

August von Platen's Sonnet *To Winckelmann*. A Historical and Literary Reflection

DARIA SANTINI

I

The present essay's literary stance and the idea of a 'private' Winckelmann are not mutually exclusive, as most writings about the man and his work entail assessments of his personality as well as reactions to the circumstances of his death.

This also applies to Platen's sonnet *To Winckelmann*. The poem, a celebration of Winckelmann's supposed paganism and the pretext for an anticlerical polemic, may be read at first as a rather impersonal homage to the person in the title. Yet its impact goes well beyond the significance of the pagan theme and its secular perspective. There are also other, more far-reaching, reasons to revisit this particular sonnet. Above all, the poem constitutes an important link between an early phase of the reception of Winckelmann's life and work – exemplified mainly by Goethe's essay *Winckelmann and His Age* (1805) – and his literary celebration from around the second half of the nineteenth century until the so-called Winckelmann-Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s.

Before discussing Platen's sonnet within the context of similar works, it will be useful to mention briefly two aspects that will clarify not only this poem in particular, but also most subsequent literary meditations on Winckelmann and his works. They are: the contradiction between the scholar's symbolic role as the father of neoclassicism and the obscure circumstances of his death on the one

hand and, on the other, the recurring metaphor of the marble that comes alive in his prose and thus a view of Winckelmann as a modern Pygmalion.

As for the first point – the contrast between the idealisation of the man and his violent death – interpretations are divided. Some writers choose to ignore or to undermine the significance of that end (such as Platen, who does not mention it, or Goethe, who reads it as the good fortune of those who die young), whereas others (i.e. most authors from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards) romanticise Winckelmann's death and abstract it from the indignity of the murder.

The motif of the scholar's demise is important, since from the very beginning the shock caused by that tragic event – which was immense, as many contemporary accounts testify – went hand in hand with an attempt to reconcile its irrational nature with Winckelmann's classicism. It is no coincidence that Manfred Fuhrmann talked of a 'Winckelmann Panegyrik' when defining the man's mythical role as a German national hero and as the supreme representative both of his country's culture (according to the 'high' sense of the word 'Bildung') and social mobility (given his humble origins)¹. In many ways, rehabilitating Winckelmann also meant safeguarding the authority of the humanistic – and for many nationalistic – project embodied by his life and works.

The metaphor of the animated marble is also connected to the question of a classical project in the modern world. The motif had been a recurring literary trope since the second half of the eighteenth century, and Winckelmann himself, in his famous description of the Apollo Belvedere, referred to Pygmalion in order to suggest the extraordinary vitality of the ancient statue:

In gazing upon this masterpiece of art, I forget all else, and I myself adopt an elevated stance in order to be worthy of gazing upon it. My chest seems to expand with veneration and to heave like those I have seen swollen as if by the spirit of prophecy, and I feel myself transported to Delos and to the Lycian groves, places Apollo honoured with his presence – for my figure seems to take on life and movement, like Pygmalion's beauty. How is it possible to paint and describe it!²

It is also important to remember that the theme of Winckelmann's ability to animate marble plays a central role in most literary appraisals of his work. Platen is a typical example of this, as is Herder, who many years earlier, in his *Monument to Johann Winckelmann* (1778), had written that the scholar instilled in the «dead marble which came to life» in his breast «the ideals of heroism, beauty and love»³. Others employed similar imagery throughout the following century and

1 See M. Fuhrmann, "Winckelmann, ein deutsches Symbol", in: id., *Brechungen. Wirkungsgeschichtliche Studien zur antik-europäischen Bildungstradition*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1982, pp. 150-152.

2 J. J. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, ed. by A. Pott, trans. by H. F. Mallgrave, Los Angeles, Getty, 2006, p. 334.

