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The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism

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### Chapter

14 - German Romantic painters pp. 227-242

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## German Romantic painters

### A new aesthetic

The work of German Romantic artists consistently reflects, directly or indirectly, the new aesthetic propagated by Romantic writers, critics and theorists. The two most significant painters of the epoch, Caspar David Friedrich and Philipp Otto Runge, were not given to issuing manifestos, preferring to set out their artistic agenda in letters to friends and relatives. Yet their paintings manifest the same tensions between empirical reality and spiritual vision which inform not only the poetic work of Romantic authors but also the theories of art enunciated by Romantics as diverse as Wackenroder and Friedrich Schlegel. Art was no longer conceived as a medium of entertainment, edification or even aesthetic gratification; rather, its function was to body forth insights into the transcendental. It was to be evaluated, not by the criterion of (good) taste, but according to its visionary intensity.

In the *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1797; *Heartfelt Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*), which Wackenroder wrote with the assistance of Tieck, art is described as ‘Hieroglyphenschrift’ (‘hieroglyphic script’).<sup>1</sup> The term was topical, since contemporary scholars were on their way to deciphering the Egyptian hieroglyphs. It implied a medium of communication which employed recognisable characters whilst remaining only partially comprehensible and thus offered tantalising but incomplete glimpses into ancient and arcane wisdom. Friedrich Schlegel echoed Wackenroder’s thought in his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800; *Conversation on Poetry*), asserting that all Romantic visions were in essence a ‘Hieroglyphe der Einen ewigen Liebe’ (‘hieroglyph of indivisible eternal love’) (*KFSA* II, p. 334). In other words, all forms of art, visual as well as literary, should be symbolic, adumbrating spiritual truths through the code of material forms. Infinite truths were by definition not accessible to human reason, but in the hieroglyph of art

they might be fleetingly and imperfectly intuited. The artist did portray material reality, whether human or natural, but this reality should 'intimate immortality'.

Such conceptions challenged and overthrew the doctrines of neo-classicism, according to which the arts existed to offer an idealised and harmonised reproduction of the physical world and its inhabitants, as for instance in the Arcadian landscapes of Claude Lorraine and Ruisdael or the pastoral idylls of Salomon Gessner. The idealisation sought by the neo-classicists had been best exemplified, according to the influential theories of Winckelmann and Anton Raphael Mengs, in the classical works of the ancients, and it was incumbent on modern artists to imitate and combine the timeless merits of these various models. Wackenroder was contemptuous of such eclecticism, substituting for its contrivance and derivativeness a new Romantic concept of inspiration. The artist was to be fired, not by models and copied skills, but by a personal and spontaneous afflatus, metaphorically a moment of 'unmittelbaren göttlichen Beystand' ('direct divine support')<sup>2</sup> arriving unpredictably and uncontrollably. Genius was to take the place of taste. The implications for the painter of this new Romantic subjectivism were later spelt out by Caspar David Friedrich in his injunction to painters to 'Schließe dein leibliches Auge, damit du mit dem geistigen Auge zuerst siehst dein Bild' ('close your bodily eye so that you may see your picture first with the spiritual eye').<sup>3</sup> Latent spiritual meaning could only be perceived through the inner vision of the inspired artist.

Romantic painters thus did not in general favour the history painting which in the eighteenth century had been viewed as the apogee of artistic practice, whether its subject matter was modern history or, as most often, classical mythology. Philip Otto Runge, having unsuccessfully submitted a drawing of a subject from Homer in the annual painting competition organised by the circle of 'Weimar Friends of Art' surrounding Goethe, turned away in indignation from such classical subjects. 'Wir sind keine Griechen mehr,' he wrote to his brother, 'können das Ganze schon nicht mehr so fühlen, wenn wir ihre vollendeten Kunstwerke sehen, viel weniger selbst solche hervorbringen' ('we are no longer Greeks, we can no longer sense the whole thing when we see their perfected works of art, much less produce such works ourselves').<sup>4</sup> He went on in the same letter to declare his preference for landscape, specifically for landscape with a symbolic import. The only true works of art, he argued, were those in which the artist was moved by a sense that his subject had a transcendental significance, 'einen Zusammenhang mit dem Universum' ('a connection with the universe').

