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# JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM  
AND EUROPEAN LITERATURES



*THEME*

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WINCKELMANN'S VICTIMS





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## *Editorial Note*

The current issue of the *Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures* forms a diptych with the forthcoming seventh issue, scheduled to appear in Spring 2022. Its title, *Winckelmann's Victims*, was the topic of a three-day conference that took place at Ghent University in September 2018. At the heart of the two issues lies the question of classical normativity—with its prejudices and exclusions—and the way in which it affected European cultural self-fashioning (through both art and literature). While issue seven will predominantly deal with literary normativity, the classics and their canonicity, this issue tackles the problem from a more purely art-historical point of view, looking at how Winckelmann's thinking influenced our ideas and perception of the *classical* norm.

Classical works, and the ideals that were projected on them, have frequently been considered as the standard against which the quality of a literary work should be measured. Whether a text or artistic object was positively or negatively evaluated depended on the extent to which it could meet the 'classical' requirements. This idealization of the Classical past had begun very early, already at the very end of the fifth century BC, when, for example, the comic poet Aristophanes in his *Frogs* argues that no contemporary tragedian can compare with their glorious predecessors. Fast forward into Roman times, and in spite of the ambiguous relationship of Rome with Greek culture and literature, this admiration of Classical Greek culture and literature took an even more precise turn: not only were Classical Greek authors, and, for example, sculptors the best, but contemporary production was in many cases intentionally despised.

This point of view that the grandeur of Classical Athens was only followed by a long period of decadence re-emerged at various times throughout (European) history, often with problematical consequences and uses. An example of someone whose works were used to justify and advocate for such a classical norm was the German art critic Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68). His *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* may be considered as the embodiment of the idea that the classics should be the norm for aesthetic or even any evaluation, such as has

recurrently cropped up in Western Europe, to a greater or lesser degree, from the Early Middle Ages until modern times.

Almost inevitably, this normativity has implied, shaped, and fed prejudices and thoughts of exclusion towards literary features and aesthetic characteristics that seemed to deviate from classical ideals. In this first of two issues, we present three case studies that deconstruct this process in the field of art history and provide a nuanced point of view on the influence of Winckelmann.

Melissa Gustin's article on the American sculptor Harriet Hosmer paves the road with a fascinating analysis of how her two earliest works—entitled respectively *Daphne* (1853) and *Medusa* (1853/54)—clearly react against Bernini's baroque sculptures, indirectly influenced by Winckelmann's ideas of classicism.

In the second contribution to this issue, Elizabeth Prettejohn takes a more theoretical approach to the long afterlife of Winckelmann's normativity, especially through the figures of Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton, and demonstrates that Winckelmann's classicizing ideals even influenced the history of twentieth-century modernism. Her article has far-reaching consequences for the study of often overlooked works that did not seem to fit the right definition of modernism.

Yannick Le Pape, in the third and last article, considers how the classical norms of ancient Greece and Rome made it difficult to come to an unbiased view of Assyrian art. He examines how the discoveries of Near Eastern sites such as Nineveh were, despite the initial thrill of the findings, looked down on by so many people, even Nineveh's supporters.

Finally, Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto wraps up the sixth issue with an illuminating response piece. From her own background as a medieval art historian, Rodríguez Porto sees ways to “re-engage with Greek art, Winckelmann, and the history of art historical practice in a more inclusive way” and ends with two examples of contemporary sculpture. This de-construction of classicism is a fruitful way to think about the process of (aesthetic) exclusion and inclusion, while it does not necessarily require a total rejection of the classical tradition.

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# JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND  
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

## CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Melissa L. Gustin, “Two Styles More Opposed’: Harriet Hosmer’s Classicisms between Winckelmann and Bernini,” *JOLCEL* 6 (2021): pp. 1–31. DOI: 10.21825/jolcel.v6i0.11801.

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## NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of *JOLCEL*. The other contributions are “The Future of Winckelmann’s Classical Form: Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton” by Elizabeth Prettejohn (pp. 33–56) and “Winckelmann in Nineveh: Assyrian Remains at the Age of Classics” by Yannick Le Pape (pp. 58–78). The response piece is “Bodily Exclusions? Winckelmann’s Victims and the Paradox of Form” by Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto (pp. 80–87).

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# “Two Styles More Opposed”: Harriet Hosmer’s Classicisms between Winckelmann and Bernini\*

MELISSA L. GUSTIN

*University of York*

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908) positioned two early busts, *Daphne* (1853/4) and *Medusa* (1854) in opposition to Gianlorenzo Bernini’s works of the same subject through careful deployment of Winckelmannian principles. It engages with the first English translation of Winckelmann’s *History of the Art of Antiquity* by Giles Henry Lodge in 1850, as well as the rich body of antique material available to Hosmer in Rome. It problematises art historical approaches to Hosmer’s work that emphasise biographically-led readings over object-led interpretations informed by contemporary translations, discourses of originality, and display practices. It demonstrates the conflicting position of Bernini in the middle and late nineteenth century as the “Prince of Degenerate Sculpture”, and shows that Winckelmann’s victimisation of Bernini led to his poor reputation. Bernini’s reputation as skilled but degenerate provided the foil for Hosmer to reclaim these subjects, demonstrate her correct understanding of classical principles and citation, and prove her superiority. Ultimately, however, the two artists will be shown to have more similarities than differences in their use of classical references; only access to Winckelmann’s writings separates their reception in the nineteenth century.

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\* *Acknowledgements:* This article develops a chapter from my unpublished doctoral thesis at the University of York, submitted in 2018. I have presented some of the material at the British Association for Victorian Studies annual conference in 2017, and part of it at the Winckelmann’s Victims conference in 2018. I have been grateful for the critical feedback from readers over the course of its development, particularly Prof. Liz Prettejohn and Prof. Jason Edwards as my doctoral supervisors. I am grateful also for financial support from the Terra Foundation for American Art in 2015, which allowed me to conduct archival and site research in the United States, and the Henry Moore Institute where I was Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the time of presenting and then writing this article in 2018–19.

Harriet Hosmer's *Daphne* (fig. 1) and *Medusa* (fig. 2) represent the first professional ideal sculptures by an American woman. The pair of busts were Hosmer's debut into the professional art world in Italy, Britain, and America. They announced her sophisticated grasp of aesthetic discourse and antique references, skill in carving, and artistic ingenuity. The works fit into a larger category of nineteenth-century Anglo-American ideal busts, but far from being generic "ideal" figures,<sup>1</sup> the busts reveal an erudite interplay of antique references and discursive modes. As a thematically related pendant pair, the different expressive and stylistic elements in Hosmer's sculptures produced a dynamic series of complements and comparisons between two fully realized individual works of art. This paper triangulates these busts, as a pair, between two giants of art history: the eighteenth-century German art historian/critic Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Italian Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini, a triangulation which required Hosmer, and by extension modern scholars, to work between texts, translations, and visual media simultaneously. I propose Hosmer's busts may be read as performances of Winckelmann in opposition to Bernini—setting herself up as the embodiment of a rival school of classicism. It treats Winckelmann's text, primarily via Giles Henry Lodge's 1850 abridged translation of Book IV as *History of Ancient Art Among the*



Figure 1: Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, *Daphne*, 1853/4, marble, 69.9 x 49.8 x 31.8 cm (27 1/2 x 19 5/8 x 12 1/2 in.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1973.133.



Figure 2: Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, *Medusa*, 1854, marble, 69.22 x 53.34 x 24.13 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2003.125, photo by Minneapolis Institute of Art.

<sup>1</sup> 'Ideal' sculpture is broadly conceived as "allegorical, classical, Biblical, or literary," primarily the female nude (far outnumbering male nudes); works were frequently conceived of as pairs or pendants, which "involved not only an aesthetic balance of form, but a comparison or contrast of emotional and philosophic content of the two separate units of the sculpture meant to be understood and enjoyed singly, and yet losing its ultimate message unless both halves were seen and related, one to the other." Gerdtz, *American Neo-Classic Sculpture*, 20–21.

*Greeks*, as a practical guide to antique sculpture and the formation of modern taste.<sup>2</sup>

By performing close readings of the mythological and sculptural references in Hosmer's busts, drawing on intertextual approaches from classical receptions and literary studies,<sup>3</sup> I offer new readings of Hosmer's busts by examining, and taking seriously, her engagement with antique precedents. I re-orientate the study of mid-century neoclassical sculpture towards a fuller engagement with classicism as an international, cosmopolitan language of form, invested with scholarly erudition and enriched by the encounter with antique objects. I suggest that Hosmer's works reveal a familiarity with Winckelmann's text, especially the construction of discursive modes and his chronologies and criticisms, which informed her selection of effective antique references, although Hosmer did not reference Winckelmann, Lodge, or even many antique works of art in her extant correspondence. She selected these classical citations not for their popularity or wider role in the consciousness of an art-viewing public, but for their allusive, thematic, or iconographic relevance to her subjects, which demonstrates a further awareness of her mythic subjects and the wide range of material available in Rome.<sup>4</sup> Her apparent use of Winckelmann is framed by Bernini's reception in Anglo-American criticism in the period around Hosmer's work. His status in the nineteenth century offered her the opportunity to set up an artistic rivalry that she was sure to win between herself as a Winckelmannian, correctly classical sculptor and Bernini as the anti-classical degenerate, a victim of Winckelmannian norms and exclusions. Hosmer topped Bernini in her performance of classicism and citation, which may have allowed her to simultaneously demonstrate her superior grasp of classicism and conventions, while also—by claiming his subjects for her own—developing a subtle edge to her artistic persona, without overtly branding herself as outside the bounds of artistic propriety. Hosmer's practice was demonstrative of the larger intellectual project of nineteenth-century neoclassicism, and his article offers not only new sources for her early busts but a broader demonstration of how mid-nineteenth-century American sculptors related to, appropriated, and performed their individual classicisms.

## 1 You were myth-taken: re-evaluating victimhood narratives in Hosmer's Ovidian busts

Harriet Goodhue Hosmer was born October 9, 1830, to a middle-class family outside Boston.<sup>5</sup> Having lost her mother and three siblings to tuberculosis by the

<sup>2</sup> Winckelmann, translated and edited by Lodge, *History of Ancient Art Among the Greeks*, hereafter Lodge, 1850; translated from Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*.

<sup>3</sup> This draws especially on Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*.

<sup>4</sup> On allusion and intertext, see especially Hinds, 1–16; see also Prettejohn's provocation in the introduction to *Modern Painters* regarding resemblance, allusion, and upon whom the responsibility for recognising or producing meaning from these potential references, especially points 2, 4, 5, and 12. Prettejohn, *Modern Painters*, 5–6.

<sup>5</sup> For Hosmer's correspondence, see Carr, *Harriet Hosmer, Letters and Memories*; the best modern biography is Culkin, *Harriet Hosmer*.

age of twelve, young Harriet was raised with her physician father's belief that strong bodies prevented consumption and was allowed to run free and wild in Watertown. By sixteen, she had grown into such an unholy terror that she was shipped off to a liberal girls' school in the backwoods of Massachusetts. After leaving school, she attended medical lectures in St Louis and took art lessons in Boston, before moving to Rome in 1852 for better access to models, training, and materials. There she studied under John Gibson RA, and by 1853, she progressed from copying antique models to developing her own figures. She would go on to be one of the most successful American sculptors in Rome by any measure—at one point even selling sculptures directly to the Prince of Wales from her studio. She died in penury in 1908, and today her sculptures are held in numerous public and private collections in America and Britain.

Hosmer's highly-publicized life was full of moments that exemplify an American narrative of success through grit, determination, and good old-fashioned gumption: moonlit horseback adventures and train shenanigans, attending medical school with a pistol tucked in her belt (having grown up with a "spirited horse, a dog, and a gun"<sup>6</sup>), moving to Rome more-or-less unannounced in the company of an actress to become John Gibson's first student,<sup>7</sup> upsetting the Roman community by riding unaccompanied (at full tilt) along the Corso and in the campagna. Her professional and personal reputation was one of chaste high spirits and a touch of charming wildness; she wore masculine clothes and had short hair. Her adventures included convincing Elizabeth Barrett Browning to cross dress in order to sneak into a monastery for some illicit, gender-bending art appreciation, a shenanigan foiled by Barrett Browning's nerves and Robert Browning's fear of controversy.<sup>8</sup> She never married legally but had romantic and probably sexual relationships with women throughout her life, including with Louisa Baring, Lady Ashburton, for whom Hosmer produced numerous works, and in relation to whom Hosmer called herself "*sposa*" and "hubby."<sup>9</sup>

Because Hosmer's biography is so exciting, in a *This Girl Can, Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History* way, it is not surprising that modern scholarship has privileged biographically led readings of her work. I have written elsewhere how a scholarly preoccupation with Hosmer's sexuality and sex life, and a focus on feminist psychoanalysis, have caused myths and rumours to persist as truth and to hinder new art historical research.<sup>10</sup> While biography is an unquestionably vital part of art historical research and critical interpretation, because artists develop their individual characters and artistic vocabularies through their life experiences, later scholars often read the work of women artists through their life events, gender, or sexual orientation. What is key here is the difference between *biography*, that is, the history of a person's life and context, from which historians can develop arguments around access to material, professional networks, commissions, and so on, and *biographically led interpretation*, readings of a work or oeuvre which

<sup>6</sup> Carr, *Letters and Memories*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Culkin, *Cultural Biography*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Culkin, *Cultural Biography*, 117–22; Vicinus, "Laocoöning in Rome," 353–66.

<sup>10</sup> Gustin, "Corps a corps," 824–53.

takes the artist's life as the primary source of meaning or intellectual content. These later readings often fail to account for or examine exactly the kinds of the wider literary, artistic, and historic *milieux* of the artists which critical biography offers, and do not give women credit for their intellectual and artistic work. Instead, these reproduce biological or gender-essentialist constructions, or draw on stereotypes of oppression, exceptional characters, and before-their-time gender politics. This is not to remotely suggest that biographical art history, particularly in a feminist context where much work remains to be done on restoring women's biographies and contributions to the public awareness, is not valuable. This article relies on the archival and contextual work conducted by primarily biographical historians, particularly given the Hosmer archive is not replete with manuscript evidence for her artistic choices, processes, or intellectual development.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the biographical work done by Culkin and Sherwood provides the historical basis for the less-well-documented visual and critical arguments developed herein.

Hosmer's *biography* provides evidence for what she could have seen in Rome, who she could speak to, and when objects were produced. By contrast, biographically led interpretation includes Dolly Sherwood suggesting that Hosmer made the busts discussed here to process her terror of sex because she never married or had children.<sup>12</sup> This is nonsense, as Hosmer enacted lesbian marriage ceremonies with her partners and wrote erotic letters to Louisa Baring, Lady Ashburton throughout their relationship; she just was not interested in marrying a man. Kate Culkin comments that

Harriet began to explore the themes of female power and female victimisation...Her sympathetic portrayal of Medusa critiques ways in which women were punished and judged for any sexual behavior. Her Daphne's submissiveness...emphasized that in turning to her father for help, the huntress allowed another to determine her fate.<sup>13</sup>

However, Culkin further notes that while proclaiming celibacy (and complaining about her friend's engagement), Hosmer was still engaging in sexual and romantic relationships with women, which she suggests these busts also celebrated.<sup>14</sup> Most recently Melissa Dabakis's *Sisterhood of Sculptors* argues that the *Medusa* presents Hosmer's self-identification as a "mannish woman," her lesbian desire, and that

<sup>11</sup> I was able to visit Hosmer Papers at the Schlesinger Library in 2015 thanks to a Terra Foundation for American Art Research Travel Grant, and during the COVID-19 pandemic have been very grateful for the efforts of the librarians in scanning materials that would be otherwise inaccessible.

<sup>12</sup> "It is not difficult to understand her attraction to the free-spirited Daphne; Hatty realised that a romantic involvement or matrimony could put an end to her ambitions for a career as a sculptor. Searching for her identification with Medusa is a quest far more arcane...At the root of Hosmer's fascination with Medusa may have lurked a fear of sexuality and its consequences...Her instinctive way of compensating for these subliminal terrors may have been her recreation of these two figures, resuscitated in wholeness and the purity of marble." Sherwood, *Harriet Hosmer*, 87. Sherwood also questions Hosmer's affiliation to the neoclassical aesthetic, describing it as "oddly alien to her nature," and wonders why "one so vivacious and animated wish to represent in her works the Greek ideals of repose and serenity," at 63.

<sup>13</sup> Culkin, *Cultural Biography*, 35–37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

the pair of works displays her commitment to a subversive proto-feminism,<sup>15</sup> while only briefly referring to potential visual connections or the thought process behind Hosmer's artistic choices. William Gerdts' 1978 "The Medusa of Harriet Hosmer" is the only extended examination of the work itself and the available visual and literary sources from which Hosmer might have been working.<sup>16</sup> These primarily biographical interpretations, which enact feminist and psychoanalytic readings of Medusa based on those by Hélène Cixous and Sigmund Freud,<sup>17</sup> fail to properly explore the myth in the wider art historical and sculptural histories of the Medusa, nor do they seriously engage with the majority of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which is far longer than these two episodes.

The subjects Hosmer chose for her first professional works come from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,<sup>18</sup> but the Daphne and Medusa stories are not next to each other in the text (Books I and IV respectively) and are not presented together elsewhere in sculptural history to suggest them as a natural pendant pair. Previous scholarship has presented them as a natural pair because of the theme of the victimized woman,<sup>19</sup> but this is common enough in both Ovid and nineteenth century art as to be largely meaningless as a unique joining principle.<sup>20</sup> Instead, consider those characteristics that the episodes she chose have in common—both Medusa and Daphne transform because of the actions of a deity associated with the arts, Minerva and Apollo respectively, and their transformations lead directly to a proliferation of sculptural materials: stone for Medusa, wood for Daphne.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, no major sculptor apart from Bernini had previously depicted *both* of these subjects—meaning that Hosmer was setting herself up in direct competition with him, and no other. She could therefore metamorphose not only her raw sculptural materials into finished works, but also transform the mythological subjects from Bernini's property into her own. Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* (fig. 3) and *Head of Medusa* (fig. 4) were both readily available to her; the Villa Borghese is a fifteen- or twenty-minute walk from her home in Via Gregoriana, Rome, while the Capitoline Gallery was a little further, approximately half an hour or fifteen minutes on horseback. These repositories of not only Bernini's works, but

<sup>15</sup> It also associates the bust with a door knocker on a residence Hosmer lived in, describing it as "depicting the head of Medusa whose hair showed only the first suggestion of turning to snakes," and a key moment of artistic self-fashioning. However, this door knocker is widely distributed in Rome and in Britain, has been in production since the eighteenth century, and is a vegetal figure like a Ceres or Bacchante, not any sort of Medusa or Gorgon. There is no evidence that Hosmer had anything to do with the knocker's installation. Dabakis, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors*, 51–54.

<sup>16</sup> Gerdts, "The Medusa of Harriet Hosmer," 96–107.

<sup>17</sup> Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, 53; Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 875–93; Freud, "Das Medusenhaupt," 105–6.

<sup>18</sup> Latin text and translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (hereafter *Met.*) taken from the 1916 Loeb edition by Frank Justus Miller (see bibliography).

<sup>19</sup> Culkin, *Cultural Biography*, 36; Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, 49–50; Fryd, "The 'Ghosting' of Incest and Female Relations," 292–309.

<sup>20</sup> See especially Gerdts, *American Neo-classic Sculpture*; Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives*. On violence and the body in the *Metamorphoses*, see Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies," 9–41.

<sup>21</sup> On Bernini and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see Warwick, *Bernini: Art as Theatre*, 84–85, 103–5; Barolsky, "Ovid, Bernini, and the Art of Petrification"; Wilkins, "Bernini and Ovid."



Figure 3: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne*, ca. 1622–25, marble, 243 cm (96 in), Galleria Borghese, inv. CV, photo by author.



Figure 4: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Head of Medusa*, ca. 1635, marble, 52 x 60 x 36 cm (20.4 x 23.6 x 14 in.), Capitoline Museum, MC1166, photo by author, courtesy of Roma Capitale – Sovrintendenza

ancient sculpture of the highest order, provided the visual material that Hosmer studied and refigured in her busts. We shall return to these in more depth shortly. The Daphne myth is not immediately adjacent to the Medusa episode, nor is it not connected through similar characters, scenes, or contiguous narrative. It takes place in Book I of the *Metamorphoses*, with Apollo and Cupid as the instigators of the action.<sup>22</sup> Apollo, boasting about his prowess with arms and general mightiness, irritates Cupid into shooting him with a golden arrow to inflame his lust for Daphne—who he has shot in turn with a deadening lead arrow. Apollo chases poor Daphne through the Attic woodlands, shouting after her about how great he is, doesn't she know who his father is, and he's so good at the lyre!<sup>23</sup> Even if she had not already declared that she was avoiding the chains of matrimony, and had not been further made immune to his manly charms, it's hard to imagine anyone actually being charmed into a casual woodland shag by being chased and screamed at by a complete stranger. She prays to her father, the river god Peneus, to be saved from this raving pervert chasing her through the forest shouting about his healing fingers—a line which has surely never worked. In the moment of greatest narrative tension, Daphne is overcome and transformed into a laurel tree, outreached fingers to limbs and leaves, toes digging into the soil as roots, soft flesh into firm, unyielding, splintery wood. Apollo, finally catching up to her, is very sad: he embraces her now-barky figure and tries to get a leg over despite her

<sup>22</sup> *Met.* I.451–567.

<sup>23</sup> *Met.* 1.512–18.

woodenness and lack of amorous response—apparently Cupid’s dart overpowers any concerns about chafing. Even as an immobile tree, Daphne rejects him— “But even the wood shrank from his kisses”<sup>24</sup>—and in perverse homage, Apollo decides to wear her limbs as a crown.

*Daphne’s* bound arms and distressing stillness suggest the rooted and muted nymph after her arboreal ordeal, rather than highlighting the violence, visual drama, and magical effects of her transformation.<sup>25</sup> That does not mean, however, that the violent content of the myth is “not encoded” in the bust, as Dabakis would have it:<sup>26</sup> the title and iconographic elements point to these directly and it is expected that the educated viewer would know not only the story, but also the Bernini work against which Hosmer was contrasting herself. Hosmer’s *Daphne* is caught in the sturdy twining branches of the laurel garland: bound up in herself, and in the symbol appropriated by the god responsible for her transformation. Where the sharp edges of the leaves caress the soft underside of Daphne’s breasts, the softly-rasped skin of the stone gives the effect of gooseflesh, her nipples peaking in an unclassical naturalism that suggests the coolness of a breeze that rustles the leaves and ruffles the perfect waves of her bound-up hair. The fruiting branches’ swollen berries echo and emphasize the shocking eroticism in their shape and shine, which to a too-attentive gaze may even recall the bulbous swags on the Ephesian Diana. The earthy wooden bindings, with their clumped and ripening fruits and shivering shimmering leaves, hold the nymph’s soft limbs rigidly against her trunk; only the rippling waves of Daphne’s hair beneath her ribbon recall the river where she frolicked freely under the protection of her father-god, slipping with the current and as she pleased. The modelled skin lacks the licked-wet sheen to which marble can be lovingly polished<sup>27</sup>— Daphne’s flesh is smooth, soft, but dry even to the eye, like the wood peeking through the heat-cracked bark of Apollo’s tree in summer.

