METAPHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE PAINTING

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"Das Göttliche ist überall, auch im Sandkorn,
da habe ich es einmal im Schilfe dargestellt."

____ Friedrich.

INTRODUCTION

The great revolutions, the French and the Industrial, were instrumental in changing the shape and nature of European social structure. The population explosion was the most tangible symptom of change. It was as yet, however, a condition for the Industrial Revolution, in that it created the necessary man-power and increased the number of consumers; it was not a result of industrialism, though it was later to become so. The upward social mobility of the age meant that men were no longer born to their station in life or as John Stewart Mill said, ". . . human beings . . . are free to employ their faculties . . . to achieve the lot which may appear the most desirable."[1]

The French Revolution unlike similar revolutions, such as the American War of Independence, was international in its desire to free man and not only the Frenchman. The "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" was, according to Barrès "the charter of individualism."[2] The principles enacted in the "Declaration", namely Equality, Fraternity and Responsibility were instrumental in freeing the artist to express his opinions and gave rein to his personal sensibility.

Thoré's statement "hitherto art was at the service of gods and princes; perhaps the time has come for art to serve mankind",[3] was

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[1]J.L. Talmon, Romanticism and Revolt, Europe 1815-1848. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), p. 21.

[2]René Huyghe, Art and the Spirit of Man, trans. by N. Guterman. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), p. 206.

[3]Maurice Raynal, The 19th century. (Geneva: Skira, c 1951), p. 20.

true in that now the artist was no longer at the beck and call of patrons but was free to express his own sensibility.

The very will of the artist as an individual meant that his was a solitary task and the emotions of loneliness, homelessness, yearning and the search for the ideal were natural consequences. The Romantic search for the ideal was envisaged by Novalis as the quest for the blue flower — the German symbol of love. The quest for the ideal led Caspar David Friedrich to attempt to define man's place in nature. Whether or not he achieved his aims in each of his works is immaterial. What is important is that he was never satisfied. He continually appraised and re-appraised man's place in the universe. The artist cannot rest on his laurels for to do that would be to die, if not physically, then certainly spiritually. Therefore, once the ideal has been reached it ceases to be the blue flower — another ideal has taken its place. Thus the quest for the ideal is never fully realised. One is always striving for that which one can never have. The best expression of Romantic longing is found in these lines by Shelley:

> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion of something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow.[1]

Novalis described philosophy as "home-sickness", as the "urge to be at home in all places", and the fairy tale as a dream of "that homeland which is everywhere and nowhere." It was this very isolation

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[1]Shelley: "One word is too often profaned."

which prompted Schiller to call the Romantics "exiles pining for a homeland."[1] It was this solitude and isolation that was perhaps the most important feature in enabling the artist to become one with nature, for as Louis Lavelle said, "It is the most self-absorbed, the most solitary man who is capable of performing the most disinterested, purest act of communion."[2]

The 19th. century Romantic painter could not co-ordinate nature in the wild with the nature that had been manipulated by the 18th. century populace into straight roads, houses, lofty coppices and landscape gardens. Small wonder then that the new generation was awed by "nature red in tooth and claw,"[3] and produced works that portray the essence of nature in their attempt to define man's place in nature and the world.

"Mon coeur désire tout, il veut tout, il contient tout. Que mettre à la place de cet infini qu'exige ma pensée . . . ?" we read in Senancour's "Obermann". But it is clear that this "tout" contains nothing and this "infini" is to be found nowhere.

The Romantic painters were faced with a self-imposed dilemma - they wanted to escape to solitude but at the same time were loath to leave hearth and home. They went into isolation in order to escape distraction so that they could seek the ideal. This search for the ideal

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[1] Arnold Hauser. The Social History of Art, Vol. II p. 663.

[2] Huyghe. Art and the Spirit of Man. p. 22.

[3] Tennyson: "In Memoriam A.H.H."

took innumerable forms and was expressed in a number of attempts to escape, of which turning to the past (almost a reflex action, as the prisoner in Plato's parable), was merely the most pronounced. Other attempts included turning to childhood, the world of the dream, to the weird and uncanny and even to madness. All these escape routes had one common feature — the seeking of refuge in a secret and private place such as the "Vallon" envisaged by Lamartine.

It was the Germans who best exemplified these feelings of insecurity and transcience. The insecurity that was felt by the Romantics had been felt in Medieval Times and was expressed in depictions of the "Last Judgement" and in "Vanitas" paintings. One of the major stimuli of the medieval artists was the belief that the end of the world was at hand. The powers of darkness were still stronger than the powers of light and the belief in demons and devils forced man to the conclusion that he stood alone before God. The feelings of homelessness and loneliness became the fundamental experience of the new generation and this had a profound influence on their outlook on the world.

Delécluze said of the artistic movement going on around him, "those who call themselves Romantics differ so much in their opinions, follow principles so contradictory, that it is impossible to extract one central idea from all this chaos. I myself have given up trying to understand it."[1] Similarly Paul Valéry urged that "one would have to have lost all ability to reason closely to attempt to define Romanticism"[2].

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[1]Marcel Brion. Romantic Art. p. 8.

[2]Ibid. p. 8.

One is always led to believe that Romanticism is just a word that describes a style of art that arose in reaction to Neo-Classicism, but it is more than that. To contrast it with Classicism produces arbitrary, artificial and negative conclusions. It cannot be allocated to a particular country or era because in essence it is a way of seeing things, a cosmic vision. Romantic sensibility is always latent in men's souls; one can find traces of it in the customs, literature, sciences and arts of all ages.

The Classicist felt himself to be master of his environment; he agreed to be ruled by others because he ruled himself and believed that life can be ruled. The Romantic on the other hand was basically insecure because the old order had collapsed. He was now merely another part of nature, and no longer felt in control of the situation. Regardless of the manner in which he looked at nature the overriding emotion was his inferiority to nature — he never felt equal to her.

In the 19th. century, man was strongly influenced by his imagination and as Pascal says, "L'Imagination dispose de tout."[1] All men (regardless in what measure) have their own day-dreams or cherish their own ideals. "We all of us," writes La Fontaine, "wise as well as foolish, indulge in day-dreams. There is nothing sweeter. A flattering illusion carries away our spirits. All the wealth in the world is ours, all honours, and all women."[2]

The Romantic imagination was free, not merely from outer formalistic constraint, but from all constraint whatever. The freeing

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[1]Irving Babbitt. Rousseau and Romanticism p v.

[2]Ibid. p. 71.

of the imagination was accompanied by the freeing of the emotions and both these measures were a result of partly a reaction to Neo-Classical judgement — a type of judgement that overcame any spontaneity in man by the sheer weight of its conventions — partly by reason of the Enlightenment which also tended to dampen man's intuition and immediacy.

The Oxford Dictionary definition of "imagination" is that it is "a mental faculty forming images of objects not present." It is thus the corner-stone of dreams and all forms of artistic creation. In the sphere of dreams or the unconscious the imagination is super-real. Imagination is the faculty that is never shackled by reason, indeed it is completely and utterly irrational. Due to this quality, the imagination is capable of reaching the inner core of an object and storing it in the unconscious mind. Baudelaire said that the visible world was nothing but a store of signs and images, "a kind of nourishment that the imagination must assimilate and transform."[1]

During the creation of a work of art these stored facts force their way out of the sub-conscious mind, become conscious and are incorporated into the work of art. The imagination alone is not capable of creating concrete works — that is done by the artist himself, but without imagination he would not be an artist. The Romantic painter uses the imagination to transcend himself and to become one with the object in order that he may understand the object and so recognise the true reality of that object. Coleridge described imagination as the power that unifies and this is illustrated by an example from Antiquity.