The new view of landscape painting had already been set out in Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798; *The Wanderings of Franz Sternbald*), an artist novel planned with Wackenroder, much admired by Runge and enthusiastically received by the Romantic generation in Germany in general. The eponymous hero, a journeyman artist in sixteenth-century Germany, encounters a hermit painter who declares that it is the task of the artist to discern the signature of God in nature, the 'geheime Ziffer' ('secret cypher') concealed in every stone. The artist then responds to this encoded transcendental meaning and, in an act of unconscious inspiration, reflects it in his finished work: 'heimlich sind Blumen hineingewachsen, von denen der Künstler selber nicht weiß, die Gottes Finger hineinwirkte' ('flowers have grown into it, unknown to the artist himself and worked in by God's finger').<sup>5</sup>

Pictorially, the new aesthetic was dramatically and controversially manifested in 1808 in Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Das Kreuz im Gebirge* (*The Cross in the Mountains*). Apart from the cropping of foreground and middle ground, involving the viewer emotionally with an uncomfortable directness inconceivable in neo-classical landscape, this picture was revolutionary in its juxtaposition of two entirely disparate images. On the one hand, we see a tract of Northern European landscape, realistically depicted, albeit in stylised form: a craggy mountain peak with an outgrowth of pine trees. At the same time, the peak is surmounted, at first sight incongruously, by a motif drawn from New Testament iconography: Christ on the cross. The fusion of the two elements, conspicuously European topography and the Passion of Christ in the Holy Land, is emphasised by the ivy spiralling up the crucifix and the symmetrical resemblance between the tall cross and the pines below it. A long denunciation of this picture was immediately published by Basilius von Ramdohr, a neo-classicist theoretician whom Wackenroder and Tieck in the *Herzensergießungen* had singled out for particular disapproval. Ramdohr rejected the picture on two counts: allegory, as he calls it, should not be introduced into landscapes, since it moves the viewer 'pathologically' rather than engaging a purely aesthetic interest; and secondly, the picture exemplifies the contemporary craze for religious mysticism, in which symbols and fantasies purport to be painterly and poetic images and classical antiquity is rejected in favour of 'Gothic' aberrations. The controversy clearly marks the threshold between neo-classical and Romantic art. Ramdohr spoke for an outdated school of thought, and Romantic painters were already producing landscapes which were charged with 'pathological', in other words emotional intensity, and in which 'allegorical' significance was everywhere apparent.



Figure 1. *Das Kreuz im Gebirge* (*The Cross in the Mountains*), 1808 (oil on canvas) by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) (Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden, Germany)

### Romantic landscape

As early as 1803 a set of Romantic landscapes had been created, at least in the form of drawings, which abandoned any attempt at mimetic reproduction of the natural world and aimed entirely at the expression of transcendental meaning: Runge's four *Zeiten* (*Times* – of Day and/or Seasons). Runge's main focus is on the depiction of symbolic vegetation. The times of day are represented by outsize flowers: morning, (mid)day and evening by an ascending, dominant or sinking lily respectively, night by a poppy. Seated on the flowers and their stems, in symmetrical pairs or embracing clusters and no larger than the blooms, are androgynous *putti* making music. They celebrate the wondrous and everlasting alternation of night, ambiguously portrayed as a period not only of dormancy but of menace, and pristine and regenerate day. All creation participates in an eternally unbroken and secure cycle of burgeoning (morning/spring), maturity (day/summer), decay (evening/autumn) and extinction (night/winter). This predominantly pantheistic vision of sublimely self-perpetuating nature is lent Christian significance by the framework panels of the drawings, in which icons of Jehovah, Christ and the Trinity suggest divine protection of the terrestrial cycle.<sup>6</sup> In later coloured versions of *Morgen* (*Morning*) Runge adhered to the same symbolic procedure: above the primeval earth the lily now merges with a giant figure of Aurora, the goddess of dawn.

