FRIEDRICH OVERBECK: PLAYING THE ROLE OF THE MONK-ARTIST

by

Mitchell Benjamin Frank

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of the History of Art
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Mitchell Benjamin Frank 1997
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-27925-1
Abstract

FRIEDRICH OVERBECK: PLAYING THE ROLE OF THE MONK-ARTIST
Mitchell Benjamin Frank
Graduate Department of the History of Art
University of Toronto

This thesis explores the way in which Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), the German Romantic painter, constructed his public identity as "natural" and "authentic," and how this construction is reinforced in the art-historical literature. The first chapter examines Overbeck's conception of his self as unique and individual, a conception that accords with the modern notion of the self developed in the writings of Rousseau and Herder and accepted in German Enlightenment and Romantic thought. Overbeck constructs an "authentic" self in the sense that he assumes that his outward presentation of self is coextensive with his inner nature.

The second chapter explores two roles that Overbeck plays: the independent man, which he plays in the context of his familial relations; and the monk-artist, which is his public persona. Both roles relate Overbeck to his class context. In his striving for independence, Overbeck desires bourgeois self-sufficiency, while his pure, quasi-monastic existence connects him to cultural concerns of the middle
In the third chapter, I move on to issues of historicism. Overbeck finds his individuality, it seems, through leading a scripted life and painting in an already established style. I explore early nineteenth-century concepts of imitation and origins to contextualize Overbeck’s concerns. His *Triumph of Religion in the Arts* and some of his religious works are discussed in order to bring to light both the modern and antiquated aspects of Overbeck’s historical style of painting.

The final chapter explores the characterization of Overbeck in the art-historical literature from approximately 1840 to 1940. Over this period, Overbeck’s monk-artist persona is not transformed so much as it is given new value; art historians and critics accept the properties of Overbeck’s constructed identity and frequently use them in order to marginalize Overbeck and his art from the canon of German art history.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people at the University of Toronto. First and foremost, I would like to thank my Ph.D. advisor, Professor Hans-Karl Lücke, whose guidance, patience, and support gave me the confidence to complete this project. Professor Robert Siebelhoff provided useful comments and kind encouragement throughout the preparation of the dissertation. Professors Elizabeth Legge and Matt Kavaler were always supportive and offered helpful advice. And Professor Philip Sohm was very efficient in organizing the defence.

Further thanks go to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, the Connaught and Kinghorn Scholarships at the University of Toronto, and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for their financial support. My research in Germany was greatly aided by very helpful librarians and staff at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich and the Stadtbibliothek in Lübeck.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the Lücke family for their incredibly generous hospitality in Munich. And finally I would like to thank Kathleen McDougall for her preternatural patience and sage advice.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Note on Translations and References</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Overbeck and the Modern Bourgeois Self</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Overbeck: Independent Man and Monk-Artist</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Independent Man</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Monk-Artist</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The Pure Monk-Artist</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Overbeck’s Pure Style</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 The Feminine Monk-Artist</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Overbeck and Historicism</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Imitation</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Romantic Origins</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Overbeck’s <em>Triumph of Religion in the Arts</em></td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overbeck’s <em>Marriage of the Virgin</em> and Lamentation</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Overbeck’s Characterization in the Literature</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Overbeck Criticism during his Lifetime</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Raczyński</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Förster</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Kugler</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Vischer</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Overbeck Criticism after his Death (1869-1920)..179
   2.1 Overbeck’s Champions.............................179
   2.2 The Art Historians.................................183
      2.2.1 Overbeck the schwärmerisch Painter........184
   2.2.2 Overbeck vs. Cornelius.........................191
   2.2.3 Overbeck the Idealist Painter...............203
   2.2.4 The Anachronistic Overbeck...............214
   2.2.5 The Exiled Overbeck.........................220
3. Overbeck Criticism in the 1920s and 1930s........224
   3.1 Kuhn.............................................225
   3.2 Eberlein.........................................231
   3.3 Lehr.............................................236
   3.4 Benz.............................................244
   3.5 Defense of the Early Work.....................247
Conclusion.................................................257
Appendix: A Biographical Sketch of Friedrich Overbeck...263
Illustrations.............................................269
Bibliography.............................................310
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

All illustrations are of oil paintings on canvas by Friedrich Overbeck unless otherwise indicated.

1. Wilhelm von Kaulbach, Modern German Artists in Rome, sketch for the fresco, 80 x 160 cm, 1848-54, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

2. Self-Portrait with the Bible, 55.5 x 45.5 cm, 1808-09, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, Behnhaus.

3. Self-Portrait, 22 x 20.5 cm, oil on paper, 1807, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck.

4. Self-Portrait, black and coloured chalk, 35.2 x 30.6 cm, c.1807, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt.

5. Self-Portrait with the Bible, etching, 187 x 163 mm, 1809, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck.

6. Adoration of the Magi, oil on wood, 1811-13, Kunsthalle Hamburg.

7. Adoration of the Magi, pen and pencil on parchment, 16.7 x 22 cm, 1811, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck.

8. Adoration of the Magi, pencil, 52 x 66 cm, 1807/10, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett und Sammlung der Zeichnungen.


10. Kneeling Monk Praying, pencil, gone over in pen, 125 x 85 cm, 1826, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck.

11. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Friedrich Overbeck, pencil, 281 x 208 cm, 1819, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.

12. Joseph Sutter, Overbeck taking Communion, pencil and chalk, 48.8 x 36.8 cm, c.1825, Bibliothek und Kupferstichkabinett der Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna.


vii

15. Heinrich Füger, **Portrait of Fürstin Gallizin**, 202 x 134 cm, 1792, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Nationalgalerie.

16. Vittoria Caldoni, 89 x 65,8 cm 1821, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

17. Vittoria Caldoni, black and white chalk, 25,1 x 23,1 cm, 1820-21, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

18. Italia and Germania, 94 x 104,3 cm, 1811-1828, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

19. Franz Pforr, **Sulamith and Maria**, oil on wood, 35 x 32 cm, 1811, Sammlung Georg Schäfer, Schweinfurt.

20. **Sulamith and Maria**, black chalk and charcoal, 91,7 x 102,2 cm, 1812, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, Behnhaus.

21. **Sulamith and Maria**, 22 x 26 cm, 1812, Sammlung Georg Schäfer, Schweinfurt.

22. Overbeck and Peter Cornelius, **Double Portrait**, pencil, 42,4 x 37 cm, 1812, Private Collection, Munich.

23. Alciati, Emblem of Friendship

24. Franz Pforr, ** Allegory of Friendship**, pencil, 24,2 x 18,7 cm, 1811, Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.

25. **Study of Three Hands**, pencil, 17,8 x 24,3 cm, c.1811, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett und Sammlung der Zeichnungen.

26. **Family Portrait**, oil on wood, 46,5 x 37 cm, 1820-22/1830, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, Behnhaus.

27. **Portrait of Nina with her son Alfons**, tempera on canvas, 35 x 28,5 cm, 1820, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

28. Holy Family, 164,4 x 101,7 cm, 1825, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

29. **Entry of Christ into Jerusalem**, pencil and black chalk, 154 x 225 cm, 1809, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, Behnhaus.
30. **Entry of Christ into Jerusalem**, 155 x 228 cm, 1809-24, formerly Marienkirche, Lübeck (destroyed 1942).


32. **Triumph of Religion in the Arts**, 389 x 390 cm, 1840, Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.


34. **Marriage of the Virgin**, 116 x 94.5 cm, 1834-36, Muzeum Nardowe, Poznan.

35. Perugino, *Marriage of the Virgin*, oil on wood, 234 x 185 cm, c.1500, Musée des Beaux Arts, Caen.


37. **Lamentation**, 270 x 290 cm, completed 1845, Marienkirche, Lübeck.

38. Overbeck’s *Lamentation* in the Marienkirche c.1900.


40. *Ego dilecto meo, et dilectus meus mihi* (The Madonna with the Sleeping Christ child), diameter 94.5 cm, 1842/53, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, Behnhaus.
A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND REFERENCES

The translations in the text are all my own unless otherwise indicated. I have provided the original German in the footnotes. The following books are cited frequently and thus abbreviated as follows:


INTRODUCTION

On Sunday afternoons in Rome in the 1850s and 1860s, a popular place for foreigners to visit was the studio of the world-renowned painter Friedrich Overbeck.¹ "His rooms were swarming with foreigners," one writer reports of his visit to the "patriarch of the Nazarenes."² Another attests to the "numerous foreigners of all nations [who] pushed their way into the two packed rooms of the old Cenci Palace close to the Jewish quarter, where [Overbeck] exhibited his simple drawings, always in the state of completion that they were in at the time."³ The people came on these Sunday afternoons


³Friedrich Pecht, "Friedrich Overbeck," Deutsche Künstler des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1885), p.98: "[Z]ahlreiche Fremde aller Nationen drängten sich da in den zwei Zimmern des dicht am Judenviertel gelegenen alten Palastes Cenci, in denen er seine einfachen Zeichnungen aufgestellt hatte, immer genau in dem Stadium der Ausführung, in dem sie sich gerade befanden." It is unclear when exactly Overbeck began to open his studio on Sundays. Pecht's visit at the Palazzo Cenci, where Overbeck lived from 1832 to 1854, took place in 1852 and it
"not only to see the latest work of the artist, but also to hear his explanatory words." The simplicity of the rooms was noted and the absence of worldly objects so prized by other well-established painters: "Coloured studies and coloured sketches, colourful carpets and costumes, carved furniture and casts from gypsum, in short all that makes a painter’s atelier interesting, is completely missing from Overbeck’s atelier." For sole decoration, there were only the most recent "cartoons of the master, which were drawn with Overbeck’s characteristic neatness and precision, sometimes lightly tinted with watercolours." The neatness (Sauberkeit) of his drawing style was observed by another visitor as well: "In the almost coquettish neatness, with which these ingenious contours were laid down with charcoal is the earliest visit on record.

"This is from the report of an art historian in the Neue Freie Presse, cited by Binder, "Zur Erinnerung," p.855: "'Am Sonntag empfing er in der Regel die Fremden; Künstler und Kunstfreunde aus allen Gegenden der Welt kamen da zusammen, nicht bloß um die letzten Werke des Künstlers zu sehen, sondern auch sein erläuterndes Wort zu vernehmen.'"

"Ibid.: "Overbeck’s Atelier hatte, wie ein Kunsthistoriker in einem Nachruf (in der N. Fr. Presse) beschreibt, nichts gemein mit den Ateliers anderer Maler. 'Coloristische Studien und Farbenskizzen, bunte Teppiche und Costüme, geschnitzte Möbel und Gypsabgüsse, kurz all das was sonst Maler-Ateliers anziehend macht, fehlte vollständig in Overbeck’s Atelier. Seine Empfangszimmer waren einfach; was da zu sehen war, war nichts Anderes als die Cartons des Meisters, die mit der Overbeck eigenthümlichen Sauberkeit und Bestimmtheit gezeichnet, manchmal mit Aquarellfarben leicht colorirt waren.'"
or pencil, his entire style was portrayed splendidly.\textsuperscript{6}

Overbeck’s appearance and manner also drew attention. The art historian Carl Justi, on visiting the atelier, described Overbeck’s speech as "plain and unpretentious without being awkwardly holy, and he talks of his religious or mystical ideas, as if they were the simplest, most natural things; he is somewhat like an old saintly man."\textsuperscript{7} An American sculptor was impressed by the correspondance between Overbeck’s religious art and his appearance:

A ghost-like man he was, ascetic and dry in his manner and look, with long hair piously combed behind his ears, solemn in his voice and gesture—a sort of outline of himself with almost no flesh and blood in him, who walked about his studio in a long priestly sort of dress, and explained his charcoal outlines. His figure was in form like one of the dryest of the early Siena school, without any of that gorgeous colour in which the primitive painters loved to indulge, but which Overbeck considers to be too sensuous for spiritual art.\textsuperscript{8}

Friedrich Pecht, in comparison, seems a bit more sceptical in his description of Overbeck:

Finally we were able to force our way through to the master and a tall, lean, bent-over figure stood

\textsuperscript{6}Pecht, \textit{Deutsche Künstler}, p.98: "In der fast koketten Sauberkeit, mit der diese geistvollen Contouren mit der Kohle oder dem Bleistift hingeschrieben waren, malte sich seine ganze Art vortrefflich."


before us quietly observant and at the same time with that proudly humble nature which can be recognized in pious people at first sight. A fine head! The high narrow forehead, which showed so unusually the stamp of the corresponding organ of acumen, as only found in Goethe, in addition the large shining eyes, the aquiline nose and the finely pursed, thin lips, pressed together, like the extreme pallor of his nervous face, suggest spiritual exertion and physical suffering to this high degree. His appearance made a strong impression through the limp, sickly posture of his body, as if it was held upright only by the spirit and will, shining through. Formal, but kind in company, full of ingenious depth and that superiority which strong convictions always give a character completely enclosed in itself, he made the most forceful impression, as the mature usually do on those who are immature and searching. Since then I have seen Overbeck often, and have certainly always felt that one was separated from him by a chasm, which was absolutely unbridgeable; how kind and inspiring he also appeared, as long as he was not aware of it.9

The entire atmosphere of Overbeck’s atelier is perhaps best

9Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, pp.98-99: "Endlich konnten wir uns zu dem Meister durchdrängen und eine hohe, hagere, vorgebeugte Gestalt trat uns ruhig beobachtend und zugleich mit jenem stolz demüthigen Wesen entgegen, welches die Frommen überall fast auf den ersten Blick erkennen läßt. Ein feiner Kopf! Die hohe schmale Stirn, bei der das Organ des vergleichenden Scharfsinnes so ungewöhnlich ausgeprägt war, wie es nur bei Goethe zu finden, dazu das große leuchtende Auge, die Adlernase und die fein geschürzten, mageren, zusammengepreßten Lippen, wie die äußerste Blässe des nervösen Gesichts, ließen geistige Anstrengung und körperliche Leiden in gleich hohem Grade ahnen. Die Erscheinung machte bei der schlaffen kranken Haltung ganz den Eindruck, als ob sie nur noch vom Geist und Willen, die sie durchnähten, aufrecht gehalten würde. Gemessen, aber liebenswürdig im Umgange, voll geistreicher Tiefe und jener Ueberlegenheit, die ein vollkommen in sich abgeschlossener Charakter, feste Ueberzeugungen immer geben, machte er den imponirendsten Eindruck, wie das Fertige dem Undefertigen und Suchenden gegenüber ja meistens thut. Ich habe Overbeck hernach noch öfter gesehen, freilich immer mit der Empfindung, daß man durch eine Kluft von ihm getrennt war, über die es absolut keine Brücke gab, wie liebenswürdig und anregend er auch erschien, so lange er sie nicht vermuthete."
summed up in the words of Adolf Stahr: "Everything was full
of that hectic asceticism, which appears wraithlike to a
healthy man of our day, like the appearance of the master
himself, who humbly kissed the hands of a pair of entering
clergymen!"  

Overbeck's practice of receiving visitors on Sunday
afternoons between twelve and two o'clock is characteristic
of the way in which he presented himself to others. Hidden
away while working, he would emerge on Sunday, the Christian
day of rest, after presumably having gone to church, to greet
visitors and explain his art. The above descriptions show
how almost everything about these Sunday afternoons was
controlled by Overbeck in order to create a certain
impression. The decoration of the rooms was spartan and
austere. Overbeck's appearance and speech conveyed humility
and religious passion. His draughtsmanship, in its neatness,
connoted deliberation and control. He was even in control of
the conversation. This was no open forum; rather, Overbeck

10Adolf Stahr, Ein Jahr in Italien (Oldenburg: W. Berndt,
1853), II, p.477: "Alles voll jener hektischen Aszetik,
welche einem gesunden Menschen unserer Tage gespensterhaft
erscheint, wie die Erscheinung des Meisters selbst, der ein
Paar eintretenden Geistlichen demüthig die Hand küste!" The
religious nature of Overbeck's atelier was also commented
upon by A.W. Ambros: "We entered the studio, where we were
smiled upon by heavenly figures on all sides; before us were
the large cartoons of the "Sacraments," a large spiritual
poem, so to speak, in seven hymns." A.W. Ambros, "Zur
Erinnerung an Friedrich Overbeck," Bunte Blätter (Leipzig:
Leuckart, 1872), p.130: "Wir traten ins Studio, wo uns von
allen Seiten himmlische Gestalten anlächelten, voran die
großen Cartons der "Sacramente", gleichsam ein großes
geistliches Gedicht in sieben Gesängen."
made pronouncements for the benefit of his audience. In short, his was the simple and ascetic world of the monk-artist, a role Overbeck developed early in life and continued to play until his death. The monk-artist was Overbeck's public persona. It was constructed by him, accepted by his contemporaries, and then confirmed in the art-historical literature. In taking on this role, Overbeck was attempting deliberately to generate an impression, as well as give a candid realization of how he experienced the world.\textsuperscript{11}

In examining Overbeck's identity, I am attempting to place his sense of self in the context of the social development of the ego. Erik Erikson has argued that while the individual may be developed by the end of the oedipal phase, it is only in adolescence and early adulthood that the individual chooses (consciously or not) certain roles and carves an identity for him- or herself.\textsuperscript{12} For Erikson, the issue of identity is as much an historical as it is a social problem; he believes that it is tied to the development of

\textsuperscript{11}Erving Goffman's \textit{The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life} (New York: Doubleday, 1959) is the primary text for a discussion of the issue of role-playing. For a more up-to-date introduction to the issue of role-playing in sociology, see "The Dramaturgical Perspective," \textit{Life as Theater}, eds. Dennis Brisset and Charles Edgley (New York: Aldine de Guyter, 1990), pp.1-46.

the middle class.\textsuperscript{13} An historical perspective has also been proposed by writers of the Frankfurt school. According to Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer, what Erikson calls "identity" is a concept that helps to define the individual--more particularly the bourgeois individual--of the industrial age. These writers argue that the bourgeois self is an historical and social construction that was (and still is to a certain degree) widely accepted.\textsuperscript{14} Overbeck's decision to play the role of the monk-artist can thus be understood within the context of his upbringing, especially his class, the Bildungsbürgertum (the educated middle class). I should specify, perhaps, that I consider neither social psychology nor Marxism to hold some sort of universal truth. The models they provide, however, do help us to historicize the actions of men in bourgeois/capitalist culture and to understand Overbeck's commitment to his monk-artist identity.

In this dissertation I regard the notion of presentation of self to be fundamental to an understanding of the ideology behind Overbeck's life and art. Such a focus can be

\textsuperscript{13}Erik Erikson, \textit{Identity, Youth and Crisis} (New York: Norton, 1968), p.24: "[O]nce we accept a historical perspective, we face the probability that the quotations [from Freud and William James] which I have offered as a massive motto are really tied to a kind of identity of a sedentary middle class."

justified from many points of view. In Overbeck's own presentation of self, questions of art were always secondary to religious concerns; for him, making art into something purely aesthetic or autonomous would have constituted a form of idolatry. Furthermore Overbeck's status as monk-artist is confirmed over and over in the art-historical literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where the emphasis is always on the ideological premise for his art rather than on his art per se. This emphasis on Overbeck's theoretical concerns has partly to do with the fact that German art is frequently seen as being more dependent upon theory than the arts of other nations. Mme de Staël, as early as 1813, put it this way: "in every other place criticism has followed the great productions of art; but in Germany it produced them."^{15}

All this being said, I would like to state what I attempt and do not attempt in this dissertation. The primary concerns here are Overbeck's self-presentation and the manner in which he is represented in the literature. Different types of evidence are used to explore these issues: Overbeck's actions, writings, and paintings, contemporary accounts, and art-historical commentary. Questions of iconography, style, and composition are examined, but they are not the focus of my investigation. Rather, they are used as means to elucidate Overbeck's self-presentation.

^{15}Anne Louise Germaine de Staël, Germany (London: John Murray, 1813), I, p.254.
My discussion of Overbeck's playing the role of the monk-artist is divided along the following lines. In the first chapter, I examine how Overbeck’s public persona (in its "authenticity") relates to the modern conception of the self. In the next chapter, I examine Overbeck’s contribution to the construction of his monk-artist role and the various connotations that are then assigned to it; for a more thorough understanding of Overbeck’s identity in the context of his social class, I compare his monk-artist role with another he plays, the independent or self-made man. The third chapter of the dissertation examines the critical context for Overbeck’s endeavour; in particular, I examine issues of historicism, imitation, and origins, and their relation to the way in which Overbeck situates himself in his painting and writing. The first three chapters deal with the apparent contradiction between Overbeck’s conception of his self as unique and the imitative nature of his art and life. Overbeck, in attempting to establish his individuality, plays an already scripted role and paints in an historicized style; it would seem that he finds his originality through imitation. The final chapter examines the evolution of Overbeck’s characterization in the art-historical literature. In this section I develop an historiographical context in which to view the continued construction of Overbeck’s artistic persona. A study of the literature reveals that writers frequently play on the categories established by
Overbeck in order to ridicule him. Typical of this tendency are Friedrich Theodor Vischer's 1841 description of Overbeck as weak and feminine and Alfred Kuhn's 1921 description of him as Jewish-like, degenerate, feminine, and homosexual.\textsuperscript{16} Overbeck's character is, as we shall see, frequently understood as "other" in relation to contemporary understandings of the self. In this final section, I move between Overbeck's and the writers' constructs to illustrate that there exists a tension between historical and historiographical contexts. (For readers not familiar with the life of the artist, I have provided a brief biographical sketch of Overbeck as an appendix.)

CHAPTER ONE: OVERBECK AND THE MODERN BOURGEOIS SELF

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be.¹

The canonical view of Friedrich Overbeck, ever since the early nineteenth century, has defined him as the paradigmatic Nazarene artist, a pious painter whose artistic production is determined by his religious devotion. Richard Muther puts it thus:

There are but few painters with whom life and art were in such complete agreement as with the gentle, mild, and modest Overbeck, the 'Apostle John,' as he got to be called, that young man with his still contentment of soul, who called art simply a harp of David for the praise of the Lord.²

In trying to explain the religious nature of Overbeck's art, historians frequently make reference to Wilhelm Wackenroder's Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders and


Ludwing Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*. Overbeck's decision to be a religious painter is seen as a response to these literary works. But it is also seen as an effect of his natural qualities: "Overbeck had an exceedingly mild character, a gentle, tender, lyrically voiced, and through and through religious nature." The consensus is that Overbeck, due to his pious disposition and the influence of Wackenroder and Tieck, becomes monk-like in his devotion to both art and Catholicism, to which he converted in 1813. Wilhelm Lübke, for example, writes that Overbeck's "world is that of the exclusively medieval church, and his feeling is that of a newly revived Fra Giovanni da Fiesole [Fra Angelico]." And in Wilhelm von Kaulbach's *Modern German Artists in Rome* (fig.1), one of the frescoes for the exterior of the original Neue Pinakothek in Munich, Overbeck prays

---


before a hermit, peasant woman and child, while all the other painters are busy at their craft.

This characterization of Overbeck follows the painter's own construction of his identity, an identity which depends upon an opposition between reason and emotion, or, in Kantian terms, between the intelligible and sensible sides of man. In favouring the side of emotion, Overbeck tries to establish a persona that is more "authentic" than that of the academic artist. The authenticity stems from a correlation between means and ends. Living and working in a pure way, Overbeck believes, will enable him to produce pure works of art. It was an assumption of Overbeck and many of his contemporaries, as it still is now, that reason is culturally determined as compared to the emotions, which validate authentic experiences.

The suggestion that 'higher' thought processes are fundamentally influenced by culture elicits little controversy....How different it is with the emotions! Here culture is more often than not viewed as a culprit, inhibiting and contaminating the authentic experience of emotion.6

The authentic nature of the emotions derives from the fact that they are conceived of as "outside the will," being experienced "whether we welcome them or not."7


The authenticity of emotion is assumed not only by Overbeck but also by art historians. Overbeck's monk-like character is often ridiculed in the art-historical literature, as it is in Kaulbach's fresco, but his sincerity is never questioned. The monk-artist character is assumed to be an authentic expression of Overbeck's true self based on his innate nature. However two points can be made that belie this assumption: the role of the monk-artist, as a social role, was not natural to Overbeck, but rather was constructed by him within his specific historical and social circumstances; and the notion of authenticity is itself a social construction. Authenticity, like sincerity, "seen as a match between feelings and avowals, requires rules, standards, and even manipulations." In other words, Overbeck's assumption of the role of the monk-artist requires an understanding of the social rules that govern his actions and the criteria whereby these actions will be labelled authentic.

Overbeck's authentic persona is established in opposition to the ideal of the academic painter, an ideal that he reacted against when he attended the Viennese academy between 1806 and 1809. Writing to his father from Vienna, he complains about his academic training because "the student never comes to anything pure," whereas "at home he follows his own feelings and goes hand in hand with nature" so as to

---

find "the surest and best, yes the only right way." A few months before leaving Vienna for Rome, he declares he has been successful in his search:

The result then of my stay in Vienna is that I have found the right way, that I see it clearly before me, that I can go with God's help alone and that I have the seriousness of will really to go to it....Concerning this, I can say that what I have, I have from myself and through myself; I can say that I have discovered painting anew.\(^9\)

By finding the right way introspectively, Overbeck claims to have rediscovered painting, painting being defined here not as a technical discipline in the academic sense but as a mode of self-expression and self-definition. In this Romantic spirit, every true painter redisCOVERS painting in that he finds his own unique way to paint and his own way to truth.

Overbeck's belief in the importance of his own path, his striving for self-definition, was encouraged by the painter Eberhard Wächter, whom he met in Vienna through his friend

---

\(^9\) Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 13 December 1807), Hasse, p.1068: "So kommt der Schüler nie auf's Reine. Zu Hause aber folgt er seinem eigenen Gefühl und geht an der Hand der Natur, von keinem irre geleitet, den sichersten und besten, ja den einzigen richtigen Weg."

\(^{10}\) Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 13 January 1810), Hasse, p.1199: "Das Resultat also meines Aufenthaltes in Wien ist, daß ich den rechten Weg gefunden habe, daß ich ihn klar vor mir sehe, daß ich ihn mit Gottes Hülfe allein gehen kann und daß ich den ernstlichen Willen habe, ihn wirklich zu gehen....Dazu kann ich sagen, das, was ich habe, habe ich von mir selbst und durch mich selbst, ich kann sagen, daß ich die Malerey von Neuem erfunden habe."
Franz Pforr. As Overbeck becomes closer to Wächter he distances himself more and more from Heinrich Füger, the director of the Viennese academy. "Since I met [Wächter]," Overbeck writes to his father, "Füger, whose works, in comparison to those of this second Raphael, are really only weak caricatures, has fallen in my estimation." And when Overbeck, again writing to his father, calls Füger a mannerist, he compares him to Wächter, "an extraordinarily great man." The influence of Wächter on Overbeck can best be seen in an answer that Overbeck gives to his father about reading Winckelmann and Lessing on the art of antiquity:

You wish me to read Winckelmann’s, Lessing's work in order to learn from them how one should properly view the antique; only I believe that to those in whose soul nature has not already placed deeply a feeling for the higher sense of the antique, a Winckelmann or a Lessing can hardly teach them such feeling. And moreover I must admit to you that Lessing’s Laokoon, which I already began in the winter, is not much to my taste; he is to me much too learned and often even hairsplitting. If one has read these works, then one sees the antique no

---


12 Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 4 March 1807), Hasse, p.1062: "Seitdem ich diesen Mann kenne, ist Füger sehr bey mir gesunken, dessen Arbeiten wahrlich gegen die dieses zweyten Raphaels nur fade Caricaturen sind."