Ovid’s version of the Medusa myth is developed in Book IV,<sup>28</sup> although this is only one of the multiple antique versions of the myth and artistic traditions.<sup>29</sup> Though the Gorgon head was utilized throughout the Perseus narratives, her transformation from mortal woman to apotropaic emblem is only explained at the very end, in twenty lines. Where Daphne had been textually allowed to speak for herself, Perseus narrates Medusa’s story in the past tense. He tells the audience at his wedding to Andromeda that Medusa was once the priestess of Minerva, especially noted for her beautiful hair. Neptune raped her in Minerva’s temple while Minerva averted her gaze from the assault. Afterwards, Minerva punished Medusa for the violation of the sacred precinct by transforming her into the snaky, sculpting monster, then sending Perseus to kill her. He brought her now-magical head to Minerva for her to use as a weapon. The Gorgoneion appears throughout

<sup>24</sup> *Met.* I.556.

<sup>25</sup> Dabakis notes that this work “combined a sensuous naturalism with the geometric clarity of the fifth-century B.C.E. classical ideal...The face, however, inspired by Greek Severe-style sculpture, stands in sharp contrast to the naturalism of the rest of the body.” *Sisterhood*, 49.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> On neoclassical sculptural surfaces, see especially Ferando, “The Deceptive Surface.”

<sup>28</sup> *Met.* IV.783–803.

<sup>29</sup> See especially Wilks, *Medusa*; Garber and Vickers, eds., *The Medusa Reader*.



Greco-Roman art as an apotropaic device on armor, sarcophagi, and buildings. Medusa's wings are an iconographic holdover from the older, more monstrous "pot" Gorgon, and are not wholly necessary to a recognition of Medusa. Medusas or Gorgoneions are particularly numerous and varied.<sup>30</sup> Major pieces to which Hosmer had access, apart from the aforementioned Bernini, included Canova's *Perseus and Medusa*, the first version of which stood the Vatican, and variations of the Rondanini Medusa, which had been removed to Berlin well before Hosmer's arrival in Rome. There were also decorative and architectural examples—one Gorgoneion even appears embedded in the wall of Canova's studio in Rome.

One hundred and sixty-odd years after its original creation, Hosmer's *Medusa* retains its arresting quality: I found it difficult, upon seeing the work for the first time, to refrain from touching the marble. The stone is not quite the sugary whiteness of Seravezza or freshly cut Parian but in the carved flesh of the shoulder and bust, seems to absorb warmth and light like a densely woven velvet and becomes fleshier compared to the glinting polish of the hairband and sandy desert-adder scales of the lowly serpents. Medusa's meltingly soft upward gaze refuses to meet the eye of the beholder—perhaps for their safety—and joined with the graceful twist of the neck to turn her cheek towards us, goes towards the application of the beautiful style. Here is not an unthinking and frozen terror in the face of gruesome death, or a hardness which can be felt more than described. Nor is Hosmer's *Medusa* the personified battlefield shriek or monstrous medallion of the ancient world,<sup>31</sup> the multiple, morbid mask of Canova's *Perseus*,<sup>32</sup> or Cellini's bulbous, dribbling trophy.<sup>33</sup> Despite being a harbinger of death by petrification, the *Medusa's* materiality and narrative marmoreality is submerged under the velvety fleshiness of the surface, the soft throat and gently downturned lips: the beauty of the figure and the beauty of the expression are as intimately tangled up in each as the snakes below her breasts. Her suffering is transformed from horrific if mundane physical pain to an elevated plane of experience, beyond mortal ken but made tolerable to human sight, watchable when the horror should make us look away—approachable through the supreme physical charms of the work. The graceful forms and sensual charms of the *Medusa*, the pleasing fleshiness of the arms and the breasts, the luxurious if snake-laden hair, the attractively parted lips, invite the touches and caresses of the viewer despite the risk—or because of it.

These narratives are not sufficiently unique as 'victim' episodes within the *Metamorphoses* to be inherently paired together, even as proto-feminist statements. They are, as noted, three books apart in the text; it is worth noting also that the myths leading up to the Perseus episode are Juno transforming the Theban women into birds, then Cadmus and Harmonia. The former involves the

<sup>30</sup> Cima, "Imago Medusae."

<sup>31</sup> Feldman, "Gorgo and the Origins of Fear," 484–94; Belson, "The Medusa Rondanini," 373–78.

<sup>32</sup> Culkin suggests Canova's *Perseus* as a competitor for Hosmer, but I disagree with this reading; she is not competing with Canova but aligning herself with him through shared classical principles, *Cultural Biography*, 35–37. On the Medusa within Canova's *Triumphant Perseus*, see especially Boucher, "Head of Medusa," 62–63; O. Raggio, "Canova's Triumphant Perseus," 204–12; on the Bassano del Grappa version of the Medusa in copper and alternative antique points of references, see Gustin, "Canova's Copper Head of Medusa," 916–23.

<sup>33</sup> Cole, "Cellini's Blood."

transformation of women by a goddess, and the latter involves snakes, and are therefore related to Medusa either thematically or iconographically. Closely following the Medusa episode, the Muse Calliope sings of the rape of Proserpina, again thematically relevant, and in textual proximity. By noting this, it becomes clear Hosmer's underlying principle of pairing Daphne and Medusa was not sexual assault or female victimization, but the sculptural themes which associated her with the *bête noire* of nineteenth century taste, Bernini. These narratives, likewise, are not sufficient in and of themselves to explain the difference in affect between Hosmer's two busts, nor to fully explain the selection of antique prototypes and references. Previous scholarship has loosely gestured towards Hosmer's citation of classical Athenian sculpture and Bernini's *Medusa*,<sup>34</sup> but not explored why, and how, the young sculptor might have constructed these contrasting images of Ovidian subjects, let alone why these subjects. We will therefore turn to the primary text through which Hosmer was most likely familiar with various modes of classical ideal sculpture.

## 2 Winckelmann, Lodge, and the question of style

It is essential to ascertain not only to which antique prototypes Hosmer was referring, but to determine what her selection criteria were, and what those have to do with her subject. To answer those questions, we turn to Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*. Winckelmann's writings were highly influential for the development of what is now called neoclassical sculpture,<sup>35</sup> and he is often given credit for essentially founding art history (especially classical art history) as an academic discipline.<sup>36</sup> The Lodge translations (partial in 1850, see fig. 5, and complete in 1872, with another edition in 1880<sup>37</sup>) were the only English translations of Winckelmann's *History* before the twenty-first century but it is not unlikely that Hosmer had access to or awareness of the 1850 edition before commencing the *Daphne* and *Medusa*. Lodge was active in Boston, a member of prominent Brahmin family, and Hosmer, as a graduate of the well-connected Sedgwick School,<sup>38</sup> a regular visitor to the Boston Athenaeum, and a practising art student, may well have been aware of his translation work even before she left for Rome in 1852. By reframing Hosmer's works in this light, we can ask seriously what artists in the nineteenth century could *do* with Winckelmann's writings, and how the impact of these texts might be seen in the finished works of art. Unfortunately, Hosmer did not write her letters with future art historians in mind, and barely discussed her visual or critical materials nor her

<sup>34</sup> Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, 49–50.

<sup>35</sup> See also Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 21; on nineteenth-century sculpture and German aesthetic thought, see MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects*; on ideal beauty, the antique, and modern sculpture, see Ferrari, "The Sculptor, the Duke, and Queer Art," 230.

<sup>36</sup> On Winckelmann's predecessors and the question of Winckelmann's 'invention' of art history, see Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, 105–15; Potts, 72–81.

<sup>37</sup> Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, translated by Lodge. Further citations given from the 1880 edition, as Lodge 1880.

<sup>38</sup> Culkin, *Cultural Biography*, 9–15.

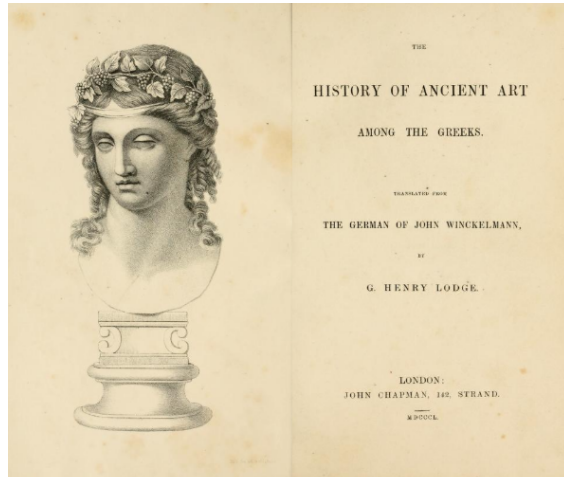


Figure 5: Frontispiece and title page of Winckelmann, trans. Lodge, 1850, photo by Getty Research Institute.

design process, let alone her reading list, and leaves us with only circumstantial evidence and our observational skills to connect dots rather than specific references to Winckelmann or Lodge.<sup>39</sup> This absence of manuscript evidence, however, should not discourage us from pursuing new readings and interpretative strategies, particularly where such approaches might open up wider critical avenues. Furthermore, a biography of Gibson, to which Hosmer contributed material and which purports to largely reproduce Gibson's own writings, makes repeated reference to Winckelmann's theories and histories of art as a touchstone for his practice, which suggests that she was at least circumstantially exposed to Winckelmann's ideas under Gibson's tutelage;<sup>40</sup> indeed, a passage from the 1850 edition is (with minor discrepancies) reproduced in *Life of John Gibson*. We should therefore use the visual evidence from her finished works—the close attention to which allows for the development of a set of comparanda from which she could have drawn on the balance of availability, similarity, and appropriateness in subject or situation—and the presumption that a serious young artist was at least broadly familiar with a major underlying discourse for their chosen profession, particularly by an author who influenced her beloved teacher.

<sup>39</sup> By way of demonstrating how frustratingly vague Hosmer was about her visual sources, in her Beatrice Cenci, she made no contemporary mention of the so-called Guido Reni painting to which she clearly referred, but only discussed it many years later in passing in a newspaper interview. See Gustin, "Corps a corps."

<sup>40</sup> Eastlake, *Life of John Gibson*, 210. The most direct and extensive discussion of Winckelmann from the volume is an uncited quote from Lodge 1850, 48, no. 29. "The following passage from Winckelmann was always in my mind. 'The forms of a beautiful body are determined by lines the centre of which is always changing, and which, if continued, would never describe circles. They are consequently more simple, but also more complex than a circle which, however large or small it may be, always has the same centre, and either includes others or is included in others. This diversity was sought after by the Greeks in works of all kinds, and their discernment of its beauty led them to introduce the same system even into the forms of their utensils and vases, the easy and elegant outline of which is drawn after the same rule, that is by a line the centre of which must be found by means of several circles. Thus all these works have an elliptical figure, and therein consists their beauty. The greater unity here is in the junction of the forms and in the flowing of one out of another, the greater is the beauty of the whole.'"

Lodge's first translation presents the sections of the *Geschichte* that covers Greek art, Books VI and V, with an abridged text. Lodge noted in his introduction that his translation was "encouraged, besides, by the growing love of art in this country, stimulated as it has been by a few admirable works from the hands of native artists," and because

it presents a systematic exposition of the principals by which the author supposed the Greek artists to have been governed in the conception and conformation of those works which still stand the noblest creations of artistic genius, and about which the students and the lovers of beauty, grace, and majesty still gather with admiration and reverence.<sup>41</sup>

The volume was produced as a primer to introduce Americans to antique sculpture and inculcate good taste. Though substantially reduced in scope from Winckelmann's original text, which covers art from Egypt to the Late Antique, Lodge's translation highlighted the portions most relevant to the growing field of American sculpture: the nude. By presenting a scholarly text that explained the attributes, qualities, and types of the antique examples the artists were studying, Lodge prepared his American audience to properly appreciate the new works being displayed in their cities and the antiques they saw in reproduction or on tour in Italy. It was available on both sides of the Atlantic and accessible to interested readers in a range of social classes and roles.<sup>42</sup> The elevation of modern art through study and imitation of antiquity was further something to be desired, and that in many respects the sculpture of the modern age (i.e., Winckelmann's day, but continuing into Lodge's time with his translation), had surpassed that of earlier generations through "a more attentive study of antiquity," and that "our artists, having been required to make copies of antique works, have consequently been more confined to an imitation of the style of the ancients, whereas prior to this time... the style of Algardi and Bernini was regarded as the evangelical law."<sup>43</sup>

The text is heavily annotated with notes from the "German edition" and comments from Lodge, with further examples, translations, and information, especially regarding Winckelmann's errors of chronology or new discoveries. This made it an ideal primer for a young sculptor developing her aesthetic principles far from the actual material of antiquity, or for the art lover looking to improve his understanding of historic art. Lodge's annotations occasionally contradicted Winckelmann with new information, but were aimed at explicating his more obscure or counterintuitive comments, suggesting that Lodge intended Winckelmann's text to be taken primarily at face value. As it has been widely noted, the star sculptures within Winckelmann's *Geschichte* were overthrown from their fame within fifty years—that is, well before Lodge began his translation. Many of his chronologies and attributions were overturned or corrected by new scholarship

<sup>41</sup> Lodge 1850, pref. NP.

<sup>42</sup> For example, the Royal Academy of Arts' copy was once owned by John Russell Colvin, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces of British India. Royal Academy of Arts Library Catalogue, RA Collection: Book, 06/1846.

<sup>43</sup> Lodge, 1850, 179–80.

and new discoveries.<sup>44</sup> The removal of the Parthenon marbles from the Acropolis to London brought Greek original sculptures to the British, the Aegina sculptures to Berlin, and the Nike of Samothrace to Paris; the Apollo Belvedere was shown to be Hellenistic and new additions to the canon of Greek sculptors (admittedly, via marble copies of bronze works) included the Discobolus of Myron in 1781, the Apoxyomenos of Lysippus in 1849, and in 1863 the Doryphoros of Polykleitos, just to name a very few. Prettejohn notes that Walter Pater's discussion of Winckelmann in *The Renaissance* cites Winckelmann's lack of access to true Greek sculptures, and his use of Roman copies and imitations "left in Winckelmann's actual results much that a more privileged criticism can correct."<sup>45</sup> However, Prettejohn notes that "The experienced reader of Pater will hear the irony in the phrase 'actual results'."<sup>46</sup> Despite his errors and inability to foresee what had yet to be excavated, Winckelmann's wider didactic project still offered valuable insights for artists and audiences.

Winckelmann's systematic categorizations and explanations of antique sculpture and paintings, with descriptions of each part of the body, the conformations of different deities and personages, and the best examples of each type or personage, were paired with the effusive ekphrastic passages that conveyed the power of antique art. These drew not only from close observation of the works, but the study of ancient literary texts, numismatic evidence, and earlier critical histories like Vasari and Caylus, to produce systematic theories of causation as well as the visual analyses and histories of development in style.<sup>47</sup> Even in Lodge's somewhat stodgy and reduced text—the Campbell's Condensed Soup edition of Winckelmann—the aesthetic fervour Winckelmann felt for antique sculpture comes through in passages describing the "most beautiful spring-time of youth"<sup>48</sup> in images of Apollo or calling the Laocoön "a miracle."<sup>49</sup> Winckelmann's combination of evocative descriptions and painstaking formal, archaeological, and textual analyses of the works to construct a coherent history of ancient art made this text a useful handbook for artists—if an artist wanted to know, for instance, where to look for the finest example of female hands, or how *not* to pose a heroic male figure (lest he look effeminate), Lodge's translation had them covered.

Winckelmann ordained that sculpture should aspire to the serenity and self-containment of the best Greek sculptures, which was depicted through the finest modelling and refined contours, without jarring or incoherent, undignified gesture or forms. Subtlety of contour and expression, and elevated spirit or concept, were the order of excellence, not necessarily virtuosic demonstrations of mechanical skill bereft of internal sensibility. *Expression* included both action and its more

<sup>44</sup> On the broad question of Winckelmann's inaccuracies and his relevance today, see Potts, "Introduction," 4–6. On near-contemporary responses to Winckelmann's chronologies and scholarship see Harloe, *Winckelmann*, 170–87; on the intersection of reception of Winckelmann's historical structures, new archaeological and classical studies, and modern art's relationship to antiquity, Potts, *Flesh*, 29–32.

<sup>45</sup> Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, 10–11.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Harloe, *Winckelmann*, 105–30; Potts, "Introduction," 16–28.

<sup>48</sup> Lodge, 1850, 81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

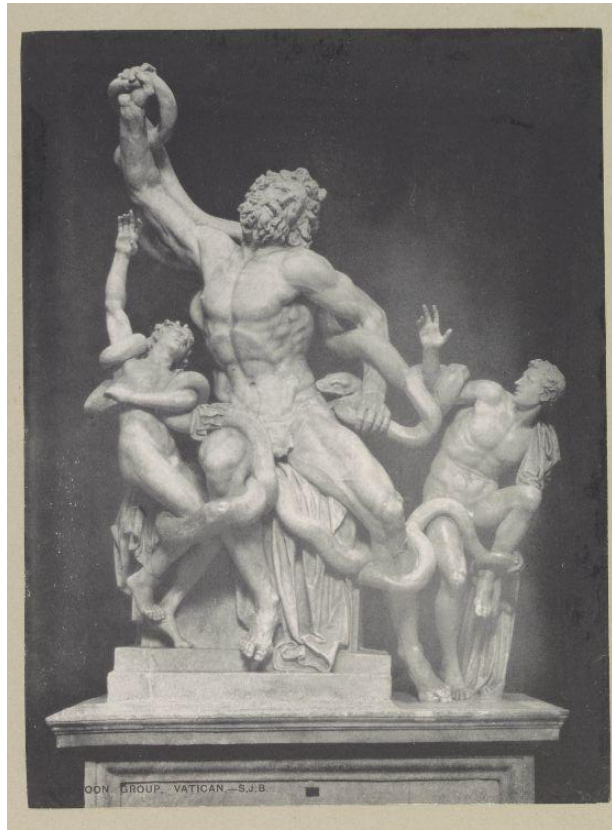


Figure 6: *Laocoön*, ca. 40-30 BCE, marble, 208 cm x 163 cm x 112 cm, Musei Vaticani, inv. 1059, photo by Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-F-2001-7-362-8.

limited form, and “changes the features of the face, and the posture, and consequently alters those forms which constitute beauty. The greater the change, the more unfavorable it is to beauty.”<sup>50</sup> An over-exuberance of any expression, positive or negative, would distort the features too far to be beautiful. The phrase, “*eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Größe*,” from Winckelmann’s earlier *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst*,<sup>51</sup> sums this up tidily: the noble simplicity and quiet grandeur of antique sculpture was the aspiration (that this described a work as contorted and emotive as the *Laocoön* of the Vatican is a matter for another text entirely) (fig. 6).<sup>52</sup> To understand the thought process behind Hosmer’s selection of antique sources that might allow her to produce modern works conforming to these standards of beauty, we must understand Winckelmann’s theory of high and beautiful styles in art. Hosmer may not have considered her works in these explicit terms, but we will see that her aesthetic argument demonstrates her familiarity with and use of the concepts.

Lodge’s translation emphasizes the high style’s suppression of facial expression in the face of death and unimaginable terror. He notes that Winckelmann is

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>51</sup> Winckelmann, trans. Heyer and Norton, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*; Prettejohn, *Modernity*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Potts, *Flesh*, 138–39.

not making excuses for an ancient artist's deficiency in modelling human individuality, the softness of flesh, or momentary vagaries of expression. Instead,

A state such as this, in which sensation and reflection cease, and which resembles apathy, does not disturb a limb or a feature, and thus enabled the great artist to represent in this instant the highest beauty just as he has represented it; for Niobe and her daughters are beautiful according to the highest conceptions of beauty.<sup>53</sup>

The abridged 1850 translation does not include Winckelmann's more explicit explanations of the character of the high style versus the beautiful or its chronological development.<sup>54</sup> As previously discussed, though, there is every possibility that Hosmer, training in Boston at this same moment, may have been in contact with Lodge, or been apprised of his work by her teachers, and had the opportunity to discuss the untranslated text. Furthermore, she had, by the time she started *Daphne*, been studying sculpture under John Gibson in Rome for a year; this meant not only practicing her modelling skills but spending time embedded in a studio environment with a senior sculptor who also incorporated Winckelmannian precepts into his practice. Anna Frasca Rath has demonstrated how Gibson integrated Winckelmann's ideas around imitation into his sculpture, following *his* teacher Canova;<sup>55</sup> it is unlikely that these ideas were never part of Hosmer's studio education, even if not in explicit terms, and as noted earlier Hosmer contributed autograph material to Eastlake's *Life of John Gibson* wherein Winckelmann is discussed repeatedly. Gibson may not have read aloud from Winckelmann to her or set her passages to read as homework but from experience as a student in active studios, these kinds of discussions happen as part of the daily practice and critique around a work in progress, a teaching environment which is not necessarily conducive to producing written records but which leaves visual traces on the developing work.

The high style is characterized by a hardness of contour that Winckelmann had associated with the severe style that preceded it. This "is a hardness more easily felt than described. We might wish to see in the face a certain grace which it would receive through more roundness and softness." The *Niobe and her Daughters* were considered "indisputable works of the high [grand] style."<sup>56</sup> (fig. 7) According to Winckelmann, the

fundamental principle of the high [grand] style was, as it appears, to represent the countenance and attitude of the gods and heroes as free from emotion, and not agitated by inward perturbation, in an equilibrium of feeling, and with a peaceful, always

<sup>53</sup> Lodge 1850, 164.

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that in the 1872/80 translations, Lodge translated Winckelmann's "*der höhe Stil*" (Winckelmann 1776, 470) as "the grand style," (Lodge 1880, vol 2, 135). *Höhe* is most commonly translated as "high" today, as opposed to Lodge's "grand" which connotes grandiosity, massive scale, richness or sumptuousness, and social elevation, rather than the intellectual or spiritual elevation Winckelmann described. This probably draws on Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* rather than Winckelmann's definitions, and I will continue to use "high" to describe the discursive style Winckelmann outlined. Reynolds, "Discourse XV."

<sup>55</sup> Rath, *John Gibson & Antonio Canova*, 75–78.

<sup>56</sup> Lodge 1880, 2:132.

even state of mind [...] it demands a lofty understanding to express this significant and speaking stillness of the soul.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 7: *Niobe and her daughter*, ca. early 3rd c BCE, marble, 47.5 x 45.5 x 177 cm, Uffizi Museum, Florence, photo by Rijksmuseum, RP-F-00-8143.