The *Zeiten* are the most well-known of Runge's landscapes, but in fact they only constitute the most conspicuous application of techniques which are apparent in a number of his works. In the frame of *Die Lehrstunde der Nachtigall* (1805; *Instruction of the Nightingale*), for instance, we see again the stylised figures which reflect the influence on Runge of the two-dimensional sculptures and outline drawings of the English artist John Flaxman. *Quelle und Dichter* (also 1805; *The Source and the Poet*) offers another symbolic landscape, employing luxuriant vegetation and more *putti* figures to convey the religious belief, derived from the German mystic Jacob Böhme, that terrestrial creation strives towards divine light. The notion of light, or whiteness, as the embodiment of goodness or the divine is explicitly developed in Runge's simultaneously technical and rhapsodic treatise *Farbenkugel* (*Sphere of Colours*) of 1810 and is exemplified in paintings such as *Die Ruhe auf der Flucht* (1806; *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*), in which the infant Christ lies irradiated by a sky flooded with preternatural whiteness. Like Turner in Britain, Romantic painters in Germany discovered luminosity as a means to convey the transcendental.

In a whole series of landscapes by Caspar David Friedrich brightness, varying from pale patches in a leaden sky to yellow or red light suffusing an



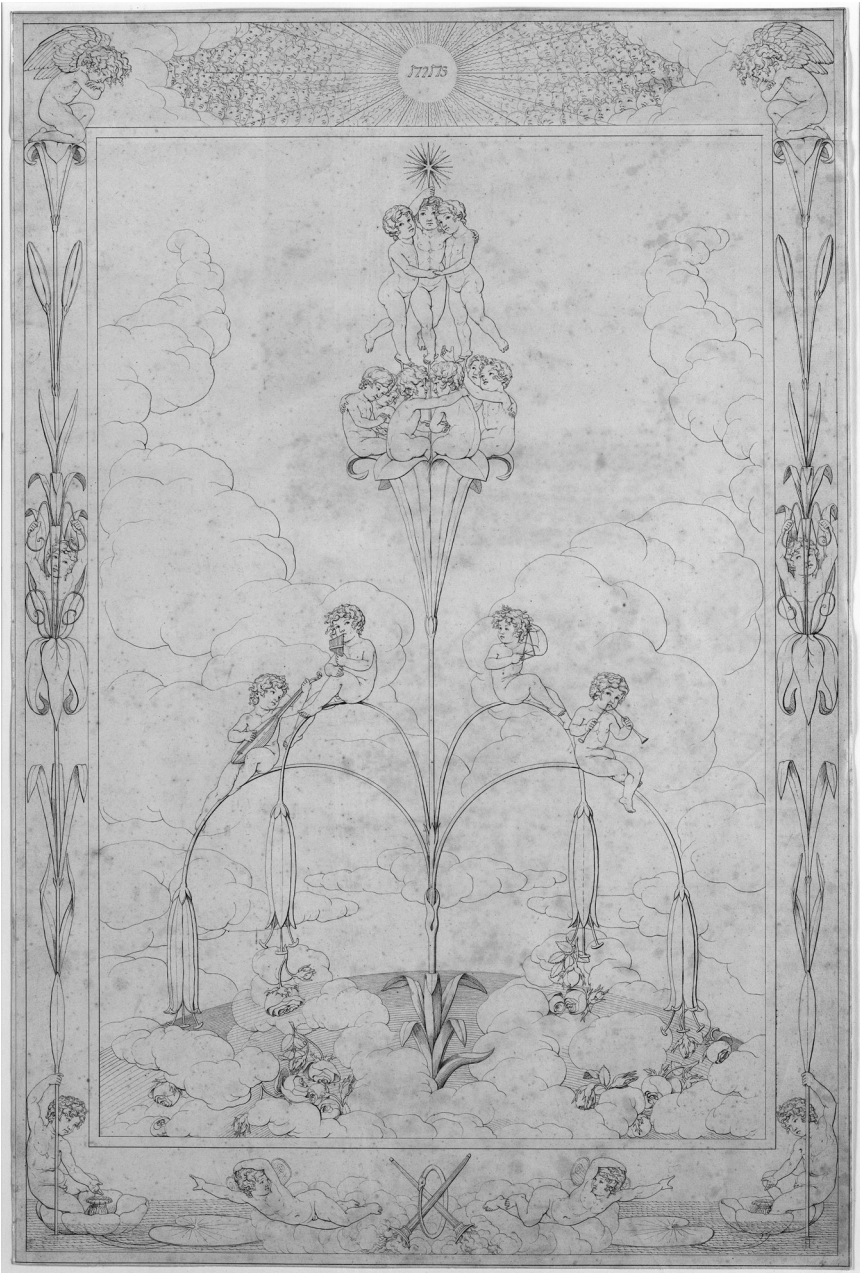


Figure 2. *Morgen* (*Morning*), 1803 (ink on paper) by Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810) (Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany).