3 J. G. Herder, *Denkmal Johann Winckelmanns. Eine ungekrönte Preisschrift aus dem Jahr 1778*, in: id., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by B. Suphan, vol. 8, p. 31.

beyond. One could think of the author of a biographical novel about Winckelmann published in 1861, Alexander von Ungern-Sternberg, who recounted a fictional incident set in the residence of Count Bünau, where Winckelmann admires a statue of young Mars which comes to life and purports to be the Count's nephew. Max Kommerell, too, in his poem *Winckelmann in Triest* (1929), portrayed Winckelmann as someone who learned through his senses, forming with his hands «the hips and head of the god»⁴, who was also a beloved youth.

There are many other examples of this. Moreover, the motif of a Winckelmann-Pygmalion forming and animating dead matter conceals a homoerotic component, of which Platen was well aware, although he did not address it openly in the sonnet.

It is also interesting to note that the theme of the vitality of sculpture links Winckelmann and Platen in more than one sense. A frequent criticism of Platen's poetry is that his verses are «as cold as marble»⁵. On the other hand, for instance, a champion of his work such as Richard Dove observed a positive turn in Platen's *oeuvre* when the colourful language of the early work paved the way for a style of writing for which «plastic art had become the prime guiding principle»⁶.

On this subject, it would appear that the most significant feature of the Pygmalion-motif in Platen's poem is not so much the one secretly connected to homoerotic love, but rather the one highlighting the pivotal role played by sculpture – by plastic – in German classical aesthetics. This point is closely linked to the question of Winckelmann's role in our time, for it concerns the idea of the search for a classical legacy that is 'alive' and relevant in the modern world.

II

To Winckelmann

If I escaped the hypocrisy of the bigots,
For this you have my gratitude:
Your spirit found what time cannot design
Yet found it not in books of piety.

For you a divine light would glow
In heathen works, which lavishly reflect it;
For what is ever perfect is divine,
And Christ himself bade us to be perfect.

4 M. Kommerell, *Winckelmann in Triest*, in: id., *Gedichte, Gespräche, Übertragungen*, Olten-Freiburg i.B., Walter-Verlag, 1973, p. 48.

5 E. Stemplinger, *Der Münchner Kreis: Platen, Curtius, Geibel, Strachwitz*, Leipzig, Reclam, 1933, p. 29, but see also P.H. Bumm, *August Graf von Platen. Eine Biographie*, Paderborn-München, Schöningh, 1990, p. 390.

6 R. Dove, *The 'Individualität' of August von Platen. Subjectivity and Solipsism at the Close of the 'Kunstperiode'*, Frankfurt a.M.-Bern, Peter Lang, 1983, p. 169.

Gladly indeed would certain sable frocks
Ensnare the spirit that wants to break free,
Or number us among the hircine flocks.

Yet cease the heathen to bewail! For those
Who can breathe life into marble blocks
Tower above our litanies⁷.

To Winckelmann was most probably written in March 1826, when Platen, still at Erlangen, was beginning to plan the journey that would lead him to Rome after the summer of the same year. His *Venetian Sonnets*, the major product of his stay in Venice two years previously, had been published in 1825. Thanks to the expressive spontaneity of these compositions and the rich variety of their content, the volume marked the pinnacle of Platen's career as a poet. Although he had initially felt that the enforced brevity of the sonnet form was uncongenial to him, Schlegel's translations of Calderon de la Barca, as well as the sonnets of Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Goethe lead him to embrace the genre. In his later work – as in the poem dedicated to Schelling and in the one to Winckelmann – Platen often used the sonnet to express his own aesthetic and religious views.

The year 1826 had begun well, with «fortunate auspices»⁸, as Platen wrote in his diary on 3 January, while working on a tragedy about Tristan and Isolde through which he hoped to strike a «more elevated tone»⁹ than he had in his other plays. On 9 March he was still optimistic, inspired by the imminence of spring and by a new romantic infatuation.

At this time, as well as researching ancient Greek drama, the poet was also interested in art. He was reading the *History of Graphic Arts* (1798-1808) by the German painter and art historian Johann Dominicus Fiorillo and enjoying Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity*. Of his own work, Platen noted that he was writing sonnets; *To Winckelmann* is likely to have been one of them.