By contrast, the beautiful style (*der schöne Stil*)<sup>58</sup> had “a more sensual charm,” and was deployed to “make grandeur more companionable, as it were, through an engaging desire to please.”<sup>59</sup> The beautiful style was more accessible, charming, and physical; it allowed a greater range and depth of emotive expression: “The variety and greater diversity of expression in the beautiful style did not detract from its harmony and grandeur.”<sup>60</sup> It was also considered a newer, younger development in art, opposed to the stylistically older high style, though works in both modes could be produced simultaneously; in the 1850 edition, Lodge particularly notes that a work of the “later style” like the *Apollino* of the Uffizi has a “flowing softness,” compared to a “severe and punctilious treatment.”<sup>61</sup> The beautiful style accounted for a more sensually, recognizably human element in sculpture. Charm, grace, and physical attractiveness were the products of a Praxitelian revolution; works such as the *Aphrodite of Cnidos*, or a later discovery like the *Apoxyomenos*

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>58</sup> Winckelmann 1776, 475.

<sup>59</sup> Lodge 1880, 2:137.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>61</sup> Lodge, 1850, 82.



of Lysippus all embodied this new naturalism. They were still highly idealised and elevated, of course, but with a more approachable, human beauty.

The high is not merely *older* art, though in Winckelmann's original construction of chronology and style he positioned it as the earlier style. To consider all severe or early classical works, before the supposed intervention/invention of Praxiteles's grace, as examples of the high style would contradict the positivist angle that Winckelmann put on the lack of softness and modulations of form and surface in works in the high style. The style's rigid contours and hard surfaces, after all, could not be ascribed to a failure if Winckelmann's point about the ideological and spiritual superiority of the high style was going to stand. The rigidity and hardness, any awkwardness of pose or carving, had to be consciously chosen aesthetic qualities in service to the elevated idea of the artist and the work. As Lodge's explanatory footnote comments,

It seems as if he wished to defend the artist of Niobe and her daughters merely by an ingenious explanation, or praise him conditionally, and tacitly concede the justice of the matter-of-fact objection usually made by incompetent judges, that the work is deficient in force of expression. But we maintain that it needs for its defence no such display of elaborate reasons. We must simply acknowledge what is obvious—that the artist's conception of his figures is raised far above the level of common nature.<sup>62</sup>

That is, the high style must be consciously chosen to express the idea of sublimity beyond common human experience; it is not the absence of skill. Winckelmann's construction further privileges the Greek original, which is a key part in why he could only name two objects in Rome at the time that might be rightly called works in the high style. However, when separated from the chronological requirements and looked at as a set of formal and expressive conditions that signal 'early' and 'intellectual'—mirroring the beautiful style's signalling of 'emotional' and 'later', the high style can be used to explore works from later periods, especially consciously archaizing works from any period.

Because Winckelmann could only name two works—the *Niobe* of the Uffizi and the *Athena Albani*, which was partially illustrated in Lodge—that he would consider original examples of Greek sculpture in the high style,<sup>63</sup> artists looking to emulate the style had few concrete options to consult for visual references. Niobe's stony transformation made her somewhat more relevant to Daphne's story than the *Athena Albani*, but the stone element ties her more closely to Medusa. More importantly, Daphne was transformed so she could remain ever-virgin, unlike Niobe's fabled and ultimately fatal fecundity.<sup>64</sup> The *Athena* also resonates more with the *Medusa*, since Minerva was the one who transformed Medusa into the marble-maker in the first place. Moreover, neither work was readily accessible to Hosmer while she was working; the *Niobe* was in Florence, and the *Albani* collection was not a public museum. Hosmer had to use her powers of reasoning to identify a new corpus of material—high or severe in style, figures who rejected

<sup>62</sup> Lodge, 1850, 164.

<sup>63</sup> Lodge, 1880, 1:132.

<sup>64</sup> *Met.* VI.302–12.

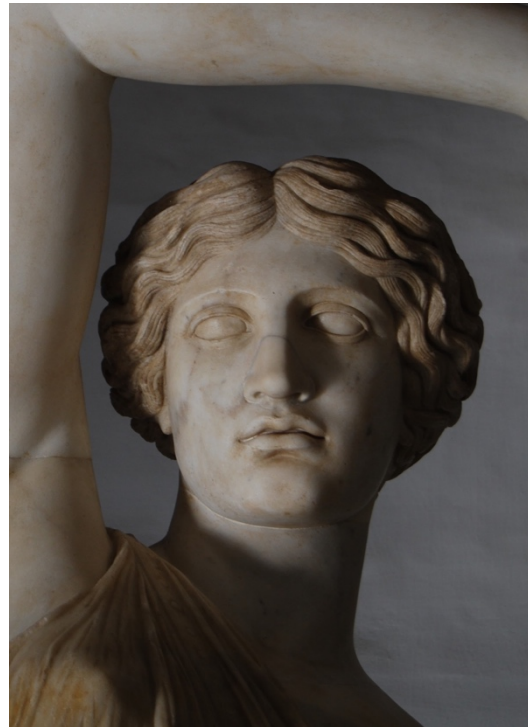


Figure 8: *Wounded Amazon of the Mattei type*, ca. 1st c CE, marble, 197cm, Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. S733, photo by author, courtesy of Roma Capitale – Sovrintendenza Beni Culturali.

Figure 9: Detail of head (fig. 8), photograph by author, courtesy of Roma Capitale – Sovrintendenza Beni Culturali.

the world of men, historically or narratively early (compared to the *Medusa's* Roman references), fatal. Looking again at the finished bust, and thinking of what is held in the collections Hosmer visited to see the Bernini *Apollo and Daphne* or *Medusa*, we get an answer—the *Wounded Amazons*.<sup>65</sup> While the works in question were known Roman copies with extensive restorations, this was not really a problem; Hosmer seems to have preferred Roman sculptures over available Greek originals, probably because they were largely more complete works and more readily accessible. Furthermore, even by Hosmer's day, objects Winckelmann had dated or named had shifted in reputation or period, so viewing his categories of high and beautiful more as a discursive method or framework for *relative* age or style rather than a wholly factual chronology eliminates the need for chronological, archaeological accuracy.

The *Wounded Amazons* exist in substantial numbers around Rome, in a variety of types; most relevant for this is the Capitoline Mattei-type Wounded Amazon in the Sala del Galata (Figs. 8–9), only a very short distance from the Bernini *Medusa* downstairs. That these sculptures were repaired with non-pertinent heads and modern additions was largely irrelevant, as their general conception and

<sup>65</sup> The *Wounded Amazons* feature heavily in Carel Vosmaer's novel *The Amazon* (published 1880, English version 1884); see Prettejohn, "Seeing and Making Art in Rome," 286–303.

relative stylistic ages was the key factor—not the wholeness or originality of these particular examples. These statues, described in Pliny as the products of a competition between the best sculptors, were displayed on the temple precinct at Ephesus.<sup>66</sup> The (questionable) dating of the original models to a group of Greek artists in the fifth century BCE (mostly),<sup>67</sup> provides further justification for Hosmer's use of the model despite the knowledge that all of the extant sculptures were later Roman copies with extensive restoration and therefore not purely high works. Not only were the works early in artistic origin, but their story is also 'historically' early: the last Amazon of importance, per Diodorus Siculus, was Penthesilea, who died in the Trojan War.<sup>68</sup> In drawing on the hair and faces of these works, Hosmer activated an intertext between her and the Amazons, investing her work with the narrative and artistic weight of their historic interpretations. The serenity and restraint in the face of abject terror and death for *Daphne* and the Amazons contrasts with the gravity-defying hair, reaching limbs, and violent transformation of Bernini's *Daphne*.

The beautiful style, by contrast, is both easier to recognise and elaborate upon, and in Hosmer's pair is seen in the *Medusa*. The beautiful style was exemplified by the *Laocoön*, in which Alex Potts notes that "the figure's beauty might at some level intensify, rather than displace, the psychic resonances of its struggle."<sup>69</sup> However, its diversity of facial expression, pose, and emphasis on charm, beauty, and a more human sensuality, and the 'newer' relative age, meant that the range of material from which Hosmer could draw was much wider. While scholars like Dabakis, Culkin, and Sherwood have argued against a close relationship between Hosmer and Bernini's heads, and instead suggested the Canova *Medusa* as the nearest sister for Hosmer's bust, there are other, more closely related objects in Rome, as well as a wide array of fragmentary, architectural, and funerary contexts. At the Capitoline Museums, where the Bernini *Medusa* is held, Hosmer would have encountered Hellenistic works such as the so-called Head of Alexander the Great, next to the Mattei Amazon in the Sala del Galata, with its upward-twisting neck, melting gaze, and flowing hair. This may especially please those who prefer a biographical reading, as Alexander was famous (like Hosmer) for his same-sex lovers, and the masculine subject fits the mannish woman interpretation. The fragmentary *Medusa Ludovisi*, now called a *Sleeping Fury*, in the Palazzo Altemps, shows little formal similarity with Hosmer's bust, but emphasizes the fragmentary nature of the Medusa myth and image. It also furthers the association with the dynamic later sculpture of the beautiful style.

We may even look to architectural and armorial elements: the Gorgoneion boss of armour and Minerva's aegis, and in the arrangement of the snakes at Medusa's brow, to the Gorgon antefix or palmette or even the ouroboros. The Gorgoneion, as an antefix, was frequently used as an apotropaic device, while the palmette was a common decorative element. On images of armour, the Gorgoneion

<sup>66</sup> Ridgeway, "A Story of Five Amazons," 1–17.

<sup>67</sup> Recall Dabakis's comment that Hosmer's *Daphne* looked to "fifth-century B.C.E. classical ideals," 49—these would fit the bill, but she makes no specific reference to these or any other possible examples.

<sup>68</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *The Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian*, trans. G. Booth, 138.

<sup>69</sup> Potts, *Flesh*, 136.



Figure 10: *Head of a woman with snakes in her hair*, Roman, ca. 1st c CE, marble, 60 cm (23.6 in). Galleria Borghese, Rome, inv 73, photo by author.

Figure 11: Detail of fig. 10, side rear view.

Figure 12: Detail of fig. 2. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art.

performed the same role as on Minerva's aegis, a protective element and a symbol of power. The palmette-like arrangement may derive from these as well,<sup>70</sup> or from the prevalence of this form on grave markers in nineteenth-century cemeteries, which would underscore the deathliness and marmoreality of the subject, as well as the beautiful style's diversity of expression and references. Nineteenth-century funerary monuments were heavily informed by classical prototypes, including the popular reproductions of Scipio Barbatus' sarcophagus, the original of which is in the Vatican, temple-form mausoleums, and a wide array of classical iconographies and models on a smaller scale. To be briefly biographical once more, Hosmer may have spent a great deal of time in Mount Auburn cemetery as a child and young woman, due to both her family history (dead mother and siblings); its proximity to her home (approximately two and a half miles); and its cultural role in mid-century America (one of the most popular tourist destinations and outdoor museum).<sup>71</sup> This cemetery, as well as the Cimitero Acattolico in Rome, were filled with images of ouroboroses and palmettes on marble headstones. These may have given Hosmer the form of Medusa's snaky tiara—the palmette as an emblem on tiaras even has classical and neoclassical precedents, including the monumental Roman Ludovisi Juno, Canova's *Bust of Peace*, and a bust of Marie-Louise of Austria by Luigi Pizzi in the Museo Correr. This orderly arrangement of snakes therefore would support additional subtle resonances to her wider project. Rather than seeing this as a psychoanalytic connection between Hosmer's developing psyche, sex, and death, I propose this as part of the development of Hosmer's visual

<sup>70</sup> On the palmette in the nineteenth century decorative discourse, see especially Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 31–36, pl. XVI, XVIII–XXI; Olin, "Self-Representation."

<sup>71</sup> On Mount Auburn's visual field, see Giguere, "Variety there must be"; Dimmick, "Thomas Crawford's Monument." It is worth noting Hosmer is buried at Mount Auburn, and the cemetery holds two of her relief sculptures in their collection.

vocabulary from a young age, wherein she may have had her first exposure to explicitly classicising art and architecture in a familiar environment.

But if we look at the other major Bernini site, the Galleria Borghese, we see a work which I believe is of great importance to Hosmer's bust, and which has never been identified in relation to it: the head of a woman with snakes in her hair (figs. 10–11). It is only three rooms away from the *Apollo and Daphne*; the head, according to the one published catalogue entry I have been able to find on it, was in the Borghese collection by 1607. It was originally attached to a full figure known as "The Spinner," and it is unknown when the head was detached from the body. The face has been reworked; the head has been identified at times as Hygiea or a follower of Dionysus.<sup>72</sup> This Roman work, with the square knot of snakes on her brow and the low, loose bundle of hair at the nape of her neck, recalls in iconography and in detail Hosmer's bust (fig. 12). Late, fragmentary, and obscure, this object must be slotted into the available schema of imagery for her *Medusa*. For Hosmer, looking to antiquity for references and for formal solutions, this snaky tangling would have been not only suggestive but inspirational: we see these square-knotted serpents under the breasts of her *Medusa*, and the echoes again in the wriggling snakelets which tangle into the tendrils at the temples. Unlike the medallion Medusas of Canova and of architectural details, here the snake-haired woman is presented in three dimensions, at eye-level, and in close proximity to highlights of antiquity and to her opponent, Bernini. It is Roman, therefore 'late,' uncommon and therefore an original point of comparison, and still more classical than Bernini. By smoothly integrating these multiple, minor, and fragmentary, works like the Borghese head and architectural details into a visually unified work, Hosmer was producing her own brand of accretive classicism, wherein the individual reference points were subsumed into the overall whole. Whether or not a viewer recognised one or any of these citations was less important than the cumulative effect—which was a recognisable Hosmerian beauty, in a fleshy classicising mode, in contrast to the chillier *Daphne*.

The two sculptures that Winckelmann named as original works in the high style, as data points, are insufficient for an artist like Hosmer, developing work in the different modes. In order to expand the data set, as it were, Hosmer had to perform a type of Winckelmannian research and conjecture to identify material that might not be Greek 'originals,' but which conformed to the temporal and formal characteristics of Winckelmann's styles: older, harder, and emotionally suppressed, versus younger, softer and more sensual, more emotionally expressive. These modes of classic style contrast with the prototypical anti-classic sculptor, Bernini—an artist of such outsize influence and reputation that when Quatremère de Quincy felt the need to critique Canova's *Cupid and Psyche* for slipping off the correct path of the truth, simplicity, and purity of the antique, he described it as a risk of becoming "*un Bernin antique*"<sup>73</sup>—that is, an antique Bernini. Hosmer's deployment of Winckelmann's styles in her own work is therefore a statement of

<sup>72</sup> Moreno and Viacava, *I marmi antichi della Galleria Borghese*.

<sup>73</sup> Quatremère de Quincy, *Canova et ses ouvrages*, 49; Pavanello, "Amore e Psiche che si Abbracciano," cat. 122, 236.

superiority against Bernini: she correctly walks the path of antique imitation and citation, where Bernini represents the road of error, vulgarity, and anti-classicism. We turn at last to the Prince of Degenerate Sculptors, to understand why the young Hosmer set herself so clearly in competition with him.

### 3 "Bogs and pools": Bernini in the nineteenth century

It is time to consider Bernini's reception in the nineteenth century, as his reputation as a corrupting, talented-but-degenerate outsize influence offered him up Hosmer's rival, and to consider Hosmer's selected antique sources as her ammunition in her rivalry with him.<sup>74</sup> This will ultimately suggest that not only did the two artists have more in common in their relationship to antiquity than not, but that Hosmer developed her work using critical material poor Gian Lorenzo had no access to—Winckelmann's *Geschichte*. Furthermore, Bernini's reputation as an anti-classical sculptor, as well as biographical parallels—they were of an age when both made their *Daphnes*—suggested this contest; Hosmer could exhibit her range, command of visual sources and erudition in selecting them, and superiority over the "Prince of Degenerate Sculpture."<sup>75</sup>

To understand Bernini's status as the *bête noire* of nineteenth-century sculpture criticism, we return first to Lodge's translation of Winckelmann: Bernini was "utterly corrupted...by a vulgar flattery of the coarse and uncultivated, in attempting to render everything more intelligible to them." Michelangelo contemplated lofty beauty, but

The very course which led Michel Angelo to impassable places and steep cliffs, plunged Bernini, on the contrary, into bogs and pools; for he sought to dignify, as it were, by exaggeration, forms of the most ordinary kind [...] Yet this artist long held undisputed sway, and homage is paid to him even now.<sup>76</sup>

Another text published in Boston in 1850 makes the anti-classical nature of Bernini's reputation clear:

But it would be difficult to conceive [...] two styles more opposed to each other than that adopted by the sculptors of this age, and that of the great artists of antiquity. In one, the pervading principle was simplicity and expression, united with beautiful and appropriate form; in the other, simplicity was of all things most studiously avoided.<sup>77</sup>

In 1864 Sir Richard Westmacott, RA, declared, "it would have been better for this art if Bernini had never lived,"<sup>78</sup> developing ideas from British sculptor and draughtsman John Flaxman, RA. Flaxman (in a remarkable understatement) said Bernini had "adequate talents," but rapid success at an early age corrupted his

<sup>74</sup> Relevant Bernini literature includes di Gioia, ed., *La Medusa di Gian Lorenzo Bernini*; Posèq, "On Physiognomic Communication in Bernini"; Wittkower, *Bernini*; Mormando, trans., *The Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*; Petersson, *Bernini and the Excesses of Art*.

<sup>75</sup> "The Crystal Palace," 336.

<sup>76</sup> Lodge 1850, 36.

<sup>77</sup> T.C., *Sculpture*, 165.

<sup>78</sup> Westmacott, *Handbook of Sculpture*, 314.

artistic development, and consequently, “the Pope [Urban VIII] and the Sculptor carried all before them, in their time, and sent out a baleful influence, which corrupted public taste for upwards of one hundred years afterwards.”<sup>79</sup> The straightforward “prince of degenerate sculpture” is an appellation that needs no elaboration, though, unsurprisingly, the author provides quite a bit of it:

But there is no mistaking him who accelerated the speed [of the decline of art] with all the weight of a ready hand, a prolific fancy, and a long life. Bernini was the prince of degenerate sculpture. To him belongs the fatal distinction of proving that this stern and haughty art, which the ancients had scrupulously enthroned... that this haughty art could, not undextrously, be so degraded as to win the commonest eye, and to tickle the most frivolous fancy.<sup>80</sup>

Not only did Bernini train a generation of sculptors himself, but his works continued to be set as exams or training exercises for several generations following his death—meaning his loathsome legacy lingered.<sup>81</sup>

The nineteenth-century criticisms of the *Apollo and Daphne* (and Bernini in general) were consistent: “se giustamente si critica come manieralo, e mancante di verità, si ammira nulladimeno pei meccanismo del lavoro,”<sup>82</sup> or

A dire il vero non credo che meglio potesse esprimersi ristante della metamorfosi, ma non v'è sublimità di concetto: la forma e le mosse sono volgari, non convenienti ad un nume: e mentre da un canto si ammira il meccanismo dell' arte, dall'altro deplorasi la mancanza del gusto.<sup>83</sup>

Another text calls his work “not the creations of inspiration, but of a heated jejune fantasy,” the *Apollo and Daphne* “equally destitute of natural truth and artistic inspiration,” and his lasting impact on sculpture the introduction of “a tasteless, unnatural, affected style, which robbed it of all its sublimity and its charms.”<sup>84</sup>

Bernini's reputation as a precocious, masterfully talented but ultimately tasteless or corrupt artist suggests why Hosmer positioned herself in opposition to him through her subjects. Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* was an early work, with authors in the nineteenth century giving his age as 18 when he produced it, though current scholarship places it closer to 24–25. It still stands in the room for which it was originally sculpted (and which is named after it), though now it is centrally located to allow circumambulation.<sup>85</sup> Eager to display her own technical skill and

<sup>79</sup> Flaxman and Westmacott, *The Lectures on Sculpture*, 278–80.

<sup>80</sup> “The Crystal Palace,” 336.

<sup>81</sup> See Pestili, “On Bernini's Reputed Unpopularity,” and the critical reappraisals of his reputation by Andrea Bacchi and Anne-Lise Desmas (333–48), Lucia Simonato (349–56), and Evonne Levy (357–67), in *Bernini*, eds. Bacchi and Coliva.

<sup>82</sup> “[I]f justly criticized as mannered and wanting in truth it is admired for the perfection of the work,” Vasi, *Itinerario istruttivo di Roma*, 253.

<sup>83</sup> “Actually, I do not think he could better express the instant of metamorphosis, but there is no concept of sublimity: the shapes and the moves are vulgar, not conventional for a god: and while on the one hand you can admire the mechanical art, on the other you deplore the lack of taste,” in Nibby, *Monumenti scelti della Villa Borghese*, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Heck, *Iconographic Encyclopaedia of Science, Literature, and Art*, 54–55.

<sup>85</sup> González-Palacios, “The Stanza di Apollo e Dafne in the Villa Borghese.”

her good taste, Hosmer reclaimed subjects from Bernini and refashioned them through the application of Winckelmannian precepts. By doing so, she set herself and her personal style in direct competition with the precocious bogeyman of sculpture—claiming the mantle for herself of a sculptural wunderkind. The Capitoline *Head of Medusa*, though not an early work by Bernini, was nonetheless a display of virtuosic carving and emotional affect; like Hosmer's *Daphne* and *Medusa*, Bernini's works show the variations possible within an artist's oeuvre even when working in the same medium and from the same source material.

In her *Daphne*, Hosmer suppresses the drama and violence of the Ovidian narrative, in opposition to Bernini's emphasis on the chase and effects of transformation. The distressing stillness of her Daphne, its utter rigidity despite the appearance of tender flesh, is characteristic of its Winckelmannian high beauty: "Stillness is the state most appropriate to beauty, just as it is to the sea [...] for the idea of lofty beauty cannot be conceived otherwise than when the soul is wrapt in quiet meditation, and abstracted from all individuality of shape." The gracefulness and refinement of the features do not detract from the work's qualification as a high piece because these qualities were aesthetic requirements for a successful sculpture in the middle nineteenth century, and because they are a major element of Hosmer's personal style. The transformation is also suppressed—no special effects wizardry here—and the work demands from its viewer previous knowledge of the narrative to produce the correct response. Rather than "a vulgar flattery of the coarse and uncultivated" audience through cheap emotive tricks and pantomime narrative that attempted "to render everything intelligible to them"<sup>86</sup> as Bernini did, Hosmer's *Daphne* sublimates terror and elevates the figure to a Niobe-like sublimity—that Bernini has been accused of lacking.

Bernini's *Medusa* of the Capitoline has often been discarded as a touchstone for Hosmer's work, but the roundness and softness—fleshiness—of Hosmer's Gorgon has more in common with the Bernini head than it does any other modern sculpture—certainly more than with the Canova *Medusa* in any of its versions. Hosmer's *Medusa*'s expression, though on a nineteenth-century neoclassical face, is as pathetic and dramatic as Bernini's, *not* substantially less so: the expressive pain of the Laocoön, not Niobe's suppressed suffering.<sup>87</sup> The detail of the snakes, too, is related; both exhibit a degree of naturalism, though the snakes on Bernini's *Medusa* are more baroquely beefy and have an attitude of their own, distinct from the face they frame—one seems to smirk over her brow, meeting the viewer's gaze more than she does. The expressive features of Hosmer's *Medusa*, far from rejecting Bernini's interpretation of the subject, refine the Baroquely swirling snakes into daintily squirming snakelets in an ouroboros-palmette crown, and the fleecy locks into an elegant coiffure which again seems to derive closely from the Borghese head discussed above. Neither Bernini nor Hosmer's depiction shows the Gorgon decapitated, unlike Canova's or the armorial gorgoneion, but both show beautiful, humane women in distress. The humanity of the monstrous Medusa is underscored not only by her narrative—in Ovid's text a transfigured mortal, rather

<sup>86</sup> Lodge 1850, 35–36.