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[1]Huyghe. Art and the Spirit of Man, p. 431.

We are told that the Greeks never saw an oak tree without at the same time seeing the dryad. Imagination then is the faculty that unifies the sub-conscious information with the conscious information or the thing unseen with the thing seen.

It is as well to realise the importance of the rôle of the imagination in Romanticism for a great deal depends upon it. The search for the ideal, the retreat to Utopia, could never have been envisaged let alone embarked upon, had not the Romantics had a free imagination. "The finest works of art", wrote Delacroix, "are those which express the pure imagination of the artist."[1]

Samuel Palmer wrote that artists such as Claude, Poussin and Bourdon did not attempt to copy nature and thus accommodate that "curiosity of the eye that an intelligent tourist ever feeds and never sates" because they realised that there was more matter in a simple hedgerow than could be crowded into a picture gallery. And supposing that they could deceive the eye, the real impression could not be completed without the senses of touch and hearing — "the gushes of air and the singing of the birds." They addressed not the perception chiefly, but the IMAGINATION, and here is the "hinge and essence of the whole matter."[2]

The question that now arises is whether the function of art is to copy nature or not. Is there a difference between the external reality of a scene and the beauty portrayed by the artist? The answer

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[1]Brion. Romantic Art. p. 134.

[2]Palmer A.H. The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer. Letter to L.R. Valpy. p. 359.

to this question is in the affirmative. If the function of art was merely to reproduce the appearance of nature it would then follow that the closest imitation of that appearance would be judged the best work of art. It would also follow that with the progress made in the field of photography art would by now no longer exist. Here then is the crux of the matter — art is not simply the reproduction of appearances. Rather, in painting the artist attempts to impart some facet of information gleaned from nature by his imagination to the viewer. External reality is therefore not his goal but merely his point of departure. Therefore we arrive at the conclusion that nature is the point where the artist enters into his own private fantasy.

The information to be transmitted to the viewer can be emotion that the artist felt on viewing the scene or it can go deeper and be the pictorial expression of true reality — the dryad in the oak tree.

Caspar David Friedrich is the example of the metaphysical painter par excellence. In his works, we the observers, are not called upon to use our sense of touch and hearing, in the manner described by Samuel Palmer, but rather to exercise our sensibility. The sense of hearing is important in his works —we do not hear noises but we can hear the silence. There is a deep and contemplative silence which pervades all these works and this is the fundamental tenet of German Romanticism. The artist is contemplating the inner reaches of reality and is attempting to capture the true reality rather than the apparent reality. His paintings are conscious attempts to plumb the depths of reality, to go beyond mere appearances and to arrive via nature at a point beyond nature.

Phillip Otto Runge expressed a wish that was common to many of the Romantics when he said that he wanted his huge compositions (of each hour of the day) placed in a sanctuary dedicated to painting, music and poetry — the complete work of art. The total work of art is the work that should appeal simultaneously to all the senses, to sensibility, the emotions and to the intelligence. This vague conception of the total work of art demands that everything should appeal to all the perceptions and be accepted simultaneously as music, poetry and visual art. Delacroix, for example, imagined symphonies performed while the audience was shown paintings in order to strengthen the effect. Baudelaire outlined a still more ambitious programme of synthesis in the famous line: "Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent."[1]

Romantic landscape paintings executed by the German and Swiss painters have two realities — the apparent reality and the true reality. It is the apparent reality or the outward appearance of objects represented on the canvas that are immediately recognisable as trees, mountains, rocks and rivers etc.

The true reality is that which Plato referred to when he spoke of "things unseen". Plato argued that only "things unseen", as opposed to "things seen", were proper objects of knowledge. True reality is not evident to the eye as a physical object — rather, it is something suggested by the mood, atmosphere and technique of the painting.

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[1]Baudelaire. "Correspondances."

The subtlety involved in portraying the true reality of an object lends to the composition an aura of mystery and spiritualism. It is also intransient and unchanging.

Aristotle's metaphysics is that branch of ontology that deals with the nature of reality. One of its puzzles is the contrast between the permanent and the changing. It asks the question whether there is an unchanging essence which is timeless even though its instances come and go (eg. man, the kind or species persists while particular men are born and die). Plato and his many followers, both in medieval and modern times have answered "yes" to this question.

Thus, the metaphysical element in German and Swiss Romantic landscape painting is that element which speaks to us, the observers, as the spirit or essence of the object or objects represented, that is the deeper level of reality behind the appearance. This metaphysical quality is achieved only when the painter has succeeded in imbuing the painting with his own sensibility. Solitude seems to be a pre-requisite for achieving this. The essence is transmitted by an empathy that exists between the observer and the observed. For example, let us take the "Raft of the Medusa" by Géricault. When we look at the work we may feel sympathy towards the men on the raft, a sympathy for them in their plight. But, regarding the work as a whole we are caught up in the movement and tangle of the composition and our eyes are led by the outstretched arms to search the horizon for the speck of white sail that signals the approach of a craft and possible rescue. There is no longer a sympathy for the men because we, the spectators, have become added members of the raft — we are now all in the same boat!

The generation of empathy is not a phenomenon peculiar to the Romantics as it has occurred before and after them. Kandinsky said, "A work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artist; this emotion has the capacity to evoke a similar emotion in the observer."[1]

Seeing things with the heart implies arriving at the essence or the inner meaning of an object and it was this idea that inspired Romanticism to abolish the barrier between the observer and the observed. Coleridge, for example, turned attention away from the outward appearance of the object when he said, "The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure and discourses to us by symbols — the Naturgeist or the Spirit of Nature."[2]

The idea or concept of looking into the object for the "things unseen" was more fully realised in the words of Caspar David Freidrich, who said, "The true, the only source of art is our heart, the language of a pure and candid soul . . . Close your physical eye in order to see your canvas with the eye of the spirit. Then, bring to the light of day that which you have seen in your night in order that its action works on other beings, from the exterior to the interior."[3]

In German and Swiss Romanticism, landscape painting fulfilled more than the role of mirroring the external world. Rather, it attempted to reach the essence of nature through devotion and study.

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[1] Herbert Read. A concise History of Modern Painting. p. 170.

[2] Dore Ashton. The unknown Shore. p. 160.

[3] Ibid.

Liebniz had stressed the fact that art must not be "mirrors or images of the universe or created things . . . but also images of the Godhead itself . . . capable of imitating certain elements of the 'system of the universe' in the form of architectonic samples, each mind being a little godhead in its own compartment."[1] This idea was hardly more than outlined by Liebniz. It was Romanticism that brought it up to date and made it it's fundamental dogma so that Lamennais could say, "Art is to man what the creative power is to God,"[2] and Baudelaire could speak of "L'Homme—Dieu" or the Man-God.[3]

For landscape painting to become an end in itself it had to subscribe to the ideal concept that had been upheld by painters for close on three hundred years after the Renaissance. That is to say that landscape painting had to aspire to the heights of those branches of painting which illustrated themes — historical, religious, poetic.