Several critics read the poem as a sort of programmatic statement of Platen's own classicism and anticlerical sentiment, two aspects that prove his closeness to Winckelmann at the time. A letter posted from Rome and dated 2 December 1826 confirms this: the poet, hoping for his publisher's financial support, wrote

7 «Wenn ich der Frömmeler Gaukelein entkommen, / So sei der Dank dafür an dich gewendet: / Wohl fand dein Geist, was nie beginnt noch endet, / Doch fand er's nicht im Predigtbuch der Frommen. // Dir ist das Licht des Göttlichen entglommen / Im Werk der Heiden, die es reich gespendet; / Denn himmlisch ist, was immer ist vollendet, / Und Christus selbst gebietet: Seid vollkommen! // Zwar möchten gern gewisse schwarze Röcke / Den Geist verwickeln, der sich will befreien, / Wo nicht, uns stellen in die Zahl der Böcke. // Doch laßt nur ab, die Heiden zu beschreien! / Wer Seelen hauchen kann in Marmorblöcke, / Der ist erhaben über Litaneien.» My version of the sonnet is partly based on the one published in August von Platen-Hallermünde, *The Sonnets*, trans. by R. Bancroft Cooke, Boston, Richard G. Badger, 1923, p. 35.

8 «Glückliche Auspizien», G. von Laubmann-L. von Scheffler (Eds.), *Die Tagebücher des Grafen August von Platen*, vol. 2, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1990, p. 789.

9 «Einen weit höheren Ton», *ibid.*

jokingly to a friend that, without money, he might have to become a Catholic like Winckelmann.

Winckelmann's name does not seem to appear anywhere else in Platen's work or autobiographical writings, yet it is almost certain that he had long been familiar with his work. An example of this is an unfinished composition written in 1818 and mainly inspired by Platen's interest in Calderon de la Barca. It consists of two ten-line stanzas of rhymed trochaic tetrameter (the meter usually adopted by Calderon). The poem opens with a comment on Platen's favourite classical statues, which clearly reveals his knowledge of Winckelmann's writings. Quoted below are the first seven lines:

More highly than Venus Cytherea
I rate, although I am mocked,
The beautiful Antinous
And the god of Belvedere;
For him I would build altars
Yet to me he is faithful and real
Alive and animated¹⁰.

Noteworthy in these lines is the reference to Winckelmann through the mention of the three classical sculptures that play a preeminent role in his *History of the Art of Antiquity*: the Medici Venus, the Apollo Belvedere and the Belvedere Antinous. Moreover, in this fragment Platen established a subtle connection between Winckelmann's work and the motif of masculine desire. This is confirmed by the fact that further on in the same poem Platen compared the statue of Apollo to Adrastus, a name he usually identified with one of his lovers. Another significant detail concerns the link between the Apollo Belvedere and the image of the statue that comes to life, which is almost certainly a reference to Winckelmann's masculine reading of the Pygmalion myth.

As for the later sonnet, it is first of all useful to remember an earlier point about the sculptural quality of Platen's mature work. *To Winckelmann* is a good example of his structural mastery. Once he managed to overcome the limitations imposed by the sonnet form, the poet took full advantage of its brevity, reining in his youthful enthusiasm and acquiring instead a more serious tone, better attuned to the expression of his artistic and religious convictions. Whereas the fragmentary poem written in 1818 was mainly a celebration of classical (masculine) beauty, *To Winckelmann* considered the question of the relationship between art and religion and the poet's attitude towards the classical past.