<sup>87</sup> Lavin, "Bernini's Bust of the Medusa: an Awful Pun;" Haughey, "Bernini's Medusa and the History of Art," 76–86, 154.



than a nymph like Daphne—but also the possibility that Bernini's *Medusa* may have been based on his mistress, Costanza Piccolomini.<sup>88</sup> And it is important to note that the setting of the bust reinforces its affiliation with Rome the city with crests, inlays, and framing devices. The Bernini *Medusa* becomes emblematic of the marmoreal Rome of Augustus, and the imaginary petrified, permanence of the city as a playground for artists interested in antiquity. The *Medusa's* 'younger' stylistic age is enhanced by the Capitoline *Medusa's* position within the museum, which emphasises its Roman-ness; its plinth and the marble plaque behind it are emblazoned with SPQR. This setting associates the bust and the figure of Medusa more broadly with Rome as an ancient empire and the contemporary city where Hosmer lived and worked—unlike the *Daphne*, which highlights Grecian art, art history, and legends.

Furthermore, despite the low critical opinion of Bernini's taste, no one questioned his technical brilliance in producing sculpture. It is not hard to believe that it was the level of his material proficiency that led to the excoriating commentary, because he was seen to have not only wasted his own talent on vulgarities and degradations of art, but also dragged others down with him. Winckelmann decried Bernini as having corrupted art by “a vulgar flattery of the coarse and uncultivated, in attempting to render everything more intelligible to them,” while Lodge was at pains to explain that Winckelmann is not being unjustly harsh, or comparing them to the pinnacles of modern art. Rather, he was measuring them against the “highest idea of beautiful form derived from the best examples of antiquity.”<sup>89</sup> That is, however, a self-contradictory statement, as the best examples of antiquity were also the models for the pinnacles of modern art from Winckelmann's time well through Hosmer's—Anglo-American tourists still flocked to see the *Apollo Belvedere* in Rome, even though they had the Parthenon sculptures—genuine Greek originals!—in London.<sup>90</sup> Bernini's biography describes his fondness for the Belvedere Hermes, saying that “when he was very young he used to draw from the antique a great deal, and in the first figure he undertook, whenever in doubt over some question, he would go off to consult the Antinous as his oracle.”<sup>91</sup> The biography also mentioned the Pasquino and Belvedere Torso (his two favorite works of antiquity), the Apollo Belvedere, and Laocoön; the Apollo in particular was “measured” as part of his formal research for an unspecified sculpture.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps it was the *Apollo and Daphne*, where the head, drapery, and even sandals of the handsy deity evoke those of his more reserved ancestor in the Vatican Museums.<sup>93</sup> Bernini's supposed rejection of classical style was a different interpretation, not a rejection. In order to set Bernini up to fail against the Winckelmannian schema, Hosmer—and critics—had to ignore that Bernini wrote about studying

<sup>88</sup> Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque*, 92; McPhee, *Bernini's Beloved*, 10–11; McPhee, “Bust of Costanza Piccolomini (Bonarelli),” 246–47, cat. VII.3, ill.

<sup>89</sup> Lodge, 1850, 35.

<sup>90</sup> Even as late as 1839–43, American sculptor Thomas Crawford was using the Apollo Belvedere as a reference point for his *Orpheus*, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; see Dimmick, “Thomas Crawford's Orpheus.”

<sup>91</sup> Bernini, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, 101, n. 29; 31; 283.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>93</sup> Warwick, *Bernini*, 85–86.

the ancients, that he restored fragmentary antiquities, and that his sculptures were displayed cheek to chiselled cheek with their classical ancestors.

As for Bernini's classicism: scholars today recognize Bernini's *David* at the Galleria Borghese as an erudite reworking of the Borghese Gladiator, now at the Louvre, and at the time considered "the most illustrious ancient sculpture in the Borghese collection."<sup>94</sup> Minozzi notes that "Bernini reworked his study of the ancient model and transformed it in accordance with the needs of the narrative,"<sup>95</sup> just as I have argued Hosmer was doing with her selected references. Bernini was also producing amalgamations of the most beautiful parts of disparate sculptures, further supporting an affiliation that Hosmer would not have been happy about, as she, too, accumulated references and assembled or blended them into a unified work. Bernini seems to have selected not only for reputation, but thematic relevance: the Borghese Gladiator is a martial figure like David, and is refined to suit the narrative moment he illustrated—just like Hosmer selected the *Wounded Amazons* as virginal, deathly women, and reworked them in accordance with her sculptural needs. Bernini is also supposed to have noted that while the Pasquino and Belvedere Torso were more perfect stylistically than the Laocoön, the Laocoön was more complete—and thus more useful. Similarly, Hosmer never seems to have drawn on the genuinely Greek sculptures from the Parthenon but repeatedly referred to complete or restored Roman works—demonstrating that both sculptors had a keen sense of utility over strict adherence to the ideologically or discursively better works of antiquity. Both sculptors engaged with antique prototypes according to their artistic needs, adapting their sources to suit their aesthetic and stylistic modes; these are beginning to be recognised and reconsidered as informative, productive areas for research or viewing pleasure within Bernini and Hosmer's oeuvres.

#### 4 Conclusion

What is clear is that Bernini was not rejecting classical antiquity, but that instead, Winckelmann, Hosmer, et.al, denied his *mode* of classicism. At most, it might be argued that his idiosyncratic mode of classical referencing was less literal than some nineteenth-century sculptors'—and those literal sculptors *do not* include Hosmer, whose classicism was imitative in the most Winckelmannian sense of the word, developed through training and intellectual engagement rather than rote copying. Rather, Bernini's anti-classical reputation is the product of his Winckelmannian victimization, and his differing artistic goals. The critical diatribes against Bernini made it possible to construct an antagonistic rivalry with the long-dead, and with an entirely different mode of sculpture. Bernini's so-called failures became Hosmer's ammunition against him, and these failures may have been a major factor in Hosmer's choice of subjects and references to reclaim and rehabilitate from Bernini's corrupting legacy. Her use of 'relevant' references for these subjects creates an intertextual depth and richness of interpretative

<sup>94</sup> Marina Minozzi, "David," in Bacchi and Coliva, *Bernini*, 170–74.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

possibilities for the educated audiences who viewed her work in Rome and in her patrons' homes, just as Bernini's use of antique citations had enriched his work in the seventeenth century.

Framing Hosmer's busts of *Daphne* and *Medusa*, her first professional works, as the ammunition in an artistic competition with Bernini prioritizes her authorial intent and erudition as a serious neoclassical sculptor, rather than starting from the position that her work is, at either a conscious or subconscious level, autobiographical. Hosmer's modern interpretation of ancient myths, which only Bernini had also produced in sculpture, and in close physical proximity to not only her studio but to the ancient works she was referencing, makes her competition with Bernini clear. Both Hosmer and Bernini were fully invested in their own period's version of antiquity, but Hosmer set herself up on Team Winckelmann, as it were, in order to be victorious over the degenerate and degenerating Bernini. Her use of the high and beautiful styles underscores not only her skill in sculpting a range of emotional expressions, but also her alignment with a modern understanding of good art through Winckelmann's legacy.

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## NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of *JOLCEL*. The other contributions are “Two Styles More Opposed’: Harriet Hosmer’s Classicisms between Winckelmann and Bernini” by Melissa L. Gustin (pp. 1–31) and “Winckelmann in Nineveh: Assyrian Remains at the Age of Classics” by Yannick Le Pape (pp. 58–78). The response piece is “Bodily Exclusions? Winckelmann’s Victims and the Paradox of Form” by Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto (pp. 80–87).

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# The Future of Winckelmann's Classical Form: Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton\*

ELIZABETH PRETTEJOHN

*University of York (UK)*

## ABSTRACT

Winckelmann's thought and writing are routinely acknowledged to have had a profound influence on the artistic practices of the half-century after his death, known under the label 'Neoclassicism.' Standard accounts of modernism in the arts, however, assume that this influence came to an abrupt end around 1815. According to such accounts, the anti-classical reaction that followed the Battle of Waterloo and the demise of Neoclassicism was itself a motive force in the generation of modern art and modernism. This paper argues, on the contrary, that Winckelmann's ideas not only remained relevant, but gained in power through the generations after the fall of Napoleon. Mediated by critics and artists among whom Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton serve as the principal examples, Winckelmann's thought made a decisive contribution to twentieth-century modernism. In particular, the articulation in both criticism and artistic practice of ideas about classical form, indebted to Winckelmann, had a subtler and more complex impact on the modernist doctrine of 'formalism' than literary or art historians have acknowledged. A renewed attention to classical form will help future scholars to write a more nuanced account of modernism in the visual arts. More importantly, it will call attention to artistic projects that have been excluded from histories of modern art due to reductive assumptions that classicism and modernism are inherently contradictory. The paper concentrates on Frederic Leighton

\* I thank Michael Squire for inviting me to give an early version of this research as the Rumble Fund Lecture in Classical Art (King's College London, 2017); Elisabeth Décultot for providing the opportunity to explore Winckelmann's legacy as part of a lecture series celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth (Germanistisches Institut, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2017); Wim Verbaal, Tim Noens, and Paolo Felice Sacchi for inviting me to speak in the conference, *Winckelmann's Victims. The Classics: Norms, Exclusions, and Prejudices* (Ghent University, 2018); Martin Dönike for guiding me around the exhibition he co-curated with Elisabeth Décultot and Claudia Keller, *Winckelmann. Moderne Antike* (Klassik Stiftung, Weimar, 2017); Cora Gilroy-Ware, Elizabeth Tyler, and Caroline Vout for illuminating discussions. The inspiration of Charles Martindale and his careful criticism have shaped my work at every stage.

as a case study of an artist whose historical importance and aesthetic merit have been occluded by reductive thinking of this kind.

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Figure 1: Frederic Leighton, *Elijah in the Wilderness*, 1878, oil on canvas, 234.3 x 210.4 cm, National Museums Liverpool (Walker Art Gallery).

*Elijah in the Wilderness* made its first public appearance at the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1878, when its painter, Frederic Leighton, also served as President of the jury for the British section; later that year, Leighton was elected President of the Royal Academy of Arts, the principal professional body for artists in England. *Elijah* reappeared at the Royal Academy's annual exhibition the next year, 1879. The painting has every historical credential to be considered one of the more important works of European art of the later nineteenth century. It is also, as this paper will argue, exemplary in its presentation of classical form, despite its Old Testament subject.

As one would expect for a work with that exhibition history, *Elijah* is a large painting, its figures life-sized. Less to be expected, given the date and intended audiences, is the representation of the nearly nude male figure in exhaustion or anguish, his face obscured by the heavy beard and a sharply foreshortened view. An olive-green drapery prevents the viewpoint from being over-explicit (as in a work often mentioned as a prototype, the *Barberini Faun* of the Glyptothek in Munich), but the drapery nonetheless follows the contour of the hips and thighs. Its grand-manner folds contrast with the rippling gauzelike material that clings to the body of the angel. In nineteenth-century painting it is not unusual to see angels that are obviously based on female models, but this angel's muscular arm

and sturdy feet appear male. The pale flesh and the nuanced pastel shades of the wings might, however, be called 'feminine' next to the more rugged chiaroscuro of Elijah, or perhaps that contrast simply marks the difference between divine and human natures. The application of paint is surprisingly varied, for a painting that some might call 'academic'. The impasto of the angel's white drapery and the sketchy, variegated texture of the rock surface contrast with the evanescent handling of the flesh, the modelling of which is so subtly graduated that the transitions are invisible; as if by magic, the heels and the shoulder round themselves into three-dimensional volume. Throughout the painting, outlines are clear, and the range of hue is severely restricted to shades of green, grey, brown, and white—the colours of stone.

The subject-matter recalls a striking moment from Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, first performed in Birmingham in 1846 and overwhelmingly popular in Victorian England. We see the prophet Elijah in his greatest despair, cast out into the wilderness, exhausted, and longing for death; he has not yet glimpsed the angel who comes to give him food and drink. This corresponds to the passage in Mendelssohn's oratorio, just after Elijah cries out to the Lord: "It is enough!"—a moment of stillness when the angels begin to sing the hauntingly beautiful trio, "Lift up thine eyes unto the hills." Leighton is known to have been interested in ideas of synaesthesia, from sources in both German and French aesthetics, and it is likely that he meant his painting to evoke that thrilling moment in viewers' memories.<sup>1</sup>

In this painting the human body is the vehicle of expression. The bearded face is scarcely visible, which leaves the rugged musculature of the body to convey the force of the prophet's character. The visible forms conjure up memories of the art of the past. As already noted, previous scholars have seen the torso as an imitation of the Hellenistic sculpture known as the *Barberini Faun*.<sup>2</sup> If so, it is one where a leaner chest and tenser musculature transform the connotations of the Faun's drunken slumber to suit the different context of Elijah's exhaustion after religious struggle. At the same time the forms of body and legs recall Michelangelo, and perhaps particularly the Christ of the unfinished *Entombment* that entered London's National Gallery in 1868.<sup>3</sup> The rude strength of the pagan body is united with Christian pathos to characterize this Old Testament prophet. Perhaps there is also an echo of the same painting by Michelangelo in the rocky background and subdued colouring, a sublime effect, intensified in the Leighton by the dramatic point of view and luminous sky.

It is difficult to explain how so austere a painting as Leighton's *Elijah in the Wilderness* can be experienced as beautiful, although I have attempted to suggest, in the preceding paragraphs, that the way it conjures the sound of Mendelssohn's music, as well the forms of ancient and Renaissance art, are thrilling to me. Of

<sup>1</sup> On Leighton's interest in philosophical aesthetics, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, chap. 5 ("The Classicism of Frederic Leighton").

<sup>2</sup> See for example Jones et al., *Frederic Leighton*, 185 (catalogue entry by Christopher Newall); Østermark-Johansen, "The Apotheosis of the Male Nude," 123.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, "Leighton's Debt to Michelangelo," 37.



Figure 2: Frederic Leighton, *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, 1877, bronze, height 174.6 cm, Tate, London (NO1754), photo by Andreas Praefcke.

course, I cannot predict that you too will hear that music in your imagination, nor can I force you to experience the classical forms of these bodies as beautiful. Rather, I am *inviting* you to engage in a free play of imagination and thought around ideas of classical form, of musicality and rhythm, of pathos and strength—the kind of experience that inspired Johann Joachim Winckelmann to write his most stirring descriptive passages about works of ancient sculpture.<sup>4</sup>

In 1877, the year before *Elijah* appeared in Paris, Leighton had exhibited his first work in sculpture, *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, which clearly relates to the *Laocoön*, the sculpture so closely associated with Winckelmann since his first work, *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Wercke in der Malerey und Bildhauer-Kunst* (*Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*) of 1755.<sup>5</sup> While there is no such obvious ‘quotation’ in *Elijah*, the contour-line around the forms of a body in stress show Leighton continuing to think about the *Laocoön*, and much in Winckelmann’s terms. Arguably the painting makes an advance on the slightly earlier sculpture in showing how a figure may express both violent pain and quiet grandeur at once—Winckelmann’s famous, and still so intriguingly paradoxical, insight about the *Laocoön*.

Leighton was educated at the Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt between 1846 and 1852; he was a fluent German speaker with a special interest in the

<sup>4</sup> For this formulation of aesthetic experience as the ‘free play’ of imagination and understanding, and its communicability to others, I draw on Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §§8–9.

<sup>5</sup> Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 32–35. For Winckelmann’s response to the *Laocoön* see also Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, 22–27.

philosophy and history of art. His artworks provide *prima facie* evidence that he thought deeply about Winckelmann—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he thought deeply about Greek art with Winckelmann as a kind of cicerone. Although Winckelmann's works were not separately catalogued in the posthumous sale of Leighton's extensive library, it would be surprising if they were not among his books, which included a complete Goethe, in the Stuttgart edition of 1857, and an impressive selection of more recent German books on ancient art.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, however, I argue that he had another cicerone, one who interpreted Winckelmann for him as Goethe and Hegel interpreted Winckelmann himself, and as Winckelmann interpreted Greek art through the ancient authors: Walter Pater, whose essay of 1867 on Winckelmann played a more crucial role in transmitting Winckelmann's ideas to the worlds of modern art and literature than previous scholars have acknowledged, or even suspected.

One influential Anglo-American art historian has claimed that Winckelmann's influence lasted about half a century—that is, through the period conventionally called 'Neoclassical'.<sup>7</sup> On this view, the anti-classical reaction that followed—as inexorably as day follows night—was what generated modern art and modernism. This corresponds to a standard narrative in art-historical survey texts, in which the authority of Neoclassicism, represented by Winckelmann and his painter-friend Anton Raphael Mengs, is overthrown in the Romantic generation of Eugène Delacroix. Modern art then proceeds through a familiar sequence of 'isms' from the Realism of Gustave Courbet, through Edouard Manet, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, and on to the modernist movements of the twentieth century. Under such circumstances, Winckelmann and his writings on ancient art must necessarily become increasingly irrelevant, and indeed the specialist literature on Winckelmann has tended to concentrate on his impact in the years immediately following his death in 1768.<sup>8</sup>

This paper presents a different view. I argue that Winckelmann's ideas not only remained relevant, but gained in power through the generations after the fall of Napoleon, and that—mediated by critics and artists among whom Pater and Leighton were particularly important—they made a decisive contribution to twentieth-century modernism in both theory and practice. It is possible, then, to propose an alternative narrative for modern art in which classical form, far from being discarded, generates a sequence of new possibilities in successive generations. An alternative genealogy may then be traced, for example from Jean-Auguste-

<sup>6</sup> *Catalogue of the Valuable Library of the Right Hon. Lord Leighton of Stretton*, auction catalogue, Messrs Christie, Manson & Woods, 15 July 1896, lots 42, 48, 76, 130, 235. Many of the lots include unidentified books, and some of Leighton's books may have been kept by family and friends. On Leighton's holdings of German works on classical art and mythology, which correspond closely to the texts Walter Pater used for his essays on classical subjects, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 152 and 307, n. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Potts, "Introduction," 28–29; see also 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent recent example see Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*. An enterprising exhibition on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Winckelmann's birth surveyed aspects of his reputation and legacy up to the present day; see Décultot et al., *Winckelmann. Moderne Antike*.

Dominique Ingres, through Leighton, to Pablo Picasso.<sup>9</sup> I stress at the outset that my argument is not a teleological one: it was not inevitable, or somehow pre-programmed, that Winckelmann's account of classical form should continue to generate powerful aesthetic ideas in the generations after neoclassicism, and through to modernism. The story is genealogical, not teleological; but that is no reason to omit it from the record, as our art-history books currently do.<sup>10</sup>

One reason for that neglect is the recidivist tendency to confine art-historical writing and research within nationalist schools, so that the German classical tradition is considered separately from the so-called 'classical revival' in Victorian Britain, from 'academic classicism' (again so-called) in France, and again from French and Anglo-American modernism. That nationalistic bias results in false history and unimaginative art history. A constant undercurrent to my argument, then, is the premise that it was the fully internationalised art-world of the nineteenth century—exemplified by the presentation of Leighton's *Elijah* at the Exposition Universelle—that enabled the genealogical (not teleological) flourishing of classical form from Winckelmann into the future of Pater, Leighton, and modern art.

## 1 Walter Pater's 'Winckelmann'

Pater's essay of 1867 was published in the intellectually and politically radical journal, *The Westminster Review*, and it conformed to the conventions of that journal both in being anonymous and in being presented as a review.<sup>11</sup> It was not unusual for the authors of such articles to take the books they were ostensibly reviewing as mere pretexts for ideas they wished to discuss, although Pater perhaps goes farther than most since he never even refers to the two books listed at the head of the article: the first instalment of G. Henry Lodge's English translation of Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*, the part on the Greeks first published in 1849,<sup>12</sup> and Otto Jahn's *Biographische Aufsätze* of 1866 (a collection of biographical essays that begins with Winckelmann). In fact, when Pater quotes from Winckelmann on Greek art, he ignores the Lodge translation and makes his own—to good effect, for although Lodge must be applauded for his perseverance in translating Winckelmann's text, Pater's writing is finer by far.

<sup>9</sup> Picasso's interest in classicism of both subject and style has been widely acknowledged. See Blunt, "Picasso's Classical Period;" Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis*; Cowling, *Picasso*, 141–52, 537–51, and *passim*; Madeline, *Picasso Ingres*; Riopelle, "Return to a Kind of Order."

<sup>10</sup> Several exhibitions have explored classical revivals in artistic modernism, although (like the studies of Picasso's classicism cited above) they have interpreted these in relation to twentieth-century concerns (particularly the desire for a return to tradition after the First World War), rather than placing them in an intellectual history of classicism. See Cowling and Mundy, *On Classic Ground*; Green et al., *Modern Antiquity*; Silver, *Chaos and Classicism*.

<sup>11</sup> [Pater, published anonymously], "Winckelmann." On the review essay see Himmelfarb, *Spirit of the Age*, 18–22.

<sup>12</sup> Pater was reviewing the first London edition, *The History of Ancient Art Among the Greeks* (1850). Giles Henry Lodge (1805–88), a Boston medical doctor, brought out his translation in four volumes, with three different Boston publishers, between 1849 and 1873; a complete edition was published by James R. Osgood of Boston in 1880. Lodge's was the first translation of the *History* into English.

When Pater reprinted the article, as the last essay in his volume *The Renaissance*, he omitted any trace of the pretence at reviewing.<sup>13</sup> In that form the essay on Winckelmann reached countless people who never read a word of Winckelmann's own writings. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Pater's essay in transmitting Winckelmann's thought to the Anglo-American world and beyond it, to the many countries where Pater's volume was read and discussed.<sup>14</sup> The Lodge translation remained the only English version of Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* until 2006,<sup>15</sup> but it was never widely accessible; throughout the twentieth century, before internet archives made historical books available, Anglophone readers were limited to excerpts from Winckelmann's writings, unless they had access to a good research library.

On the other hand, many more people read Pater's essay than would have taken an interest in a long and scholarly book on ancient art in any language. Its readers certainly included writers, artists, and intellectuals of the first modernist generation, among whom Pater's reputation remained high.<sup>16</sup> If Winckelmann is important to the art and literature of modernism, that has much to do with Pater. Moreover, the influence goes beyond the essay of 1867. Pater's ekphrasis on Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, for example, which appears elsewhere in the volume on *The Renaissance* and remains the most famous passage of writing on a work of visual art in English, is profoundly indebted to Winckelmann's way of writing about works of art. W.B. Yeats, editor of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* of 1936, printed the passage on the *Mona Lisa* in lines of free verse and placed it first in the anthology.<sup>17</sup> By implication this passage, inspired by Winckelmann's artwriting, becomes the founding work of modern English poetry.