entire scene, appears in the distance or background, whilst nearer the viewer an individual traveller or a group in procession make their way towards it, often through a church archway or some other portal. The symbolism is clear: struggling in earthly adversity, mortals can attain to redemption through the means of faith. One of the only two works by Friedrich held in Britain, *Winterlandschaft* (probably 1811; *Winter Landscape*) in the National Gallery, offers a striking example of this recurrent configuration: a solitary pilgrim in a snowy wilderness has dispensed with his crutches on sighting a wayside crucifix, whilst in the distance the outline of an extravagantly Gothic church beckons to a heaven indicated by a mist illuminated with pink brightness. In paintings such as *Das grosse Gehege* (1832; *The Great Enclosure*) or the startling early work *Mönch am Meer* (1809; *Monk on the Seashore*) Friedrich uses a panoramic and luminous sky to suggest the majesty of the cosmos and the insignificance of humanity in relation to it. This last painting attracted admiration and amazement from Romantic writers, Kleist remarking that the vastness of the scene created a sensation ‘als ob einem die Augenlider weggeschnitten wären’ (‘as if one’s eyelids had been cut away’),<sup>7</sup> referring to Friedrich’s renewed cropping of the foreground. In other maritime paintings, such as *Auf dem Segler* (1818–19; *On the Sailing Boat*), Friedrich again portrays a passage towards redemptive light.

Employing the metaphor of the journey of life, Friedrich also painted scenes of ships sailing into the distance, cruising towards the shore, or safely at anchor. A more enigmatic example of this category is *Die Lebensstufen* (1834–5; *The Stages of Life*), in which Friedrich depicts a group of five ships approaching a shoreline on which we see a corresponding group of five family members of representative different ages. This is again a clearly symbolic seascape, as the mannered gestures and postures of the family indicate, perhaps with a coded political message. A perhaps more realistic scene is the subject of *Kreidefelsen auf Rügen* (1818; *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen Island*), in which a trio of friends peers over a cliff edge at the rocks and shore below in what appears to be a holiday memory or genre picture. But here too the perspective opens up on a wide and bright expanse of water, just as in the nocturnal woodland scene of *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes* (1819; *Two Men Observing the Moon*) the friends gaze in awe at the full moon in the distance, or in *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1818; *The Walker above the Sea of Mist*) the solitary spectator stands on high and stares away from us at a seemingly unending panorama of mountain peaks. Everywhere in Friedrich’s work landscapes and seascapes imply a numinous dimension beyond the topographical data. His numerous disciples and imitators – Carl Gustav Carus, Ferdinand Oehme, Julius Leypold, the Norwegian Johann Christian Clausen Dahl – rehearse his Romantic images and themes but



rarely achieve his evocative power. Carus's painting *Kahnfahrt auf der Elbe* (1827; *Boat Trip on the Elbe*), for example, whilst reproducing the familiar rear view of passengers gazing into a bright distance, only suggests comfortable *Biedermeier* normality, whilst the destination of this trip is nothing more mysterious than contemporary Dresden sketched in postcard style. More originality was exhibited by Carl Blechen, another follower of Friedrich and Dahl, who broke free of the clichés of Gothic ruins to produce paintings of sunlit Italian scenes but also northern landscapes with hints of industrialised reality.