The Classicist ideal dictated that man was supreme and that landscape should be subordinate to him. The landscapes executed by Poussin such as "Jupiter and Amalthea", "The Triumph of Flora" and "Bacchanalian Revel" are creations of settings in which man has a part, of a nature that recalls the Golden Age, when man was in harmony with nature. Even when the artist attempted to paint the landscape for its own sake this branch of painting was still considered inferior. At no time did the painters accept this ideal without argument. When

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[1]Huyghe. Art and the Spirit of Man. p. 441.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

it became necessary to introduce a human element, this element was placed in such a position that the landscape could still be seen and be able to live. Romanticism was revolutionary in this regard, for the artists painted scenes devoid of men in their attempts to communicate with Mother Nature. Altdorfer, in the 16th century, painted nature in a way that was to be echoed in the Romantic era. His works such as "Susanna at her Bath" and "Battle of Alexander" are full of the human element but nature is the witness and despite the mêlée of battle, man is subservient to nature and all the pomp and military splendour is overshadowed by the turbulent sky and the mountain peaks. The works of the Danube School sprang from the discovery of landscape as an artistic subject in its own right and the recognition of the links between man and nature. Although the majority of Altdorfer's works are concerned with Biblical themes they can be recognised as the first steps towards the portrayal of a cosmic pantheism that was to reach its zenith in the works of the Romantics. In Altdorfer's "Danube landscape" the human figure is completely absent. The mark of man is to be seen in the castle that nestles in the background but even this edifice is overshadowed by the splendours of nature. (Those landscapes that do possess the human element are nevertheless landscapes because the figures are subservient to nature and their inclusion is used to emphasise some emotion of the artist. In the case of "Couple gazing at the Moon" by Friedrich, the figures have been used to underline the feelings of awe and contemplation that the wonders of nature aroused in Friedrich's soul).

The change that occurred in the artist's approach to landscape painting was radical to say the least. From being regarded as merely

a setting for historical or biblical scenes, landscape aspired to the highest plane of painting — the capture of the essence of nature. Ruskin, in his "Lectures on Landscape" had said that a cloud was only worthy of being painted if it was looked at as the "means of nourishment and chastisement to men, or the dwelling place of the imaginary gods."[1]

Although Romanticism took different courses in different countries, it was, as far as Germany and Switzerland were concerned, to do with the language of the soul and the representation of true reality rather than solely apparent reality.

Apart from the effects of the changes wrought by the French and Industrial Revolutions, Romanticism in Germany sprang from three main sources:

(i) A reaction to the rigid rules laid down by the 18th century Classicist régime in Germany which had borrowed its ideas from French Rationalism and the Age of Reason.

(ii) The art of the 19th century German Romantics traced its roots back to the mysticism of the great German art of the 15th and 16th centuries.

(iii) The rediscovery of the medieval texts of the Minnesängers and the Niebelungenlied by Bodmer, and Herder's work on folk poetry.

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[1]F. Jameson. Art's Enigma. p. 149

During the 18th century the German painters had turned to Rome and Paris for their tuition and ideals, now however, the Romantics turned their backs on the Italian and Greek ideas of form and composition and turned to the north for their inspiration and to the Rhine and the German countryside. This turning to the German landscape was not a new concept but it was for a different motive. Now the interest of the painters lay purely in the landscape for its own sake and not as a background to historical or mythological scenes.

In German Romanticism the urge to be at one with nature was the most dominant emotion shared by the artists and this reached its highest intensity in the art of Caspar David Friedrich, Carl Gustav Carus, Phillip Otto Runge and Joseph Anton Koch.

The "Weltauschärung" of painters in general shows much that is in common with the philosophers of the time. The painters shared Lorenz Oken's view that "without a philosophy of nature there can be no philosophy of the mind."[1]

Teachers of high reputation like Jens Juel and Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard now taught at the Academy of Copenhagen and were an attraction to the young German painters. The intellectual atmosphere of the Scandinavian countries, plus the fact that they could call on medieval legends and war poems was an added draw-card. The fame of the Danish masters attracted Friedrich, Runge, Blechen and Kersting to their studios.

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[1]Brion. Romantic Art. p. 89.

Carl Gustav Carus, in his "Nine Letters on Landscape Painting" wrote: "A man contemplating the magnificent unity of a natural landscape becomes aware of his own smallness and, feeling everything is a part of God, he loses himself in that infinity, giving up, in a sense his individual existence . . ." It was this very feeling of smallness that prompted the artist to carve a niche for himself in the infinite, to become, even for only a moment, one with nature. Carus continues, "To be engulfed in this way is not to be destroyed; it is a gain: what normally one could only perceive with the spirit almost becomes plain to the physical eye. It becomes convinced of the unity of the infinite universe."[1] These lines are tremendously powerful because the word "almost" carries so much weight. So much pathos is carried in that one word and yet it is also an exultation. The "thing unseen" is for a brief moment in time so close to the surface that one can almost see it. Carus has, as nearly as possible, captured the essence, the fundamental tenet of Romanticism — the quest for true reality. So important is this quest for true reality that the subject of the painting becomes secondary.

In his paintings Carus shows the influence of the 17th century Dutch landscape painters with regard to technique but the subject matter is treated in a far more searching manner. Not only do Carus's subjects resemble those of Friedrich but we are also aware of his attempt to capture the essence or the spirit of nature. ("Friedhof auf dem Oybin" by Carus is very similar in both treatment and subject to "Kreuz im Gebirge" by Friedrich).

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[1] Ibid. p. 99.

Another similarity is to be found in the works of these two artists — the use of one or more figures placed in the foreground with their backs to the spectator. This could be termed a trick, if one were to be harsh, but nevertheless the figures emphasise the searching and the contemplation felt by the artist when faced with the changing moods of nature. Both Carus and Friedrich use the figure that looks into the canvas and the spectator immediately identifies himself with that figure and in this way experiences the same emotions as the artist. The inclusion of a figure is also an attempt by the artist to define man's place in nature.

Caspar David Friedrich towers over the other German Romantics because he expressed the German feeling to nature most fully. His interest in the faithful reproduction of the things of nature, an objectivism carried to the most extreme consequences, also concerned the French landscape painters of the 1830's. But profoundly different cultural conditions lent to Friedrich's analytical spirit a meditative, philosophical quality; his attempt to seize the vital principal of each tree, branch and leaf often produced an almost surrealistic effect because of a sense of the absolute reality of the inner vision. "I have to give myself up to my surroundings, to be united with my clouds and rocks, in order to be what I am",[1] wrote Friedrich. (Surrealism used in this context as a variant of Baudelaire's "Supernaturalism").

A visit made by David d'Angers to Friedrich describes Friedrich as "l'homme qui a découvert la tragedie du paysage." He goes on to

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[1]Brion. Romantic Art. p. 110.

say that Friedrich "est doué d'une touche simple, il y a dans son crayon quelquechose du laconisme des grands orateurs."[1] David d'Angers had noticed that Friedrich painted sombre and melancholy scenes and also that Friedrich used the representation of nature to explore the depths of reality.

The German Romantic was not merely in search of balance; he also aspired to go beyond himself. "We seek God throughout our lives, are in perpetual quest of his name. At all events, it is certain that we are looking for something else all through our lives — something different from the too obvious light of day, a light that does not merely illuminate appearances, but makes visible the secret that underlies them: a mysterious light not made for human eyes, a light imperceptible to those who see only with their eyes. To them this light would look like darkness, and yet would nonetheless be the sole true light, the only light capable of slaking the thirst of the spirit."[2]

The works that best illustrate the metaphysical quality are certainly those of Caspar David Friedrich and Carl Gustav Carus. Friedrich painted "The Wreck of the Hope" which is one of his most famous works as well as being one of the few paintings devoid of human figures. It is more than just the representation of a naval tragedy. Rather it shows the tremendous forces at Nature's command and also perhaps the futility of man's endeavours. A similar theme was expressed in Théodore Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa" which, when it was exhibited in 1819, took the critics by storm. As Michelet said:

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[1]Herbert von Einem. Caspar David Friedrich. p. 45.

[2]Huyghe. Art and the Spirit of Man. p. 449.

