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## Butler's Winckelmann

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### ABSTRACT

The book *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (1935) by Eliza Marian Butler is about the development of German intellectual life in the period from Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) onwards. Winckelmann is often seen as the man who gave the impetus to a wave of philhellenism in Germany. According to Butler, German intellectuals' nostalgic longing for Greece and lack of interest in real societal problems bears much responsibility for the cultural collapse of interwar Germany and the rise of Nazism. The ideas that Butler put forward have been of great importance for those who criticize the political use of classical art in public monuments. Discussing Butler's points of view, this article will take a critical look at her reasons for attributing such a central role in the cultural decline of interwar Germany to Winckelmann's philhellenism.

### KEYWORDS

Eliza Marian Butler;  
J. J. Winckelmann;  
J. W. Goethe; philhellenism;  
daimon; Stefan Zweig;  
*Laocoön*

In 1935, a book was published that has attracted a lot of attention in recent decades: *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* by the English German scholar Eliza Marian Butler (1885–1959). Being the first important critique of German philhellenism, the book deals with the works of a number of key personalities in German intellectual life in the period from approximately 1760 until approximately 1930. It presents the life and works of important representatives of German literature and philosophy, such as Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Heine, and Nietzsche. However, these are not exhaustive biographies. What interested Butler was one specific aspect of their work, namely the way in which they were influenced by Greek art and poetry — a cultural impulse that had an enormous significance for German intellectual life in the period in question.

Butler's educational background was crucial to the completion of the project. Her father, Theobald F. Butler, who was originally Irish, had studied at the University of Heidelberg and, according to his daughter, nurtured 'a great admiration for all things German'.<sup>1</sup> This must be the reason why Butler was sent to Hanover in the 1890s to complete her early schooling. As a 15-year-old, she

<sup>1</sup>Eliza Marian Butler, *Paper Boats: An Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 7.

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went to France with some friends to go to school in Paris. However, the German language was closer to her than the French, and when, in 1913, she received a scholarship to pursue literary studies, she preferred German writers. A study on the playwright and poet Friedrich Hebbel was never completed, and when she later realized that she needed a doctoral thesis to get a position at a British university, she chose instead to focus on Heinrich Heine. A chapter on Heine is included in *The Tyranny of Greece*.

Although the book is mostly about literature, its opening chapter is not dedicated to the celebrated champion of German poetry, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, but a slightly older compatriot: Johann Joachim Winckelmann. He was a leading classical archaeologist and considered by many as the founder of art history as an academic discipline.<sup>2</sup> His main academic work, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, analysed art from different cultures of antiquity: Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan, Roman, as well as the mutual influence between them. According to Winckelmann, art reached its highest level in Greek sculpture, and he claimed that only this was worth an in-depth analysis. Winckelmann's scheme according to which Greek art can be divided into four phases of development — *älterer Stil*, *hoher Stil*, *schöner Stil* and *Stil der Nachahmer* — has been considered by many as model and starting point for art historical style analysis as such.

Alongside the Homeric scholarship of Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), the publication of Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst* in 1764 was perhaps the most important single contribution to the first wave of Greek reverie in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Among the poets who were inspired by his philhellenism were Lord Byron in England, and Goethe, Schiller, Herder and Lessing in Germany. In France he was hailed by leading intellectuals; Denis Diderot compared him to Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>3</sup> Although interest in his theories waned somewhat in the 1770s, no one, possibly with the exception of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, could challenge his position as the undisputed leader in German intellectual life.<sup>4</sup> This special position was due to the enormous effort he made to systematize works from archaeological excavations and collections. The philologist Christian Adolph Klotz (1738-1771), today perhaps best known for his dispute with Lessing over the sculpture group *Laocoön*, was told by his friend Christian Garve that his field of research 'would now be quite uncultivated, had not Winckelmann left such successful (*glückliche*) followers'.<sup>5</sup>

However, it would be wrong to conclude from these tributes that the intellectual elite of the time worshipped Winckelmann as a guru. Although many

<sup>2</sup>There is an extensive discussion about Winckelmann as the father of art history. For an overview, see for instance, Édouard Pommier, *Winckelmann, inventeur de l'histoire de l'art* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); Elisabeth Décultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann: Enquête sur la genèse de l'histoire de l'art* (Paris: Presses universitaires, 2000), especially pp. 245-66, and Alex Potts, 'Winckelmann's Construction of History', in *Art History*, 5.4 (1982), 377-407.

<sup>3</sup>Pommier, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Caraway Hatfield, *Winckelmann and his German Critics 1755-1781: A Prelude to the Classical Age* (Morning-side Heights: King's Crown Press, 1943), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Hatfield, *Winckelmann and his German Critics*, p. 100.

were seduced by his thoughts and fantasized about creating a new Greece in Germany, his theories met with critical opposition already from his contemporaries. His description of the Greek people and their mentality was an idealized image poorly supported by facts, something Lessing realized when he launched his polemical attack on Winckelmann in *Laokoon; oder, Über die Grenzen der Malerey und Poesie* (1766). The *Laocöon* group, which owed its renown partly to its description by Pliny the Elder, had been rediscovered in 1506 near the site where Emperor Nero's Domus Aurea once stood on the slope of the Oppian Hill in Rome, and excavated in the presence of, among others, Michelangelo. In Winckelmann's time (as today) the *Laocöon* group was part of the Vatican collections. Lessing largely agreed with Winckelmann's analysis of the work itself — that the sculptors deliberately avoided giving the Trojan priest the strong, bodily emotional expression that the situation (and the story as recounted by Homer and Virgil) actually demanded — but he disagreed about the reason why. While Winckelmann believed that the sculpture group was meant to emanate a serenity similar to the *edle Einfalt und stille Größe* that characterized most of Greek art in its heyday,<sup>6</sup> Lessing claimed that among Greeks, unlike the Trojans, there was no shame in crying.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the statue's relatively restrained emotional expression must have a different explanation, and Lessing found it in the genre difference between word and image.