In this sonnet, as was so often the case in Platen's work, the poet's use of punctuation and rhetorical figures gives a clear indication of his polemical and didac-

¹⁰ «Mehr als Medicis Cythere / Gilt, wer immer auch mich höhne, / Mir Antinous der Schöne / Und der Gott von Belvedere; Bauen würde ich ihm Altäre; / Doch er stellt sich treu und wahr / Leben und belebt mir dar.», Quoted in W. Adam, *Sehnsuchts-Bilder: antike Statuen und Monumente in Platens Lyrik*, in: "Euphorion", n. 80, 1986, p. 365.

tic aim, as colons, exclamation marks and repetitions emphasise the urgency of his message. Metrically and rhythmically, on the other hand, the text presents no irregularities, for it is written in iambic pentameter and is easily contained within the interlocking tercets. It is almost as if the poem's formal rigour helped to restrain the subversive nature of its content.

A significant theme in this sonnet concerns the sense of a special affinity between the poet and his subject. As Goethe had done before him, Platen praised Winckelmann the man rather than the scholar. The poet's closeness to his dedicatee is asserted in the opening line, in which Winckelmann is addressed directly. The most frequently recurring pronouns in the poem are therefore in the second person singular («you», «your spirit», «For you»). These are mirrored, in the final tercet, by the second person plural in the poet's call against the hypocrites («Yet cease the heathen to bewail!»), which reiterates his connection with Winckelmann in the battle against a common enemy. The affinity between the poet and his subject is further confirmed by the 'us' in the eleventh line. Platen's and Winckelmann's enemies are the clergy, the representatives of the official church. The metonymy «sable frocks» alludes to the followers of Christianity whom Jesus himself, in the Gospel of Matthew, calls «the goats» as opposed to «the sheep»¹¹. The latter symbolise the true believers, those who behave according to Christian principles and eschew the dogmatic and judgemental demeanour of the moralists (the German expression «schwarze Röcke», whose literal translation is «black frocks», is a reference to the term «Schwarzrock», used to describe priests and, in this case, bigots).

As a defence against such bigotry, two terms are repeated with significant symmetry within the poem: «spirit» in the first quatrain and in the first tercet, and «heathen» in the second quatrain and in second tercet. Both nouns appear to denote Winckelmann's (and Platen's) autonomy in relation to the restrictive moral codes of the Catholic Church. An illustration of this is the connection, in the third line, between the word «spirit» referred to Winckelmann and a drive towards infinity («what time cannot design») which, in the noun's repetition in the tenth verse, is threatened by the bigots' constraints. As for the first mention of the word, it is more than likely that Platen remembered a passage from Goethe's 1805 essay, in which the latter ascribed to Winckelmann «a pagan spirit»¹² as well as an idea of the work of art as divine, the expression of «a present which comprises past and future»¹³.

11 See Matthew 25:32: «And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats».

12 J. W. von Goethe, *Winckelmann and His Age*, in: *The Collected Works*, vol. 3: *Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by J. Gearey, trans. by E. von Nardroff and E. H. von Nardroff, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 102.

13 Ivi, p. 104.

Platen followed Goethe in considering Winckelmann a 'pagan'. The term «heathen» appears twice in the sonnet and is employed according to two different meanings of the word: on the one hand in the historical and religious sense, as implied by Christ who, according to Matthew, used it to define those who are able to live as good Christians outside the church. On the other hand, in the twelfth line, the word is used in a wider sense, which refers to people who take pleasure in life and beauty. Winckelmann and Platen, associated by the 'us' mentioned at the end of the first tercet, clearly belong to the latter group.

An exclamation occurs towards the end of the first line of the second tercet, when the poet calls upon the clergy to stop condemning the heathens. The vehemence of his appeal is effective in preparing the reader for the poem's central message: the superior value of those who, like Pygmalion, can breathe life into dead matter. Here, the reference to Winckelmann's ability to animate works of art through the power of language could be read, at the same time, as an indirect allusion to Platen's own poetic skill.