### Political art

Like writers such as Kleist, artists in Germany were provoked into political themes and even propaganda by the upheavals of the Napoleonic wars. Following the defeats of the Austrian Empire in 1805 and of Prussia in 1806, the ensuing French hegemony over the German states as a whole induced a wave of nationalistic sentiment. Philipp Otto Runge, who joined a patriotic society in Hamburg, sketched cover designs in 1809 for a periodical with the programmatic title *Vaterländisches Museum* (*Museum of the Fatherland*). Drawn at a point where there seemed little hope of the survival of German identity and traditions, the front cover, designated *Fall des Vaterlandes* (*Fall of the Fatherland*), was to show Germany as a male figure buried alive, naked and without a coffin, while the turf above comes under the plough. In 1815, following the wars which had led to the expulsion of the French, Georg Friedrich Kersting, another of Friedrich's Dresden associates, produced a painting entitled *Auf Vorposten* (*On Outpost Duty*), showing himself and two friends serving in a volunteer corps in the campaign against the retreating French. The subtext of the picture lies not only in the fact that the comrades in arms are wearing uniforms based on the 'old German' costume fashionable amongst young nationalists and that one of them has been decorated with the Iron Cross, but in their location in dense oak forest, a symbol of German fortitude in the face of French oppression. A similar message is conveyed by Friedrich's *Chasseur im Walde* (1812; *Chasseur in the Forest*): a solitary French cavalryman stares at an impenetrable German forest, implying the hopeless isolation of the occupying French in a resilient Germany. Under the repressive French regime political themes could only be presented through such covert allegory. A number of paintings executed by Friedrich in this period thus express patriotism obliquely by portraying monuments to German patriots from the past, whilst in one of them (*Grabmale alter Helden* (1812; *Tombs of Ancient Heroes*) a barely visible snake in the colours of the French flag slithers sacrilegiously over a German hero's grave.

In the period after the Congress of Vienna Romantic artists moved to a different political agenda, although nationalism remained the underlying focus. Reflecting the dashed hopes for German unification, the disappointment over the restoration of absolutist government, and the general pessimism of the post-Napoleonic era, Friedrich painted *Das Eismeer* (1824; *The Polar Sea*): a sailing ship with the significant name 'The Hope' lies cap-sized, crushed by the inexorable force of huge slabs of ice, its broken masts projecting out into a desolate Arctic wilderness. Other artists sought comfort in traditional German folk themes, in celebration of German provincial culture, or in re-creation of medieval splendour. The Viennese painter Moritz von Schwind exploited German folklore, illustrating fairy tales and romances, as in his vivid painting (1845) of the grotesque sprite Rübekahl; another typical work, *Kuno von Falkenstein* (1843–4), shows the legendary knight guiding his horse up to a medieval castle from which a fair damsel leans out, while dwarves and hobgoblins scramble up the path behind him. Similar scenes were painted by Adrian Ludwig Richter, such as *Die heilige Genoveva im Wald* (1841; *St Genevieve in the Forest*), although he tended more to favour sentimental subject matter drawn from rustic German life, often in the medium of woodcuts. The architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel painted medieval castles which are entirely imaginative pastiche, such as *Dom über einer Stadt am Wasser* (1813; *Cathedral above City Waterfront*), in which a Gothic church of massive proportions and impossibly intricate arches and spires dominates a dramatic medieval city. One of Richter's most well-known pictures, *Die Überfahrt am Schreckenstein* (1857; *Crossing the River by the Schreckenstein*), shows a party of pilgrims and tourists being rowed past a Gothic castle perched on a crag. Since Goethe's essay on Strasburg Cathedral (1773) Gothic architecture had been supposed, erroneously, to be a characteristically German phenomenon; and, in an epoch where campaigns to complete the unfinished Cologne Cathedral were linked closely to continuing aspirations for German unity, historical fantasies such as those of Schinkel and Richter had unmistakable political implications.

