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From Platonism and the Farnese Hercules to Steve Reeves
and the *Peplum* Hercules via a Radical Ohio Hegelian
and his Socialist German Acrobats

In Jane Campion's recent film version of Thomas Savage's *Power of the Dog*,¹ young Peter comes across his, and his mother's tormentor, Phil's secret hiding place. There he discovers in a lean-to the cowboy homophobic Phil's copies of *Physical Culture*. As he leafs through the magazines, he sees the famous pictures of Eugen Sandow and his fig leaf posed as the Farnese Hercules. The scene does not appear in Savage's novel. Flash backward or forwards a few years depending on whether you place Peter and Phil in 1925 or 2021 and you have Tim Curry as Dr. Frank-n-Furter belting out the invitation to guests to "take in an old Steve Reeves movie" in the introductory musical number "Sweet Transvestite" in the musical extravaganza *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.²

In 1893 Bernarr Macfadden visited the Chicago World Exposition and met Florence Ziegfeld and Eugen Sandow. Ziegfeld had met the strongman Sandow in Europe and brought him back to the United States where he became the star of a vaudeville act performing acts of strength. Sandow was Prussian born in 1867 and had changed his name from Friedrich Wilhelm Mueller. When Macfadden met Sandow he was already one of the world's most famous athletes.³ He, Ziegfeld, and Macfadden would create entertainment and exercise empires stretching to Mr. America and bodybuilding and the popular *peplum* films of the 1960s. This influence is still

1) *The Power of the Dog*, directed by Jane Campion (2021; Transmission Films).

2) *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman (1975; 20th Century Studios).

3) Mark Adams, *Mr. America: How Muscular Millionaire Bernarr Macfadden Transformed the Nation Through Sex, Salad, and the Ultimate Starvation Diet* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 34.

felt in the numerous Gold's Gyms, Muscle and Health Magazines, and the fitness culture. At the Exhibition Ziegeld had Sandow dusted with white powder striking the poses of famous statues.⁴ The most famous picture of *Eugen Sandow Posing as the Farnese Hercules* was taken by Napoleon Sarony in 1893.⁵ The picture reflects the Victorian fascination with the idealized masculine form but also the reverence for the ancients. Sandow would not only perform dusted as a classical sculpture, but before Greek columns. Macfadden would have Sarony photograph him as well. Fasting for a week before the session to accentuate his muscle definition.⁶ In 1904 Macfadden founded the first body building championship on what he saw as classical Greek ideals. This would later become the Mr. America competition and Steve Reeves would become its most famous champion.⁷ Keeping with the Greek ideal, Reeves would pose as Myron's *Discobolus*.

Phil Burbank, of *Power of the Dog*, is an interesting character for thinking about the physical culture movement and Champion makes the connection in the film when Peter discovers Phil's stash of *Physical Culture Magazines*. The Magazines and Bernarr Macfadden cut both ways; they were ideal renderings of the human body. Eugen Sandow posing as the Farnese Hercules and *Physical Culture* were also regarded by some as pornographic, and its ideal male and female bodies doubled as ideals and erotica. Phil is a student of the classics, a phi beta kappa in classics from Yale who speaks ancient Greek and Latin. He is a person of many talents but who aims at being only a cowboy, a populist of sorts but also a romantic figure of the American West. Phil does not want to be a romantic and makes fun of the movie cowboys and the young ranch hands who imitate them. These romanticize the West. But he, with his degree in classics, romanticizes it none the less, and especially his cowboy mentor Bronco Henry.⁸ In the same way the physical culture movements and the body building tradition it spawned in the Mr. America contest, it saw its roots in the Ancient Greeks, at least the Ancients via German Romanticism and Nationalism. The popular tradition of the muscular strongman became, like the cowboy, a staple of male cinema. At the Chicago Exhibition, Macfadden was deeply moved by a replica of a Greek colonnade that supported an entablature with naked men and women in heroic poses. Macfadden's biographer William Hunt claims, "the sight of the entablature was really all that he needed in the way of a classical education."⁹