Summarising, one might assert once again that the poem's main themes are the celebration of paganism and the question of the enduring vitality of the classical tradition. The same motifs formed the core of Goethe's 1805 essay, and they both recur, more or less consistently, in all literary portraits of Winckelmann for decades to come. Following Goethe, who had vowed to portray the great scholar «as a man»¹⁴ and saw him as the epitome of the free, heathen spirit in contrast with religious orthodoxy («his Protestant baptism had not been able to turn him into a true Christian»)¹⁵, Platen emphasised Winckelmann's ability to shape and revive the world around him. In Goethe's *Winckelmann and His Age* we read that the scholar «saw his ideas embodied in the sculptures around him»¹⁶, and that everything he wrote was «alive and meant for the living, not for worshippers of the written word»¹⁷. Platen, too, asserted the importance of Winckelmann's paganism as a quality closely connected not only to his vitality, but also to his gift of evoking the plastic nature of sculpture through his prose.

14 «Als Menschen». Goethe's letter to August Friedrich Wolf, 25 February 1805. In: J. W. von Goethe, *Briefe*, Hamburger Ausgabe, ed. by K. R. Mandelkow, vol. 2, 1786-1805, München, DTV, 1988, p. 474.

15 «[...] dass ihn, als einen gründlich geborenen Heide, die protestantische Taufe zum Christen einzuweihen nicht vermögend gewesen sei», J. W. von Goethe, *Winckelmann and His Age*, cit., p. 105.

16 «Verkörperst stehn seine Ideen um ihn her», *ivi*, p. 107.

17 «Und so ist alles, was er uns hinterlassen, als ein Lebendiges für die Lebendigen, nicht für die im Buchstaben Toten geschrieben», *ivi*, p. 114.

On the subject of his celebration of Winckelmann as a heathen, it is relevant to point out that Platen did not equate paganism with Graecophilia. Despite his use of Greek poetic forms, his frequent references to Greek myths and authors, and despite the fact that his anticlericalism often coincided with philhellenic sentiments (as when, in 1814, reading August Wilhelm Schlegel's poem *The Alliance of the Church with the Arts*, he expressed indignation at the latter's comparison between «Apollo's temple» and «the dark arches of a Gothic church»)¹⁸, Platen deplored the mere imitation of Greek models. Throughout a long essay written in 1825 and entitled *Theatre as a National Institution*, for example, he maintained that modern authors should not emulate the Greeks, but rather find inspiration within their own culture and tradition. From this perspective, it becomes apparent that his admiration for Winckelmann stemmed not so much from a particular attachment to the classical world, but rather from an appreciation of the scholar's unique ability to rediscover and embody the vitality of the ancient ideals for his own time.

The poet's perception of Winckelmann can also be read in the context of his acquaintance with the archaeologist Eduard Gerhard, the man to whom we owe one of the most authoritative endorsements of Winckelmann's legacy, and – to quote historian Katherine Harloe – one of the most influential promotions of the «Winckelmann cult»¹⁹ in the nineteenth century. Platen is likely to have met him in Rome where, in 1829, Gerhard founded the *Institute of Archaeological Correspondence* (the future *German Archaeological Institute*). Eduard Gerhard was also responsible for establishing a renowned publication series on classical archaeology dedicated to Winckelmann and published by the *Archaeological Society* in Berlin since 1842. In a famous speech held in Berlin at the Winckelmann celebrations the previous year, Gerhard argued that the principal merits of the «great man»²⁰ were to have enriched the German language, to have been the founder of a discipline and, above all, a «paradigm of an inexorably striving German nature»²¹. In his eyes, Winckelmann's influence extended well beyond the sphere of his scholarly achievements. Similarly, Gerhard's friendship with Platen in the 1820s was

18 «Welches Gemeinsame kann man zwischen dem Tempel Apolls und den düsteren Bögen einer gotischen Kirche finden?», quoted in: P. H. Bumm, *August Graf von Platen. Eine Biografie*, Paderborn-München, Schöningh, 1990, p. 70.

19 K. Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity. History and Aesthetics in the Age of 'Altertumswissenschaft'*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 14.