### Rediscovered religion

Gothic church architecture, often in picturesquely ruined form, figures ubiquitously in the work of Friedrich and his followers and there too has patriotic connotations; but, as we have seen above, in these cases its significance is primarily religious. Sometimes only residual church facades are portrayed, as in Friedrich's *Abtei im Eichwald* (1809–10; *Abbey in an Oak Forest*), where a procession of monks makes its way across a snow-covered graveyard through two archways into the light of eternity, or

Oehme's *Gotische Kirchenruine im Walde* (1841; *Gothic Church Ruin in the Forest*), or Carus's *Fenster am Obyn bei Mondschein* (1828; *Window on the Obyn in the Moonlight*), where a pair of lovers gazes at the moon through an overgrown Gothic arch. Sometimes an entire church appears in ethereal two-dimensional form, as in Friedrich's *Kreuz im Gebirge* (1812, *Cross in the Mountains*) or his *Die Kathedrale* (1817; *The Cathedral*): visions of the glory of heaven. Sometimes there is a view from outside into a church, as in Oehme's *Dom im Winter* (1821; *Cathedral in Winter*), where the brilliantly illuminated altar offers the warmth of salvation, or a church interior is shown, as in Blechen's *Gotische Kirchenruine* (1826; *Gothic Church Ruin*). A ruined Gothic window frame provides a site for individual meditation in Friedrich's *Der Träumer* (1835–6; *The Dreamer*) and, with additional patriotic significance, in his *Huttens Grab* (1823; *The Grave of Ulrich von Hutten*). The ruined monastery of Eldena was painted repeatedly by both Friedrich and, less mysteriously, by Carus (1823), and in Friedrich's case it combines in one picture with a mountainous background to symbolise redemption in double form.

The religious significance for Romantic artists of mountains or mountain ranges is made spectacularly explicit in Friedrich's *Morgen im Riesengebirge* (1830–4; *Morning in the Riesengebirge*). In the foreground a tall crucifix surmounts the peak of the highest of a wide sweep of mountains, and a female figure assists her male companion in scrambling up to the foot of the cross. Christian faith is the rock on which human beings climb to marvel at the prospect of heavenly salvation, symbolised again by the brilliant light of the dawn rising over the mountains and illuminating the climbers as they emerge from the dark shadow of the earthly side of the peak. Similar iconography operates in Friedrich's *Gebirgslandschaft mit Regenbogen* (1810; *Mountain Landscape with Rainbow*), in which a solitary climber finds rest on a rock illuminated by the rainbow. Often the sheer scale and magnificence of a mountain peak or peaks are enough to suggest the sublime, as in Friedrich's *Felsenschlucht* (1823; *Rocky Chasm*), or in pictures of the Watzmann mountain as painted by Richter (1824) and Friedrich (1825), or in Oehme's painting *Das Wetterhorn* (1829). In these last three works snow-covered peaks tower over rocky foothills, densely wooded middle ground, and waterfalls plunging down to form rushing streams in the foreground, reminiscent of Eichendorff's poem 'Sehnsucht' ('Yearning') with its description of an Alpine landscape with 'schwindelnde Felsenschlufte' ('dizzying rocky abysses') and springs which 'von den Klüften sich stürzen in die Waldesnacht' ('plunge from the chasms into the night of forests'). Both Romantic artists and writers envisaged such mountain vistas as symbols of a sublime spiritual world in contrast to imperfect social reality. Josef Anton

Koch's *Der Schmadribachfall* (1821–2; *The Schmadribach Falls*) appears almost like an illustration to Eichendorff's poem.

In the *Herzenergießungen* Wackenroder had concentrated on the religious art of the Renaissance, suggesting that it was of at least equal value to the art of antiquity which neo-classicist theorists had extolled as the ideal. Raphael's madonnas, so he proclaimed, were lifted and inspired by the religious devotion which underpinned them. Friedrich Schlegel went a step further in the art-historical essays which he published in his journal *Europa* (1803–5), at a time when he was on his way to conversion from a form of pantheism to Catholicism, maintaining that the criterion by which works of art should be judged was not their aesthetic appeal but their 'hohe, ja göttliche Bedeutung' ('high, indeed divine meaning', *KFSA* IV, p. 93). Whilst Friedrich, Runge, and their Protestant associates in North Germany used landscape as a means of indirectly symbolizing their religious convictions, another group of artists emerged in Vienna in 1809 who put Schlegel's assertion into practice, painting overtly religious and even devotional subjects and thus in part returning to history painting: the so-called Nazarenes.