Power of the Dog is set in 1925. Across the ocean in Italian popular cinema the first *maciste* cycle of muscleman films was just drawing to a close. The series had started with Giovanni Pastrone's classic *Cabiria* in 1914.¹⁰ Set in ancient Carthage and Rome, at a time of Italian colonial adventures in Libya, it starred Bartolomeo Pagano, a longshoreman and muscle man who launched a string of twelve popular and populist films ending around 1927. This was the first series of strongman films, and they were quite popular among the fascists. The strongman Maciste solved all problems through his enormous strength. Remember Mussolini displaying himself bare chested on balconies to show his ideal body and vitality. Maciste first appears in *Cabiria* as a frozen image for us to gaze upon like a Greek statue, but then moves to action completing acts of incredible strength and solving the problems that separate the lovers. The lovers are average human beings who lack the strength to overcome the difficulties that keep them. The strongman Maciste triumphs over these obstacles, and then, like the heroes

4) Ibid., 35.

5) Napoleon Sarony, 1893, Eugene Sandow with Leopard Skin (posing as Farnese Hercules), Artstor, library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001322989.

6) Adams, *Mr. America: Ultimate Starvation Diet*, 37.

7) John D. Fair, *Mr. America: The Tragic History of a Bodybuilding Icon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 2.

8) Thomas Savage, *The Power of the Dog* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009).

9) William R. Hunt, *Body Love: The Amazing Career of Bernarr Macfadden* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989) 10.

10) *Cabiria*, directed by Giovanni Pasterone (1914; Itala Films).

of Westerns, walks off into the sunset. In a strange way these early muscle man movies are a combination of Plato and Bergson. We gaze for a moment on the ideal human form and then launch into the *élan vital*.¹¹

Muscleman movies were reborn in 1958 with *Hercules* starring Mr. America, Steve Reeves.¹² The film's success spawned an industry of Italian popular films dubbed "*peplum*" by the French critics at *Cahiers du Cinema*. The French, unlike their Italian counterparts, took the popular movies quite seriously, seeing some as the work of "*auteurs*." Italian and American critics were not as kind and named them "sword-and-sandal" movies. They did not look at them as serious art, or even popular art. The term *peplum* refers to a flap of fabric attached to a blouse or a skirt. In classical antiquity the word "*peplum*" also referred to an article of women's clothing, the Greek *peplos* (later Roman *peplus* or *peplum*). It was a loose, draped shift or tunic for women. The ancient setting gave filmmakers the freedom to present the adolescent male audience with shapely young women in revealing "ancient" attire. But *Peplum* cinema is famous for its loin cloth clad American bodybuilders, as if Italian popular cinema was saved by strong Americans, as Italy was saved by Americans from the Nazis and Fascists. Bodybuilders, like Richard Harrison, Gordon Scott, and most famously Steve Reeves, starred as a variety of heroes: Hercules, Romulus and Remus, the Sons of Hercules, Goliath, Samson, Son of Samson and, of course, Maciste (when Maciste movies showed up in American drive-ins, Maciste became the Son of Samson, Son of Hercules, or some such because Americans had no idea who Maciste was). Even Italian muscle men got American names like Alan Steel. This was only appropriate given that Bernarr Macfadden had made famous America's most famous muscle man, the Italian American Angelo Siciliano, later known as Charles Atlas. Siciliano first appeared in a 1914 article by Macfadden as an exemplar of all-around development. Macfadden declared that he was "the living realization of my lifelong battle for the body beautiful." His life story appeared in the November and December 1921 issues of *Physical Culture* under the title "Building the Physique of a Greek God."¹³

The 50s–60s *peplum* cycle began in 1958 with the international success of *Hercules* starring Mr. America, Steve Reeves. The Italians made hundreds of these films with titles ranging from *Hercules* to *Goliath vs. the Vampires*,¹⁴ and my favorite, *The Son of Hercules vs. The Mole People*.¹⁵ They varied wildly in quality from the groundbreaking *Hercules* to *Hercules Against the Moon Men*¹⁶. Some, like *The Fury of Achilles*¹⁷ with Richard Harrison, are quite good and closer to *The Iliad*¹⁸ than *Troy*,¹⁹ the \$185 million 2004 spectacular with Brad Pitt. But most are fairly loose with ancient history and myth. Often the only relation to the ancient world are the names of the characters and the togas. In one movie Samson, Hercules, and Ulysses get together, and the friends overthrow a Philistine tyrant. In many the ancient warrior, clad only in his loin cloth, wanders through non

