made me feel like someone who, in writing the history of his country, has to describe its destruction as if he had experienced it himself. Just so will a loving woman stand by the shore, and

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 22-23.

look tearfully at her departing sweetheart whom she cannot hope to see again, and imagine that she can recognize his features even on the distant sail. Like this woman, we are left with only an outline of the object of our desires. But our yearning for what is lost is all the greater for this, and who knows? Perhaps we regard the copies more attentively than we would ever have examined the originals if we had been in full possession of them.⁶⁸

Thus while the highest aspirations for founding another Greece end on a note of melancholy, he never renounced his doctrine of imitation. A letter of Winckelmann's written during the last year of his life, was signed "Johann Winckelmann, Pilgrim."⁶⁹

Winckelmann exerted a powerful influence upon the entirety of German culture. His ideas were, of course, modified and sometimes distorted. Unfortunately, his name became, in all too many instances, a symbol of neoclassical mustiness and heaviness in the fine arts, of dusty plaster casts in grey lecture rooms, of the official classicism of the "Prusso-German Gymnasium." Fortunately, however, Winckelmann's more sensitive readers have always realized that his objective was different; he sought not academicism but a nobler and freer life.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Leppmann, Winckelmann, p. 299.

⁶⁹Winckelmann, Briefe, 3:303, cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 23.

⁷⁰Ibid.

Winckelmann is the father of German Classical Hellenism. He exerted a pervasive spell over Goethe that was stronger than that of any contemporary. Goethe's Classical Hellenism began and ended with the study of Winckelmann. Winckelmann not only established the form but also the content of German Hellenism. He believed that the Greeks had achieved the highest stage of humanity, and if they would be equalled man must imitate the Hellenic life-style. Winckelmann's Greeks represented the synthesis of Hellenic values and eighteenth century humanism. He perceived Greek civilization from an aesthetic and social perspective and minimized a historical interpretation of the Greeks. It appears that Winckelmann's interpretation of the Greeks was far from comprehensive; he stressed the Apollonian aspects of Hellenic culture and either ignored or suppressed its Dionysian side. Winckelmann did not seek to study the Greeks and stop there. He was not so much of a classical scholar as he was a prophet, preaching with tremendous zeal, the rebirth of a Greek Weltanschauung. Implicit within Winckelmann's glorification of a Hellenic Golden Age was a depreciation of Germany and Christianity.

CHAPTER III

GOETHE AND CLASSICAL LITERATURE

An understanding of Winckelmann's conception of the Greeks is necessary in order to understand Goethe's perspective of antiquity. Goethe came into contact with Winckelmann's thought during his student years at the University of Leipzig, and he returned to his thought over and over again throughout his lifetime. Goethe's conception of antiquity rested upon two pillars: Winckelmann's understanding of Greek life and art, and his own readings in classical literature. Goethe read extensively in classical literature throughout his lifetime.

In Goethe's pantheon of Greek writers Homer stood supreme, towering above the other authors as a titan among dwarfs. Roughly speaking, Goethe refers to Homer in his works as many times as he does to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides combined, and these four authors, taken together, receive as much attention as all the remaining Greek literature. There were few years from 1770 on during which Goethe did not occupy himself at least to some extent with Homer; whereas it was common for him to neglect the other authors, even those he admired immensely, for lengthy periods of time.¹

¹William Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers As Revealed by His Works, Letters, Diaries, and Conversations (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1916), p. 17.

In looking back over Goethe's continual occupation with Homer, one is amazed by its extent and continuity. From early childhood until his death he frequently read and meditated upon the Iliad and Odyssey, although his interest was especially concentrated during 1770-1775, the Italian journey from 1786-1788, and the periods from 1793-1798, and 1820-1821. Altogether Goethe devoted an astonishing amount of his time to Homer; his epics were an inexhaustible source of interest and study. The result was not only a comprehensive understanding of Homer but also these epics actually became a necessity for Goethe: he fled to them for refuge as a troubled youth and later as an old man. When Goethe wanted nature, untouched and true, he turned to Homer. Goethe never grew weary of expressing his admiration for Homer's naturalness, and it was this quality that made him urge other artists to choose subjects from Homer. He admired the Iliad as much as the Odyssey. During his sojourn in Italy he had a special admiration for the Odyssey; he even ventured to emulate it by writing his Nausikaa, and in the late 1790's he tried to emulate the Iliad with his Achilleis. For Goethe both were models of epic poetry; he, however, observed that the Homeric poems were not written with a moral purpose. The Odyssey and the Iliad appealed to different audiences, the latter to the palace, the former to the agora. Homer presented only what was necessary, and rejected all mere ornament. Above all,

Goethe admired the lofty style and unity of Homer.² He acknowledged Homer's poems as examples of pure Nature. They were not a second nature but Nature itself. One cannot emulate Homer like Propertius or Hafiz—their poems were products of the poetical genius of their creators but Homer's poems abide in their pure naturalness. The Homeric poems sprang from a precultural stage of history. Goethe considered Homer as the "primal father" of poets; and, later in his life admitted that he was unable to emulate Homer. Emulation was out of place for the Bible and Homer. Goethe had deep reverence for Homer and the Bible because their impact transcended the merely aesthetic.³

Ever since the 1770's Goethe had demonstrated that he was well-versed in Homer, very much as Christians were in the Bible. He occasionally saw everyday life through the mirror of pre-existing Homeric images. Expressions like "temporizing Penelope-like," The "Aeolian leather sack of passions," and the "unfair exchange of arms" were common in Goethe's vocabulary. Homeric visions sometimes materialized before Goethe's eyes when he traveled. Homer was an element of Goethe's spiritual existence and of his private way of looking at and analyzing existence. Homer was no longer an object, but an instrument of recognition. Under these circumstances there can be no

²Ibid., pp. 45-47.

³Joachim Wohlleben, "Goethe and the Homeric Question," The Germanic Review 42 (1967):260-261.

question of an objective recreation of what is essentially Homeric.⁴

Goethe's interest in Greek lyric poetry was slight; this is strange because he was an excellent lyric poet. Apart from Anacreon and Pindar, he paid little attention to the Greek lyric poets, and even in the case of Anacreon his interest was only temporary.⁵ Goethe developed not only an interest but also a great temporary enthusiasm for Anacreon during the early 1770's. His early influence on Goethe was tremendous; however, Anacreon was never so prominent a factor in his life as were the tragedians. And yet, Anacreon continued to hold a high place in Goethe's estimation.⁶ Tyrtaeus, a Spartan poet, was praised for his manly courage in facing the trials and tribulations of life.⁷ Goethe found Theognis too much of a moralist and melancholy besides—in short Goethe considered him un-Greek. He was familiar with Simonides while, for the most part, he failed to appreciate Sappho.⁸

⁴Ernst Maass, Goethe und die Antike (Leipzig: n. p., 1912), pp. 92-99, cited in Joachim Wohlleben, "Goethe And the Homeric Question," 42 (1967):262.

⁵Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 49.

⁶Karl Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, trans. Moses Hadas (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 4-5.

⁷Johann P. Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, trans. C. Gisela. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 124.

⁸Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 50.

Goethe was familiar with the more neglected literature of the Greeks. It would be incorrect to say that Goethe knew only the more rationalistic, less mystical aspects of Greek life. Goethe found himself strangely attracted to the semi-legendary oracle Bakis. Indeed, he playfully identified himself with Bakis and wrote in his spirit The Soothsayings of Bakis.⁹ Orpheus as a mystical musician and city-builder held a prominent place in Goethe's thought; he was mentioned several times as an ideal poet. Thus, in 1817 Goethe composed his First And Last Words, Orphic. One may gather that the amount of interest Goethe showed in this second-rate literature—Bakis, Orpheus, and others—was an indication of his mystical bent.¹⁰

For Goethe, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were the objects of profound admiration.¹¹ Unlike Winckelmann, Goethe had great respect for Aeschylus and considered him surpassed only by Homer and Sophocles.¹² Aeschylus represented the old and lofty style.¹³ Sophocles ranked after Homer in

⁹Harold Jantz, ed. and trans., The Soothsayings of Bakis: Goethe's Tragi-Comic Observations on Life, Time, and History (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 1966), pp. 3-6.

¹⁰Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, pp. 56-57.

¹¹Ibid., p. 64.

¹²Ibid., p. 72.

¹³Ibid., p. 75.

Goethe's evaluation of Greek writers. He was for Goethe a great literary artist and his works were a standard by which to judge others; he represented the beautiful style of Greek tragedy, even though his flare for rhetoric tended to become a fault. Goethe admitted that Sophocles was the master of his youth, and in his last years he felt that no one compared with him except Homer.¹⁴ Goethe was not blind to the faults of Euripides, such as his lack of "high seriousness" and "strict artistic perfection"; he acknowledged such faults freely even at the heights of his greatest enthusiasm. He argued that the faults of Euripides were due to the age during which he wrote, an age that was incapable of appreciating the stern art of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Goethe defended Euripides against the unjust, unscholarly, and prejudiced criticism of Friedrich Schlegel and other German romantics.¹⁵ Of all Euripides' plays, the Bacchae was undoubtedly Goethe's favorite.¹⁶

Although Goethe showed considerable interest in Aristophanes at various periods during his life, he gave him nothing like the almost continuous attention that he gave Homer and the tragedians. His attitude towards Aristophanes was quite different from his attitude towards the tragedians; to them

¹⁴Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁵Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, p. 101.

¹⁶Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 94.

he looked up with humble, intense awe. His attitude to Aristophanes was rather patronizing. For Menander, Goethe entertained a great respect; perhaps it was uncritical and ill-founded.

Goethe said that the Greek historians were the ideal and despair of their successors. He admired them for their commitment to the world of reality. Herodotus received more attention than the others, but this was due to his style and story element. Thucydides received very little attention, while Xenophon was studied in 1771 not for his own sake, but because of Goethe's great interest in Socrates.¹⁷

It is doubtful that Goethe studied any of the pre-Socratic philosophers.¹⁸ Goethe was attracted to Socrates by the practical tendency of his philosophy and his avoidance of what Goethe considered empty speculation. To Goethe, Socrates was a sage, who in his life and death might be compared with Jesus.¹⁹ Despite Goethe's numerous references to Plato and some interest in him during his youth, there was no utterance that shows, even to a minor extent, any real appreciation of Plato's greatness.²⁰ Perhaps the strongest Platonic influence on Goethe was Plato's assertion that wonder is the mother of

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 98-102.

¹⁸Karl Viëtor, Goethe the Thinker, trans. Bayard Morgan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 61.

¹⁹Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 103.

²⁰Ibid., p. 107.

everything beautiful and good.²¹ Plato's appeal for Goethe, however, was almost entirely scientific and not literary or philosophical. Plato was the great model to be followed by every student of nature.²² Goethe's interest in Aristotle, for the most part, clustered around the Poetics and the problem of catharsis. What was especially admired in Aristotle was his rigid adherence to the facts, his insistence upon experience, and his acute and penetrating power of observation. Aristotle's fault was that he often jumped to conclusions before all of the facts were in. Goethe explained away the chilling effect that Aristotle's authority had exerted upon artistic creation; it was the result, Goethe claimed, of a narrow interpretation of the master's canons. This was especially true of the Poetics where Goethe argued that the interpreters took only the most trivial points of Aristotle's theories and blew them all out of proportion.²³ While Goethe failed to appreciate the philosophy of Diogenes of Sinope, he had a profound liking for the man, with whom he identified himself on numerous occasions. It seems that he admired Diogenes' self-containment and independence. For Pyrrho and other skeptics Goethe entertained little regard.²⁴

²¹Ibid., p. 110.

²²Ibid., p. 108.

²³Viëtor, Goethe the Thinker, p. 61.

²⁴Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 122.

The Attic orators were strangely neglected. They were important, however, since it was in oratory that Greek, as a language, reached its fullest development.²⁵ For the poets of the Alexandrian period, Goethe devoted little time or effort, with the exception of Theocritus, who was an object of his youthful enthusiasm.²⁶

Plutarch was one of Goethe's favorites. The amount of time he devoted to Plutarch was hardly paralleled by his interest in any other Greek author other than Homer. Admiration for Plutarch was, however, common during the eighteenth century.²⁷ Goethe read Plutarch purely for pleasure, and Plutarch stands almost alone in this respect; for elsewhere in his reading Goethe was sharply critical, constantly finding similarities and contrasts, discovering new problems, and arriving at conclusions.²⁸

Goethe lavishes extravagant praise upon the pastoral romance Daphnis and Chloe by Longus.²⁹ It is doubtful that this favorite of eighteenth-century Rococo is worthy of half of Goethe's praise. Goethe lamented that such "excellent" authors of the Alexandrian period as Longus, Nonnus, and Musaeus had been neglected in favor of the classical period.³⁰

Marcus Aurelius was of enduring interest to Goethe,³¹ and

²⁵Ibid., p. 123.

²⁹Ibid., p. 142.

²⁶Ibid., p. 127.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 132-142.

²⁷Ibid., p. 135.

³¹Ibid., p. 146.

²⁸Ibid., p. 131.

Plotinus also greatly attracted him. Understandably, however, Goethe found Plotinus' terminology abstract and mystical.³² Goethe spent a little time on the Neo-Platonist Proclus.³³

Though he was highly proficient in Latin, Goethe lacked the admiration for Latin literature that he entertained for Greek.³⁴ Goethe held Lucretius in high esteem; he spoke of himself as a follower, to some extent, of his materialism. Goethe saw Democritus as the original teacher, Epicurus as the didactic follower, and Lucretius as representing dogmatic materialism in its intolerant form. Goethe considered the religious views of Lucretius to be of minor importance, while his views on nature were grand and lofty. Angered by man's fear of death, Lucretius had felt that to deny immortality would free man from that fear. Goethe, however, detected a dark spirit that wished to raise itself above his contemporaries. Indeed, Goethe had planned at one time to write about Lucretius, contrasting his tranquility with the chaotic age during which he lived. He had to abandon the plan due to a lack of material.³⁵ Cicero received considerable attention from Goethe, and he had read a number of

³²Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 24.

³³Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, p. 148.

³⁴Ibid., p. 149.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 154-158.

his works.³⁶ In general, Goethe was little moved by Vergil,³⁷ but he had a certain fondness for Horace, especially as a source of mottoes.³⁸ Ovid, especially his Metamorphoses, exerted a strong influence upon Goethe throughout his life.³⁹ Martial, though inferior to the Greek epigramists, was the foundation for Goethe's Xenia.⁴⁰ Among the Roman historians Goethe was fascinated with Tacitus and Suetonius.⁴¹ Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius, the "triumvirs of Love" mentioned in the Roman Elegies, were their inspiration.⁴²

Goethe's Hellenism is based not only upon Winckelmann's vision of the Greeks, but also upon his own readings in classical literature. Of all the classical authors, Goethe felt Homer stood supreme; no other Greek writer could compare with him. Homer's naturalness, directness, and objectivity exerted a powerful influence over Goethe. Following Homer at some distance were the great tragedians of Greece—Aeschylus

³⁶Ibid., p. 159.

³⁷Ibid., p. 162.

³⁸Ibid., p. 169.

³⁹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 26, 68, 98.

⁴⁰Walter Horace Bruford, Culture and Society in Classical Weimar, 1775-1806 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 339.

⁴¹Keller, Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers, pp. 179-181.

⁴²Herman Grimm, The Life and Times of Goethe, trans. Sarah Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1881), p. 339.

Sophocles, and Euripides. Goethe read an abundant amount of classical literature; he did not do so systematically, nor did he devote as much serious study to any other classical author as he did to Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides.

CHAPTER IV

GOETHE'S CONCEPTION OF THE GREEKS DURING
HIS STORM AND STRESS PERIOD

Goethe was born in 1749, which was just the right time for the formulation of a generalized view of the Greeks. Born twenty years before, he would have had to combat the modernist prejudice against the Greeks, and in the thick of battle he would have lacked the tranquility needed for the penetration of the essence of antiquity. Born twenty or even ten years later, he would, with his opportunities, have obtained too much historical knowledge of the Greeks, which would have prevented his lifting them above time and place.¹

In Goethe's family there was no tradition of interest in Greek matters. Johann Kaspar Goethe, Goethe's father, had probably learned some Greek at the Coburg Gymnasium, but he had neglected it, and retained no particular knowledge of Greek literature. The family, however, owned a number of volumes of Latin authors, Roman antiquities, and lexicons of many languages. It is most significant to note, however, that while Johann Kaspar had no particular enthusiasm for the Greeks, he had no hostility to the Greeks or to

¹Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 14.

classical antiquity in general. While he would not allow Goethe to study antiquity under Christian Heyne, one of the leading classicists of the day at Göttingen, this merely illustrated his indifference to classical studies as an unessential though perhaps pleasant ornament to life, not hostility towards them as intrinsically bad. Above all, Goethe's father retained deep within himself an enthusiastic remembrance of his travels in Italy. While Italy was not Greece, there was certainly a Greco-Roman civilization that stood united, apart from the dreary transalpine world of northern Europe. Rome and Greece were not clearly separated in Goethe's mind until the journey to Italy, when he came to distinguish them. It is not imaginary to see in the tales of Italy that Johann Kaspar told his son the earliest stimulus of Goethe's never-stilled longing for antiquity, and thereby of his tendency to see the Greeks generally, not historically. Goethe's first impressions of Greece before 1765 were formed by his study of classical mythology, especially Ovid's Metamorphoses.²

By the summer of 1765 Goethe found that he was not attracted to the legal career his father had planned for him. He had decided to devote himself to languages, the classics, and history. Thus, Goethe would become a professor and write poetry with his thorough knowledge of antiquity. Goethe, however, was aware that he needed direct guidance for this

²Ibid., pp. 15-17.

task; he wanted to go to the excellent classical school at Göttingen. Unfortunately, his father had the last word and Goethe went to the University of Leipzig to study law. Goethe, however, consoled himself with the thought that Leipzig was also a center of classical studies with such excellent scholars as Ernesti and S.F.N. Morus (1736-1792).

Had the young Goethe been permitted to go to Göttingen and to study what he chose, he would have obtained a thorough knowledge of Greek literature, art, and history. This would have made him more critical of the ideas of his great contemporaries, Winckelmann, Herder, and Lessing; he would have had an abundance of certain knowledge with which to test their theories. His concept of the Greeks would have been more historical, and he would have known the Greeks as more human, and as a people whose ideas and manners were the outcome of their time and place. The Greeks would have lost their commanding influence over other peoples and eras. They would have been less the eternal essence of humanity, and therefore less of an inspiration for his poetry and thought. Familiarity would not have bred contempt, but most likely a cool detachment. Had he known the Greeks better, they might have lost half their spell over him.³

From 1765-1768 Goethe was a student at the University of Leipzig. And while this period was barren of any advance in his knowledge of Greek literature, he was introduced to

³Ibid., pp. 27-29.

classical plastic art. Before the end of this period Goethe was reproducing in his poetry the traits of Greek art that he had seen, and was consciously engaged with the problems. What was the essence of Hellenic art? What was the standard for a Hellenic artist?⁴

In the fall of 1765, at the Leipzig Fair, Goethe made the acquaintance of some Greeks and tried to learn Greek from them. He was, however, soon perplexed to discover that their Greek bore little resemblance to his knowledge of Greek, particularly in the pronunciation. He also made his first attempt to read Greek poetry in Greek. Unfortunately, Goethe's attempt to improve his Greek led only to despair and discouragement. With this second setback all of Goethe's determination to master Greek and the classics seems to have vanished. He recognized the uselessness of trying to master this subject by himself. He had placed all of his hopes on a properly directed course of studies at Göttingen; when he failed to reach that objective, he shelved his Greek studies for the remainder of his Leipzig student years. Yet, had he still been determined to master Greek and Greek literature Goethe could have done well at Leipzig. There resided in Leipzig four men with whom Goethe could have taken private lessons and acquired a command of Greek and through it a familiarity of Greek literature: J. F. Fischer, an excellent scholar and editor of four Platonic dialogues;

⁴Ibid., p. 34.