13 Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 27 April 1808), Hasse, p.1190: "Von den hiesigen Professoren möchte ich mich keinem anvertrauen, und (im Vertrauen gesagt) am wenigsten dem großen-Manieristen--Füger....Wächter ist ein außerordentlich großer Mann, aber er hat eine so übertriebene Bescheidenheit, daß garnichts aus ihm heraus zu bringen ist...."
longer with an unprejudiced eye; one will always see and believe what is pointed out to one, what one does not truly feel. Wächter, of whom I just asked his opinion, said that he wishes very much that he had not read so much about art, and there were so few really good works; most of those who had written about it were themselves not artists and those who dealt with the mechanics of art had nothing at all to say.\textsuperscript{14}

In shifting his allegiance from Füger to Wächter, Overbeck replaces the principles of an aristocratic academic system with a subjective search for his inner self. It is a move away from the fabricated or learned and towards the natural or naive. Most adherents of Romanticism as well as Neoclassicism are in agreement in their rejection of universal academic rules and in their replacement of them with an ideal of individualism: the Romantic emphasis on the inner self can be seen as the counterpart to the ideas of rationality and universality that are characteristic of

\textsuperscript{14}Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 9 June 1807), Hasse, p.1065: "Sie wünschen, ich sollte Winckelmanns, Lessings Werke lesen, um aus ihnen zu lernen, wie man eigentlich die Antiken ansehen sollte; allein ich glaube, wem nicht schon die Natur tief in die Seele ein Gefühl für den höheren Sinn der Antiken gelegt hat, den wird wohl schwerlich ein Winckelmann oder Lessing, dieses zu empfinden lehren können. Und überdies muß ich Ihnen gestehen, daß Lessing's Laokoon, den ich schon im Winter anfing, mir nicht so ganz schmecken wollte; er ist mir gar zu gelehrt und oft selbst spitzfindig. Wenn man dergleichen gelesen hat, so sieht man die Antiken nicht mehr mit unbefangem Auge an, man will immer was sehen und glaubt, was an ihnen zu bemerken, was man doch eigentlich nicht fühlt--Wächter, den ich erst kürzlich um seine Meinung befragte, sagte, er wünsche sehr, daß er nicht so viel über die Kunst gelesen habe und es gebe so wenig wirklich gute Werke, die meisten, die darüber geschrieben hätten, wären selbst keine Künstler gewesen, und diejenigen, die über das Mechanische der Kunst handelten, wollten gar nichts sagen."
enlightened culture. Overbeck may reject the enlightenment emphasis on reason and learning, as evidenced in the letter quoted above, but he retains the concept of individualism (although with a Romantic emphasis on subjectivity), which he inherited from his father, an enlightened humanist.

Having detached himself from the academic system, Overbeck had to develop a strategy to compete and be successful in an art market that was freer than ever before. One strategy pursued by middle-class artists was and still is to preserve "an ideal in danger of being forgotten" so that "its images are the avenue to an ideal community." Overbeck adopts such a strategy in his assumption of the role of the monk-artist: by reviving a pre-Reformation art and living in an artistic community modelled on the medieval guild, Overbeck attempts to find his true self and to present this self honestly and truthfully to others.

Role-playing can serve either to conceal or to reveal

---


16 David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.84. Held is here discussing Max Horkheimer's aesthetic theory: "Art anticipates the good life. It preserves an ideal in danger of being forgotten... To the extent that it suggests utopia can be realized in the aesthetic realm, or that its images are the avenue to an ideal community, it is idealist and false. Bourgeois art often advances one of these ideals."
one's true nature; the difference lies in the motivation behind playing the role. Overbeck plays the role of the monk-artist in order to reveal his inner self; he thus claims authenticity through his role-playing. I prefer the term authenticity to sincerity because, as Lionel Trilling indicates, the former points to a more strenuous moral existence and to a greater distance from established cultural values.\(^\text{17}\) It is partly due to these two aspects of Overbeck's role-playing that nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers accept it at face-value: Overbeck has been naturalized as the monk-artist.

If one believes oneself to be acting authentically, then one assumes the existence of a self to which one can be faithful. In his letters to his father from Vienna, Overbeck complains that his academic training threatens his true self. He writes that "heart, soul, [and] feeling" are missing in all modern painting, and that "out of systematic learning emerges always a skillful, but a cold artist."\(^\text{18}\) Furthermore, he does not want to learn to paint like Titian,


\(^\text{18}\)Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 27 April 1808), Howitt I, pp.71-2: "Eins fehlt in allen neuern Gemälden, was aber wohl vielleicht Nebensache sein mag--Herz, Seele, Empfindung!...ich glaube, aus dem Systematischen kommt immer zwar ein geschickter, aber ein kalter Künstler heraus."
or be as strong in chiaroscuro as Correggio, or be as strong in marginal things and composition as Poussin: "if only one day I could become an Overbeck. That would surely be better, by heaven, than if one would call me a second Raphael or Correggio or the like." In these statements, Overbeck rejects an academic training that privileges eclectic imitation over originality and reason over feeling. He is concerned with coming to terms with his self, a self which he assumes to be free to make choices and which defines itself through these choices.

The conception of the self to which Overbeck adheres is aptly described by Clifford Geertz:

The Western conception of the person [is] as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background....

This way of thinking about the self has not only a geographical context, but a temporal one as well; it became

---

19 Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna 5 February 1808), Howitt, I, pp.67-8: "[I]ch lernte denn auch nicht malen wie Tizian, würde nicht so stark im Helldunkel wie Correggio, nicht so stark in Nebensachen und der Anordnung wie Poussin--wenn ich denn nur einmal ein Overbeck werde. Das wäre doch beim Himmel mehr werth, als wenn man mich einen zweiten Rafael, oder Correggio oder dgl. nennte."

firmly established in the West in the second half of the eighteenth century. Before this era, it can be generalized that "a person lived through his function, and that was determined by forces over which he had no control (his family, race, religion, class) and which he had no occasion to question." In the writings of authors as diverse as Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, Schiller, and Hegel, there emerges a conception of the self that "cannot be socially derived, but must be inwardly generated." Rousseau is often seen as the key figure in the emergence of the modern conception of the self, one he puts forward in the opening lines of his Confessions:

...the man I shall portray will be myself.
Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the entire world. I may be no better, but at least I am different.

Herder expresses a similar idea when he claims that "Each human being has his own measure, as it were an accord

---


22 Lyons, Invention, p.44.

23 Taylor, Ethics, p.47.

peculiar to him of all his feelings to each other." 

For Rousseau the relation between his inner self and his presentation of this self is relatively unproblematic. He writes that the purpose of his Confessions is "to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature." For some German writers, on the other hand, to connect the inner self with its presentation was a more difficult endeavour. Fichte, for example, distinguishes between the empirical self (das empirische Ich) and the pure self (das reine Ich), and argues that the ultimate requirement of man is "absolute unity, constant self-identity, complete agreement" between the two selves. Schiller similarly claims that

every individual human being...carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging

---

25As quoted in Taylor, Sources, p.375: "Jeder Mensch hat sein eigenes Mass, gleichsam eine eigne Stimme aller seiner sinnlichen Gefühle zu einander." It should be noted that the modern conception of the self as a source within does not prevent one from searching for God, as in the case of Overbeck. "In a sense, it can be seen as a continuation and intensification of the development inaugurated by Saint Augustine, who saw the road to God as passing through our own reflexive awareness of ourselves" (Taylor, Ethics, p.26).

26Rousseau, p.17.

unity of this ideal. 28

What we see emerging in Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, and Schiller is the desire to express one's true nature through one's deeds and actions. This attempt to express oneself is the basis for a new and fuller individuation. "This is the idea which grows in the late eighteenth century that each individual is different and original, and that this originality determines how he or she ought to live." 29

More recently the validity of the eighteenth-century notion of the self, frequently connected to the expansion of the middle class at this time, has been put in question. The


29Taylor, Sources, p.375. This concern for the self and its presentation may be the reason for the popularity of the image of the marionette at this time. For both Rousseau and Goethe, marionettes symbolized the ability to play-act, to take on roles that could either hide or expose the self. For Rousseau, role-playing led to self-knowledge, while for Goethe it cloaked the self (Lyons, pp.103-4, 113-114; Rousseau, The Confessions, p.35; and Goethe, Poetry and Truth, tr. R.O. Moon, [Washington, 1949], p.37.) In fact, Goethe states that self-knowledge, which Rousseau deems so important, is not necessary: "I do not know myself, and God forbid that I should" (Goethe, Conversations with Eckermann, tr. J. Oxenford [London; Dent and Sons, 1930] p.324, as quoted in Lyons, p.218). While Goethe acknowledges individuality, he believes that it should turn one outward to nature; for Rousseau, the discovery of one's individuality turns one inward to the self. For Heinrich von Kleist on the other hand, the marionette suggests problems relating to the modern conception of the self, because, in its spiritless imitation of humans, it raises questions as to the relation between outer appearance and inner self. (See Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," tr. Roman Paska, Fragments for a History of the Human Body, ed. Michael Feher [New York: Zone Books, 1989], I, p.420.)
critical theorists of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse), in particular, construe this notion of the self as "predetermined by socioeconomic forces" and thus see it not as a true universal category, but as a representation put forward self-servingly by the hegemonic bourgeoisie. Social historians for their part have described aspects of the historical and social construction of the bourgeois self in the German-speaking world of the nineteenth century. Wolfgang Kaschuba, writing about the

30 Sampson, "The Deconstruction of the Self," p.5. Sampson (p.2) lists six challenges to this notion of the unified self: cross-cultural investigation, feminism, social constructionism, systems theory, critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and deconstructionism. As for the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, for example, writes that in the idealist philosophy of the bourgeois era, the individual is constructed "as an ego isolated from and against others in its drives, thoughts, and interests" (Marcuse, "On Hedonism, " Negations, tr. Jeremy Shapiro [Boston: Beacon Press,1968], p.159). Theodor Adorno for his part states: "While social laws cannot be 'extrapolated' from psychological findings, the individual is, on the other hand, not simply individual, not merely the substratum of psychology, but, as long as he behaves with any vestige of rationality, simultaneously the agent of the social determinations that shape him" (Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology," New Left Review 46 [1967], p.73).

31 The efficacy of the term "bourgeois" has been questioned in the German context due to what is usually called, in historical writing, Germany’s Sonderweg (Germany’s special or different historical path which led to Nazism). For a discussion of and an attempt to re-establish the usefulness of the term "bourgeois" for German history, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, The Peculiarities of German History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). I will retain the term because it is in many ways helpful for explaining Overbeck’s conception of himself. "Bourgeois", like the German Bürgerlichkeit, will not be used as a systematic category, but rather as a descriptive or associative quality that refers to attitudes and cultural factors that characterize enlightenment and romantic culture.
idea of German Bürgerlichkeit ("bourgeois mentality, culture and lifestyle"), states:

The bourgeois subject had become the 'object' of its own observation and concern. It had an analytical interest in its own process of formation, almost as if it were looking at it from the outside. All these phenomena that we group together in the concept of Bürgerlichkeit seem centered around this complex concept of Bildung, which projected a quite definite socio-cultural practice, in the sense of a system of values and forms of conduct.32

And Ute Frevert, discussing the bourgeois sense of honour in Germany, writes:

The polished display of personality prescribed by the rules of aristocratic behaviour, and by the underlying concept of aristocratic honour, was very attractive to the new Bürgertum....Unlike the nobleman, however, who embodied the forms of fine appearance, the Bürger promoted a culture of individuality based on Bildung (education) and centered on the individual person in his striving for self-perfection. The bourgeois ideal was the development of the whole (male) personality, an education that enabled him to make fullest use of his talents and abilities.33

Both these writers emphasize Bildung in the development of a sense of commonality among members of the German middle class. The emphasis in the educational process was on the development of the individual nature of the person. Whether it be through study at home, at the Bürgerschule, at the


Gymnasium (for the sons), or through travel abroad (Wanderjahre), the goal of these experiences was to discover the uniqueness of one's own path--even though many seem to have trodden the same path.34

One way that members of the middle class evaluate their uniqueness is through their production. Unlike the aristocracy, whose self-worth is defined principally by their station in life, and the lower classes, whose "occupations involve conditions unfavourable to self-definition and evaluation," the consequences of the productive activity of the members of the middle-class "in the form of objects, creations, services performed, constitute a basis for self-definition."35 The artist takes on a new importance in this context as he becomes a model for the development of the bourgeois self. Because "self-discovery requires poiesis, making," artists come to be seen as "paradigm achievers of self-definition."36

In Romantic theory, there is an assumed harmony between artist and work. Friedrich Schlegel puts it thus: "He who

34 Kaschuba, "German Bürgerlichkeit," p.10: "The new possibilities to freely structure one's life often ended up, in reality, in what was a normal, 'average' bourgeois life." Overbeck's training follows this pattern: he was first educated at home by his father, then in the local school, and after his stay in Vienna, he travelled to Italy.


36 Taylor, Ethics, pp.62-3.
does not have and does not know the inward life, cannot reveal it magnificently also as artist."\textsuperscript{37} And Franz Pforr, in agreement with Overbeck, states: "a painter, in order to be great, must be not only an artist, but also a human being."\textsuperscript{38} The promise of Overbeck's Brotherhood of St. Luke "to work enthusiastically against every academic manner" is a criticism of the academic painter's inauthenticity, in that his work does not make reference to or reflect his inner self. The "guiding principle" of the Brotherhood was "truth," which meant creating works that were true to and expressive of one's inner nature.\textsuperscript{39}

While the notion of self under discussion may have originated in Rousseau's writings and may have been developed in Herder's, it was Kant who provided the general framework for the problem of the self that faced the German Romantics.

\textsuperscript{37}Friedrich Schlegel, "Gemäldebeschreibungen aus Paris und den Niederlanden," \textit{Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe}, IV, pp.149-150: "Wer das innre Leben nicht hat und nicht kennt, der kann es auch als Künstler nicht in großer Offenbarung herrlich entfalten...."

\textsuperscript{38}Franz Pforr, "Geschichte des Studiums in Wien," Howitt I, p.81: "...daß ein Maler, um groß zu sein, nicht allein Künstler sondern auch Mensch sein muß."

\textsuperscript{39}On the diplomas received by all members of the St. Luke Brotherhood, it states: "In lasting memory of the highest principle of our order, truth, and of the promise to remain true lifelong to this principle, to work towards it with all strength, and to work enthusiastically against every academic manner...." Howitt I, p.102: "Zur beständigten Erinnerung an den Hauptgrundsatz unseres Ordens, die Wahrheit, und an das geleistete Versprechen, diesem Grundsatz lebenslang treu zu bleiben, für sie zu arbeiten mit allen Kräften, und hingegen eifrig jeder akademischen Manier entgegen zu wirken...."
Kant is the key source for the modern conception of the self as bounded and unique, for he isolates the self, which he conceives of as essentially rational, from both physical nature and the natural, or sensible, side of the person. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he posits his a priori categories of the mind, Kant irreconcilably separates man from nature, for man cannot go beyond the world of phenomena to that of noumena. For Kant, consciousness "is a world unto its own, complete with laws," but consciousness also "presupposes, precisely qua consciousness, a 'thing-in-itself'; without it, it collapses upon itself." In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant assumes the bifurcation of the self into rational and sensible sides proposed in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. In accordance with his reason, man is free to act; in accordance with his sensible side, his actions are subject to the laws of nature. In the end, Kant does not truly reconcile man's two natures (he does not really solve the antinomy of practical reason), but rather posits the existence of "an intelligible Author of


nature" in order to do away with any inconsistency. Thus in neither Critique does Kant conciliate the divisions he makes; his only aim is to ensure that nothing contradicts the limits he has set.

Post-Kantian and Romantic thought often attempt to come to terms with Kant’s alienation of the rational self from nature, whether it be physical nature (as in the first Critique) or the natural side of man (as in the second). Accepting Kant’s premises led either to the acknowledgment of man’s alienation or to the attempt to find strategies to combat this sense of alienation. The former is probably best represented by the stance of romantic irony, as developed in the early work of Friedrich Schlegel. On the other hand, strategies to deal with alienation are developed in the writings of Fichte, Schelling, Schiller, and the later Friedrich Schlegel, who had converted to Catholicism. Fichte, for example, argues that while we may think we are conscious of the external world, all that we really are

---

42Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, p.119. Theodore Greene writes: "Thanks to the thoroughgoing separation which Kant has effected between the intelligible and sensible worlds and between man’s rational and sensible natures, it is inevitable that he should find no essential harmony between them....We must therefore postulate the existence of a Being who acts in harmony with the moral law and who is also ground and cause of nature" (Greene, "The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant’s Religion," introduction to Kant’s Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960], lx).

43For a discussion of irony in relation to German Romantic painting, see William Vaughan, "Landscape and the 'Irony of Nature'," Art History 2 (1979), pp.457-73.
conscious of are our own perceptions: "In all perception you perceive only your own condition." Thus, knowledge of external objects is merely knowledge of one's own mental activity. Fichte eliminates the "thing-in-itself" and argues that there is a harmony between man and nature in the self.

Another solution to Kant's problem of alienation was provided by the aesthetic realm. This solution was usually established in the context of the comparison of modern or romantic art to classical art. When Schiller writes that the poet "either is nature, or he will seek nature," he distinguishes between the poet of a pre-alienated (classical) age and one of an alienated (modern) age. "The former makes for the naive poet, the latter for the sentimental poet." Classical poetry is naive in that it reflects an established harmony between man and nature; ancient man being co-extensive with nature. But ancient art, while it may be

---


45Schelling also tries to resolve the subject/object distinction within the human ego, but he insists that just as the self is a whole unto itself, so is nature. Thus Schelling must develop both a Philosophy of the Self ("System of Transcendental Idealism") and a Philosophy of Nature ("Nature-Philosophy").


harmonious and complete, is also finite: "the ancient poet’s
to the art of something limited."48 For
Schiller, the ancient artist is limited to the "imitation of
the actual."49

The situation for the Romantic artist is quite
different, for he, like all modern men, is conscious of his
alienation from nature. When Schiller writes that the
sentimental poet "seeks nature," he is suggesting that the
modern poet attempts consciously to retrieve the unconscious
unity between man and nature. The modern artist cannot
merely imitate nature but must "touch us through ideas" so as
to "make us feel, at least temporarily, out of tune with
actual life.... Instead of striving for sensuous objects
present outside ourselves, we prefer to sink meditatively
into ourselves where we find, in the world of ideas,
nourishment for the awakened urge."50 As modern man
contemplates works of art and moves into himself, he enters
what Schiller calls a state of play, in which he "is in the
fullest sense of the word a human being."51 Man can be
described thus because his rational and sensible natures are

49 Ibid., p.201. Friedrich Schlegel, in his early essay
"Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie," views the
relation of man to nature in classical and modern society in
a very similar way to Schiller. Schlegel later recants these
50 Schiller, "Naive and Sentimental," p.234.
united. Art, because it develops "our capacity for feeling...[and] for reason," makes man whole.\textsuperscript{52} And in this unity, man is no longer out of balance or alienated from nature.

While Schiller may argue for this unity of man's two sides, he also privileges, in a very Kantian way, the rational over the natural in man:

But what makes him man is precisely this: that he does not stop short at what nature herself made of him, but has the power of retracing by means of reason the steps she took on his behalf, of transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity.\textsuperscript{53}

Fichte similarly emphasizes reason for he conceives of his sensual side as exterior to his self: "Even a person's body (which he calls "his" body) is something outside of the Self."\textsuperscript{54}

While Overbeck's aesthetic concerns are couched in Catholic terms, the fundamental problems of his art are the same as those voiced by Schiller, Fichte, and others. His recognition of cultural despair leads him to adopt a strategy that not only protects him from the world at large, but also allows him to create works of art through which he can become whole and through which the viewer on reception can become

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p.122.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p.90.

whole. Overbeck attempts to come to terms with the problem of alienation by assuming the role of the monk-artist, in which nature, in the tradition of Rousseau (not that of Kant), is privileged over reason. Overbeck conceives of his natural side not as law-governed, limited, and evil, but as pure, naive, child-like, and good. By getting in touch with his natural self and by constructing an outer appearance which matches his true inner self, Overbeck believes he is able to achieve an identity between his nature and his public persona. One could say, using Fichtean language, that he constructs an empirical self that is co-extensive with his pure self. Overbeck adopts a strategy that attempts to resolve the Kantian alienation of man from nature through the role of the monk-artist in which the inner (natural) and outer (cultural) parts of his self are united.

Overbeck’s strategy was seen by many of his contemporaries and has been seen by historians as either naive, in its attempt to return to a pre-alienated state, or reactionary, in its rejection of reason as man’s guiding principle. Hegel writes, probably in reference to Rousseau, that Reason should not "give up again the spiritually developed consciousness it has acquired,... submerge the widespread wealth of its moments again in the simplicity of the natural heart, and relapse into the wilderness of the nearly animal consciousness, which is also called Nature or
innocence." The type of criticism is often made of Overbeck in terms of his attempt to revive the art of Early Renaissance painters:

It was therefore a vain, false endeavour in the nineteenth century to see again with the eyes of the fourteenth, to learn to feel with the sentiment of the fourteenth....

The accusation that Overbeck and other medieval revivalists are reactionary is voiced clearly in Heinrich Heine's description of the Romantic school as "crowding back into the old prison of the mind from which their forefathers had freed themselves." In a similar vein, we find the comment of the German historian and statesman Barthold Georg Niebuhr that Overbeck has given up freedom in his choice to go under the

---


56 Bruno Meyer, "Johann Friedrich Overbeck, Die sieben Sacramente in Bildern" (1866) Studien und Kritiken (Stuttgart: W. Spemann, 1877), p.40: "Es war also ein vergebliches, falsches Bestreben, im XIX. Jahrhundert wieder mit den Augen des XIV. sehen, mit der Stimmung des XIV. empfinden zu lernen...."

57 Heinrich Heine, "The Romantic School," tr. Helen Mustard, The Romantic School and other Essays, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Continuum, 1985) pp.23-24. Heine is following the topos of describing Catholicism in terms of shackles. For example, C.F. Moser wrote in 1792: "A religion [Catholicism] which confines the spirit of man, which weakens his elasticity and deprives him of some of his powers, which prohibits him from exploring or thinking about certain questions, which imprisons his reason with the shackles of blind faith and a blind obedience...such a religion cannot possibly make a people joyous, happy, contented with its lot, and filled with an understanding of itself" (as quoted in Klaus Epstein, The Genesis of German Conservatism [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966], p.278).
yoke of the Catholic church.⁵⁸

These types of criticism are based on a progression/regression binary opposition that privileges the former term; progress is linked to the development of modern rational society. This bias has been so strong in the discipline of art history, due to its Hegelian underpinnings, that it has even been used to revive Overbeck and the Nazarenes in this century.⁵⁹ Art historians have tried to place Overbeck and the Nazarenes within the development of Modernism in two ways: by claiming anachronistically that the Brotherhood of St. Luke was the first secessionist movement in modern art and by emphasizing the purity of Nazarene drawing.⁶⁰

Rather than favour one pole of the progression/regression opposition myself, I prefer to see it as a tool to produce meaning; I prefer to notice which side of the opposition was favoured by a given critic or artist. Overbeck does not innocently or naturally take his stance of reaction; rather he consciously rejects notions of cultural progress by assuming the role of the monk-artist. In the way


⁵⁹For a discussion of the importance of Hegel in art history, see Michael Podro, The Critical Historians of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁶⁰For a discussion of the Nazarene movement as secessionist, see Conclusion.
he positions himself through his historicist lifestyle and painting, Overbeck uses the past to challenge modernity. Overbeck’s claims to history should thus be considered in the light of his claims to authenticity and individuality.

In this chapter, I have made several assertions regarding Overbeck’s monk-artist role: that it is a social construction in which the personal and public are perfectly matched, in other words, that it is authentic; that it should be seen within the parameters of late eighteenth-century/early nineteenth-century German bourgeois society; that it is reinforced in the art-historical literature; and that it should be seen in the light of notions of human development and history that were current in his time. The rest of this dissertation examines these issues more in depth. In the next chapter, I investigate specific issues relating to Overbeck’s monk-artist role as well as to another role he plays, that of the independent man.
CHAPTER TWO: OVERBECK: INDEPENDENT MAN AND MONK-ARTIST

What more can or should a man want than to win the kingdom of heaven through a virtuous life and, by the quality of his work, to secure everlasting fame on earth?¹

One of the tenets of Romanticism is that one must be true to oneself; this is, in part, what the members of the Brotherhood of St. Luke mean when they say that their guiding principle is truth. Overbeck is in many ways the prototype of the Romantic artist in his attempt to gain authenticity through his assumption of the monk-artist role, in which the personal, the public, and the artistic are all united. Because of this assumed identity between art and life, Overbeck’s art cannot be separated from and is in fact dependent upon his presentation of self. In this chapter, I explore two main roles played by Overbeck. I have called these roles the "independent man" and the "monk-artist," although, as we shall see, these labels are somewhat rudimentary given the fact that they do not capture the particular colouring that Overbeck lent them. A component of Overbeck’s independent man role, for example, is kingship, and a component of his monk-artist role is purity. While the monk-artist role can be considered Overbeck’s public persona, the independent man is the role to which he aspires in the

context of his familial relations, both parental and marital. The focus of this dissertation is more on Overbeck's public persona, but the identity of the independent man is nevertheless important for understanding how much Overbeck defines himself within and is defined by the concerns of the middle class to which he belongs.

The formation of Overbeck's identity occurs in the decade between 1806 and 1815, during his student days at the Viennese Academy and his early years in Rome. In this period, Overbeck leaves his parents' home (although they continue to support him), begins and then rejects his academic schooling, receives his first independent commission, and converts to Catholicism. In the years between 1815 and 1830, Overbeck gains confidence in playing the roles developed in his earlier years. During this period, the Brotherhood of St. Luke dissolves, Overbeck establishes his reputation as a religious painter, marries, and becomes a father. In these later years, Overbeck is no longer experimenting, but rather consolidating the roles that he has already established for himself.²

²These two phases correspond to the division William Vaughan makes between the origins of the Nazarenes (1808-15) which are "intimately linked with the populist Gothic movement of the wars," and the appropriation of their work after 1815, which is more reactionary in character. See Vaughan, "Subverting the Prospect, Superseding the Survey," rev. of Monument und Volk by Jutta Held and A Social History of Modern Art II: Art in the Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815, The Oxford Art Journal 17 (1994), p.124. Wolfgang Kaschuba similarly makes a distinction between the early more experimental years of Romanticism (up to 1815) and the more
In the period during which he forges an identity (1806-15), Overbeck develops, through particular choices, the more public of his personae, that of the monk-artist, and accedes to a status of socio-economic independence. This period in Overbeck’s life can be viewed, in the words of Erik Erikson, as a psychosocial moratorium during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him. In finding it the young adult gains an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness which will bridge what he was as a child and what he is about to become, and will reconcile his conception of himself and his community’s recognition of him.¹

In his desire to become financially self-sufficient, Overbeck attempts to meet parental and societal expectations, which he has internalized. Internalized expectations also contribute to the monk-artist role: Overbeck’s strong religious upbringing, although protestant, lent a "sense of inner continuity" to the role of the monk-artist, a role which was reactionary years afterwards. See Kaschuba, "German Bürgerlichkeit after 1800: Culture as Symbolic Practice," Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell (Oxford: Berg, 1993), p.395.