That suggests one reason why an essay on an eighteenth-century German classical scholar belongs within Pater's volume on the art and literature of the Italian and French Renaissance of the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. As I have argued elsewhere, the essay on Winckelmann was the intellectual germ from which Pater's exploration of the Renaissance as an aesthetic and theoretical concept grew.<sup>18</sup> It follows, historically and logically, that Winckelmann, as mediated by Pater, is a crucial, indeed foundational, influence on modernist art and literature in the Anglo-American and related traditions.

'Winckelmann' is much the longest essay in *The Renaissance* and it is complex in structure and argumentation. This paper will concentrate on a single aspect: the way the essay transmits Winckelmann's ideas and observations to the

<sup>13</sup> Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873). The essay appeared in the same position in all subsequent editions of the volume, which was retitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* from the second edition (1877) onwards. Subsequent references will be to the scholarly edition: Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*.

<sup>14</sup> See Bann, *Reception*.

<sup>15</sup> The translation by Harry Francis Mallgrave, published by Getty Publications in 2006, is of the first edition (1764), interesting for students of Winckelmann's life and intellectual development, but of limited value for the study of his reception, since it was superseded by the much more comprehensive second edition of 1776.

<sup>16</sup> See further McGrath, *Sensible Spirit*; Prettejohn, "Pater and the Classics."

<sup>17</sup> Yeats, *Oxford Book*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Prettejohn, *Modern Painters*, 139–47.

'modernist' future. Pater specifically theorises how such transmission may take place at the beginning of the extended middle section of the essay, where he introduces the term 'classical tradition'. That is now a very familiar term, the title of many a university course and at least two authoritative recent volumes.<sup>19</sup> It was, however, new in 1867, evidently a coinage of Pater's, and one to which he gives a very specific meaning. It is not a synonym for 'classicism' and it does not denote, in vague or indiscriminate fashion, just any reference to the classical world. In Pater's usage, 'the classical tradition' is altogether unlike other inheritances from the past that have been absorbed or amalgamated into our general culture. Rather, it is something 'conscious' and 'intellectual' that each generation takes from the previous one. To quote Pater:

The supreme artistic products of succeeding generations thus form a series of elevated points, taking each from each the reflexion of a strange light, the source of which is not in the atmosphere around and above them, but in a stage of society remote from ours.<sup>20</sup>

The classical tradition is not, then, a dead weight or compulsion; rather it is freely chosen, and that free choice is unique to the intellectual tradition that originates in ancient Greece. In Pater's narrative of Winckelmann's life story that choice of the Greek tradition happens in biographical reality, as Winckelmann frees himself from what Pater calls "the tarnished intellectual world of Germany in the earlier half of the eighteenth century" and "divines" or "penetrates" the world of Greek antiquity—or, in words from Goethe that Pater quotes and then translates, his "*Gewahrwerden der griechischen Kunst*, his *finding* of Greek art."<sup>21</sup> But the free choice of the Greek tradition is also a radical extension of Winckelmann's own account of Greek political freedom. As Pater insists, it is *only* the 'classical tradition,' originating in ancient Greece, that is conscious, intellectual, and freely chosen in later generations.

Pater's phraseology is always similarly precise. He uses the word 'classicism' with a pejorative adjective—"artificial classicism" or "false classicism"—to denote a classical tradition gone wrong, one that has somehow lost its connection to ancient Greece.<sup>22</sup> These phrases are used in strict antithesis to what Pater calls "the genuine antique"—or, as he puts it, "the clear ring, the eternal outline, of the genuine antique."<sup>23</sup> Those phrases echo Winckelmann's emphasis on contour or outline in artistic form.<sup>24</sup>

In the first version of the essay, published in the *Westminster Review*, Pater states the idea this way: "The service of Winckelmann to modern culture lay in the appeal he made from the substituted text to the original. He produces the

<sup>19</sup> Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow, *Classical Tradition*; Grafton, Most, and Settis, *Classical Tradition*.

<sup>20</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 159. The imagery echoes that of the lighthouses or beacons of artistic tradition in Baudelaire's poem "Les Phares" (published in Baudelaire's collection of 1857, *Les fleurs du mal*).

<sup>21</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 142, 146–47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 144, 150.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 144. The phrases "genuine antique" and "eternal outline" recur frequently.

<sup>24</sup> On contour, see Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 24–27. The emphasis on contour or outline as a key aesthetic principle is also evident throughout the sections on Greek sculpture in Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*.



actual relics of the antique against the false tradition of Louis XIV.” He then refers to “the rehabilitation of Homer” as the “clearest note of this new criticism.”<sup>25</sup> As a Classics don himself, he was no doubt acutely aware of how expertly Winckelmann deployed every scrap of textual evidence to help construct his history of art. But when he came to reprint the essay, Pater deleted those phrases. Perhaps he wanted to mute the specificity of the references to the age of Louis XIV and to Homeric criticism, but a more important motive may have been to focus attention on Greek art, on what he calls the “actual relics” of the antique. Winckelmann’s distinctive innovation, as Pater presents it, is his finding of the Greek ideal not in a text, or a theory, or in the imagination, but in the concrete. This is described in a stirring passage early in the essay:

Filled as our culture is with the classical spirit, we can hardly imagine how deeply the human mind was moved, when, at the Renaissance, in the midst of the frozen world, the buried fire of ancient art rose up from under the soil. Winckelmann here reproduces for us the earlier sentiment of the Renaissance. On a sudden the imagination feels itself free.<sup>26</sup>

Pater’s phrase, “the buried fire of ancient art,” refers to the ancient sculptures discovered in the Renaissance and already famous before Winckelmann invented them anew in the descriptive passages that taught Pater how to write about art. But here there is a difficulty, one which Pater makes no attempt to gloss over: in almost every case, subsequent scholarship had debunked the claims of these sculptures to represent the celebrated Greek originals of the ancient canon.<sup>27</sup> As Pater writes, Winckelmann “had seen little or nothing of what we ascribe to the age of Pheidias... For the most part he had to penetrate to Greek art through copies, imitations, and later Roman art itself; and it is not surprising that this turbid medium has left in Winckelmann’s actual results much that a more privileged criticism can correct.”<sup>28</sup> Pater solves the problem by choosing the examples for his own essay from works discovered since Winckelmann’s day, but which had secure credentials as genuinely Greek. From the “age of Pheidias,” for example, he emphasizes the sculptures from the Parthenon, which Winckelmann had never seen, and which became available to artists only when they entered the British Museum in 1816: “If a single product only of Hellenic art were to be saved in the wreck of all beside, one might choose perhaps from the ‘beautiful multitude’ of the Panathenaic frieze, that line of youths on horseback, with their level glances, their proud, patient lips, their chastened reins, their whole bodies in exquisite service.”<sup>29</sup> Leighton seems to have agreed with this estimate; he had a cast of that section of the Parthenon frieze embedded in his studio wall, and also placed it behind his own head in the self-portrait he made for the Uffizi Gallery.

Pater illustrates his argument about Winckelmann, then, almost entirely with works that Winckelmann did not himself discuss. That cannot, however, be

<sup>25</sup> Pater, “Winckelmann,” 107.

<sup>26</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 146.

<sup>27</sup> See Prettejohn, *Modernity*, 2–3, 7–27.

<sup>28</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

ascribed merely to expediency. The paradox is that it is Winckelmann's innovation, in Pater's account—his demonstration that one must *see* Greek art with one's own eyes—that drives future generations of archaeologists to excavate in Greece itself, on the Greek islands, and in Asia Minor.<sup>30</sup> Implicitly, Pater is crediting Winckelmann with inspiring the great expansion in archaeology, which would eventually lead to the discoveries of archaic Greek art that would make so profound an impact on the modernist generation of the early twentieth century.

Those objects had not yet appeared when Pater wrote the essay on 'Winckelmann,' although he does have interesting, and important, things to say about archaic art in his later writings.<sup>31</sup> In 1867, though, his key example is a work unearthed on the island of Melos in 1820, and thus unknown to Winckelmann, but genuinely Greek. Pater's description makes an almost miraculously succinct summary of the 'classical art-form' as Hegel had crystallised the idea from his own study of Winckelmann. Here is Pater:

But take a work of Greek art,—the Venus of Melos. That is in no sense a symbol, a suggestion, of anything beyond its own victorious fairness. The mind begins and ends with the finite image, yet loses no part of the spiritual motive. This motive is not lightly and loosely attached to the sensuous form, as its meaning to an allegory, but saturates and is identical with it.<sup>32</sup>

A little later Pater notes that "The actions selected [for Greek sculpture] are those which would be without significance, except in a divine person—binding on a sandal, or preparing for the bath."<sup>33</sup> One wonders whether he could have known of the painting that Leighton was working on at the time of the essay's publication in January 1867, *Venus Disrobing for the Bath*; the painting was not publicly exhibited until a few months later, in the Royal Academy exhibition that opened in May that year, but the figure is both preparing for the bath and playing with her sandal.<sup>34</sup> The body type and pose recall contemporary French paintings of the female nude such as Ingres's *La Source* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), which had been seen at the London International Exhibition in 1862 and made a great impression on progressive artistic circles in London.<sup>35</sup> Leighton's painting, which appeared 'Ingresque' to contemporary critics, took the lead in an initiative of the later 1860s to present the nude figure at public exhibition; notable examples include Albert Moore's *A Venus* (1869, York Art Gallery), which closely imitates the Venus de Milo.<sup>36</sup>

Whether or not Pater had actually seen Leighton's *Venus Disrobing for the Bath* before the 'Winckelmann' essay went to press, the emphasis on the unclothed

<sup>30</sup> For this nineteenth-century expansion see Michaelis, *A Century of Archaeological Discoveries*; Marchand, *Down from Olympus*.

<sup>31</sup> See Prettejohn, "Pater on Sculpture."

<sup>32</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 164.

<sup>33</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 173.

<sup>34</sup> On Leighton's painting, now in a private collection, see Smith, *Victorian Nude*, 115–17.

<sup>35</sup> The painting, begun in 1820, was not completed until the 1850s, with the help of studio assistants. On its impact in London in 1862 see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 44–45, 112.

<sup>36</sup> On the flourishing of the nude in the late 1860s see Smith, *Victorian Nude*, 101–61; Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, 131–41.

human form in the essay runs parallel to the new exploration of the nude figure among artists at exactly the same date. This soon extended to the male figure. Leighton, again, took the lead with his *Daedalus and Icarus* (Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park), shown at the Royal Academy in 1869, but soon there were others, such as Edward Burne-Jones's watercolour *Phyllis and Demophoon* and Simeon Solomon's painting *Love in Autumn*.<sup>37</sup> It has sometimes been said that these artists used classical reference in order to legitimise or sanitise their exploration of the nude at public exhibition, but that may be to reverse the causality. It was the artists' primary interest in classical form that impelled them to explore the nude figure in their work. Moreover, that interest was inspired to a significant extent by Winckelmann, either directly or through Pater's essay of 1867—or, more likely, in both ways.

That is by no means to deny the importance of sexual desire in this artistic project, or in Pater's fascination with Winckelmann. The classical and the erotic are bound together in complex ways in these artistic projects, as they are in Winckelmann's writings. Thus it is scarcely possible to understand the erotic element unless one takes the classical one seriously, and not just as a pretext. Pater refers repeatedly to the beauty of the human body throughout the essay. He uses the phrases "beautiful body" and "fair body" on occasion, but much more often he uses the phrase "human form."<sup>38</sup> This cannot be regarded as a euphemism; Pater is quite frank about Winckelmann's love-relationships with other men. However, it appears that the phrase, "human form," does signal his concern with the aesthetic or artistic representation of the beautiful body, particularly among the Greeks, and that concern is shared at the most profound level with Winckelmann.

## 2 Leighton, Ruskin, and the human form

The same concern is evident in a statement by Leighton from 1873 where he describes a change in his artistic aims over the previous decade or two:

By degrees, however, my growing love for Form made me intolerant of the restraint and exigencies of costume, and led me more and more, and finally, to a class of subjects, or, more accurately, to a set of conditions, in which supreme scope is left to pure artistic qualities, in which no form is imposed upon the artist by the tailor, but in which every form is made obedient to the conception of the design he has in hand. These conditions classic subjects afford, and as vehicles, therefore, of abstract form,

<sup>37</sup> Burne-Jones's *Phyllis and Demophoon*, exhibited in 1870 at the Old Watercolour Society, is now at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery; Solomon's *Love in Autumn*, exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1872, is in a private collection. On these paintings see the catalogue entries by Robert Upstone and Alison Smith in Smith, *Exposed*, 142, 104–5 (cat. nos 66, 39).

<sup>38</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, 153 ("beautiful body"), 167 ("fair body"), 145, 152, 158, 165, 168, 169 ("human form," twice on p. 169); cf. 153 ("beauty of living form"), 168, 182 ("bodily form"), 169 ("pure form," repeated three times).

which is a thing not of one time but of all time, these subjects can never be obsolete, and though to many they are a dead letter, they can never be an anachronism.<sup>39</sup>

Leighton is explaining the change in his artistic practice since his triumphant debut at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1855, with his monumental painting, more than five metres wide, *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna Is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* (Her Majesty the Queen, on loan to the National Gallery, London). The subject-matter is literally Pre-Raphaelite, in that it features an event from the history of art before Raphael, and Leighton's attention to accuracy of period detail owes something to the work of the contemporary Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (founded in 1848 and still controversial at the London exhibitions), although the primary points of stylistic reference are to the historical works of the German Nazarenes and French artists of the Romantic generation; in 1855 the German-trained Leighton moved his primary residence from Rome to Paris, and he was no doubt more conversant with continental than with English art. Royal Academy critics marvelled at the ambition of this first exhibit by a hitherto unknown artist, and particularly noted the meticulous historicism of the costumes. As one critic opined: "If those frizzled heads, top-knots, long draggled cloaks, and glaring colours, were in vogue in the thirteenth century, we do not sigh for the period when the whirligig of fashion shall bring them back to us."<sup>40</sup> Leighton clothes nearly 50 figures in costumes that display every ingenuity that a Florentine "tailor" of the fourteenth century might have devised, from the head-dresses down to the pointed slippers; Cimabue, the hero of the painting, is resplendent in white silks, and sports a gold leg-bracelet just below the knee of his spotless white tights.

In the next years Leighton moved decisively away from that mode in a shift he described elsewhere as "the passage from Gothicism to Classicism."<sup>41</sup> The change has often been treated as a mere question of subject-matter, but it is worth taking seriously the exact words that Leighton chooses in his letter of 1873. Like Pater, he emphasises the word "form" with the clear implication that he means the form of the human body untrammelled by what he calls "the restraint and exigencies of costume." He notes that this led him to "a class of subjects" but then immediately revises the phrase: "or, more accurately, to a set of conditions" in which "pure artistic qualities" may take priority over the requirements of historicised costume, or as he succinctly phrases it, "in which no form is imposed upon the artist by the tailor."

By the later 1860s, Leighton was exhibiting works in which the "human form," and not the costume, is the principal vehicle of expression, whether the ostensible subject-matter is drawn from Greek antiquity—as, for example, in *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon* (fig. 3)—or not, as in *Jonathan's Token to David* (fig. 4). In either case, Leighton was exploring what it might mean to 'imitate' the

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Frederic Leighton to Joseph Comyns Carr, 27 November 1873, printed in Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians*, 98. The word 'abstract,' which does not yet have the connotation of 'non-representational,' is also a favourite for Pater in the essay on Winckelmann; see Pater, *Renaissance*, 141, 146, 169, 172, 178–79.

<sup>40</sup> W. G. C., "On Some Pictures," 710.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Frederic Leighton to Emilia Francis Pattison (later Lady Dilke), 1879, quoted in Barrington, *Life*, 2:118.



Figure 3: Frederic Leighton, *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon*, 1869, oil on canvas, 150 x 75.5 cm, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.



Figure 4: Frederic Leighton, *Jonathan's Token to David*, 1868, oil on canvas, 171.5 x 124.5 cm, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the John R. Van Derlip Fund.

ancient Greeks, not in the superficial sense of choosing a subject from Greek history or mythology, but in the more significant sense recommended so powerfully by Winckelmann, first in the *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* of 1755: by presenting the natural beauty of the human form, the contours of the body, and drapery as distinct from costume.<sup>42</sup> Leighton might be responding to such a passage as this one, from the translation by the painter Henry Fuseli most familiar in Leighton's day: "In their dress [the Greeks] were professed followers of nature. No modern stiffening habit, no squeezing stays hindered Nature from forming easy beauty; the fair knew no anxiety about their attire."<sup>43</sup>

This helps to explain Leighton's impatience with "the tailor," in the letter of 1873: he wants the human form *itself* to convey the whole message of the work, without relying on the anecdotal or illustrative details that clothes or accessories might introduce. In *Electra* the sweeping draperies, akin in their simplicity to the fluted funerary column beside her, convey the monumentality of her grief. In *Jonathan's Token to David* the composition revolves around the contrast between the manly forms of Jonathan and the boyish limbs of the "little lad" who carries the arrows in the Biblical story, as a sign to David, in hiding.<sup>44</sup> David is not represented in the painting, but perhaps the love between David and Jonathan is expressed visually, so close is the bodily form of Jonathan, in Leighton's painting,

<sup>42</sup> Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 2–33.

<sup>43</sup> Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> 1 Samuel 20:35–39.

to that of David in Michelangelo's celebrated sculpture in Florence. Leighton's Jonathan is draped rather than clothed, and the artist is using 'imitation' to enhance the expressiveness of the bodily forms without relying on either costume or facial expression. Indeed, it is possible that Leighton has 'corrected' the contrapposto of his Renaissance prototype in the direction of the Greeks. Rather than the balletic loose leg of Michelangelo's *David*, Leighton uses a more contained pose reminiscent of the Polykleitan types that were just coming to the attention of classical archaeologists in the 1860s; a good example is the sculpture in the Naples Museum, identified by the German scholar Karl Friedrichs in 1863 as a marble copy of the celebrated bronze Doryphoros by Polykleitos.<sup>45</sup>

I am arguing, then, that Leighton, with Pater's guidance, takes his cue from Winckelmann for an artistic development that goes far beyond the superficial adoption of classical subject-matter. It may sound strange, on Leighton's part or indeed on Winckelmann's, to keep harping on about costume or clothing—are not the clothes merely superficial, too? However, there is more to the question of nudity *versus* clothes, or in Leighton's terms the artist *versus* the tailor, and it is enough to cite Thomas Carlyle's novel of 1836, *Sartor Resartus* ('the tailor re-tailored') to remind us of the connection to German idealist philosophy. The binary pair, body and clothes, makes an exceptionally supple or flexible figure for other binaries such as form and matter, spirit and flesh, essential and superficial, or in the case of the visual arts design and colour.

One critic for whom Leighton's devotion to the nude body was perplexing was John Ruskin:

I have no right whatever to speak of the works of higher effort and claim, which have been the result of [Leighton's] acutely observant and enthusiastic study of the organism of the human body. I am indeed able to recognize his skill; but have no sympathy with the subjects that admit of its display.<sup>46</sup>

To demonstrate the better qualities of Leighton's art, Ruskin produces for his audience two delicate drawings from the very beginning of Leighton's career, before his shift to the classical: one a pencil drawing of a Byzantine well-head, the other, the now-famous drawing of a lemon tree made on Capri in 1859.<sup>47</sup> Both of these are stunning displays of technical skill and compositional elegance—but with no human figure. It would be easy enough to dismiss this move of Ruskin's as an extreme or eccentric example of the moral or sexual discomfort with the nude so often attributed to 'the Victorians,' but—even if that is the case—Ruskin has something more in view. The context is the third lecture in Ruskin's series of 1883 on *The Art of England*, the lecture ostensibly devoted to 'Classic Schools of Painting,' but in fact structured around a large-scale opposition between Gothic and Classic that turns, precisely, on *clothes*.

<sup>45</sup> See Vout, *Classical Art*, 4, 202–3; Prettejohn, *Modernity*, 113–16.

<sup>46</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 33:318 (paragraph 76).

<sup>47</sup> Both drawings are in private collections. See the catalogue entry in Jones et al., *Frederic Leighton*, 102–3. On the *Lemon Tree* see further Martin et al., *A Victorian Master*, 50–51 (catalogue entry by Christopher Newall).

Ruskin begins with a standard-issue characterization of classical art, something like diluted Winckelmann: “you find from the earliest times, in Greece and Italy, a multitude of artists gradually perfecting the knowledge and representation of the human body, glorified by the exercises of war.” Then he introduces Northern art, seemingly by way of contrast:

[...] innumerably and incorrigibly savage nations, representing, with rude and irregular efforts, on huge stones and ice-borne boulders, on cave-bones and forest-stocks and logs, with any manner of innocent tinting or scratching possible to them, sometimes beasts, sometimes hobgoblins—sometimes, heaven only knows what; but never attaining any skill in figure-drawing, until, whether invading or invaded, Greece and Italy teach them what a human being is like; and with that help they dream and blunder on through the centuries [...]

Yet somehow the fable takes a turn and among these Northerners, says Ruskin, there emerges a Holbein, “and, in the end, for best product hitherto, Sir Joshua [Reynolds], and the supremely Gothic Gainsborough.”<sup>48</sup>

Somehow a reversal of values has taken place. The heroic classical body has come to seem overblown, and the northern paintings delightful for the supposedly superficial element of costume. Ruskin goes on to cite famous works by the eighteenth-century artists, all of which feature figures elaborately clothed in the dress of their period: “Take, as types of the best work ever laid on British canvas ... Sir Joshua’s *Age of Innocence* ...; Gainsborough’s *Mrs. Graham*, divinely doing nothing, and *Blue Boy* similarly occupied; and, finally, Reynolds’ *Lord Heathfield* magnanimously and irrevocably locking up Gibraltar.”<sup>49</sup> Then he asks his audience to imagine those works as they would appear if they had been painted in classical style:

Suppose, now, under the instigation of Mr. Carlyle and *Sartor*, and under the counsel of *Zeuxis* and *Parrhasius*, we had it really in our power to bid Sir Joshua and Gainsborough paint all these over again, in the classic manner. Would you really insist on having her white frock taken off the *Age of Innocence*; on the *Blue Boy*’s divesting himself of his blue; on—we may not dream of anything more classic—*Mrs. Graham*’s taking the feathers out of her hat; and on *Lord Heathfield*’s parting,—I dare not suggest, with his regimentals, but his orders of the Bath, or what else?<sup>50</sup>

The clothes, as Ruskin is at pains to acknowledge, are the superficial element—he refers in the next paragraph to “frillings and trimmings, cuffs and collarettes.” Yet the listener or reader is in no doubt that a reversal of values has occurred, and Ruskin is delighting in the art of the tailor: the superficial has taken the moral high ground.

<sup>48</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 33:308–9 (paragraph 62).