F. W. Reiz, a linguist who offered private tutoring; J. J. Reiske, the great humanist and scholar; and Morus, who was Professor of Greek and Latin. Indeed, Goethe dined with Morus often during his first winter in Leipzig, asking questions about classical antiquity; unfortunately, he never made use of this acquaintance to begin a systematic study of Greek.⁵

Adam Friedrich Oeser (1717-1799) was Goethe's drawing master and a personal friend of Winckelmann. Oeser was director of Leipzig's Academy of Painting. He was a member of the rather mediocre Viennese School, which specialized in allegorical ceiling and cupola work. Above all, Oeser seems to have been quite an unconventional character: lazy in his work, but an inspiring teacher and a moving force among the bohemian circles of Saxony.⁶ Oeser and his daughter, of whom Goethe was quite fond, were his only real friends during his student years at Leipzig.⁷ Oeser introduced Goethe to the history of art⁸ and led him to Winckelmann's doctrines.⁹ In a letter

⁵Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁶Wolfgang Leppmann, Winckelmann (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 105-106.

⁷Richard Friedenthal, Goethe: His Life and Times, (New York: World Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 50-51.

⁸Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethe's Autobiography: Poetry and Truth from My Own Life, trans. R. O. Moon (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1949), p. 267.

⁹Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 62.

Goethe expressed his sense of gratitude to Oeser: "His instruction will influence my whole existence. He taught me that the ideal of beauty is simplicity and repose. . ."¹⁰

Two visits to the Hall of Antiquities in Mannheim, in 1769 and 1771, reinforced the lesson. There Goethe found "a forest of statues, through which one was forced to wind."¹¹ He was greatly impressed with the Laocoon, the Dying Gaul, and Castor and Pollux. But above all else, he was taken with the Apollo Belvedere, with its excellent proportions and conquering glance.¹² In a letter written to Herder in 1771, occurs the following passionate outburst: "Apollo Belvedere, why dost thou show thyself to us in thy nakedness, that we must be ashamed of ours? Spanish suit and cosmetic!"¹³ The impact of the Mannheim statues must have been tremendous, though Goethe tried to expunge it from his mind, for:

This early sight, although so great and so effective throughout my whole life, was nevertheless attended with but small results in the time immediately following. . . . no sooner was the door of the noble saloon closed behind me, than I wished to recover myself again, nay, I rather sought to remove those forms as cumbersome from my memory; and it was only by a long circuitous route

¹⁰ Edward Bell, ed. and trans., Early and Miscellaneous Letters of J. W. Goethe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), p. 60.

¹¹ Goethe, Goethe's Autobiography, p. 434.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bell, Early and Miscellaneous Letters of J. W. Goethe, p. 84.

that I was brought back into this sphere. However, the quiet fruitfulness is quite inestimable of those impressions, which are received with enjoyment, and without dissecting judgment.¹⁴

Goethe did not as yet consider that he had a secure foundation in Greek art.¹⁵ Through Oeser Goethe was brought into an intensely close relationship with Winckelmann and his doctrines. Winckelmann's Reflections on Imitation made a deep impression on Goethe during his stay in Leipzig. Goethe learned from Winckelmann the superior importance of the Greek element in classical antiquity, and the subordinate and imitative role played by Rome. It was Winckelmann who offered Goethe a different view of the Greeks from that given by stage presentations of French classical tragedy, which until then were his only source for visual impressions.¹⁶ As Trevelyan wrote:

He was shown now the Greek of the palaestra—of beautiful bodies and of the sun, where the mind of the philosopher and the eye of the artist were alike trained on the aspect of beauty: a land where a kindly climate brought all nature to its most perfect development and led on the hearts of men to a natural joyfulness; where beauty was held in esteem above all else, and where no bourgeois respectability hemmed the free and natural outlets of all youthful joys. This picture he got from Winckelmann as a student in Leipzig, and it remained with him throughout his life; later reading and observations the influence of

¹⁴Goethe, Goethe's Autobiography, pp. 435-436.

¹⁵Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 30.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 42.

Lessing and Herder, only developed and added to the picture, they did not change it.¹⁷

Goethe, however, was not quite ripe for Winckelmann's doctrines. It seems that Winckelmann's cult of calm and simplicity as well as his exhortations to imitate the Greeks were unable to take root in Goethe's youthful mind. If he acknowledged Winckelmann's doctrine, that the highest ideal of beauty was simplicity and calmness, Goethe failed to embody it in his literary productions, which remained thoroughly Rococo.

From Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729-1781) Laocoön, Goethe learned to temper Winckelmann's influence. Lessing's Laocoön had a profound effect upon Goethe; Lessing had argued that a distinction must be made between plastic art and literary art. Each had its own laws; and the major law of plastic art was that only that which was beautiful should be represented. Thus, rage and despair were lacking in Greek plastic art, and violent passions were sublimated until all ugliness was removed.

Goethe himself, however, after visiting Mannheim in 1769, concluded that while Winckelmann was incorrect in believing that the Greeks had suppressed their emotions or remained coolly indifferent no matter what happened, Lessing was just as wrong in believing that they refused to express their deep knowledge of suffering in their art. Goethe concluded that the Greeks sought to avoid not so much what was ugly in their art as what was false. The greatness of the Greeks must be

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 42-43.

sought in something other than the mere creation of beauty.¹⁸

During his short stay in Strassburg Goethe made the acquaintance of Herder. Herder convinced him that the Greek language must be mastered if he were to gain an understanding of Homer and the other Greek authors which would be both true and fruitful.¹⁹ For Herder, the Greeks were great because they lived life to the full and expressed what they felt with great intensity. Herder accepted Winckelmann's code of clarity, form, and order, and also stressed the naturalness, directness, and youth of Greek plastic art.²⁰

The ideals of simplicity and tranquility were not to assert themselves until much later. For the moment, under the guidance of Herder, Goethe was devoted to other ideals: original genius and characteristic force rather than beautiful form.²¹

During this period Goethe felt himself drawn to figures of superhuman stature: Prometheus, Faust, Caesar, Mohammed, Shakespeare, and Pindar.²² Looking back on the early 1770's, Goethe remarked that he had had a reverence for the gigantic,

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 45-48.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 50.

²⁰Henry Caraway Hatfield, Winckelmann and His German Critics 1755-1781: a Prelude to The Classical Age (New York: King's Crown Press, 1943), pp. 89-98.

²¹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 62.

²²Ibid., p. 64.

heaven-storming character of the Titans, who he argues are the foil of the Olympian gods just as Lucifer is the foil of the Christian God. Goethe had great admiration for the Titans' patient opposition, which, while recognizing the superior power of the gods, claimed equality. And yet, Goethe added: "the bolder members of the race, Tantalus, Ixion, Sisyphus, were also my saints;"²³ and he expressed profound sorrow at the exile of the Titans from the earth.

Goethe's fragmentary drama Prometheus, like the great ode of the same title, represented the Titan as a revolutionary genius who is also the supreme artist, and not, as Shaftesbury would have it,²⁴ "a second master; a just Prometheus under Jove."²⁵ Prometheus created man and instructed him in the arts. Above himself Prometheus acknowledged only Fate. He rejected the Olympian gods and all they represented, particularly any conventional system of morality. Prometheus proclaimed that man was not degenerate, nor was he to be judged by rationalistic standards of good and evil.²⁶

You are diligent and lazy, Cruel and kind
Generous and niggardly: You are like all

²³Goethe, Goethe's Autobiography, p. 39.

²⁴Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 65.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

your brothers in fate, like the animals
and the gods.²⁷

It was, however, quite remarkable but typical that Goethe did not completely identify himself with the Promethean attitude. In this drama he was able to project his intimate sympathy with Prometheus, and yet transcend this point of view; the Olympians were not the sinister being that Prometheus thought. As Athena tells him:²⁸

To the gods lot fell—permanence
And might, and wisdom and love.²⁹

Eventually, had this drama been completed, Prometheus probably would have been reconciled with the gods; Goethe's own acceptance of the universe is here foretold. It was characteristic of Goethe to acknowledge the justification both of convention and of revolt—each as an Hegelian moment, as it were—and to attempt to establish harmony between these polarities.³⁰

Goethe nearly always saw the Greeks as Great—great in spirit and in physical size. In his earliest visions of the Homeric heroes, they were seen as "storks, wading large and free.

²⁷Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948-1971), 10:199 F., cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 250.

²⁸Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 65.

²⁹Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, 4:190, cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 250.

³⁰Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 66.

Goethe saw Socrates as a great man, an heroic champion of truth and chastiser of error; Olympus, the home of the gods, towered into the clouds. Goethe was awe-struck with Greek lyric poetry, which was powerful, vigorous and impassioned.³¹ Everywhere there was the same striving to express the vastness that Goethe believed the Greek genius lent to everything it touched.

The mystical experience of ecstasy or direct union with the divine—which represented the highest degree of Goethe's abnormal receptivity, the basic quality of his genius—he saw personified in Ganymede, a beautiful youth who was carried to heaven, in a state of rapture, by Zeus's eagle. Goethe's Hercules was not the average-looking man of Wieland; he was a colossus and a monster. Energy, sheer physical life-force, was possessed in superhuman abundance by Goethe's Hercules. Coupled with this excess of energy was another trait of the superman (recognized also by Nietzsche)—the right to harm and destroy, as well as to build and create order.

In short, according to Trevelyan, Goethe's early image of Greece was a wild stormy one, full of gigantic figures struggling with pitiless gods, of heroes locked in desperate struggle, of suffering and death. The English author Thomas Blackwell (1701-1757), who had emphasized the violent and lawless nature of Homer's world in his Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer (1735), helped Goethe to see Greece in

³¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 74.

this light. But chiefly this picture was a reflection of Goethe's own Storm and Stress experience.

In all of this there seemed to be no appreciation of the Greek feeling for measure and proportion; yet, Goethe found this quality in them too, not as a static law of proportion in art or of moderation in life, but as a dynamic tendency to control the too-expansive life-force and conduct it into creative channels.³²

Goethe saw the Greeks as a people who had understood better than any other people how to give form to life on a grand scale. They had had the urge to strike out recklessly and know life to the limit; but they had also known how to keep this urge within bounds so that it never lost itself in formlessness. Greek form might at times be superhumanly vast, but it remained form.³³

In The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774), Werther was devoted to Homer's patriarchal quality and naturalness, when he was in a healthy state of mind. When Werther became brooding, introspective, and morbid he abandon Homer for Ossian.³⁴

"Ossian has replaced Homer in my heart, and what a world it is into which this divine poet leads me!"³⁵ His contemplation

³²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 74-77.

³³Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 63.

³⁴Catherine Hutter, ed. and trans., The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings (New York: New American Library,

³⁵Ibid.

of Ossian conjured up a state of melancholy and visions of death.³⁶ In a conversation on August 2, 1821 Goethe stated: "No one remarked that while Werther is in his senses he talks about Homer and only after he grows mad is [he] in love with Ossian."³⁷ While Werther, certainly, could perceive only those aspects of Homer which aided in reinforcing his own Weltschmerz, Goethe's own concept of Homer was deeper and less sentimental.

In his poem "Artist's Morning Song", Goethe presented a reverent artist before the altar, reading his liturgy from the works of "holy Homer." But most arresting of all was Goethe's description of a bust of Homer, which appeared in Lavater's Physiognomic Fragments (1775-1778). This short invocation, while it is a prose poem, lacked Werther's subjectivity. Goethe contemplated the bust with emotion and awe, but found Winckelmann's calm and classical containment in Homer.³⁸

It is Homer!
This is the skull in which the enormous gods
and heroes have as much space as in the broad
heaven and the boundless earth . . .

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷David Luke and Robert Pick, eds. and trans., Goethe: Conversations and Encounters, (Chicago: Henry Regenery Co., 1966), pp. 193-194.

³⁸Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 63.

Purposeless, passionless, this man passes calmly through life; he exists for his own sake, and the world he contains within him in his occupation and reward.³⁹

It was during this period of unrest and indecision, which was common not only to Goethe but also to the entire Storm and Stress movement, that Goethe found in Pindar's analogy of the charioteer mastering and harmonizing his unwieldy team of horses a brilliant insight which was most pertinent to his own situation. In a letter dated July 10, 1772, Goethe wrote to Herder that "the Greeks have been my only study."⁴⁰ Among those he read, Goethe was especially impressed with Pindar's splendor and self-mastery: "I am living now in Pindar, and if the splendour of the palace could make for happiness, it ought to be mine."⁴¹ On reading Pindar's analogy of the self-mastering charioteer, Goethe found fresh hope and courage for his own task of self-mastery.

When you stand in a chariot, full of courage, and your four unbroken horses rear up in wild disorder against your reins, when you control their strength, force back with your whip the horse that pulls to one side, force down the horse that rears up, driving them on again till all sixteen legs fall in step and carry you to the goal, that is mastery . . . virtuosity.⁴²

³⁹Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, 13:38 ff., cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 63.

⁴⁰M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym, eds. and trans., Letters from Goethe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p. 23.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 23-24.

Goethe continued by confessing that his own life lacked self-mastery and harmony. It was his opinion that self-mastery could be attained by mastering his protean nature and giving form to concrete objective reality. Thus he wrote:

But I have been wandering about everywhere and taking a look at everything—never grasping anything firmly. Seizing, gripping—that's the essence of every mastery. You [Herder] have proved this for sculpture, but I think that no creative artist, can be anything so long as his hands have no share in shaping things.⁴³

The great problem of Goethe's life during this period was how to live under the unbearable stress of the demonic forces within himself. Goethe had discovered that he could save himself by projecting the struggle with the demon outside himself into artistic form. The secondary problem was then to find the means of expressing this task. For the solution of both problems the Greeks became indispensable for him. From their mythology, literature, and art, Goethe discovered that the artists and thinkers of Greece had also been racked by a demon that brought them to the brink of the abyss. But the Greeks had been strong enough to master the demon and turn this terrible power into peaceful and useful forms. In Pindar the struggle and the barely won victory were evident; in Aeschylus it was also evident for he, too, wrestled darkly with words, and his heroes reveled in the unholy defiance of the gods. Socrates had yoked the demon to the cause of Truth; and Homer, though visions of gods and heroes had

flowed in and out of his mind, had attained a serenity, a detachment, that belied the soul-shattering experiences he must have felt. Indeed, why had the Odyssey exerted such a special fascination for Werther? Because Werther, who felt himself slipping into destruction due to his inability to harness his abnormal sensibility to something productive, saw in Odysseus the image of what he himself would like to be. Odysseus too was a genius, or at least he was for Homer a symbol of genius. While he was blown over the length and breadth of the knowable world and even beyond, he never lost sight of his goal—the day of his return to Penelope. Through everything he kept his powers fixed on one objective; he remained steadfast, limited, and thoroughly human. Werther wanted to remain limited and human, but he could not. And when he knew that further struggle was useless, when the powers of destruction had him beyond hope in their grasp, he turned from the comforting clarity and decisiveness of the Odyssey to the pathetic wailing of Ossian. Fortunately, Goethe was able to save himself from Werther's fate thanks to the examples set by Homer, Pindar, and Socrates.

Goethe saw the Greeks as models; he would not imitate them, but he would emulate them. He would not produce works like theirs, but he would compose as they had done from the same deep understanding of humanity, the same store of intense feeling, the same nearness to the basic values of life.

For Goethe satisfying creative activity was as vitally

necessary as breathing is to common man. Had it not been for the Greek tradition, Goethe probably would have been hard put to give artistic form to the ideas that seethed within him. These ideas were too vast, too complex, often too mysteriously trans-rational to be expressed in the language of abstract thought. Before these ideas could become poetry, they had to be made visual, to be given a body that could express by its actions and its appearance every aspect of the conception which, as it were, was its very soul. Goethe needed symbols, images taken from life, which by their richness and concreteness in association could be made to convey these multiple meanings, deep or subtle. His method was to scan the history and mythology of the world in search of subjects which seemed to have experienced what he was trying to express. He demanded three things of these symbolic figures: that their experiences should be similar to his own; that they should be real beings with an existence of their own, not mere personifications of an abstraction; and that they should be reasonably familiar, primarily to himself, secondly to the public, so that there would be no smell of mustiness about them. It was not surprising therefore to find that Greek mythology provided him with more of these than that of any other people, including the Germans.⁴⁴

Goethe, however, was far from being a stable or tranquil figure; his old chameleon nature still pursued him. In

⁴⁴Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 77-80.

his attempt to see both the positive and the negative aspect of a personality or doctrine, Goethe could not always achieve a reconciliation of conflicting insights; ambiguity occasionally prevailed. This was quite apparent in one of his more extreme dramatic skits, the Satyros. Goethe's satyr was a Rousseauistic primitive who preached the ideas of his master and a diet of wild chestnuts.⁴⁵ He expounded half-mystical outpourings, reminiscent of Herder, and a faith in nature much like Goethe's own. He was the champion of a golden age of unrestraint: nudism, sexual freedom, and vegetarianism. The satyr was crude and often ridiculous, but charismatic, especially to women. Having carried his natural lusts too far, he was discovered attempting rape and forced to flee. The satyr, however, was not totally vanquished; Psyche, a local maiden, whose name is certainly symbolical, accompanied him. Thus, while Goethe felt the appeal of a Rousseauistic paganism, his mockery was, to a great extent, self-mockery.⁴⁶

Goethe was severely critical of the literary vogue of the contemporary Rococo Hellenism. The contemporary use of Greek materials struck him as for the most part French, and French culture, with the exceptions of Rousseau, Diderot, and Mercier struck him as inferior. One of the gravest sins of French classicism, according to Goethe, was its attempt to reduce

⁴⁵Barker Fairley, A Study of Goethe (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 14-15.

⁴⁶Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 66.

the Greeks to the level of gallant courtiers.⁴⁷ In an address on Shakespeare, Goethe sarcastically maintained that the Greek armor was too heavy for the "little Frenchman," and concluded that all of the French tragedies were parodies of themselves. Goethe believed that any treatment of Greek themes must be authentic, in some way original, and free of Rococo pettiness.⁴⁸

The most gifted exponent of French taste in German literature in Goethe's time was Wieland, whom Goethe held in high regard, though he was generally detested among the leading figures of the Storm and Stress movement. When Wieland wrote a Singspiel, called Alcestis (1773), and accompanied his mediocre text with an essay implying that it was superior to Euripides' Alkestis, Goethe was enraged and seized by a desire to put Wieland in his place; he responded quickly with his farce Gods, Heroes, and Wieland (1773), whose plot was reminiscent of Aristophanes' Frogs.⁴⁹ Goethe had Hermes conduct the unfortunate Wieland from his sleep to Hades, where Euripides, Admetus, and Alcestis indignantly confront him—they have heard of his insipid drama and his cutting remarks about themselves. Wieland, however, does not recognize the real Greeks⁵⁰ —"my imagination never produced

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 66-67.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁰Ibid.

such images."⁵¹ They mock Wieland for his Pietistic morality and attempt to explain the actual emotions of Alcestis and Admetus; however, Wieland cannot understand them.⁵²

You speak like persons of another world, a language whose words I hear, whose meaning I cannot grasp.