Virtually all central hypotheses in the *Geschichte der Kunst* were debated and criticized by Winckelmann's contemporaries. One of these was the question of the freedom of the Greek people. Winckelmann's theory that art of the highest quality and beauty, as we know it from ancient Greece, could only be made by free individuals, seemed to have some support among ancient writers. In Book xxxv of his *Natural History* Pliny said that 'there had not been any famous works "neither in painting nor in the art of statuary [...] that were executed by any person who was a slave"'.<sup>8</sup> It was a common belief in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that constitutional freedom was a necessary prerequisite in a society of flourishing arts and cultural politics. However, Winckelmann's 'freedom thesis' was opposed by perhaps the most prominent expert on antiquity of the time, Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), who claimed that prosperity and magnificence contribute more to art's flowering than freedom.<sup>9</sup> As a 'cause of art' in addition to freedom, economic conditions, public spirit, and even pure coincidence must be taken into account.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Winckelmann used this famous phrase in *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*. Cfr. Hermann Uhde-Bernays (editor), *Winckelmanns kleine Schriften zur Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums. Mit Goethes Schilderung Winckelmanns* (Leipzig: Insel, 1913), pp. 85-86.

<sup>7</sup>Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. by Ellen Frothingham (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Pliny, *Historiae naturalis libri XXXVII* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1841), xxxv. 36.

<sup>9</sup>Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of 'Altertumswissenschaft'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 182-84.

<sup>10</sup>Hatfield, *Winckelmann and his German Critics*, p. 126.

One of Winckelmann's most ardent supporters, Johann Gottfried Herder, was, oddly enough, also a prominent critic of his ideas.<sup>11</sup> Like Winckelmann and Heyne, he shared the view that the beauty of Greek art was unrivalled, but he doubted that this was a result of virtue. In *Geschichte der Kunst*, Winckelmann suggested that the distinctly humane nature of the Greeks was reflected in their scorn for bloody gladiatorial displays of the type that the Romans liked. Herder, by contrast, who defined taste as a certain order and harmony of our sensuous powers, stressed the difference between beauty and life, claiming that virtue is how we describe actions, not art.<sup>12</sup>

One of the topics that aroused the most debate was the question of where the Greeks got their inspiration from. The fact that they had received impulses from other nations was not controversial. Herodotus had said that the Greeks inherited the techniques of stone carving, the forms of religious worship, as well as the foundations of literature from the Egyptians.<sup>13</sup> No one doubted that the Greeks had contact with other peoples, but Winckelmann downplayed the effect of external influence, claiming that the Greeks were able to transform any foreign impulse and influence into something genuinely original and personal. Herder, for his part, once again broke with his idol. In contrast to the Winckelmannian model, which considered art as something that emerges from the bosom of a nation in complete ignorance of foreign ethnicities, Herder emphasized the importance of what he called 'Kette der Mitteilung'.<sup>14</sup> Claiming that nations are closely bound together, Herder agreed with one of Winckelmann's opponents, the French Comte de Caylus (1692–1765), that Greek art could not possibly arise in isolation, without the influence of other cultures.

Not even Winckelmann's request to young artists to imitate the ancient Greeks rather than nature was allowed to remain valid for very long. For the representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* period in the 1770s, art was seen as an expression of emotion. Slavish imitation was for them an obstacle to creativity, genius, and originality. Some of the movement's representatives, such as Johann Georg Hamann and Klopstock, had a religious background and condemned the pagan tendencies of philhellenism. Challenging the Greek works' status as paradigm examples of fine art, however, was more difficult. Even Herder had to admit that 'to modern men a Greek temple must mean more than a Gothic church and Greek beauty more than Chinese'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Herder's ambivalent relationship to Winckelmann is discussed by Elisabeth Décultot in *Herder und die Künste: Ästhetik, Kunsttheorie, Kunstgeschichte*, ed. by E. Décultot and Gerhard Lauer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 81–100.

<sup>12</sup>Johann Gottfried Herder, 'The Causes of Sunken Taste among the Different Peoples in Whom It Once Blossomed', in J. G. Herder *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. by Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 314.

<sup>13</sup>Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, p. 227.

<sup>14</sup>Décultot, *Herder und die Künste*, p. 86.

<sup>15</sup>Hatfield, *Winckelmann and his German Critics*, p. 90.

All of this is what one might call professional criticism. No one had accused Winckelmann of anything other than misunderstanding some aspects of Greek art. Butler's critique was of a different kind. As a literary historian, it was not her task to refute Winckelmann's dates and attributions of ancient statues. What interested her was not Winckelmann himself, but the reception of his ideas and how they affected German society, its thinking and political visions. A basic idea in her book is that the creativity of German poets was hampered by their obsession with Greek *edle Einfalt und stille Größe*. She undoubtedly chose the title *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* to signal that the current of philhellenism had a negative rather than a positive impact on German intellectual life, and the year in which the book came out, 1935, says a lot about the political context in which it was seen. It is true that there is no mention of Nazism in the book, and Hitler's name is mentioned only once. Things that we today know about the war and the terrors of the Nazi regime were impossible to foresee in 1935, when *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* first appeared. However, in her 1958 preface to the book, Butler stated that, reading between the lines of the original introduction, it should be evident that it was Germany's political collapse in the interwar period that was on her mind when she wrote it. In the new preface she also said: 'I cannot help smiling at a note in my diary of the time to the effect that I intended the work partly as a warning.'<sup>16</sup>