20 Eduard Gerhard, *Festgedanken an Winckelmann*, Berlin, Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1841, p. 3.

21 Ivi, p. 4 (the English translation is quoted from Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, p. 8).

based on a mutual passion for poetry and on a boundless admiration for Winckelmann, rather than on an academic interest in art and archaeology²².

In Platen's case, it is worth remembering that his interest in Winckelmann must have also been marked by the sense of an affinity on a personal level, for they had two important biographical traits in common: they were both homosexuals and they both left Germany for Italy.

Platen's understanding of Winckelmann as the embodiment of a pagan sentiment that touches chords deep within our human nature defined the reception of the scholar's life and work for decades to come. In this respect, the ideas expressed by Platen in his sonnet coincide for example with Nietzsche's thoughts on the subject. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche recognised Winckelmann as the precursor of Goethe's and Schiller's «noblest struggle for self-cultivation»²³ that had characterised their discovery of the Greek classical ideal, whereas in the first of his *Untimely Meditations* he remembered Winckelmann as the man who, in order to escape the «grotesque absurdities»²⁴ and narrowmindedness of the philistines, was driven to his «shameful»²⁵ religious conversion. In his later writings, too, Nietzsche recognised more than once the value of Winckelmann's paganism as celebrated by Goethe. A passage from a fragment written in 1887-88 is particularly significant in this regard. Here, Nietzsche defined Winckelmann's classical project as a product of his time rather than something based on historical accuracy. The Greeks as portrayed by Winckelmann and Goethe – just as «Victor Hugo's orientals, Wagner's Edda characters and Walter Scott's Englishmen of the thirteenth century» – were to him «historically false beyond measure, but – modern»²⁶. In spelling out the idea of Winckelmann's modernity more boldly than Platen and Gerhard had done before him, Nietzsche echoed the thoughts of another writer who, also inspired by Goethe's Winckelmann-essay, endorsed the scholar's supposed paganism as a way towards a new, modern understanding of ancient Greece: Walter Pater.

In an essay written in 1867 and published in his volume on the Renaissance, Pater, while criticising the unreliability of Winckelmann's theories from a scholarly point of view, praised him for having redefined our relationship with the

22 See also H. Sichtermann, *Vier Briefe August von Platens an Eduard Gerhard*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1979, pp. 6-7.

23 «[...] edelsten Bildungskampfes», F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. by R. Geuss and R. Speirs, trans. by R. Speirs, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 95.

24 «[...] grotesken Albernheiten», F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. by D. Breazeale, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 21.

25 «[...] schmähhlicher Uebertritt», *ibid.*

26 «[...] Victor Hugo's Orientalen, Wagner's Edda-Personnagen, Walter Scott's Engländer des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts» and «über alle Maaßen historisch falsch, aber - modern», F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. by W. Kaufmann, trans. by W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Random House, 1968, p. 438.

Greeks. Not only did Winckelmann open «a new way of communion with the Greek life», but he also gave us what Pater called «a new organ for the human spirit», which – in line with Goethe's and Platen's views – is «alien from the Christian world»²⁷. It is worth adding at this point that the criticism of religion that usually accompanies the portrayal of Winckelmann as a 'pagan' is historically inaccurate, since his writings were deeply indebted to religion, from a Lutheran Pietist as well as from a Catholic perspective. And yet the anticlerical element plays a major role both in the literary reception of his life and work and in the creation of the 'Winckelmann-myth'.

Similar ideas were fashionable in Germany around the same time and well into the twentieth century. In his fictional biography *Winckelmann* (1861), for instance, Alexander von Ungern-Sternberg reiterated the motif of the condemnation of Christianity as opposed to Winckelmann's connection to the vivifying power of the Hellenic spirit. In a comparable way, Wilhelm Schäfer, in a novella published in 1925 and entitled *Winckelmann's End*, juxtaposed his protagonist's enthusiasm for the natural vitality of Greek marble to the mean spirit of the Roman clergy. Fourteen years later Gerhart Hauptmann, in his unfinished Winckelmann novel, took a different, more original approach to the story by introducing the motifs of a dark, somewhat demonic Greek world and of a murderous Jesuit plot.