"It is France herself, our whole society which he put aboard the raft of the 'Medusa'".[1]

Friedrich was at times both religious (in the Christian sense), and pantheistic. The churches, churchyards and crosses that Friedrich painted in the Harz Mountains of Bavaria, such as "Cross in the Mountains" and "Cross in the Riesengebirge", show that a stronger religion pervades even these symbols of Christianity — the love of Nature. A description by Joukowski (to the Czar of Russia) illustrates Friedrich's belief in life after death. Joukowski wrote: "Le peintre a voulu nous faire penser à l'autre monde. Les pauvres parents se sont arretés à la porte du cimétière. Leurs regards fixés sur la tombe de leur enfant sont frappés de quelque apparition mystérieuse. En effêt, le brouillard mouvant qui l'entoure est animé; il leur semble voir que leur enfant s'élève de sa tombe, que les ombres de ses aïeux sont portées vers lui, en lui tendant les bras et qu'un ange de paix avec une branche d'olivier voltige au-dessus d'eux et les réunit."[2]

The influence of the 17th Century Dutch landscape painters is plain to see in Friedrich's work. The Dutch traditions of topographical landscape are continued in his paintings but the distinction lies in the fact that Friedrich's works contain far more information than topographical details would allow. His deep feeling for nature, his desire to portray the essence of nature regardless of the time of day, (several

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[1]Brion. Romantic Art. p. 133.

[2]Herbert von Einem. Caspar David Friedrich. p. 65.

of his works include in the title the time of day, such as "Mittag" or "Nachmittag") mark Friedrich as the landscape painter par excellence.

Schopenhauer summer up Friedrich's attitude to nature, the world and art when in "Parega und Paralipomena", he wrote: "In order to have original, uncommon, and perhaps even immortal thoughts, it is enough to estrange oneself so fully from the world of things for a few moments that the most ordinary objects appear quite new and unfamiliar, in this way their true nature is disclosed."[1]

Phillip Otto Runge was another who was fascinated by the spectacle of nature and subscribed to the "Naturphilosophen". Runge does not aspire to the heights that Friedrich and Carus aspired to but nevertheless in some of his work, such as "The young Perthes", he employs Friedrich's technique of using the figure that gazes into the canvas. In this case, the child is standing on a chair at the open window and although she is looking for the spectator as though at an intruder, one gets the impression that she had been looking out of the window before our arrival and will do so again. Runge is perhaps most renowned for his wish to paint several huge compositions depicting each hour of the day. (He left only sketches for these works).

Oehme combines the influences of Caspar David Friedrich, and Joseph Anton Koch. The influence of Friedrich is seen in "Dom in Winter" which underlines the verticality of the cathedral in the same way that it is emphasised in Friedrich's "Kreuz im Gebirge". The arch of light draws the eye towards more open space, towards the infinite in the way that Friedrich was capable of doing in so many of

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[1] Arthur Schopenhauer. Essays from the Parega and Paralipomena. On Reputation. p. 86.

his works, such as "Woman at the Window", so forcing the spectator to review his own place in the universe. Friedrich's works have in common the desire to unite man and the universe. The figure is represented as a silhouette that rises from the earth and is seen against the light of the sky. The figure is the means whereby the observer, through empathy, can regard nature and assess his own position in the world. Oehme's "Das Matterhorn" clearly shows the influence of Joseph Anton Koch. The way in which the mountains completely dominate the scene and the mark of man is similar to Koch's "Schmadribach Falls", whose torrents threaten to burst their banks and engulf the flock of sheep that is grazing on the water-meadow. Both Oehme and Koch painted scenes of the Alps and their work invests the mountains with grandeur and mystery. The painting of mountains was perfected in Switzerland in the art of Alexandre Calame.

A theme which occurs again and again in German Romanticism is that of ruins. Practically every artist in Germany painted ruins - whether they were ruins of churches or houses it mattered little. This theme was supplied by the English art of the 17th and 18th centuries as well as Altdorfer. The publication of Macpherson's "Ossian", Percy's gloomy "Reliques" and the rediscovery of the "Niebelungenlied" and the "Minnesängers" focussed attention on the past. Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" (1751) exerted no mean influence judging by the number of representations of churches and cemeteries. This may seem a rather morbid topic to choose as a subject but there was a reason. The Romantics, regardless of nationality, were very aware of Death. The very fact that Death is inescapable, that it is

inevitable, was the major driving force behind their desire to immortalize themselves in art.

Another facet of German Romanticism was the founding of the Lukasbrüder in Vienna. Started by Overbeck and Pforr and joined by Peter Cornelius, this group set out to regenerate the German religious art in imitation of Dürer, Perugino and Raphael. Their influence was strong and one can find traces of it in the work of Phillip Otto Runge, such as "Rest on the Flight to Egypt".

The communion with the divine which gives the works of the German Romantics such an intense religious aura is revealed in all their subjects: the crucifixes, the churchyards, the expanse of the North Sea, or the dark stretches of forested slopes. This results, however, not from a deification of nature or the elements, but from the conception of a universal omnipresent soul which had been portrayed by the German mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Angelus Silesius and Böhme as well as poets such as Novalis and Hölderlin.

The artist and nature in German Romanticism became so inextricably fused that it became impossible to distinguish the mood of the artist from the external images reproducing that mood. The artist managed, by casting distractions to the winds, to communicate with nature so wholly and deeply as to be able to strip off the external or apparent reality and reach to the inner meaning or essence of the object. Rabindranath Tagore wrote that to rely solely on sight, neglecting the mind was to confine oneself to the outer shell or the apparent reality. What one must do to acquire true knowledge is to "illumine all things with the rays of our soul and be ready to receive the light that emanates from things visible and invisible."[1]

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[1]Huyghe. Art and the Spirit of Man. p. 15.

The Romantic era in Switzerland was the age in which Albert von Haller was writing his great poem of the Alps, which was to stir up the sensibility of the artists as much as Young's "Night Thoughts" or Rousseau's "Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire"; when expeditions climbed the Alps for scientific rather than sporting reasons; when Joseph Anton Koch was remarking for almost the first time, the majestic beauty of the waterfalls and glaciers. In the sphere of art Swiss painters were discovering and marvelling at the rich fund of aesthetic emotions, surprises and joys offerred by the mountains of their country. Perhaps for the first time, they saw them not as hostile and terrifying peaks but as features of a landscape worthy of being painted for its own sake and not merely as the background to a regional or dramatic plot.

To the Renaissance minds of men such as Manuel Deutsch, Graf or Len, the mountains and forests were tragic elements in themselves, but they were still tied up with events, actions in which man was implicated: the 'man of nature' of the German Renaissance was a mongrel creature, part animal and part rustic god, but still a kind of man.

During the period of Romanticism, the Swiss, picking up the vibrations of the current trends in landscape painting, looked upon the Alps as a subject worthy to be painted for the first time. Cranach, Wolf Huber and Altdorfer had sensed that wooded and alpine slopes might be animated by invisible presences, represented without anthropomorphism, in trees, rocks and torrents, like ancient earthly deities. This can be felt in Altdorfer's "St. George", where nature is as much

the subject as the figure. In the depths of the forest St. George has slain the dragon, but the eye has to search amid the trees and foliage to find the subject named in the title.