It is obvious that the perspective was completely different in 1935 than in the period after 1945, but even when reading some of the early reviews of her book one gets a feeling that there was an awareness that the international political situation was tense. In a 1935 review, Henry Hatfield discussed the fates of Hölderlin and Nietzsche, both of whom, according to Butler, were victims of a philhellenism that drove them insane. Hatfield, who is rather negative in his review, claimed that Butler had ignored how people are affected by pathological and social factors. It was quite natural to read the book as an account of how individuals succumbed to the daimon (or its opposite), not how an entire culture could be affected.<sup>17</sup> Still, it seems that Hatfield had a clue what was impending when he asked if they (Hölderlin and Nietzsche) would have been better balanced had they 'been devoted to the Romantic idealization of Nuremberg instead of an ecstatic vision of Athens?'.<sup>18</sup>

Is it conceivable that the poetry and writings of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Hölderlin helped to inspire the ideology that later formed the basis of Nazism? At first, Butler seems to deny this. In Greek classicism the authors of the great classical age of German literature saw an embodiment of humanitarian and liberal ideals.<sup>19</sup> Schiller and Hölderlin's ideas were as far away as possible

<sup>16</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. vii.

<sup>17</sup>This central concept in Butler's *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* does in many ways represent the opposite of Winckelmann's *stille Größe*.

<sup>18</sup>Henry C. Hatfield, 'Review of *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*', *GR*, 11 (1936), 287.

<sup>19</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, pp. vii–ix.

from Nazi ideology, and Lessing wrote about religious tolerance. Not even Nietzsche would have welcomed Hitler's Reich. Butler thought that such men would certainly act as brakes along the rush towards catastrophe, 'yet as I studied their attitude towards Greece more closely, I became aware of a danger which the Greeks themselves feared greatly, the danger of excess.'<sup>20</sup> This may seem innocuous, but 'the "noble simplicity and serene greatness" imposed on the poets by Winckelmann had far-reaching and unforeseeable consequences'.<sup>21</sup>

The basic idea of the book is that Germany, through philhellenism, had been overexposed to the Greeks in a way that made German society unable to cope with real political and social challenges; it had succumbed to the tyranny of an ideal. How Winckelmann's aesthetic theories and ideals of noble simplicity and self-control could be assigned political effects, even contributing to the German nation's total cultural and political collapse in the interwar period, is not immediately obvious, but perhaps the reasoning becomes clearer if viewed in the light of another of Butler's works, the book *Byron and Goethe: Analysis of a Passion*, which was published in 1956. As is well known, Byron was not only a leading poet but also a political activist who was committed to the struggle for Greek independence. According to Butler, Byron saw the Greek people's fight for liberation from Ottoman oppression as an image of how the whole of Europe would rise from darkness and stand on its Greek feet, for:

the cause of Greece [...] naturally excites our sympathy. The very name of the country is associated in our minds with all that is exalted in virtue, or delightful in art. From it we have derived our knowledge and under the guiding hand of its wisdom, did modern Europe first make its tottering and feeble steps towards civilization.<sup>22</sup>

Goethe's ideal image of Greece, where, below the ripples of the sea, there is always peace and harmony, was based on Winckelmann's ideas of noble simplicity.<sup>23</sup> As a political ideal, Goethe saw this as being at variance with British pragmatism, for, as he put it, while Germans work as galley slaves to solve philosophical problems, the British go around and conquer the world.<sup>24</sup> However, Goethe's conviction that the prosperity of modern society would be based on a purely intellectual resurgence of this golden age, was shaken when he got to know Byron, one of the most creative figures of his time, who, it seemed, spent hours every day outdoors, riding a horse or swimming in the sea. His encounter with Byron made Goethe change his views on a number of things; from this point onwards he realized that philosophical treatises would not be

<sup>20</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. viii.

<sup>21</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. ix.

<sup>22</sup>Butler quotes Byron through William Parry, *The Last Days of Lord Byron*, in Eliza Marian Butler, *Byron and Goethe: Analysis of a Passion* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956), pp. 199–200.

<sup>23</sup>The metaphor of the sea which at its depths always remains calm, no matter how the surface may rage, was first introduced by Winckelmann in the *Gedanken ueber die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst* (1755). For a further discussion, see Hatfield, *Winckelmann and his German Critics*, pp. 8–11.

<sup>24</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 23.



the most useful tool in the struggle for Greek independence — political and military action was needed.

The concrete, physical, and powerful counterpart to the abstract approaches to art and poetry represented by Winckelmann's neoclassicism was Napoleon. Both Goethe and Byron admired this ingenious military leader who, to them, was like a demigod striding

from battle to battle and from one victory to the next. In all his acts Napoleon showed that productivity (or creativeness) which is the hall-mark of illumination, [...] was imbued with a power that changes the face of the world.<sup>25</sup>

There was more of the devil in Byron than in Goethe, but 'the part Goethe's conception of daimonism was to play in the future as one of the great impersonal forces driving towards disaster'<sup>26</sup> is easy to discern.

The most thorough further development of Butler's ideas about Germany's seductive Hellenism is Claudia Schmölder's *Faust & Helena: Eine deutsch-griechische Faszinationsgeschichte* from 2018. The book's title refers to the time travel in Goethe's *Faust II*, which brings Faust to ancient Greece where he meets the beautiful Helen of Troy. For Schmölders, the wedding between Faust and Helen is the image of an impossible synthesis between incompatible opposites: the mysticism of ancient Nordic societies, and the light and beauty of classical civilization. There is a connection between the Faustian element discussed by Schmölders and Butler's central concept 'daimon'. Although the main topic of Schmölders's book is slightly different from that of Butler — not so much on how German authors' obsession with Greece drained their poetry of energy, more on the vain attempts to trace Germany's linguistic, cultural, and biological origins back to the ancient Greeks — her book concludes in much the same way as *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*: the way German authors dealt with the Greek tradition was problematic, seductive, and to some extent dangerous.