Initially calling themselves the 'Lukasbrüder' ('Brethren of St Luke'), this group of artists was led by Franz Pforr and Friedrich Overbeck. Rejecting the sterile classicism of the Vienna Academy, they aspired to imitate the primitive and pious art of Raphael and his predecessors. In 1810 the brotherhood moved to Rome and took up residence in the monastery of San Isidoro, where they affected a monastic style of dress and way of life, which seems to be the origin of the designation 'Nazarenes'. Perhaps the most typical of their quasi-religious paintings is Pforr's *Sulamith und Maria* (1811), a diptych showing on the left Shulamit as the embodiment of the South, a figure redolent of Raphael madonnas and seated in front of an Italian landscape, and on the right Maria as the personification of the North, combing her hair in a Gothic chamber recalling domestic scenes by Dürer. A similar parallelism is evoked in Overbeck's *Italia und Germania* (1811–28), where two pious maids in flowing medieval costumes are set against contrasting backgrounds of Italian and German architecture respectively. Overbeck's *Der heilige Sebastian* (1813–16; *St Sebastian*) shows the martyr as a Christ-like figure in a state of holy repose against a background of Italian church buildings. From the beginning the Nazarenes also took to painting scenes from German medieval history and legend, as in Pforr's *Der Graf von Habsburg und der Priester* (1810; *The Count of Habsburg and the Priest*), a picture strikingly primitivist in its flatness and two-dimensionality. His *Einzug Rudolfs von Habsburg in Basel* (1810; *Entry of Rudolf von Habsburg into Basel*) is a crowded and colourful medieval scene which might have been painted by

Dürer or an artist of the Flemish school, with buildings and their occupants in the background shown flat and without perspective.

Not all of the original ‘brothers’ accompanied Pforr and Overbeck to Rome, but they were joined there by important new members of the Nazarene school, in particular Peter Cornelius and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. Cornelius had already made his name as the illustrator of Goethe’s *Faust* in appropriately ‘old German’, medievalizing style, and in Rome he took up the Nazarenes’ preoccupation with religious themes, illustrating parables such as *Die klugen und die törichten Jungfrauen* (1813; *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins*) and completing a range of Old Testament history paintings in Renaissance style, for example *Joseph deutet die Träume Pharaos* (1816; *Joseph Interprets the Pharaoh’s Dreams*). The paintings relating the story of Joseph were part of a cycle of frescos for the Casa Bartholdi, a collaborative project which also involved Overbeck, Wilhelm Schadow, Philipp Veit and Franz Catel. For Schnorr von Carolsfeld religious subjects were of less interest, although he did later paint *Die Hochzeit zu Kana* (1819; *The Marriage at Cana*) in the naive Renaissance manner which the Nazarenes cultivated. Schnorr’s strength lay in medieval history paintings, as exemplified by his dramatic *Reiterkampf auf Lipadusa* (1816; *Cavalry Battle on Lipadusa*) with its bold symmetrical composition, and he also produced the remarkable portrait of Bianca von Quandt playing the lute (1819–20), the medieval costume, loggia setting and Italian landscape background of which make it one of the most characteristic products of the Nazarene group.

Other German artists in Rome gravitated into the circle surrounding the Nazarenes. The Riepenhausen brothers, Franz and Joseph, had already emigrated to Rome in 1805, having made a reputation with illustrations to Tieck’s *Genoveva* in Flaxman’s outline style, and they now became interested principally in producing art with Christian themes. Another pair of brothers, Ferdinand and Friedrich Olivier, painted portraits and medievalising urban scenes in the Nazarene style. Joseph Anton Koch, an older Swiss painter who had begun painting according to neo-classical conventions, collaborated in some of the Nazarenes’ fresco projects and in the 1820s turned, as we have seen, to landscape painting in a Romantic manner akin to the work of Friedrich. In the context of the conversion to Catholicism of a number of Romantic writers, the activities of the Nazarenes and their circle induced a sharp condemnation in 1817 by Goethe (and/or by his ally Meyer) of the mysticism of what they termed the ‘neu-deutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst’ (‘new-German religious-patriotic art’) of the day; but the Nazarenes laid the foundations of major schools of art in Germany in the nineteenth century, particularly in Düsseldorf, and were important models for the Pre-Raphaelites in England.