Hercules Seghers, a Dutchman, visited the Alps and made several paintings of them which were extremely influential. His empty landscapes breathe an atmosphere of pagan divinity. With the Swiss painters of the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, the haughty, distant beauty of the mountains acquires a certain homeliness which softens their inaccessible severity. "The finest view leaves a certain emptiness in the spirit if it is not animated by some more approachable object which suggests the presence of our fellow creatures",[1] wrote Karl Albert Kasthofer, but the suggested presence of gods does more towards immortalising the spirit of the mountains than could the presence of man. This idea was held by Alexandre Calame. He is aware of powers in nature which come to the surface all the more freely when man is excluded from the haunts of gods and demons. It is in this way that Calame echoes the thoughts of the German Romantics. However, his Romanticism stays within the limits of a Realism saturated with supernatural qualities, strangely fantastic and unfamiliar. Calame was fond of Italy and profited from what that country had to offer. However, he did not allow this Italian influence to overcome his own individuality. Calame was, like all the German Romantics, intimately bound up with the cantons over which he roamed. His real greatness lay in the portrayal of the tragic grandeur of the mountains and not in the representation of scenes of everyday life in Switzerland. He had a predeliction for storms,

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[1]Brion. Romantic Art. p. 190.

a feature common to Romantics, and his world revolved around ominous clouds, grey glaciers, heavily forested slopes and alpine torrents. In this way he shares much of the attitude of Joseph Anton Koch and to a certain extent the Barbizon masters.

François Diday discovered the magnificence of the mountains of the Bernese Oberland. He acquired his training from examples of such predecessors as Pierre Louis de la Rive, Adam Topffer and Nicholas Fassin, who was the first Swiss artist to draw on models from Dutch art.

Joseph Anton Koch shares much with Calame. His paintings of the Alps such as "The Schmadribach Falls" are full of Romantic penchants. Nature is shown in all her glory. She is also a nature to which man must and can only be subservient. Koch was not solely a landscape painter but he comes closest to the representation of metaphysical awareness in his scenes of nature.

At the time when the Futurists were arousing a greal deal of interest, another Italian artist was working in a different way entirely. He was not concerned with reaching the essence of objects by taking them to pieces in the manner of the Cubists but to emphasise their stability, and solidity. This artist was Giorgio de Chirico. His art can most definitely be termed 'metaphysical' because it takes its point of departure beyond the physical.

The "Scuola Metafisica' was formulated in Ferrara between the years 1917 and 1919. Its principal members were Giorgio de Chirico, Carlo Carrà and Chirico's brother who worked under the name Alberto

Savinio. They were later joined by Giorgio Morandi. The main principle of the Scuola Metafisica was to evoke those "disquieting states of mind that prompt one to doubt the detached and impersonal existence of the empirical world, looking at each object as only the external part of an experience which is chiefly imaginative and enigmatic in meaning."[1]

In discussing the metaphysical qualities of the German and Swiss Romantics, one realises that this aspect arises out of the intense feelings of contemplation that their works evoke in the spectator, having been executed by intensely contemplative painters. When one looks at the works of Giorgio de Chirico one also becomes aware of the feeling of contemplation. Indeed, in Chirico one is also aware of a state of impending doom. This is done by the inclusion of a shadow that falls across the canvas from an object that is not included in the composition. (eg. "The Seer" or the hands of the clock in "The Enigma of the Hour" set at five minutes to three.) Apollinaire wrote that "The 'metaphysical' painters were moving farther and farther from the old art of optical illusion and natural proportions, in order to express the grandeur of metaphysical forms".[2] Although the early Cubists are hard to ally with the Metaphysicals, they were both concerned with plumbing the depths of the visible world.

De Chirico said, "Who can deny the strangely suggestive relationship between perspective and metaphysics."[3] A number of Chirico's

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[1]Herschel B. Chipp. Theories of Modern Art. p. 446.

[2]Lionello Venturi. Italian Painting. p. 143.

[3]Ibid. p. 144.

works involve perspective, such as "The Enigma of the Hour", "Metaphysical Interior with small factory" and "Morning Meditation". The perspective used by Chirico is a rational perspective but it is employed for irrational ends. The eye is led down the lines of perspective and draws the observer into the work in the same way that Friedrich's figures encourage participation in the quest for the true reality. In the same way that Friedrich and the other Romantics focussed attention on the infinite, the works of the Scuola Metafisica encourage contemplation of the world and man's position in the universe. The inclusion of statues as well as figures (i.e. "Enigma of the Hour") lends the work an air of mystery which is again reminiscent of the German Romantics.

"What we wish to paint", wrote Carrà, "is not plastic reality in its raw state but that essential form which has so great a clarity that it reveals reality itself. Without this constructive premise it is impossible to achieve spiritual freedom, and any claim to our independence of the physical world is but a vain pretence. Thus the painter should always direct his attention to the very essence of things; there is no other way of achieving true architectonic austerity; and this is what we mean by the 'new reality' and 'metaphysical painting'".[1]

In 1918, Morandi entered the sphere of the Scuola Metafisica. He did not use the themes that Chirico and Carrà employed. There are no mannequins, for example, and he did not try to create that dreamlike quality that had been the aim of the first metaphysical painters. Morandi's works are rather exercises in strict control of objects and media, but

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[1]Lionello Venturi. Italian Painting. p. 149.

nevertheless he attempts to reach the essence of objects. The coolness and definition of the objects such as in "Metaphysical Still Life", provides the stimulus for thought. We feel that there is more to the objects than meets the eye.

Can we now classify German and Swiss Romantic painting as metaphysical? Indeed we can. If we take the words of Carlo Carrà, who first applied the term 'metaphysical' to the works of himself and Chirico, that "the painter should always direct his attention to the very essence of things", we realise that he is re-stating one of the fundamental tenets of Romanticism as expressed by Caspar David Friedrich and Carl Gustav Carus. Alberto Savinio said that Metaphysical painting constituted not so much a real 'school' as a way of seeing things, which is one of the fundamental definitions of Romanticism.