Butler did not put equal emphasis on political and literary issues. Her main concern was Winckelmann's influence on Goethe. The discovery that the greatest period in Greek art, the one dominated by sculptors like Phidias, was also a period of political strength under the leadership of Pericles, led Winckelmann to conclude that art was influenced by external conditions like climate, soil, and political circumstances. Following the political theory of Montesquieu, Winckelmann thought that art reflects the national character of the people that produced it, which, in turn, is shaped by climate and society. For instance, he believed that, due to the extreme heat in their country, the Egyptians' body fluids had an excess of black bile that made them melancholic and unfit for democratic rule.<sup>27</sup> From this he concluded that not all people were fit to live

<sup>25</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 210.

<sup>26</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 221.

<sup>27</sup>Lasse Hodne, 'Winckelmann's Apollo and the Physiognomy of Race', *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, 59 (2020), 6–35 (pp. 30–31).



in a free society. To him, a Greek was a person who could act as a free man because he was able to control his urges and desires, to act rationally and ethically. To Winckelmann, then, the reason why Greek sculpture is characterized by a noble simplicity and serene greatness is simply that it is a reflection of the Greek soul.

How Winckelmann imagined the restrained greatness of the Greeks is evident from his description of the Laocöon Group. Winckelmann's characterization of Greek art in its heyday as unexpressive is based on a notion of the Greek mentality. It was this vision of Greek personality and culture that spread among German intellectuals in the late eighteenth century. It is not surprising that the idea of the Greeks as an extraordinary and freedom-loving people should gain great significance in political thought in the period immediately following the French Revolution, but how was this idea presented in literature? One of Butler's main topics were the difficulties that Goethe had in incorporating this ideal into his work. This is especially evident in the epic poem *Hermann und Dorothea*, where the plot is divided into nine cantos bearing the names of the Greek muses. Goethe's emphasis on moral problems prevented him from portraying a passionate love affair between a man and a woman; the story was without 'movement and life', Butler said.<sup>28</sup> This is particularly evident in the scene where Dorothea twists her ankle and falls into Hermann's arms. 'The two young lovers remain sculpted for ever,' Butler said, 'like the marble he alludes to, in that statuesque embrace.'<sup>29</sup> The statuesque in Goethe's story was a knee-jerk reaction to Winckelmann's *edle Einfalt* and Apollonian composure.<sup>30</sup>

Words like 'marble' and 'statuesque' refer to the special image of Greece created by German neoclassicism. The statue of Juno that Winckelmann and his companions studied in the Villa Ludovisi in Rome, for instance, was not a real Greek being it was a static marble god. Emanating nothing but noble simplicity, it lacked the sorrow, conflict, and tragedy of Ovid. Marble is introduced as a metaphor for quiet grandeur in Butler's chapter on Heine, where the young Francesca is described as being white as marble and also marble-cold, just like the Venus of Canova.<sup>31</sup> Butler emphasized marble as a metaphor for coldness, rigidity, and death, to illustrate the contrast between Winckelmann's 'quiet greatness' and its opposite, the daimon. In his *Denkmahl Johann Winkelmanns*, Herder expressed the desire that Winckelmann's spirit, 'this Greek daimon', might enter into some German artist.<sup>32</sup> Goethe, who defined the daemonic as a force that was capable of mediating between the human and the divine, claimed to find support for his ideas in Greek philosophy.<sup>33</sup> According to

<sup>28</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 128.

<sup>29</sup>Eliza Marian Butler, 'Goethe and Winckelmann', *PEGS*, 10.1 (1934), 1–22 (p. 14).

<sup>30</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 128.

<sup>31</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 260. The 'Venus of Canova' is most likely to refer to one of the statues of the Greek goddess by the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova.

<sup>32</sup>Hatfield, *Winckelmann and his German Critics*, p. 94.

Butler, daimon represents what should have given life force to Hermann and Dorothea. Goethe himself realized that the daimonic, which can alternately have both positive and negative aspects, was something that actually existed in nature, history, and human life, manifesting itself in life's contradictions: 'It seemed neither divine nor human; neither angelic nor devilish; it was ambiguous, incomprehensible and excessively powerful.'<sup>34</sup> Goethe's Egmont was a figure that possessed such ambiguous qualities, having measureless love of life while, at the same time, being dangerous and destructive.

In *Faust II*, the daimonic is present in the strange, embryonic figure Homunculus, which interprets Faust's thoughts using intuitive faculties. Goethe tried to explain the presence of the daimonic and his own relationship to it in the last part of the autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. At this point, he was finally able to admit the dual nature of this primordial force, its destructive as well as its creative side. Strange as it was, however, given the philhellenism of his Weimar years, among the personalities he mentioned who had drawn nourishment from this source — politicians and statesmen such as Napoleon, Frederick II, Peter the Great; artists like Raphael, Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Holbein the Younger; musicians such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; and writers like William Shakespeare — he found only room for one Greek: the sculptor Phidias.<sup>35</sup> Where had the others gone?