11) At the time, Bergson's thought was popular among Italian Futurists. The photographer, Anton Bragaglia, was influenced by Bergson and found the truth of cinema in its movement, rejecting its reliance on the single image, while for Ricciotto Canudo, notions of immobility and fixation assume a positive role in cinema. Both found the relationship between stillness and motion a fundamental and highly charged question for cinema of the 1910s. Anton's brother Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia later directed four midcentury *peplum* films, two starring American bodybuilders. Robert A. Rushing, *Descended from Hercules: Biopolitics and the Muscled Male Body on Screen (New Directions in National Cinemas)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 36.

12) *Hercules*, directed by Pietro Francisci (1958; Lux Film).

13) Fair, *Mr. America: The Tragic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 28.

14) *Goliath vs. the Vampires*, directed by Sergio Corbucci and Giacomo Gentilomo (1961; Ambrosiana Cinematografica).

15) *The Mole Men Against the Son of Hercules*, directed by Antonio Leonviola (1961; Leone Film).

16) *Hercules Against the Moon Men*, directed by Giancomo Gentilomo, (1964; Nike Cinematografica).

17) *The Fury of Achilles*, directed by Marino Girolami (1962).

18) Homer, *The Iliad*.

19) *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Peterson (2004; Warner Bros. Pictures).

ancient settings like Puritan America where he enters hell; Latin American where struggles with Incas, Aztecs, and Conquistadors; and even Classical China. American bodybuilder Gordon Mitchell even destroyed the underground futuristic city of Atlantis in *Giant of Metropolis*.²⁰ In all these films both male and female bodies are on display for the gratification of pre-pubescent and adolescent males who were the target audience. Unlike film noir where the muscle-bound hero is not tempted by the numerous scantily clad *femme fatales* that populate each feature. The movies usually include erotic dances by a bevy of provocatively clad Euro-beauties.

This cycle of *peplum* films lasted from 1958 to about 1965 when it was killed by Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone. Steve Reeves, Richard Harrison, Alan Steel, and the other body builders tried to transition to the Spaghetti Western but why do you need muscles when you have guns. Reeves attempt, *A Long Ride from Hell*,²¹ has a great title but was a commercial failure after which, he retired from acting. Gordon Scott, who had been Tarzan for Hollywood, went on to make Euro-Spy movies (another Italian Fad).

Peplum came back in the 1980s with the incredible success of another bodybuilder turned actor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Conan the Barbarian* spawned another slew of Italian popular spinoffs. But these “Barbarian” *peplums*, did not have the tenuous relation with the ancient Greek and Roman ideals that hovered somewhere above the first and second waves of *peplum* films of the 20s and 50s. They were not modern imitations of the idealized and perhaps caricatured ancient past in the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger was not the same kind of bodybuilder as Eugen Sandow and Steve Reeves. With Schwarzenegger, gone was any nostalgia for the ideals of the ancient Greeks physique. The barbarian ideal seemed more appropriate to the sword-and-sandal films of the 80s. Johan Winckelmann and Bernarr Macfadden’s ideal human body was a romanticization of what they saw as the Platonic and Greek ideal. Schwarzenegger represented something quite different. It was Joe Wieder’s “bigger the better” ideal of muscles propounded in an empire of body building magazines, and modern medicine in the form of steroids.²² The 1980s *peplum*’s ideal, like the barbarian invasions it was supposed to emulate, was quite different from Farnese Hercules that Eugen Sandow modeled for the pages of *Physical Culture*.