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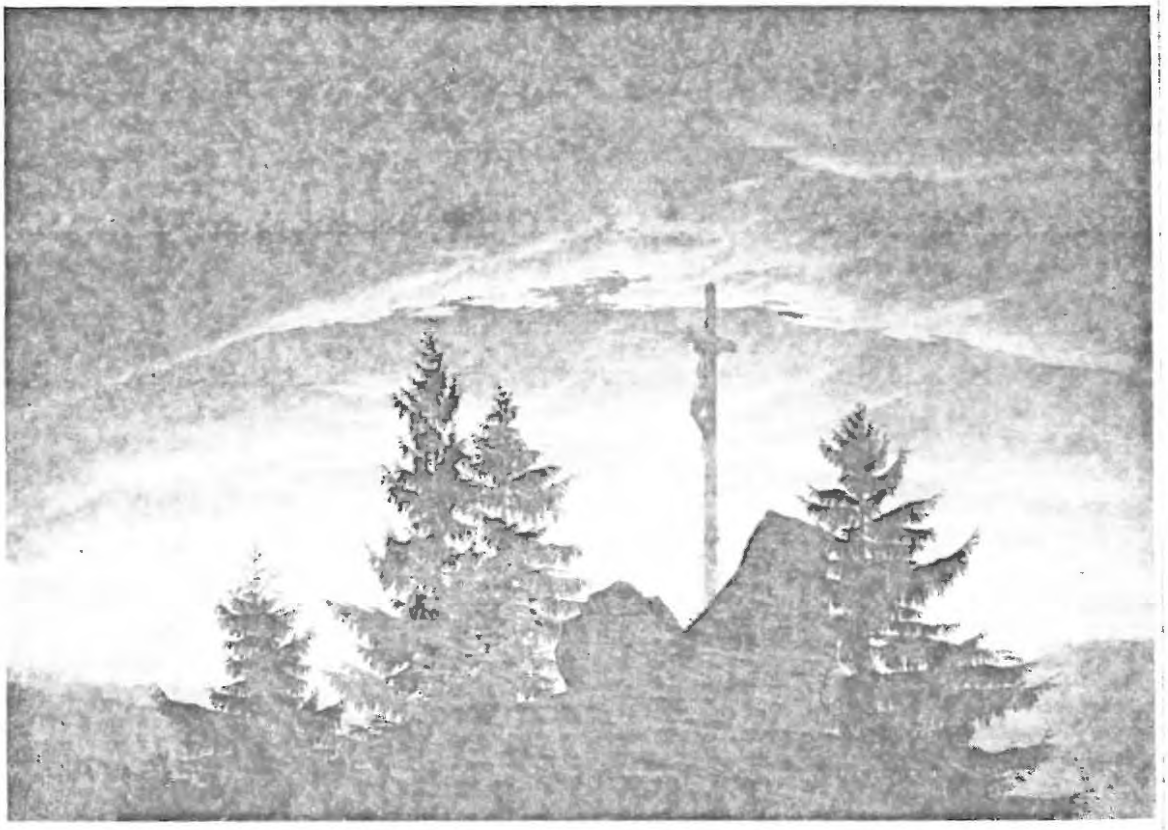
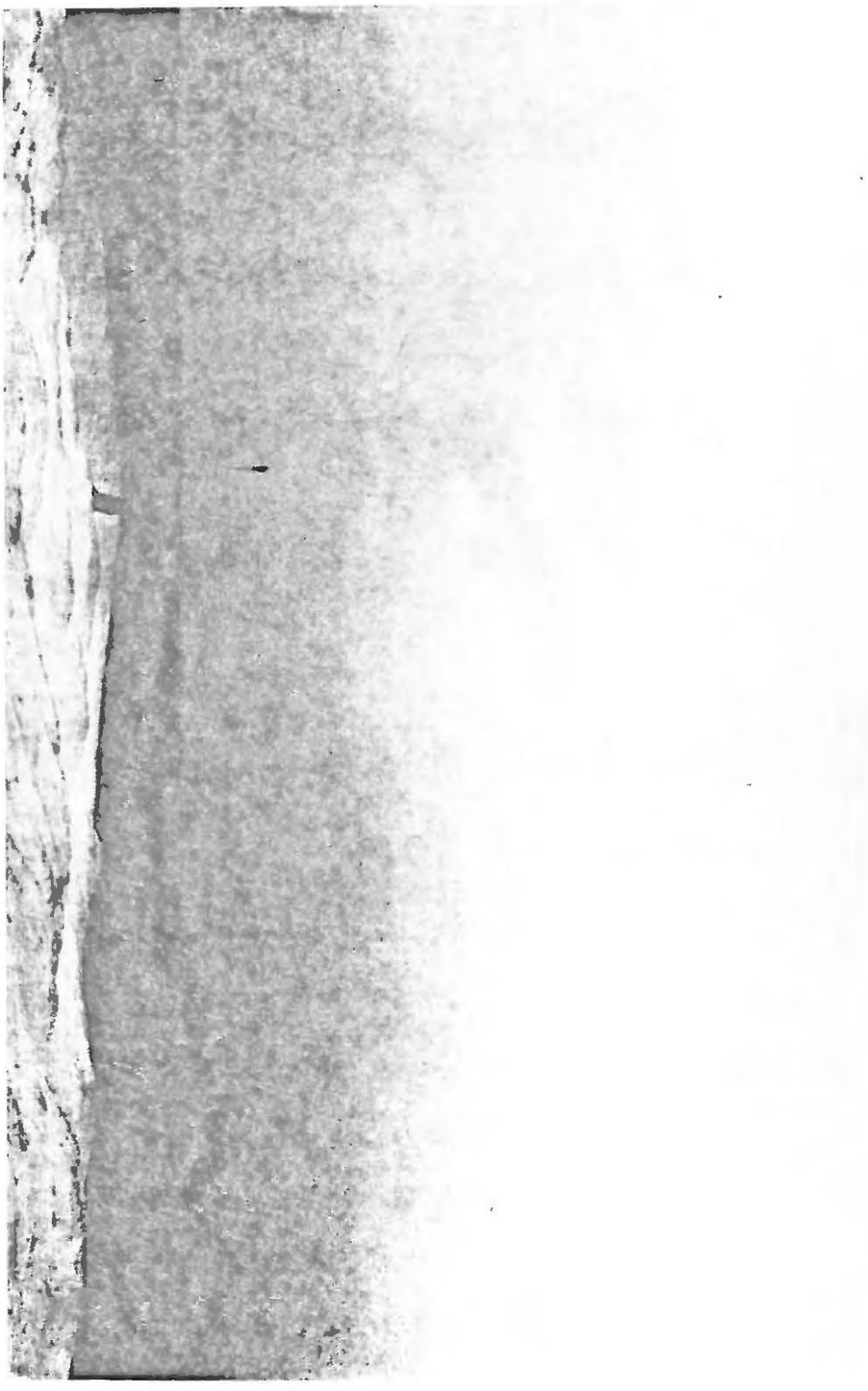
A SELECTION OF WORKS BY