<sup>49</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 33:311–12 (paragraph 66). The paintings cited are Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Age of Innocence*, c. 1788, Tate, London; Thomas Gainsborough, *The Honourable Mrs Graham*, 1775–77, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; Thomas Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy*, c. 1770, Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, CA; Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Lord Heathfield of Gibraltar*, 1787, National Gallery, London. Lord Heathfield led the British defence of Gibraltar against Spanish and French forces ending in 1782.

<sup>50</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 33:312 (paragraph 66).

Ruskin's lecture reads as engagingly eccentric, but he has a deceptively firm grip on the conceptual structure, based on large-scale oppositions between the Gothic and the classic, the clothes and the body. The two antitheses seem parallel. Which term, however, is the essential one, and which the superficial? The very energy of the vocabulary with which Ruskin declares the superficiality of the Gothic and the clothes turns the tables and persuades the hearer that the moral weight is, after all, on that side.

That is so, it must be stressed, for Ruskin, not for Leighton. It is worth noting that Leighton's Presidential Addresses to the Royal Academy, delivered biennially from 1879 onwards and therefore contemporary with Ruskin's lectures on *The Art of England*, take a determinedly anti-Ruskinian position, particularly in their forthright and uncompromising rejection of an ethical or moral aim for art.<sup>51</sup> One aspect of the difference of outlook between the two men is worth emphasis in the present context: Ruskin is concerned with a national art, as his title *The Art of England* indicates. He is also the author of *Modern Painters* (1843–60), and his concern with clothes, fashion, and nationality bears comparison with Baudelaire's famous essay of 1863 on 'The Painter of Modern Life'. Leighton's lectures, on the other hand, are thoroughly international and cosmopolitan. He deals confidently with Islamic, Egyptian, and Assyrian art—or what might now be called 'global art history.' Although the series was curtailed by his death in 1895, its scope and ambition were to cover the art of all times and all places. That helps to make sense of his remark, in the letter of 1873, about form as "a thing not of one time but of all time."

These writings by Leighton and Ruskin demonstrate a stark difference of opinion not merely on the propriety of presenting the nude figure at public exhibition, but also on much larger social and political debates, for example about the relative claims of nationalism and international cooperation, or of modernist innovation *versus* respect for tradition. Which position, however, is the 'radical' one, and which the 'conservative?' As President of the Royal Academy and 'academic classicist,' Leighton has often been taken for a conservative, at least in art-politics, and it is even assumed, entirely without evidence, that he must somehow have been a political or social conservative as well.<sup>52</sup> In this complex clash of ideas, however, a commitment to classicism cannot be taken straightforwardly to represent adherence to conservative values; nor, on the other hand, does a call for modernity simply signify an openness to revolutionary change.

Ruskin represents a nineteenth-century modernity, nationalistic and romantic or (as he puts it) "Gothic." However, it is Leighton's 'classical form' that, in my view, contributes to the theorisation of artistic modernism. Like Pater, and like Winckelmann (in Pater's interpretation), Leighton consciously chooses Greek

<sup>51</sup> *Addresses*; see especially the second Address (1881) on "the relation in which Art stands to Morals and to Religion."

<sup>52</sup> Leighton's letters and his Presidential *Addresses* demonstrate his antipathy to any form of authoritarian politics, as well as a perhaps naïve, but certainly heartfelt, enthusiasm for Greek principles of democracy. His only known interventions in contemporary politics were in support of the Italian Risorgimento. See Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, p. 308, n. 104. Pater's early essays were published in radical or progressive journals (*Westminster Review* and *Fortnightly Review*) and as a young man he was described as a 'Liberal in politics'; see Wright, *The Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 216.



art, centred on the “human form,” as his inspiration. That, though, may sound like a paradox: how can a return to the “genuine antique,” in Pater’s phrase, make a route to modernism and modernity?

### 3 Classicism, romanticism, modernism

In the first version of the ‘Winckelmann’ essay, Pater cites a work by the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt, *Claudio and Isabella* of 1853 (Tate, London), as his key example of a ‘modern’ painting. In this scene from Shakespeare’s play *Measure for Measure*, the young nun Isabella visits her brother Claudio, imprisoned and sentenced to death for getting a girl pregnant, and tells him that she can win his freedom if she agrees to sleep with Angelo, the corrupt ruler of Vienna. Pose, gesture, facial expression, costumes, and accessories are all expertly nuanced to convey the dramatic tension, psychological complexity, and moral ambiguity of this situation. A contre-jour light effect puts Claudio’s face in shadow as he turns away in vexation mixed with fear, while it catches Isabella’s earnest glance and clear blue eyes as she pleads with him not to sacrifice her honour to his self-interest. ‘Modern’ art here is Hegel’s ‘romantic’ art-form, and in Pater’s brilliantly succinct exposition of Hegel’s sequence of art-forms it necessarily supersedes the classical art-form, associated with ancient sculpture.<sup>53</sup>

But Pater, unlike Hegel, has no desire to predict the end of art, and the essay already contains hints of what a future art might look like—what might be called a ‘Post-Romantic Modern Art’. Moreover, as we have already seen, in the passage on the ‘classical tradition’ Pater had made it clear that the Greek element does not become absorbed or superseded in the historical process. Rather it remains a conscious choice for the artist to pick up at will in succeeding generations, so that the “series of elevated points” may extend indefinitely. The essay on Winckelmann, as previous scholars have often noted, is Pater’s most detailed exploration of Hegel’s historical scheme for the arts.<sup>54</sup> In this respect, however, he is taking issue with Hegel, quietly but unmistakably. We may then ask whether the ‘romantic’ art-form need *not* be seen as the last phase in the historical development of art, after all, and whether the next, ‘post-romantic’ phase might renew the ‘classical tradition’—not, of course, a false or artificial classicism, but one genuinely antique, genuinely Greek.

Pater deleted the reference to Hunt’s painting when he reprinted the essay in his volume of 1873 on the Renaissance. Was that because the painting no longer seemed the last word in modern art as soon as 1873—also the year of Leighton’s statement about his “growing love for Form?” That year, at the Royal Academy, Leighton exhibited *Weaving the Wreath*, a single figure, expressionless, engaged in the trivial activity of making a laurel wreath, seated on a Persian carpet before

<sup>53</sup> Pater, “Winckelmann,” 100. Pater omitted the example, but retained the discussion of Hegel’s sequence of art-forms in the later versions of the essay; see Pater, *Renaissance*, 167–79.

<sup>54</sup> See for example Shuter, “History as Palingenesis,” 411–21; McGrath, *Sensible Spirit*, 118–39.



Figure 5: Frederic Leighton, *Weaving the Wreath*, 1873, oil on canvas, 63.7 x 59.9 cm, National Museums Liverpool (Sudley House).

a white marble bas-relief with a Bacchanalian scene. There is nothing here of the dramatic and moral complexity seen in Hunt's picture. The painting clearly has classical things in it, but also non-classical things. It would be hard to describe it as a classical subject or indeed to say what the subject is at all: does the laurel wreath refer to poetry and poetic fame or achievement? What then is the role of the Bacchanalian dance on the bas-relief? Perhaps the figure's draperies are of the Renaissance, but is it a girl or a boy? I experience the figure as beautiful, whatever its sex, and the painting with its simplified colour scheme and incisive outlines is very beautifully crafted. This is not a classical-subject painting, but it is reasonable to call it an exploration of classical form in the more extended sense of Leighton's statement or of Pater's essay on Winckelmann: it displays what Pater calls "the clear ring, the eternal outline, of the genuine antique."

Leighton's painting departs abruptly from the 'Pre-Raphaelite' dramatization and pictorial style of Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella*. In Hegelian terms that departure could be described as a retreat or a regression from the 'romantic art-form' and modernity back to an outmoded 'classical art-form' that ought to have been superseded forever. Some such view has dominated discussions of artistic modernism, and it has led to a paranoid rejection of any kind of 'classicism'—the so-called 'academic classicism' of such as William Bouguereau and Alexandre Cabanel in France, as well as the classical-subject painting, again so-called, of Victorian England.

In this paper I have been arguing instead for a longer history of modern art from Winckelmann through to our own times, in which the classical tradition (in Pater's sense) remains active as a conscious choice for artists. In my book of 2012, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, I presented data to show that twentieth-century artists made reference to specific Greek sculptures far more extensively than

the historiography of modern art has acknowledged. Now I would like to extend that empirical insight into a larger argument about classicism in modern art: the ideas of ‘form’ and ‘formalism,’ as they are inflected and debated in modernist theory, criticism, and art practice, are fundamentally related to ways of thinking about classical form first explored in Winckelmann’s writing. ‘Related’ does not mean ‘identical,’ and in their *Nachleben* these ways of thinking developed along widely divergent, and often contested, lines. However, standard art-historical accounts of modernism are too ‘romantic,’ in Hegel’s sense. It is important, then, to recuperate the classical aspect centred on clarity of contour or outline, on the body as it occupies space—neither too meagre nor too flabby<sup>55</sup>—and on the rejection of superficiality. The ‘classical’ or Winckelmannian aspect of form may be more apparent in some works of modernist art than others, and perhaps it is easiest to spot in the artistic practices that early twentieth-century critics called “abstract,” “geometrical,” or “all dry and hard” (to quote a famous phrase of T.E. Hulme).<sup>56</sup> I do not, however, wish to propose a new binary, or any division of modernism into ‘romantic’ and ‘classical’ strains. We need in my view to acknowledge the ‘classical’ or Winckelmannian aspect as integral to thinking about artistic form in modernism as a whole.

What role, then, does Frederic Leighton play in this longer history? Winckelmann had to make do with Anton Raphael Mengs as his exemplary modern artist, but Mengs was not able fully to grasp the implications of Winckelmann’s new ways of experiencing and conceptualising classical art. Leighton, a century later, had both the intellectual capacity and the sheer technical skill to make classical form the basis for an art that is genuinely modern. As well as reflection and skill, it took hard work, applied to every finely crafted painting, and over a lifetime. It is appropriate, then, to conclude with Leighton’s final masterpiece, now also his most famous painting: *Flaming June* of 1895.

*Flaming June* is a very ‘romantic’ painting in one aspect, its endless profusion of subtly differentiated hues—orange, red-orange, gold, amber, saffron, all relieved against the blinding white impasto of the sunlit background. There seems to be no subject-matter apart from the representation of the body for its own sake; part of the picture’s fascination is a face that is beautiful without having any character or expression at all. The face is the thinnest and most evanescent part of the painted surface, seeming almost to vanish into its own dreamworld, and it is the whole body that carries the expressive weight.

Yet this is also a very learned painting, one that stirs the viewer to recall countless other works of art, including classical ones: the *Discobolus* with its coiled pose, together with late-fifth-century relief sculpture for the drapery and the foot peeping from the hem. Again, though, Leighton unites classical with Renaissance sculptural form, as though to encourage the viewers’ imaginations to roam

<sup>55</sup> Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 6–9.

<sup>56</sup> “Romanticism and Classicism” (1911), in Hulme, *Speculations*, 126. Hulme’s essay can productively be read alongside Pater’s discussion of the same antithesis (or dialectic) in “Romanticism,” first published in *Macmillan’s Magazine* (November 1876), revised and reprinted as the “Postscript” to Pater’s volume, *Appreciations*. For this vocabulary see also Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*; Wilenski, *Meaning of Modern Sculpture*.



Figure 6: Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June*, 1895, oil on canvas, 119.1 x 119.1 cm, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.

through the history of art seeking associations. Michelangelo's *Night* (in the Medici Chapel of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence) and the *ignudi* and Sibyls of the Sistine Chapel come immediately to mind; Leighton seems to condense the experimentation with twisting and turning bodies, male and female, into a single body. Nor should we forget the massive body forms of the Parthenon sculptures, casts of which Leighton kept near himself in his studio.<sup>57</sup>

Classical, Renaissance, Romantic: Leighton's immensely learned painting makes a good lesson in art history, and in art theory to boot. The President of the Royal Academy, at the end of a lifetime's striving for perfection, distils everything he knows into this final image, square in shape, centred on the human body. According to the argument presented in this paper, that amounts to a realisation, at least within the conditions of its time and place, of Winckelmann's call for a modern art based on the imitation of the Greeks. Yet all the science, all the training and practice, cannot quite account for the experience of the painting—the thrill, simultaneously sensuous and intellectual, that we associate with the beautiful. In the end, as Leighton and Pater would surely agree, that is Winckelmann's most important legacy to modern art.

In Fuseli's translation of Winckelmann's *Reflections*: "There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled; I mean, by imitating the ancients."<sup>58</sup> That sets the standard high: the work of modern art must be as powerful in its effect as the greatest Greek sculpture. In other words, it must be capable of inspiring the kind of experience that Winckelmann had when he

<sup>57</sup> For these art-historical references, as well as further information about the painting and its reception history, see Pérez d'Ors et al., *Flaming June*.

<sup>58</sup> Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting*, 2, spelling modernised.

contemplated the Apollo Belvedere—the experience that made his breast seem to swell with the spirit of prophecy, and which transported him in imagination to the groves of Apollo.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Winckelmann, *History*, 2:312–13 (Book XI, Chapter III, paragraph 11).

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# JOLCEL

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## CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

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## NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are “Two Styles More Opposed’: Harriet Hosmer’s Classicisms between Winckelmann and Bernini,” by Melissa L. Gustin (pp. 1–31) and “The Future of Winckelmann’s Classical Form: Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton” by Elizabeth Prettejohn (pp. 33–56). The response piece is “Bodily Exclusions? Winckelmann’s Victims and the Paradox of Form” by Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto (pp. 80–87).

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# Winckelmann in Nineveh: Assyrian Remains in the Age of Classics

YANNICK LE PAPE

*Musée d'Orsay*

## ABSTRACT

By the middle of the nineteenth century, French and British diplomats managed excavations in the land of Assyrian kings, where Nineveh had been buried long before classical Greece. This could have been the opportunity to update the way Winckelmann considered ancient art, but when Assyrian remains entered museums, they precisely had been evaluated according to the *History of the Art of Antiquity*, in which Near Eastern items were said to be exact opposites of classical beauty. Aesthetic value of such strange objects has been immediately under notice, and museums themselves were quite reluctant to exhibit this unexpected heritage close to masterpieces of Greek “high art” (Edmund Oldfield). However, Assyria had got too many fans to be forgotten a second time: and instead of highlighting Hellenic pieces as art treasures, the “chain of art” inherited from Winckelmann was used to improve how Assyrian remains, at the very end, had influenced classical standards.

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It may seem surprising to consider the case of Assyria in a paper dedicated to Winckelmann. Not only did Winckelmann die in 1768—that is to say more than seventy years before the rediscovery of Assyria in the North East of the Ottoman Empire—but the notorious art historian did not even mention the scarce illustrations of Near Eastern art of Antiquity that were known by the eighteenth century.

Even if Winckelmann did not have the opportunity to study Assyrian remains (as they had still to be revealed when he was living), the way he emphasized Greek art definitely affected those who found and removed this heritage from Assyria to Western museums. This paper explores this kind of loose influence on museum practices by the second part of the nineteenth century and on the aesthetic debates that occurred in its wake.

## 1 Dreams and contest over a lost empire

Nineveh was one of the most important cities of the ancient Assyrian Empire, located in the North of Mesopotamia (where nowadays is the upper fringe of Iraq), and dominating a large part of the Near-East from the tenth till the seventh century before Christ. After the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., Assyria was set to decline and, at last, had been lost for many times. “All traces of it, incredible as that may appear, had passed away from the earth,” wrote M. Jones in 1866.<sup>1</sup> Scientific reports were frequently illustrated by these strange shapeless mounds that were being identified as the poor evidences of Assyrian civilization. Victor Place, who had played a part in the search for the Assyrian remains, noted in 1867 that “if it was easy to figure Romans, Egyptians or ancient Greeks, Assyrians did not leave any acceptable profile.”<sup>2</sup> Greek authors that Winckelmann used to read<sup>3</sup> had themselves said a few things on that matter—and those who did, tried to combine historical and biblical perspectives<sup>4</sup>—but Winckelmann checked many other documents about the East, including the *Travels and observations relating to several Parts of Barbary and the Levant*, published by Thomas Shaw in London around 1757,<sup>5</sup> and Chardin’s chronicles about Persia (*Journal du voyage du Chevalier Chardin en Perse*), edited at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> It is true that few pages of the *History of Ancient Art* (*Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, 1764) mention Eastern art from Antiquity, but Winckelmann focused on Persian gems, although he did know about monumental reliefs from Persepolis<sup>7</sup> that were to be linked, as quoted by George Rawlinson and others,<sup>8</sup> with Assyrian sculptures.

Assyrian remains had to wait till the end of 1842 to be excavated from the sands of North Mesopotamia. Some previous explorations had been done from 1808 by James Claudius Rich but nothing significant were found. Austen Layard, the consul who was to manage the first complete British excavation in Assyria from 1845, wrote in one of its archeological stories that “a case scarcely three feet square enclosed all that remained, not only of the great city of Nineveh, but of Babylon itself!”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Nineveh and its Story*, 17.

<sup>2</sup> “S’il nous était permis de nous représenter l’image exacte d’un Égyptien, d’un Romain ou d’un Grec, celle d’un Assyrien ne s’offrait à nous sous aucune forme saisissable.” Place, *Ninive et l’Assyrie*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> On Winckelmann’s references as recorded in the nineteenth century, see Winckelmann, translated by Henry Lodge in 1873, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Vlaardingebroek, “The founding of Nineveh and Babylon in Greek historiography,” 233–241.

<sup>5</sup> Winckelmann referred to a French translation (*Voyages dans plusieurs provinces de la Barbarie et du Levant*, 1743). See Grimm and Mina Zeni, *Winckelmann e l’Egitto*, 21–22.

<sup>6</sup> Décultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*, 264.

<sup>7</sup> Eppihimer, “Caylus, Winckelmann, and the Art of ‘Persian’ Gems,” 1–27, especially 18.

<sup>8</sup> We may refer to Rawlinson’s *Five Great monarchies of Ancient Eastern World*, 5, where the author reported the similarities between the ornaments of the winged bulls from Khorsabad and those “adopted afterwards by the Persians.”

<sup>9</sup> Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, xxv.

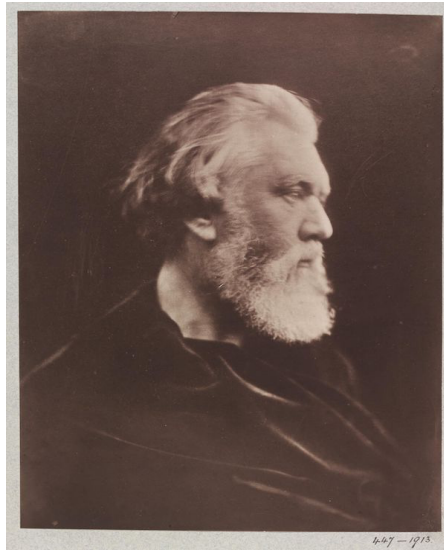


Figure 1: Julia Margaret Cameron, *A.H. Layard M.P.*, 1869, carbon print from copy negative (photographed), London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Prints and Drawings Study Room, 447–1913, given by Miss Enid DuCane, 3 April 1913.

Layard, indeed, had travelled to the land three years before, and was seduced by French discoveries in the same area.<sup>10</sup> In search of Nineveh,<sup>11</sup> the French consul Paul-émile Botta, with whom Layard maintained friendly relations about Near Eastern archaeology,<sup>12</sup> had found spectacular remains in Khorsabad, a little village in North East Mosul. The French government was immediately concerned by Botta’s scientific operations, but did not ignore the political benefit that provided such a foreign success over Great Britain and other European challengers. British opinion quickly urged London to fill the gap with the French and to cover Layard’s second trip in Assyria,<sup>13</sup> from where he was expected to get antiquities “to be added to the National Collections.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Layard, *Autobiography and Letters*, 107–8.

<sup>11</sup> On the advice and request of Jules Mohl, the then president of the Asiatic Society in Paris, see Menant, *Ninive et Babylone*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Layard, *The Nineveh Court in the Crystal Palace*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> *The Athenaeum*, October 26, 1846, recalled how France was generous towards Botta while Great Britain neglected Layard’s discoveries: “It is painful, after witnessing this munificent patronage of science by the French Government, to think that, up to this moment, nothing has been done to assist Mr. Layard in his researches by our own” (“Mr. Layard’s Excavations at Mossul, Fine Arts, Foreign correspondence, September 3rd”: 1016–1017).

<sup>14</sup> Rawlinson, *A Memoir of Major-General Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson*, 172.

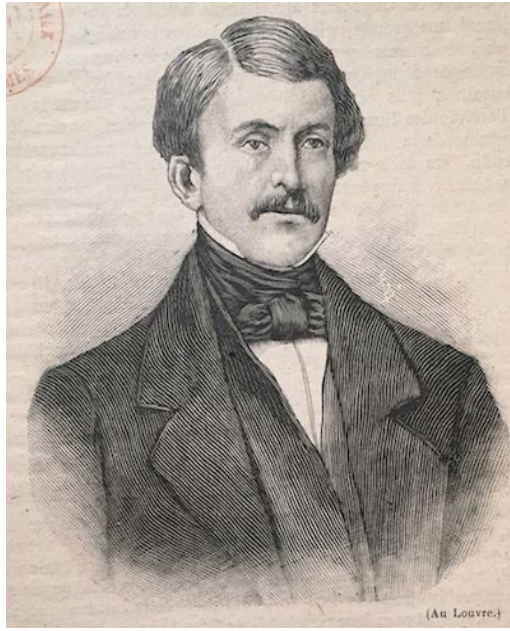


Figure 2: *Paul-Émile Botta*, 1840, etching after a painting by Charles-Émile de Champmartin, *Paul-Émile Botta, orientaliste*, Paris, Musée du Louvre (*Le Contemporain*, August 9th, 1914, p. 1), from the Musée d'Orsay Resource Library.

## 2 Faith and fashion: Assyria in nineteenth-century popular culture

Thus, one could think that the matter did not concern anyone but a few wealthy adventurers and political leaders in search of snap reputation, but discoveries in Assyria, on the contrary, acquired a real mass reputation over the Victorian society and in Imperial Paris—“the discovery created an immense sensation in Europe,” recalled George St Clair in 1892.<sup>15</sup>

Layard and Botta's results were obviously attractive for historians. But, in addition, these findings from the East were interpreted through the holy writings,<sup>16</sup> so that each discovery seemed to enlighten the Bible in a new and amazing way. In his broad circulation books, Layard himself intentionally focused on possible connections between Assyrian relics and the Old Testament,<sup>17</sup> although he preferred to remain cautious on that matter, whereas many publications around 1890 took the opportunity to document how archaeology revealed sacred history—“confirming in a remarkable manner the historical statements of the Bible,” as we

<sup>15</sup> St Clair, *Buried Cities and Bible*, 346.

<sup>16</sup> Especially in England. See Mirjam Brusius, “Le Tigre, le Louvre et l'échange,” 34–46, notably 35. British scholars in particular studied similarities between cuneiform tablets and biblical texts; see Menant, *Les langues perdues de la Perse et de l'Assyrie*, XIII.