To understand this difference, we need to examine some of the ideas that contributed to *peplum* and Physical Culture and eventually Mr. America and body building. This is a circuitous path and takes in much more than this writer can see. But part of it winds from Plato, via Johan Winckelmann’s ideal of the ancient Greek body, to Friedrich Ludwig Jahn’s creation of the German nationalist Turner movement in reaction to Napoleon’s defeat of the Prussian Army at Jena, where young Hegel had just finished the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The Turners will turn from a nationalist to a socialist movement, the nationalism being *aufheben* within the socialism, during the 1848 revolutions. After the revolutions, Turners were suppressed in the Germanies but reborn in America. In America, the Ohio Hegelian and radical socialist Auguste Willich joined with the Turners and led German Turners in his German brigade in the Civil War.

The Ideal: Platonism, and the German Turners

Eugen Sandow, Bernarr Macfadden, Bartolomeo Pagano, Charles Atlas, and Steve Reeves represent the development of bodybuilding and physical culture through the 1960s. But the roots of this trend can be traced to similar endeavors at the outset of the twentieth century that mimicked the ancient Greeks. This may have been a kind of distorting mirror but the ideal of the Greeks was seen as the highest value; respect for Greek values that permeated European societies in the nineteenth century. In athletics, this admiration for all things classical

20) *Giant of Metropolis*, directed by Umberto Scarpelli (1961).

21) *A Long Ride from Hell*, directed by Camillo Bazzoni (1968; Titanus).

22) Fair, *Mr. America: The Tragic History*, 195.

led to the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896. This fascination with Greek civilization inspired a renewed preoccupation with the physical-culture ideal. In addition to depictions in Greek poetry and drama, and on Greek vases, the Hellenic aesthetic tradition that influenced Western civilization survived as damaged sculptures or Roman imitations of Greek originals. Sandow said he was awakened to the Greeks by a visit to Italy: "I went to Italy, and there my eyes were opened. The Greek and Roman statues I saw there inspired me with envy and admiration. I became morally and mentally awakened."²³

For Plato, the idea of the sound mind and the sound body turned on the notion that the two were inter-related but that the mind should rule the bodily desires. "It is not true that a sound and healthy body is enough to produce a sound mind, while on the contrary, the sound mind has power in itself to make the bodily condition as perfect as it can be" (*Republic* 403d). Physical beauty is the expression of the beauty of the soul. Daniel Dombrowski discusses this renewal of Greek ideals in modern athletics. "The goal was *kalokagathia*: bodily and moral or intellectual excellence."²⁴ Dombrowski writes that the Greeks tended to be *hylomorphists* who saw the material part of a human being (*hyle*) as integrally connected to, as informed by, the structure (*morphe*) given to it by mind (or soul). This hylomorphism was crucial in the effort to achieve the ideal of *kalokagathia*.²⁵ The Greek ideal, however, was not limited to the body. *Arete* (goodness or excellence) meant a cultivation of the whole person, including one's mental and spiritual qualities.

Greek *arete* had a compelling influence on the physical culture movement. This lifestyle, which sought development through weight training, diet, aerobic activity, athletic competition, and mental discipline, was in vogue by the end of the nineteenth century. Strongmen like Sandow showed up in popular pulp magazines like *The National Police Gazette*. Sandow, who was German, gave concrete expression to social trends from earlier in the century. Most notably, the German physical-culture or the Turnen movement.²⁶

In spite of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717–1768) misconceptions of the Greeks in his *History of Ancient Art*, Winckelmann's idea of the ancients had a significant impact on the development on nineteenth century romantic notions of the ancient world and were the glasses through which Europe (including Goethe, Lessing, Herder, and importantly for physical culture, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn), looked at Greece for many generations. Winckelmann drew his ideas of the Greeks mainly from what he had seen of their art. For Winckelmann, the Greeks were lovers of beauty who spent their days in games and festivals and had a high sense of decorum. Winckelmann looked on the tranquil beauty of Greek art and seemed to think the figures of the Parthenon porticoes were portraits of the average Greek citizen. The streets of Athens were full of well-draped, statuesque men and women.²⁷

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn is sometimes referred to as the Turnvater, the father of modern gymnastics. The Turnvereine ("gymnastic unions"; from German *turnen* meaning "to practice gymnastics," and *verein* meaning "club, union"), were founded by Jahn during the French occupation of Prussia after the defeat at Jena. These were not only athletic but also political clubs and part of a national movement for independence. The Turners were a nationalist movement when they were founded in the war of liberation against the French. But the Turnvereins had fundamentally changed by the time of the 1848 revolutions in the Germanies. Jahn may have founded the movement, but his nationalism as loyalty to the Hohenzollerns distanced him from the direction being taken by the movement. The Turners were moving to the left and Metternich banned

23) *Sandow's Magazine*, January 1902, 56–58.

24) Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Contemporary Athletics and Ancient Greek Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 23.

25) *Ibid.*, 24.

26) Fair, *Mr. America: The Tragic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015) 20.

27) Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006).

the Turnverein and had Jahn imprisoned. The Turnvereins were reborn in the 1840s. The revived movement shifted out of Prussia to the South and West German States. In the 1840s, core membership was not students and academics, but craft workers. There were even Jewish members who were often in positions of leadership. The Turners were more closely aligned with workers' organizations and democratic clubs that sought reform than traditional hierarchies.

In contrast to the organization Jahn had founded, almost one-half of the membership in the 1840s were non-gymnasts, the so-called "Friends of Turnen," and because of this, the new clubs engaged in more non-gymnastic activities, such as funding libraries and reading rooms, and sponsoring lectures, often of a politically liberal nature. An all-German gymnastic union was formed in April 1848, shortly after revolution had swept the German Confederation. It was established in support for the Frankfurt Parliament; the new league was immediately controversial. Its purpose which was "to work for the unity of the German people and to uplift the brotherhood and the physical and spiritual power of the people." The Turners were directly involved in the 1848 revolutions. Turnverein leaders took leading roles in local uprisings. Turner gymnasts manned barricades and participated in crucial fighting during the revolutions. The aftermath of the 1848 revolutions devastated the German gymnastic movement. The clubs were disbanded, their property confiscated, and leaders were imprisoned and went into exile.²⁸ Many of the Turners fled to America. These "Forty-Eighters" included the former Prussian military officer, Left Hegelian, and revolutionary general August Willich. The Turner movement had not made great progress in the German communities in the United States until the heavy immigration of German Forty-Eighters. Many of the new arrivals in this later period were German intellectuals and other political refugees. They transplanted their movement to the Midwest in cities like Louisville, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati. August Willich was at the center of the groups.²⁹

August Willich, Left Hegelianism, and the Turners

August Willich, with his friends, J.B. Stallo and Moncure Conway, was part of the group of thinkers and political figures who came to be known as the Ohio Hegelians. Unlike Stallo and Conway, Willich received his Hegel mainly through philosophical conversations with other Hegelians, first in Germany and then in the United States. Willich's Hegelianism was developed through the lens of Feuerbach, Marx, and particularly, Moses Hess.³⁰

Willich was born in 1810, the son of a Prussian Cavalry captain, in Braunberg East Prussia about 30 miles from Kant's Königsberg. His father, Johan Georg Willich was a captain of Hussars who was wounded in the Napoleonic wars and died when August was three years old.³¹ Willich hated his mother, a Polish actress. Of her he said: "my mother was a beautiful Polish woman – and how I hated her."³² Part of the reason for this, apart from the fact that she abandoned him and his brother Julius to be raised by others, there was a rumor that his real father was Prince August, brother of King Frederick William III. Stallo and Conway believed this story.

28) Claire E. Nolte, "The German Turnverein," in *The Encyclopedia of the 1848 Revolutions*, <https://www.ohio.edu/chastain/rz/turnvere.htm>.

29) David T. Dixon, *Radical Warrior August Willich's Journey from German Revolutionary to Union General* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2020), 4, 7.

30) Lloyd Easton, *Hegel's First American Followers, the Ohio Hegelians: J. B. Stallo, Peter Kaufmann, Moncure Conway, August Willich* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1966), 159.

31) Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 12.

32) Easton *Hegel's First American Followers*, 160.