Admetus: We're speaking Greek. Is that so incomprehensible?

Euripides: You're forgetting that he belongs to a sect which tried to persuade every victim of the dropsy and consumption, every . . . hopelessly wounded person: once they were dead their hearts would be fuller, their minds more powerful, their bones stronger. He believes that.

Admetus: He only pretends to.⁵³

The last sentence is a sarcastic slap at Wieland's vacillations between Pietism and the Enlightenment. At this point, Hercules appears and censures Wieland for wavering between two abstract extremes, labeled virtue and vice, when the middle course of virtue—valor, pride, sexual prowess, and unlimited generosity—should be pursued. Hercules concludes by stating that something might have become of Wieland if he had not surrendered himself to Christianity and its moral dogmas.

While Goethe, during his Storm and Stress period (1768-1775), stressed exuberance, strength, and elemental powers, he had a keen sense of hybris. His attitude was neither amoral

⁵¹Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, 4:216, cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 67.

⁵²Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 67.

⁵³Goethe, Gedenkausgabe Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, 4:220, cited in Henry Hatfield. Aesthetic Paganism in German

nor cynical; his heroes were fundamentally kind and generous. When on rare occasions Goethe used the word Übermensch (superman), the term had an ironic connotation.⁵⁴

Had the critics of Versailles not been so absurdly shocked by Homer's simplicity and naturalness, Goethe would probably have never done so violently an about-face when the true Homer was first revealed to him by Herder. Goethe's attitude to the Greeks expressed in Gods, Heroes, and Wieland, and implied throughout Werther, was no doubt only a symptom of his general rejection of the social and moral standards of Versailles. It was however, a symptom summoned by the corresponding symptom in the previous age; the one cannot be comprehended without the other. Of course, it is impossible to ascertain just what subtly distorting effects the ideas of the French classicism of Versailles may have produced in the young Goethe. One can only conclude by saying that, in the matter of actual knowledge of the Greeks, the atmosphere in which Goethe matured cannot have been stable enough for the "formation of soundly based ideas" with which to build a balanced and well-proportioned interpretation of the Greeks.⁵⁵

Considering Goethe's Storm and Stress works as a whole, one finds that he was more classical—at least in matters of form—than he realized. Above all, an intuitive sense of

⁵⁴Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 67-69.

⁵⁵Humphry Trevelyan, The Popular Background to Goethe's

artistic discipline distinguished him from such Storm and Stress figures as Lenz, Wagner, and Klinger. If Götz von Berlichingen, especially in its first version, was shapeless and undisciplined, Werther was a masterpiece of harmonious constitution. While other members of the Storm and Stress rejected almost all aesthetic criteria, Goethe made standards flexible but did not discard them.⁵⁶

During the years of Storm and Stress Goethe discovered Greco-Roman pagan morality and found it an alternative to Christian morality. That Pietistic mysticism attracted him, in a period of spiritual sickness, after his state of instability at Leipzig ended his student career there, does not weaken the force of the argument; if anything, it confirms it.⁵⁷

To Goethe it seemed self-evident that what was needed most, indeed, the very quality that was lacking during the years of Storm and Stress, was Pindar's sense of mastery which must necessarily involve self-mastery.⁵⁸

Goethe's classical aspirations received a serious setback when his father determined that he should go to the University of Leipzig and study law instead of to Göttingen to study the classics. Even so, Leipzig was a major center of classical studies—second only to Göttingen. Unfortunately, Goethe failed to cultivate the classical scholars of Leipzig, and

⁵⁶Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 72.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 71-72.

most important of all, he abandoned his attempt to learn Greek. Thus Goethe's knowledge of Greek remained rudimentary. Goethe, however, did make some progress in his classical studies; he was introduced to Winckelmann's writings. After he left Leipzig, his conception of the Greeks was enlarged by Herder and Lessing—especially Herder, who stressed the naturalness and dynamism inherent in Greek civilization. Under the influence of Herder and the Storm and Stress movement Goethe tended to emphasize the Dionysian aspects of Greek culture. In contrast to Wieland and French Rococo, Hellenism, which emphasized the polished, tranquil, elegant aspects of Greek civilization, Goethe, in revolt against this distortion, stressed the dark, violent, passionate, and powerful aspects of Hellenic culture. Had Rococo Hellenism not been so exaggerated, it is doubtful that Goethe would have been so extreme in his effort to correct this distortion with an equally unbalanced perspective.

CHAPTER V

GOETHE'S CHRISTIAN HELLENISM:

THE SPELL OF CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

The years following the period of Storm and Stress, from Goethe's arrival in Weimar in 1775 to the flight to Italy in 1786, were a period of responsibility, altruistic labor for the state and friends, and a conscious struggle for self-mastery. It was not a period during which pagan tendencies were likely to flourish. No doubt this period represented a fruitful stage in Goethe's evolution; however, there were losses as well as gains. It seems evident that something was amiss; the precipitous, almost panic nature of Goethe's flight to Italy was a clear indication of this. Goethe's admission that he dared not, for several years, contemplate any classical work is certainly eloquent. A longing for the South was the most poignant element in the rather prosaic Wilhelm Meister just as it is in Iphigenia in Tauris. In both works the classical South, the Italy his father had loved, fused into one image with Winckelmann's Greece. The "Urge for the South"¹ was suppressed and more or less subterranean during the entire

¹Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 89.

period of Charlotte von Stein's influence. When, however, Goethe's classical nature erupted in 1786, with his Italian pilgrimage, the results were a poetical and psychological revolution—the birth of his Classical Hellenism and paganism. And, while Goethe's Greeks assumed, under Charlotte's spell, a more Christian than pagan stance, they would assume a very different aspect once the spell was broken.²

Upon his arrival in Weimar in 1775, Goethe came almost immediately under the influence of Charlotte von Stein (1742-1827), a lady-in-waiting in Weimar. Goethe and Charlotte were close friends, not lovers.³ As Emil Ludwig writes: "She loved the idea of Goethe, not Goethe himself. He loved the idea of her, not the woman herself. In that resides all which was fine, all which was fruitful in their relation."⁴

Charlotte, while she was not excessively ethereal or deeply religious, at least in the sense of organized religion, represented for Goethe not only for the sweet feminine spirit offering the healing power of Christian love (caritas), calm, purity, and order; but also the rigorous self-denial and introspection of Pietism. Especially prominent in Charlotte's Pietism was the belief that man stood completely apart from

²Ibid., pp. 89-90.

³Richard Fridenthal, Goethe: His Life and Times (New York: World Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 204-215.

⁴Emil Ludwig, Goethe: the History of A Man 1749-1832, trans. Ethel Mayne (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), p. 138.

the rest of nature. Charlotte did not control her passions; insofar as she was able, she tried to purge them. The cluster of forces working for self-denial, including Spinoza's ethics and the concept of duty to society, was opposed by another cluster in which the development of the individual, the integral wholeness of nature, and the appeal of antiquity were joined. While Charlotte and her ideals inspired some of Goethe's most beautiful poetry, her Pietism was unable, in the long run, to satisfy either his intellectual or personal needs.⁵

Most of Goethe's poetry of this period consisted of a vacillation between a defiant pagan self-confidence and Christian spiritual love and humility. In his epic fragment The Mysteries (1784), he attempted a synthesis of the two strains. Generally, the tendency of the poem is toward a blending of eighteenth century humanism and Christianity, toward self-mastery and discipline, as its location in Montserrat and its cast of knightly monks suggest:⁶

The man who overcomes himself can
liberate himself from the power which
confines all beings.⁷

These are its most significant lines. Twice the symbol of the

⁵Barker Fairley, A Study of Goethe (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 97-104.

⁶Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 91.

⁷Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948-1971), 3:278, cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1964), p. 254.

cross wreathed in roses appears:

The cross stands densely entwined by rose.
Who has linked roses and the cross?⁸

Sadness and joy, suffering and love were fused into one ideal. The roses represent "ancient thought, turned toward life."⁹ Like Hendrik Ibsen and Stefan George after him Goethe joined here in the tradition of the "Third Kingdom," with its dream of a new religion higher and nobler than Christianity. One is reminded of George's line about "the Christian dancing" and D. H. Lawrence's The Man Who Died. The attempt to fuse renunciation with a philosophy of enjoyment was not easy and proved impossible for Goethe; the poem remained a fragment.¹⁰

In 1777 Goethe began Proserpina. Proserpina, the leading character, was the symbol of Goethe's attempt to attain knowledge of classical antiquity and embody its essence in eighteenth century Germany. Goethe's longing for the South of glorious sunshine and luxuriant vegetation, which a captive of the North can know only from the poets of antiquity, was especially intense. But he was skeptical of any attempt to breed this Southern culture by artificial means on Northern soil. Proserpina, a captive of the Underworld, the North, saw a pomegranate and was given the hope that even in the Underworld, Greece may be acquired by merely tasting the fruits

⁸Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, 3:275, cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), p. 254.

⁹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 91.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 92.

of Greek culture. Proserpina, all too late, realized that by tasting the knowledge of the ideal, which was once living in Greece, one drags the ideal into the modern world of darkness and suffering. Both the ideal and modern man must now suffer eternally; modern man because he could never be content and is impotent to make the vision real; the ideal, because it was powerless to transform the world into which it has been dragged.

For Goethe, this problem was not an academic problem to be discussed learnedly pro and con; he was engaged in one of the decisive struggles of his life. Was he to continue to be a victim of the uncontrollable attacks of the demon, which had often brought him to the brink of destruction, or was he to achieve self-mastery? In that struggle the Greeks were coming to stand for the idea of repose and self-mastery. It was a matter of vital importance for Goethe to discover how to put their example into practical use.

By the spring of 1778, the battle appeared to be won. Goethe felt sure enough of himself and his ability to advance with self-confidence, in full control of his genius and fate.¹¹

Thus, in a serene state of mind Goethe began Iphigenia in Tauris, which he did not complete until 1787 in Italy.

Iphigenia was Goethe's most characteristic and major work during his period of Christian humanism under Charlotte's influence. The drama was an expression of victory over the furies of Storm and Stress. With the aid of Winckelmann,

¹¹Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), pp. 87-91.

Herder, and Mings¹²—all of whom based their thought on the tradition of Greek sculpture—Goethe had begun to realize the inner significance of the human form. The Greeks had understood this significance as no other people had and revealed it in the ideal human forms of their sculpture. This was the principle upon which, from this instant on, Goethe interpreted Greek art. The deeper knowledge that he gained in Italy and afterwards did not cause him to change his attitude; he used it only to develop the simple idea in every greater detail.¹³

The way was clear to create through the inspiration of the Classical Ideal. He must recreate in his poetry the noble simplicity and quiet grandeur of Greek statuary. In the statuesque simplicity, the austere restraint, the perfect humanity of the characters, Goethe was trying to recreate in words his vision of the Hellenic man. It may be argued that Goethe was not successful, since the characters in Iphigenia lacked real plasticity. It was true that one learned to know them entirely through their thoughts and feelings; their physical appearance was not portrayed. Such description, however, seemed unnecessary to Goethe. Their physical attributes were those of Greek sculpture, which were well known and had little need of description. Goethe was concerned

¹²Anton Rafael Mings (1728-1779), a noted painter of his day, was greatly influenced by Winckelmann's doctrines.

¹³Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 92-95.

deeper significance of Greek contour and proportion, as he understood it. His use of Winckelmann's Greek sculptural ideal involved a reproduction, in the poetic medium, of certain qualities of Greek plastic art. It was in a sense imitation—a thing that would have been unthinkable during the period of Storm and Stress.

A number of phrases and images in the play were strongly reminiscent of passages in various Greek tragedies. The version of the myth adopted by Goethe did not always correspond with that used by the tragedians, although this was not surprising, since the tragedians themselves used different versions in different dramas. Iphigenia was not written in trimeters, but in prose that tends towards an iambic rhythm; and, there is no chorus. No doubt Goethe must have felt that all of his characters in Iphigenia were as dissimilar to the characters of Greek tragedy as they could be. With all of their gentle nobility, generosity, sweet reasonableness, and perfect consideration of each other's feeling, they were the negation of the passionate, bloodthirsty, ruthlessly selfish characters of Aeschylus. The emphasis upon the inner life of the characters of Iphigenia was not meant to conflict with an Homeric directness of feeling and expression. Goethe's characters had their passions under control; they responded to reason and self-control to which Iphigenia appeals in the last act.

Goethe felt that it was the task of the actors to recreate for the audience the glow that inspired him and the plastic

qualities of the Greeks.¹⁴ "We want to see powerful Greeks and heroes, wind-blown in fresh sea air, alarmed and oppressed by manifold evils and dangers, who speak out strongly as their hearts command."¹⁵

Throughout Iphigenia Christian morality more or less prevailed; it was one of Goethe's least pagan works. The insignificant authentic pagan element in Iphigenia, particularly the "Song of the Fates"¹⁶ was submerged by the more dominant element of Pietism. Indeed, the entire play was characterized by an almost Pietistic inwardness and soulfulness. Iphigenia, the main character, was exceedingly inwardly-directed, soulful, and over-flowing with sentiment.¹⁷ Her famous line—"With my soul searching for the Grecian land?"¹⁸ —is typical. Mignon, a leading figure in Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, expressed longing for her Italian homeland far more concretely. Iphigenia did not think; she felt.¹⁹ The gods must conform to her image

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 95-100.

¹⁵Johann Peter Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, trans. C. Gisela (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 102.

¹⁶Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Iphigenia in Tauris, trans. Charles Passage (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), act 4, lines 1726-1766.

¹⁷Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 92.

¹⁸Goethe, Iphigenia in Tauris, act 1, line 12.

¹⁹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 92-93.

of them; she prays: "Save me, and save your image in my soul!"²⁰
Thus man becomes the judge of the gods.

Iphigenia was the expression of a fusion of Storm and Stress sentiment with Enlightenment ideas. Its praise of tolerance was reminiscent of Lessing's Nathan the Wise. In its happy ending, its vindication of the essential goodness of the gods, its diction, and its general optimism the Weltanschauung of the eighteenth century prevailed.

Generally speaking, the diction reflected the two influences which largely shaped the play: Pietistically-tinged Christianity and the Greece of Winckelmann. The key adjectives of the play—"quiet, calm, pure, noble, holy"—were mainly culled from the Pietist vocabulary; and most of them were at the same time essential in Winckelmann's prose. Thus form reflected content very closely. In the statuesqueness of the bearing, grouping, gestures of its characters, and in the relative lack of color, the drama was indebted to Winckelmann.²¹ When Orestes referred to Iphigenia as a "great soul,"²² one is reminded of Winckelmann's description of Laocoon or Niobe.

With all of the concomitant Pietist atmosphere of Iphigenia there were some truly pagan elements such as the "Song of the Fates." At the height of her moral anguish, Iphigenia almost reverted to an understanding of the gods

²⁰Goethe, Iphigenia in Tauris, act 4, line 1717.

²¹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 93-94.

²²Goethe, Iphigenia in Tauris, act 1, line 76.

which Hesiod or Aeschylus would have found familiar. The gods were cruel, jealous, and indifferent to the problems of man, whose life was dominated by fear and necessity. Thus

Iphigenia sings:

In fear of the gods let
The race of man stand!
Dominion they hold
In hands everlasting,
With power to use it
As they may see fit.

One whom they exalt
Should fear them twice over.
On cliffs and on clouds
Are chairs set out ready
At tables of gold.²³

Indeed, the loyal favorite of the gods:

. . . may be cast,
Abused and dishonored,
To the depths of the dark
And there wait in vain,
Amid gloom and in fetters,²⁴
For judgment with justice.

But the gods are indifferent to men's fate:

Sit endlessly feasting
At tables of gold.²⁵

It is possible to interpret Iphigenia in Aulis so as to discover in it a moral similar to that in Goethe's Iphigenia. Specifically by willingly accepting her fate Iphigenia appeals to the highest moral powers and thus wins her own salvation from the gods, but it is not clear that Goethe saw any such moral in his drama. For Goethe the moral to be

²³Ibid., act 4, lines 1726-1736.

²⁴Ibid., lines 38-43.

²⁵Ibid., lines 44-45.

gleaned from the Greek tragedians' handling of the Tantalid myth must have been disturbingly unsatisfactory. That he chose this particular myth, which for him had always symbolized the superman's monstrous opposition to the supremacy of God, to represent his own reconciliation with the moral world-order, suggests that he was aware of this shortcoming of the Greek spirit and was determined to show that it could be corrected by Greek literature. He would complete the Greek cycle of dramas with his own Iphigenia, and offer in it the harmonizing conclusion that the Greek spirit had failed to discover. His play would be worthy to stand beside the Greek masterpieces. It would be Greek as far as a modern play could productively be; but it would teach a moral nobler than anything the Greek tragedians had conceived. Of the essential trinity—the Good, the True, and the Beautiful—the Greeks had had a unique revelation only of Beauty. But in the Good and True they had fallen short of the highest ideals Goethe saw. Goethe could not yet compose in a spirit of complete surrender to the spirit of Greece. He was still at odds with Hellenism on points of major significance.²⁶

Goethe's Iphigenia was, according to Schiller, much more than just an attempt to imitate the Greeks; foremost, it was an attempt to emulate them. Schiller found Iphigenia a close approach to the Hellenic spirit:²⁷

²⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 101-103.

²⁷Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 125.

One can't read this piece without feeling the breath of a certain spirit of antiquity, which is much too authentic, much too vivid, for a mere limitation, even the most successful. One finds here the imposing, grand repose, which places every ancient work so above rivalry, the dignity, the lovely seriousness, even in the most highly pitched expression of passion.²⁸

And yet, many years after the completion of Iphigenia Goethe said to a friend: "Insufficiency is productive. When I wrote my Iphigenia I had studied Greek materials, but insufficiently. If I had done so exhaustively, the play would never have been written."²⁹ Schiller, on reading Iphigenia for the second time, remarked that it was "so astonishingly modern and un-Greek that one fails to understand how it was possible ever to compare it to a Greek play."³⁰

For Goethe, Greece was not yet synonymous with the universal nature of man. It is not surprising therefore to find that Iphigenia does not mark the opening of a period of fruitful relationship with the Greek spirit. Goethe was still drawn to Greece by a mysterious force; he read more Greek and took what opportunities occurred for the contemplation

²⁸Fredrich von Schiller, Sämtliche Werke, ed. by Edward von der Hellen, 16 vols. (Stuttgart and Berlin: n. p., 1904-1905) 16:196 cited in Henry Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), pp. 124-125.

²⁹David Luke and Robert Pick, eds. and trans., Goethe: Conversations and Encounters (Chicago: Henry Regenery Co., 1966), p. 84.

³⁰Ronald Peacock, Goethe's Major Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), p. 223.

of Greek sculpture. There was, however, a lack of method in these studies.³¹ Elpenor, Goethe's second attempt to enter into the atmosphere of antiquity, ended in failure. He worked on Elpenor off and on from 1781-1783, but it remained rather wooden and was never completed.³² Thus, by 1786 most of Goethe's attempts to embody Hellenism in eighteenth century Germany and synthesize Christianity with antiquity had produced--with the exception of Iphigenia--only fragments: Proserpina, The Triumph of Sentimentality, and Elpenor.