Only towards the end of his life did Goethe realize that his notion of daimon was incompatible with his idea about Greece. Two later prominent figures in German intellectual life, Heinrich Heine and Friedrich Nietzsche, both included with separate chapters in Butler's book, were never in doubt about where Goethe (as well as Winckelmann) had underestimated the daimonic element, 'what Nietzsche was later to call the Dionysian aspect of life and art'.<sup>36</sup> Criticizing Goethe and Winckelmann for their unwillingness to accept the existence of emotional, irrational, and mythical elements in ancient Greek culture, Nietzsche claimed that the two had constructed an ideal image of Greece that did not take into account actual conditions. Is it really the case, Nietzsche asked, that the ancient Greeks only knew noble simplicity and sublime perfection?<sup>37</sup> In opposition to these Apollonian values, he placed the god of wine Dionysus, a symbol of the ecstatic, primitive, inebriated and savage.

That Nietzsche preferred to speak of the Dionysian instead of daimon is probably due to the fact that he was aware Winckelmann had already assigned different and somewhat opposite characteristics to the two Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. According to Butler, Dionysus is the real hero in Heine's *Die*

<sup>33</sup> Angus Nicholls, *Goethe's Concept of the Daemonic: After the Ancients* (Rochester N.Y.: Camden House, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 152.

<sup>35</sup> See Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 153.

<sup>36</sup> Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 332.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 79–80; Hodne, 'Winckelmann's Apollo', p. 25.

*Götter im Exil* as well. Heine had undergone a similar process as Goethe. At first it was Apollo, the god of poetry, who reigned his heart, but when he realized that noble simplicity and serene greatness was nothing but lifelessness and rigidity, he ‘put in the place of the glorious sungod [Apollo] the god of intoxication and inspiration, the truly daimonic god’.<sup>38</sup> It was Heine who first introduced Dionysus as a challenger to Apollo; then it was up to Nietzsche to see that he got his rights.

One question that must be asked is why, if the two concepts are practically synonymous, Butler chose the word ‘daimon’ rather than ‘Dionysian’, given that the latter is opposed to ‘Apollonian’, while the former as its counterpart has the rather diffuse ‘anti-daimon’. Apollo is not a pure, impotent void that exists only as the daimon’s abstract absence; the Apollonian is conceived as an independent entity with its own characteristics. One reason may be that Butler was influenced by the Austrian author Stefan Zweig. In 1925 Zweig published the book *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, which, like Butler’s *The Tyranny of Greece*, was written as an intellectual biography of poets and philosophers, in this case Hölderlin, Kleist, and Nietzsche. Butler was clearly inspired by Zweig, referring to his work in her book. Like many of his Jewish compatriots, Zweig was a victim of the Nazis’ violent conduct, and the autobiography *Die Welt von Gestern*, published posthumously in 1942, describes the same cultural decay in Germany that occupied Butler in 1935.

The book’s title, *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, indicates that Zweig’s approach to literary questions was similar to Butler’s. To really understand the authors he discussed, Zweig felt that one must know the cultural and historical background of their authorship. For this reason, it was necessary to give the reader the right background knowledge through an introduction to the literary situation at the end of the eighteenth century and the world of thought of Goethe and Schiller.<sup>39</sup> As mentioned, Goethe’s awareness of the daemonic element in art is clearly stated in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, but he was still convinced that an artist must be the daimon’s master, not its servant. Zweig also reminds us that Goethe was opposed to volcanism (a theory of the origin of rock formations), and that he preferred elements that favoured the evolutionary over the eruptive.<sup>40</sup>

Goethe’s attitude may need to be seen in the light of his interest in science. The diary he wrote during his Italian journey from 1786 to 1788 reveals a lively interest in rocks, plant life, and cultivation methods. His polemics against Isaac Newton’s optics and the attempt to establish his own colour theory on a scientific basis gained great importance in artist circles; theorists like Rudolf Steiner and Johannes Itten (1888-1967), as well as artists such as William Turner and Wassily Kandinsky, were influenced by his ideas. This alternation between

<sup>38</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 299.

<sup>39</sup>Stefan Zweig, *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche* (Chicago: Mosaic, 2017),

<sup>40</sup>Zweig, *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, p. 11.

science and poetry was not unproblematic. According to Zweig, it led Goethe to overestimate the rational and moral motives behind people's actions, while the impact of their emotions was suppressed. Thus, art was subject to the anaemic law of rationality.

Like Zweig, Butler was concerned with what fuelled creativity and what, if anything, could inhibit it, and the answer to the first question was: daimon. Daimon stands for creativity, genius, power of imagination, and inspiration; poetry could not exist without it. If an artist lacks creativity, it is due to a loss of daimon. Butler's and Zweig's choice of the word anti-daimon as daimon's counterpart is quite ambiguous. One gets the impression that absence of the daimon is the absence of any creative power. However, it is possible that Zweig did not consider this an important issue, since his intention in writing *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon* was to discuss certain aspects relating to the history of German literature. Initially, Butler's plans were the same: *The Tyranny of Greece* was originally conceived as a book on the history of German literature; the political aspects must have been something that began to occupy her at a later stage. For Zweig, Winckelmann was only a side character. His name is mentioned only once in *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, albeit in a way that is in line with what Butler said. Here Zweig describes how first Hölderlin and then Nietzsche created a whole new picture of the ancient world, in which Greece emerged as a young, bloodthirsty empire, just snatched from the barbarians; something quite different from the classical, plastered Greece of humanism, which Winckelmann taught.<sup>41</sup>

However, Zweig introduced a different person as antagonist in his book, namely Immanuel Kant. In the chapter on Hölderlin, Zweig violently attacks metaphysical speculation, and especially Kant, whose dominant position in German intellectual life led the authors to feel that their artistic works had to be supported by doctrines. Zweig claims that the encounter with Kant was fateful not only for Hölderlin, but for artistic creativity in Germany as a whole. Contrary to traditional literary theory, which tends to celebrate the authors' capacity to incorporate Kant's ideas into their poetic schemes as an important achievement, Zweig claims that artistic creativity was fatally harmed in this period: 'The pure productivity of the classical epoch, that he [Kant] overcame with the constructive mastery of his thoughts, infinitely hampered the sensitivity, the joy of life, the freedom of imagination of all artists.'<sup>42</sup>

This dependence on Kant was confirmed by Goethe himself in the book *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*, which was based on some of Winckelmann's letters as well as the introduction *Skizzen zu einer Schilderung Winckelmanns*, written by Goethe together with Johann Heinrich Meyer and Friedrich August Wolf. Here, Goethe claimed that no scholar (apart from, possibly, a few

<sup>41</sup>Zweig, *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, p. 88.