Marx and Engels referred to him as “The Hohenzollern Knight.” Engels said he had inherited the “treacherous Hohenzollern eyes.” Willich himself would say “look at me and you will see the Kaiser.”³³

Willich grew up in the home of the famed liberal theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher thought that we all had a feeling of self-dependence and a clear sense of right, so Willich, was expected to repay his privilege with public service.³⁴ In his case this would be a life in the military. Willich attended the Prussian military academy at a key moment. He studied with the Prussian reformers, including the great military thinker Carl von Clausewitz. His time at the academy would influence his later relation to Turnerism and physical culture. Willich would become a relentless master of the drill. This would be very important to how he approached training his troops in the revolutions of 1848 and during the Civil War in America. But unlike the traditions associated with the Prussian military, Willich, from an early age and in association with other radical students at the academy, thought of the person as above the soldier. He wrote “where human law is contrary to the law of the state, the state is wrong; where military law is in conflict with state law, the military is wrong... Humanity and human rights constitute the foundation of the state as well as the rank.”³⁵

While an officer in the Prussian Army he became the leader of a liberal reform minded circle of officers, some of whom were active in the Revolution of 1848 and the American Civil War. They paid attention to Hegelian philosophy. Loyd Easton writes: “the study of Hegelian philosophy and political-social sciences led to a critical investigation of conditions and brought forth an opposition party in the officer corps.”³⁶ Following Hegel and Jahn, they discussed the “spirit of the people.”³⁷ These ideas led him to resign his commission. He wrote a long letter to the king stating that he could no longer have anything to do with a rank or position which was opposed in principle to the idea of humanity and human dignity.³⁸

In 1847 Willich went to Cologne where he became part of the Communist League. The league had a membership of 7,000 workers and in 1848 Willich became its president.³⁹ It was there he met Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Willich led a unit of the republican army in the 1848 revolution. After its failure, he would lead his troops to sanctuary across the border in Besançon, France where he shared their hardships. Philip Wagner later said of Willich in Besançon, he was “like a Christ among his children,” who clung to his ideal of the brotherhood of humanity. He was “the Christ of Besançon as a living Don Quixote.”⁴⁰

In the second revolt in Baden, Willich met Marx and Engels in Speyer. Engels served as Willich’s adjutant in a force of about 5,500 including some of whom he had trained in Besançon.⁴¹ Willich’s column included a large contingent of Turners. In a letter to Marx, Engels described Willich as “brave, cold-blooded, skillful, and of quick and sound perception in battle but outside of battle a somewhat boring ideologist and true socialist.”⁴²

The revolution once again failed against a much larger Prussian army dispatched to put down the rebellion in Baden. Willich fled to Paris and then London. He was sentenced to death in absentia. Marx and Engels arrived in London around the same time. Marx wrote colleagues in Cologne “Willich with his trash ... had vehemently

33) Ibid., 161.

34) Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 13.

35) Ibid., 22.

36) Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 163.

37) Ibid.

38) Ibid., 165.

39) Ibid., 167.

40) Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 62.

41) Ibid., 67.

42) Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 169.

opposed him” and Willich had said “socialism would have to be introduced in the next revolution, even if only through the force of the guillotine.” Engels admired Willich the soldier, but at this time wrote of him “he was entirely the prophet,” who was “convinced of his personal mission as the predestined liberator of the proletariat.” Engels wrote that Willich was anxious for the revolution and that he wanted to create a military dictatorship, a kind of “communist Islam.”⁴³ Marx and Engels later accused Willich of being a Prussian spy and Willich challenged Marx to a duel.⁴⁴ The two carried on a fierce series of accusations and recriminations from across the Atlantic in leftist newspapers throughout the early 1850s.⁴⁵

Willich had emigrated to New York in 1853. He worked in the Brooklyn Navel Yard and organized refugees for a military invasion of Germany. After a stint with the Coastal and Geodetic Survey, Willich landed in the German community in Cincinnati where he befriended another Hegelian, J. B. Stallo. With Stallo’s help he became editor of the *Cincinnati Republican* published by the Social Workingman’s Club. In his first editorial Willich offered the paper for free stating that the paper was “truly by and for workers.”⁴⁶ Before a decade had past, Willich publicly identified his socialism with Marx, ending their old rivalry. In his *Cincinnati Republican* essay “On Man, History, and Socialism” he excerpts a long passage from Marx’s “Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy.”⁴⁷