GERMAN ROMANTICS



1. FRIEDRICH: DAS KREUZ IM GEBIRGE 1806/07.

2.- Friedrich : "Das grosse Gehege in Dresden" 1832

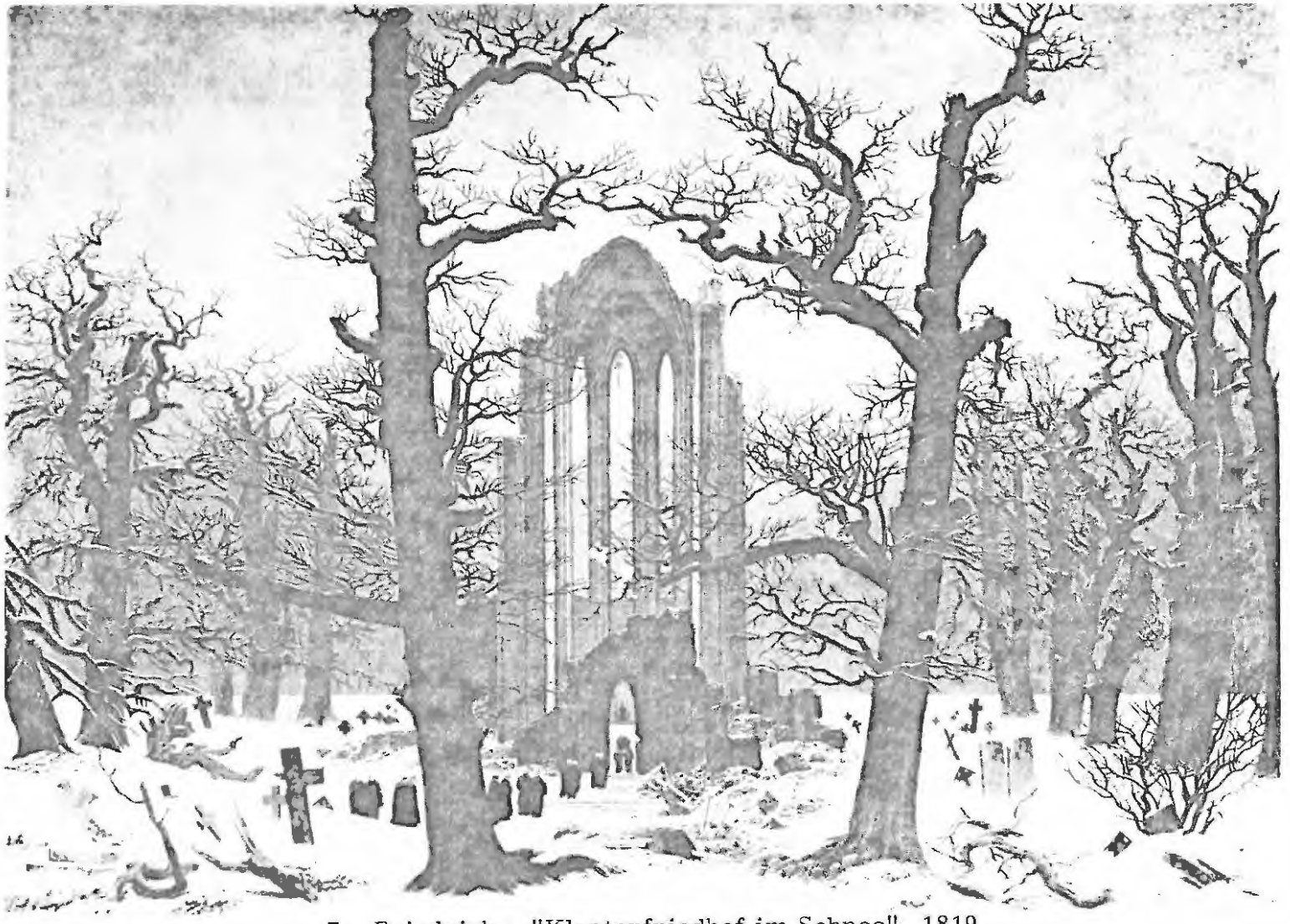


3. FRIEDRICH: "MÖNCH AM MEER" 1808/09.

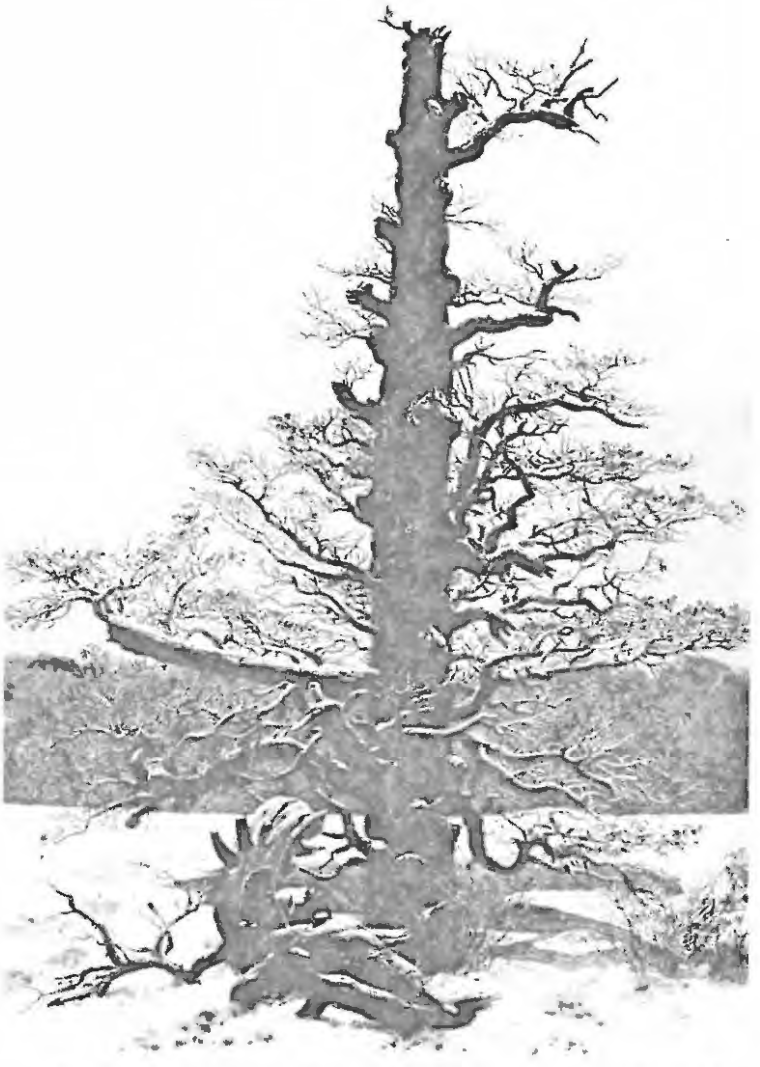
4. Friedrich: "Morgen im Reisengebirge" 1811