From the completion of Iphigenia in April 1779 until early 1785 Goethe took every opportunity to stimulate his Hellenic vision. Thus, in September 1779, he saw the antiques in the Landgraf's galleries at Cassel. During their journey in the Alps in the fall of 1779, Goethe and the Duke of Weimar, Karl August, read Homer in translation. What Goethe sought in Homer was the soothing effect of his description of man in a state of naturalness.³³ Trevelyan writes:

With the naivete of his departed youth he read the Odyssey aloud to the neatherds in the high valleys, and drew strength, as he toiled up the rough ascents under the precipices and glaciers, from the thought of Odysseus's divine endurance.³⁴

³¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 103-104.

³²Eliza Marian Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: a Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 103.

³³Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 104.

³⁴Ibid.

As they left Zurich Goethe conceived the idea of building a monument in Weimar to commemorate his Alpine journey. This monument would be classical. Goethe conceived of it as four-sided, rather taller than its width, with an indented roof above quite simple, like the monuments which were the remains of antiquity. Each of three sides would have a single, significant figure, the fourth a Latin inscription.³⁵ On one side would stand Fortune; on another "Genius, who spurs us on, finds and points the way, bears the torch with bold stride;" and on the other Terminus, "the quiet setter of limits, the thoughtful, moderate councillor, standing and pointing with the serpent wand to a boundary stone."³⁶

It may seem rather odd to find the Orphic hymns still exercising their influence on Goethe's thought at a time when in other ways his relations with Greece were becoming more and more dependent on the intellectual assimilation of knowledge. But his conscious admiration of Greece was always based on an intuition which lay deeper than the intellectual plane and could not find full expression solely in terms of intellectual thought. For Goethe there was nothing wrong in the fact that the Greeks, for all their sunny self-awareness,

³⁵Ibid., pp. 104-105.

³⁶Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethes Briefe, ed. by Philipp Stein, 8 vols. (Berlin: O. Elsner, 1902-1905), 4:141-146 cited in Humphry Trevelyan: Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 105.

possessed their own tradition of intuitive wisdom. Thus it was natural that, in his quest for points of reference with the Greek spirit, he should utilize both the manner and the style of the Orphic hymns when attempting to express his own intuitions on such themes as the nature of life and the world.³⁷

In the early summer of 1782, Goethe wrote a number of epigrams in the Greek fashion. The urbanity of the Greek epigrams, their refined variety of subject and mood and the thoughtful daintiness of their expression greatly appealed to Goethe. These epigrams helped him forget, for a moment, the cruelty and violence which still disturbed his relations with the Greek spirit. They were the products of a refined, perfected civilization. Goethe temporarily suppressed the truth, that he had once realized clearly, that Greek greatness was founded on strength, and he came to regard delicacy of thought and outline as an essential quality of Greek formal perfection. Even the once detested Anacreontics were now held in esteem and thought worthy of translation.³⁸

Goethe found the insistence that wise limitation brings contentment in the gnostic wisdom of the Greeks. As part of his official duties in the Weimar government, Goethe had been commissioned to restore the mines at Ilmenau. While at Ilmenau, where his task and the men were crass beyond endurance, he read, "as cleansing and purification", the

³⁷Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 114.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 117-118.

Golden Words of the Pythagorean school and translated a short passage into German hexameters.³⁹ The lines that he chose are noteworthy:

And when you have done it, you will realize
the unalterable nature of gods and men,
within which all things move, by which all
if bounded; you will quietly watch Nature
unchanging in all things, will hope for
nothing impossible, and yet will do your
part in life.⁴⁰

It should be noted, however, that Goethe's return to a conception of the Greeks of which Winckelmann would have approved, did not blind him, as Winckelmann had been blinded, to the beauty and power of Aeschylus's genius.⁴¹ Unfortunately, Goethe had set out to accomplish an impossible task; there could be no reconciliation between the Christian faith and the stark Aeschylean morality, the survival of an age of violence, or the cynicism of Euripides' more refined morality. Goethe, however, could affirm many of the moral lessons of Greek tragedy such as the often recurring theme of hybris; it was probably for this reason that he had a preference for the Persians. But he had come to realize that the Greeks had failed to find a solution to the problem of violence. Upon this point he was aware of a chasm between his own perspective and that of the Greeks. Inevitably, he tried to prove to himself that the chasm could be bridged; inevitably,

³⁹Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁰Goethe, Goethes Briefe, 4:283-284, cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 105.

⁴¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 106.

he failed.⁴²

It was as early as 1778 that Goethe first fully realized the significance of Greek sculpture. The years has passed and the vision never left him, but it was difficult to maintain its productiveness in a Northern land. A few plaster casts in Weimar, the glimpse of a prince's gem collection, Richard Chandler's Travels in Asia Minor and Greece, read by Goethe in a German edition in April 1781—thus meagerly did the sunshine of Goethe's Hellenic ideal filter down through the mists of Thuringia to warm the bud that longed to blossom.⁴³ With the exception of these glimpses Goethe's life was spent among the dark fir-forests of Thuringia without a classical environment or object upon which to focus his longing. The vision was there but in such circumstances it could never be realized. It turned instead into a longing so violent that it became in time a sickness. The longing for the ideal, not the symbol itself, became poetically active and produced a symbol itself—Mignon, a character in Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship. Mignon, a sensitive child, pining for her sunny homeland, misunderstood at times and poorly treated by crass teachers, strangely resembled Proserpina. Both were condemned to wander in a dark land and long for the South. Mignon symbolized a frustration almost as complete as that for which Proserpina had stood. There was, however, a

⁴²Ibid., p. 113.

⁴³Richard Chandler, Travels in Asia Minor and Greece,

difference—an essential difference. Prosperina's longing was utterly hopeless; at that time it seemed to Goethe that Greece was forever gone because it was past in time. Mignon was not without hope; the land of her longing was not in the past. It was just beyond the Alps—removed in space but not in time.⁴⁴

Do you know the country where the lemon-trees
flower, and the golden oranges glow in the dark
foliage, where a gentle wind blows from the
blue sky, where the myrtle stands quiet and
the bay-tree towers up? Do you know it? That
is where, oh that is where, I would like to go
with you, O my beloved!

You know the house? Its roof rests on
pillars, the hall gleams, the rooms glitter
and marble statues stand and look at me:
'Poor child, what have they done to you?'
You know it? That is where, oh that is
where I would like to go with you, O my protector!

You know the mountain range and its cloudy
path? The mule seeks its way there in the mist;
the ancient blood of dragons dwells in caves;
the cliff falls sheer and the stream over it.
You know it? That is there, oh, that is where our
way leads, oh, father let us go!⁴⁵

By early 1785, Goethe could not read a Latin Book; now he avoided the contemplation of Greek sculpture; except for Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, his poetic creativity, for the moment, was almost dead. He had turned the energy of his genius to natural science. He had seen Greece as in a distant vision, but living as and where he did, he could never possess it. Thus, while Goethe wrote some beautiful, humanistic,

⁴⁴Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels, trans. R. O. Moon, 2 vols. (London: G. T. Foulis and Co., 1947), 1:122-123.

⁴⁵Leonard Forster, ed. and trans., The Penguin Book of German Verse (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1957), pp. 216-217.

and Christian poetry under the spell of Charlotte von Stein, in the long run her Pietism stifled his creative spirit and Christianized his vision of the Greeks. Goethe felt that he must free himself from Charlotte's spell and realize his Hellenic vision in Italy. As the winter of 1783 drew to a close he asked Charlotte for some maps of Italy. For two more years he endured the harsh winters of Weimar.⁴⁶ By July 1786, he could not contain himself any longer—he crept out of Weimar "realizing that everyone at home was chained, body and soul, to the north"⁴⁷ and fled across the Alps to Italy.

After Goethe's arrival in Weimar in 1775 he fell under the spell of Charlotte von Stein. Charlotte inspired Goethe's Hellenic aspirations, but colored his conception of the Greeks with Pietistic Christianity. While Charlotte represented the warm feminine spirit of Christian love she also symbolized the harsh self-discipline and self-denial of pietistic Christianity. It was under Charlotte's spell that Goethe wrote Iphigenia, a play which not only represented the height of his Christian humanism but also the fusion of Charlotte's Pietism with Winckelmann's Hellenism. Goethe, however, was not satisfied with either Charlotte's Christianity or her humanism; he sought the Greeks uncontaminated by Christian or humanistic preconceptions. For this he must travel across the Alps into Italy and experience the world of the Greeks and Romans.

⁴⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 120.

⁴⁷Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Italian Journey, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), p. 22.

CHAPTER VI

THE ITALIAN JOURNEY

It may be argued that Goethe's Italian journey (1786-1788) not only marked the birth of his Classical Hellenism, but also his paganism. In Italy Goethe forged his pagan sensualism and penetrated into the essence of both Greek art and Homer. Gundolf justifiably wrote:

If Goethe had died before the Italian journey, he always would have been known for his genius, but not for his wisdom, not as a man who commanded general concepts with the same easy mastery as perceptions and feelings.¹

Goethe consciously strove for objectivity from the very beginning of his pilgrimage.² He was the first visitor who attempted to understand the various phenomena in Italy as products of forces. His scientific studies had disciplined his mind so that he was able to eliminate from his judgments, to a significant degree at least, the subjective element, and think in terms of cause and effect.³

¹Rolf King, ed., Goethe on Human Creativeness and other Goethe Essays (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1950), p. 236.

²Camillo von Klenze, The Interpretation of Italy During the Last Two Centuries: a Contribution To the Study of Goethe's Italienische Reise (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), p. 79.

³Ibid., p. 70.

Goethe's conception of Italy was a rather narrow one; in his quest for inspiration he did not expect to be inspired by everything he found. He was too apt to rank artists according to their ability to adopt the Hellenic Ideal. Indeed, his very choice of route and the art works he visited demonstrated a rationalistic bias and a total reliance upon Winckelmann and Mengs.⁴ Goethe came to detest Gothic architecture which became symbolic, in his mind, of an entire world of Northern superstition and ugliness.⁵ He considered Gothic churches and Early Renaissance paintings as monstrosities and perversions of classicism.⁶ Goethe's admiration for Raphael, Titian, Correggio and his acceptance of Michelangelo, with certain reservations, was certainly due to the authority of Mengs, who regarded them as the only valid artists of the past for a classical artist.⁷

On numerous occasions Goethe wrote ambiguously of "the ancients," in such a way as to suggest that he saw no clear-cut division in the entity commonly known as Greco-Roman civilization. Instead, he contrasted the Ancient with the

⁴Ibid., p. 81.

⁵Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 96.

⁶Klenze, The Interpretation of Italy During the Last Two Centuries, p. 81.

⁷Karl Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, trans. Moses Hadas (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 79.

Modern as more or less alien to each other in outlook and practice, and he was not concerned about discovering just how much of the Ancient was entirely Greek. And yet, he recognized that even in Italy there were still veils between himself and the eternal radiance that had once streamed out of Greece. Italian art was disabled and distorted by its Christian content, and even the Romans were barbarians who had destroyed much of Hellenic civilization. All in all, Goethe was seeking the essence of the Greek experience in life and art, and he had no patience with the Modern, Christian, or Nordic tendencies which obscured his vision, even in Italy.

At times, Goethe found traces of this pristine Hellenic element in the sunny clarity and luxuriant vegetation of the Italian climate and landscape; at other times he saw its remains in the Homeric directness, simplicity, and naturalness of the Italians; sometimes he felt its power in Roman ruins or Renaissance architecture, painting, and sculpture.⁸

One may well ask why Goethe did not go directly to Greece instead of trying to satisfy himself with a vision of Greece perceived indirectly through Italy. The voyage to Greece, while inconvenient, was not out of question; indeed, Goethe had the occasion to go and rejected it.⁹ His refusal was

⁸Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), pp. 122-124.

⁹Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Italian Journey, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), pp. 213-214.

partly due to lack of adventurousness, inertia, and inconveniences. But these were merely superficial reasons. The proper question was: should he go to Greece? As far as he was able to ascertain, all the remains of Greek sculpture were in Italy—and most of them were assembled in Rome. Most of the excellent works of Greek sculpture were buried or sunken, and would not be brought to light until the nineteenth century.¹⁰

Thus Karl Viëtor wrote:

Classical archaeology made its greatest finds only in the nineteenth century. Of the results of the excavations of cult sites in Samothrace, Delos, Olympia, Eleusis, Delphi, Crete, and on the Acropolis, of the ruins of Pergamon, Troy, and Mycene there was as yet no knowledge, and scarcely anything was known yet of the archaic period.¹¹

The Parthenon marbles had been seen by a few exotic and whimsical unscholarly travellers; their existence was realized, but not their importance. Greece did not interest Goethe historically. It would have meant little to him to read on or view historic sites; this was not the type of great impression for which he thirsted. To be brief, there was nothing to coax him to make a distant and dangerous voyage to an outpost of the Ottoman Empire.¹² While Goethe did not visit Greece proper, he did spend much time in, and received his greatest impressions and insights from Southern Italy and

¹⁰Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 125.

¹¹Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, pp. 83-84.

¹²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 125.

Sicily, of which he wrote: "The Greeks themselves . . . have pronounced sentence on the land by conferring on . . . it the name Magna Graecia."¹³

On his arrival in Rome, Goethe stated "I reckon my second life, a very rebirth, from the day when I entered Rome."¹⁴ He found the magnificence of Rome so overwhelming that he was forced to observe it in "Pythagorean silence." He discovered that Rome had a calming and lucid effect upon his mind.¹⁵ He wrote:

I am now in a state of clarity and calm such as I have not known for a long time . . . In this place, whoever looks seriously about him and has eyes to see is bound to become a stronger character: he acquires a sense of strength hitherto unknown to him. His soul receives the seal of a soundness, a seriousness without pedantry, and a joyous composure.¹⁶

Goethe had found that the past could be understood in Rome, where "The school of the Greeks has stayed open, the years have not closed its doors."¹⁷

In Rome, however, while Goethe was in the presence of numerous art works—in fact, his senses were flooded by a chaos of art—art, which he considered worthy of contemplation,

¹³Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 318.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁷David Luke, ed. and trans., Goethe (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 99.

he was in dire need of creating a harmonious hierarchy out of this mass of confusion. For this he turned to Winckelmann's History of Ancient Art. Winckelmann not only served as his guide through a maze of undated and unclassified statues, but also provided him with a frame work into which he was able to fit all the vast knowledge that had come to him through years of observation and study. Thus Winckelmann served Goethe as a guide in the task of ordering his impressions and deducing from their multiplicity a ruling single idea, which led him to ask the question:¹⁸

What was the process by which these incomparable artists evolved from the human body the circle of their god-like shapes, a perfect circle from which no one essential, incidental or transitional feature was lacking?¹⁹

To that question he answered: "My instinct tells me that they followed the same laws as Nature, and I believe that I am on the track of these."²⁰

It was at this point that Goethe became a friend of Karl Philipp Moritz (1757-1793), an antiquarian with an inquiring and delicate mind. He and Goethe co-operated throughout 1787, except for the period of Goethe's visit to Sicily, and the result of their joint effort was the Mythology, which was not published until 1791. Since Goethe was the

¹⁸Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 140-142.

¹⁹Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 156.

²⁰Ibid.

dominant partner perhaps he suggested the nature and execution of the work; it may be assumed that the Mythology essentially revealed Goethe's own views on the genesis and significance of the Greek myths.

According to Moritz, the myths revealed, by means of poetic imagination, the nature of the necessary forces which create and sustain existence. The gods were these forces revealed by poetry to human understanding. It was Moritz's hope that his book would be the bible of a new religion, based upon the pagan tradition that Christianity had destroyed. Indeed, he spoke of a "new dawn" that would come when the myths were properly understood. For Moritz, the victory of the Olympian gods over the Titans represented the victory of order and form over the distorted and formless. He defended anthropomorphism in religion; Nature created man so that it might be self-conscious. In return, man had learned to re-express Nature in his own form. Greek art had reached the apex of achievement; the Greeks created forms of the gods that were human yet raised above mere humanity, forms from which everything accidental was excluded and in which all the fundamental characteristics of powers and sublimity were fused.²¹

It was incorrect to seek moral edification in the myths. In them "man is of such secondary importance that little regard is taken of him or his moral needs. He is often nothing but a

²¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 145-146.

sport of the higher powers."²² The gods did not punish so much for injustices done by man to his fellow man,²³ as for "every appearance of encroachment on the prerogative of the gods."²⁴ The gods were not moral entities; their attribute was raw power. Each god symbolized Nature in all of its "luxuriant, wanton growths,"²⁵ and was thus above morality. Conflict between the gods was not the product of a uncivilized religion but the recognition that all these higher powers coexisted in Nature, thus conflict between them was inevitable, as a basic law of Nature. The battle between the Olympians and the Titans was not one of Good against Evil, but Power against Power. The Olympians triumphed not because they were more moral, but because they were firmly established and defined. But the Titans were not destroyed; they still remained great and powerful. They were part of Nature—an essential part—and could not be destroyed. Conflict and violent destruction are part of Nature's order. Though the Titans may seem to disturb the order of the Cosmos, the Greeks knew that they too must be allowed to follow their appointed course. The Greeks realized fully the essence of Life. They represented it in

²²Karl Philipp Moritz, Götterlehre Oder Mythologische Dichtungen Der Alten (Berlin: J. F. Unger, 1795), pp. 5-6, quoted in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 146.

²³Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 146.

²⁴Möriz, Götterlehre, pp. 5-6, quoted in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 146.

²⁵Ibid.

the Fates and the Furies. And yet they gave even the Fates beautiful forms.²⁶

The Fates represent the terrible Power to which even the gods are subject, and yet they are portrayed as beautiful women. . . . Everything is light and easy for the unlimited highest Power. Nothing laborious or difficult exists on this plane; all opposition ceases at this culminating point.²⁷

Thus, Goethe learned to admire what was great, beautiful, and powerful, even though it was harmful to the interest of humanity.²⁸

On his arrival in Italy in September, 1786, Goethe did not realize the radical transformations that his insight into the essence of antiquity would have on his own Weltanschauung. But by late December he realized the full significance of his Italian experience.²⁹

Though I expect really to learn something here, I never thought I should have to start at the bottom of the school and have to unlearn or completely relearn so much. But now I have realized this and accepted it, I find that the more I give up my old habits of thought, the happier I am. I am like an architect who wanted to erect a tower and began by laying a bad foundation. Before it is too late, he realizes this and deliberately tears down all that he has built so far above ground.

²⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 147.

²⁷Moritz, Götterlehre, p. 34, cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 147.

²⁸Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 138.

²⁹Goethe, Italian Journey, pp. 136-148.

He tries to enlarge and improve his design, to make his foundations more secure, and looks forward happily to building something that will last.³⁰

Klenze argued that to no one since Winckelmann had Italy—Rome in particular—meant as much to anyone as it did to Goethe.³¹ By January, 1787, Goethe wrote, "my life has acquired a ballast which gives it the proper balance; I am no longer afraid of the ghosts who so often used to make me their sport."³² And, "Everything is beginning to make a pattern . . . My preferences are becoming clearer and my emotional responses to what is greatest and most authentic is now freer and more relaxed."³³ Unfortunately, as much as Goethe had learned during his first stay in Rome there was still something vital missing. Already by the middle of December, Goethe had decided to leave Rome and spend some time in Naples.³⁴ His object was "to enjoy the glorious countryside, wash my mind clean of so many mournful ruins, and to get relief from over-austere aesthetic conceptions."³⁵

³⁰Ibid., pp. 138-139.

³¹Klenze, The Interpretation of Italy During the Last Two Centuries, p. 84.

³²Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 155.

³³Ibid., pp. 159-160.

³⁴Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 139.

³⁵Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethes Briefe, ed. by Philipp Stein, 8 vols. (Berlin: O. Elsner, 1902-1905), 8:33, cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 148.