¹Erik Erikson, "The Problem of Ego Identity," Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: International Universities Press, 1959), p.110. An important part of Erikson’s theory is its emphasis on the social construction of identity. Identity formation absorbs childhood identifications into a new configuration which "is dependent on the process by which a society (often through subsocieties) identifies the young individual, recognizing him as somebody who has to become the way he is, and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted." The community "in turn, feels ‘recognized’ by the individual who cares to ask for recognition" (p.113).
recognized as natural to him by his fellow Brothers of St. Luke and by society at large. External sanctioning of the monk-artist role only strengthened its apparent authenticity, and this sanctioning continues in the literature up to today. The role of the independent man, on the other hand, being considered irrelevant to an artist’s canonical standing, drew a more private kind of recognition during Overbeck’s lifetime and has completely escaped critical notice.

(1) THE INDEPENDENT MAN

When Overbeck receives his first important commission in 1811, from the Queen of Bavaria, he writes to his father:

Finally, dearest parents, the moment has come for which I have so long yearned, when I can relieve you of your worries concerning me! A renewed commission and indeed from such a significant person that it enables me to support myself from now on through the work of my own hands, and so God willing, you need no longer think about your Fritz.4

The feeling of immense joy expressed in this letter attests to the importance to Overbeck’s self-esteem of being a financially independent artist, a status he had striven for ever since he had left his parents’ home.

In 1806, Overbeck, not yet seventeen years of age,  

4Overbeck, letter to his father (Rome, 20 December 1811), Hasse, p.45: "Endlich, geliebteste Eltern, ist denn nun der von mir so lang ersehnte Zeitpunkt gekommen, wo ich Sie der Sorge um mich entladen kann! eine abermalige Bestellung und zwar von einiger Bedeutung macht mich dazu fähig, mich hinfert durch meiner eigenen Hände Arbeit zu ernähren, und so Gott will, brauchen Sie an Ihren Fritz nun nicht mehr zu denken."
travelled from Lübeck, his birthplace, to Vienna to attend
the academy, then under the directorship of Heinrich Füger.
In many of his letters, Overbeck discusses his financial
situation and in some instances asks for and has to justify
additional expense money; for example, he mentions models he
needs to hire for work sessions at home and additional
tuition fees for anatomy lessons at the university.\(^5\) In an
attempt to alleviate his parents' financial burden, Overbeck
raises the possibility of supporting himself through portrait
painting or through the production of biblical illustrations
for engravings to be used in high schools, but there is no
evidence that these schemes met with any real success.\(^6\) At
this time, Overbeck, in a letter to his mother, apologizes
for failing to keep track of his expenses and declares that
he will turn over a new leaf:

\(^5\)In a letter to his brother Christian (Vienna, 7
November 1807), Overbeck asks his brother to convince his
parents that the money for models is worth the expense
(Hasse, p.1066). In a letter to his father (Vienna, 13
December 1807), he requests money for models and for lectures
at the academy (Hasse, p.1067).

\(^6\)Overbeck writes to his brother Christian (Vienna, 22
May 1807) that it troubles him that he sees no way to support
himself: "Was mich nur so oft beunruhigt, lieber Christel,
ist, daß ich noch gar keinen Ausweg sehe, wie ich nur vor der
Hand etwas verdienen könnte." He then suggests that he might
earn some money through portrait painting (Hasse, p.1064), a
suggestion he also makes to his mother (Vienna, 3 October
1807; Hasse, p.1066) and to his father (Vienna, 13 December
1807; Hasse, p.1067). In a letter to his mother (Vienna, 25
June 1808), Overbeck writes that he has a contract to make
pictures from the bible to be engraved for the local school
(Hasse, pp.1190-91). It is curious that it is mostly in his
letters to his mother, rather than his father, that Overbeck
discusses his expenses.
As promised, dear mother, I enclose the receipts from the last quarter year, whether it is as low as expected I do not know, I only hope that you will forgive me for the confusion of the past year, when you see that I am serious in my intention of improving myself in this respect. Since Michaelmas I have thus begun in earnest to write out my expenses in Kreuzer and pennies every evening, and I promise you again that I will no longer stray from this path. The rest of my activities are so well ordered that I can say to you with a clear conscience and open eyes, that in the last quarter year I have completely mended and improved my ways. On my work table you no longer see such a painterly Quodlibet, all is in its proper place."

Overbeck displays his new, more responsible self in a self-portrait, which he was working on at the time he wrote this letter. Self-Portrait with the Bible (fig.2) was intended for his parents' anniversary on 22 November 1808, but was not finished in time and only arrived in Lübeck in 1810. With a very serious expression on his face (a bit too serious, according to his mother), Overbeck looks out to the viewer from his studio, furnished with objects that evoke


8Johann Friedrich Overbeck, p.108 (cat.8).
both the classical and Christian traditions. Overbeck
depicts himself holding the bible, from which he will draw
inspiration, sitting in front of a blank canvas. Behind him
are the signs of classical learning (the column, bust, and
perhaps the books). Religion certainly takes precedence in
this painting over the attributes of classicism, but it does
not seem to me, as has been suggested, that Overbeck portrays
himself as leaving the classical tradition behind him, as he
will do later in the commentary he wrote on his painting The
Triumph of Religion in the Arts (1841). Rather, the signs
of classical training in this painting suggest that he still
considers antiquity part of his artistic inheritance.
Certainly his parents, for whom the painting was intended,

9Howitt I, p.118: "His Mother assured him that he could
not have given them a more agreeable present in all the
world. Everyone found it a good likeness and well painted,
only 'too serious' in expression for a 21-year old." ("Die
Mutter versicherte, daß er ihr in der Welt kein angenehmeres
Geschenk hätte machen können. Alle fanden es ähnlich und
schön gemalt, nur 'zu ernst' im Ausdruck für ein 21jährigen
Jüngling.")

10Andreas Blühm (Johann Friedrich Overbeck, p.108) argues
that in this self-portrait, Overbeck "wanted to express his
reservations as to the classicizing artistic ideal and
certainly not his association with it." But it must be noted
that rejecting an academic training did not necessarily mean
rejecting classical art. On his arrival in Rome, Overbeck
writes, in a letter to Hottinger's sister (3 July 1810), of
the enjoyment derived from being surrounded by "most
good influence on the artist." (Howitt I, p.162: "Doch
excellent artworks" of both the classical and Christian era
(Howitt I, p.143). And to Sutter (Rome, 10 October 1810), he
writes: "Surely the classical spirit, which speaks to us from
these works [Horace, Cicero, etc.], can certainly have only
a good influence on the artist." (Howitt I, p.162: "Doch
kann der klassische Geist, der uns aus diesen Werken
anspricht, gewiß auch auf den Künstler nur guten Einfluß
haben.")
would have thought so. For them, being trained in the classics, as Overbeck had been by his father, was a requirement for success in the arts. In privileging the bible yet allying himself with the classical tradition, Overbeck attempts to meet his parents’ expectations. Similarly the severity of the setting, in its neatness (apart from the slight untidiness of the books) and sparseness, is in line with his bourgeois, Protestant upbringing. Moreover Overbeck, in presenting himself as contemplating his subject, rather than as actually painting, suggests the intellectual nature and thus high rank of his profession. Overbeck does not display the manual aspect of his work; there are no signs of paint here: the canvas is blank, there is no paint box nearby, and the only drawing instruments are charcoal and chalk. In this painting, Overbeck presents himself as a solitary, well-trained painter (in both religion and the classics), who has chosen a noble profession, who takes his work seriously, and who is thus deserving of his parents’ support, both emotional and financial.

In Overbeck’s earlier self-portraits (figs.3-5), there is an intimacy between the painter and the viewer. In this work, on the other hand, Overbeck distances himself from the viewer through his serious expression and through the device of a ledge in the foreground. Overbeck situates himself in his own sphere, where he is master of his domain. This feeling of mastery is one of the themes of the letter to his
mother quoted above (concerning his resolve to handle his expenses more responsibly), which continues with a description of Overbeck in his studio, perhaps a verbal replacement for the picture that did not arrive in time for his parents' anniversary:

On a chair between the easel and the table lies my paint box and on the other side I myself sit before my easel as a person of the highest rank, like a king, and command my most submissive servants, the brushes, to complete the most wonderful works, commands which they often execute with an admirable speed, for there often come into being, in a day, entire palaces, even entire cities, places and towns....Don't believe that the strength of my servants extends only to inanimate nature, oh how little you know of my magical abilities. What monarch can boast, like me, that he can summon living knowledge from nowhere, through the hands of his servants. Sometimes I command them to create for me a virgin lovely and beautiful and sweet, sometimes an austere philosopher, with whom I can consult about the building of worlds, the essence of the divine; sometimes I want to see myself as a father and quickly my servants must create for me charming children with golden locks, blue eyes....Now you will understand easily, dear mother, that I would not like to change places with any king on the earth, I wish only to be able to buy from these powerful men more respect and authority through my servants....

Overbeck, letter to his mother (Vienna, 14 January 1809), Hasse, pp.1194-95: "Wenn ich an der Staffeley sitze und male, so liegt nur meine (Ihnen wohl bekannte) Uhr und allenfalls ein Stück Brod (Groschenlaib genannt), um den ewig unruhigen Magen von Zeit zu Zeit zu schwichten, damit er nicht dem Geist in seinen Wirkungen hinderlich sey, neben mir. Auf einem Stuhle zwischen der Staffeley und dem Tische steht mein Malkasten, und auf dem andern sitze ich selber in Höchst eigener Person vor der Staffeley, wie ein König und gebiete meinen unterthänigsten Dienern, den Pinseln, höchstwunderseltsame Werke zu vollbringen, welche Befehle sie oft mit bewundernswürdiger Schnelligkeit ausführen, denn da entstehen oft an einem Tage ganze Palläste [sic], ja ganze Städte, Flecken und Dörfer....Doch glauben Sie nicht etwa, daß die Kräfte meiner Diener sich nur auf die leblose Natur..."
This passage provides a possible explanation for the absence of paint and brushes in the painting. Overbeck the painter is able to liken himself to a king because of the intellectual nature of his discipline. Its manual aspect, signified by brushes (and paint), are not part of his self-definition. He distinguishes himself, the intellectual painter, from his brushes, the servants to whom tasks are assigned. And again, this type of description of the artist would have met with the approval of his parents.

In both the verbal and painted self-depictions, Overbeck the artist conceives of himself as in a world apart. Visually, Overbeck distances himself from the viewer through the ledge which acts as a barrier. Verbally, he declares himself a king in his own sphere: here he has the ultimate power and authority that he lacks in other aspects of his life, especially since he is dependent upon his parents for financial support. It is the power to be in control of his own destiny that Overbeck desires, a power he can only

achieve through financial independence. In keeping with the protestant ethic, Overbeck privileges work and intellect over station, and so claims to have, through his capacity to create, more power than a king. But he would like to earn the "respect" of kings, as this would lead to social acknowledgement of, and financial renumeration for, his intellectual and artistic powers.

Overbeck again invokes the royal metaphor after he receives his first significant commission, which occurs after he leaves Vienna and settles in Rome. In December 1811, Queen Caroline of Bavaria commissioned Overbeck to paint a subject of his own choice. In his diary, as well as in a letter to his father, Overbeck transcribes part of a letter the Queen wrote to artist Sophie Reinhardt, a mutual acquaintance: "From the painter Overbeck I desire and I ask you to order a picture for me; and do not be scrupulous about the price, for if one expects something beautiful, one does not regret the cost." 12 In response to this commission, Overbeck, writing in his diary, again compares himself to a king:

---

12Overbeck’s diary (16 December 1811), Howitt I, p.221; "'Von dem Maler O. wünsche ich und bitte ich Sie mir ein Bild zu bestellen; und mit dem Preise seien Sie nicht so gar gewissenhaft, denn wenn man etwas Schönes erwartet, läßt man sich die Kosten nicht reuen.'" When Overbeck writes to his father a few days later (Rome, 20 December 1811), he changes the quote slightly: "'von dem Maler O. bitte ich Sie, mir ein Bild zu bestellen und seyn Sie mit dem Preise nicht so gar gewissenhaft, denn wenn man etwas Schönes erwartet, bereut man nicht die Kosten u.A’" (Hasse, p.46).
The moment has arrived, so long yearned for; now you are thus finally, or better yet already! a man, an independent artist, who rules in his workshop freely like a king over his infinite empire of fantasy, and who creates by himself a more beautiful world.\textsuperscript{13}

Overbeck makes explicit the equation between being a king and being an independent artist, an equation that is based on the notions of freedom and authority. On this same day, Overbeck expresses, in a letter to his father (part of which was quoted above), the joy and sorrow he derives from his newly found financial independence.

My mind roams to and fro and I search for words to describe to you first and foremost the joy which I discover; while I articulate this, my emotions, my innermost feelings of gratitude would like to be able to show themselves, but I find no expressions that suffice; instead of words, tears come and my heart wants to break from melancholic joy. Ah! and now I only feel that I sit down to write in vain, for instead of a joyful celebration or an enthusiastic and loud thanks, with which I wanted to tell you of my good fortune, I feel something like a pang of separation; it is to me as if a beautiful band has been loosened at this hour, which had fastened me to the dearest and most precious ones on the earth! But no! impossible. Should you love me less, if you no longer worry about me? And should I cease to feel thankful towards you, if I no longer enjoy your visible kindness? No, away with these thoughts and make room for joy, the highest joy.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}Overbeck’s diary (20 December 1811), Howitt I, p.222: "Dies ist der so lange ersehnte Zeitpunkt; nun bist du also endlich, oder vielmehr schon! ein Mann, ein unabhängiger Künstler, der in seiner Werkstätte frei wie ein König über das unendliche Reich der Fantasie herrscht und sich selber eine schönere Welt schafft."

\textsuperscript{14}Overbeck, letter to his father (Rome, 20 December 1811), Hasse, pp.45-46: "[I]ch sinne hin und her und suche nach Worten, Ihnen zuvorderst meine Freude zu schildern, die ich empfinde; indem ich das ausspreche, möchte Ihnen meine
While Overbeck feels joy in attaining his goal of self-sufficiency, he nevertheless mourns the loss of a role, that of the dependent son, which had hitherto formed an important part of his self-definition. But a more satisfying role has replaced that of the dutiful son. As he writes to his mother a few days after receiving the commission, "but would you, dearest, even still recognize your Fritz? hardly, [for] the boy has become a man."\(^{15}\)

Through the royal metaphor Overbeck expresses his desire to be an autonomous man, and this metaphor seems an appropriate topic for a discussion of the painting he executes for the Queen of Bavaria, the *Adoration of the Magi* (fig.6).\(^{16}\) In the same letter to his father concerning this

\(^{15}\)Overbeck, letter to his mother (20 December 1811), Hasse, p.46: "[A]ber würden Sie, Geliebteste! auch so Ihren Fritz gleich wieder erkennen? wohl schwerlich, der Knabe ist zum Mann geworden...."

\(^{16}\)For a discussion of this work, which is now in the Hamburg Kunsthalle, see Carl Georg Heise, "Johann Friedrich Overbeck, 1789-1869, Die Anbetung der Könige," *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* 2 (1952), pp.8-9. For a discussion...
commission, Overbeck, writes:

I am free to determine the subject myself, and I have already chosen for it my favourite, the Adoration of the Three Magi, of which I have by chance already made a small drawing, which I want to use with the approval of [Sophie] Reinhard. A blessed enterprise, to paint the favourite picture of his heart for a noble, pious, and art-loving Queen! and moreover with such a subject, whereby one has the opportunity to urge in the mildest of ways such an important truth on her majesty; for certainly it is the highest goal of art to ennoble the heart of men, and that it is able to do so, I have, praise God, not yet lost my beautiful faith.17

Overbeck's statement that the Adoration of the Magi is his favourite subject should be seen in the light of his interest in Catholicism (although he had not yet converted), and of his ideas regarding the truth of Christianity. Before receiving the commission, Overbeck discusses, in a letter to his father, not only the comparative worth of Catholicism and Protestantism, but also the possibility of his converting to Catholicism.

17 Overbeck, letter to his father (Rome, 20 December 1811), Hasse, p.46: "Für ein gekröntes Haupt soll ich malen, die Königin von Bayern, ist es, die ein Bildchen von mir will....Den Gegenstand zu bestimmen bleibt mir selber freigestellt, und ich habe bereits meinen Lieblingsgegenstand, die Anbetung der heiligen drey Könige dafür bestimmt, von dem ich zufällig grade jetzt eine kleine Zeichnung gemacht habe, die ich mit Genehmigung der Reinhard dazu benützen will. Seliges Geschäft, für eine edle, fromme und kunstliebende Königin die Lieblingsbilder seines Herzens zu malen! und doppelt bey einem solchen Gegenstand, wo man zugleich Gelegenheit hat, auf die mildeste Weise der Majestät eine so wichtige Wahrheit ans Herz zu legen; denn gewiß ist es der höchste Zweck der Kunst, das Herz der Menschen zu veredeln, und daß sie das vermöge, den schönen Glauben habe ich Gottlob! noch nicht verloren."
Catholicism. He describes how a Catholic procession in a Roman piazza "made such an extraordinary impression on me that I...fell involuntarily to my knees."\(^{18}\) Moreover, Overbeck was at this time reading a book that he claims "should be in every household as a commentary on the bible," the *Geschichte der Religion Jesu Christi* by Count Stolberg, the famous German convert to Catholicism.\(^{19}\)

The drawing Overbeck mentions above in connection with Sophie Reinhard (fig.7) can be compared to an earlier drawing of the same subject (fig.8), in which the composition is more iconic due to the symmetrical arrangement of the holy family along a central vertical axis. The later drawing and his painting for the Queen feature a processional composition: the Magi move towards the Holy Family along the horizontal axis. Whereas the earlier drawing's composition stresses the Holy Family and the fact that Christ is the saviour, the composition of the later drawing and painting emphasizes the three Magi's recognition of Christ as saviour: their central, triangular configuration marks them as the focal point of the

\(^{18}\)Overbeck, letter to his father (Rome, 29 April 1811), Hasse, p.44: "Das machte einen außerordentlichen Eindruck auf mich, daß ich unwillkürlich auch auf die Kniee [sic] fiel."

\(^{19}\)Overbeck, letter to his mother (Rome, 1 March 1812), Hasse, p.48. At this time, Overbeck may have also been attending lectures by Abbate Pietro Ostini, the theologian who helped convince Overbeck to convert to Catholicism. Howitt does not mention when Overbeck began attending Ostini's lectures. In a letter to his father of 27 December 1812 (Hasse, pp.50-51), Overbeck quotes a theologian who is most likely Ostini.
work. The importance for the church of the adoration of the Magi is that it "shows the call of pagan nations to the evangelical revelation." In opposition to many Protestant reformers, who did not acknowledge the existence of the Magi, thinking them more legend than fact, Catholics of the early nineteenth century saw the Magi, along with the shepherds, as the first to recognize Christ's divinity. Referring to the star that led the Magi to Christ, present in Overbeck's painting above the three kings, Stolberg states that its existence cannot be doubted; even though it cannot be considered a real star, it was nevertheless a sign from God. So Overbeck presents to the Queen, who remained a

---

20Henri Leclercq, "Mages," Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, ed. Fernand Cabral (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1931), X, pp.983-984: "[l'] importance vraie [du fait de l'adoration des Mages], sa gravité éternelle c'est sa signification historique, le symbole qu'il représente et que les premières générations chrétiennes ont su comprendre et énoncer en y montrant l'appel des nations païennes à la révélation évangélique."


protestant despite her marriage to a Catholic monarch, a painting designed "to urge in the mildest of ways such an important truth on her majesty"—namely, I believe, the recognition of the truth of Catholicism.

In his identification with the Magi (he too has had a revelation), Overbeck again seems to be thinking of himself in terms of royalty. But here the royalty must be understood in religious terms. And it should be pointed out that at the time that Overbeck, in his diary, claims to be like a king in that he has reached his bourgeois goal of financial security and become an independent man, he is also living in a monastery, and playing a very different role, that of the monk-artist.

(2) THE MONK-ARTIST

In 1809, Overbeck and five of his fellow students at the Viennese Academy, dissatisfied with their academic training, formed the Brotherhood of St. Luke. To signify membership in the fraternity each brother received a diploma decorated with the group's device, designed by Overbeck (fig. 9). St. Luke, the evangedtist and patron saint of painting, sits alone in his cell, like a medieval monk, writing his gospel with his painting implements nearby. The letter W in the keystone of

the arch stands for Wahrheit (truth), which was the ruling principle of the brotherhood and which is also symbolized by the sword and torch in the upper corners of the device. The other letters inscribed in the arch are the initials of the last names of the six original members of the society (clockwise from left, Hottinger, Wintergerst, Pforr, Overbeck, Vogel, and Sutter). In 1810, the ideal of the monk-artist here depicted became a reality, when four of the six St. Luke brothers journeyed to Rome and eventually settled in St. Isidoro, an Irish Franciscan monastery, which was closed due to the Napoleonic occupation of Rome.

Overbeck, at that time, wrote to his father: "Now we thus become monks!" 24

The four painters lived a quasi-monastic life, spending time alone in their cells, but also meeting in the refectory

24Overbeck, letter to his father (Rome, 29 September 1810), Hasse p.39: "Nun werden wir also Klosterbrüder!" In a diary entry a year later (21 October 1811), Overbeck writes of the difficulties of his new life: "Peaceful cloister-life with Wintergerst; sweetness of solitude and the separation from the world; only so can true art succeed today. Wish of being able to be a monk.--Impossible to fulfill--what then makes the cowl of the monk? not the heart and a pious life? humility and obedience to the voice of virtue are the first duties of an order--chastity and moderation the vow--mercy one of the chief virtues--love makes everything easy."

(Howitt I, p.186: "Einträchtiges Klosterleben mit Wintergerst; Süßigkeit der Einsamkeit und Abgeschiedenheit von der Welt; nur so kann heut zu Tage die wahre Kunst gedeihnh. Wunsch, Mönch sein zu können.--Kann unmöglich erfüllt werden!--macht denn die Kutte den Mönch? nicht das Herz und ein gottseliges Leben?--Demuth und Gehorsam gegen die Stimme der Tugend sind die ersten Ordenspflichten--Keuschheit und Mäßigkeit das Gelübde--Barmherzigkeit eine der Haupttugenden--Liebe macht alles leicht.")
to draw together after models and to discuss their work. They wore their hair long "alla nazarena," which was the reason for the nickname "Nazarenes." From the beginning, Overbeck was more closely associated with the monk-artist role than his brothers. Within the group, he was considered the priest, Pforr the master. And after the dissolution of the group, only Overbeck retained the monk-artist persona (see chapter four).

In pursuing their ideal life of monastic solitude, the Nazarenes were consciously attempting to revive quattrocento art and life. Concerning one of his role models, Fra Angelico, Overbeck wrote in his diary:

How pure the soul of the pious Fiesole [Fra Angelico] must have been, how so entirely passionless, entirely devoted to the heavenly, that is Christian love! how strict and regulated his monastic way of life!

It was Goethe who pointed out Wackenroder's faulty


26Sutter, letter to Overbeck (4 December 1810): "You are our priest and Pforr is our master. Religion and wisdom guide us through you, dearest ones, accompanied with the blessing of heaven." (Howitt I, p.159n1: "Du bist unser Priester und Pforr ist unser Meister. Religion und Weisheit leiten uns durch Euch, Geliebteste, mit dem Segen des Himmels begleitet.")

27Overbeck's diary (9 October 1811), Howitt I, p.182: "Wie rein mag die Seele des frommen Fiesole gewesen sein, wie so ganz leidenschaftlos, ganz der himmlischen d. i. der christlichen Liebe hingegeben! wie streng und pünktlich sein klösterlicher Lebenswandel!"
syllogistic reasoning, which the brothers of St. Luke seem to have adopted as well: it does not follow that because some monks were painters, all painters ought to be monks. But in taking on the monk-artist role, Overbeck replaces the role of the academic painter with a role that he believes to be more authentic. As I argued in the last chapter, Overbeck constructs an empirical self, to use Fichte’s terms, that reflects his pure self. He attempts to authenticate his work through his lifestyle.

Overbeck never portrays himself as the monk-artist, although the figure of the monk is present in his drawings (e.g., fig.10). But this role is suggested in depictions of him by others. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld portrays Overbeck in deep contemplation, or perhaps prayer, before a blank canvas (fig.11). Joseph Sutter, an original member of the Brotherhood of St. Luke, portrays Overbeck taking communion (fig.12). Variations on the theme are Overbeck’s inactive poses in Wilhelm von Kaulbach’s The Struggle Against


29For a discussion of Overbeck’s depictions of monks, see Hans Ost, Einsiedler und Mönche (Düsseldorf: Rheinland Verlag, 1971), pp.164ff.
Antiquated Tradition and Modern German Artists in Rome, both murals for the original Neue Pinakothek in Munich. In the The Fight Against Antiquated Tradition (fig. 13), while the classicists on the left and the Nazarenes on the right fight against the Cerberus of the stodgy, academic tradition, which imprisons the three graces, Overbeck sits passively on Pegasus between Peter Cornelius and Philipp Veit, holding a banner with hands folded. In the Modern German Artists in Rome (fig. 1), as mentioned in the introduction, while all the other artists are drawing, Overbeck prays before a hermit, peasant woman, and child.

By the time Kaulbach painted his murals, Overbeck's work, and that of the Nazarenes in general, had already been disparaged by many critics. That Kaulbach's murals aim at deriding Overbeck's monk-artist character is made clear in Paul Hasse's introduction to an 1887 collection of Overbeck's letters:

Reports from the life of the painter Friedrich Overbeck will perhaps be met today with only

---

30 The murals, with the rest of the Neue Pinakothek, were destroyed in the second world war, but the preparatory oil sketches remain. For a discussion of these works, see Walter Mittlmeier, Die Neue Pinakothek in München 1843-1854 (Munich: Prestel, 1977), pp. 49-62; Werner Busch, Die notwendige Arabeske (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1985), pp. 114-125. In relation to Overbeck, see Andreas Blühm, "'Herr vergieb ihnen, sie wissen nicht was sie thun': Overbeck und seine Kritiker," Johann Friedrich Overbeck, pp. 71-2. Frank Büttner discusses Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's negative reaction to Kaulbach's frescoes in his "Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld und die Kunstschauungen seiner Zeit," Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, ed. Herwig Guratzsch, exh. cat. Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, 1994, p. 53.
partial interest. For certainly he and his school stand in direct contrast to the taste and the style of the present; with the name Nazarene, one holds them for marked, dismissed, and buried, especially since Kaulbach endeavoured to expose them to general ridicule through his well-known satires.\textsuperscript{11}

But Hasse defends Overbeck's idealism and he cites archaeologist Friedrich Matz's first-hand description of the painter, which emphasizes a correspondence between Overbeck's pure character and art: "'What makes such a wonderful and overwhelming impression (with Overbeck) is how...[he] speaks with such infinitely child-like purity and goodness of heart. At once I saw that he sets down in his pictures nothing artificial or semi-skilled, but only his own essence...all is pure, easy, and even....'"\textsuperscript{32} Both Kaulbach's ridicule and Matz's praise show how successfully Overbeck conveys the properties of the monk-artist: purity, passivity, innocence, and a child-like naivete.

\textsuperscript{11}Hasse, p.897: "Mitteilungen aus dem Leben des Malers Friedrich Overbeck werden heutigen Tages vielleicht nur einem geteilten Interesse begegnen. Denn allerdings stehen ja er und seine Schule in geradem Gegensatze zu dem Geschmacke und der Mode der Gegenwart; mit dem Namen der Nazarener hielt man sie ja längst für gekennzeichnet, abgethan und begraben, insbesondere seitdem Kaulbach sie durch seine bekannte Satire dem allgemeinen Sprotte [sic] preisgegeben zu haben meinte."