<sup>42</sup>Zweig, *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, p. 48. (Translations from this book are by the author.)

true scholars of antiquity) could reject or oppose the great philosophical movement initiated by Kant unpunished.<sup>43</sup> The fact that Winckelmann's students, according to Goethe, were less dependent on Kant than other academics does not exclude the possibility that Winckelmann himself could have made a contribution to the aesthetic philosophy in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. There is an evident affinity between the depreciation of emotion in Winckelmann's aesthetics and the key Kantian notions of aesthetic distance and disinterested delight. Richard Brilliant said something similar when he observed that what Winckelmann found in the Greek masterpieces was a 'projection of an absolute, if mythical, aesthetic that would serve as proper goal of human aspiration, shaped by reason; in effect, a forerunner of the Kantian *Aufklärung*'.<sup>44</sup>

It is important to emphasize that it is Kant's influence on German intellectuals, not Winckelmann's, that occupies Zweig. Otherwise, his critique would have affected all German philhellenism, including Hölderlin and Nietzsche, who were as concerned with Greece as Goethe, only in a different way. The engagement (or 'obsession', Butler would have said) with Greek culture was shared by a number of German-speaking intellectuals and scholars between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries, including Sigmund Freud. Freud's interest in the culture of antiquity included both literature and visual arts. Through his collaboration with professional art collectors such as Ludwig Pollak (1868-1943), he built up a collection of several thousand objects consisting of antiquities from Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, and the Near East. We can hardly imagine his psychoanalytic method without the figures we know from Greek mythology, such as Oedipus, Narcissus, Eros, and Thanatos.

Zweig's critique was not directed at any of these, nor Hölderlin, Nietzsche, or Freud. On the contrary, artistic creativity, which had been stone dead under Kant's dogmatic critique, would be redeemed through a release of the irrational and demonic forces of poetry; through a reinterpretation (but not an elimination) of the Greek, where Dionysus was equated with Apollo. It is not impossible that Zweig imagined this redemption as a form of psychoanalysis. Freud and Zweig were close friends, especially during the period before Freud's death in 1939 when they both lived in exile in London. *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon* opens with a dedication to Freud, 'the penetrating spirit, the stimulating creator'.<sup>45</sup>

Another crucial difference between Zweig's and Butler's books is the year of publication. Zweig's came out in 1925, not long after the First World War and relatively soon after both Germany and Austria had gone through phases of

<sup>43</sup>Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Winckelmanns kleine Schriften zur Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums. Mit Goethes Schilderung Winckelmanns* (Leipzig: Insel, 1913), (Goethe's introduction), p. 44.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Brilliant, 'Winckelmann and Warburg: Contrasting Attitudes toward the Instrumental Authority of Ancient Art', in *Antiquity and its Interpreters*, ed. by Alina Payne, Ann Kuttner, and Rebekah Smick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 269-275. (p. 274).

<sup>45</sup>Zweig, *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, p. 6.

hyperinflation. Zweig himself gave a detailed description of this period in his biography *Die Welt von Gestern*. It was as if society was about to recover after a period of illness, and prospects were generally positive. In 1935, when *The Tyranny of Greece* was first published, the situation was completely different. The outlook was far gloomier, and the fact that it was again Germany which was about to throw the world into a catastrophe made it natural to think that there might be something wrong with the whole of German culture.

Given that background, it is understandable that Butler was looking for the original sin of German culture. It was not enough to draw attention to the cultivation of Apollonian values in neoclassical aesthetics — the whole Greek world of gods and its place in German cultural life had to be dealt with. The question one had to ask was how it could be that the praise of the culture which was considered the cradle of Western civilization could become an obsession and, at some point, turn into the opposite of what it originally was, with terrible consequences for humanity. Butler herself showed that she was aware of this paradox in the 1958 introduction to *The Tyranny of Greece*, where she acknowledged that Winckelmann had not only rediscovered the lost beauty of Greek art for the modern world but also the ethical standards of ancient Greek culture: 'Nothing could be further removed from the tenets of Nazi ideology [than] the gods of Greece whom he revered in their marble perfection.'<sup>46</sup>

Butler had once believed in the educational effect of Greek culture, something she discussed in her autobiography *Paper Boats* from 1959. While doing service at a Yugoslav field hospital towards the end of the First World War in 1918, Butler had had the opportunity to take a detour to Athens. Her diary notes from the journey give a vivid description of the healing radiance she felt when she finally got to see the Parthenon and the other temples of the Athenian Acropolis. Her belief in the candlelight that shone from this place did not fade until 1933, when 'darkness once more began to spread from German lands, obliterating amongst other things what had seemed to be the source of light emanating from the German Classical Movement'.<sup>47</sup>

The reason why Greek humanism never gained a foothold in Germany was that the Germans' image of Greece ultimately remained removed from real life. What interested Goethe and his generation was philosophy, art, and literature; but ancient Greece was so much more; it was myths, religion, superstition, violence, and tragedy too. Butler realized that to understand a foreign culture one must try to grasp it in its full complexity when, during her sabbatical leave from the university in 1934–35, she was given the opportunity to make a journey to India. There she became acquainted with a popular tradition and a religion that

<sup>46</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, pp. vii–viii.