Willich was disturbed by the idea that humans were egoistic and selfish. He searched for a philosophical view that would find the conditions of reconciliation. He desired to bring together the physical and the ideal. The Greek ideal is still in Willich, present via Hegel and the left Hegelians. For Willich, the Greek ideal of the expression of the beauty of the soul in the well-trained body is the relation of the human to nature. He turned to thinking about “the essence of man and his relation to nature” to find a way to reconciliation. This led him to a search for the whole, the “totality,” and the “thought of existence.” “Man lives eternity in a moment and a moment in eternity.”⁴⁸ He was inspired by the left Hegelianism of Feuerbach and Moses Hess. Feuerbach helped him resolve his concern about the egoistic nature of human beings as separate individuals striving for self-preservation. He wrote in an 1859 essay in *The Republican*:

The self-preservation drive of man presents itself as the thinking essence, the personal totality of the whole life of humanity and nature, in a necessary opposition to the self-preservation drive

43) Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 85. Willich joined Marx and Engels in London in founding The World Society for Revolutionary Communists. The first article of the charter of the society written by Willich in 1850 declared: “the aim of the Association is the overthrow of all privileged classes and their subjection to the dictatorship of the proletariat by maintaining the revolution in permanence up to the achievement of communism which is to be the ultimate organizational form of the human family,” Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 171.

44) Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 96. One of Marx’s supporters would take up the challenge. Willich was a crack shot and wounded him in the duel. Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 175–76; and Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 86.

45) The key disagreement is that Willich thought the revolutions should happen now. Marx thought Willich a romantic ideologue and that history needed to develop. Marx wrote about “The Willich-Schapper Faction” of the League of the Just in his book: Karl Marx, *Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne* (1853). Willich replied in an article for the New York German Newspaper: August Willich, “Doctor Karl Marx and His Revelations,” *New Yorker Criminal Zeitung*; in which he accuses Marx of seeking to control the revolutionary movement and that his “revelations,” including that Willich was receiving money from the police, were based on forged documents. Marx answered Willich in a pamphlet “Knight of the Magnanimous Spirit.” Taking his clue from the Beautiful Soul or Magnanimous Spirit in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* that the magnanimous spirit ends up being low and mean. See Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 177–78.

46) *Ibid.*, 181.

47) August Willich, “On Man History and Socialism,” in Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 312–30.

48) Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 166.

as single in man and nature. In the first form, the self-preservation drive as single in man and nature. In the first form, the self-preservation drive is concerned with its maintenance as species, as universal individual, and thus the preservation of the whole. In the second, it appears as the single man striving to maintain himself in the struggle of existence. The opposition in the nature of man was perceived in the earliest ages of mankind as the opposition between God and the devil, heaven and hell, and sensibility, sacrifice, and selfishness. There is no experience or thought of mankind which does not contain in itself this opposition.⁴⁹

This is similar to what Feuerbach says about the two sides of human nature in *The Essence of Christianity*. Willich thought the whole of human life was the struggle between the two opposing sides of human nature, the universal and particular striving toward wholeness.⁵⁰ Expressing itself finally in the beauty of the community. Willich wrote that after the reorganization of labor, human beings will find themselves in the community and see the community in them. At this point selfishness and self-seeking would be put to rest. “The reconciled man, the man of the community” would be born.⁵¹ This resolution of this ideal was the meaning of history. He returned to Hegel and Marx in saying “the world’s history is the world’s court of judgment.” In this essay he was quite open to Marx and Engel’s criticisms that he was too optimistic about the possibility of revolution now. He considered Hegel to be the great philosopher of the nineteenth century and, despite his clashes with Marx in the past, he wrote that Marx alone had really understood Hegel.⁵²

In the United States Willich renewed his association with the Turners as a way toward building this ideal community. He and his friends Fritz and Mathilde Anneck started a Turner group in Milwaukee. But he was most closely associated with the Turnverein in Cincinnati. These were socialist groups. Willich said they flew the “red banner” of socialism. In a speech at the Turner Gymnasium, Willich said, the Turners were the opposite of monasteries. They promote health, power, and personal independence as well as a commitment to social life. The Society of Free Men.⁵³

In the United States, the Turners were nationalist, socialist, and German defense organizations. German and Irish immigrants had suffered persecution at the hands of nativist groups like the Know Nothings. The “Bloody Monday” riots in Louisville Kentucky left 22 dead in 1855. Part of the reason for the Turners in the US was protection against the nativists. The first Turners were established in Cincinnati. The Hegelian J. B. Stallo successfully defended them in court in 1856. Willich insisted that blacks be able to attend Turner festivals and led the Turners to write a resolution against discrimination along color lines.