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., pp.897-898: "'Gerade das...macht (bei Overbeck) einen so wunderbaren und überwältigenden Eindruck, wie aus seiner ganzen Erscheinung ein Mensch von so unendlicher kindlicher Reinheit und Herzensgüte spricht. Jetzt erst habe ich es gesehen, daß er in seinen Bildern nichts Künstliches, Angelertes, sondern nur sein eigenstes Wesen niederlegt. Da ist keine Falte, kein versteckter Hinterzug, alles ist rein, leicht und eben, und wie er in seinen Schöpfungen, meiner Ansicht nach mit Recht, den Naturalismus völlig außer Augen setzt, so liegt ihm auch alles fern, was die Welt bietet, selbst das, was er am notwendigsten braucht.'"
Overbeck did not invent these characteristics, of course. Vasari, in his description of Fra Angelico, outlines the basic attributes of the monk-artist:

The rare and perfect talent which Fra Angelico enjoyed neither can nor should be granted to anyone who does not lead a thoroughly religious life. Artists who devote themselves to work of a religious or holy kind ought themselves to be genuinely holy and religious.... Fra Angelico was most gentle and temperate and he lived chastely, withdrawn from the snares of the world. He would often comment that anyone practising the art of painting needed a quiet and untroubled life and that the man who occupies himself with the things of Christ should live like Christ.\footnote{Vasari, "The Life of Fra Giovanni of Fiesole (Fra Angelico," I, pp.204-206.}

And Wackenroder reiterates:

Fra Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole, artist and Dominican monk in Florence, was especially famous because of his strict and pious life. He did not concern himself with the world at all, even declined the office of archbishop which the Pope offered to him, and always lived quietly, peacefully, humbly and in solitude.\footnote{Wackenroder, Confessions from the Heart of an Art-loving Friar, tr. Mary Hurst Schubert (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), p.145.}

The various characteristics attributed to Fra Angelico’s life can be found in Overbeck’s device for the brotherhood portraying St. Luke: seclusion, austerity, devotion to God and to an art inspired by God. In his diary, Overbeck puts into words what he depicts in this image: "only an orderly, pure, and innocent way of life gives that quiet of spirit and mind, which is absolutely necessary in order to bring forth
truly pure works."\(^{35}\)

(2.1) THE PURE MONK-ARTIST

I will now focus on Overbeck's claim to purity, which Matz, a contemporary of Overbeck, took at face value, and which has also been taken at face value by art historians. Jens Jensen, for example, writes that Overbeck turned out to be "the constant guardian of inner purity in the complete sense of purity of life, thought and of the purity of art."\(^{36}\) I propose to examine the fundamental role played by the concept of purity in the way in which Overbeck constructs himself and presents it to others. This will lead to a discussion of the place accorded to art in Overbeck's time.

In the Grimm dictionary, "pure" (rein), in the material sense, is defined as "free from foreign mixing, free from any additions."\(^{37}\) To yearn for purity is to yearn for an original or natural condition or a return to this state, if

\(^{35}\)Overbeck's diary (9 October 1811), Howitt I, p.182: "[N]ur ein ordentlicher reiner und unstraflicher Lebenswandel giebt ihm diejenige Ruhe des Geistes und Gemüthes, die unumgänglich nothwendig ist um wahrhaft reine Werke hervorzubringen."


additions or mixtures have occurred. Mary Douglas argues that purity should be seen in the context of a society's beliefs regarding pollution: for there to be a concept of purity, there must also be the concept of dirt. Douglas defines dirt as "matter out of place," and purification rituals as procedures that re-establish order. A desire for purity is thus often a reaction to a situation that is deemed ambiguous or anomalous or to a world that is felt to be in crisis.

By removing oneself from the world to an enclosed realm, in which one makes oneself impenetrable and impermeable, one


39In early nineteenth-century Europe, there were many reasons why one could feel the world to be in a disturbing state of flux: the French Revolution of 1789, the rise of Napoleon, the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, the Prussian Reforms of 1808, which officially ended the Estates-system in Prussia, and the re-ordering of the world along bourgeois lines. Kurt Lankheit argues that this was especially true for the Romantic artist, who had a "feeling of uncertainty and emptiness, which had developed from economic need, from being professionally and artistically misunderstood, from the privation of a home and familiar surroundings, and finally from doubt and lost belief." (Lankheit, Das Freundschaftsbild der Romantik [Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1952], p.94.: "...[das] Gefühl der Unsicherheit und Leere, das sich durch wirtschaftliche Nöte, durch berufliches und künstlerisches Mißverstandenwerden, Entbehrrung eines Heims und familiären Geborgenseins und schließlich durch Verzweiflung aus Gewissensnot und verlorenem Glauben ergibt....") In the words of Hegel: "The satisfaction of everyone's spiritual needs is no longer guaranteed by art, which earlier times and peoples searched for and found in it." (As quoted in Lankheit, Revolution und Restauration [Köln: Dumont, 1988], p.8: "daß die Kunst nicht mehr diejenige Befriedigung der geistigen Bedürfnisse gewährt, welche frühere Zeiten und Völker in ihr gesucht und nur in ihr gefunden haben.")
attempts to protect oneself against such ambiguity.

Overbeck’s desire for a pure state, his attempt "to keep the body (social and physical) intact," had already begun when he was still in Vienna, before his stay at St. Isidoro. In a letter to his father from Vienna complaining about his academic training, he writes:

I believe that the result of systematic learning must always be a skillful, but cold artist. The lawyer can study law systematically, the theologian his church history, etc., but the poet, can he be educated systematically? So it is with the painter.

Here we have the idea of a threat posed by rationalism and practicality, which govern the external world, to the artist’s integrity of feeling. In the same letter to his father, Overbeck states:

The young painter above all guards his feelings, he never allows so much as an impure word to pass through his lips, so much as an impure thought to enter into his soul....And [Raphael] felt himself to be pure, and his heart was full of divine feelings....

For this reason I have now decided not to study anatomy after cadavers, because one certainly blunts one's feelings by doing this...[and] never after the female model for the same reason. I prefer to draw less correctly, rather than certainly damage my feelings, which are the

---

40 Douglas, Purity, p.140.

The state of purity that Overbeck desires is free not only of systematization but also of the world of matter, corrupting and corruptible. His decision not to work after cadavers and female nudes, like his cloistering of himself in St. Isidoro, is an attempt to keep himself whole, impermeable to the world of death and sex. This notion of shelter is also an ingredient of the friendship that unites the members of the brotherhood. Unlike earlier friendship groups, which were the "starting point for the conquest of the public sphere," the brotherhood of St. Luke was a "place of shelter from the temptations of the world."  

In St. Isidoro Overbeck and his brothers believed that


\[43\] According to Vasari, Raphael began to study cadavers when he developed his "Michelangelesque" style, which is when, according to Overbeck, his art declined. See Overbeck's letter to his parents (Vienna, 22 December 1810), Hasse, p.42.

they had created a pure world separate from the quotidian world, an artistic realm in which spirituality had pride of place. Pforr clearly states this belief in a letter to Johann David Passavant, in which he cites the Franciscan virtues: "I would like to ask the man, who wants to consecrate himself to art, what we ask the man, who wants to become a monk: can you take and observe the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience? If so, enter." Pforr's remark preserves the distinction between the Nazarenes and actual monks, while erasing the distinction at the same time. Overbeck's role-playing does the same thing. He stresses the fact that his art is in the service of religion (a notion that is frequently reiterated in the art-historical literature), and the monk-artist role elides the fact that he is by profession an artist, not a monk. But it is through his art that he made his contribution to religion, and it is in the world of art, not religion, that he established himself as an independent man. Overbeck's pure, monastic-like seclusion, if seen in artistic rather than religious terms, conforms to a strong current of aesthetic thought, put forward by enlightenment thinkers, that "plays off the spiritual world against the material world by holding up culture as the realm of authentic values and self-contained

45 Pforr, "Über Freundschaft, Freunde und eigene Kunst," Lehr, p.275: "Ich möchte den, der sich der Kunst weihen will, fragen, wie man einen, der Mönch werden will, fragt: kannst Du das Gelübde der Armут, der Keuschheit und des Gehorsams ablegen und halten, so tritt ein."
ends in opposition to the world of social utility and means."  

In making the connection between Overbeck and the Enlightenment notion of autonomous art, I am not arguing from intention. In fact, Overbeck intended his art to be just the opposite: he saw it as as a means to an end, as a sign that would lead people to God. Frank Büttner writes that the true cause of the crisis in art, according to the Nazarenes, was its evolution towards autonomy....[A]rt always flourished best when it served religion and public life, as in the Gothic and Renaissance periods. There could be no new flowering of art, said the Nazarenes, until art returned to its former condition. Only by giving up its autonomy could art resume its true place in the life of the people and help to overcome the historical crisis. 47

Manfred Jauslin also argues that the intention of the Nazarenes was to re-unite art and life through the revival of


47Büttner, "The 'Official' Art of Romanticism as a Synthesis of the Arts," The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990, ed. Keith Hartley et al, exh. cat. Royal Academy of Art, Edinburgh (Stuttgart: Oktagon, 1994), p.307. Büttner argues similarly in the Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld catalogue: "In opposition to classical art theory the Nazarenes were of the conviction that true art should not be autonomous..., should not be made for itself, but for people. From their point of view, art could only display its true worth, if it served religious life and, next to this, public life." (Büttner, "Julius Schnorr von Carlsfeld," p.56: "Im Gegensatz zur Kunsttheorie der Klassik waren die Nazarener...der Überzeugung, daß 'wahre' Kunst nicht autonom..., nicht für sich, sondern für den Menschen gemacht werde. Nach ihrer Auffassung konnte die Kunst ihren eigentlichen Wert nur entfalten, wenn sie dem religiösen und nächst dem dem öffentlichen Leben diente."
a historical model (the Middle Ages) in which art and life had been as one. But he believes that the enterprise was bound to fail:

An attempt, like that of the brothers of St. Luke, to lead art back into the practice of life amounted to a *l'art pour l'art* of an aestheticization of the sphere of living (life), as one of the possibilities in which the failure of the cultural revolution's intention became manifest.\(^{48}\)

Jauslin is right to claim that the Nazarenes failed to revolutionize art in their culture, but in the case of Overbeck it is problematic to say that his artistic enterprise was a failure. He was accepted in the role he wanted to play; he was able to support himself through his art; he was one of the most famous artists of his time, and one of the most acclaimed, as is attested by the numerous awards he received.\(^{49}\) Through the construction of his monk-

\(^{48}\) Jauslin, *Die gescheiterte Kulturrevolution*, p.196: "Ein Versuch, wie der der Lukasbrüder, Kunst in Lebenspraxis überzuführen, läuft im L’art pour l’art auf eine Aesthetisierung der Lebenssphäre hinaus, als einer der Möglichkeiten, in denen das Scheitern der kulturrevolutionären Intentionen offenkundig wird." Jauslin proposes that the Brothers of St. Luke worked against the autonomization of art in their attempt to bring art and *Lebenspraxis* together on the model of a medieval world that they believed had not undergone social alienation. This attempted cultural revolution fails, according to Jauslin, because the art of the brotherhood could not overcome the process of autonomization: its dependence on the classical theory of Winckelmann led to an emphasis on linearity, which diminishes the construction of central perspective and gives their work a flat and abstract quality; and their work eventually ends up in museums, where there is necessarily a distance between art and life.

\(^{49}\) For a list of the rewards Overbeck received, see Howitt II, pp.397-398. The official documents are in the Overbeck archives (VII, 2) in the Stadtbibliothek, Lübeck.
artist role, he was even able to deal with harsh criticism: "God forgive them, they know not what they do," he said, in a Christ-like manner, of his critics.\(^5^0\)

If I am suggesting that Overbeck was successful in his artistic life, it is because he was able to live the life that he wanted to lead, a life that he deemed authentic. Here the criterion for success is not the actualization of an artistic programme, but the realization and presentation of one's "true" self. Using this standard allows one to position Overbeck within his class rather than outside its boundaries. The problem with opposing the Nazarenes' artistic programme to enlightenment notions of art as an end in itself is that Overbeck and other members of the St. Luke Brotherhood adopt a strategy to fight these notions which is steeped in the very idea that they are trying to defeat. In claiming purity as one of the chief characteristics of the monk-artist, Overbeck attempts to remove himself from the quotidian world. And by removing himself to the pure sphere of religious isolation, in which he produces his art through divine inspiration, Overbeck perpetuates the bourgeois conception of the artist as marginal to society and as needing this marginality in order to create works that can move the viewer into a realm beyond the everyday.

\(^{5^0}\)Overbeck, letter to Sutter (Rome, 25 December 1814), Howitt I, p.375: "Herr vergieb ihnen, sie wissen nicht was sie thun." Andreas Blühm uses this quotation in the title of his essay in *Johannes Friedrich Overbeck*. 
For Kant, Schiller, and other enlightenment thinkers, culture is attainable by anyone, not merely by a privileged upper class. Schiller believes that art will be able to remedy the imbalances that he sees in his world. These imbalances are due to an excess of either sensuality or refinement. Schiller attributes the first kind of imbalance to the uneducated peasants, who have "crude, lawless instincts" and "ungovernable fury," and the second kind to the decadent aristocrats, who are a "repugnant spectacle of lethargy."\textsuperscript{51} The emerging bourgeoisie, on the other hand, positions itself in a middle ground and represents its social interests through culture, opposing not only "the worldly ideal of taste that is associated with the aristocracy," but also "any kind of carnal or physical pleasure and the experience of the common man."\textsuperscript{52} Herbert Marcuse clearly articulates the universal nature of culture: it is "realizable by every [middle-class] individual for himself 'from within,' without any transformation of the state of fact." In culture, objects "gain value which elevates them above the everyday sphere. Their reception becomes an act of celebration and exaltation....Culture affirms and conceals

\textsuperscript{51}Schiller, "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," p.95.

the new conditions of social life."\textsuperscript{53}

Overbeck's monk-artist persona, in its claims to purity, should be seen within middle-class parameters, for it depends upon the distinction between the material sphere of activity and a sacred and autonomous one. In a letter to his father, Overbeck makes his case for the superiority of Catholicism to Protestantism by arguing that within the Catholic church, there are no class distinctions, everyone is equal.

And in the [Catholic] churches, is not it wonderful how all differences of class are removed before God? There the beggar kneels next to the counts and princes, the woman next to the man, the child next to the old man, and everyone beats his breast humbly and thinks: God have mercy on me, the poor sinner....Oh why is this equality of classes before God removed with us? Why do we go into the church, as we go to the theatre, not to pray but rather to listen to preaching? Why is it that we do not kneel anymore?\textsuperscript{54}

What we have here, to use Peter Paret's phrase, is an "embourgeoisement of the middle ages."\textsuperscript{55} In Overbeck's conception of religion, just as in the enlightenment conception of autonomous art, equality and universality

\textsuperscript{53}Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character," pp.95, 96.

\textsuperscript{54}Overbeck, letter to his father (Rome, 29 April 1811), Hasse, p.44: "Und in den Kirchen, wie herrlich ist es nicht, daß aller Standesunterschied vor Gott aufgehoben wird? Da kniet der Bettler neben dem Grafen und Fürsten, das Weib neben dem Manne, das Kind neben dem Greise und Alles schlägt demüthig an seine Brust und denkt: Gott sey mir arnen Sünder gnädig!...O warum ist diese Gleichheit der Stände vor Gott wohl bei uns aufgehoben? warum geht man wohl in die Kirche wie ins Theater, nicht um zu beten, sondern perorieren zu hören? warum kniet man wohl nicht mehr bei uns?"

reign, making up for or doing away with the inequality that is present in other spheres of activity. Some participants create works of art, while others contemplate and are improved by these works. Some, like Francesco Francia in Wackenroder's [Confessions from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk], even become canonized as martyrs "of art enthusiasm," through their recognition of great art. Whether art moves the viewer into a religious realm or an aesthetic one (both returning one to wholeness), the result is the same in that art "projects the image of a better order and to that extent protests against the bad order that prevails." And this movement is one into "fiction, which is semblance (Schein) only"; the result is that the social status quo is relieved "of the pressure of those forces that make for change. They are consigned to confinement in an ideal sphere...."

Overbeck, as the monk-artist and as a member of the Bürgertum, works within his own class structure to produce works that reinforce that structure. Within the context of the relation of culture to class structure, German Romanticism should be seen as a counterpart to Neoclassicism, in that "Romantic interiority is not so much the overcoming of classicism as is often said, but rather the dialectic

---

56 Wackenroder, Confessions, p.90.


58 Ibid.
counterpart of the sociability characteristic of enlightened culture.\(^{59}\) As mentioned in the introduction, the enlightenment emphasis on public virtue and Romanticism's emphasis on interiority are both aspects of the bourgeois re-ordering of the world with its ideology of the unique, contained, and free self, whether it be defined internally in terms of a rich, emotional life or externally in terms of political freedom and autonomy. As George Mosse puts it:

Romanticism, through...medieval imagery, reinforced the onslaught of respectability, whose driving force was the religious revivals and the French Revolution, working within the imperatives of the new bourgeois society.\(^{60}\)

Overbeck's art, while seemingly antagonistic to bourgeois notions of material progress and the autonomy of art, is, through his monk-artist persona and its emphasis on self-expression and purity, ultimately an ideological representation of middle-class values.

(2.2) OVERBECK'S PURE STYLE

Overbeck, in his statement concerning purity quoted above, claims that a pure life will enable one to produce pure works. Purity characterizes Overbeck's style, in which there is a preference for "local colour over the effects of

\(^{59}\)Suck, "Bourgeois Class Position," p.1116.

light and for precise line over sfumato."61 According to Ignaz Jeitteles' Aesthetisches Lexikon of 1839, purity in the fine arts usually refers to draughtsmanship.62 The connection between purity and linearity for Overbeck has to do with the opposition between natural and artificial styles. The plain style in classical rhetoric is "pure" in its use of "everyday language" and its rejection of all ornament.63 In seventeenth-century painting, purity refers to a style without artifice or ornament, a natural style. Writers such as Albani and Malvasia describe Correggio's style as pure in its being "apparently free from the contaminants of artifice and ornament."64 While the Nazarenes do not favour the work of Correggio (Pforr states that it had "little effect" upon them),65 they nevertheless define purity of style as

61Lionello Venturi, Il gusto dei primitivi (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1926), p.167: "La loro [the Nazarenes'] estetica era costituita dalla preferenza per i colori locali contro gli effetti di luce, e per le linee precise contro lo sfumato." Venturi, quoting Camillo Laderchi, writes that Overbeck stayed in Rome to guard the purity of the sanctuary ("'custodire la purità del santuario'”).


64Ibid., p.86.

65Pforr, "Geschichte des Studiums in Wien," Howitt I, p.82.
unadorned and natural. The work of the old German school impressed them greatly: "The noble simplicity spoke loudly to our hearts in its most exact characterisation; here was no bravura of the brush, no bold method of treatment, everything there was simple, as if it had not been painted but had grown." Pforr distinguishes here between an ornamental (academic) style that is artificial and a simple style that is organic or natural. But natural for the Nazarenes does not relate so much to the imitation of natura naturata as it does to the creative aspect of natura naturans. An organic, natural, or pure style has to do with the painter’s self, a self that has not been corrupted, as for example by the mannered and decadent academy with its penchant for

66 Ibid., p.83: "Die edle Einfalt sprach mit der bestimmten Characteristik laut an unser Herz, hier war keine Bravur des Pinsels, keine Kühne Behandlungsart, einfach stand alles da, als wäre es nicht gemalt sondern so gewachsen."

67 Another painter the Nazarenes deem natural is Giovanni Bellini. Overbeck writes in a letter to his father (Venice, 5 June 1810) that his paintings are divine: "this simplicity and unpretentiousness of the old ones, this child-like disposition, that is expressed in everything; Goethe’s words occur to me: the greatest strength, knowledge, remains hidden to the world, and he to whom it is sent, who doesn’t think, he has it without worries! And what masterful perfection is at the same time in these pictures, they would not be unworthy of Raphael." He concludes by saying that these works are "the perfection of art" as compared to those of Tintoretto or Veronese, which are "Barbarisms of art." (Hasse, p.1278: "Es ist doch etwas himmlisches, diese Einfalt und Anspruchlosigkeit der Alten, dies kindliche Gemüt, das aus allem spricht, mir fallen dabei Goethes Worte allemal ein: die hohe Kraft, die Wissenschaft, bleibt aller Welt verborgen, und wer nicht denkt, dem wird sie geschenkt, der hat sie ohne Sorgen! Und welch’ meisterhafte Vollendung ist zugleich in diesen Bildern, sie wären Rafaels nicht unwürdig.")
eclecticism. In Overbeck’s words:

He who demands from a young painter that he must endeavour, because Raphael was the greatest in composition, to learn to compose like Raphael, because Titian was the greatest painter, to learn to paint like Titian, because Correggio was the greatest in chiaroscuro, to learn to shade like him, or because Michelangelo possessed the most powerful and greatest style, to make that style his own, and to combine all these merits: he demonstrates that he understands little of these things; that he has not considered that these different merits are so opposed to one another as to be impossible to bring together. One takes a figure from Michelangelo and paints it like Titian; now you no longer have a Michelangelesque figure; the outer contour remaining would appear loathsome in reference to the layers of flesh in between, that Titian must bring in, if he wants to paint like Titian... I am of the opposite opinion, as I wrote to you earlier; in my view, one should endeavour to bring each to a definite perfection, but, it should be noted, with the help of nature.  

This opposition between an individual (or pure) and an academic (or mixed) style is in keeping with contemporary

---

68 Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 5 February 1808), Howitt I, pp.68-69: "Wer nun gar verlangt von einem jungen Künstler, er müsse sich bestreben, weil Rafael der größte in der Composition war, so componiren zu lernen wie Rafael, weil Tizian der größte Maler war, so malen zu lernen wie Tizian, weil Correggio am größten im Helldunkel war, so beleuchten zu lernen wie dieser, oder wohl weil Michel-Angelo den mächtigsten größtesten Stil besessen hat, sich diesen Stil zu eigen zu machen, und alle diese Vorzüge vereinigen: der zeigt, daß er wenig von der Sache verstehe; daß er nicht bedacht habe, daß diese verschiedenen Vorzüge einander so widersprechend sind, daß es sich gar nicht zusammen denken läßt. Man nehme eine Figur von Michel-Angelo und lasse sie von Tizian malen; ja da bleibt sie keine Buonarottische Figur mehr; die äußere Contour, die da bleibt, würde übel stehen zu den innern Fleischichten, was Tizian hineinbringen müßte, wenn er als Tizian malen wollte.... [I]ch bin im Gegenteil gesonnen, wie ich Ihnen früher geschrieben habe, mich zu bestreben, es in jedem zu einer gewissen Vollkommenheit zu bringen; aber NB. durch Hülfe der Natur."
views of the academy as eclectic or mannered. Winckelmann was the first to use the term eclectic with negative connotations, in particular in his attack on the art of the Carracci. While the German Romantics may reject Winckelmann’s prioritization of the antique, they nevertheless accept his criticism of academic art as eclectic. In his Ansichten über die bildenden Künste, a defense of the Nazarenes that was published after they were critically attacked on the occasion of a public exhibition in Rome, Johann David Passavant argues that artists should aim for a pure style. At first Passavant seems to be thinking of purity in terms of national characteristics, especially in his earlier chapters, where he discusses architecture. In his comparison of Italian to German architecture, Passavant


70 Denis Mahon, Studies in Seicento Art and Theory (London: Warburg Institute, 1947), p.212ff. Winckelmann wrote: "They [the Carracci] were eclectics and wanted to unite the purity of the early painters and Raphael, the knowledge of Michelangelo, with the richness and abundance of the Venetian school, especially Paolo [Veronese], and with the gaiety of the Lombard brush of Correggio." (Johann Winckelmann, Abhandlung von der Fähigkeit der Empfindung des Schönen in der Kunst [Dresden, 1763], p.26, as quoted in Mahon, Studies in Seicento Art, p.213n35: "Diese waren Eclectici, und suchten die Reinheit der Alten und des Raphaels, das Wissen des Michael Angelo, mit dem Reichtume und dem Ueberflusse der Venetianischen Schule, sonderlich des Paolo, und mit der Froehlichkeit des Lombardischen Pinsels im Correggio, zu vereinigen.")

71 Johann David Passavant, Ansichten über die bildenden Künste und Darstellung des Ganges derselben in Toscana; zur Bestimmung des Gesichtspunctes, aus welchem die neudeutsche Malerschule zu betrachten ist (Heidelberg, 1820).
argues clearly and cogently that the German style is Gothic and the Italian classical. Any combining of the two styles, for example in most Florentine Gothic architecture, produces a mixed style. But these national boundaries do not seem to hold in Passavant’s discussion of painting. Here chronology seems to be the main concern. What was done in the Quattrocento and up to Raphael’s early period is pure, and what followed is mixed. According to Passavant, Raphael’s early work has "a purity of taste" that is unsurpassable. In the later sixteenth century, painting declined due to a rise in individuality, a problem present not only in the work of the Mannerists of the later sixteenth century, but also in the late work of Raphael and Michelangelo. And this led to the eclecticism of the Carracci.

72 Ibid., pp.13-21.

73 Ibid., p.18: "In Florenz ist nur das Innere der Kirche von St. Maria Novella im rein deutschen Style; alle übrigen Kirchen aus dieser Zeit sind, wie es überhaupt in Italien der Fall ist, mit vielen einzelnen Theilen der antiken Architektur vermischt, und man könnte diese Vermischung wohl am passendsten die italienisch-deutsche Bauart nennen."

74 Ibid., p.49: "In den ersteren [Raphael’s first period] zeigt sich bei hoher Einfalt des Geistes zugleich eine Reinheit des Geschmacks, welche nie übertroffen worden."

75 Ibid., pp.51-54.

76 In similar terms to Winckelmann and Overbeck, Passavant writes: "So they [the Carracci] wanted to combine the greatness of Michelangelo with the sense of beauty and the grace of Raphael; the colouring of Correggio with the correct drawing after nature and the antique; the wealth of composition of the Venetian school with the ideal conception
In Overbeck's painting purity is signified by his stylization, in the imitation of quattrocento painting, and, more specifically, by his conscious omission of chiaroscuro. Overbeck's style follows the precepts of Friedrich Schlegel, who "was waging war against the excesses of Rococo and the polite Mengsian mythologies."77 Schlegel describes the old German school as follows:

No confused masses of people, but figures that are few and separate, but completed carefully...; strict, even meagre forms in sharp contours which emerge clearly, no painting in chiaroscuro and no filth in night and cast shadows, but pure proportions and masses of colours, as in distinct harmony....78

Overbeck's Portrait of Franz Pforr (fig.14) follows of the Tuscan; suffice it to say that they were eclectics." (Passavant, Ansichten, p.57: "So wollten sie das Großartige des Michel Angelo, mit dem Schönheitssinn und der Grazie des Raphael; das Colorit des Correggio mit der richtigen Zeichnung nach der Natur und der Antike; den Reichthum der Composition bei der Schule der Venetianer mit der idealischen Auffassung bei den Toscanern vereinigen; genug sie waren Eklektiker.")