IV

The other theme at the core of Platen's Winckelmann-sonnet is that of Pygmalion. It is appropriate to mention once again that from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, the rediscovery of Greece led almost always to the question of the role of the plastic arts. The three-dimensionality of sculpture was thought to provide a level of authenticity which granted the viewer a more immediate interaction with the work of art. Moreover, the impact of Winckelmann's passionate descriptions of classical statues gave rise to new reflections on the question of the relationship between art, reality and sensual experience. Here lie the roots of the idea of Winckelmann's 'pagan' sensibility as portrayed, as we have seen, by Goethe and Platen.

Decades later, Walter Pater offered a similar interpretation in his Winckelmann essay. His argument emphasised the Greeks' appeal to the senses and identified the spiritual nature of sculpture as the art form closest to our inner life:

[Sculpture] deals more exclusively than any other art with the human form, itself one entire medium of spiritual expression, trembling, blushing, melting into dew with inward excitement. That spirituality which only lurks about architecture as a volatile effect, in sculpture takes up the whole given material and penetrates it with an imagi-

27 W. Pater, *Winckelmann*, in: id., *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by M. Beaumont, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 88-89.

native motive; and at first sight sculpture, with its solidity of form, seems more real and full than the faint abstract manner of poetry or painting²⁸.

In these pages, the theme of Winckelmann's connection with the 'physical' language of sculpture is addressed more decisively than in Goethe's or Platen's Winckelmann tributes; not to mention the fact that Pater added to the idea of the scholar's enjoyment of Greek art the sensual connotation of an almost physical exhilaration at the sight of male beauty. Yet like Goethe and Platen before him, Pater, too, portrayed Winckelmann as someone who dealt «with the sensuous side of art in the pagan manner»²⁹.

Walter Pater harked back to Herder's ideas on the aesthetics of sculpture and appeared to be conscious of Hegel's notions on the superior nature of the plastic arts. In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel had defined sculpture as the branch of the visual arts in which «the inward and the material come together for the first time»³⁰, and the only one able to produce a «kind of all-pervasive vitality»³¹. More importantly, almost half a century earlier, in his essay entitled *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Dream* (1778), Herder had used the Pygmalion-motif and the metaphor of the living statue to illustrate the perfection of sculpture as the only artform that, by presenting the human form as the external container of man's inner life, expressed «the truth of the physical body»³².

Within this context, Herder's definition of plastic beauty in terms of «the sensible expression of perfection»³³ could also be related to Platen's line about perfection in the sonnet *On Winckelmann*: «For what is ever perfect is divine, / And Christ himself bade us to be perfect». Here, the poet invokes once again the Gospel of Matthew and Jesus' pronouncement on perfection in the *Sermon on the Mount* («be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect») ³⁴. But these words also refer to Winckelmann's relationship with Greek sculpture, and it is not a coincidence that they introduce the poem's concluding lines about the scholar's ability to breathe life into blocks of marble. In highlighting the significance of the three-dimensional, tactile quality of sculpture as the artform most closely connected to man's spiritual self, Herder, too, had presented sculpture as something whole and akin to a living organism.

28 Ivi, p. 112.

29 Ivi, p. 105.

30 «[...] das Wunder [...], dass der Geist dem ganz Materiellen sich einbildet». G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. by T. M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 85.

31 «[...] diese Art durchgreifender Lebendigkeit», ivi, p. 173.

32 «Leibhafte Wahrheit», J. G. Herder, *Sculpture. Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. and trans. by G. Gaiger, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 81.

33 «[...] sinnlicher Ausdruck der Vollkommenheit», ivi, p. 78.