Many Turners enlisted in the first calls for volunteers at the opening of the Civil War. Willich raised a regiment, the Ninth Ohio, and clad them in red Garibaldi shirts until they got uniforms. They sang the Marseillaise in camp. There their ranks were dominated by Turners. Willich and his men saw the war as a crusade against slavery but also a way to improve the conditions of workers. The Turners in the Ninth Ohio erected makeshift gymnastic equipment in the camp. Willich refused to have a chaplain for the regiment and dismissed the ones

49) Quoted in Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 183–84.

50) Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 286.

51) Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 166–67.

52) Willich wrote: “Marx was and is the only one who could undertake the work of extracting from Hegel’s logic the kernel which comprised Hegel’s genuine discoveries in this area and construct the dialectical method, divested of its idealistic trappings, in the development of thought. The working out of this method which forms the foundation of Marx’s critique of political economy we consider a result scarcely less important than his basic materialist perspective”; quoted in Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 182.

53) Dixon, *Radical Warrior*, 104.

that were sent to him. He was their “chaplain” and lectured the troops himself on Socialist principles and the brotherhood of humanity.⁵⁴ Following Prussian and Turner ideas on physical culture Willich drilled his soldiers and put them through intense physical training. Willich said “a drop of sweat on the drill-ground will save many drops of blood on the battlefield.”⁵⁵ This proved to be the case as his troops helped save the union army at the battle of Chickamauga through his tactic of “advance fire.” Such tactics involved intense drilling to execute. Yet as Easton writes of Willich “on returning to camp he would put his troops at ease, address them as citizens, and proceed to a lecture on socialism.”⁵⁶ Willich’s actions in the Civil War caused Marx to revise his assessment of Willich, writing that while he had engaged in romantic revolutionism, “in the American Civil War Willich demonstrated that he was something more than a weaver of fantastic projects.”⁵⁷

Conclusion: Turnerism, Socialism, Hucksterism, and Popular Cinema

It seems a long way from the Greek ideal of the human form to German socialist acrobats and a radical Prussian Civil War general, to Bernarr Macfadden and Eugen Sandow posing as naked Greeks in the pages of *Physical Culture* and *Sandow’s Magazine*, to Mr. America contests, to popular fascist Maciste films of the 20s, and Italian *peplum* starring American body builders. Yet, the Greek ideal, the idea of the sound mind relating to the sound body winds its way through all these widely different phenomena of the physical culture of Europe and America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In many ways this particular strain of the Greek ideal of the relation of mind and body, of the ideal human form in the popular imagination seemed to die with Arnold Schwarzenegger, steroids, and the Barbarian *peplums* of the 1980s. But is it gone completely? Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator*⁵⁸ (2000) is a *peplum* as are Frank Miller’s *300*⁵⁹ films. Yet, I think, no one would say that these films reflect the optimism of achieving an idea of the nineteenth century; not the Turners, nor Macfadden’s physical culture movement, nor the idealism of the 60s, Steve Reeve *peplums* and certainly not the socialist hopes of August Willich and the 1848 Turners. In *Gladiator*, General Maximus Decimus Meridius represents the old ideals of a Rome in irreversible decline and *300* movies are flat out reactionary. One questions when or if the optimism of the popular admiration of the Greek ideal will return.

54) Ibid., 118–35.

55) Ibid., 174.

56) Easton, *Hegel’s First American Followers*, 195.

57) Ibid., 180.

58) *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott (2000; Dreamworks Distribution LLC).

59) *300*, directed by Zack Snyder (2006–2007; Warner Bros. Pictures); and *300: Rise of an Empire*, directed by Noam Murro (2014; Warner Bros. Pictures).



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