78Friedrich Schlegel, "Gemäldebeschreibungen aus Paris und den Niederlanden," Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1959), IV, p.14: "Keine verworrrene Haufen von Menschen, sondern wenige und einzelne Figuren, aber mit dem Fleiß vollendet...; strenge, ja magre Formen in scharfen Umrissen, die bestimmt heraustreten, keine Malerei aus Helldunkel und Schmutz in Nacht und Schlagschatten, sondern reine Verhältnisse und Massen von Farben, wie in deutlichen Akkorden...." Keith Andrews (The Nazarenes, p.18) draws attention to this quotation from Schlegel and writes that "these stipulations sound indeed like the programme of the Nazarenes." I have used my own translation here, rather than the nineteenth-century one that Andrews uses, because of the latter's inaccuracy, which Andrews himself (p.16n2) notes.
these precepts. He portrays his good friend in a domestic setting with all the attributes of a pure life. In particular, the virgin in the background, while frequently taken as a sign of domestic bliss, can also be understood as pointing to Pforr’s own purity. (As we will see below, the Nazarenes’ isolation from the material world is, in some ways, a feminine strategy.) But the purity of Pforr’s life is also represented through Overbeck’s pure style. If Overbeck’s portrait of Pforr is compared with the Portrait of Fürstin Gallizin by Heinrich Füger (fig.15), we can see what Overbeck was reacting against. In opposition to the baroque tendencies of the aristocratic Viennese Academy, exemplified in Füger’s portrait, Overbeck employs a strict linear style with little if any chiaroscuro. The academic painter and theoretician Anton Raphael Mengs argues that quattrocento paintings, because they lack chiaroscuro, are "dry," and "servile" (servile in the sense of merely copying nature and not raising it to the ideal).\footnote{\textit{Ellen Spickernagel, "Die Macht des Innenraums: Zum Verhältnis von Frauenrolle und Wohnkultur in der Biedermeierzeit,"} \textit{Kritische Berichte} 13.3 (1985), pp.7-8.} For Mengs, chiaroscuro is one of the elements that distinguishes sculpture from painting. Sculpture imitates "the form of truth, and not the appearance," while painting "imitates...visible objects of

\footnote{\textit{Mengs, "Reflections upon the three great painters, Raphael, Correggio and Titian. And upon the Ancients,"} \textit{The Works of Anthony Raphael Mengs} (London: Faulder, 1796), I, p.147.}
nature, not punctually as they are, but as they appear, or could or ought to appear."\(^1\) Pforr, who like Overbeck favours the works of the quattrocento, questions the academic privileging of appearance when he writes: "The old painters attempted to make something that is good, but the moderns make works that appear good."\(^2\) One can say that Overbeck’s style of painting is sculptural in Mengs’s terms, and it is along these lines that many art historians have tried to argue that Overbeck’s style is classical. What I find interesting is that by consciously imitating models that do not use chiaroscuro, Overbeck adopts a style of painting that privileges form over appearance, in a Platonic sense, in order to express truth through a painterly rhetoric of purity. Because of this emphasis, Overbeck’s style connotes an asceticism that is commensurate with notions of good taste. For Kant, a judgement of taste is pure if it is disinterested, which means if the object is judged not for its utility in fulfilling a specific function, but on its own, "according to its mere form." Kant is quite explicit in

\(^1\)On the Baroque sculptor Algardi, Mengs ("Fragment of a Discourse", Works, II, p.121) writes that because of his use of "clare-obscure," he "exceeded the limit of the end of sculpture, which is, to imitate the form of truth, and not the appearance, which is the office of painting: in this manner he introduced an affected style." The second passage quoted is from Mengs, "Letter to Don Antonio Pontz," Works, II, p.58.

\(^2\)Pforr, "Über den Verfall der Kunst," Lehr, p.270: "Die alten Maler suchten etwas zu machen, das gut ist, aber die neueren machten Werke, die gut scheinen." The emphasis in the translation is mine.
his decree that works of art are supposed to be judged exclusively by their linear form or disegno and not by any sensuous effects:

In painting, sculpture, and in all the formative arts...the delineation is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste. The colors which light up the sketch belong to the charm; they may indeed enliven the object for sensation, but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful.83

Kant's conception of good taste is puritan and ascetic due to the fact that "art, the object of taste, is constituted in a sphere which transcends any economic, physical, or material reality."84

Just as the purity of Overbeck's quasi-monastic lifestyle depends upon the bourgeois separation of material and aesthetic spheres, so the purity of his artistic style relates to bourgeois notions of taste. Overbeck's linear, abstract line can be related to the ascetic nature of good taste and to the respectable nature of the bourgeois who controls his "biological nature, needs, and sensations" in order to "maintain an ethical relation with the world."85 In consciously imitating a pre-Raphaelite style of painting, Overbeck stylizes his subject and such stylization is in keeping with his and Kant's conception of the pure as that


84Suck, "Bourgeois Class Position," p.1109.

85Ibid., p.1110.
which is not sensual. In his diary, Overbeck writes: "Beauty, that is purity of all accidental or inessential faults, which interrupt the form in any small way or which disturb or weaken the impression."86

In the two preceding sections, I have examined how the concept of purity can help us not only to understand the correlation between Overbeck's lifestyle and his style of painting, but also to situate the painter within the Bürgertum. In the next section, I will explore how the monk-artist persona operated within the strict polarization of gender roles that prevailed in the middle class. I will argue, more specifically, that the monk-artist role, in its opposition to the world of economic and material activity, takes on feminine characteristics.

(2.3) THE FEMININE MONK-ARTIST

The medieval monk, as Marina Warner argues, held a position in society that was in some aspects similar to that of the woman. Both could "practise, without jeopardizing their state in society, those Christian ideals that of themselves deny the possibility of worldly success." The woman's relation to her husband is like the monk's relation to his feudal benefactor: each is a "vicarious Christian who

86Overbeck's diary (7 October 1811), Howitt I, p.182: "Schönheit! d.h. Reinheit von allen zufälligen oder außerwesentlichen Mängeln, die die Formen kleinlich unterbrechen und den Eindruck stören oder schwächen."
is humble and obedient—and chaste—enough for two." In similar ways, Overbeck and his "brothers", in attempting to save the world through their art, saw themselves as vicarious Christians at a time when the behaviour associated with social advancement was seen to be incompatible with spiritual purity. It is partly to manage this ethical and practical split that strict gender roles were constructed. At the beginning of the nineteenth century,

[t]he man was now clearly predestined for the outside world and the woman for domestic life; the man by his activity/rationality constellation of character traits...the woman by her character based on passivity/emotionality. Thus the polarization of "home" and "world" was reflected in the contrasted "character of the sexes".

By withdrawing into a quasi-monastic world, Overbeck enters a space which, like the home, is enclosed, non-monetary, and independent of the material world. That Overbeck is frequently described as feminine in the art-historical literature suggests how his monk-artist persona persisted even after he had left the confines of St. Isidoro (see chapter 4). Moreover, enthusiastic devotion to religion (in the form of a conversion to Catholicism, for example) was at that time seen as feminine in character. The article


"Geschlechstskarächer" (the character of the sexes) in the Allgemeine Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste states: "Woman is more religious, and religion is to her thoroughly a need of the heart, while it is for men...a subject of thought."  

Overbeck's frequent depiction of the virgin and of other ideal women is commensurate with his monk-artist role. Such feminine ideals are prototypes of purity. In Christian theology, the state of purity or chastity is assumed to be more easily achieved by the male, because of his assumed superior rationality, "with its possibility of self-transcendence." St. Jerome states: 

As long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the

---

89 Allgemeine Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste, eds. J.S. Ersch and J.G. Gruber (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1856), LXIII, p.30: "Das Weib ist mehr religiöses, und die Religion ist ihm durchaus Bedürfnis des Herzens, während sie bei dem Manne zugleich oder vorzüglich Gegenstand des Denkens ist." In this next section I am not arguing that Overbeck consciously acted in a feminine way. In fact he held quite conventional attitudes towards women. (See Spickernagel, "Die Macht des Innenraums," pp.6-11.) I am arguing rather that aspects of his public persona, the monk-artist, are feminine in character.

90 For example, Die Madonna vor der Mauer (1811), Madonna mit Kind (before 1819), Maria und Elisabeth mit dem Jesuskind und dem Johannesknaben (1825), Die Vermählung Mariä (1834-36), Der Triumph der Religion in den Künsten (1841), Die Madonna mit dem schlafenden Jesuskind im Grünen (1842/1853), Die Heimsuchung Mariä (1867-8).

world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called man.\textsuperscript{92}

But it is only the female body that is able to represent chastity and its opposite, promiscuity. Only the female body can be thought of as a closed vessel (because of the hymen), and only the female body shows the result of unchaste behaviour (through pregnancy).\textsuperscript{93} Overbeck's depictions of pure, ideal women represent the state to which he aspires.

In this context, Overbeck's Vittoria Caldoni (fig. 16) is relevant. Caldoni was a fourteen-year-old peasant girl to whom were attributed all the characteristics of the pure and chaste feminine ideal. Howitt, in reiterating the claims of the artists in the Nazarene circle in Rome, explains that the girl from Albano "discovered accidentally" by August Kestner "was brought up in the strict chaste customs of this city, so that she only seldom stepped over the threshold of her parents' house other than to go to church or to work in the vineyard." Kestner "stared in wonder at her wonderfully beautiful appearance, but in getting better acquainted with her he grew even more fond of the uncommon good sense and

\textsuperscript{92}As quoted in Warner, Alone of All her Sex, p. 73.

\textsuperscript{93}Constance Jordan writes: "men's bodies can lie; they do not reveal their sexual experience; they cannot signify the virtue of chastity or its opposite, the vice of promiscuity. Women's bodies can and do" (Renaissance Feminism [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], p. 40).
unaffectedness of this child of nature.\textsuperscript{94} In the winter of 1820-21, Kestner brought Caldoni to Rome, where she posed for many of the artists in the Nazarene circle. Of all the portraits of her (Kestner counted forty-four),\textsuperscript{95} Overbeck's is the only one that situates her in a field (within nature) and portrays her in the pose of melancholy.\textsuperscript{96} Of all the


\textsuperscript{95}Kestner, Römische Studien, p.86.

\textsuperscript{96}For a discussion and many illustrations of the depictions of Caldoni, see Georg Poensgen, "Zu einer neu aufgetauchten Bildnisbuste der Vittoria Cladoni von Rudolph Schadow," Pantheon 19 (1961), pp.250-259; and Hermann Mildenberger, "Vittoria Caldoni und der Kult des Modells im 19. Jahrhundert," Künstlerleben in Rom. Berthel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844): Der dänische Bildhauer und seine deutschen Freunde, exh. cat. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, 1991. The drawings (e.g. Hensel, August Lukas, Kestner, Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Milde, Overbeck) and busts (Schadow, Tenerani, Thorvaldsen, Johan Niklas Byström) do not locate her in a setting. In the painted portraits by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (now lost; see Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, p.84), Heinrich von Hess (Poensgen, p.257), and Wilhelm Wach (Poensgen, p.256), Caldoni sits in the foreground with an
painted portraits, it is the most refined and most idealized, perhaps because it was painted for Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria. Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldani* is exemplary not only for its correct execution of the sitter's character, but also in its "purification of physical faults." In a preparatory drawing (fig. 17), Overbeck indented the outlines of Caldoni's features with the point of a pen or perhaps a dull knife; he seems to have wanted to emphasize the underlying forms of his painting so as to produce an idealization of his sitter. Beauty, for Overbeck, as we learned above, is "purity of all accidental or inessential faults...which disturb or weaken the impression." It is the untainted quality of this image, in both its pure style and its depiction of the Nazarene ideal, that makes it such an appropriate image for a discussion of Overbeck's self-definition. Overbeck's depiction of Caldoni has all the attributes to which he aspires: she is simple, naive, good, natural, uncultivated, and pure. And her melancholic pose suggests that her naïvete

Italian landscape behind her in the tradition of Renaissance portraits. In the versions by Franz Catel (Poensgen, p. 258) and Horace Vernet (Poensgen, p. 259), she stands with nature behind her.

97 Howitt I, p. 480; II, p. 407. Howitt (II, p. 407) mentions that a copy in oil of the painting was found in the artist's estate. This version is probably the one now at the Van der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal.

is not unreflective, but rather mature and wise.99

Overbeck’s identification with the feminine is also relevant to his Italia and Germania (fig.18), which was begun in 1811, when he was living in St. Isidoro, but was only completed in 1828. Its original title was Sulamith and Maria, as it was made as a companion piece to Franz Pforr’s Sulamith and Maria (fig.19). Pforr was dying of tuberculosis at the time and these two works were meant to signify the strong friendship that the two leaders of the Nazarenes felt for one another.100 According to Overbeck’s biographer Margaret Howitt, it was Overbeck’s idea that “each should paint a picture for the other, in which the essential beauty and character of each one’s specific artistic style would emerge; these...could be depicted entirely through two female figures, as representations of both of their chosen ‘types of painting’.”101 The preparatory drawing of 1811/1812 (fig.20)

99One male historical figure who can be characterized thus is St. Francis, whom Overbeck depicts in his fresco, The Vision of St. Francis (fig.39), for the Portiuncula in Sta. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi.

100Overbeck wrote that Pforr’s "love was to me more special than the love of a woman!" (Overbeck, letter to his parents [Ariccia, Day of the Feast of St John the Baptist, 1812], Hasse, p.48: "Ach Pforr, mein Bruder! Deine Liebe war mir sonderlicher denn Frauenliebe!")

101Howitt, I, p.196: "Sodann kam Overbeck auf den Gedanken, es sollte jeder für den Andern ein Bild malen, in welchem die wesentliche Schönheit und der Charakter der Jedem eigenthümlichen Kunstweise zur Erscheinung kommen müßte; dieselben könnnten, meinte er, ganz wohl durch zwei Frauengestalten, als Repräsentanten der beiden von ihnen erwählten ‘Arten der Malerei’, dargestellt werden." As Lankheit has pointed out, the works thus have three sources:
is indicative of Overbeck's original conception: Overbeck's early Raphaelesque representation of his ideal is on the left; Pforr's Dürer-esque ideal is on the right. The subject Sulamith and Maria comes from a story written by Pforr about two sisters who eventually marry two painters. Sulamith marries Johannes (as in Johann Friedrich Overbeck), who, like Overbeck, has a palm branch as his insignia, and Maria marries Albrecht (as in Dürer, Pforr's idol), who, like Pforr, has a cross on top of a skull (Todtenkopf) as his insignia.

This work is not a friendship portrait in the traditional sense of the term. In friendship portraits, whether they be of individual or groups, each sitter looks

friendship, each artist's ideal female figure, and each artist's artistic ideal (Larkheit, Das Freundschaftsbild, p.136).

102 Following convention I refer to the drawing as Sulamith und Maria and the painting as Italia und Germania. We do not know what the painting would have looked like in 1812, but the large drawing, which was completed according to Jensen in 1811-1812 (Jensen, Die Zeichnungen Overbecks in der Lübecker Graphiksammlung, Lübecker Museumsheft 8, cat.#123, pp.30-31), and a small painted sketch from this time (fig.21), now in the Georg Schäfer collection, do give us some idea. In the background of these earlier works one sees a double wedding, which is described in Pforr's story. This narrative aspect has been removed in Italia und Germania and replaced by Italianesque and Germanic landscapes on the left and right.

out to the viewer, for example in Cornelius's and Overbeck's double portrait of 1812 (fig. 22). *Sulamith and Maria* has been designated an allegory of friendship;\(^{104}\) one might also call it an emblem. In fact, Overbeck's drawing has characteristics in common with Alciati's "Emblem of Fidelity" (fig. 23): two of the figures hold hands and one of the figures also wears a laurel crown. Furthermore, the arch (which Overbeck removed in the painting) is an emblem of friendship, in the sense that each side depends on the other for strength.\(^{105}\)

Pforr's *Allegory of Friendship* (fig. 24), a drawing from 1808, is frequently cited as a source for Overbeck's *Sulamith and Maria*, but the figures in these two works relate to one another in different ways.\(^{106}\) In Pforr's work, both friends look at each other beseechingly. In Overbeck's, there is an active/passive opposition. Maria, on the right, looks in the direction of Sulamith, while Sulamith modestly looks downwards. Maria's hands hold Sulamith's hand. Overbeck portrays Sulamith (his ideal) in a passive pose as compared to Maria's more active one. Conversely, in Pforr's little

---

\(^{104}\) Lankheit, *Das Freundschaftsbild*, p.137.

\(^{105}\) Henkel/Schöne, *Emblamata* (Stuttgart, 1967), pp.235-236. Overbeck's painting, it should be noted, is not an emblem in the true sense, as it is only an image. An emblem proper is tripartite, containing *superscriptio*, *imago*, and *subscriptio*.

book, *Sulamith and Maria*, it is Maria who "is always characterized as the more secluded and bashful one in opposition to Sulamith."\(^{107}\) Each artist seems to want to make his ideal, and by extension himself, more passive, that is more feminine.

With the rise of respectability in the nineteenth century, male friendship, according to George Mosse, became purified: "The sentimentality of eighteenth-century friendship was going out of fashion as friendship became an act of almost religious chastity and dedication."\(^{108}\) This was exemplified in the Brotherhood of St Luke. The idea of a pure and all-consuming friendship, it seems to me, motivates the composition of Overbeck’s *Sulamith and Maria*. Whereas in friendship portraits the figures are depicted as distinct entities, independent from one another, Sulamith and Maria are absorbed with one another. This connection between the figures is emphasized by the closed composition of the painting. The two figures fit together almost perfectly, especially in the region of the head and hands. Maria’s profile follows, but does not break, the outline of Sulamith’s face, and the three interlocking hands, which Overbeck carefully worked out in a sketch (fig.25), keep their own integrity. While the two figures combine to make one, the outline of each is never broken. The figures

\(^{107}\)Lehr, p.189.

\(^{108}\)Mosse, *Nationalism*, p.76.
connect, but they do not penetrate one another. This accords with how Overbeck, in a letter to August Kestner, describes his friendship with Pforr:

We were separated from everyone and lived only for ourselves and for art; we were shut away from all others, only we both were one. We always began our pictures together and tried to finish them at the same time. Pforr loved the middle ages and painted stories from them; I preferred the bible and chose my subjects from it.\textsuperscript{109}

In this description and in Overbeck’s drawing, there is a sense of unity as well as individual integrity. The formal construction of \textit{Sulamith and Maria} may thus suggest the purity of a chaste friendship, of two friends who share their lives, but keep their own individuality. Concerning such male friendships, Mosse writes: "Eroticism was difficult to banish from the ideal of friendship. More often than not, it was combined with a quest for sexual purity."\textsuperscript{110} Such an understanding of friendship accords well with Overbeck’s monk-artist role.

When Overbeck completed the painting in 1828, he retitled it \textit{Italia and Germania} and gave it a new interpretation. In writing to Johann Friedrich Wenner, the

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{109}}Overbeck, letter to August Kestner (Vienna, 24 March 1810), in August and Charlotte Kestner, \textit{Briefwechsel zwischen August Kestner und seiner Schwester Charlotte}, p.359: "Wir sonderten uns von allen anderen ab und lebten nur uns und der Kunst; gegen alle andern waren wir verschlossen, nur wir beyde waren Eins.--Unsre Bilder fingen wir immer zusammen an, und suchten sie zu gleicher Zeit zu vollenden. Pforr liebte das Mittelalter und malte Geschichten daraus, mich zog die Bibel besonders an, und ich wählte daraus meine Gegenstände."

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{110}}Mosse, \textit{Nationalism}, p.67.
buyer, Overbeck states that he feels that the painting remained and had to remain a picture from his youth.\textsuperscript{111}

Nevertheless it developed into something more mature:

...after so many years, from both brides came a pair of honourable women, Italia and Germania. In other words, the need naturally occurred, later during the execution, to underlie the young, unclear conception with a certain meaning, which...gave rise to the question: what then does this painting actually signify? That I straightaway chose Germania and Italia sheds light on my special position here as a German in Italy.\textsuperscript{112}

For the Overbeck of 1828, the painting is no longer about his friendship with Pforr, but about the two elements of his own art, the Germanic and Italian.\textsuperscript{113} It is no longer a friendship emblem, but a quasi-self-portrait. Or as Carl Georg Heise put it, "Sulamith and Maria did not remain loving...


\textsuperscript{112}Overbeck, letter to Wenner (Rome, 31 January 1829), Ziemke, p.239: "...daß nach so vielen Jahren aus den beiden Bräuten ein Paar ehrbare Frauen geworden sind, die Frauen Germania und Italia. Es trat nämlich in späterer Zeit der Ausarbeitung natürlich das Bedürfnis ein, der jugendlich unklaren Vorstellung eine bestimmtere Bedeutung unterzulegen, wozu schon die häufige Frage: was denn das Bild eigentlich vorstelle? veranlaßte. Daß ich nun aber gerade die Idee einer Germania und Italia wählte, darüber gießt mein besonderer Standpunkt hier als Deutscher in Italien Aufschluß." In the same letter, Overbeck states that in his portrayal of the memory of his homeland and the charm of all that is beautiful in Italy, he has attempted to create a harmony between the figures, so that Friendship could also be a possible title for the work.

\textsuperscript{113}Lankheit, Die Freundschaftsbild, pp.136-137.
sisters, but became rival muses...." In the completed version of 1828, Overbeck changed the setting of the painting from an interior to an exterior one. The interior setting of *Sulamith and Maria*, whether the space be enclosed by an arch of friendship (as in the drawing) or a wall (as in the small sketch), has given way to the outside world in *Italia and Germania*. The enclosed setting of the former seems appropriate, as Overbeck thought of his friendship with Pforr as closed off from the rest of the world. But in *Italia and Germania*, in which two female figures are allegories representing the two sides of Overbeck's artistic character, the two women are no longer sheltered. Overbeck, at the time of *Italia and Germania*’s completion, is a well-known and successful artist, and as such he deals with the outside world. He is also married, and has a son, and so has assumed a more traditional male role. On the other hand, he does retain the monk-artist persona, and therefore feminine alter egos remain appropriate.

In his *Family Portrait* (fig.26), Overbeck again depicts himself backgrounded by the outside world. As was the case with his *Self-Portrait* of 1811-12, the intended destination of his *Family Portrait*, begun in 1820, was Lübeck, since Overbeck painted this work for his parents. But his mother’s death in 1820 and his father’s death the following year

---

delayed work on this group portrait, and it was only
delivered to Lübeck, as a present to his brother Christian,
after its completion in 1830. Overbeck depicts his
family for his parents, who had never met his wife Anna
("Nina") Schiffenhuber-Hartl or his son Alfons. Within his
family unit, Overbeck portrays himself, as he did in his
early self-portrait, in the role of an independent man.
Unlike the role of the monk-artist, which takes on feminine
characteristics, the role of the independent man, whose
success is mirrored in his family, relies on masculine
virtue. In the portrait, Overbeck stands behind a table in
the domestic world of wife and son, but he is dressed in work
clothes (his smock and beret), backgrounded by the exterior
world, and he looks out to the world of the viewer. Nina,
enclosed by the curtain of domestic life, modestly looks
downward, absorbed in her son. Overbeck portrays himself in
an entirely masculine position in opposition to his wife.
Alfons is between the masculine and feminine realms, but like
his father he looks out to the viewer, which suggests his
eventual departure from the enclosed domestic world.

115Johann Friedrich Overbeck, p. 132 (cat. 20). For a
discussion of the genesis of this work, see Jens Christian
Jensen, "Friedrich Overbecks Familienbild in Lübeck,
Entstehungsgeschichte und Umkreis, 1818-1830," Pantheon 20

116The division between a masculine and feminine sphere
in this painting has been observed by Jauslin, Die
gescheiterte Kulturrevolution, p.155. For a general
discussion of the depiction of women by Overbeck and Pforr,
see Spickernagel, "Die Macht des Innenraums," pp.6-11. Fritz
This image is almost a visual parallel of Hegel's discussion of gender roles in his *Philosophy of Right*:

[M]an has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world.... In the family... he lives a subjective ethical life on the plane of feeling. Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind....

Overbeck's marriage was an important sign of his independence, but he nevertheless needed his parents' approval. He thus asked Barthold Georg Niebuhr, the statesman and historian, to write to his father to recommend

Schmalenbach argues that Overbeck's portrait, with its symmetry, portrays not merely three figures, but the concept of family in the strictest and most paradigmatic sense. See Schmalenbach, "Das Overbecksche Familienbild" (1959), *Studien über Malerei und Malereigeschichte* (Berlin, Gebr. Mann, 1972), pp.77-81.

117 Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), pp.114-115 ($166). Schiller, in "Das Lied von der Glocke," similarly describes the division between the sexes: "The man must forth wend,/ In hostile life driving,--/ With work and with striving,/ With planting and easing,/ Devising and seizing,/ With vying and daring,/ Good fortune ensnaring./...And managing there [in the house]/ The virtuous housewife,/ The children's dear mother,/ Is wisely schooling/ The home to her ruling,--/ Both training the girls and/ Restraining their brothers; And busily plying/ Hands never still lying,/ She make the wealth rise/ In orderly wise." (Schiller, *The Song of the Bell*, tr. J. Perry Worden [New York: Max Niemeyer, 1900], p.20. The original German goes as follows: "Der Mann muß hinaus/ Ins feindliche Leben,/ Muß wirken und streben/ und pflanzen und schaffen,/ Erlisten, erraffen,/ Muß wetten und wagen,/ Das Glück zu erjagen./...Und drinnen waltet/Die züchtige Hausfrau,/Die Mutter der Kinder,/ Und herrscht weise/ Im häuslichen Kreise,/ Und lehret die Mädchen/ Und wehret den Knaben,/ Und reget ohn' Ende/ Die fleißigen Hände,/ Und mehrt den Gewinn/ Mit ordnendem Sinn.")
that he consent to his son's marriage. In the letter, Niebuhr states that Overbeck's decision to marry was a relief to him and to many of Overbeck's friends. They had worried that he would actually become a monk, a life that "is truly nowhere desirable, and certainly nowhere less than here, in this destroyed nation,...in which the monks are almost an entirely submerged class." Niebuhr goes on to praise Nina and to discuss Overbeck's financial situation: "Your son's economic circumstances are not entirely clear. I hope that Marchese Massimi can be induced to allow him to paint portraits from time to time, a task for which such an artist is very well paid here." It was perhaps because of

118 Howitt (I, p.441) seems mistaken when she writes that the marriage took place on the day of St. Luke, 18 October 1818, a remark that is repeated in Johann Friedrich Overbeck, p.252. In a letter to his parents (Rome, 26 September 1818), Overbeck states that he and Nina have chosen the feast of St. Theresa, 15 October 1818, as their wedding day (Hasse, p.176). And he writes to his parents (Rome, 22 October 1818): "Seit dem 15. dieses Monats, wie ich Ihnen schrieb, sind wir mit dem heiligen Band verbunden" (Hasse, p.176). In this letter, he describes the ceremony, which was attended by his friend Veit and Veit's mother, Dorothea Schlegel (née Mendelsohn).