34 Matthew 5:48.

In his sonnet, Platen equates his criticism of Catholic moralism with Winckelmann's pagan nature, a quality which he presents as intimately linked with his subject's ability to give life to inanimate matter. Platen's reference to Pygmalion is not surprising, for it takes its place within a long tradition on the subject. The motif had been very popular in the eighteenth century, from Bodmer's *Pygmalion and Elise* (1747) to Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (1762-63), to cite two well-known examples. Furthermore, Goethe remembered Pygmalion in one of his first letters from Rome in 1786, when he described the pleasure of his real encounter with the city in his *Italian Journey*³⁵, whereas in the fifth of his *Roman Elegies* he famously compared the ancient statues with the sensuality of his own physical experience («Marble comes doubly alive for me then, as I ponder, comparing, / Seeing with vision that feels, feeling with fingers that see»)³⁶. Furthermore, on the subject of the Greeks' relationship with sculpture, Platen is likely to have been familiar with the treaty *The Figurative Arts and Nature* (1807) by his friend and mentor Friedrich Schelling, who had stated in those pages not only that sculpture should present a perfect balance «between the soul and matter»³⁷, but also that such perfection had been reached, as Winckelmann recognised, in the Belvedere Apollo.

From around the end of the nineteenth century until the 1930s, the theme of the association between Winckelmann and the Pygmalion-metaphor is often accompanied by otherworldly, irrational motifs. On the eve of the birth of the Third Reich, the classical ideal represented by this idea takes on a nationalistic tinge and is suffused with arcane symbolism. One could think of *Winckelmann* (1931), the biographical study by Berthold Vallentin, who turned the Hellenic dream of the perfect man into the image of a 'Führer' for the Germans; or of Gerhart Hauptmann's novel, in which Winckelmann, now a sculptor, is surrounded by ominous symbols and tormented by visions of death.

August von Platen's *To Winckelmann* is the poetic synthesis of some of the major motifs in the history of the literary reception of Winckelmann's life and thought in the two centuries since his murder. And although the sonnet is somewhat tangential to the theme of a 'private' Winckelmann, it also encapsulates the

35 «When Pygmalion's Elisa, whom he had formed completely in accordance with his wishes and given as much truth and life as an artist can, finally came up to him and said: 'It is I!' how different the living woman was from the sculpted stone!», J. W. von Goethe, *Italian Journey*, ed. by T. P. Saine and J. L. Sammons, trans. by R. R. Heitner, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 104. For a more in-depth discussion of the subject see H. J. Schneider, *Rom als klassischer Kunstkörper. Zu einer Figur der Antikewahrnehmung von Winckelmann bis Goethe*, in: P. Chiarini and W. Hinderer (Eds.), *Rom – Europa. Treffpunkt der Kulturen 1780-1820*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2006, pp. 15-28.

36 «Dann versteh' ich den Marmor erst recht: ich denk' und vergleiche / Sehe mit fühlendem Aug', fühle mit sehender Hand», J. W. von Goethe, *Roman Elegies*, ed. and trans. by D. Luke, London, Chatto & Windus, 1977, p. 41.

37 «Das Ideal der Plastik liegt im Gleichgewicht von Seele und Materie», F. W. J. von Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art. An Oration on the Relation Between the Plastic Arts and Nature*, trans. by A. Johnson, London, John Chapman, 1895, p. 24.

idea of the man's vitality in a way that recurs in many of the literary works about him for at least one hundred years to come. The same words and concepts – such as paganism, perfection, marble, Pygmalion, the lasting legacy of Winckelmann's personality and the extraordinary vigour of his style – recur regularly, with slight variations, in almost every piece written about him.

Platen's text is also a notable example of how Winckelmann emerges as a central figure in the construction of a modern identity. On the one hand, the poet's insistence on the scholar's paganism is part of the discourse of Germany's love affair with Greece and of modern man's relationship with the classical world. On the other hand, Platen addressed his sonnet's dedicatee as someone who questioned and refashioned the role of art in his own time. Both aspects are still relevant today.