Goethe hoped that the landscape and vegetation of the Naples area would show him what he desired--Nature revealing itself unrestricted in great and simple forms, that were perfect expressions of the "primary phenomenon" behind them. He found even Rome contained too many Modern, Northern, and Christian elements--all of which tended to blur the sharp forms of his impressions. By February, 1787, Goethe had come to realize that the achievement of the Romans was limited to their history and political institutions. In art the Romans were merely imitators of the Greeks; they could not aid Goethe in his quest for aesthetic-philosophical truth. Goethe was searching for Natural Laws, which had not only been valid for the Greeks but would also be valid for modern man. He now understood that the Greeks and only the Greeks had been the fountainhead, the source of these eternal forms. He had to flee from form-confusing Rome to a land where Nature was great and simple and historical memories were not so oppressively present.³⁶

Goethe thoroughly enjoyed the clarity and fruitfulness of a purely Mediterranean climate and vegetation. He saw Nature revealed in its simple directness; there was nothing half-expressed, distorted, or veiled. Above all, Goethe experienced an intense admiration for the simple, direct, cheerful, and unrestricted life-style of the Neapolitans. It seemed reminiscent of the ancients.³⁷ Goethe made a side-

³⁶Goethe, Italian Journey, pp. 137-165.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 174-198.

trip to the Greek temples at Paestum. There he saw for the first time real Greek architecture undistorted by Roman or Renaissance imitators. He was left utterly speechless at the sight of these stark Doric temples with their thick lumpy columns and their condensed mass.³⁸

In Naples Goethe experienced the same longing for Sicily that he had experienced for Italy when he still lived in Weimar. The temples at Paestum had reminded him of his austere task: the discovery of the Natural Law which the Greeks had discovered and followed. Goethe felt that he must discover and embody the Natural Law so he would feel and think as a Greek. It was in Sicily that Goethe would find what he sought: essential Greece, free of Germanic influence, Roman vulgarity, and Christian mysticism. So after much debate within himself he decided to sail for Sicily.³⁹ He went to Sicily for two reasons: to see Greek civilization uncontaminated by any Roman influence, and to see the land which Greek civilization had influenced.⁴⁰ In the only surviving letter from Palermo, Goethe wrote: "I have seen an enormous amount that was new to me; only here does one get to know Italy."⁴¹ Later he wrote

³⁸Ibid., pp. 208-211.

³⁹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 152-153.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 154.

⁴¹Goethe, Goethes Briefe, 8:211 cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 153.

that Italy without Sicily made no image on one's mind.⁴² For Goethe Sicily was the key to Italy.⁴³ He had been greatly disappointed that Rome had not fulfilled all of his needs, while his utter unfamiliarity with the Greek temples of Paestum was a shock to his preconceived notions and wound to his pride. These experiences left Goethe curiously touchy and on the defensive against any new experiences which might make new demands upon him. Sicily was as far as he was willing to search in his quest of the Greek spirit.⁴⁴

Just before his departure for Sicily, Goethe was approached by the Prince of Waldeck, who offered Goethe the chance to travel with him, on Goethe's return from Sicily, to Dalmatia and Greece. This greatly irritated Goethe; he would not travel to Greece and face the same kind of shocks that he had encountered at Paestum.⁴⁵ Goethe's rejection of the offer to travel to Greece proper is indefensible. Goethe, however, had thoroughly studied Richard Chandler's Travels in Asia Minor and Greece in a German translation in 1781; thus Goethe was familiar with the topography and ruins of Greece, especially the Acropolis, which Chandler had described in detail.⁴⁶

⁴²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 155.

⁴³Klenze, The Interpretation of Italy During the Last Two Centuries, p. 59.

⁴⁴Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 155.

⁴⁵Goethe, Italian Journey, pp. 213-214.

⁴⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 189.

Unfortunately, Goethe drew little inspiration from ruins, and during his exploration of Sicily, he had become quite bored with even the most splendid of Greek temples. He certainly did not need to journey to Greece in order to appreciate the Aegean sea, the plain of Attica, or the site of Sparta. Homer had described the Mediterranean "world", and Goethe contrasted the Mediterranean world with that of the transalpine North. What makes Goethe's refusal to make the voyage to Greece so incomprehensible is the fact that he feared that it would upset his preconceptions of the Greeks, and he seemed to have felt that he would have been unable to assimilate the shattering impact of new experiences. This attitude reveals a certain intellectual dishonesty and lack of objectivity. In light of Goethe's enraptured praise in 1824 for the drawings of the Elgin Marbles, Aeginetan sculpture, and the frieze from Bassae, a trip to Greece would not have upset his conceptions of the Greeks formed during his stay in Italy. On the contrary, it would have reinforced them--a voyage to Greece would have been fully justified.⁴⁷

It was in the Sicilian countryside that Goethe hoped to find unveiled, primordial Nature that he had been seeking since he crossed the Alps. He found it and much more. Goethe discovered, in his own words, not only "Urlandschaft" (primordial Nature) but also "Urmensch" (primordial Natural Man), as well as the connection between the two, which was

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 266-267.

Homer's Odyssey. The German scholar Walther Rehm observed that the understanding of Greece and the understanding of Nature were but two aspects of the same problem for Goethe. If Goethe had not seen the Urlandschaft in Naples and Sicily, Greece would have remained a unanswered enigma. Had he not reread the Odyssey in Sicily and understood what he did about Greek art and culture, the deepest significance of the Urlandschaft would have never entered his mind. His voyage to Sicily introduced him to the world of the Odyssey. Goethe was introduced to Homer's sea, with all of its terrifying beauty and power. And, when in the public gardens at Palermo he saw the full luxuriance of Southern vegetation, he felt himself to be in the gardens of Alcinöus. It was then that it occurred to Goethe that the world of Homer was not an enchanted fairyland that could never exist. Homer had described with accuracy the world he had known. It was, however, an ideal world, although not in the sense that it was subjective; it was ideal because Nature's intentions were perfectly realized. For Goethe the Odyssey ceased to be a poem; it seemed to be Nature.⁴⁸ Thus he wrote to Schiller on February 14, 1798:

But what splendour the poem took on for me when I read parts of it in Naples and Sicily! It was as if you had varnished a dull old picture, giving clarity and harmony to the work. I must confess that it ceased to be a poem for me, it seemed to be nature herself, and this was all the more important for the ancients, whose works were declaimed in the presence of nature. How many of

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 159-160.

our poems would bear being read in the market-place or anywhere in the open air?⁴⁹

And, he wrote to Herder:

His [Homer's] descriptions, his similes, etc., which to us seem merely poetic, are in fact utterly natural though drawn, of course, with an inner comprehension which takes one's breath away.⁵⁰

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that Goethe depended merely upon physical Nature. His poetry was in essence human-oriented. To create as the Greeks had done he had to perceive and understand ideal Man and Woman. The vision of the Urmensch was even more necessary to his thought than that of the Urlandschaft. While the modern Italians approached the ideal of the Urmensch, they were at best decadent descendants. Goethe came to realize that while the Urlandschaft was present, there were no Urmenschen in the modern world. The Urmensch was only an empty form; and yet it had not always been so for Homer had once described him.

Goethe found his Urmensch in Homer's Odyssey, especially in the description of the Phaeacians and later in the Iliad. The picture that Homer drew of man was of man as he is, without distortion, and with all of his essential qualities, passions, and endowments, free to develop within his fixed limits, unencumbered by an unfavorable habitat, confining

⁴⁹M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym, eds. and trans., Letters from Goethe, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), pp. 277-278.

⁵⁰Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 305.

social customs, and religious superstitions. Homeric man was sensual, but not vulgar. He delighted in all the sensations of life and prized art as the most lofty of these; without art, life would be unsatisfactory. Homeric man was an ideal man living in ideal natural surroundings, and he was fully aware of this fact. Therefore, Homeric man was content merely to describe what he saw, not what he felt.⁵¹ Thus, Goethe wrote contrasting unfavorably the modern poets with the Greek poets:

They represented things and persons as they are in themselves, we usually represent only their subjective effect; they depicted the horror, we depict horribly; they depicted the pleasing, we pleasantly, and so on.⁵²

Goethe had conceived the idea of writing a tragedy on Odysseus's stay among the Phaeacians before he reached Rome in 1786. He had named the tragedy Ulysses in Phaeacia and had written an outline and the first scene before he read Homer in Sicily. The other fragments were written in the public gardens at Palermo with the Odyssey in hand. All of the hundred and seventy-five lines of the fragment were written in Sicily. It was in Sicily that Goethe renamed the tragedy Nausikaa.

While it is highly questionable as to whether Homer meant to hint that Nausikaa had fallen in love with Odysseus, a

⁵¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 161-163.

⁵²Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 305.

modern interpretation is inclined to assume that. Goethe saw the unexplored episode as material for his own tragedy. Nausikaa would fall in love with Odysseus, unaware of his marriage and his destiny; and, when she discovered that he was married and planned to return home she, realizing her love was hopeless, would kill herself. It may be argued that such romantic love for which life loses all value except in relation to the beloved, was a passion alien to Homer. Goethe, however, did not consider the theme un-Greek. Had he considered the question at all, Sappho's and Phaedra's suicides would have been confirmation enough. Furthermore, since he considered Homeric men and women as Urmenschen, he believed that they could not have been ignorant of a passion so essential in modern times. Indeed, the theme of Nausikaa was taken from Goethe's own experience. On numerous occasions Goethe had aroused a woman's love, and always his daemon had made him desert her so that he might fulfill his fate.

This treatment of a very personal theme, however, was to demonstrate the effects of Goethe's new insight into the essence of Greek art and wisdom. In the first place, Nausikaa would be a real tragedy. There would be no sentimental trust in the goodness and love of the gods that would cause them to alter the conflict of the Laws of Nature. Odysseus's guilt would be insignificant, merely deriving from his lie that he was unmarried. The death of Nausikaa over her unrequited love would be represented as a misfortune caused by the gods. The world-order would be disclosed as essentially

inhumane. That is, the daemonic attraction of Odysseus's personality over Nausikaa, and her impossible love for Odysseus, which drove her to her death, were utterly inhumane.

Still the form of Nausikaa was modern: five-footed iambic lines, five acts, no chorus. It was in the style in which the empathy with Homer would emerge most lucidly. It would be purely descriptive, portraying reality, not its effect. There was to be almost endless description of the Urlandschaft—the sea, beaches, the hills, and the vegetation. A large segment of the second act was to be devoted to the destructive effects of a storm on the beauty of the gardens.⁵³

Most important of all, it was at this time that Goethe rejected Charlotte von Stein's Christian interpretation of the world. In a letter to Charlotte, he mocked Herder for clinging to this Weltanschauung, calling his humanism a "dream wish":⁵⁴

Speaking for myself, I believe that humanity will win in the long run; I am only afraid that at the same time the world will have turned into one huge hospital where everyone is everybody else's humane nurse.⁵⁵

Goethe concluded with "That which is, is moral."⁵⁶ On his return to Naples from Sicily, Goethe made a second pilgrimage to the Greek ruins at Paestum. These ruins no longer left

⁵³Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 163-166.

⁵⁴Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 312.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 169.

Goethe speechless. Goethe found the effect of these temples majestic and awe-inspiring; however, he still preferred the more slender, graceful and less stark Ionian column. Thus, Trevelyan justifiably wrote: "He [Goethe] never came to feel at home in the world of the Doric temple."⁵⁷

By June, 1787, Goethe had returned to Rome. During the next few days, Goethe made the final discovery that rounded off what he had learned in Sicily.⁵⁸ He wrote to Charlotte:

The human form is asserting its rights. . . .
I have found a principle which will lead me
like Ariadne's thread, through the labyrinth
of the human structure. . . . It is as
though a veil had suddenly been removed from
all statues.⁵⁹

And the Italian Journey further illuminates his revelation:

At long last the alpha and omega of all things
known to us--the human figure--has come to grips
with me and I with it, so that I say: bless me,
even though I wrestle until I am lame. . . . I
have arrived at an idea which makes many things
easier for me. . . . my obstinate study of
Nature and the careful attention I have paid to
comparative anatomy have now brought me to the
point where I have a vision of many things in
Nature and sculpture as a whole which professional
artists can arrive at only by a laborious study of
details.⁶⁰

During the next few weeks Goethe applied his principle to the

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 169.

⁵⁹Goethe, Goethes Briefe, 3:255, cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 169.

⁶⁰Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 374.

study of classical statuary and also to his drawing and shaping of the human form. He wrote:

The principle, by which I interpret works of art and unlock the secret which artists and art experts since the Renaissance have been laboriously trying to discover, seems to me sounder every time I apply it. . . . Without going so far as to claim I know how to use such a master key properly, I find myself competent to discuss with artists the details of their work, to see what point they have reached and what their difficulties have been. My own door stands open and I stand on the threshold, but alas, I have only time to peer into the temple before I must depart.⁶¹

Unfortunately, neither Goethe's letters nor his Italian Journey reveal the substance of his principle. He did, however, speak of brilliant intuitions, of seeing deeply into the essence of things and their relationships, and in connection with this he wrote: "The study of the human body now holds me completely. Everything else is nothing to it."⁶² While once Goethe had been unable to gaze upon the brilliance radiating from the human form, he was now able to contemplate it and to linger on it with rapture. He now called the human form "the non plus ultra of all our knowing and doing."⁶³ There seems to be little doubt that his study of Greek sculpture and anatomy had given Goethe an insight into the

⁶¹Ibid., p. 383.

⁶²Ibid., p. 437.

⁶³Ibid., p. 440.

Urmensch. Homeric man was revealed to him in Sicily and brought him close to the vision of the Urmensch. Homer had portrayed the moral qualities of the Urmensch; however, they lacked form. Goethe was unable to attain the impression of the form of the Urmensch from Homer. It was during his second stay in Rome that the Urmensch as visible, sensual, compact form was revealed to him. It was from the Greek statuary that Goethe derived the form of the Urmensch. Outside of Rome—that is, away from Greek statues—he felt that one could only attain a blurred, fuzzy image of the human body.

Thus, like Homer, the Greek plastic artists had known Nature inside out. They had anticipated Nature's intentions, even if these were seldom realized in the actual world; and they had created works of art according to Natural Laws so that what the artist produced was the complete expression of Nature's Laws. Thus, Goethe triumphantly and joyfully wrote:⁶⁴

These masterpieces of man were brought forth in obedience to the same laws as the masterpieces of Nature. Before them, all that is arbitrary and imaginary collapses: there is Necessity, there is God.⁶⁵

One must not assume, however, that any particular Greek statue showed him the Urmensch. No single statue could express all the properties that existed in the essence of man. Art was

⁶⁴Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 171-172.

⁶⁵Goethe, Italian Journey, p. 383.

limited to expressing each one of these properties in perfection. All of the statues of the gods and heroes were variations of the basic essence; and yet behind each variation the essence of the Urmensch was visible, and the totality of Greek statuary expressed the idea of man completely. The Greeks, or at least their artists and poets, had penetrated into the heart of the cosmos and had perceived the vast powerful forces whose action and interaction created and sustained the world. Homer had personified these forces as gods in human form; later the sculptors represented them in marble. Thus, it was possible to express Necessity and the Laws of Nature through the human form, since in man Nature becomes self-conscious, contemplating and reflecting itself. Man was a microcosm of the entire cosmos. This conception was certainly a great achievement.⁶⁶ As Trevelyan wrote: "That he should have wrung this revelation from the grudging hands of Nature, was the supreme achievement of his Italian journey."⁶⁷

In Italy Goethe experienced a spiritual awakening. It was during his stay in Italy that Goethe's Classical Hellenism and paganism were born. Goethe's conception of Italy was narrowly classical; he demonstrated no interest in any of the Christian, Medieval, or Germanic influences in Italy. Goethe attained his Classical Hellenism in Sicily and Rome. In

⁶⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 172-178.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 172.

Sicily he discovered that the world Homer described was not a fiction but truly existed. Homer had revealed to Goethe Natural Man living in ideal Natural surroundings. And in Rome, Goethe discovered the significance of the human form in relation to the cosmos. Goethe left Italy a spiritually transfigured man. He had assimilated the non-humanistic and pagan outlook of the Greeks and cast aside his German and Christian perspectives.

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN TO WEIMAR AND THE SPELL

OF CHRISTINE VULPIUS

Goethe returned to Weimar in June, 1788. He had fled across the Alps without any warning or good-bye, withdrawn into solitude, transformed himself, and became a new person, and now he expected to be received back into Weimar society without comment, as though nothing had happened and as though he were still the same person. He had amassed a vast wealth of knowledge and experience, and now he expected everyone to listen with rapture and enthusiasm to his newly formulated ideas and discoveries. Goethe, however, was coolly received by Weimar society and his old circle of friends.¹ Thirty years later Goethe wrote bitterly:

I had come back from Italy, so rich in forms,
to shapeless Germany; I had to exchange a
bright sky for a dull one. Instead of con-
soling me and drawing me closer to them-
selves, my friends reduced me to despair.
My delight over what lay so distant and
which was known to so few, my sufferings,
my sorrow at what I had lost, all seemed
an offense to them. I met with no sympathy
at all; no one really understood what I said.²

¹Richard Friedenthal, Goethe: His Life and Times (New York: World Publishing Co., 1963), p. 255.

²M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym, eds. and trans., Letters from Goethe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p. 166.

Soon after his return to Weimar Goethe took Christine Vulpius (1762-1827), a poor semi-literate Thuringian girl of twenty-three, as his mistress.³ Christine was of major significance in Goethe's achievement of Classical Hellenism; however, Butler wrote:

That anyone so young and so completely uneducated as Christine Vulpius should have been the muse which transported Goethe back to the days of Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius and set him writing in hexameters and pentameters, is certainly bizarre.⁴

Thus, the essential difference between Winckelmann and Goethe was that while the former saw the male form as the prime example of beauty, with homosexual overtones,⁵ the latter saw beauty par excellence in the sensuous harmony he experienced as the gift of a beautiful young woman.⁶ As Butler wrote:

The creator in his immortal hexameters rebuilt Rome stone by stone, so that he and Christine should inhabit it. In this sunny pagan world tragedy is not conquered so much as completely eliminated,

³Karl Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, trans. Moses Hadas (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 90-91.

⁴Eliza Marian Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: a Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 117.

⁵Wolfgang Leppmann discusses Winckelmann's homosexuality in Winckelmann (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 209, with special attention devoted to the identification of the Hellenic spirit with homosexuality.

⁶Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 117.

and the gods whose ghost fled before Iphigenia have undergone an Ovidian metamorphosis.⁷

Goethe's major Hellenic works, from his return to Weimar in 1788 until his friendship with Schiller in 1794, were his Roman Elegies and Venetian Epigrams. The Roman Elegies (first called Erotica) were written between October, 1788 and April, 1790,⁸ though they were not published until 1795.⁹ They were written to celebrate his love affair with Christine.¹⁰ In style, theme, and attitude this cycle of erotic poems represented Goethe's first major attempt to write objectively like a Greek. A pagan Weltanschauung also dominated these poems. As always Goethe utilized his own experiences—in this case transferred into a classical setting—as raw material, but he also attempted to present everything in a timeless, essential, and plastic form. Thus, the young woman of the Roman Elegies was not an individual but an archetypal woman—simple, sensual, devoted, and of pristine classic beauty. In the third elegy the lovers were associated with an entire procession of mythological predecessors.¹¹ While

⁷Ibid.

⁸Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 182.

⁹Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to The Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 104.

¹⁰Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, p. 89.

¹¹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 104.