119 Niebuhr to Overbeck's father (Rome, 13 June 1818), Hasse, pp.173-174: "Erlauben Sie mir nun zuerst Ihnen zu sagen, daß mir und mehreren Freunden Ihres Sohnes die Nachricht von seiner Verlobung einen schweren Stein vom Herzen nahm: die Sorge nämlich, die wir beynahe als Gewißheit betrachtet haben, daß er in den klostergeistlichen Stand treten möchte. Das Leben ist wahrlich nirgends wünschenswerth, und gewiß nirgends weniger als hier, bey dieser vernichteten Nation, unter der die Geistlichen, und unter diesen die Mönche doch noch fast die allerversunkenste Classe sind.... "Von seiner Verlobten kann ich nur das sagen, daß jedermann ihren Geist und ihre Anmuth lobt.... "Die nicht ganz heitre Seite sind seine öconomischen Verhältnisse. Ich hoffe, daß er den Marchese Massimi bewegen


Niebuhr's letter that Overbeck's father ("never a well-to-do [begüteter] man," according to Howitt) sent the painter one thousand marks to set up his household. Furthermore, Hofrat Hartl gave his adopted daughter a "complete dowry." In getting married, Overbeck gains financial security, but is further indebted to his parents. It is in this context that he presents himself to them as a successful artist and capable father. In relation to his parents, from whom it seems he still seeks approval, he presents himself as competent to fill his father's shoes as provider and master of his house. The struggling monk-artist of the 1810s, who shut himself off in the enclosed, non-monetary domain of the monastery, a realm not unlike the feminine, domestic realm, has given way in this context to the self-sufficient man, defining himself clearly in opposition to the feminine. Within his family unit he portrays himself as the strong masculine provider, not the reclusive monk-artist. It is Nina, his wife, who is portrayed in terms of Marian imagery, which is also evident in the Portrait of Nina with her son Alfons (fig.27).

wird, ihm zu erlauben, von Zeit zu Zeit Porträts zu malen, eine Arbeit, die einem solchen Künstler hier sehr reichlich bezahlt wird...." At this time, Overbeck was working on the frescoes at the Cassino Massimo. This letter is also reproduced in Barthold Georg Niebuhr, Briefe. Neue Folge, 1816-1830, ed. Edouard Vischer (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1981), I, pp.310-312

120Howitt I, p.441.
The two main roles that Overbeck plays may be seen as related in the following way: by presenting himself to the world as the monk-artist, Overbeck becomes established as a successful painter and is thus able to present himself to his parents as an independent man. But there are inconsistencies here: the monk-artist denies the material world, while the self-sufficient man's status is dependent upon success in this same material world; the monk-artist, in closing himself off from the material world, is defined by notions of purity and interiority, which are feminine in character, while the success of the independent man is a masculine attribute; and finally Overbeck's monk-artist persona is connected to a community of painters, the Brotherhood of St. Luke, while the self-sufficient man needs to establish himself on his own. Because Overbeck plays different roles in different contexts, there is no need for there to be consistency. But the inconsistency here is rather intriguing for it goes against the bourgeois norm. Usually it is in the context of the external world that the man plays his masculine role, while in the security of his home, he is able to take on feminine characteristics. For Overbeck, the roles are reversed. Perhaps it is because his public persona is connected to the feminine that he needs to emphasize his masculine position in the context of his familial relations. Whatever the explanation, the inconsistencies of the roles Overbeck plays suggest how for each social context there is a particular way
in which values such as the masculine and feminine, or the ethical and the practical, are polarized.
CHAPTER THREE: OVERBECK AND HISTORICISM

In this chapter I would like to set aside Overbeck's presentation of self in order to focus upon the historicist nature of his art. Ideas of self will nevertheless come into play now and then, for Overbeck's historicism is complemented by his public persona. One can say that his historicist style of painting reinforces his monk-artist role, which in turn validates his style. The theoretical stance of his art thus constitutes part of his self-definition.

In the last chapter, I described Overbeck's style as pure. The smooth surface of his paintings effaces the artist's presence. Overbeck the monk-artist does not want to come between the viewer and the sacred subject matter. He intends his paintings to take part in a maieutic form of communication: the painter leads the viewer gua worshipper into the holy realm, but the viewer must come to truth by himself. This is not solely a subjective process, in the Kierkegaardian (Protestant) sense of indirect communication, but rather a journey that is both personal and directed.¹ For Overbeck, every viewer will come to the same Catholic truth.

While Overbeck's presence as a painter does not mediate between the viewer and the subject matter, the historicist

nature of his art does. Friedrich Schlegel, in a defense of the Nazarenes, made this claim succinctly:

With many, especially with most of the outstanding pictures of the new school, it is easy for anyone who has seen many paintings to recognize that the artist has contemplated one or another great Italian master of the earlier time with special love, even if he has not copied an individual model.

The Holy Family (fig.28) in Munich is perhaps the best example of Overbeck's working in the manner of an earlier painter. Here he uses a Raphaelesque formula without directly copying any particular work of Raphael. Overbeck,
as we will see, was well aware of the imitative quality of his art, but he believed that this did not compromise his originality. In such a painting as *The Holy Family*, Overbeck claims both authority, through his imitation of Raphael which reinstates the tradition of true painting, and originality, through his own treatment of a Raphaelesque theme. All of Overbeck’s paintings operate in this manner: historical authority and originality complement one another.

Overbeck’s claims to historical authority and artistic originality may seem contradictory to us today. How can an artist make a claim to originality when working in a style that is already established? This type of question assumes that every artist worthy of his or her name develops something new, perhaps partly inspired by the art of the past, but nevertheless distinctly different from anything that has been produced before. Overbeck’s place in the canon is frequently questioned because his style is deemed derivative and thus cannot be aligned with a modern view whereby art is progressive.⁴ But to understand Overbeck’s theoretical stance one must eschew such a notion. For Overbeck, imitation and originality were not opposing principles. As we have already seen, it is through imitation, through the playing of an already established role, that Overbeck is able to find his true or original

⁴The treatment of Overbeck as "anachronistic" is discussed in chapter four.
These two elements, historical authority and artistic originality, will be at the core of my investigation of Overbeck's historicism. Until recently Overbeck's medievalism tended to be seen as conservative and reactionary, as encouraging the viewer to see the noble past as a prescription against the decadent and increasingly secularized present. More recently his work has been set in opposition to the ideal of autonomous art as put forward by enlightenment writers such as Karl Philip Moritz, Kant, and Schiller. In this context, his art is described as consciously heteronomous, in the service of something else. Both these approaches to Overbeck's art assume a binary opposition: in the first case between liberal enlightenment classicism and conservative Catholic medievalism; in the second, between autonomous and heteronomous art. The problem I see with these divisions is that Overbeck's work draws upon both sides of these oppositions. As we have seen, the medievalism of Wackenroder and Tieck afforded Overbeck an opportunity to construct a monk-artist persona and develop a style of painting in opposition to that of the classicism championed by his enlightenment predecessors. But Overbeck

---

5For authors who take this view, see chapter four.

6This argument is put forward most convincingly by Berthold Hinz and Frank Büttner, whose contributions to an understanding of Overbeck's art are discussed below in this chapter.
also makes claims to purity and individuality, which connect him closely to enlightenment values. What seem to be contradictions in Overbeck’s program (between authenticity and the authority of history, and between purity/marginality and heteronomy) can only be construed as such if we accept the limits imposed by these oppositions. But because Overbeck’s life and work make claims to both history and originality, the pre-Reformation past is both present and absent. We will see that such connection to and estrangement from a particular historical form of thought and perception are very much in line with the tactics of the Bürgertum, a class that grounds its dominance in a historicization of the present and a search for origins in the past. In this chapter, I will explore these issues relating to the problems of historicism, beginning with the issue of imitation, then dealing with the Romantic search for origins, which is quite explicit in Overbeck’s *Triumph of Religion in the Arts*.

Before preceding I would like to discuss briefly how I will use the term historicism, a concept that has been described as both vague and contentious.  

7The historian Thomas Nipperdey writes: "The definitions [of historicism] are vague and they are contentious. Historicism is regarded by some as a method, more accurately as a methodology, as a theory of science, by others as a metaphysically grounded worldview with political implications." (Nipperdey, "Historismus und Historismuskritik heute," *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976], p.60: "Die Definitionen sind vage und sie sind strittig. Historismus gilt den einen als Methode, genauer als Methodologie, als Wissenschaftstheorie, den andern als metaphysisch begründete
defines historicism, in relation to architectural practice, as "the position in which the contemplation and use of history is more essential than the discovery and development of new systems, new forms of a particular time." For Pevsner, historicism is a method of working, and this formulation suits Overbeck and the Nazarenes quite well. Attention to the past is evident in so much of the activity of the Nazarenes: for example, Pforr’s interest in the German middle ages and Overbeck’s in the art of Raphael and the Italian Preraphaelites. The historicist nature of Overbeck’s art is signalled not only through his Raphaelesque style, but also through other pictorial features. In his first large-scale work, Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (figs. 29-30), both in the preparatory drawing (1809) and the completed painting (1824), Overbeck depicts himself and other members of the Brotherhood of St. Luke in the crowd, just as Raphael and other early Renaissance painters worked themselves into their painted scenes. (Overbeck employs the same convention in his Triumph of Religion in the Arts.) And in what are usually


described as his last important works, the series of the seven sacraments, he uses a format that he himself claims is derived from Raphael's tapestries for the Sistine chapel.  

Historicism can also be viewed in broader terms, "as a comprehensive philosophy of life which views all social reality as a historical stream where no two instances are comparable and which assumes that value standards and logical categories, too, are totally immersed in the stream of history." Herder is usually seen as the most important early proponent of such a view and Friedrich Meinecke the historian who made its case most strongly. It is possible to apply this more philosophical conception of historicism to

9In his commentary to his Seven Sacraments, Overbeck writes: "So much about the conception of the pictures in general; now concerning their outer form, they suggest tapestries, after the type of the famous Raphael's Arrazzi, as such were formerly used in church celebrations in Italy." (Die sieben Sakramente in Bildern von Joh. Friedr. Overbeck [Dresden: August Gaber, 1870], p.2: "So viel über die Auffassung der Bilder in Allgemeinen; was aber ihre äußere Form anlangt, so stellen sie Teppiche vor, nach Art der bekannten Rafaelischen Arrazzi, wie solche in Italien bei Kirchenfesten gebaucht zu werden pflegen.") The copy of this text I consulted is in the archives of the Hansestadt Lübeck, Overbeck Familienarchiv 10.3, p.77.


11For Meinecke (Historism, lv), "historism is nothing else but the application to the historical world of the new life-governing principles achieved by the great German movement extending from Leibniz to the death of Goethe."
Nazarene interests. Friedrich Olivier's frontispiece to his seven etchings of the landscape around Salzburg (fig. 31) shows the genealogy of the new German painting in the form of a tree, which suggests the natural growth of the school from the German soil. Such a genealogy places each artist on the tree within a historical framework. Herder writes:

Just as the tree grows from its roots, so must it be possible to derive the growth and flowering of an art from its earliest origins, which contain the whole essence of its later products, just as in the corn-seed the whole plant with all its parts lies wrapped together...\(^\text{12}\)

Pforr, in an essay written in answer to the question, "whether it is necessary that the artist's feeling be strengthened through reason," provides a "short history of art" from its Indian origins to the present.\(^\text{13}\) Overbeck, as we shall see, is also very concerned with issues of origins, in particular, the origins of Christian painting. These few examples suggest that for the Nazarenes historicism was more than merely a license to use older models, but a conception of the world which questioned "the stability of human nature and above all of human reason."\(^\text{14}\) While Overbeck's interest in the past is not relativist, but rather partisan, his concerns are nevertheless couched in historicist thinking.

\(^\text{12}\) As quoted in Meinecke, Historism, p. 310.

\(^\text{13}\) Franz Pforr, "Über die Frage, ob es nothwendig sey das Gefühl des Künstlers durch die Vernunft zu befestigen," Lehr, p. 303.

\(^\text{14}\) Meinecke, Historism, lvi.
(1) IMITATION

For the painter, historicism is, one could say, put into practice through imitation. Rudolf Wittkower has charted the change in art theory that occurred in the late eighteenth century from an emphasis on imitation to one on genius.\textsuperscript{15} Eclecticism or bad imitation, which borrowed indiscriminately from many different sources, was attributed by Winckelmann to the Carracci, and with it the fall of all painting into triviosity.\textsuperscript{16} By the later eighteenth century, "the toiling scholar artist was replaced by the genius who invents--to quote Addison--'by the mere strength of natural parts and without any assistance of art and learning.'"\textsuperscript{17} In their rejection of the academy, as discussed above, Overbeck and his fellow Brothers of St. Luke also attack eclecticism: they believe in the individuality and purity of artistic genius. Nevertheless the Nazarene painter makes reference to earlier masters, as Schlegel puts it, "even if he has not copied an individual model." And the clear references in Overbeck's work to earlier painters, especially to Raphael, suggest the importance of imitation to him. By the end of the nineteenth century, Overbeck, like those artists he rejected, is


\textsuperscript{17}Wittkower, "Imitation," p.157.
condemned for being an eclectic painter. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the conception of imitation was much more liberal than it was at the end of the century. While Wittkower's thesis that genius replaced imitation is convincing in a general way, it is nevertheless not subtle enough for a discussion of such an artist as Overbeck.

At the time the Brotherhood of St. Luke was formed, the idea of imitation was still central to art theory. In reacting against the academy, the brotherhood rejected Mengs's apian model of imitation:

for since no flower produces honey from every part, the Bee visits that only which it can extract the richest sweets; thus can also the skillful painter gather from all the creations the best and most beautiful parts of nature, and produce by this Artifice the greatest expression and sweetness.¹⁹

The goal, as Petrarch had made clear, is to produce something completely new: "the bees would not be glorious if they did not convert what they found into something different and

¹⁸Richard Muther, The History of Modern Painting, tr. Ernest Dowson et al. (London: Henry and Co., 1895), pp. 225: "As eclectics [the Nazarenes] would stand on the same rung with the academics of Bologna, except that the confession of faith of these was a combination from Leonardo, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Correggio, and Titian, and that they possessed an incomparably greater technical facility."

something better." In a letter to his father, quoted in chapter two, Overbeck rejects this type of imitation on the grounds of inconsistency: a painting coloured in the style of Titian, for example, cannot have the strength of contour of Michelangelo. He may also have been wary of this type of imitation because "transformation of the model into something new and different...means hiding a text's relation to its model." Overbeck's paintings, although always different from their sources, nevertheless gain authority through an easily discernable citation of these sources.

These issues surrounding the nature of Nazarene imitation came to the fore in a series of writings published between 1817 and 1821, some in conjunction with an exhibition of the German artists in Rome at the Caffarelli Palace in April, 1819. Goethe's and Meyer's essay "Neu-deutsch religios-patriotische Kunst" was the starting point for a

---

21 Howitt, I, pp.68-69.
23 Heinrich Meyer's "Neu-deutsch religios-patriotische Kunst" (1817), August Kestner's Ueber die Nachahmung in der Malerei (written in October 1817, published in 1818), the anonymously published "Uber die Kunstaustellung im Palaste Caffarelli zu Rom im April 1819" (1819), Friedrich Schlegel's "Uber die deutsche Kunstaustellung zu Rom, im Frühjahr 1819, und über den gegenwärtigen Stand der deutschen Kunst in Rom" (1819), Johann David Passavant's Ansichten über die bildenden Künste... (1820), and J.D. Fiorillo's "Blicke auf den gegenwärtigen Zustand der Mahlerey, besonders bey den Deutschen" (1820).
discussion of the relevance and importance of the new German school of painting. Frank Büttner has examined these texts in depth and has succinctly argued that the dispute was an old one, the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes," dealing specifically with ideas of imitation and historicism. For Meyer and Goethe, and their followers Bartholdy and Fiorillo, art is a rule-governed activity and imitation of the proper models, nature and classical art (the work of antiquity and the high Renaissance), is essential for its survival. What Goethe "mistrusted" in the Nazarenes was "their neglect of 'universal humanity': their infraction of the dogma of the antique human ideal, which Goethe, as a follower of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, would not allow to be challenged."

The anonymous review of the Caffarelli exhibition in the Allgemeine Zeitung (23 July 1819) by Bartholdy is, like Meyer's and Goethe's attack, mostly a ridiculing of the painters: "At the end of the eighteenth century the preference began for the romantic, the half-witted, the enthusiastic; good heads, for this is always needed in order

---

24"Neu-deutsche religios-patriotische Kunst," Ueber Kunst und Alterthum, (Stuttgart, 1817; reprint Bern: Herbert Lang, 1970), I, pp.7-62. The essay is signed WKF (Weimar Kunstfreunde). Most scholars believe it to have been penned by Meyer with the full approval of Goethe.


to give to the spirit of weakness a false direction." The author's one strong criticism is in terms of the models that these painters follow. By following quattrocento painters, the new German school follows artists who did not reach the apex of their craft. The modern painters never "ask the advice" of such great painters as Titian, Veronese, Rubens, or Rembrandt. J.D. Fiorillo is not as harsh a critic as Bartholdy, but he believes that "every early painting, which has awakened this new feeling, violates the unerring law of nature." The new German painters would be better off if they looked to the antique: "pious, religious feeling goes


28 Ibid., p.138.

very well with the study of the antique and can give religion an even higher value."\textsuperscript{30}

For August Kestner, German art has not yet developed fully due to the habit of imitation, which is beneficial "because it leads us into nature," but is also dangerous "because of the difficulty involved in avoiding the errors of a model, which one treasures."\textsuperscript{31} For Kestner, nature is the source of art and any model, classical or medieval, can lead one to nature. While Kestner's essay is frequently seen as pro-Nazarene, its position, as Büttner makes clear, is fairly close to that of Meyer and Goethe; all these writers believe that nature is the true criterion of art.\textsuperscript{32} That Kestner's support of the Nazarene cause is only partial accords with the letters he wrote at that time to his sister. In one letter, he describes Overbeck as intolerant and bigoted in his Catholicism.\textsuperscript{33} Later, Kestner will condemn Overbeck's

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.: "...nämlich das fromme, religiöse Gefühl sehr gut mit dem Studio der Antike verbinden, und dadurch der Religion selbst eine noch höhere Würde geben können...."

\textsuperscript{31}Kestner, \textit{Ueber die Nachahmung in der Malerei} (Frankfurt am Main: Varrentrapp, 1818), p.81: "Daß die deutsche Kunst noch nicht zu ihrer Entwicklung gediehen, ist auf der einen Seite der Nachahmung günstig, auf der andern gefährlich; günstig, weil sie uns in die Natur hereinführt...; gefährlich wegen der Schwierigkeit, die Fehler eines Vorbildes zu vermeiden, welches man werthschätzt."

\textsuperscript{32}Büttner, "Der Streit," pp.69-70.

\textsuperscript{33}August Kestner, letter to Charlotte Kestner (Rome, 26 March 1817): "Unfortunately bigotry has come over him. He has, like many other young people, become Catholic, and indeed with such severity that he, in the most intolerant of ways, spurns one who has not [converted]." (August and
Triumph of Religion in the Arts for its bias towards Christian painting at the expense of the antique.\textsuperscript{34}

Such criticism of the Nazarenes’ choice of models does not take into account the type of imitation that the Nazarenes favoured. Büttner explains that "the Nazarenes replaced the classical conception of imitation [Nachahmung] with following [Nachfolge]."\textsuperscript{35} Citing Passavant’s defense of the Nazarenes, Büttner explains that they attempted to copy the spirit of a work or art, rather than the outward qualities of the work.\textsuperscript{36} Passavant argues that the work of eclectic artists (the Carracci, Mengs, etc.) "did not speak to the soul, as it didn’t emerge from soul."\textsuperscript{37} In


\textsuperscript{34}Kestner, Overbeck’s Werk und Wort. Ein Aufsatz von einem römischen Kunstfreunde in Bezug auf Overbecks Erklärung seines im Städelischen Kunst-Insttitut befindlichen Bildes: Triumph der Religion in den Künsten (Frankfurt am Main: Friedrich Wilmanns, 1841).

\textsuperscript{35}Büttner, "Der Streit," p. 66: "Die Nazarener setzten an die Stelle der im Klassizismus geforderten Nachahmung die Nachfolge."

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 65.

\textsuperscript{37}Johann David Passavant, Ansichten über die bildenden Künste und Darstellung des Ganges derselben in Toscana: zur Bestimmung des Gesichtspunctes, aus welchem die neudeutsche Malerschule zu betrachten ist. Von einem deutschen Künstler in Rom (Heidelberg, 1820), p. 57: "[D]as Kunstwerk spricht nicht zur Seele, wie es nicht aus der Seele gedrungen ist."
comparison, the works of many of the German artists at the exhibition at the Caffarelli palace were much different:

In general it can be said that one can observe in many works in the exhibition a very earnest effort, which was based on the older, long since abandoned type of paintings of the Germans and Italians. But this did not exist in the imitation of certain styles in their outer forms....rather this striving existed much more in the great manner of conception, in the living, characteristic representation, in the beautiful ordering of the whole and parts. 38

Passavant's essay is very much in line with the Nazarenes' own ideas about imitation, which are made clear in an undated and unsigned manuscript entitled "Über die Kunst" found among Overbeck's papers. 39 This essay, anti-academic in nature, makes a similar claim to Passavant's: academic imitation emphasizes the outer form, while Nazarene imitation emphasizes the spirit of the artist:

As far as the Italian masters before Raphael are concerned, they deserve reverence and respect because of their simplicity and truth, however they should not be followed unconditionally. Artists who imitate outer characteristics run the danger of falling into a new mannerism, which would be

38 Ibid., p.88: "Im allgemeinen nur ist hier zu sagen, daß in vielen Werken der Ausstellung ein sehr ernstes Bestreben zu bemerken war, welches sich auf die ältere längst verlassene Art der Malerkunst der Deutschen und Italiener stützte. Nicht aber bestand solches in der Nachahmung gewisser Manieren in den Äußerlichkeiten,....sondern vielmehr bestand dieses Streben in einer großartigen Auffassungsweise, in einer lebendigen, charakteristischen Darstellung, einer schönen Anordnung des Ganzen und des Einzelnen."

39 The manuscript is now in the archives of the Lübeck Stadtbibliothek (Overbeck Nachlaß, VII, 11). Howitt (I, p.151) believed Eberhard Wächter to be the author of the text, although she thought it to be in the hand of Giovanni Colombo, a member of the Nazarene circle.
different from the others, but would nevertheless still be mannerism. The main merit of these early masters lies in their modesty and sincerity.\textsuperscript{40}

Overbeck himself was well aware of the imitative quality of his art. In a letter to his father of 1815, he writes:

If one perceives in my works the striving to subscribe to a great time of old, one is very unfair to scold this as direct mimicry. As Goethe said rightly and beautifully: beautiful nature, you are not the same and are still eternally the same, and everything is old and everything new in your blossoming empire, etc., so I would like to say the same thing of art.\textsuperscript{41}

For Overbeck, "All true art is spiritually related, striving after one and the same goal, running on the same track to this goal." In comparison, "false art, which carries no true originality in itself, would like always, in order to appear original, to leave this search for originality in our characterless times."\textsuperscript{42} Overbeck is here using the term

\textsuperscript{40}Howitt I, pp.152-153: "Was die italienischen Meister vor Rafael betrifft, so verdienen sie Verehrung und Hochachtung wegen ihrer Einfachheit und Wahrheit, doch sei ihnen nicht unbedingt zu folgen. Künstler, welche auch ihre äußeren Eigenheiten nachahmen, laufen Gefahr in eine neue Manier zu verfallen, welche von der andern zwar verschieden, aber doch Manier wäre. Das Hauptverdienst dieser früheren Meister bestehe in ihrer Anspruchslosigkeit und Innigkeit."

\textsuperscript{41}Overbeck. letter to his father (Rome, 8 February 1815), Hasse, p.159: "Wenn man in meinen Arbeiten das Streben wahrnimmt, sich an eine große alte Zeit anzuschließen, so thut man sehr Unrecht, solches gradezu Nachäffung zu schelten. So wie Göthe einmal so wahr wie schön sagt: du schöne Natur bist nicht einerley und bist doch ewig die Gleiche, und alles ist alt und alles ist neu in deinem blühenden Reiche u., so möchte ich dasselbe von der Kunst sagen...."

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.: "Alle wahre Kunst hat eine innere Verwandtschaft, strebt nach ein und demselben Ziele, wandelt auf ein und derselben Bahn zu diesem Ziele. Nur die falsche
originality not in the sense of innovation, but, in its literal sense, as relating to origins. And the proper origin for the painter lies within the painter himself, as it did for the early Raphael and the generation that preceded him, rather than in a rule-governed activity, as imposed by the Academy:

this path is not one prescribed through school rules or through convention; the way, which has been observed as compulsory for every simple, uncorrupted imagination, which constitutes the true artist, must be self-imposed in accordance with its nature. Overbeck’s argument hinges on the motivation of the painter. His distinction between imitative art that is false and imitative art that is true turns on whether or not the artist’s task is self-imposed, whether or not he is authentic. Because Overbeck believes himself to be so, he is able to conclude that his art is not merely an aping of past masters: "I thus cannot at all acknowledge this reprimand, though I gladly admit, in the feeling of my weakness, the imperfections of my work."  

Kunst, die keine wahre Originalität in sich trägt, möchte, um originell zu scheinen, immer davon abspringen, daher die Sucht nach Originalität in unsren characterlosen Zeiten....."

43Ibid.: "Diese Bahn ist aber kein durch Schulregeln oder durch Convention vorgeschriebener und mit Zwang beobachteter Weg, den eine jede einfältige unverdorbene Fantasie, die ja doch den wahren Künstler ausmacht, von selbst, ihrer Natur nach, einschlagen muß...."

44Ibid. p.160: "Ich kann also diesen Tadel garnicht anerkennen, so gerne ich sonst, im Gefühl meiner Schwäche, die Mangelhaftigkeiten meiner Arbeiten eingestehe."
Overbeck’s notion of authentic imitation, imitation which is true to the self, can be considered a type of following. Büttner argues that the Nachahmung/Nachfolge distinction is based upon the classical distinction between "imitatio" and "emulatio."\(^{45}\) I prefer to translate Nachfolge as following; emulation, to a certain degree, assumes the possibility of progress, which is more of a Renaissance ideal, than a Nazarene one.\(^{46}\) Given his historicist tendency, Overbeck would not claim that his art is better than that of the past. Rather, he would more likely claim, following Lucretius, that he steps in the footsteps of his model. He works according to the process and in the style of his model "because my love for you makes me long to imitate you."\(^{47}\)

The importance of following for Overbeck is evinced not only in his artistic style but also in his monk-artist role, for the latter involves living a life in accordance with Christian doctrine. When he died, Overbeck had next to him, according to Howitt, a copy of L’Imitation de Jésus Christ, méditée par M. l’Abbé Herbet.\(^{48}\) In one sense, Overbeck led a pre-scripted existence and painted in a pre-established

\(^{45}\)Büttner, "Der Streit," p.66.


\(^{47}\)As quoted in Pigman, "Versions," p.19.

\(^{48}\)Howitt, II, p.392.
style; in another sense, he found his own identity and his own style.

(2) ROMANTIC ORIGINS

Those who investigate the past frequently do so in order to guide present action: such investigators, as Nietzsche writes, "invariably postulate[] that the salvation of mankind depend[s] upon insight into the origin of things."49 Such is the case with both Overbeck and Friedrich Schlegel, whose precepts on art in his "Descriptions of Paintings from Paris and the Netherlands" (the so-called "Letters on Christian Art") were seen even in the nineteenth century as a source for Overbeck's work: "Overbeck, the celebrated German painter, now residing in Rome, appears to be almost an embodiment of all of Schlegel's suggestions and anticipations; a consummation in the bringing about of which these letters probably have had no inconsiderable share."50 According to Schlegel's "Letters," the purity of the style of the old masters has a "variety of expression or individuality of characteristics throughout and everywhere a child-like,


good-natured simplicity and reserve, which I am inclined to take as the original character of man."51 This innocent dignity is precisely what Overbeck seeks to represent. In using a historical style of painting, he takes part in this Romantic search for origins.52

Claims to origins and an interest in history are frequently accompanied by claims to individuality. We see such a connection in Overbeck's concern for his true self and for the past: Overbeck believes that origins lie both in the past, in the works of pre-Reformation painters, and in the present, in the painter himself. Herder had made similar claims for both individuals and societies. In his Yet Another Philosophy of History, a rather satirical attack on enlightenment notions of reason and progress, Herder writes: "Have you noticed how inexpressible is the individuality of one man, how difficult it is to know distinctly what distinguishes him, how he feels and lives, how differently his eyes see, his soul measures, his heart experiences,


52Frank Büttner calls the Nazarene search for origins "the innermost driving force" of their art. (Büttner, Peter Cornelius I, p.124: "Innerste Triebkraft dieser Kunst war die Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprünglichen, die sich auf verschiedenste Weise äußerte.")
everything?" Similarly he writes about entire epochs: "Each age is different, but each has the centre of its happiness within itself." In claiming both a sympathy for past ages and the individuality of human nature, Herder expresses the fundamental notions that made possible "further progress...in historical thought." One can generalize that beginning with Herder (or maybe Winckelmann) a different conception of the world--one could perhaps say a different paradigm--developed in which history and man's place in it replaced nature or natural law as the guiding principle. According to a historicist framework, "the nature of anything is contained in its history," so that history, rather than nature, becomes the "key to truths and values."