<sup>47</sup>Butler, *Paper Boats*, p. 126.

filled poor people with the hope of healing. The gods of the Hindu pantheon were popular, in stark contrast to Goethe's beloved Greek goddesses, who were nothing but abstract allegories. It is madness to think that Goethe's vision of the Greek gods could 'ennoble or civilise humanity as a whole, let alone Nazi Germany'.<sup>48</sup>

As a model for modern society, the Germans used Greece not as a more or less realistic prospect, but as a utopian fantasy; it was based on an illusion that was never supported by concrete experiences. Neither Winckelmann nor Goethe ever visited Greece. Winckelmann had the opportunity on several occasions; the Scottish painter Morrison<sup>49</sup> proposed himself as a companion in the winter of 1758/59. Two years later Winckelmann's plans to travel together with an English woman, Lady Orford, were almost fulfilled, but eventually had to be abandoned owing to lack of means.<sup>50</sup> Goethe would have had the possibility during his travels in Italy between 1786 and 1788, but he considered the Prince of Waldeck's proposal to join him on a journey to Greece and Dalmatia as too hazardous.<sup>51</sup>

One may wonder why Butler believed that Winckelmann's decision not to go to Greece would have had such catastrophic consequences. The whole of southern Italy had once been part of Magna Graecia; much of the art he found in Roman collections consisted of Greek or Roman copies of Greek originals. Besides, at the time Greece was under Ottoman rule and far less accessible to researchers like Winckelmann than Italy. Nevertheless, Butler believed that his choice not to go there had fatal consequences, simply because the story he created about Greece was a foreign vision of a fantasy land that did not exist in reality. His notion of the free city-states of antiquity recognized no boundaries between heaven and earth, between utopia and reality. The hopeless and futile attempt to seize Greek reality and keep it as a shining image of nineteenth-century Germany drove several of his disciples to the brink of collapse, Butler claimed. Hölderlin's mental breakdown must be seen against this background, that it 'happened because Winckelmann in discovering Greece had delivered his countrymen bound hand and foot to an idea'.<sup>52</sup> No matter how much the Germans indulged in their luminous ideals, they were largely paralyzed when it came to political issues. 'Humanism, the "Humanität", preached by Lessing, Herder, Goethe and Schiller, was offering no effective resistance to insurgent Nazism.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Butler, *Paper Boats*, p. 135.

<sup>49</sup>Most likely Colin Morison (1732–1810) with whom Winckelmann became acquainted through his countryman Anton Raphael Mengs. Steffi Roettgen, „Winckelmann in Italien“, in *Winckelmann-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Martin Disselkamp and Fausto Testa (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017), pp. 18–47, (p. 36).

<sup>50</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, pp. 34–35.

<sup>51</sup>Butler, 'Goethe and Winckelmann', p. 10.

<sup>52</sup>Butler, *The Tyranny*, p. 240.

<sup>53</sup>Butler, *Paper Boats*, p. 133.



It should be emphasized that Butler's critique of philhellenism is a critique of Germany, no other country. As prominent cultural personalities in Europe, Goethe and Byron could, to some extent, be seen as competitors, but there was also mutual respect and sympathy between them. Byron was generally sceptical of Germans, but he did not hate them as much as Goethe hated the British. Butler herself was probably marked by her background, having been educated at German boarding schools during her childhood; and her own confrontation with Germans did not help to dampen the contrast. The lack of humanity and human care she observed in German society, especially after the outbreak of the Second World War, led her to have an aversion to everything related to that country. She totally lost interest in German literature, which had previously been her field of research. What she now found there was "hatred for all other nations ... total indifference to the sufferings of others [and] lovelessness towards humanity as a whole. It was (I always came back to it) the lack of "Humanität".<sup>54</sup> The only person that she had a semblance of sympathy for was the sensitive Rainer Maria Rilke. His writings were the only place where she could find traces of compassion, but even there without self-sacrifice if it involved any kind of risk.<sup>55</sup>

The picture that emerges from Butler's work describes Germans as idealists who prefer thoughts to deeds, while the British are practical people with a greater ability to carry out their projects. At the forefront of the men of action, of course, is Lord Byron, who actually went to Greece in 1823, not only to see the country but to lend his support to the movement for independence from Ottoman rule. It was 'the passionate call to the Greeks to remember the past and throw off foreign yoke in the second canto of *Childe Harold* and in the beginning of *The Giaour*' that awakened the European opinion to the existence of the Greek question.<sup>56</sup> Goethe, according to Butler, admired Byron for his power of action and felt attracted to his daimonic character; he envied Byron for all the qualities he himself lacked, even his vices: his hectic life, his terrific personality, his destructiveness, and his sins against society.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that Goethe changed his mind on the daimon towards the end of his life makes Butler's scheme quite awkward, for what was she actually criticizing when she turned against the philhellenism of his generation: was it neoclassicism's Olympian sage or was it the Dionysus of Romanticism that Byron also admired? For Butler, philhellenism was primarily an escape from reality; it was not associated with any political program (although it could well have been linked to the liberal movement in case one considered Kant to be part of it). On the other hand, Butler said a good deal about the political aspects of daimonism; the consequence of Byron's political agitation was nationalism.

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<sup>54</sup>Butler, *Paper Boats*, p. 154.

<sup>55</sup>Butler, *Paper Boats*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>56</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 217.