<sup>17</sup> See Larsen, “Nineveh,” 111–35.

read in a 1889 Philadelphia publishing.<sup>18</sup> In the early 1870s, the discovery by George Smith of a tablet on which was inscribed an ancient story that could recall the Biblical flood, had already stressed the same point, in England as in Germany a few years later.<sup>19</sup> At the very beginning of the discoveries, it was still common to read the history of Assyria in relation to the accounts of the Bible (and especially Genesis), as Brownell did in 1856.<sup>20</sup>

That partly explains why mainstream press, excited by such stunning shortcuts, had informed British lecturers about Layard's adventures from 1846,<sup>21</sup> and why French papers had published on Botta's excavations as soon as the consul was in Khorsabad.<sup>22</sup> Popular medias covered the event when the Louvre opened the first Assyrian gallery in May 1847, and British periodicals wrote about monumental remains from Nimrud that Layard found among Ottoman sands,<sup>23</sup> even if the opening of the Assyrian room in the British museum had to be postponed till 1849. The topic drove the buzz, especially in London, where visitors hurried around the little corridor dedicated to Assyrian slabs in the ground level of the British Museum. In October 1850, the noisy arrival of the iconic colossal sculptures figuring bull and lion<sup>24</sup> had been significant enough for public opinion to require a better and enlarged display in the British Museum.<sup>25</sup> In Paris, so many visitors wanted to see antiquities from Khorsabad that the museum had to remain open all week long.<sup>26</sup>

For many decades, Assyrian matters was the big deal, not only for upper class but also for artists and writers. Painters as Britton Riviere or Edgar Degas did use Assyrian galleries as stimulating models, and many architects (for example Charles Chipiez or Charles Garnier) exploited inferences from Nineveh and Khorsabad in relation with their own researches. Something of a fancy Nineveh-style was appreciated in fashion, design, jewellery,<sup>27</sup> and ceramic.<sup>28</sup> Near Eastern history inspired performing arts as well: in Paris with the 1860 opera *Sémiramis* by Gaetano Rossi,<sup>29</sup> or in London a decade before with the *Sardanapalus* produced by Charles Keans and directly sketched after Botta and Layard.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the amazing bestsellers published by Layard from 1848 (in particular *Nineveh and its Remains*

<sup>18</sup> DeHass, *Buried Cities Recovered*, 412. A part of research in Assyria was seen as a scientific attempt "to describe the indices of the Deluge of Scripture." Ainsworth, *Researches in Assyria, Babylonia and Chaldaea*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, 223.

<sup>20</sup> Brownell, *The Eastern or Old World*, 57.

<sup>21</sup> See Holloway, "Nineveh Sails for the New World," 243–256, especially 248.

<sup>22</sup> See "Fouilles entreprises à Khorsabad pour la découverte des Antiquités de Ninive," *L'Illustration*, June 27, 1846: 268.

<sup>23</sup> See "The Nimroud sculptures," *The Illustrated London News*, June 26, 1847: 412.

<sup>24</sup> These sculptures instantly became the flagship image of ancient Assyria in Western imagination. See Danrey, "Winged Human-Headed Bulls of Nineveh," 133–39.

<sup>25</sup> Bohrer, "The Times and Space of History," 202–5.

<sup>26</sup> Fontan, "Adrien de Longpérier et la création du musée assyrien du Louvre," 230.

<sup>27</sup> See Roe, "Henry Layard et les arts décoratifs," 260–272.

<sup>28</sup> McCall, "Reinventing Babylon: Victorian Design in the Assyrian Style," 15–23.

<sup>29</sup> Hartmann, "Der Traum von der Fremde," 127–33.

<sup>30</sup> McCall, "Rediscovery and Aftermath," 202.

and *The Monuments of Nineveh*) were considered as a major information source for creators until the end of the 1880s.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 3: Unknown artist, *Assyrian stèle recording the conquest of Jews*, London, *British Museum*, ca. 1880s, Albumen print (photographed), London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection, PH.3255–1897.

### 3 Near Eastern relics and their reception in a classical world

This unexpected Assyrian revival seems to have been enthusiastic,<sup>32</sup> especially when the “oriental renaissance,”<sup>33</sup> far from being a scientific matter only, tended to fix French and British colonialist ambitions.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, such a sudden intrusion of Assyrian aesthetic in the official academic art field generated many controversies because of Greco-Roman reputation. When Assyrian remains had to enter national collections, they had to face what Stephen L. Dyson called “the ghost of Winckelmann,”<sup>35</sup> that is to say, the idea about “the eternal value of Classical art” that still ruled museums by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The fact is that Winckelmann’s writings had a large impact upon European knowledges since the first edition of his *Reflections*, in 1755,<sup>36</sup> and even more in the tiny world of art historians of the next century: Ruskin or Ernst Curtius, to

<sup>31</sup> See Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, “Assyrian Monsters and Domestic Chimeras,” 901.

<sup>33</sup> Gran-Eymerich, *Naissance de l’archéologie moderne*, specifically 90–91.

<sup>34</sup> See Holloway, “Nineveh Sails for the New World,” 255.

<sup>35</sup> Dyson, *In pursuit of Ancient Pasts*, 167.

<sup>36</sup> See the introduction of Winckelmann, *Letter and Report on the Discoveries at Herculaneum*, 1–62 (especially 3 and 21).

name just two, did share his ideas in the first part of the 1850s,<sup>37</sup> and Walter Pater published the decade after an essay about Winckelmann, in which he particularly mentioned how the librarian considered the main part of art history regarding to Greek spirit.<sup>38</sup>

According to the Winckelmann historical model, ancient civilizations had to be systematically compared to classical culture,<sup>39</sup> and that is precisely the way Assyrian remains had been considered. Maurice Joly, a French writer, soon underlined what he called “the limits” of Assyrian art, opposed to “the infinite diversity and vibrant innate Greek art design.”<sup>40</sup> Layard himself had been surprised to receive a mail from Henry Rawlinson (a renowned officer and scholar who would play a great part in the decipherment of cuneiform), in which his colleague, usually so benevolent with Layard, did question the aesthetic merit of slabs and sculptures that has just arrived from Baghdad. And when Layard replied and tried to stress the Assyrian “knowledge of the art,”<sup>41</sup> Rawlinson found it relevant to call for the Greek model: “When I criticize design and execution, [I hope you will] understand I do so merely because your winged god is not the Apollo Belvedere.”<sup>42</sup> The comment is quite significant as the Apollo Belvedere was precisely the last stop of the walking tour that Winckelmann imagined for the Museo Profano, in Vaticano at the end of the 1760s—not to mention that the guidebook of the museum described the statue as “the most beautiful in existence.”<sup>43</sup> So that, a century later, Rawlinson’s visions about Assyrian marbles were nothing else but a late revival of the device designed by Winckelmann and applied to recent discoveries in East Asia. As a conclusion, Rawlinson emphasized the peculiar aspect of the slabs sent by Layard: “Your cases arrived all right [...] The dying lion and the two Gods are my favorites. The battle pieces are curious, but I do not think they rank very highly as art.”<sup>44</sup>

#### 4 Marbles battle: Museums and the Greek standard

Richard Westmacott, from the British Museum, stated also that the Art of Nineveh was “very curious” (the same word used by Rawlinson) when he was interviewed by the museum in 1853 to judge if that kind of artefacts entered in the museum the year before can be exhibited so close to Greek marbles. The fact is that the gallery dedicated to the Assyrian remains (the “Assyrian” or “Nineveh Gallery”) paved the way to the classical section of the museum, and the “Nimrud Central Saloon” has been displayed precisely alongside the Elgin marbles room.

<sup>37</sup> See Haskell, “Winckelmann et son influence sur les historiens,” 83–100.

<sup>38</sup> Pater, “Winckelmann,” 115.

<sup>39</sup> Haskell, “Winckelmann et son influence sur les historiens,” 92.

<sup>40</sup> “C’est dans ces splendides monolithes que l’art assyrien semble avoir atteint ses dernières limites. Ce n’est certes ni la variété inépuisable, ni la forme si vivante et si naturelle de l’art grec.” Quoted by Hanno, *Les Villes retrouvées*, 148.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to his mother, quoted by Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted by Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 147–148. See also Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Ruprecht, *Winckelmann and the Vatican’s First Profane Museum*, 105.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted by Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria*, 102.



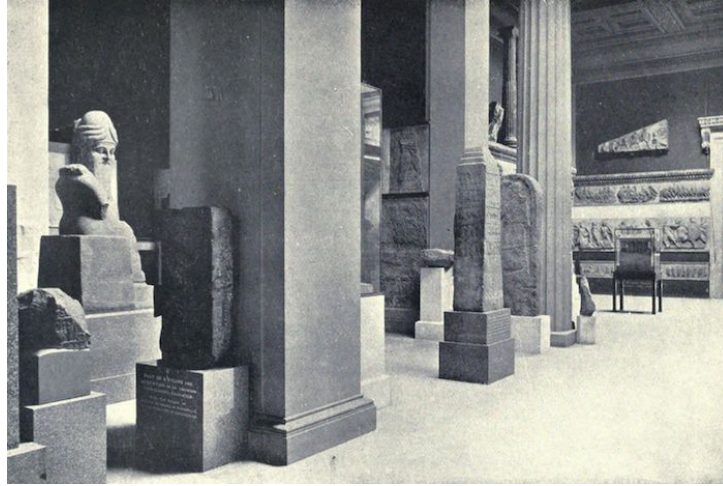


Figure 4: *The Nimroud Central Saloon* (Ada R. Habershon, *The Bible and the British Museum*, London, Morgan and Scott, 1909, Pl. IV). The Assyrian remains in the British Museum, with Greek masterpieces in the background. With thanks to the Internet Archive, Microsoft, and the UCLA Library for this image.

Such a display had to be controversial in England, where the 1851 Great Exhibition had just promoted an idealized vision of classical Greece.<sup>45</sup> In the British Museum, although the Trustees chose to support excavations in Assyria from the second Layard mission, a special committee had to make a decision concerning the value of Assyrian remains, and to estimate their incidence on visitors. Question n° 9057 was particularly straight; the chairman, indeed, asked to Westmacott: “Do you think that giving so very prominent a place [to Nineveh marbles], and drawing attention so much to works of that character, will to a certain extent draw [people] away from models of pure beauty?”<sup>46</sup> In a word, the point was to say not only if Assyrian art could get the same attention than high samples of classical art considered as national treasures (and especially the Elgin marbles, purchased by the British Museum in 1816), but also to care about its effects on public taste.<sup>47</sup> Parthenon marbles were still said to be invaluable,<sup>48</sup> and it is quite significant that when Stratford Canning, the British ambassador in Constantinople, encouraged Layard in Nimrud, he primarily expected his name to be associated with the recovery of Assyrian slabs, as had the name of Lord Elgin been associated with Parthenon masterpieces.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Layard himself, who had been charmed by Hellenic ruins when he was young,<sup>50</sup> had at first enhanced Assyrian inscriptions over sculptures, and he

<sup>45</sup> See Challis, “Modern to Ancient,” 174–75.

<sup>46</sup> See Siegel, *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 159.

<sup>47</sup> Malley, *From Archaeology to Spectacle in Victorian Britain*, 64–65.

<sup>48</sup> Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 107.

<sup>49</sup> Reade, “Nineteenth-Century Nimrud,” 3.

<sup>50</sup> See Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 40–41.

asserted that objects “cannot have any intrinsic value for their beauty” (as he wrote to the Ambassador in Spring 1846). Layard concluded: “They are undoubtedly inferior to the most secondary works of Greece.”<sup>51</sup> In France, popular press also argued that these unusual artefacts, despite their attractive appearance, cannot compete with the “unmatched masterpieces by Phidias” (*Le Magasin pittoresque*, Paris, 1852).<sup>52</sup> Taste changed so slowly that the Louvre had to wait till the middle of the 1880s to think about an Assyrian-like decoration, forty years after the first discoveries, for the exhibition room dedicated to Mesopotamian findings<sup>53</sup>—as if the style of the ancient Near East had been too colorful for Parisians when Botta and Place had sent these remains from Khorsabad. Actually, as Seton Lloyd noted, scholar “brains” of the nineteenth century were too much involved in traditional disciplines to consider Near Eastern discoveries apart from classical references.<sup>54</sup> It is particularly revealing how Nineveh’s supporters themselves, in search of key arguments, felt it was more relevant to relate analogies between Near Eastern items and Greek arts, rather than to study Assyrian identity, as if relationships with classical icons was a kind of scientific label. So did Layard himself when he wanted to boast of his findings, which would be said to be “designed with a spirit and truthfulness worthy of a Greek artist,”<sup>55</sup> as he wrote in his book *Nineveh and Babylon*.

At the very end, the way Assyrian remains had been displayed in the British museum by Edward Hawkins, the Antiquities manager, just illustrated the “chain of art [...] derived from Winckelmann and later antiquarian thinkers,” as Frederic Bohrer quoted.<sup>56</sup> Antiquities were ordered so that visitors can discover sequentially Egypt, Assyria, Philageia and, at last, the Elgin marbles. It is quite surprising that a similar staging has been followed by the Louvre, where the first Assyrian Museum had been located just between the Egyptian gallery, as Théophile Gautier himself reported,<sup>57</sup> and the artefacts from Phoenicia and early Greece. Museums, in other words, wanted to show a progress from works of art that Winckelmann’s followers keep to consider archaic, essentially Egyptian, till a kind of transitional Etrusco-Persia-Levantine art that lead, upgraded and completed, to the Greek sense of harmony that defines the classical period.<sup>58</sup> Here was shown (exhibited) the mechanism described in the *Geschichte*, according to which art before Phidias had just expressed a feeling of *grandeur* while Greece had performed the final step of beauty.<sup>59</sup> At best, Assyria was substituted to Persia as the link between the upper level of the Egyptian art, still deficient, and the ideal of ancient Greece.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>51</sup> April 21, 1846. *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>52</sup> “Elles doivent à leur nouveauté, non moins qu’à leur étrangeté, d’attirer en ce moment beaucoup plus leur attention que les admirables œuvres de Phidias; elles ne feront point oublier ces dernières qui leur sont si incomparablement supérieures.” (« Antiquités assyriennes », *Le Magasin pittoresque*, XX, (1852): 243).

<sup>53</sup> See Fontan, “Le décor assyrien de la salle Sarzec au Louvre,” 246.

<sup>54</sup> Lloyd, *The art of the Ancient Near-East*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Layard, *Discoveries in Nineveh and Babylon*, 120. See Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 217.

<sup>56</sup> Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, 121 and note 70.

<sup>57</sup> Gautier precisely quoted that the Assyrian Museum was nearby the room dedicated to the “Pharaonic hugeness” (“l’énormité pharaonique”). See *Guide de l’amateur au musée du Louvre*, 189.

<sup>58</sup> Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> Décultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*, 121.

<sup>60</sup> Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures*, 13.

## 5 Down the art evolution

We may notice how such gradual typology of Antiquity in museums deals with the idea of progress in civilizations (with the master place to Europeans) built by British scholars in the mid-nineteenth century from the “Great Chain of Art.”<sup>61</sup> Museums, in short, promoted an evolutionary history of art that precisely reminded of how Winckelmann discredited art from Persia and Phoenicia on the grounds that these civilizations skipped the feeling of freedom (*Freiheit*) that would prevail in classical Greece. Following Winckelmann, this idea of a connection between art progress and political environment had been sustained at the turn of the nineteenth century by Friedrich Wolf in its *Prolegomena ad Homerum*,<sup>62</sup> and later in Humboldt and Curtius.<sup>63</sup> Only a minority of academics tried to put an end to “the dominant position” of Winckelmann and “his aesthetic of pure form,” as William McGrath observed.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, the explicit vision of art as an organic process (from birth to decline), directly inherited from Winckelmann and his lecture of Paolo Rossi,<sup>65</sup> can still be detected in James Fergusson’s *Historical inquiry*, in 1875, where the architect studied “which was born and slowly nurtured on the banks of [the Nile and] the Euphrates, suddenly expanded and reached its manhood of intellectual power in Greece, and perished in decrepitude and crime in Rome.”<sup>66</sup> The “aesthetic credo of Winckelmann” (Simon Goldhill) was a hit in the late nineteenth century, as well as the idea of “calm serenity” did identify the classical era to a kind of “pre-Christian haven”<sup>67</sup> which was quite attractive in Victorian Society—and which definitely disqualified the art of previous times as wild and uncivilized.<sup>68</sup>

Needless to say how degrading for Assyrian remains this vision was. Shawn Malley, from the Bishop University, observed that an 1853 engraving of *The Illustrated London News* figured visitors of the British Museum’s Nineveh gallery as if they did not really care about the Assyrian slabs: one single person seems to be drawn to the winged bull exhibited on the entrance of the museum, while the others look elsewhere, back turned, and are moving to enter the gallery on the left, precisely dedicated to classical collections.<sup>69</sup> Instead of underlining the leading position of Assyrian aesthetic among the history of art, the picture promoted the Nineveh gallery as a kind of crossing point where families can have a walk on their way to the Parthenon masterpieces.

Although Assyrian accounts to history of art can no longer be denied, its aesthetic value has still to face classical relics’ notoriety. That is precisely what P.V. Myers suggested in *Remains of Lost Empires*, a 1875 book, when he argued that

<sup>61</sup> Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 33; see also “History in Revenge,” 18–20.

<sup>62</sup> See Werner, “Textual or Cultural Scholarship,” 95.

<sup>63</sup> See Ehrenberg, “Freedom - Ideal and Reality,” 139.

<sup>64</sup> McGrath, “Freedom in Architecture,” 43.

<sup>65</sup> Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 60.

<sup>66</sup> Fergusson, *An Historical Inquiry*, 326.

<sup>67</sup> Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, 31 and 54.

<sup>68</sup> Allison Karmel Thomason observed how “the trope of the decadent Orient is deeply embedded in the western imagination.” See “From Sennacherib’s Bronzes to Taharqa’s Feet,” 151–162, especially 151.

<sup>69</sup> Malley, *From Archaeology to Spectacle in Victorian Britain*, 67.

Assyrian intentions about art had to wait “the transcendent genius” of Greece to pop up: “The various structural declinations upon the *bassi-relievi* of Nineveh reveal the fact that the Assyrian artists were acquainted with all the first elements of Grecian architecture [...] The Grecians borrowed, in part at least, their mimetic art from the East, but they borrowed only to transform [...] «the hard and rigid lines of Assyria»—we quote the language of Layard—were converted into the flowing draperies and classic forms of the highest orders of art.”<sup>70</sup> The same idea was shared in France, where *L’Illustration*, a large-scale newspaper, was inclined “to believe that the Greeks [and the Etruscans] began by imitating, in order later to perfect, the art of the Assyrians.”<sup>71</sup> This was also the official stance: Eugène Flandin, the artist appointed by the French government to conduct graphic surveys at Khorsabad, conceded that Greeks “had ingeniously improved” the Assyrian art they took inspiration from.<sup>72</sup>

However, we may note how this kind of comments go further than did Winckelmann himself, who remained reluctant to approve that Greece had borrowed a single feature from the other civilizations, not even Egypt, as if each country had had an independent life and a parallel development<sup>73</sup>—we can read in *Gedanken* that “inventions from foreign peoples were only an exploratory seed for Greece.”<sup>74</sup>

## 6 Nineveh’s revenge: Assyrian art as a model for the Greeks

Consequently, in the late nineteenth century, the main contribution to Winckelmann looks like a drift, as scientists interpreted the superiority of classical art neither as a revelation nor as a miracle, but as an accomplishment of previous Near Eastern attempts. In the last part of the eighteenth century, Caylus had already set out against Winckelmann an history of art designed as a chain<sup>75</sup> in which the origins of Greek art were located in Egypt. For the supporters of Assyria, the idea of an efficient hierarchy in the *History of Ancient Art* implied that Antiquity had to be read as a whole—like Winckelmann did before the scholars of the nineteenth century became definitely fond of the idea<sup>76</sup>—but also that each moment of the process was valuable enough to legitimate the most adventurous comparisons. James Fergusson soon underlined how Layard’s discoveries in Assyria showed that “it was from this country that the Greeks got the Ionic form of their art, though it was from Egypt that they borrowed the Doric,” and he confessed “to believe, however, that [...] there is scarcely an idea or a detail in Grecian art that may not be traced to one of these sources.”<sup>77</sup> In another book, Fergusson

<sup>70</sup> Myers, *Remains of Lost Empires*, 131–132.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted by Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, 77.

<sup>72</sup> “Sans doute, cet art a été profondément modifié par leur génie, mais on ne peut, sans injustice, leur accorder l’honneur d’avoir imaginé le principe qui a eu l’antique Orient pour berceau.” See Flandin, “Voyage en Mésopotamie,” 78.

<sup>73</sup> About the influence of Shaftesbury on Winckelmann concerning the peculiarity of Greek culture, see Décultot, *Johann Joachim*, 143 and 165.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted by Blanc, “Winckelmann et l’invention de la Grèce,” 25–06.

<sup>75</sup> Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, 126–127.

<sup>77</sup> Fergusson, *An Historical Inquiry*, 278–279.

dedicated the final chapter to convince how Greek art “is derived from the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates,”<sup>78</sup> especially in the field of architecture, as the author suggests through his restorations of the Khorsabad palaces. Even Robert Smirke, the architect who designed a smooth Greek revival building for the new British Museum,<sup>79</sup> felt that Assyria announced Greek art.<sup>80</sup> The *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* explained in the same way that “Assyria may be regarded as the nation which, with Egypt, laid the foundation of that stupendous fabric of fabric of the earth’s civilization, which, progressively rising and accumulating under the intellect of ages, received, as it were, its next story in the era of Greece [...]”<sup>81</sup>

Layard himself changed his mind on Assyrian art<sup>82</sup> and finally wrote that “it has now taken its place amongst other styles of ancient art.”<sup>83</sup> For the opening of the Nineveh Court, a kind of a motley replica of an Assyrian building in Crystal Palace, near London in 1854, he was proud to mention in the guidebook “the sculptures [...] which were evidently the origin of some of the ornaments of classic Greece.”<sup>84</sup> In *Nineveh and its Remains*, he published a few drawings of reliefs from Lycia and from Xanthos to demonstrate how sculpture “is peculiarly Assyrian in its treatment,” and he insisted on the resemblance with images from low-reliefs and seals from Assyria (see Figs. 5, 6, 7 and 8).

If Layard conceded the genius of Greek sculptors, he paid attention to recall their artistic debt to Assyria.<sup>85</sup> No later than 1845, he attributed to Botta’s findings (and to his own) the same merits as the classical masterpieces:

To those who have been accustomed to look upon the Greeks as the true perfectors and the only masters of the imitative arts, they [Botta’s findings] will furnish new matter for inquiry and reflection [...] The extreme beauty and elegance of the various objects introduced on the groups are next to be admired... all designed with the most consummate taste, and rival the productions of the most cultivated period of Greek art.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Fergusson, *The Palaces Of Nineveh and Persepolis Restored*, 340.

<sup>79</sup> Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Russell, “Saga of the Nineveh Marbles,” 39.

<sup>81</sup> *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, cited by Malley, “Austen Henry Layard and the Periodical Press,” 159.

<sup>82</sup> Larsen, “Nineveh,” 125.