5. Friedrich: "Kreuz im Gebirge" 1811

6. Friedrich: "Abschied" 1818

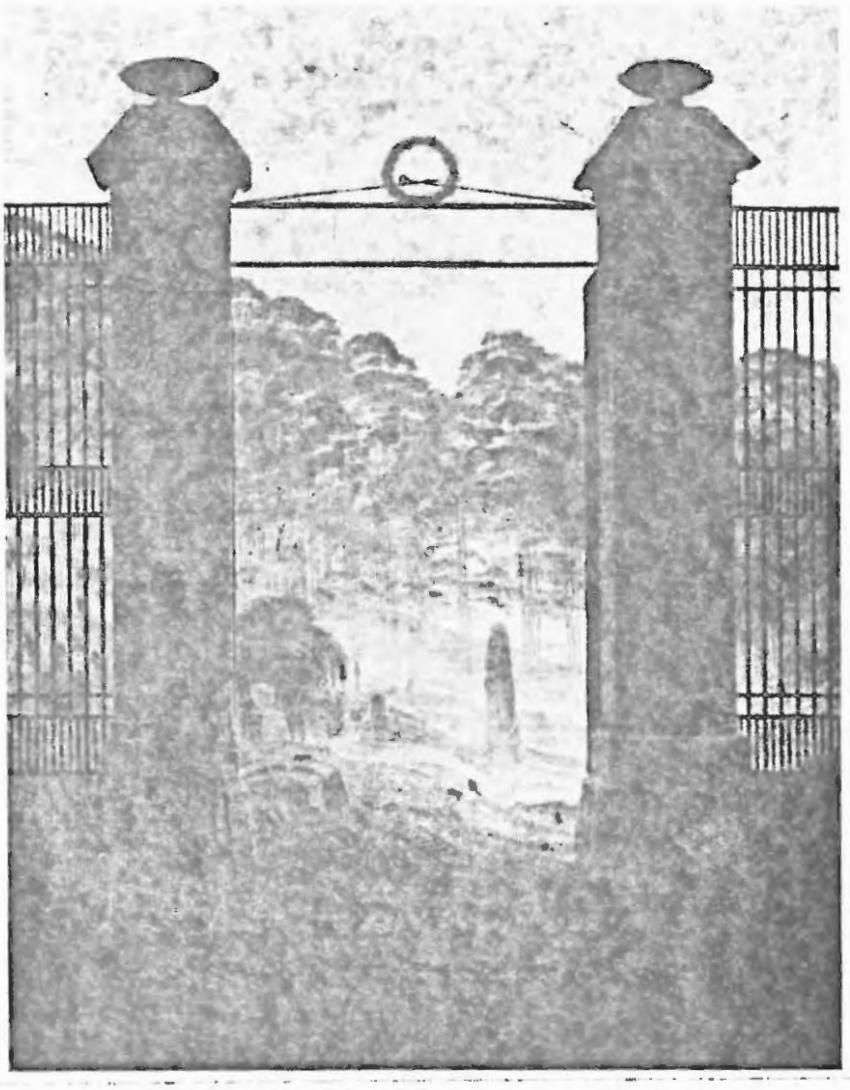


7. Friedrich: "Klosterfriedhof im Schnee" 1819

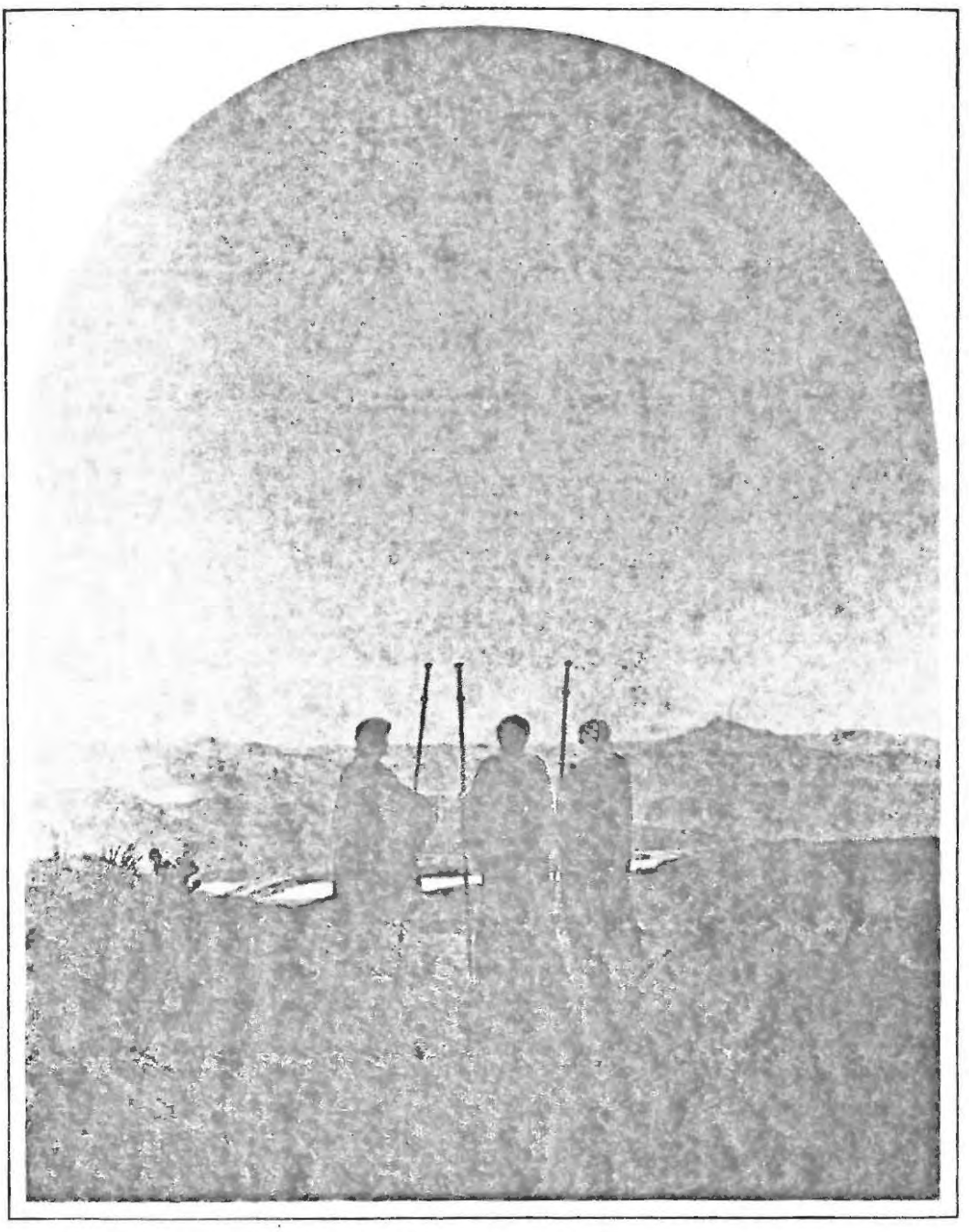


8. Friedrich: "Eichbaum im Schnee" 1821

9. Friedrich: Die Verunglückte "Hoffnung" 1822

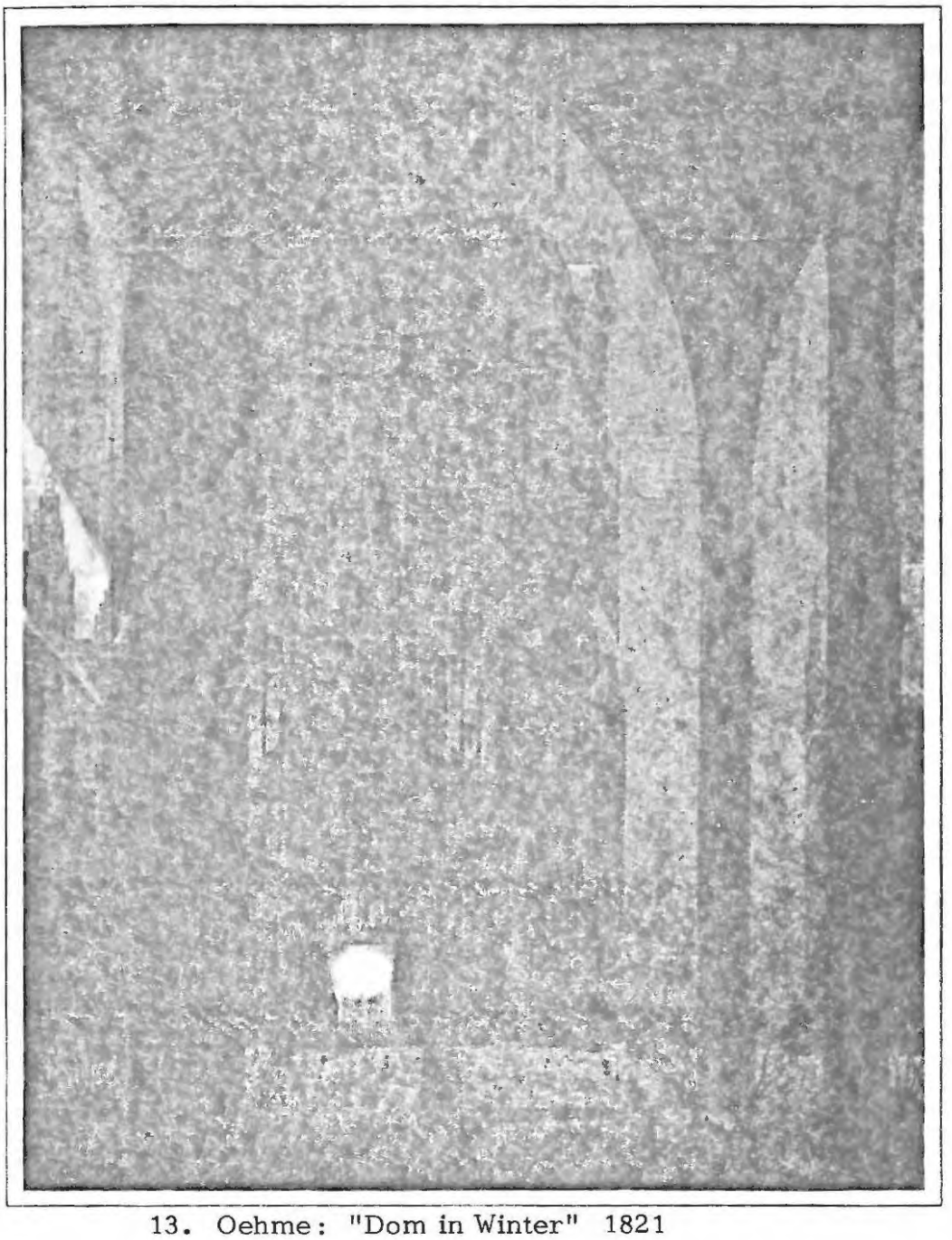


10. Friedrich: "Friedhofseingang" 1825



11. Carus: "Die drei Weisen" 1825

12. Carus: "Friedhof auf dem Oybin" 1828



13. Oehme: "Dom in Winter" 1821

14. Runge: "Die Kleine Perthes" 1805

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2. Ibid. p. 119.
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