Roman elegists Propertius, Tibullus, and Catullus provided the model, form, and content for this cycle of poems on a deeper level their inspiration lay in Homer.¹² In his Roman Elegies Goethe admonished the modern artist:

Are you now thinking of being creative again,
my friend? The school of the Greeks has
stayed open, the years have not closed its
door. I, the teacher, am eternally young,
and I love youth. I do not like you to
have an old head on young shoulders!
Look lively! Mark my words! After all,
antiquity was new in the days of those happy
ancients. Live happily, and so bring the
past to life in yourself!¹³

Thus, antiquity was associated with youth, freshness, and vigor. While Goethe did not fully banish the historical consciousness of modern man, the problem was treated flippantly — "the school of the Greeks has stayed open."¹⁴

In the seventh elegy, Goethe contrasted the gloomy North and its introspection with the clarity, warmth, and objectivity of Rome:

Oh, how glad I feel to be in Rome, as
I remember those times back there in the
north, where grey days clung about me
and the sky was gloomy and pressed down on
my head like a dead weight, and I was
surrounded by a colourless, shapeless,
dulling, exhausting world, and sank into
contemplation of my ego, trying to spy
out the dark paths of my discontented

¹²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 182-183.

¹³David Luke, ed. and trans., Goethe (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 99-100.

¹⁴Ibid.

mind. Now, the radiance of a brighter
air shines round my brow; Phoebus, the
god, calls forms and colours into being.¹⁵

Goethe rejected romantic, that is, sentimental love and
praised, with a brutal frankness, the joys of physical love:

In the heroic age, where gods and goddesses
loved, desire followed upon a look, and
enjoyment followed upon desire.¹⁶

While in another poem, "Gay Insolence", Goethe wrote:

My heart despises the torment of lovers, sweet
sorrow and soft moan: tell me of none but the
vigorous kind--bold burning glances and
smacking kisses. Let poor dull dogs find
refreshment in pleasure mingled with pain!
I am fresh of heart, my girl; Give me no pain!
give me noting but pleasure!¹⁷

Goethe's pagan love was, however, the love of a poet who was
determined to steep himself in the atmosphere of antiquity.

How glad, how inspired I feel now on classic
soil! The world of the past and the world
of the present both speak to me with more
voice and more charm. Here, as I have
been counselled, I leaf through the works
of the ancients with busy hand and daily
with fresh delight.¹⁸

And yet, Goethe only partially followed Horace's advice of
studying the classics day and night, for:

throughout the nights Cupid keeps me busy
in another way; I become only half a scholar,
but twice as happy.¹⁹

But Goethe did not divide love from learning; love, too, has
lessons to teach that the poet and sculptor should be eager to

¹⁵Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 109.

learn:

And is this not learning, to study the forms of her lovely bosom, and slide my hands down over her hips? For I understand marble then all the better: reflecting, comparing, I see with an eye that feels and feel with a hand that sees. . . . we do not spend all the time kissing, but some in sensible conversation; and when sleep overtakes her, I lie and am full of thoughts. I have even many a time composed poetry in her arms, and softly, with fingered hand, counted out on her back the hexameters' measure.²⁰

Goethe, lest he be misunderstood, was quick to point out that this union of love and art and learning that fed his inspiration as a poet was not romantic. Cupid granted the same service to the Roman elegiac poets.

[Cupid] thinks back to the times when he did the same service for the three sovereign poets [Catullus, Propertius, and Tibullus] of Love.²¹

While Winckelmann's ideal of Greece was poeticized, its nostalgia was deleted. The Roman Elegies glorified a fulfilled, happy present, to which Hellenism contributed dignity and solidity and excluded all illusion. And yet the world of the Roman Elegies was a green-house culture. Goethe was living in the midst of German-Christian world—the very negation of his own pagan Hellenic existence. His paradise was one that could not long last. In the distance the rumble of the French Revolution grew ever greater until at last it could no longer be ignored. Its harsh winds smashed the panes of

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

Goethe's green-house and upset his delicately achieved balance and tranquility.²²

In March, 1790, Goethe was once more in Italy; he was in Venice to await the return of the Duke of Weimar's mother, who was returning from Rome, and to escort her home. He would have preferred to have remained in Weimar with his young mistress. He was most disillusioned with Venice. The weather was cold and rainy. Goethe complained of the city's filth and frivolity; he called the lagoons a "frog-pond," and the whole city nothing but a "prison of stone and water."²³ The world of the Roman Elegies was in ruins; nothing remained but Christine. In Venice he longed for the tranquility and security that she alone could have offered him.²⁴ Fortunately, the weeks of depression bore fruit. "I have seen, read, thought, composed, as never before in a year."²⁵ The results were a cycle of caustic, short, witty epigrams which heaped sarcasm and contempt upon Christianity, the French Revolution, and things German. Goethe called these epigrams, written in the spring of 1790, The Venetian Epigrams.²⁶ The tone was

²²Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 120.

²³Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, p. 88.

²⁴Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 120.

²⁵Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, p. 88.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 88-89.

set by the following one:

You are deceived by statesmen, priests and the teachers of morals: and this cloverleaf, mob, how you like to adore it! Even today there's, alas, little worth thinking and saying that does not grievously flout mores, the state, and the gods.²⁷

Goethe was especially critical of Christianity. Karl Viëtor wrote: "He speaks sarcastically, like an apostle of the Enlightenment in the manner of Voltaire; never before or afterward did he depreciate Christianity to such a degree."²⁸ It is argued by some scholars that the very fierceness of Goethe's rejection of Christianity betrays a subconscious fascination for it; however, Hatfield maintained that this is speculation, for the Venetian Epigrams themselves reveal no such struggle.²⁹ Not only does Goethe reject and mock Christianity, but also the sacrosanct figure of Jesus. Jesus was himself deceived, and since he failed to follow the right path during his life, none of his numerous followers would find a reasonable enjoyment of life any more than he did.³⁰ Butler wrote that: "it is almost unknown for Goethe to snap and snarl; but there is no other term for the tone he used

²⁷Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans., Twenty German Poets: a Bilingual Collection (New York: Modern Library, 1962), p. 31.

²⁸Viëtor, Goethe the Poet, p. 88.

²⁹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, pp. 107-108.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 107-108.

about Christianity between the years 1788 and 1794."³¹

Goethe's vicious criticisms of his one time Pietist friend Lavater and his absolute fury with Kant's Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason demonstrate that his Christian environment was a "terrible bugbear to the newborn pagan who believed that he had done forever with the spiritual aspect of love and life."³²

For Goethe the period 1790-1793 was not only an unproductive period, but also one of flagging interest in Hellenism.³³ On November 5, 1789 he wrote to Karl August: "I am busy with Greek and have good hopes for it."³⁴ Until November, 1793, when he returned to the study of Homer, there is documentation for only one instance of Goethe reading Greek literature.³⁵ During January, 1793 he read Plato's Apology, Phaedrus, and Symposium with great enthusiasm. Goethe's interest in Greek sculpture was kept alive by his correspondence with Heinrich Meyer (1760-1832), a classical scholar and art critic, and from November, 1791 on, by Meyer's presence in Weimar. Unfortunately, their researches, except those concerning the por-

³¹Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, pp. 118-119.

³²Ibid., p. 119.

³³Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 187.

³⁴Herzfeld and Sym, eds. and trans., Letters from Goethe, p. 207.

³⁵Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 188.

trayal of ideal characteristics in sculpture, were not fruitful.³⁶

In 1793 Goethe had taken the medieval animal fable, Reynard The Fox, and, using Gottsched's prose account of this fable as a model, he rendered this work into hexameter. Goethe, according to his own accounts, chose hexameter because he wished to practice writing in this meter according to the rigorous rules laid down by Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826) the poet-scholar. There was, however, a deeper reason for his choice. He wished to write a naive description of the world without the subjective commentary of the poet. While Reynard The Fox did not describe the ideal world of Homer, it was as close to Homer's spirit as Goethe could come in 1793, living as he did in spiritual isolation in Weimar and horrified by the violence of the French revolution.³⁷ Schiller, however, wrote to a friend on June 12, 1793, that he was most pleased with Reynard The Fox, "especially on account of the Homeric tone, that is observed in it without affectation."³⁸

During the summer of 1793 Goethe's interest in the Greeks lay dormant. Then, on November 18 he wrote to a friend: "In order to have some limitless occupation I have betaken myself to Homer. So I hope, I shall never be hard up again

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 189.

³⁸Friedrich von Schiller, Schillers Briefe, ed. by Fritz Jonas, 7 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1892-1896), 3:453, cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 189.

in all my life."³⁹ This was, as Trevelyan wrote:

the starting point of a study of Homer, which continued with unrelenting intensity for more than five years and finally made the Homeric world as much a part of Goethe's life as was the air he breathed."⁴⁰

It was possible that Goethe intended to translate both the Iliad and Odyssey himself. Early in June Goethe's interest in Homer was powerfully stimulated by the presence in Weimar of Voss⁴¹ who had produced what is considered by many even today as the best German translation of the Odyssey (1781) and Iliad (1793).⁴² During this period Voss read aloud from his translation of the Odyssey to a brilliant intellectual circle which included Goethe, Herder, Wieland, Bottiger, and Knebel. In July Voss sent Goethe his recently published translation of the complete works of Homer. And in November and perhaps the winter of 1794-1795, Goethe read aloud from Voss's Iliad to the Friday Club Association, a circle of the intellectual elite of Weimar, which met on Fridays about once a month from September, 1791 until sometime in 1796, usually at the palace of the Duchess Amalia. These oral

³⁹Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethes Briefe, ed. by Philipp Stein, 8 vols. (Berlin: O. Elsner, 1902-1905), 8:127, cited in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 189.

⁴⁰Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 189.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 189-190.

⁴²Werner P. Friedrich, Oskar Seidlin, and Philip A. Shelley, History of German Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949), p. 87.

readings were often followed by discussion of the merits and inadequacies of Voss's translation.⁴³ It is logical to maintain that most of Goethe's translations of Homer were made at this time, partly with the intention of improving upon Voss. While it is true that Goethe's translation of Homer's description of Alcinöus's palace and gardens was more correct in essentials than Voss, one passage reveals a curious blindness to the Homeric mentality and style.⁴⁴ Where Richard Lattimore's translation of Homer has:

and dogs made out of gold and silver were on each side of it, fashioned by Hephaistos in his craftsmanship and cunning, to watch over the palace of great-hearted Alkinoös, being themselves immortal, and all their days they are ageless.⁴⁵

Goethe translated:

Golden and silver dogs on either side did Hephaestos set as immortal guards before Alcinöus's houses.⁴⁶

Homer's four lines were drastically reduced to two, and in the process all of Homer's love for detail has gone. Homer's style lacks any ornamentation, if one is speaking of mere external display. Homer's use of compound adjectives and leisurely delight in description for its own sake, however, may be considered to add luster to the plot. Thus, Alcinöus

⁴³E. Heyse Dummer, "Goethe's Literary Clubs," The German Quarterly 22 (1949):195-201.

⁴⁴Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 190.

⁴⁵Homer Odyssey 7, 91-94.

has lost his appellation "great-hearted" and Hephaestos his attribute of "cunning", and the dogs are only immortal, not ageless. The immense difference between the two divergent renderings speaks for itself. Goethe's translation is distinguished by a lack of Homer's naïveté—a fundamental feature of his Achilleis.

With the renewal of interest in Homer, Goethe sought afresh to solve some of the problems of Greek art. In August, 1794 Goethe and Meyer were in Dresden, where they continued their study of ideal characters in Greek sculpture and the characteristics of the different periods of Greek art.⁴⁷

Goethe's return from Italy met with little response in Weimar. He had left Weimar without a word and spent approximately two years in Italy, where he had transformed himself. He then returned to Weimar as an alien. During the years following his Italian journey Goethe was especially negative towards Christianity and a Northern Weltanschauung as his Roman Elegies and Venetian Epigrams illustrate. Goethe made Christine Vulpius his mistress, and she served as a further inspiration for his Classical Hellenism. Goethe's union with Christine served to infuse his Classical Hellenism with a vigorous, natural feminine spirit, and it fused Goethe's love for a young woman with his classical aspirations. Goethe developed a lively interest in Homer during the 1790's; he translated several lines from Homer and conceived the idea of

emulating him. Goethe continued his studies of the human form and Greek art with his friend Meyer.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIENDSHIP WITH SCHILLER

The summer of 1794 was of great significance in Goethe's life: it brought him Schiller's friendship. While Schiller is usually given the credit for reawakening Goethe's dormant creative genius, Goethe himself had already initiated the process with Reynard The Fox, continued work on Wilhelm Meister, and above all renewed his interest in the study of Homer. Schiller's friendship, however, greatly stimulated Goethe, and allowed him to begin a period of Hellenic literary productions as creative, prolific, and hectic as the period of Storm and Stress. In Schiller Goethe had found a man capable of understanding his life-purpose such as no one else had been able to demonstrate since his return from Italy. And not the least part of Goethe's delight was due to Schiller's lucid realization and affirmation of the position and function of the classical ideal in Goethe's Weltanschauung.

On August 23, 1794, when their friendship was in its infancy, Schiller analyzed Goethe's creative genius and the nature of his task in realizing the classical ideal.¹ He wrote:

For long although at a considerable distance,
I have watched the progress of your spirit,

¹Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 192.

and have with ever renewed admiration noted the road that you have set for yourself. You are seeking law in Nature, but you seek it by the hardest path, that any weaker minds would avoid. You take the whole of Nature together, in order to get light on the individual; you seek the explanation of the individual in the sum of Nature's manifestations. . . . You can never have hoped that your life would suffice for the accomplishment of such a purpose; but only to set out on such a path, is worth more than to complete any other. You have chosen, like Achilles in the Iliad, between Pythia and immortality.²

Continuing, Schiller added that it was Goethe's tragic fate to be born a German since he was essentially a classical personality born out of time and place.

If you had been born a Greek or even an Italian, and had been surrounded from the cradle by an ideal Nature and an idealizing art, your way would have been enormously shortened, perhaps made quite unnecessary. With your first perception of things you would then absorb the form of the ideal, and with your first experience the great style would have developed in you.³

But since Goethe was born a German, and his "Grecian spirit has been thrown into this northern world",⁴ Schiller offered Goethe two alternatives:

either to become a northern artist, or to provide your imagination by means of your intellect with the material which the real world could not give it, and so to produce your Greece as it were from within,

²Ibid., pp. 192-193.

³Ibid., p. 193.

⁴Ibid.

by an intellectual process. In that period of your life when the spirit is creating its inner world out of the outer world, you were surrounded by imperfect forms, and so had already been imbued with a lawless, northern world; but your victorious genius, mightier than the material world, discovered this imperfection from within, and was confirmed in its view by evidence from without, through acquaintance with the Greek world. You then had to correct the older, worse world that had been forced upon your imagination, in accordance with the pattern that your creative spirit made for itself. That can be accomplished only with the help of guiding principles. But this logical tendency, which the spirit cannot avoid in contemplation, is not easily compatible with the aesthetic function, through which it creates. You had therefore one more labour: as you previously passed from perception to abstraction, so now you had to turn logical conceptions back into intuition, and change thought into feeling, since genius can bring forth only with the help of the latter.⁵

Thus, with this letter, Schiller restored Goethe's lost confidence in his struggle to recapture Hellenistic norms in life and art, and also initiated their friendship and close co-operation in aesthetic matters. On August 27, Goethe responded to Schiller's letter; he held out to Schiller an offer of friendship and mutual confidence. Thus began a friendship and close co-operation which lasted until Schiller's death in 1805. Each poet had a liberating and stimulating effect on the other's creative genius,⁶

In On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795-1796) Schiller drew a clear and defined distinction between Greek poetry and

⁵Ibid., pp. 193-194.

⁶Ibid., pp. 194-195.

modern poetry.⁷ The Greeks, the naïve poets par excellence, had sought an exact and faithful description of nature by turning towards the external world in search of sensuous objects. Nature aroused intellect and curiosity in the naïve poets.⁸ The modern poets, that is the sentimental poets, turned inwards in contemplation of themselves where they drew their inspiration.⁹ Nature aroused in them a depth of feeling and a gentle sense of melancholy.¹⁰ At the conclusion of his essay, Schiller argued that modern literature stood in need of a synthesis of the naïve and sentimental which would provide a fruitful union for the future. There is some evidence that Schiller's concept of the synthesis of the naïve and the sentimental was a new insight for Goethe. It aided in reconciling him with the sentimental traits of his own creative genius.¹¹ In fact, he probably granted Schiller's contention that, in theory at least, "the idea of a beautiful humanity is not exhausted by either (the naïve or the

⁷Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 133-134.

⁸Friedrich von Schiller, On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry, in The Works of Friedrich Schiller, 4 vols., Edited and trans. by John D. Williams (New York: John W. Lovell Co., 188?), 4:284.

⁹Ibid., p. 326.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 284.

¹¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 201.

sentimental)], but can only be presented in the union of both."¹² For Schiller, Goethe was neither merely a naive poet nor was he a Greek poet; he had also treated sentimental materials (Werther) in a naive way, and he thus represented the triumphant synthesis, the ultimate ideal.¹³ Therefore, the "Idyl of Greece should not bring him back to Arcadia [an idyllic past] but lead him [forward] to Elysium [an idyllic future]."¹⁴ While Goethe's position as a synthesizer of the naive and sentimental poetry was vindicated, the Greeks were relegated to a relative but revered place in the history of culture; they were but one component, not the absolute peak of human endeavor and cultural perfection.¹⁵

Goethe's friendship with Schiller was of major consequence for Goethe's Classical Hellenism. Schiller not only understood Goethe's classical aspirations but was also sympathetic towards them. Schiller offered Goethe friendship and intellectual stimulation. He offered Goethe constructive criticism and encouragement in his attempts to emulate the Greeks. And with the publication of his essay On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, Schiller led Goethe to see that any attempt to write in the spirit of the Greeks must advance into the future, not

¹²Schiller, On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, p. 339.

¹³Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 135.

¹⁴Schiller, On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, p. 324.

¹⁵Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 135.

seek a return to the past. Schiller also urged Goethe to acknowledge that he was a blend of the Modern and Hellenic, the objective and subjective--and that this was an improvement over the Greeks themselves.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRODUCTS OF GOETHE'S

CLASSICAL HELLENISM

In April, 1795, Goethe conceived of the drama The Liberation of Prometheus, which, although it was abandoned in 1797 after he completed a mere twenty-three lines, contained a new dimension of Goethe's Hellenism. The drama concerned the liberation of Prometheus, who represented civilized man. Prometheus was chained to a rock where an eagle, representing the dualism of duty and natural inclination, the artificiality of modern civilization, and the destructive effects of the Christian doctrine of sin, tore and devoured his liver. Hercules, representing aesthetic man, would destroy the eagle and free Prometheus, who would arise whole and free.¹ As Schiller wrote, The Liberation of Prometheus was to be in Greek form; and an inspection of the fragment reveals the use of two fragments of chorus and two lines in iambic trimeter, a form peculiar to Greek tragedy. Never before had Goethe contemplated using the external forms of Greek tragedy. Unfortunately, during 1795 and even 1797 the execution of his

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Die Befreiung des Prometheus, in Gedenkausgabe der Werk, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948-1971) 6:849.

intention still remained beyond his technical powers. The Greek meters were too alien to him.²

Goethe and Schiller collaborated in 1796 to write their Xenia, which consisted of several hundred epigrams written in the style of Martial's Xenia.³ One of their major targets was Christian piety in German literature. From Klopstock down, none of the Christian poets was spared.⁴ In place of Christian and Nordic subjects Goethe and Schiller advised the creative artist and poet to turn to antiquity for their inspiration:

The things of beauty that we have in the arts are a gift from above, for in truth the ground below [Germany] does not produce them. Must not the artist himself procure his cuttings from abroad, borrowing from Rome and Athens the sun and air to make them grow?⁵

Encouraged by Schiller's depiction of him as the leading naive poet of modern times Goethe turned his full energies in 1796 to the production of naive art. For a period he toyed with the idea of treating the myth of Hero and Leander, but he soon abandoned this idea, turning instead to the idyll

²Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), pp. 201-203.

³Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Xenien, in Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948-1971) 2:443-497.

⁴Henry Caraway Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to The Death of Goethe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), p. 109.

⁵Walter Horace Bruford, Culture and Society in Classical Weimar, 1775-1806 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 404.

Alexis and Dora, which was written in May, 1796.⁶ This idyll concerned the maturation of man and woman in an unspoiled Greek atmosphere. Alexis and Dora was a fusion of both objective and subjective elements. Goethe not only described events and Nature but also the emotions as experienced by the young lovers. He was preaching an ideal—the ideal of a natural morality that followed inclination, in the assurance that it was divine. The entire poem was a rejection of the Christian-German Weltanschauung. Free of subjectivity as Alexis and Dora might be, it was not as objective as a Greek poem. Goethe's success with this poem encouraged him to emulate the Greeks further.⁷

From May, 1796 to early 1797 he worked on his epic, Hermann and Dorothea.⁸ Trevelyan wrote: "from the first . . . Homer was its godfather."⁹ Its contents was un-Homeric—it was set in Germany during the French Revolution and the main characters were German peasants—Hermann and Dorothea. But it was reminiscent of Homer in many ways; it was Homeric as indeed Goethe meant it to be. It was based upon Goethe's ability to reproduce Homericly the world around him in words with clarity and an understanding of the Laws of Nature. Since the Greek world was the Urlandschaft, Homer needed only

⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 203-204.

⁷David Luke, ed. and trans., Goethe (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 131-139.

⁸Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 205.

⁹Ibid.

to describe what he saw to attain the ideal; Goethe, however, had to be more selective. Thus, he selected as the scene of his epic his own birthplace, the Rhineland. He endeavored to endow the Rhineland with as many Sicilian qualities as possible.¹⁰

In order to create his ideal world in the naive style, Goethe adopted a number of Homeric mannerisms, the most obvious of which was the tendency to idealize the material world.

For example:

Hermann hurried at once to the stable; the
spirited stallions
stood there at ease, consuming the nourishing
oats, and
hay which was mown on the best of the meadows,
and dried to perfection
Quickly he fitted the gleaming bits in their mouths,
then at once he
pulled the straps through the buckle, beautifully
silvered and polished;
Then he attached to the buckles the reins, which
were longer and broader;
led out the horse into the courtyard; the stable
boy, willing,
thither had brought him the coach, which to push
by the shafts was quite easy.
Carefully then they attached to the whiffletree, tightly,
with neatest
cords, the swiftness and strength of the gracefully
galloping horses.

Like the Iliad and the Odyssey, Hermann and Dorothea abounded in such passages of idealized description. They revealed a world in which man's material surroundings were excellently wrought, perfectly executed, and always in flawless condition.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hermann and Dorothea, trans. Daniel Coogan (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966), lines 132-141.

Thus, the normal state of human existence, which Goethe depicted, was naively ideal like that of Homer's description of the Phaeacians or Sparta.

Hermann and Dorothea owed much of its Homeric nature to Goethe's leisurely delight in description for its own sake; however, the untrained modern reader might take it for realism. There was no anxious rushing on with the plot; each moment was an end in itself.¹²

Goethe did not seek to copy Homer mechanically but to imitate him, that is, to create in his spirit; from the essence outwards into external form, he sought a recreation of epic poetry from an insight into its necessary, essential nature, derived from the study of Homer. Goethe's characters and the scenery were not Homeric as such; yet in essence they were. Goethe drew his characters and scenery from an intuition of the nature of man, which he had gleaned mainly from Homer, and to some degree his own observations. Thus, the German peasant and the Rhineland became the Urmensch and Urlandschaft respectively.¹³

Hermann and Dorothea, however, contained a number of mere imitations from Homer which were not recreations of his ideas. It entertained Goethe to enrich German with a number of Homeric compound adjectives.¹⁴

¹²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 210.

¹³Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 213.

For Goethe, the hexameter was as integral a part of epic poetry as the technique of objective description and the Urmensch. If the Greeks had not discovered and developed it, it would have been necessary for later poets to have done so. Here, too, Goethe was not slavishly copying, but recreating. He was not as concerned with metrical exactness as with achieving an effect similar to Homer's hexameters. Therefore, the hexameters of Hermann and Dorothea were a felicitous union of freedom with observance of rules gathered from classical models.¹⁵

Butler, however, argued that Goethe "recklessly subvert [ed] the ethical standards of value" by trying to make "the very soul of poetry, its rhythm and motion" resemble the standards of sculpture.¹⁶ She is quite critical of Hermann and Dorothea, finding the plot trival, the use of hexameter unsuited to German, and the Homeric effects out of place in describing the peasants of the Rhineland during the late eighteenth century. She wrote: "No modern incident, one helplessly feels, should be dressed up in a pseudo-antique garment."¹⁷ And yet even such a severe critic as Butler had to admit that Goethe not only successfully imitated the Greeks

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Eliza Marian Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: a Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 129.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 128.

but produced a work of beauty:

In Hermann and Dorothea, however, he achieved a miracle and falsified a proverb by making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. . . . Even those readers who cannot accept it wholeheartedly acknowledge a baffling quality which redeems it.¹⁸

One must agree with Trevelyan when he wrote:

In the great upsurge of energy which came with Schiller's friendship, Goethe's genius achieved the end towards which it had been struggling, and mated at last with the spirit of ancient Greece. No matter then how modern or how German his material, the flame of Hellas would pass through it all and purify it; the ore would be gold and he could mould it to the eternal forms. Hermann and Dorothea is the crown of Goethe's Hellenism. It is justification for the battle that he had fought for twenty years, to tame his northern genius and teach it Greek ways. Could he have been content with this victory, could he have realized that this was all that Hellenism could give him, that in achieving this blending of his own genius with the spirit of Greece he had accomplished his task, could he in fact have stood still for awhile and bid the moment stay; he might have produced in the next few years other works as great as Hermann and Dorothea; and he would be spared himself fruitless toil and final disappointment.¹⁹

In May, 1797 Goethe wrote The Bride of Corinth.²⁰ While it was written in modern ballad form, it was set in ancient Greece and was essentially a protest against Christianity. The story was set at a time when Christianity was gaining ascendancy over paganism. The Bride of Corinth was pagan with

¹⁸Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 214-215.

²⁰Ibid., p. 225.

a vengeance. Christianity was depicted as a vampire which had sucked the life blood from men; it was a religion of self-denial, ugliness, and death.²¹ The God and the Dancing-Girl was also a vindication of paganism and a rejection of sin, guilt, and Christian morality.²² The New Pausias,²³ Euphrosyne,²⁴ and Amyntas,²⁵ all written in 1797, with their elegiac meter and allusions to Hellenic themes, bore further evidence of Goethe's complete absorption with antiquity.²⁶

By late 1797 Goethe was no longer satisfied to write as a German under the guidance of the Hellenic ideal.²⁷ Thus, Goethe, misjudging the applause of Hermann and Dorothea, accepted it as an encouragement not to write another such work but to penetrate further into the Classical Ideal.²⁸ Homer was seldom far from Goethe's side during the two years.

²¹Luke, ed. and trans., Goethe, pp. 159-168.

²²Ibid., pp. 168-173.

²³Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Der Nene Pausias, in Gedenkausgabe der Werk, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948-1971) 1:188-195.

²⁴Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Euphrosyne, in Gedenkausgabe der Werk, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948-1971) 1:196-201.

²⁵Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Amyntas, in Gedenkausgabe der Werk, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. by Ernst Beutler, 27 vols. (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1948-1971) 1:202-203.

²⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 225.

²⁷Ibid., p. 315.

²⁸John George Robinson, Goethe (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1927), p. 151.

following Hermann and Dorothea. The newly raised Homeric question, his aesthetic conversations with Schiller, and finally the preparatory work for his *Achilleis*, all united to keep Homer in the forefront of Goethe's mind. This was especially true during the spring of 1798, when Goethe's full energies were devoted to making a digest of the *Iliad*, which offered him at last a clear perspective of the entire plot. He also devoted much time to the tragedians, with Sophocles playing a secondary role to Aeschylus and Euripides. There could be little doubt that in all of his conversations with Schiller about the nature of tragedy, Sophocles was a prominent figure—and the most often referred to as being the most canonical of the three tragedians. All this intensive reading of Greek authors was accompanied by the renewed contemplation of ancient art which Goethe's aesthetic essays demanded. With a fresh study of Winckelmann from August, 1798 on, with numerous fruitful discussions of Greek subjects with Schiller, Meyer, the Schlegel brothers, Karl August Böttiger (1760-1835), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), Aloys Ludwig Hirt (1759-1839), Gottfried Hermann (1772-1848), and the famous Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), Goethe increased his knowledge of the Hellenic Weltanschauung.²⁹ Thus, Trevelyan is fully justified in writing: "During these three years Goethe lived and breathed and had his being in Greece."³⁰

²⁹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 224.

³⁰Ibid.

The idea for the Achilleis came to Goethe in late December, 1797. By March, 1798 he had decided to treat it in epic form and had written an outline of this work. In the Achilleis Goethe was brought face to face with the fundamental problem of recapturing the essence of Classical Hellenism, and in this case the problem could not be evaded. When confronted with the choice of treating modern subjects in a Homeric manner as in Hermann and Dorothea or recreating Greek literature as if he were a product of classical Greek culture and its age, he chose the latter. From the beginning Goethe realized that the idea which the Achilleis was to symbolize was in many ways purely modern and thus incompatible with a Homeric mentality.³¹

The Achilleis is a strange and contradictory work. While its form is essentially Hellenic and Homeric, its content is sentimental and based upon a personal experience. While the content of the Achilleis is sentimental and tragic, its external form is thoroughly Hellenic, perhaps slavishly so. Goethe took infinite pains, more so than with Hermann and Dorothea, to make his hexameters approach the Greek usage in accordance with the system favored by Voss and Humboldt and this exactness he achieved without recourse to experts.³² Goethe endeavored to make the local color fully Homeric

³¹Alexander Rogers, ed. and trans., Reineke Fox, West Eastern Divan, and Achilleid, in The Works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 14 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), 14:336-376.

³²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 236.

throughout the Achilleis by reading all he could find in the libraries of Weimar and Jena, particularly topographical descriptions of the plain of Troy. The Achilleis abounds in references to the Iliad and in Homeric compound adjectives. Those references not taken from Homer were taken from Hesiod, the tragedians, or the minor sagas of Dictys Cretensis, Philostratus's Heriikos, Quintus Smyrnaeus's Posthomerica, or Statius's Achilleis.³³

The content of the Achilleis is thoroughly romantic, that is, subjective, life-weary, and capricious. Goethe's Achilles is brooding and melancholy, more like a romantic than Homer's hero. It was this mood that Goethe hated and feared most in the Christian Weltanschauung. It was certainly odd that Goethe allowed the greatest hero of the Iliad to fall prey to this mental disease. For the life-weariness of Achilles was Goethe's invention; it was not taken from any classical source. Trevelyan seems to offer a logical explanation of this phenomenon. He argued that it had its basis in Goethe's personal experience. Thus, he argued that Goethe's Achilles was a man who finds life empty and joyless, and then perceived something which filled him with passionate longing, so that he forgot all fears, doubts, and troubles in the pursuit of this desire. This was an experience which Goethe had had at least three times: he had experienced it towards the end of his student years in Leipzig when Herder's

³³Ibid., pp. 234-237.

friendship and inspiration rescued him; during the latter part of his tutelage under Charlotte in Weimar until his Italian journey delivered him, and again upon his return to Weimar until Schiller's friendship liberated him. Achilles was killed just as he was about to marry Polyxena, the beautiful Amazon—the sole object of his desire. His death was brought about by his imprudent pursuit of his beloved object and his blindness to external dangers. Thus, the death of Achilles, just at the very moment that he was about to be mated with his beloved, reminds one of Faust, when Faust prematurely attempts to grasp the vision of Helen, and the Fairytales in which a youth reaches for his beloved object, the "Beautiful Lily",³⁴ and is turned to stone by its touch. Trevelyan argues that Goethe wished to express some spiritual problem of life by this "thrice repeated symbol", but adds, "Perhaps he meant nothing."³⁵

It may be assumed that Goethe would have radically altered the content of the Achilleis, if he had seriously attempted to write as Homer did. He indicated this in a letter to Schiller dated May 12, 1798. It was necessary for him to find a subject that had no special connection with his own life. But the Achilleis, as he conceived it, was based upon a personal experience, and this was fatal to the achievement

³⁴Catherine Hutter, ed. and trans., The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 244.

³⁵Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, pp. 234-235.

of a purely Homeric stance.³⁶ It seems that from the beginning Goethe realized that the content of the Achilleis was purely modern and thus incompatible with a Homeric mentality. Perhaps it was his hope to fuse Homeric form with romantic content and thus achieve Schiller's poetic ideal—the union of naive and sentimental poetry.³⁷

It may be argued that the Achilleis is in many ways Goethe's purest Classical Hellenism. And yet it was a failure. The reason for its failure was illustrated in Goethe's correspondence with Schiller.

On May 12, Goethe wrote to Schiller, expounding his rigorous working principles in the construction of the Achilleis: "If I am to succeed in a poem fairly close to the Iliad I must not fail to follow the ancients also in those features we reproached them with. In fact, I must adopt what makes me uneasy."³⁸ Such a rigorous concept of Homeric imitation, suppressing all free inspiration, verged on artistic self-denial. How could such an ideal be realized? Goethe's canonical classicism was thus set against his poetical instinct. He sought to emulate Homer directly in subject matter, style, and character. A great model overshadowed the Achilleis. The rationalistic construction of the total architecture and detail, the endlessness of the project, and in particular the

³⁶Ibid., pp. 231-232.

³⁷Ibid., p. 227.

³⁸Johannes Urgidil, "Goethe and Art," The Germanic Review 24 (1949):265.

tendency to reduce to raw material which had already been formed into an absolute cohesive unity, that is, the subject matter of the Iliad--all these features reduced it to derivative art.³⁹ Schiller, in responding to Goethe's letter of May 12, wrote:

Of course you will not purposely imitate those elements in Homer which displease you; but if any such get into your work, they will be proofs of the completeness with which you have entered into the Homeric spirit and of the genuineness of your mood.⁴⁰

In a letter to a friend on May 15, Goethe spoke of his new enterprise, which might indeed be too bold. "Yet even clearly to realize that some lofty model is beyond our reach, gives ineffable delight."⁴¹ On May 16 Goethe wrote to Schiller:

I am more than ever convinced that the poem is an indivisible unity and that no man, living or yet to be, is fit to judge it. I for instance keep finding that I judge it subjectively. . . . Yet my first idea of an 'Achilleis' was right, and I must stick to it, if I am to write anything of the sort. The 'Iliad' seems to me so rounded and complete that nothing can be added to it or taken from it, whatever one says. One would have to try to isolate any new poem too if one undertook to write one, even if it followed directly in time upon the 'Iliad.'⁴²

Thus, despairing over the impossibility of using the Achilleis

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 228.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym, eds. and trans., Letters from Goethe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p. 280.

as a link between the Iliad and Odyssey, or as Trevelyan puts it "add [ing] jewels to the broken necklace of Greek tragedy" Goethe was at a loss as to how to proceed.⁴³

At this point Goethe asked Schiller to decide for him whether with these conflicting elements (the subjective and the objective, a universal perspective and individual, private perspective) he should undertake the execution of the Achilles. Of course, this dilemma would simply vanish if Goethe had intended to produce a classical-modern poem such as Hermann and Dorothea, but he was instead hoping to recreate Homeric poetry in its purest essence.⁴⁴ Schiller, who could perceive all too well how his friend's mind was working, wrote on May 18:

Since it is certainly true that no other Iliad is possible after the Iliad, even if there were another Homer and another Greece, I believe I can wish you nothing better than that you should compare your Achilleis, as it now exists in your imagination, only with itself, and should seek only the right mood and atmosphere from Homer, without really comparing your work with his.⁴⁵

Schiller went on to encourage his friend to have confidence in his own creative genius and added:

It is certainly a virtue rather than a fault of the subject that it meets the

⁴³Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 215.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 228-229.

⁴⁵Friedrich von Schiller, Schillers Briefe, ed., Fritz Jonas, 7 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1892-1896), 5:384 F., quoted in Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge, 1942), p. 229.

demands of our age halfway, for it is a thankless, nay an impossible task for a poet to leave his native soil entirely and really to set himself against his age. It is your fair calling, to be citizen of both poetic worlds, and because of this great advantage you will not belong exclusively to either.⁴⁶

Goethe responded to Schiller saying that his letter had comforted and encouraged him; but in fact it had delivered the death-blow to Goethe's hopes of making Homer live again.⁴⁷ Friedrich Wolf's thesis, in his Prolegomena ad Homerum,⁴⁸ was that the Homeric poems were the product of numerous poets. For if the Homeric poems were the anonymous product of the entire Greek people and yet retained their essential artistic unity and were such perfect representatives of epic poetry, it was because the individuality of every poet who had worked on them had been absorbed in the work of the rest. Thus, in the Iliad and Odyssey the element of caprice which the individuality of even the greatest artist introduces into his work was entirely absent. Therefore, perhaps it was possible, Goethe thought, to submerge his individuality into the powerful tradition of the Greek epic, to let the idea of epic poetry merely speak through him as it had the scores of nameless poets of Greece. This was Goethe's struggle throughout May: first,

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸For a detailed account of Goethe's relationship with Wolf's theory of the authorship of the Homeric poems see Joachim Wohlleben "Goethe And The Homeric Question," The Germanic Review 42 (1967):251-275.

to identify himself so completely with the Homeric world that in studying it he would be raised above the limit of a subjective judgment; second, to suppress every objection that his personal nature might make to what he saw; and finally having attained a state of "super-personal receptiveness,"⁴⁹ to let his Achilleis grow of its own accord, as the seed planted on rich soil grows by the laws of nature. This idea, however, was daring beyond any hope of realization. Goethe's thought, abundantly supplied with poetic inspiration and vision, was unable to give birth to his ideal because he lacked the intellectual tools and a thorough classical education. For to accomplish his ideal Goethe would have to be not only a poet but also a rhapsodist and philologist; and the process that had supposedly taken centuries would have to be completed in a few months.⁵⁰ Trevelyan writes:

For four days perhaps Goethe was held in the power of this vision. In those four days he saw at least how his dream of Hellas re-born might be fulfilled. They were the culminating point of his Hellenism.⁵¹

Unfortunately, the effect of all Goethe's "archaeological paraphernalia" fused with the sentimental content of the Achilleis was not felicitous. For all of the accuracy of its Homeric setting, the references to the topography of the Trojan plain, and his intimate understanding of the personal

⁴⁹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 231.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 229-231.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 231.

and political relationships of the Greeks and Trojans, he still failed to achieve the naivité of the Homeric mentality.⁵² Due to the personal and sentimental treatment of the Achilleis, Goethe fell into subjectivity again and again.⁵³

It appears at first glance that Goethe's effort to embody the spirit of Greece was a failure. Goethe himself expressed grave doubts as to whether his union of the ancient and the modern was of any value.⁵⁴ As usual, Butler was unreservedly critical; she argued that the Achilleis fragment is "a reductio ad absurdum of Winckelmann's cherished principles; nobility has become pomposity; simplicity inanity; severity rigidity; and greatness has disappeared."⁵⁵ She further stated: "This fragment is the only example in the whole of his works of a slavish imitation of any model."⁵⁶ Butler concluded by asserting that Goethe was so familiar with Homer that there was no room left for his own poetic inspiration and creativity.⁵⁷ Therefore, he "could only laboriously copy the master as an intelligent but uninspired sixth-form schoolboy might hammer

⁵²Ibid., p. 237.