## Conclusion

In the work of Friedrich and his followers such as Kersting there are a number of paintings of interiors which seem to have only private importance, in particular scenes beside windows or simply plain square windows without human presence. But here too symbolism is at work. In Friedrich's *Frau am Fenster* (1822; *Woman at the Window*) we again encounter a figure facing away from the spectator, gazing out from a window on to a river scene and a sunlit wood on the far bank. As in the writings of Kleist and Eichendorff at this time, the window is significant as a threshold, the point at which those unsettled in a restrictive domestic circle or social environment can escape into visions of freedom. It is no accident that *Frau am Fenster*, an interior, resembles *Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, set in the most open of panoramas: in both cases a reflective individual communes with a bright beyond. In his two paintings entitled *Caspar David Friedrich in seinem Atelier* (1811 and 1819) Kersting showed Friedrich himself at work beside a window, the sunlight pouring through on to the easel, and by implication into the painted scene, in an otherwise austere bare room. The symbolism of the window is at work too in paintings by Kersting such as *Die Stickerin* (1812; *The Embroideress*), but here *Biedermeier* composure and even sentimentality outweigh Romantic longing.

In Runge's portrait of Luise Perthes (1805) the little girl stands on a chair facing a window and is illuminated by rays of sunshine, an embodiment of childish innocence with divine endorsement. In his picture of the three Hülsenbeck children (1805–6) the innocence of the siblings is celebrated not only by the light of dawn but by their domination of a garden world uncorrupted by adults and urban civilisation. In this way Runge's innovative portraits too are intensified by symbolism. He does not paint wealthy patrons, but portrays family and friends in intimate and often nervous stances, as in *Wir Drei* (1810; *We Three*), showing himself with his wife and brother, pensive individuals huddling together in politically turbulent times, or in *Die Eltern des Künstlers* (1806; *The Artist's Parents*), where the elderly couple seem apprehensive and discomfited by the happy grandchildren at their feet. In this last work the sense of vulnerability, political as well as personal, is further symbolised by threatening red clouds gathering in the sky above the sea behind the house.

Thus in numerous ways Romantic art in Germany follows the same agenda as in literature: empirical reality is acknowledged and portrayed, but it is shown to be imperfect and in need of transcending spiritual visions which can only be suggested through symbolism. One final but especially striking illustration of this phenomenon may be cited: again and again

Friedrich paints landscapes which at first sight represent topographic reality, such as *Dorflandschaft bei Morgenbeleuchtung* (1822; *Village Landscape in Morning Light*) or *Ruine im Riesengebirge* (1830–34; *Ruin in the Riesengebirge*), but in the former the tree dominating the scene is a stock feature taken from Friedrich's sketchbooks, whilst in the latter the ruin is Eldena, situated hundreds of miles away near Greifswald. In the final phases of Romanticism altogether more realistic techniques began to be employed, as in the Viennese rural scenes painted by Ferdinand Waldmüller. Romantic painting in Germany came to an end with the wryly observed social scenes painted by Carl Spitzweg, in which he affectionately but also sardonically shows the descent of grand Romantic gesture into provincial *kitsch*. In *Der arme Poet* (1837; *The Poor Poet*), perhaps his most well-known work, the Romantic poet has become a sad eccentric stuck in his garret; Friedrich's sunlit window is still there, but the poet finds no vision looking out of it, instead he cowers away from it in his bed and creates poetry in the least Romantic fashion imaginable – reckoning metre on his fingers.

#### NOTES

1. Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, eds. Silvio Vietta and Richard Littlejohns (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991), vol. I, p. 98.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
3. *Caspar David Friedrich in Briefen und Bekenntnissen*, ed. Sigrid Hinz (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1974), p. 83.
4. Philipp Otto Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften*, ed. Johann Daniel Runge, 2 vols. facsimile edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965 [1840–1]), vol. I, p. 6.
5. *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*, ed. Alfred Anger (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1966), pp. 252–3.
6. For more detailed interpretation of these drawings, see my article 'Philipp Otto Runge's *Tageszeiten* and their relationship to Romantic Nature Philosophy', *Studies in Romanticism*, 42 (2003), pp. 55–74.
7. Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, 4 vols. (Munich: Hanser, 1982), vols. III, p. 327.

#### FURTHER READING

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