As the world began to be viewed as developing through time, so origins came to be seen as important for an understanding of where humanity was heading and/or whence

---


54 Ibid., p.188.


56 For a discussion of Herder as the "father" of historicism, see Meinecke, Historism, ch.9, and Igers, The German Conception of History, ch.2. For the importance of Winckelmann's historicism in relation to art theory, see Alex Potts, "Political Attitudes and the rise of Historicism in Art Theory," Art History 1 (1978), pp.191-213.

humanity should return. The latter investigation was frequently a response (often described as reactionary or conservative) to modernization.\textsuperscript{58} The Nazarenes, and particularly Overbeck, are frequently seen along these lines.\textsuperscript{59} In order to evaluate the nature of Overbeck's search for origins, I will compare it to other romantic searches for origins, in particular, those of language, which will be used to contextualize Overbeck's theoretical stance.

Rousseau is perhaps the central figure for an understanding of the romantic notion of origins and its importance. In his \textit{Discourse on Inequality} he writes:

\begin{quote}
   it is no small undertaking to separate what is inborn from what is artificial in the present nature of man, to have a proper understanding of a state that no longer exists and perhaps never did and probably never will, but about which we should nevertheless have accurate notions in order to judge our present state properly.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Rousseau, in making this distinction between what is original and what is artificial, puts forward "two great motivating powers" of Romanticism: the desire to know correctly a state which no longer exists, and the desire to express one's

\textsuperscript{58}For a discussion of such conservativism, see Klaus Epstein, \textit{The Genesis of German Conservatism} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

\textsuperscript{59}Recently Albert Boime has written that the Nazarenes' "medievalism was an aesthetic complement to the forces of reaction." (Boime, \textit{A Social History of Modern Art II: Art in an Age of Bonapartism 1800-1815}, [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990], p.656.)

awareness of the fictionality of such a state.\textsuperscript{61} There were different levels of awareness of this fictionality.\textsuperscript{62} German Romanticism, as expressed for example by Novalis, in his "Europa" essay, is quite conscious of it, to wit the essay's fairy-tale like opening: "There were once beautiful splendid times, when Europe was a Christian land, when One Christianity inhabited this civilized part of the world."\textsuperscript{63} With Overbeck, on the other hand, there is more of a disavowal of this fictionality. While his claims to originality and identity belie the hope of returning to a golden medieval age, his monk-artist role and the historicist nature of his art play on such expectations in order to vindicate his own endeavour.

Rousseau's \textit{Discourse on Inequality} is an attempt to distinguish what is original from what is artificial in man (a hypothetical and conditional, rather than an historical enquiry, as he puts it).\textsuperscript{64} In doing so he praises the natural:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61}Brisman, \textit{Romantic Origins}, p.11.
\item \textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p.12.
\item \textsuperscript{64}Rousseau, \textit{Discourse}, p.24.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
if you would...pit the two [primitive and modern man] naked and unarmed against each other,...you will soon see the advantage of having all one's strength constantly available, of being ever ready for any eventuality, and of always carrying, so to speak, one's whole self with one.  

Rousseau praises the savage for his life which is "solitary, idle, and never far from danger." The most distinctive feature of natural man, according to Rousseau, is the fact that he lives according to instinct. Perception and feeling are primary to him.  

In this discussion Rousseau comes to the issue of language and its origin. "Man's first language, the most universal and forceful," was "the cry of nature," but eventually he had to use language "to persuade gatherings of other men." Therefore, "men eventually thought of substituting vocal articulations, which, without having the same relation to certain ideas, are better for representing them all as words or conventional signs." Rousseau expands on this argument in his essay "On the Origins of Languages," where he distinguishes between the musical quality of primitive languages, which are languages of passion, and modern languages, which show the cold and methodical

---

65Ibid., pp.27-28.
66Ibid., p.34.
67Ibid., p.39.
68Ibid., p.40.
reasoning of man. In Germany, Rousseau's ideas on language were
tested, in particular by Herder, in his own exploration
of the origin of language. For Herder, human language did
not develop instinctual cries. Rather, language, like
reason, is essential to man. If man is a thinking being, he
must also be a language-using being, for thinking is
impossible without language:

it is not an organization of the mouth that made
language, for even one who is mute for life, if he
is human and if he reflects, has language lying in
his soul. The point here is that it is not a
scream of emotion, for not a breathing machine but
a reflective being invented language. But while Herder may reject the development of conventional
forms of language from natural ones, he nevertheless retains
a distinction between older, more original languages and more
evolved ones. And he believes, along the lines of Rousseau,
that feelings are more important to older languages: "The
older and the more original languages are, the more the
feelings intertwine in the roots of the words," and "the

69Rousseau, "On the Origin of Languages," On the Origin
of Language, tr. John Moran and Alexander Gode (New York:
Frederick Ungar, 1966). For a general discussion of Rousseau
on language, see Paul Kuehner, Theories on the Original and
Formation of Language in the Eighteenth Century in France,
Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1944, pp.29-
34.

70Herder, "Essay on the Origin of Language," On the
Origin of Language, tr. John Moran and Alexander Gode (New
fewer its abstractions and the more numerous its feelings."

In German Romantic theory, art is frequently associated with language in general, and with a language of feeling in particular, that is a primitive language. The painter Asmus Jakob Carstens, in a letter of 1793 to a Prussian minister, attacks painters of the French Academy for knowing only about the mechanics of art: "It appears never to have occurred to these artists that art is a language of feeling." The most clearly articulated statement concerning this view of art is Wackenroder's "Of two wonderful languages and their secret strength" in his Herzensersättigungen. For Wackenroder, language is limited to things of this world, while nature and art allow us to perceive "invisible forces" which hover over us and are "not drawn into our hearts by words."

They enter into our souls through entirely different ways than through the aid of words; they move our entire being suddenly, in a wondrous manner, and they press their way into every nerve and every drop of blood which belongs to us....

The teachings of the philosophers set only our brains in motion, only the one half of our beings; but the two wonderful languages whose power I am proclaiming here affect our senses as well as our minds; or, rather (I cannot express it differently), they seem thereby to fuse all the parts of our nature (incomprehensible to us) into one single new organ, which perceives and comprehends the heavenly miracles in this twofold

---

71 Ibid., pp.148-9, 155.

Art is a language that works on the emotional, rather than the rational, side of man. And in this sense, it was considered more original or primitive.

In his "Letters on Christian Art," Schlegel accepts most of Wackenroder's claims. True art, the art of the old masters, is based upon feeling:

The true source of art and the beautiful lies in feeling. With feeling, correct conception and a purpose in itself ensue, and so also precise knowledge, ... if the artist can preserve it, not in words, but in practice. It was religious feeling, devotion and love, and the most spiritual, quiet inspiration itself which led the hand of the old painters....

In the work of modern artists, on the other hand, such "spiritual and deep feeling" is missing. For Schlegel, painting deviated "from its original designation, which it had everywhere in the old times, to glorify religion and to reveal its secrets even more beautifully and clearer than can


74Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, IV, p.149: "Die echte Quelle der Kunst und des Schönen aber liegt im Gefühl. Mit dem Gefühl ergibt sich der richtige Begriff und Zweck von selbst, und das bestimmte Wissen dessen, was man will, wenn gleich der Künstler es nicht in Worten, sondern nur praktisch bewahren kann. Das religiöse Gefühl, Andacht und Liebe, und die innigste stille Begeisterung derselben war es, was den alten Malern die Hand führte...."

75Ibid., p.147: "...dazu fehlt...am meisten aber das innige und tiefe Gefühle."
be done in words," and so lost itself "to all kinds of vanity...vacillating between misunderstood ideal and empty effect."\(^7\)

Schlegel makes two distinctions here. One (like Wackenroder) is between visual and verbal communication: painting has the ability to affect the beholder in a more forceful or more passionate way than words. The second distinction Schlegel makes is between primitive and modern art, a distinction that is similar to the one made by Herder between primitive and more developed languages. Primitive art, according to Schlegel, affects the emotions through religion, while modern art, because it is so distanced from its original character, is decadent and frivolous. In Schlegel’s history of painting the Reformation plays a central role: "Here [in Germany] the reformation produced...a violent division, whereby the conception of art turned away from its customary subjects of Christian devotion."\(^7\)

\(^7\)Ibid., p.79: "So wie die Kunst selbst von der ursprünglichen Bestimmung, die sie in alten Zeiten überall hatte, die Religion zu verberrlichen, und die Geheimnisse derselben noch schöner und deutlicher zu offenbaren, als es durch Worte geschehen kann, durchaus nicht abweichen darf, ohne in alle Arten von Eitelkeit und endlich zwischen mißverstandnem Ideal und bloßem Effekt schwankend in eigentliche Gemeinheit sich zu verlieren; so darf auch die Theorie der Kunst nie von der Anschauung getrennt werden, ohne unvermeidlich in willkürliche Hirngespinste oder in leere Allgemeinheiten zu geraten." Schlegel also here states his belief in how art and its theory should go hand in hand.

\(^7\)Ibid., p.81: "Die Reformation machte hier auch von außen einen gewaltsamen Abschnitt, indem sie den Kunstsinn von den gewohnten Gegenständen der christlichen Andacht weglenkte."
Henceforth, painting was divided into distinct genres (landscape, portraiture, fruit and flower pieces, church perspectives, domestic scenes, etc.), all striving for the highest technical perfection, "until finally, in this chaotic confusion of servile imitation applied to all possible subjects of nature, art sunk to empty technique and its original conception was entirely lost." This is a claim that Schlegel repeats many times in his letters. The history of art moves from a state of unity to a divided state. And while painting may be technically more proficient than it once was, through the development of what one may call an academic grammar of painting, it is also more distanced from truth and beauty: "What is the divine in nature? Not life and strength alone, but the one and unutterable, the spirit, that which is significant, that which is characteristic. And this, we believe, is the true sphere of painting."

Schlegel’s first principle of painting then is that "there is no genre of painting other than the one, totally complete painting, which is usually called historical or, more

---

78 Ibid., p.81: "...bis endlich in diesem chaotischen Gewirre von knechtischer Nachahmung aller möglichen rohen Naturgegenstände, die Kunst zur bloßen Technik herabgesunken und ihre ursprüngliche Idee ganz verloren gegangen war."

79 Ibid., p.77: "Was ist das Göttliche in der Natur? Nicht das Leben und die Kraft allein, sondern das Eine und Unbegreifliche, der Geist, das Bedeutende, die Eigentümlichkeit. Und dieses, so glauben wir, ist die eigentliche Sphäre der Malerei."
properly, ... symbolic painting." When Overbeck writes to his father from Vienna that he wants to be a history painter, he is thinking along the lines of Schlegel.

Herder's fifth principle concerning the origins of language states:

"Since every grammar is only a philosophy of language and a method for its use, it follows that, the more primordial a language is, the less grammar must there be in it, and the oldest language is no more that the aforementioned dictionary of nature."

Schlegel's assertion that in modern painting there is a more developed grammar accords well with Herder's similar claim with respect to language. Schlegel's letters are also like Herder's writings in that they are thoroughly historicist in nature. Schlegel is not interested in finding universal laws for art, but rather theoretical principles derived through historical study: "The idea [of art] can only be developed through and together with evidence, and there is no other theory of art than a historical one." History is the

---

80 Ibid., p. 72: "Von diesen festzustellenden Grundsätzen nun ist der erste der, daß es keine Gattungen der Malerei gebe, als die eine, ganz vollständige Gemälde, die man historisch zu nennen pflegt; schicklicher, aber gar nicht besonders, oder symbolische Gemälde nennen würde."

81 Overbeck, letter to his father (Vienna, 13 December 1807), Hasse, p. 1067.


83 Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, IV, p. 71n: "Nur an der Anschauung und zugleich mit ihr kann sich die Idee entwickeln und es gibt keine andere Theorie der Kunst als eine geschichtliche."
avenue for an understanding of painting, because, like painting, it cannot be divided. The academic division of painting into fixed elements (design, expression, colouring, etc.) is therefore a "destructive error." 

But there is a difference between Schlegel's and Herder's thought: the former is more judgmental than the latter. Schlegel's letters are not just explanatory; they are prescriptive as well. Unlike Herder, who does not necessarily privilege the natural or naive, Schlegel, like Rousseau, believes that the child-like naivete of the old masters is worth re-embodying:

How natural and commendable it would thus be, if painters continued along the way which Raphael, Leonardo, and Perugino went, putting their ideas and mentality in the place of new ones, inventing again in their spirit, and so the new painting would be linked most securely to the old.

Overbeck similarly commends the works of the early painters. When in Venice, he writes to his father:

Splendidly we found more pictures of an older painter, Giovanni Bellini, Titian's teacher, I think, which were wonderful and which gave us immensely great pleasure. It is something divine, this simplicity and unpretentiousness of the old ones, this child-like disposition, that speaks from

---

84Ibid., p.75

85Ibid., p.57: "Wie natürlich und löfflich wäre es also, wenn die Maler auf dem Wege fortgingen, den Raffael, Leonardo, und Perugino gegangen sind, sich in ihre Ideen und Denkart von neuem versetzten, in ihrem Geiste weiter fort erfänden, und so die neue Malerei an die alte zu dem schönsten Ganzen anschlossen!"
Furthermore, he writes of a "purity of feeling and of style, a simplicity and clarity of composition" in describing Fra Angelico's frescoes in the chapel of San Lorenzo in the Vatican. According to Overbeck the distinction between pre- and post-Reformation art can be expressed in terms of the relation between inner feeling and execution: for the old Masters, "the execution flowed entirely out of feeling and not out of acquired skill." (This is the same distinction, discussed above, that Overbeck makes between true and false imitative art.) Overbeck in taking on the monk-artist role thus attempts to take on the attributes of pre-Reformation artists. In 1831, the painter Erwin Spektor writes of Overbeck's "piety, his purity of soul and innocence,

---

86Overbeck, letter to his father (Venice, 5 June 1810), Hasse, p.1278: "Vorzüglich aber fanden wir mehrere Bilder von einem älteren Maler Giovanni Bellini, ich glaube Titians Lehrmeister, die wunderschön waren und die uns ungemein vielen Genuß gewährten. Es ist doch etwas himmlisches, diese Einfalt und Anspruchlosigkeit der Alten, dies kindliche Gemüt, das aus allem spricht...."

87Howitt I, p.253: "[Overbeck und Pforr] wurden in der Kapelle San Lorenzo mit dem seraphischen Fiesole vertraut, dessen Fresken 'an Reinheit der Empfindung und des Styls, an Einfachheit und Klarheit der Anordnung alles übertreffen', was sie bis dahin kennen gelernt." Howitt is quoting from Overbeck's diary, 10 October 1811.

88Overbeck's diary (15 September 1811), Howitt I, p.176: "--Giotto, Masaccio u.--weil bei ihnen die Ausführung ganz aus der Empfindung herfloß und nicht aus erworber Fertigkeit."
something truly saintly and consoling."²⁹

Overbeck, in following Schlegel's prescription, is similarly searching for origins. Like the first generation of Romantics (Novalis, the early Schlegel, etc.), Overbeck uses the primitive argument as a rhetorical ploy to attack what he sees as decadent and wrong in the world in which he lives, but unlike the first generation, Overbeck takes this pursuit after origins seriously rather than assuming an ironic distance. He tries to authenticate this quest through his lifestyle and his painting. This is not to say that Overbeck believed that a return to a medieval golden age would be possible; the lack of irony, however, suggests that the noblest course of action is to make the attempt in this fallen world. Catholicism afforded Overbeck a possibility to claim ahistorical truth but at the same time the historicist nature of his milieu and his own thinking made for a conflict between ideal state and present condition, a conflict that is evident in the paintings he produced.

(3) OVERBECK'S TRIUMPH OF RELIGION IN THE ARTS

Overbeck's Triumph of Religion in the Arts (fig.32) is his most important statement concerning his position on the relation of history to religion and art. Unlike most of his paintings, the Triumph is as didactic or allegorical as it is

religious. The work, modelled after Raphael's *Disputa* (fig.33), was commissioned by the Städel Institute in Frankfurt and took Overbeck a decade to complete (1829-40). It is enormous in size (3.89 x 3.9 m) and contains over a hundred figures. Overbeck also produced a commentary to explain the intention behind the work, the division of the composition, and the numerous figures he depicts. The upper sphere, which Overbeck describes as being "like a vision," depicts the heavenly realm. Mary and the Christ child sit enthroned surrounded by holy personages from the Old and New Testaments, who "served Christian art." To Mary’s immediate left are Luke (representing painting) and John (representing architecture), followed by a series of New Testament saints and martyrs. To Mary’s right are David (music) and Solomon (sculpture) flanked by a phalanx of Old Testament prophets and figures. The Madonna herself represents poetry: "Poetry appears in the middle symbolized by the Virgin herself, who writes down her sublime hymns of praise." Poetry is the centre of all the arts, "just like the secret of God becoming man from the Virgin Mary is the centre of all religious ideas." Below Mary, in the centre

---

90 Overbeck's "Der Triumph der Religion in den Künsten" is reprinted in Howitt II, pp.61-72.

91 Ibid., p.62: "Die Poesie aber erscheint in der Mitte durch die hl. Jungfrau selbst, die jenen erhabenen Lobgesang niederschreibt, vertreten; indem die Poesie Centrum aller Künste ist, wie das Geheimniß der Menschwerdung Gottes aus der Jungfrau Centrum aller religiösen Ideen ist."
of the composition, is a fountain, whose water strives heavenward, like Christian art itself. The fountain has two pools of water, the upper reflects heavenly and the lower earthly subjects. These two pools symbolize the two elements of art, spiritual knowledge and nature. "The double sphere of art is now represented through the artists who surround the fountain." To the immediate right of the fountain is the Venetian school (Bellini, Titian and others), and further to the right stand the great artists of southern and northern Europe, who glorified religion: Dürer, Fra Angelico, the Van Eycks, just to name a few. To the left of the fountain are the Tuscan and Roman schools with Dante at the far left and Raphael, who wears a "white cloak, which symbolizes the universality of his spirit." Michelangelo and Signorelli sit on an ancient fragment in the middle ground and on the terrace sit two monks admiring miniature illuminations. In the foreground there are two groups: to the left, an emperor stands with Nicolo Pisano and his students around him; to the right, a pope stands with Erwin von Steinbach, surrounded by students of all nationalities (French, English, Spanish, Italian and Oriental). The front left group represents the art of sculpture and the power of the emperor, and the front right group architecture and the power of the pope. Overbeck writes that art aims at protecting, and in turn is protected

92Ibid., p.64: "Diese doppelte Sphäre der Kunst ist nun auch durch die den Brunnen zunächst umgebenden Meister vertreten."
by church and state.\textsuperscript{93} He concludes his commentary with a simple "Amen."

Overbeck's history of art is purposefully selective: he only chooses those artists who have contributed to Christian art. As such, his conception of history is very much in line with Friedrich Schlegel's, as put forward in his \textit{Philosophy of History}, a series of lectures given in Dresden in 1828.

Near the end of his lectures, Schlegel concludes:

\begin{quote}
So I have endeavoured to show how in the first thousand years of ancient history divine revelation, kept pure in its singular source, also flowed in full current into the holy tradition of other great nations of ancient times. Although this created many errors of combination, the simple origin of the divine, even in this chaotic mixture, was recognizable; and this shapes the content and the beginning of belief in a religious view of world history.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

Like Schlegel, Overbeck wants to arrive at the source, in his case, the source of art. He wants to wade through the "chaotic mixture" in order to retain only those pure artists who have shown divine revelation through their art.

Overbeck also follows Schlegel in regarding the

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., p.67.

Reformation as the point in time that distinguishes early from modern painters, original from decadent painting. In the commentary to his Triumph, he writes of the Reformation as a split (Spaltung) that led to wars "which robbed Germany of its ornament and totally hindered the complete development of German art."95 Even the two greatest artists, Michelangelo and Raphael, showed in their late works how art degenerated: "Michelangelo surrendered to the admiration of the antique, at the same time erecting these as new idols of his school; and Raphael no longer felt the strength of his complete gift as soon as he lustfully reached his hand out to the forbidden."96 This idea of the Reformation as a Spaltung was not new to Overbeck's thought. As early as 1813 he wrote:

I recognize now why with the reformation every spirit of simplicity and piety, which speaks from the old works of art and knowledge, is blurred and has disappeared, and instead of this a self-importance enters and a type of enlightenment, which robs man of all certain, beautiful relationships, makes him cold and has no feeling

---

95Overbeck, "Der Triumph," Howitt II, p.70: "...als im sechzehnten Jahrhundert jene traurigen Spaltungen ausbrachen, die lange und verheerende Kriege veranlaßt, wodurch Deutschland so mancher seiner Zierden beraubt worden, die völlige Entwicklung deutscher Kunst aber gänzlich gehindert."

96Ibid., p.71: "Michel Angelo hat von Bewunderung der Antike sich hinreißen lassen, diese gleichsam als neuen Götzen in seiner Schule aufzurichten; und Rafael fühlte sich nicht sobald in der Kraft seiner umfassenden Gaben, als auch ihn gelüstete die Hand nach dem Verbotenen auszustrecken."
for the beauty and influence of art. 97

Overbeck believes that a process of secularization occurred with the Reformation and that artists as a result began making "idols" rather than "servants in holiness." 98 It is no coincidence that the water in the fountain is the central metaphor for art in the Triumph. Overbeck writes that unlike the ancient mountain of Parnassus with its downward flowing source, his supernatural fountain has water that surges upwards. 99 True art reflects the divine; it mediates and encourages contact between the worshipper and the heavenly sphere.

This understanding of art was not original to Overbeck: it had been proposed centuries earlier by defenders of icons in their arguments against iconoclasts, and a variation on the argument was used by Schlegel in his later writings. 100

97 Overbeck, letter to Sutter (Rome, 21 May 1813), Howitt I, p.277: "Ich erkannte nun, warum mit der Reformation auf einmal jener Geist der Einfalt und Frömmigkeit, der aus allen alten Werken aller Kunst und Wissenschaften spricht, wie verwischt, wie verschwunden ist, und statt dessen eine Aufgeblasenheit eintritt und eine Art von Aufklärung, die dem Menschen alle sichere schönere Beziehung raubt, ihn kalt und unempfindlich für die Schönheit und den Einfluß der Künste macht."

98 Overbeck, "Der Triumph," Howitt II, p.71: "Die wahre Kunst erlangt man nicht dadurch, daß man die Kunst selber zum Götzen macht; sie will vielmehr nur Dienerin sein im Heilighetum."

99 Ibid., pp.63-64.

100 Perhaps Schlegel's later views should not be seen in such strong opposition to his earlier views, as they are frequently portrayed. The usual view of Schlegel is as a Romantic rebel who takes the extremist position of Romantic
In the twelfth lecture of his Philosophy of Life, Schlegel seeks to establish a parallel between the nature of man's existence and the nature of a true work of art. For Schlegel, such a work of art is categorized by its allegorical nature, by its "higher significance." True art, according to Schlegel, is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, a symbol of the divine realm. To explicate the symbolic nature of art, he examines the problem of how a human being (whom he labels \( x \)) is connected to God (\( x \)): "The solution of that general problem lies in the fact that \( x \), even that incomprehensible \( x \) of the immeasurable God, as the eternal logos, actually became or was \( x \) at the same time, that is living and in humanity, and this is still so, actually and truly." Because God became man in the form of irony only to realize the untenable nature of this position and then to reintegrate into the Catholic church so as to be able to ground his belief in something more solid. (See, for instance, Hans Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel [New York: Twayne, 1970]) But Schlegel's views on art, for example, do not change all that much from his letters of 1802 to his lectures of 1828. He consistently rejects the notion that art should be autonomous, arguing instead for an art that is tied to the community. In nineteenth-century terms, one could say that he never relinquishes the allegory for the symbol. (See next chapter for a discussion of these terms.) The difference between his earlier and later views is that the latter are more doctrinaire, in fact more in line with a Catholic understanding of the relation of art to the divine.

---


102 Ibid., p.245: "Die Auflösung jenes allgemeinen Problems aber liegt darin, daß das \( x \), eben jenes unbegreifliche \( x \) der unermesslichen Gottheit, als der ewige Logos, zugleich \( a \) d.h. lebendig und in der Menschheit wirklich geworden, oder gewesen ist, und solches auch wirklich und wahrhaft noch ist."
of Christ, all matter is redeemed. The Incarnation, according to Schlegel, gives not only significance to human life, but also a divine or symbolic nature to true art. Schlegel thus concludes: "So beginning from symbolic representation and fine art, and developing this same concept further through various spheres, I have now directed the symbolic significance of human life up to the highest hieroglyph of all existence."\textsuperscript{103}

Schlegel's argument, in moving from a discussion of the symbolic nature of art to an examination of the relation between the symbolic nature of man and the incomprehensible nature of God, is very similar to the defence of icons made in the eighth century and reiterated in the Counter-Reformation. According to the Iconodule council in Nicea of 787: "God, by becoming flesh, provides us with salvation."\textsuperscript{104} Because Christ redeemed all matter, paintings can partake in the divine and thus can lead the worshipper to God. As the iconodule St. John Damascene stated, quoting Basil the Great: "the Honour given to the

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., p.245: "So hätte ich nun die symbolische Bedeutung des menschlichen Lebens, von der sinnbildlichen Darstellung und Kunst des Schönen anfangend, und durch verschiedene Sphären denselben Begriff weiter entwickelnd, bis zur höchsten Hieroglyphe alles Daseins hinaufgeführt."

imged passes over to the prototype."¹⁰⁵

For Schlegel, the argument in defense of the symbolic nature of art is not against iconoclasm, but against a form of idolatry put forward by proponents of aesthetics.

For a very large number of men in the educated classes, art and beauty are the last remaining jewel of the divine, and are prized as such and regarded by them as the true palladium of higher and spiritual life; but, taken in isolation, this can in no way be the case.¹⁰⁶

One could say that for Schlegel those who defend artistic beauty for its own sake treat works of art as idols, in the true sense of the word, as objects who have "the same ousia [essence] as the subject of which it is an image."¹⁰⁷

Unlike the iconoclasts, who rejected the worship of icons as the veneration of "the creature rather than the Creator,"

¹⁰⁵St. John Damascene, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, tr. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Scribners, 1899) IX, p.88. This same argument is used in the 25th session (December, 1563) of the Council of Trent: "...because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ and venerate the saints whose likeness they bear." (Councils and Decrees of the Council of Trent, tr. Rev. H.J. Schroeder [Rockford: Tan Books, 1978], p.216.)

¹⁰⁶Schlegel, Das Philosophie des Lebens, Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, X, p.239: "...ist für eine sehr große Anzahl von Menschen aus der gebildeten Klasse, die Kunst und das Schöne das letzte ihnen übrig gebliebene Kleinod des Göttlichen, und wird auch als ein solches und als das eigentliche Palladium des höhern und innern Lebens von ihnen betrachtet; was es, so isoliert genommen, doch in keiner Weise sein kann."

Enlightenment thinkers, according to Schlegel, call for such veneration.