⁵³Ibid., p. 231.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 238.

⁵⁵Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany, p. 130.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 131.

out Greek lines."⁵⁸

And yet Hatfield flatly stated: "No one who has read the first canto with reasonable sensitivity is likely to dismiss the poem curtly as a 'failure'."⁵⁹ Trevelyan asserted that "there are moments indeed when the Homeric form is not belied by the content, and it is possible to imagine that one is reading a wonderfully poetical translation of Homer."⁶⁰ Trevelyan argued that the entire scene in "Zeus Kronion's holy house"⁶¹ is thoroughly Homeric⁶² and Hatfield found it "the quintessence of Goethe's ideal of paganism."⁶³ This entire scene was founded upon Homer's description of the gods in assembly in the Iliad.⁶⁴ After reading this scene and meditating upon it, I must conclude that it is hauntingly Homeric; it is Homeric on account of its lack of subjective form and content. Barker Fairley, a rather sober Goethe scholar, was lavish in his praise of the Achilleis; he maintained that it is not only the successful culmination of Goethe's Classical Hellenism but also truly Homeric.

⁵⁹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 112.

⁶⁰Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 238.

⁶¹Alexander Rogers, ed. and trans., Reineke Fox, West Eastern Divan, and Achilleid, in The Works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 14 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), 14:336-376.

⁶²Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 238.

⁶³Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 112.

⁶⁴Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 238.

He wrote:

His Achilleis, which was intended to be the first canto of an epic poem on the death of Achilles, but which as it now stands reads like a continuation, a twenty-fifth book of the Iliad
 Again we have to distinguish between Goethe and others; others imitate Homer, but Goethe recovers him and persuades us at moments that it is Homer who is speaking, and that we have all Homer before us. . . . Others have caught the physical splendour of Homer's world and will catch it again. What distinguishes Goethe is that he masters the Homeric view of life, showing himself as keenly alive to the maning of Zeus as to the meaning of Achilles, and as deeply imbued with the philosophy of the Iliad as with its scene and plot. Goethe's words in this poem on fate, hope, war, fame, death, and insecurity are as fundamental and as authentic as anything in his other writings; they reach our ears with a full voice speaking in accents that are natural to it, yet they are the accent of Homer, and they come ringing out of Homer's world.⁶⁵

Goethe had discovered, however, that the idea of suppressing his own individuality had proved not only beyond his abilities but also impractical. The Achilleis remained a fragment.⁶⁶ Trevelyan maintained that "there remained one possibility, if he was to make something of pure Greek gold; the recreation of Greece must be a subordinate theme in a greater poem of subjective self-expression."⁶⁷ In 1800, Goethe wrote his Helena fragment; it was published separately in 1827 under the title Helena. Classic-Romantic Phantasmagoria

⁶⁵Barker Fairley, Goethe As Revealed in His Poetry (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1932), pp. 114-115.

⁶⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 239.

⁶⁷Ibid.

Interlude to Faust. In this form the Helena fragment consisted of merely a part of act three, part two of Faust.

Working from 1823 until his death in 1832, Goethe moved from the Helena to the opening of part two, and then proceeded to the close, though not consistently in its finished sequence.⁶⁸

The first section of the Helena was written in trimeter and classical lyric meters, in the second, which represented the mating of Faust and Helen, the verse shifted into modern forms; and with the conclusion classical meters and a multiplicity of types of rhymed verse mingled freely.⁶⁹

Hatfield maintained that the Helena was an "extraordinary play with a play."⁷⁰ Indeed, as soon as Goethe observed that he was recapturing the authentic tones of Greek tragedy and not merely its modern substitute, he was tempted to sever the Helena from Faust, and finish it as he had originally intended, as a complete Greek tragedy. But after some reflection, he decided to subordinate the Helena to Part Two of Faust. The Helena examined by itself without reference to Faust was purely naive and objective; it had not the slightest relation with any experience in Goethe's life. It was a subject such as Sophocles or Euripides might have chosen as the theme for one of their tragedies.⁷¹ Trevelyan wrote: "There is in

⁶⁸Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, trans. Charles Passage (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), p. liii.

⁶⁹Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 230.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 229.

⁷¹Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 247.

fact no strain of modernity in the Helena fragment. It is as close a recreation of Greek tragedy as Goethe knew how to make it."⁷² For the dialogue Goethe chose iambic trimeters, and Goethe allowed the chorus a major role. The stage setting of the Helena was Greek rather than modern, and there seemed to be little doubt that Goethe's reconstruction of the Athenian stage added powerfully to the Hellenic atmosphere of the Helena.⁷³ It was in the Helena that Goethe was able fully to:

recreate the mental background of the Greek tragedies, that overwrought condition of the spirit, in which the threat or the memory of violence gives birth to fear and hatred, which in their turn beget more violence, more injustice and more hatred.⁷⁴

It was the spirit of the Greek tragedies that Goethe had sought to recapture since Iphigenia, but was prevented from doing so by a Christian-humanistic outlook.⁷⁵

At last Goethe had thrown off the shackles of a Christian Weltanschauung. He had assimilated Greek methods of dealing with the violence and dark passions of humanity. Taking the Troades of Euripides as a source of inspiration, Goethe would have Helen reminisce about how Menelaus took her back to Greece and planned to murder her for her infidelity and the misery she had caused the Greeks. The Helena opens with Helen suspicious that she was about to be slain by her own husband, and yet the threat of her own death makes her rise

⁷²Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 246.

⁷³Ibid., p. 245.

⁷⁵Ibid.

to truly heroic stature. She was just as much a heroine as Antigone or Electra.⁷⁶

The Helena marked the culmination of Goethe's Classical Hellenism. Hatfield wrote: "Here Goethe's classic and pagan ideal is at its height."⁷⁷ The brief marriage between Faust and Helen, the short life of their son Euphorion, and the return of Helen to the underworld seemed to symbolize the unattainability of the Classical Ideal. I would argue that this interpretation is incorrect. For Hatfield maintained that the relationship between Helen and Faust in "the archetype, as it were, of the "fulfilled moment,"⁷⁸ a state which cannot be permanent but which the poet preserved like a sculptor in the eternity of art. It seems that Goethe believed that the synthesis of the present and past, the classic and romantic was as fragile as it was splendid.⁷⁹

The Helena formed the living core of the second part of Faust. Goethe and Schiller maintained that the other themes to be treated in the second part depended upon the Helena act for their inner meaning. Thus, the entire nature and content of the second part of Faust were vastly divergent from the more popular first part.⁸⁰ Goethe, speaking of their

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 246-247.

⁷⁷Hatfield, Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature, p. 230.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 230-231.

⁸⁰Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p. 249.

differences, told Eckermann:

The first part is almost completely subjective; it all hailed from a more self-conscious, impassioned individual, which half-darkness—as it is—may well have its appeal. But in the second part there is almost nothing subjective; a world appears here that is higher, wider, brighter, and more dispassionate, and a man who has not been around and has not lived through a lot will not know what to make of it.⁸¹

Just how Hellenic is the *Helena* fragment? Fairley found it exceedingly Hellenic. He wrote:

For a while we cannot put aside the impression that this is no copy of the Greek spirit, but the complete evocation of it by one who has made himself a Greek and has only to speak with his proper voice, falsifying nothing, abating nothing, to make all Hellas live again as it lived of old. There is nothing like it outside Goethe. Compared with others who have invaded the Hellenic world, Goethe is Classical while they are neo-Classical. Goethe uses the Greek style as it was used by those who first used it, and with the same authority as they; other poets use it by literary right only, and with a difference.⁸²

Thus, Fairley maintained Goethe deliberately set out to produce, as though he were a "second Sophocles," a purely Hellenic piece of literature.⁸³ And yet Fairley had serious reservations as Goethe himself did about the Germanic elements of the *Helena*. He argued that the artistic perfection of the *Helena* was flawed by excessive complexity in form and content.

⁸¹Johann Peter Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, trans. C. Gisela (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 205.

⁸²Fairley, Goethe As Revealed in His Poetry, p. 114.

⁸³Ibid.

There existed an over-abundance of friction between the elaborateness of scenery and persona and the "lucid, simple, austere" Helena who finally addresses the reader. Helena was surrounded by a Faustian-Germanic atmosphere throughout most of her appearance. No sooner was she introduced—a Greek in a Hellenic setting—than she was involved in Faustian hocus-pocus. There was the magic flight to the North, the union with Faust, and the birth and death of Euphorion. All of this brilliantly symbolized the assimilation of the Hellenic spirit into the modern world. And yet, Fairley stated that this fusion of Faust and Helen, Germany and Greece, is too "intricate and mystifying to delight us."⁸⁴

While Fairley recognized that Goethe was:

telling the whole story of his Classicism, the winning and losing of it not less than the possession. We recognize this, we admire the achievement, yet we wish at times that it could have been otherwise, and that this evocation of Hellenism could have been reached in some simpler way more in keeping with the Hellenic spirit.⁸⁵

As to the Hellenic nature of the Helena Trevelyan wrote:

opinions may differ as to the nature of Greek tragedy, and it is beyond my competence and no part of my purpose to decide whether Goethe's Helena, if translated into Attic Greek, could pass for a fragment of a lost tragedy of the Athenian stage.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 116.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, p.245.

In 1805, Goethe bade farewell to his active emulation and imitation of the Greeks. What better way was there to sum up his commitment to Hellenism than by writing an essay on Winckelmann the father of German Classical Hellenism? Thus, the circle of Goethe's Classical Hellenism had become complete: it began and ended with Winckelmann. Winckelmann And His Age (1805) examined Winckelmann as an example of a man with an "antique nature," living in the modern world and his influence upon it. Goethe examined the major differences between the Greeks and Winckelmann and modern man. Modern man projected himself into the infinite, to return in the end to a limited proposition, while the Greeks, without following this roundabout path, found their exclusive happiness in this world.⁸⁷ Thus, Goethe wrote, the Greeks clung to the nearest, the true, the actual, and even the pictures of their fantasy have bone and marrow. Man, and whatever was human, was considered of the highest value, and all his inner and external relations to the world were represented with the same great intelligence with which they were observed. Passion and observation had not been separated; that almost incurable break in the healthy power of man had not yet occurred. These Hellenic properties, Goethe argued, were reincarnated in Winckelmann.⁸⁸

Winckelmann was unlike modern scholars who divorced their

⁸⁷Kuno Francke, ed., The German Classics, trans. George Kriehn, Vol. 2: Goethe (Albany, New York: J. B. Lyon Co., Publishers, 1913), 337.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 336.

life from their studies and lost themselves in disconnected knowlege; he possessed a classical spirit both in his life and studies.⁸⁹

From a religious perspective Winckelmann was a pagan. His paganism was characterized by confidence in himself, activity in the present, the worship of the gods of Greece as ancestors and awe of them as semi-artistic creations only, a desire for future fame, and resignation to an all-powerful fate.⁹⁰

Winckelmann was praised for being egotistic without being subjective. Thus Goethe wrote:

Such a nature could comfortably withdraw into itself; yet even here we discover in him the ancient characteristic of always being occupied with himself, but without really observing himself. He thinks only of himself, not about himself; his mind is occupied with what he has before him; he is interested in his whole being in its entire compass, and cherishes the belief that his friends are likewise interested therein.⁹¹

Above all, Winckelmann represented man acting as a harmonious whole, one who realized his place in the world as part of a great and worthy whole. For in the greatest moment of happiness, as well as in its greatest sacrifice, even death, the Hellene was always conscious of an indestructible well-being.⁹²

During the years 1795 to 1805, Goethe actively sought to

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 337.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 360.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 335.

write in the spirit of the Greeks as well as emulate them. Goethe tried to emulate Homer in form in his Hermann and Dorothea and to recapture the essence of Homer's naivete and objectivity. It was not enough, however, for Goethe to emulate Homer in form only. In his Achilleis Goethe sought to rival Homer in form and content; he sought to write as a Greek. Unfortunately, however, Goethe met with little success in this endeavor. In the Helena fragment Goethe did manage to emulate Sophocles and was successful in writing in the spirit of Sophocles in form as well as content. Goethe, however, subordinated the Helena to Faust, part two. In 1805, in his essay Winckelmann And His Age, Goethe paid tribute to Winckelmann, the founder of German Classicism, and summed up his own classical endeavors.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Goethe sought both to emulate the Greeks and to create in their spirit. He believed that the Greeks had discovered and acted upon the Laws of Nature. The Greeks were preeminently natural and at the same time highly cultured. They had harnessed their destructive, chaotic urges and created art and philosophy. Goethe attempted to understand the Greeks not from the perspective of a scholar or historian but as a poet. He did not wish to merely study the Greeks; Goethe wished to make them live in his own mind and spirit.

Goethe's knowledge of the Greeks was based upon three sources: the vision of Greek civilization created by Winckelmann, Goethe's own readings in classical literature, and the Italian journey. Goethe, under the influence of the Storm and Stress period, and reacting against the superficial criticisms of the Greeks by various members of the French Enlightenment, stressed the titanic, violent, natural, and daemonic aspects of the Greeks. Under the spell of Charlotte von Stein, Goethe attempted to fuse Winckelmann's Hellenic utopia with Charlotte's Pietism and eighteenth century humanism. Goethe, however, found this synthesis inadequate. He journeyed to Italy in pursuit of his vision of the Greeks, which he thought could only be realized in a genuinely

Mediterranean environment. Goethe's Italian journey marked the birth of his Classical Hellenism and paganism. Goethe discovered the significance of the human form to the Greeks. He discovered that the world Homer described was not a fairy-land but the depiction of Natural Man living in an ideal environment. Goethe united his classical aspirations with his love for Christine Vulpius. Christine inspired Goethe's classical ideals with a vigorous feminine element in sharp contrast with the masculinity and homosexuality of Winckelmann's classicism. Schiller offered Goethe his friendship at a time when Goethe was friendless. Schiller also offered further inspiration as well as constructive criticisms. Under Schiller's inspiration Goethe wrote several Hellenic works from 1795 to 1805. These works are uncannily Hellenic in spirit. The products of Goethe's Hellenism were, however, not entirely Hellenic in form and content; they were a splendid union of the Germanic with the Hellenic, the objective with the subjective.

It is my contention that Goethe's Hellenic experience was not only his most enduring but also his deepest experience. Some scholars incorrectly see Goethe's life in terms of a spiritual evolution—is by spiritual evolution one means a succession of various Weltanschauungen—Germanic, Persian, Chinese, Medieval, Christian and Hellenic—each of which is considered more or less equal. But Trevelyan correctly wrote: "All [other periods] were transitory and shallow in

comparison [with Goethe's Classical Hellenism]".¹ While the period of Goethe's Classical Hellenism lasted a mere nineteen years out of his long life of eighty-two years, much of his early life can be seen as a quest for a better understanding of the Greeks, the attainment of classical standards, and the production of semi-classical works. And it may be argued that Goethe's Classical Hellenism, after its literary and philosophical properties were exhausted, laid the foundation for his own mature Weltanschauung—Weimar Classicism, which may be seen as the fruit of his Classical Hellenism.

Goethe was convinced that the Greeks had understood the Laws of Nature, which govern not only man but also the entire cosmos. Goethe saw, in the Greeks in general and Homer in particular, man as he ought to be. He saw Homer's vision of civilized man living in a state of naturalness and harmony with the cosmos. While Goethe sought to purge Western civilization of its impurities and artificialities, he did not seek a return to a state of primitivism. Goethe's sense of Nature, and of man living in a state of Nature, must not be confused with Rousseau's emotional cult of Nature. While the former was based upon reason, order, and necessity, the latter was based upon sentimentality, subjectivity, and caprice. Thus, by imitating and attempting to emulate the Greeks, Goethe was able to develop a sound classicism which avoided both the

¹Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 258.

pitfalls of the sentimentality and the subjectivity first of Rousseau, and later of the German Romantics, and the barren intellectualism and academicism of contemporary scholars.

For Goethe, the Greeks had laid the foundations of Western civilization. They had defined its form and essence with such clarity and perfection that neither Roman law, the glittering diversity of the Italian Renaissance, or Christianity were able to equal. While the flame of Classical Hellenism was almost extinguished during the Middle Ages and other eras, it was rescued from time to time by creative elites.

Above all, it must be remembered that the Classical Hellenism of Winckelmann and Goethe was not a historical vision but an eternal form. Goethe was, after all, a poet and philosopher, not a historian; he shared with the Greeks the attitude that poetry was superior to history. While Goethe was content to examine all other cultures historically, he refused to judge the Greeks historically—they were too important for that.

The question of whether Goethe was able to imitate and embody the essence of classical Greece, perhaps cannot be proven by mere textual criticism; perhaps it is necessary to examine Goethe's Hellenism from the standpoint of intuition and empathy. Goethe, it must be kept in mind, sought to utilize the Greeks as a means to an end. He never sought to copy the Greeks in a slavish manner, he sought instead to enter into their very spirit, the very essence of classical Greece, in order to discover the same Laws of Nature

they had utilized and thus to rival their achievements. Goethe never sought to produce works that could pass as lost Greek literary productions. After all, he wrote in German and infused his Hellenic productions with numerous non-Hellenic forms and attitudes. Goethe was a creative poet and not a forger. If it must remain ambiguous to what extent Goethe actually understood the essence of classical Greece, it is certain that he did not succeed in emulating them successfully.

It has been my contention throughout this paper that Goethe created an alternative to the classical academicism of his day. Perhaps Goethe's Hellenism must be judged by its beauty and vitality as much as by its truth. Santayana dryly states that Goethe attained his Classical Ideal only to turn it over to the German professors. Thus, he wrote:

Helen, to be sure, leaves some relics behind, by which we may understand that the influence of Greek history, literature, and sculpture may still avail to cultivate the mind . . . Perhaps in the commonwealth he is about to found, Faust would wish to establish . . . professorships of Greek and archaeological museums . . . Faust would have won Helen in order to hand her over to Wagner.²

But I would argue that Helen's "relics" have significance for poets and philosophers as well as for academicians and scholars.

While Goethe's Classical Hellenism did not have much significance for German history and popular culture, it did stimulate the interest in Hellenism and creativity of a

²George Santayana, Three Philosophical Poets (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 179.

number of major German authors such as Hölderlin, Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872), Count August von Platen (1796-1835), Carl Spittler (1845-1924), and Stefan George (1868-1933). It was as if each one of these writers had followed Goethe's maxim in his essay Ancient and Modern (1818): "Let each one be a Greek in his own way, but let him be a Greek!"³ I would argue that without Goethe's infusion of the clarity, vigor, and objectivity of Classical Hellenism, German literature with its preponderant Christian-Nordic Weltanschauung would have remained even more subjective, beery, earthy, and bizarre than it is.

³John E. Spingarn, ed. and trans., Goethe's Literary Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1921), p. 70.

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