<sup>57</sup>Butler, 'Goethe and Winckelmann', pp. 20–21.

Byron became the poet 'of a movement which asserted the right of rebellion in the name of nationalism, and the splendour of war in defense of liberty, a movement of which Fichte, Carlyle and Nietzsche were the philosophers'.<sup>58</sup> Byron's support for the Italian revolutionary movement *carbonari* and the Italian *Risorgimento* for national unity against foreign rule was an important source of inspiration for the patriotic Genoese journalist Giuseppe Mazzini. Mazzini was one of the main figures behind the establishment of the modern Italian nation-state.

In *Paper Boats*, Butler talked about the difficult time in Cambridge during the run-up to the war, with steep fronts between supporters and opponents of Germany. It was probably at this time that she got to know the philosopher Bertrand Russell, whom Butler saw as a heroic figure, despite the fact that he was a pacifist and had a completely different view of the war than she had. Butler's discussion of how political movements were spurred on by daimonism, is, as mentioned, not based on Zweig's book. It was clearly inspired by Russell, as is evident from the way she interprets historical events as well as the role of political and military leaders. For instance, the French Revolution is described as a daimonic occurrence of world historical dimensions, and Napoleon as a daimonic figure.<sup>59</sup> Russell had given a similar description of Napoleon, along with Byron, Arthur Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Mussolini, and Hitler in *A History of Western Philosophy*. According to Russell, the Nazi cult of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was a variant of the daimonic and thus part of Byron's legacy, together with nationalism, satanism, and hero-worship, which had become part of the complex soul of Germany.<sup>60</sup>

Although Butler mostly agreed with Russell, she remarked on the absence of Goethe's name from his list, arguing that it should have been there, if one took into account the 'part Goethe's conception of daimonism was to play in the future as one of the great impersonal forces driving towards disaster'.<sup>61</sup> The brutal violence of man's darkest period issued not, as Russell claimed, from satanism, but from daimonism. Joined to other and darker forces, it incited Germany to megalomania and madness with all the weight of Goethe's prestige behind it.

Winckelmann was not included in Russell's scheme, and it also seems, at this point, that Butler had lost some interest in him. After all, daimonism issued from the dark forces of history the impulses that appealed to people's emotions without taking a detour via reflection. In Germany, it was represented by philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the concept of *Wille* and the idea of *Übermensch*. Although there is no basis for claiming that Nietzsche would have

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<sup>58</sup>Butler, 'Goethe and Winckelmann', p. 218; Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1947), p. 624.

<sup>59</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 14.

<sup>60</sup>Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 774–780.

<sup>61</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 221.

supported Nazism, there is no doubt that his philosophy was of some importance for the development of that ideology. The activities of Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, and her husband, the leading anti-Semite Bernhard Förster, in promoting Nietzsche's philosophical legacy to Nazi circles, are well known. Nor is it difficult to imagine how key Nietzschean concepts such as the 'will to power' would have been useful to Nazi demagogues.

This type of historical development scheme, which eventually leads to catastrophe, stands on its own two feet without Winckelmann's participation, and it can even be explained far more logically without him. If the problem were the daimon, one could have started analysing the late Goethe and the ideas he expressed in his conversations with Eckermann. That must be what Butler was aiming for when she described Nazism as a result of Goethe's spiritual surrender to Byron. This surrender must necessarily have been that Goethe finally gave in to Byron's view of things but, then, this impression is contradicted by a statement about Byron and Goethe on the very same page in the book, that the synthesis between the two was 'ill-starred' because Byron contributed to the idea of cultural development with daimonism and Goethe with philhellenism (anti-daimonism).<sup>62</sup> In *Paper Boats* Butler describes a similar division of labour between Goethe and Nietzsche. Goethe went too far in one direction, Nietzsche too far in the other. Serene greatness is replaced by mass hysteria, humanness by inhumanity.<sup>63</sup>

According to Sandra J. Peacock, there was a shift in perspective from the 1930s to the 1950s that made Butler ready to give daimon a greater share of the blame for what went wrong in German society.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, she never abandoned the idea that it was Winckelmann's philhellenism that had set everything in motion, and it is this conviction that has stuck with the many who in recent years have built on her ideas. (Martin Bernal's critique of Winckelmann and archaeological eurocentrism in the first volume of *Black Athena*, for instance, is largely based on Butler's *The Tyranny of Greece*.<sup>65</sup>) The reluctance to exclude Winckelmann from the scheme must be seen in light of how Butler initially perceived the daimon — as a creative force. How can one put the blame for all the world's troubles on daimon, when daimon, at the outset, was supposed to save literature from Winckelmann's petrified marble world? That Butler throughout most of *The Tyranny of Greece* describes daimon in positive terms must be because, although she felt tempted to consider political aspects as she observed the negative development that Germany was going through in the 1930s, she continued to cling to the daimon/anti-daimon opposition. This opposition came from Stefan Zweig and was part of an aesthetic and critical

<sup>62</sup>Butler, *Byron and Goethe*, p. 222.

<sup>63</sup>Butler, *Paper Boats*, p. 127.

<sup>64</sup>Sandra J. Peacock, 'Struggling with the Daimon: Eliza M. Butler on Germany and Germans', *History of European Ideas*, 32 (2006), 99–115 (p. 114).

<sup>65</sup>Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 212–14.

(but not political) approach to literature. What else could one expect from a person who had dedicated much of her life, first as a student and then as a university professor, to the study of literature? However, this is also the reason why I believe that her method, although interesting as an analysis of certain aspects of German philhellenism, is less useful when it comes to assessing its political consequences. Strictly speaking, it is not entirely convincing as an account of Winckelmann's aesthetics, either.

### **Notes on the Contributor**

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