<sup>83</sup> Layard, *The Nineveh Court*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>85</sup> Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, 292–293.

<sup>86</sup> *The Times*, January 30, 1845, 6. Quoted by Larsen, “Nineveh,” 129.



Figure 5: “Sennacherib on his Throne before Lachish” (Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, London, John Murray, 1853, p. 150). From the Brigham Young University-Idaho, David O. McKay Library.

Figure 6: “Bas-relief from a monument from Xanthos. In the British Museum” (Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, London, John Murray, 1849, p. 293). With thanks to the Internet Archive, Microsoft, and the UCLA Library for this image.

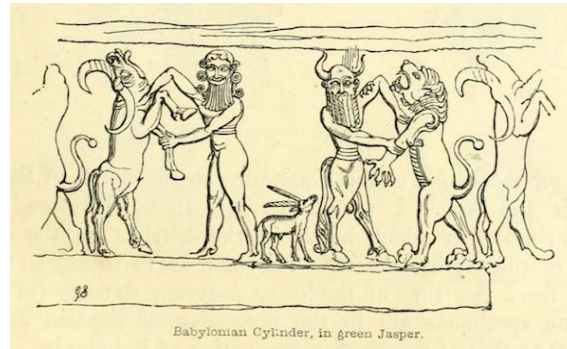
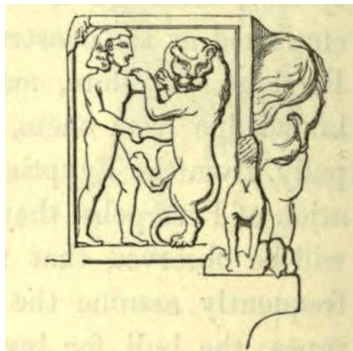


Figure 7: “Fragment of a Lycian Monument in the British Museum” (Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, London, John Murray, 1849, p. 292). With thanks to the Internet Archive, Microsoft, and the UCLA Library for this image.

Figure 8: “Babylonian Cylinder, in green Jasper” (Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, London, John Murray, 1853, p. 604). From the Brigham Young University-Idaho, David O. McKay Library.

Conclusions were somewhat identical in France, where Louis Viardot asserted that “Assyrian civilization had certainly had much more influence on Greeks” than on Egyptians,<sup>87</sup> in 1878, while Joachim Menant reported that some Assyrian slabs

<sup>87</sup> “Rivale en antiquité et en durée de celle des Egyptiens, la civilisation assyrienne a certainement exercé plus d’influence sur celle des Grecs et des Étrusques.” See Viardot, *Les merveilles de la sculpture*, 37.

from the British Museum “could be admired at all times.”<sup>88</sup> This was half a surprise: in 1857, Victor Langlois had already written not only that Greeks did nothing more than copy Assyrian style, but that they damaged and ruined such a delicate model.<sup>89</sup> The topic remained polemical during the 1880s, and Hellenists had still many arguments to sweep away orientalist aspirations,<sup>90</sup> but mindset changes were such that, after being used as a model to snipe at Nineveh value, the Greek key was quoted the other way round to claim the merit of Assyrian remains, as we can read in the *North American Review* in 1849 :

Parliament gave £50,000 to pay Lord Elgin for robbing the Parthenon, an enterprise in which his lordship incurred no risk but that of covering his own name with eternal opprobrium, for plundering what even the Goths and the Turks had spared; will it not give at least a quarter as much to unearth the precious remains of Assyria?<sup>91</sup>

It is quite significant that in Germany (Winckelmann's native land), Classics were at last challenged by exotic cultures and were no longer popular neither in the scholarly world nor in a *fin-de-siecle* ideology in search of new heroes.<sup>92</sup> Although Winckelmann was still a major reference (especially for archaeologists), the evolution of historical research required a rigorous method for which this kind of idealized classification had to be replaced by an enlarged vision of civilizations that broke with traditional philhellenism.<sup>93</sup>

This unexpected evolution involved museums practices as well. Krzysztof Pomian, who had actively studied the history of the first Western collections, noted that museums of the late eighteenth century were organized around a kind of so-called Winckelmanian Roman-Greek-Egyptian pole—which was already a break from Winckelmann's chief narrative scheme—and that these departments used to be completed by Near Eastern remains precisely in the nineteenth century.<sup>94</sup> In 1850, indeed, the British Museum had to distort the sequencing of classical sculptures when slabs from Nimrud and Nineveh were transferred to take place in the future Assyrian Transept.<sup>95</sup> And by the middle of the 1880s, the Department of Near Eastern Antiquities, in Paris, combined most of the Hellenic ceramics that had to be relocated in the Greek section forty years later with the recent discoveries from Assyria and Chaldea.<sup>96</sup>

Finally, it is quite amazing that Dante Gabriel Rossetti had himself registered this new way of understanding Antiquity in one of his most famous poems, *The Burdens of Nineveh* (1856), in which he mentioned the British Museum and its

<sup>88</sup> “Le lion blessé, la lionne mourante, sont des chefs-d'œuvre que la sculpture de toutes les époques pourrait envier”. See Menant, *Ninive et Babylone*, 127.

<sup>89</sup> Langlois, “L'art et l'archéologie,” 705.

<sup>90</sup> See Morris, *Classical Greece: ancient histories and modern archaeologies*, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Bowen, “Review of A.H. Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*,” 110–42. See Holloway, “*Nineveh Sails for the New World*,” 250.

<sup>92</sup> See Hauser, “Not Out of Babylon?” 215–17.

<sup>93</sup> See Stähli, “Vom Ende der Klassischen Archäologie,” 149–153 and 162–64.

<sup>94</sup> Pomian, “Les deux pôles de la curiosité antiquaire,” 63 and 67.

<sup>95</sup> See also Caygill and Date, *Building the British Museum*, 44.

<sup>96</sup> Parrot, *Le Département des Antiquités orientales*, 11.

new display, where precisely "Greece, Egypt, Rome" had to house "an unknown God from Nineveh." And the poet concluded, as a tribute to these Assyrian remains that Winckelmann's legacy had almost buried a second time:

All relics here together.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> About the impact of Assyrian discoveries on poetry, see Stauffer, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Burdens of Nineveh," 369–394.



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# JOLCEL

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## CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

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## NOTE

This contribution is the response piece to a larger dialogue of three articles that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are “‘Two Styles More Opposed’: Harriet Hosmer’s Classicisms between Winckelmann and Bernini” by Melissa L. Gustin (pp. 1–31), “The Future of Winckelmann’s Classical Form: Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton” by Elizabeth Prettejohn (pp. 33–56), and “Winckelmann in Nineveh: Assyrian Remains at the Age of Classics” by Yannick Le Pape (pp. 58–78).

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# Bodily Exclusions? Winckelmann's Victims and the Paradox of Form

ROSA M. RODRÍGUEZ PORTO

*Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*

“Winckelmann’s text acquires much of its present-day resonance from traumatic re-definitions of ideological formations of the self and ideal self-images that historically postdate Winckelmann, but which nevertheless cannot now but inform our reading of his work.”<sup>1</sup>

For a medievalist like me, siding with Winckelmann’s victims should come by default, since his vindication of a normative (and therefore excluding) Greek ideal only accentuated the perceived anti-classical (and therefore excluded) nature of medieval art, already sanctioned by the alternative foundational text for Art History, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* written by Vasari two centuries before. In the last decades, we art historians have also become much more aware of other questionable aspects of his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764). The “traumatic redefinitions of the self and ideal self-images” of our own age have forced us indeed to confront the essentialist and racial conceptions that lay at the core of our discipline and that turn his influential notion of style—based on the “intimate and organic link between a people and its art” and, thus, biologically transmissible—into a problematic legacy.<sup>2</sup>

And yet...

Every time we go back to Winckelmann there is something else that seems to undo the apparently simplistic divide created between the “us” addressed in his works (the Germans who should emerge as the true heirs of the Greeks), and the “others” he implicitly or explicitly leaves out. In this regard, it should be reminded that the very notion of style, as Carlo Ginzburg has masterfully argued, has served as “a means of delimiting, demarcating, and cutting out: as a weapon,” but also had “a role in the acceptance of cultural diversity,” an idea I will go back to several

<sup>1</sup> Potts, *Flesh and Ideal*, 222.

<sup>2</sup> Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions*, 32; Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes*, 118–23.



times in this response piece.<sup>3</sup> However, scholars such as Alex Potts and Georges Didi-Huberman have emphasized to what extent paradoxes are constitutive of Winckelmann's work, engrained in the unresolved tension between his normative—eternal—ideal of beauty that gives a systematic quality to his enterprise, and the task of creating a *history* able to convey the emergence and ultimate decadence of this same ideal.<sup>4</sup>

The cluster of papers gathered in this issue of *JOLCEL* not only attests to the enduring resonance of Winckelmann's doctrinal corpus well beyond the Neo-classical era, but also challenges reductionist views of its impact in nineteenth-century art by underscoring—once more—the many paradoxes of its reception. As Elizabeth Prettejohn asserts in her essay, “it was not inevitable, or somehow pre-programmed, that Winckelmann's account of classical form should continue to generate powerful aesthetic ideas in the generations after neoclassicism, and through to modernism.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, part of the enduring appeal of his works had to do with the fact that he was addressing the artists of his time, providing them with the most rigorous examination to that date of the materials and techniques of ancient sculpture and, most important, of the nude as the quintessence of Greek art and the main artistic problem for whoever attempting to “imitate the Ancients.”<sup>6</sup> The male naked body, understood as an almost dematerialized form, is at the core of Winckelmann's thinking, and this circumstance may explain both its potential for enticing artistic response and its conceptual limitations for art historical practice, as we will see.

In all three essays we are presented with an apparent exclusion in the name of the classical norm (of Assyrian art, of Baroque emotionalism, of modern art) that, nonetheless, allows at the same time for an alternative narrative and a more inclusive reformulation of the imperative Winckelmann had expressed in his earlier *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755). Thus, Yannick Le Pape's article traces the ambiguous consideration of Assyrian art in mid-nineteenth century France and Great Britain in the wake of the discovery of the great remains of Nineveh, Nimrud and Khorsabad. At the same time regarded as “inferior to the most secondary works of Greece” even by archaeologists of the Near East such as Austen Henry Layard, Assyrian art was able nonetheless to assure its place in the “chain of art” leading to the ‘Greek Revolution,’ and indeed to be displayed in the British Museum in close proximity to the Elgin marbles, as a sort of forebear.<sup>7</sup> Albeit controversial, this arrangement of the museum collections—paralleled by a similar curatorial decision in the Louvre—was inspired by Winckelmann's diachronic narrative of the development of style and paved the way for the re-assessment of the early achievements of Greek art vis-a-vis Assyrian and Persian art, as Le Pape argues. In this respect, it may be

<sup>3</sup> Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes*, 110.

<sup>4</sup> “The art history that Winckelmann advocates oscillates ceaselessly between essence and becoming. In it the historical past is invented as much as it is discovered.” See Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Prettejohn, “Future,” 38.

<sup>6</sup> Borbein, “L'*Histoire de l'art*.” Both in Dresden and Rome, Winckelmann had close contact with artists, and the *Geschichte* was dedicated to his friend, the painter Anton Raphael Mengs.

<sup>7</sup> Le Pape, “Winckelmann in Nineveh,” 66.

mentioned here that the comparison between Persian and Greek archaic sculpture—among other non-classical examples, including Indian and medieval art—had somehow prompted a reflection on the aesthetic values of the archaic among one staunch supporter of the “pure ideal of beauty” advocated by Winckelmann. In his *Lectures on Sculpture*, published posthumously in 1829, John Flaxman had dismissed Persian sculpture as lacking “in science, or imitation, [or anything] particularly favourable to our pursuit of excellence,” although acknowledged its value as “a most venerable monument of ancient history and learning.”<sup>8</sup> Unexpectedly, this understanding of art history as a learning process and, accordingly, as a narrative of the “progress of the human mind”, also allowed for his definition of *style* as “a well-known quality that originates in the birth of the art itself,” and is even present in the art of the “ignorant savage” or in the “humble labour of the mere workman.”<sup>9</sup>

Flaxman seems to have been less appreciative, however, of the art of Bernini, whom he includes among those who contributed to the “debasement” of art in the seventeenth century. In that particular matter, he was a faithful follower of Winckelmann, who had criticised Bernini’s attempt “to ennoble forms taken from lowest nature by exaggeration,” to the point that “his figures [were] like common people who [had] suddenly met with good fortune.”<sup>10</sup> As the antithesis of the “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur,” Berninian excess was execrated in the name of good taste and social distinction both in Europe and America, where Winckelmann’s work became influential from the 1850s after Giles Henry Lodge had published an abridged translation. This is the context in which Melissa Gustin sets her portrait of the sculptor Harriet Hosmer, where she analyses how the American artist affirmed her technical prowess and aesthetic authority in the competitive Roman milieu precisely by reclaiming two subjects from Bernini—Daphne and Medusa—and refashioning them “through the application of Winckelmannian precepts.”<sup>11</sup> Her careful choice of a limited set of expressive resources would have invited comparison to Bernini’s sculptures but also the identification of allusive references to the Ovidian myths as well as archaeological quotations, certainly narrowing the intended audience of these works to a selected group of educated viewers. However, by doing so, Hosmer would have created new embodiments of the female sublime Winckelmann had theorised in his approach to the Niobe statue in the Uffizi: in contrast to the extreme anguish and distress of the women sculpted by Bernini, these are no longer victims but self-possessed characters whose nobility emerges in their ultimate restraint. In this regard, the emptying of facial expression operated in the *Daphne* and the *Medusa* would have been counterbalanced by the subtle modulation in the disposition of heads and torsos, in a striking example of formal distillation. Reduced to pure form, the human body becomes an emptied

<sup>8</sup> Persepolis was only known then thanks to the *Voyages De Corneille Le Bruyn Par La Moscovie, En Perse, Et Aux Indes Orientales* (1725). See Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture*, 233. Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes*, 120–3.

<sup>10</sup> Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 193. For further commentary, see Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 159.

<sup>11</sup> Gustin, “Two Styles More Opposed,” 24.

cipher, as described by Potts, paradoxically incorporeal.<sup>12</sup> Yet, again, the opposition between Bernini and Hosmer lessens when we go deeper and forget about “Winckelmannian precepts.” The creations of the Baroque genius and the American prodigy were as far apart—or as close—as the *Niobe* and the *Laocoön*, whose bodies, either in shocking stillness or painful contortion, were understood as manifestation of their inner self. Despite Winckelmann’s attempt to turn these alternative expressive modes into incompatible artistic languages articulated in his narrative of stylistic evolution, ancient rhetorical theory and artistic practice allowed for both.<sup>13</sup>

That classicism could be regarded as an “international, cosmopolitan language of form,” in Gustin’s words, is further analysed by Prettejohn, who not only illuminates Frederic Leighton’s career and his profound engagement with Winckelmann’s work, but also vindicates nineteenth-century classicism as an unexpected path to modern art and formal experimentation, weaving a “genealogical, not teleological” narrative in which the classical form, instead of being discarded after the Neoclassical era, “generates a sequence of new possibilities in subsequent generations.”<sup>14</sup> The pursuit of the “genuine antique” may have not led Leighton in the direction he followed if it were not for Pater and his influential essay on Winckelmann, where the critic emphasizes the key role of the “human form”—that is, of the naked body conceived as an abstract and, at the same time, concrete receptacle for meaning—in classical art. As Prettejohn suggests, it was this fixation with the nude what made Greek sculpture so challenging and stimulating for Victorian artists and so uncomfortable for some of their contemporaries. The confrontation with the human body, devoid of any trappings, allowed for a demanding exploration into the ultimate limits and intimate relation between form and content. In this light, to “imitate the Ancients” was to be interpreted in a more inclusive way, oriented towards formalism and depurated expressive means instead of the servile imitation of Greek and Roman models we tend to associate with academicism. In this regard, Prettejohn and Gustin’s dialogue contributes to a re-evaluation of classicism as a progressive artistic current in nineteenth-century art. But where Hosmer had opted for a severe and de-sensualized approach to the female body, Leighton was to invest himself into the material and sensory rediscovery of line and colour afforded by painting. What would have brought them closer, though, was their renewed interest on the readability of the human body beyond facial countenance and the attention paid to the contour as the element *delineating* “the general character of the subject” (Pater’s re-framing of Winckelmannian’s text).<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, in his perceptive reading—as passionate and captivating as the prose of the German antiquarian itself—Pater did not refrain from disclosing those aspects Winckelmann had neglected. Discussing Winckelmann’s beauty ideal and its limitations, he argues that “[l]iving in a world of exquisite but abstract and colourless form, [Winckelmann] could hardly have conceived of the subtle and

<sup>12</sup> Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 165–73.

<sup>13</sup> Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 82–4 and 96–102.

<sup>14</sup> Prettejohn, “Future,” 38.

<sup>15</sup> Pater, “Winckelmann,” 172.

penetrative, yet somewhat grotesque art of the modern world." But what sparks his criticism is Winckelmann's failure to notice the anticipation of this "romantic temper" that was present "within the limits of the Greek ideal itself."<sup>16</sup> In another passage he also seems acutely aware of the misleading divides imposed by the kind of master historical narrative Winckelmann had contributed to create. Although long, it deserves to be quoted in length:

The history of art has suffered as much as any history by trenchant and absolute divisions. Pagan and Christian art are sometimes harshly opposed, and the Renaissance is represented as a fashion which set in at a definite period. That is the superficial view: the deeper view is that which preserves the identity of European culture. The two are really continuous; and there is a sense in which it may be said that the Renaissance was an uninterrupted effort of the middle age, that it was ever taking place.<sup>17</sup>

This assertion attests to the discerning and comprehensive understanding of the classical tradition that Pater had, rightly emphasized by Prettejohn, which he presents as coterminous with the European culture. His view seems to anticipate the idea formulated in 1948 by Ernst Howald, who saw the recurrent rebirth of the classical as a sort of "rhythmical form" of European cultural history, a view more recently embraced and re-articulated by Salvatore Settis in his extraordinary *The Future of the Classical*.<sup>18</sup> However, despite all his sensitivity and sharpness, Pater was blind to other problems posed by Winckelmann's works that have become urgent today, a circumstance that brings me back to the beginning of this response piece.

If, as Quatremère de Quincy eloquently described, Winckelmann "succeeded in creating a body out of what had been a pile of debris," it is time to question this central place of the represented *body* in his historical and theoretical construction, and its consequences.<sup>19</sup> As has long been acknowledged, the *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* elevated the human body as the primal subject of art history, to the extent that "the entire development of art—its aesthetic, social and intellectual rise and fall—has been measured against the ultimate perfection of the body's naturalistic representation," according to Milette Graifman and Verity Platt.<sup>20</sup> But this was done at the price of perpetuating the divide between matter and form already present in Winckelmann's work. As a result, instead of reviving the art of the Ancients, traditional art history has tended to de-animate Greek sculpture and artworks, isolating them from their ritual or cultural context and paying scarce attention to any dynamic physical interaction between artefacts and beholders.

It might be objected that without this understanding of the human body as pure form we would not have had much of later European art. Western classicisms throughout the ages have been predicated upon what Michael Squire has called

<sup>16</sup> Pater, "Winckelmann," 178.

<sup>17</sup> Pater, "Winckelmann," 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Contra* canonical historiographical narratives, such as Erwin Panofsky's *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (1960).

<sup>19</sup> Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image*, 3–4. Vasari's work is also invested in corporal metaphors, as emphasized by Squire, *The Art of the Body*, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Graifmann and Platt, "From Grecian Urn," 409.

the “Graeco-Roman art of the body” with its all-pervasive conventions for the naturalistic representation of the human figure... that are far from natural but rather culturally mediated.<sup>21</sup> As he argues, the Greek body ideal is still with us, in the images around us and in our imagination, and that unsettles the distinction between past and present, creating a deluding perception of continuity on the one hand, and allowing for the projection of our own concerns and concepts back on past creations, on the other. But when we look at ourselves in the mirror of Greek and Roman art, what do we get back? Walter Pater would have answered that we are confronted with “the perfect animal nature of the Greeks” and “the standard of taste,” an assertion that Winckelmann would have approved and that still finds support today among those who consider the classical tradition as the foundation for “the West,” according other cultures a merely subaltern position.<sup>22</sup> Leaving aside extreme formulations of this idea—Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* (1938) as a paradigmatic and terribly persuasive example—it is not difficult to see what becomes excluded, naturalizing exclusion itself, by these normative bodies and their marble whiteness.

And yet...

If we think of the study of the classical tradition along the lines suggested by Settis—developing an idea put forward by Claude Lévi-Strauss—as a form of anthropology or a defamiliarization technique applied not only to “our” culture (in the course of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and each “resurrection” of the classical) but to any culture, perhaps we can re-engage with Greek art, Winckelmann, and the history of art historical practice in a more inclusive way.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, we can follow the lead of contemporary artists such as Marc Quinn or Yinka Shonibare, who have problematized this “Graeco-Roman art of the body” by denaturalising some of their conventions. While Quinn has resorted to the monumentality and countenance of classical sculpture to visualize and dignify disability in his work *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (fig. 1), made for the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square in London, Shonibare has recently produced a series of four images of Medusa, taking Caravaggio’s famous painting as inspiration. In order to warn about the new punishment of the gods that awaits humanity—climate change—the character is portrayed here by women of different races, even if all display a tangle of snake hair made from “African” textiles, itself a token of hybridity and of the entangled histories of Europe, Africa and Asia.<sup>24</sup>

Both Quinn and Shonibare’s work prove that the classical tradition can be a source of formal and conceptual stimulus, but also a legacy that demands critical detachment from artists and viewers. It is not an easy effort since, as Squire insists, “we are married to antiquity—for better *and* for worse”.<sup>25</sup> This two-sided reception brings the echo of Ginzburg’s ambivalent definition of “style” I started with. As he

<sup>21</sup> Squire, *The Art of the Body*, 53–62.

<sup>22</sup> Pater, “Winckelmann,” 165.

<sup>23</sup> Settis, *The Future of the Classical*, 100–11.

<sup>24</sup> The colourful textiles we identify as “African” were manufactured in Europe in the eighteenth century to be sold in Asia, as a cheaper version of the Indonesian batik, and only when they were rejected there began to be sold in African markets. Today they are still produced in the UK and The Netherlands.

<sup>25</sup> Squire, *The Art of the Body*, 24.

explains, this notion was initially conceived in ahistorical terms in the realm of Roman rhetoric to refer to the different ways in which individual authors were able to pursue artistic excellence. It was later in time, and with the advent of Christianity, that it began to be used in a historical and relational way. These two positions, although mutually incompatible, are indispensable, as Ginzburg reminds. With its tensions, incoherencies, and biases, Winckelmann himself provides us with an intellectual project that attempted to reconcile these two approaches. It is our turn now to scrutinize his legacy, not only as a normative corpus entangled in subsequent readings, but also as a historical and culturally situated enterprise, whose “otherness” we should excavate behind the myths Winckelmann created and recreated for us.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 1: Marc Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2005, marble, 3,5 metres, Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London.

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<sup>26</sup> On the Winckelmannian myth, see Décultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*, 1–6.

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