Overbeck similarly believes that making art into an autonomous aesthetic ideology constitutes a form of idolatry. Overbeck is thus very much in line with Schlegel when he claims that he does not want his works to function as idols, as objects to be glorified in themselves. Rather, he wants his paintings to be "servants in holiness." Berthold Hinz, in an essay on the Triumph, examines just this point: he argues that the painting far from being a statement concerning the past, represents in fact artistic currents of Overbeck's day, specifically concerning the philosophical theme of the autonomous nature of art developed in writers from Kant to Hegel. For Overbeck, art is by necessity "heteronomous" in that it is subjected to the law of another being. Overbeck "tries to evoke the domestic, original, and truly economic [oiko-nomische] situation, where work and leisure, Sunday and everyday life are carried out under one roof, where church and home (where one worked and lived) were complementary forms of such an identically conceived life...."^{108}

^{108}Berthold Hinz, "Der Triumph der Religion in den Künsten: Overbecks 'Werk und Wort' im Widerspruch seiner Zeit," Städel- Jahrbuch 7 (1979), p.160: "Der Autor sucht die hauswirtschaftliche, die ursprünglich und wahrhaft oiko-nomische Situation zu evozieren, wo Arbeit und Freizeit, Sonntag und Alltag unter einem Dach sich vollzogen, wo Kirche und Werk/Wohnhaus noch komplementäre Formen eines derart identisch vorgestellten Lebens waren...." Like Hinz, Frank Büttner claims that the Nazarenes did not agree with the
Hinz's claim is important: Overbeck's historicism should be seen within the context of and as a reaction to the development of an autonomous sphere of artistic activity and reception. But while Overbeck's commentary posits a heteronomous conception of art, the painting itself functions similarly to works of aesthetic contemplation in the sense that it attempts to remove the viewer from the everyday world and move him into a purer realm. Its formal structure, as we will see, emphasizes the subjectivity and thus isolation of the modern viewer.

In accordance with his belief that Raphael's early work embodies the ultimate spirit of divine revelation, Overbeck chooses Raphael's Disputa as the model for his Triumph. Both works are divided horizontally between heavenly and earthly realms, both have a strong central vertical axis, and both compositions are circular in their recession from the picture plane. In terms of programme, both paintings deal with issues of origins: in the Disputa, the origin and true nature of the eucharist; in the Triumph, the origin and true nature of Christian painting. But the differences between the two

---

Hinz's claim is important: Overbeck's historicism should be seen within the context of and as a reaction to the development of an autonomous sphere of artistic activity and reception. But while Overbeck's commentary posits a heteronomous conception of art, the painting itself functions similarly to works of aesthetic contemplation in the sense that it attempts to remove the viewer from the everyday world and move him into a purer realm. Its formal structure, as we will see, emphasizes the subjectivity and thus isolation of the modern viewer.

In accordance with his belief that Raphael's early work embodies the ultimate spirit of divine revelation, Overbeck chooses Raphael's Disputa as the model for his Triumph. Both works are divided horizontally between heavenly and earthly realms, both have a strong central vertical axis, and both compositions are circular in their recession from the picture plane. In terms of programme, both paintings deal with issues of origins: in the Disputa, the origin and true nature of the eucharist; in the Triumph, the origin and true nature of Christian painting. But the differences between the two

---

postulates of Karl Philip Moritz or Carl Ludwig Fernow concerning the autonomous nature of art: "Their striving led directly in the opposite direction. Their religious painting...was the attempt to lead art back to its essential condition, as they conceived it." (Büttner, "Die klugen und törichten Jungfrauen im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur religiösen Bildkunst der Nazarener," Städel-Jahrbuch 7 [1979], p.209: "Ihre Bestrebungen führten genau in die entgegengesetzte Richtung. Ihre religiöse Bildkunst und ganz besonders das Projekt der Bilderbibel waren der Versuch, die Kunst in die ihrer Meinung nach wesensgemäße Bedingtheit zurückzuführen.")
are worth noting. Contrary to its commonly used title (the figures in the lower sphere are discussing more than disputing the nature of the host),¹⁰⁹ the Disputa, through a clearly articulated composition, shows the direct line of the host from Christ to the altar to the priest and eventually to the worshipper. There is a similar clarity in the well-defined, receding semi-circular composition which fits its semi-circular frame. This composition can be described as objective in the sense that it can stand on its own without viewer involvement, just as the host becomes the body of Christ through priestly consecration, not worshipper participation.

Overbeck’s Triumph is an attempt to show art’s true Christian nature, a lineage which originates in the Virgin Mary and continues through divine revelation in the artists depicted in the lower sphere of the work. Overbeck’s conception of true Christian painting involves mediation by the artist, who is singular in his gifts, a genius. There is thus a subjectivity in the objectivity of his programme: objective because it is deemed true; subjective because of the need of the artist/genius to act as mediator between man and God. Furthermore, unlike the semi-circular composition of the Disputa, which is complete in itself, Overbeck’s goes beyond the semi-circle, but is not a complete circle. In

Overbeck’s work there is a greater need for viewer participation: the opening in the foreground of the painting assumes the presence of the viewer, who stands before the picture and completes its circular composition. In closing the circle the viewer is removed to a past world. It must be noted however that this world, in its inclusion of artists from various time periods and places, is ahistorical, and so is Overbeck’s theme of Catholic redemption through devotion to art. In the Triumph Overbeck thus makes claims to the past in order to put forth the universal and ahistorical message of Catholic salvation.

That Overbeck’s Triumph has both historical and ahistorical elements should come as no surprise. Origins, for Overbeck, as we saw above, are in the past (in the pre-Reformation painters) as well as in the present (in the original or divine part of the self). Overbeck, in his Triumph, seems to be suggesting that the inescapable nature of temporality can be overcome in the present. However, in the modern era, one has to adopt a modern strategy. In pre-Reformation times, Overbeck believes, there was no need for one to remove oneself from the world in order to be religious as religion was an integral part of one’s life. Now removal is deemed necessary due to the secularization of the world.

(4) OVERBECK’S MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN AND LAMENTATION

Overbeck’s Triumph is singular in his oeuvre in that it
was created as a manifesto for his conception of Christian art. It functions on a meta-level, as an explanation of his ideological stance. Most of Overbeck's other paintings were intended to function on a purely religious level, showing his rejection of the category of the aesthetic and his preference for a historicist art that bridges the past and present.\textsuperscript{110} Overbeck's \textit{Marriage of the Virgin} (fig.34), for example, was painted in the tradition of Perugino's and Raphael's versions of the theme (figs.35-36), as was observed by Edward Raczynski: "It is Perugino, it is Raphael in his first style, but it is better than Perugino and it is worthy of Raphael."\textsuperscript{111} The work was commissioned by Edward's brother, Athanasius Graf Raczyński, who in his \textit{Geschichte der neueren deutschen Kunst} had professed a great liking for Raphael's painting: "None of the most perfect works of Raphael moved me so deeply as his Marriage of Maria and Joseph; I discovered from this picture an inexpressible joy, quietness, and

\textsuperscript{110}Overbeck's non-religious works include his portraits, his \textit{Italia und Germania}, and a few others. His commissions for religious subjects include \textit{The Vision of St. Francis} for the Portiuncula chapel in the church of Sta. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi (completed 1829), \textit{The Marriage of the Virgin} (1834-36) for the collection of Athanasius Graf Raczyński, the \textit{Lamentation} (completed 1846) for the Marienkirche in Lübeck, the \textit{Assumption of the Virgin} (completed 1857) for the Cologne cathedral, and \textit{Christ Withdrawing from his Followers} (1857) for the Pope's Quirinal Palace in Rome. Only the work for Raczyński was destined for a setting that was not religious in nature.

\textsuperscript{111}Edward Raczyński, letter to Athanasius Raczyński (16 May 1836), as quoted in \textit{Johann Friedrich Overbeck}, p.146: "Das ist Perugino, das ist Raffael in seiner ersten Manier, aber es ist besser als Perugino und es ist Raffael wert."
movement of the soul." Raczynski commissioned the work from Overbeck in 1828 for his private collection, and it was executed between 1834 and 1836.

Raphael's and Perugino's renderings of the marriage of the Virgin take place in a large Renaissance square with people attending the marriage and others milling about in the background. Very much in the manner of an istoria, as described by Alberti, the painted scenes, articulated with clear linear perspectival constructions, are an extension of the viewer's space. Raphael and Perugino suggest that the marriage of Mary to Joseph took place in this world, in human time. Overbeck, on the other hand, de-emphasizes the perspectival construction by replacing the deeply recessed Renaissance square and centrally planned temple with a free-standing apse that blocks the view into the background. He furthermore removes all the extraneous persons, keeping only Mary, Joseph and the priest. The marriage no longer takes


place in this world but rather in an atemporal zone. There are neither jealous suitors breaking their staffs nor attendant women, but only angels, who with music, song, and garlands proclaim the sanctity of these marriage vows. Unlike Raphael and Perugino, who wanted to bring the religious to the here and now, Overbeck wants to return it to the atemporal. It is curious but not uncharacteristic that Overbeck removes the viewer from the present to a realm that is both past, in its references to earlier models, and atemporal, in the way he deviates from these models.

For Overbeck the style of such painters as Perugino and the early Raphael signifies religiosity. Therefore, his works need not make explicit reference to one particular earlier painting--the general style suffices--in order for them to carry the desired connotations. Overbeck's Lamentation (Beweinung Christi) (fig.37), for example, is Raphaelesque in design, but not based upon any particular work of Raphael. Furthermore, like many quattrocento works, the painting was intended for a particular setting, a chapel in the Marienkirche in Lübeck. (Originally, there was a curtain above the frame of the Lamentation which made for a

---

Overbeck's Lamentation was commissioned in 1839, completed in 1845, and set in its chapel in 1846. See Johann Friedrich Overbeck, p.156 (cat.30). When the Lamentation was commissioned it was to be Overbeck's second painting for the Marienkirche. His Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (figs. 31-32; destroyed 1942) was begun in Vienna in 1808, completed in Rome, and, due to the efforts of Karl Friedrich von Rumohr, sent to Lübeck in 1824 to decorate the Marienkirche.
better transition between painting and niche [fig. 38].) As in many quattrocento frescoes, the light in the Lamentation is consistent with the natural light in the chapel. The chapel is illuminated by a window on the left, so that the light in the painting falls from left to right. Furthermore, in his attempt to communicate a message of Christian salvation, Overbeck emphasizes the role of the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of the church for which the work was commissioned. In the Lamentation, figures form a semi-circle around Christ, and the rocks and ledge (with arma Christi and other objects from the Passion) in the foreground complete the circle. Although they are in shade, the foreground elements nevertheless keep the viewer apart from the sacred scene. The only "entry" to this realm is through the altar-like ledge on the left with its objects from the passion that acts as a projection linking the chapel, with its own altar, to the painted scene. This ledge mediates between the chapel and the scene, yet does not block the worshipper's view into the holy realm. Overbeck seems to be suggesting that the only way to enter this world is through the altar, through a mystical revelation sanctioned by the church. And in the centre of the composition are the hands of Mary, which gently cradle Christ's left arm. Just as the priest at the altar gives the worshipper the host, so Mary holds that into which the host transubstantiates, an appropriate image for a church dedicated to the Virgin.
In a letter to his brother concerning the progress of his *Lamentation*, Overbeck writes that he is very much an opponent of art exhibitions, because they are inevitably an arrangement of things that do not belong together, and religious pictures particularly, which are displaced to exhibitions like some psalm in an almanac, are always singled out, as far as they are different, or even worse, if they do not comply somewhat to the taste of the times.\(^{115}\)

Overbeck is able to make the claim that works at an art exhibition do not belong together, because he refuses to acknowledge the category of the aesthetic as a criterion for artistic judgement. Whether it be through his painterly style, his public persona, or his concern for the function of a work in its proper setting, Overbeck replaces this criterion with an historicist perspective. The latter makes the viewer of his paintings aware of the passage of time as an irreversible process which both estranges him from and connects him to certain forms of thought and perception. In other words, Overbeck’s work necessarily creates in the viewer the recognition of a tension between the possibility of reviving an earlier era through its pictorial tradition and the impossibility of gaining access to that period. For Overbeck there was no need for a resolution to this problem,

\(^{115}\)Howitt II, pp.94-95: "...ich Gegner von Kunstausstellungen bin, weil sie unvermeidlich eine Zusammenstellung von Dingen veranlassen, die nicht zu einander gehören, und namentlich wenigstens immer religiöse Bilder davon ausgesondert wünschte, die sich auf Ausstellungen ausnehmen wie etwa ein Psalm in einem Almanach, wofern sie anders, was noch schlimmer wäre, nicht etwa dem Zeitgeschmack accommodirt sind."
for in his Catholic conception of salvation, there was indeed no opposition to resolve: both the past and the present were part of God's divine plan. Through following Raphael and other painters, Overbeck takes himself (and the viewer) out of the present in order to accede to his original nature or divine essence in the present.
CHAPTER FOUR: OVERBECK’S CHARACTERIZATION IN THE LITERATURE

Yes, he rests in peace, a true disciple of the King of Mercy. One whose life was simple and pure, free of all appearances of splendour, but enveloped in the brilliance which goes with such a disposition, and in the moral worth inherent in countless works and creations for the happiness and edification of others. A priest of his art, whose proclaimed teaching was not only represented in his beautiful pictures, but was also lived and tested in his eighty years of wandering the earth.

--The last paragraph of Margaret Howitt’s Friedrich Overbeck

Art historians and critics of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century, following Overbeck’s lead, represent him as a painter whose artistic production is determined by his religious devotion.² While there is no strong consensus among these writers concerning Overbeck’s place in the canon (some believe him to be central to the revival of modern German painting, others regard him as a kind of aberration in the history of art), it is generally agreed that he and his work are informed by the idea of purity and its associations.


²For a brief survey of Overbeck’s critical reception, see Andreas Blühm, "Herr vergieb ihnen, sie wissen nicht was sie thun,' Overbeck und seine Kritiker," Johannes Friedrich Overbeck, pp.63-79.
The fact that Overbeck's presentation of himself is so consistent with the way in which he is represented in the writings of critics and historians during his lifetime suggests a reciprocity between history and historiography at the time when the discipline of art history was being formed. A self-fulfilling prophecy is at work here: Overbeck fulfills the expectations that he and his critics create. The repetition of the same topoi after his death and into the twentieth century only solidifies the view of Overbeck as the monk-artist. But while this consistency works in Overbeck's favour on one level, in naturalizing his monk-artist persona, on another level it works against him. Historians and critics frequently defame him and his work, and they do so using the same criteria that define him as the monk-artist.

My discussion of the critical reception of Overbeck's monk-artist persona is divided into three parts. The first, treating of Overbeck's reception during his lifetime, will focus on the writings of Athanasius Raczynski, Ernst Förster, Franz Kugler, and Friedrich Theodor Vischer. These writers see Overbeck as youthful and undeveloped in relation to the rise of modern German painting, and as weak and feminine in relation to the art of the past. In the second section, I examine the literature after Overbeck's death (1869-1920). This section is divided between his supporters and those authors, mostly writing general histories of art, who are critical of him. The latter continue the tradition of the
earlier writers in describing Overbeck and his art as idealist and anachronistic, but they expand the list of characteristics to include "inorganic," "limited," and "foreign." The final section is dedicated to the literature of the 1920s and 1930s. In this period, Overbeck continues to be described in the terms just stated, but there is an unprecedented harshness to the criticism. With the development of a German art history based primarily on racial concerns, Overbeck and Cornelius are replaced by Friedrich and Runge as the leaders of German Romantic painting, and the work of Franz Pforr is lent new importance. What we see in the literature from approximately 1840 to 1940 is Overbeck’s marginalization with respect to the canon, a marginalization that has as much if not more to do with his ideological stance, as developed through his constructed identity, than with the quality of his art.

(1) OVERBECK CRITICISM DURING HIS LIFETIME

Of all the painters connected to the Brotherhood of St. Luke, Overbeck is the one whose identity is most firmly connected to the movement. He is the essential Nazarene. As early as 1836, Franz Kugler writes that "Overbeck is the only one who took up this direction with conviction, developed it fully with artistic ingenuity, and preserved it with faithful
Similar sentiments continue into the twentieth century. Karl Woermann believes that "Overbeck embodied the ideal [Urbild] of Nazareneness," and according to Richard Hamann, Overbeck was "the one most earnest in his Nazarene convictions, without wavering." The idea that Overbeck embodies "Nazareneness" is based upon the perceived congruence between his pure life and art. Johann Nepomuk Sepp, a supporter of the painter, writes that Overbeck's "artistic creations are the pure expression of his being, he


experienced them all inwardly and animated them with the
breath of his devout piety."⁵ Similarly Cornelius Gurlitt, a
fierce critic of the Nazarenes, writes that "[n]o one has
dared to doubt his pure piety, the sincerity of his
conviction, or to represent his mildness and devotion to
faith as inauthentic or contrived."⁶

Overbeck’s characterization as the paradigmatic Nazarene
determines the place accorded him in the development of
modern German painting. Because his art is seen as co-
extensive with that of the Nazarene movement, and because
this movement is relegated to the early, youthful stage in
the revival of painting in Germany, Overbeck’s art is
frequently seen as static and non-progressive. Only rarely
do art historians distinguish between different phases of his
career. Rather, he is usually seen as an artist who found

⁵[Johann Nepomuk] Sepp, "Friedrich Overbeck.
Gedächtnissrede in der Künstlerversammlung zu München,"
Allgemeine Zeitung 359/360 (1869) [separately published
version], p.11: "Overbecks Kunstschöpfungen sind der reine
Ausdruck seines Wesens, er hat sie alle innerlich durchlebt
und sie mit dem Hauche seiner gottseligen Frömmigkeit
beseelt." (The separately published version of the article I
consulted is in the archives of the Hansestadt Lübeck:
Familienarchive Overbeck, 19.3, p.84.)

⁶Cornelius Gurlitt, Die deutsche Kunst des neunzehnten
Jahrhunderts, ihre Ziele und Taten, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Georg
Bondi, 1907), p.209: "Sein Schaffen ist Gebet, Gebet um das
eigene Heil und im Sinne der guten Werke um das Heil
anderer....Keiner hat es je gewagt, an seiner reinen
Frömmigkeit, an der Lauterkeit seiner in Überzeugung
schlummernden Seele zu zweifeln, seine Milde und Hingabe an
den Glauben als unecht, gemacht hinzustellen."
his style early and never strayed from it. This is especially the case in the first history of modern German painting, Athanasius Graf Raczyński's *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Kunst*.  

(1.1) RACZYŃSKI

While Raczyński is a great supporter of Romantic painting in Germany, he nevertheless shares many assumptions with his enlightenment predecessors. Firstly, he believes in absolute truth and beauty:

> I believe in positive beauty, I believe in eternal truths. There is something higher than fashion and its teaching: unchanging laws and the appearance of nature, which initiate us into the intentions of the creator. These eternal miracles repeat themselves unceasingly, please us daily, carry our souls to the infinite, awaken the love of God, disclose the beautiful, and enable our souls to receive it. Even the sublime in art has never surpassed nature and truth.\(^9\)

---

\(^7\) Howitt divides Overbeck's career into seven periods. In most other examinations of Overbeck's work, the only distinction made is between his early and later works, the former having artistic value and the latter being products of formulas developed in his youth.


\(^9\) Athanasius Graf Raczyński, *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Kunst*, tr. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen (Berlin, 1836-41), I, pp.3-4: "Ich glaube an das positive
Secondly, he conceives of the history of art in terms of a "conventional organic paradigm of blossoming and decay."10 And finally, like Winckelmann and Goethe, he believes that art, while expressing something eternal, is nevertheless tied to its specific period, and that the present does not afford great possibilities for the arts: "In a time like ours, where there is pride, impatience, a lack of perseverance and constancy, the pulling eddy of delusion, the abhorrence of every restraint and constraint, these models of artists and art teaching [the antique for sculpture, and Raphael and Michelangelo for painting] are not to be recommended highly enough."11

What distinguishes Raczyński from many enlightenment writers is his expansion of the canon to include Christian Schöne, ich glaube an die ewigen Wahrheiten. Es gibt etwas Höheres, als die Mode und ihre Lehren: es sind die unveränderlichen Gesetze und die Erscheinungen der Natur, welche uns in die Absichten des Schöpfers einweihen. Diese ewigen Wunder wiederholen sich unaufhörlich, erfreuen uns täglich, erheben unsere Seele zum Unendlichen, erwecken die Liebe Gottes, offenbaren das Schöne, und machen die Seele dafür empfänglich. Selbst das Erhabene in der Kunst hat niemals die Natur und die Wahrheit überschritten."


monuments. For Raczynski, there are two great directions in art: one is the model of heroic poetry, a pagan model, especially suitable for sculpture; the other is less powerful, but as sublime, carrying the stamp of Christian faith, which is an "expression of a pure, sweet, child-like feeling."

Neither one nor the other is distant from truth....The first copied the beauty of the figure in its original perfection; the other faith and love. In both these times and in both these model directions of art, the execution, even if the thought of the artist takes a bold swing, is never deformed through carelessness and arrogance.12

But Raczynski nevertheless privileges the classical over the Christian. He believes that in the fifteenth century, painting "was animated with pure feeling," but that it had not yet freed itself completely from "what was lacking in the

12Ibid., I, p.6: "Das Höchste in der bildende Kunst gehört bisher ausschliesslich diesen beiden Richtungen an: die eine, besonders der Bildhauerkunst eigenthümliche, ist das Abbild der alten Heldendichtung, sie schafft dem Geiste des Heidenthums entsprechende Gestalten und Ausdruck; die Andere, minder gewaltige, aber gleich erhaben, trägt das Gepräge des Christlichen Glaubens, aus welchem sie hervorgegangen ist, sie ist der Ausdruck reiner, zarter kindlicher Gefühle. Weder die eine, noch die andere entfernt sich von der Wahrheit; sie haben sich dem Erhabensten, das die Natur darbietet, möglichst angenähert. Die erste hat die Schönheit der Gestalt in ihrer ursprünglichen Vollkraft abgebildet; die andere den Glauben und die Liebe. In diesen beiden Zeitaltern und in diesen beiden vorbildlichen Richtungen der Kunst ist die Ausführung, selbst wenn der Gedanke des Künstlers einen kühnen Aufschwung nimmt, niemals durch Nachlässigkeit und Anmaassung entstellt." Raczynski is following the classical/romantic opposition developed in the writings of Schiller and Schlegel. For a discussion of this opposition, see Hans Eichner, "Germany/Romantische--Romantik-Romantiker," "Romantic" and its Cognates: The European History of a Word, ed. Hans Eichner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp.98-156.
previous centuries." In the art of this time, "quietness, stillness, devotion ruled."13 Raczynski continues:

The feeling which animates the painter of this time came from a fresh heart, enthusiastic for beauty; but it was a gentle enthusiasm, which, if it strayed from truth, did so in a graceful way. It represented the amiable errors of youth, which all came to fruition in the full sense from feeling. Such painters were Fra Angelico from Fiesole, Masaccio, Giovanni Bellini, Titian's teacher, Perugino, and above all others, Raphael in his youth, and the amiable Francesco Francia.14

After its youth, art then enjoyed its period of maturity:

The most shining age of painting was under Leo X of the house of Medici, Francis I, Karl V, and Cosmas Medici, the first Grand Duke of Florence....In this time painting reached its highest level of perfection. Its works constitute the greatest and happiest exertion of this art. Style in all its beauty and purity, in the correctness and perfection of every aspect of art, belongs exclusively to this age.15

13Ibid., I, p.18: "In diesem Jahrhundert befreite die Malerei sich noch nicht gänzlich von den Mängeln der vorhergehenden Jahrhunderte: aber sie war durch ein reines Gefühl beseelt; sie war bestimmt und unbefangen. Die Ruhe, die Stille, die Andacht herrschen im Allgemeinen in den Hervorbringungen dieser Zeit."

14Ibid.: "Das Gefühl, welches die Maler dieser Zeit beseelte, kam aus einem frischen, für das Schöne begeisterten Herzen; es war aber eine sanfte Begeisterung, welche, wenn sie sich von der Wahrheit entfernte, es auf eine anmuthige Weise that. Es waren die liebenswürdigen Verirrungen der Jugend, die alle dem Gefühl vollen Sinne zu Gute kamen. Solche Maler waren Beato Angelico von Fiesole, Johannes Bellino, der Lehrer Tizians, Perugino, und vor allen anderen Rafael in seiner Jugendzeit, und der liebenswürdige Francesco Francia."

Raczynski’s ranking of Classical art over Christian is in part due to an organic model of the development of art that he takes for granted, a model that he also uses for the modern period.

Raczynski’s statement, quoted above, in which he professes pessimism concerning the state of contemporary art, ends with the suggestion that German painting might be able to regain its high status through imitation. Such is the case with Overbeck, who, in his imitation of pre-Raphaelite painters, has helped to put German painting back on the proper path.

We have seen more German artists successfully treat religious subjects, which would be worthy of a time when religion was almost the only subject for artistic inspiration and the air was so to speak impregnated with the mysteries of Catholic belief; Overbeck above all, who is gifted with a pure child-like heart, has done miracles in this area: but many others have stumbled at this hurdle, and namely those for whom this apparent striving was a calculation of self-love or self-interest. Religious zeal is only beautiful when it is true; when it is deceitful, it creates nothing in art; it is then a tarried spring.16

______________________________

Schönheit und Reinheit, die Richtigkeit und Vollendung in allen Theilen der Kunst gehören ausschliesslich diesem Zeitalter an."

16Ibid., II, p.190: "Wir haben mehrere Deutsche Maler religiöse Gegenstände mit einem Erfolg behandein gesehen, der eines Zeitalters würdig wäre, wo die Religion fast der einzige Gegenstand der künstlerischen Begeisterung und die Luft so zu sagen mit den Geheimnissen des katholischen Glaubens geschwängert war; Overbeck vor allen, der mit einem kindlich reinen Herzen Begabte, hat Wunder hierin gethan: aber viele andere sind an dieser Klippe gescheitert, und vornämlich diejenigen, bei denen dieses scheinbare Streben eine Berechnung der Eigenliebe oder des Eigennutzes war. Der religiöse Eifer ist nur schön, wenn er wahr ist: ist es
Raczynski here uses the commonplace whereby there must be a correspondance between the religious artist's life and art. But more importantly, he describes Overbeck, as he did the pre-Raphaelite painters, as child-like, and it is this characteristic that places Overbeck in the early stages of the development of modern German art. "Why is childhood so lovely, so charming?," Raczynski asks. "Because it is the picture of hope." Overbeck's painting may be praiseworthy, but, like quattrocento painting, it lacks the perfection of a more mature art. Overbeck's fresco in Assisi, The Vision of St. Francis (fig.39), is according to Raczynski "without a doubt among the immortal monuments of the art of our time;" but it is deficient, especially in the colouring, which requires "the conception of a forceful material life," something that "is not at [Overbeck's] disposal." Raczynski concludes that the "specific religious and moral intentions of this honourable man are not compatible with the development of an entirely comprehensive art."}

heuchlerisch, so schafft er nichts in der Kunst; er ist dann eine versiegte Quelle."

17Ibid., I, p.11: "Warum ist die Kindheit so lieblich, so anziehend? Weil sie das Bild der Hoffnung ist."

18Ibid., I, pp.50-51: "Dieses Bild erscheint mir der Gipfel von Overbecks Kunst, und gehört, ohne allen Zweifel, zu den unsterblichen Kunstdenkmälern unserer Zeit. Ausserdem fertigte dieser Künstler eine ganze Reihe vortrefflicher Handzeichnungen, in welchen er sich überhaupt am grössten zeigt. Der Grund dieser Erscheinung ist wahrscheinlich in dem Mangel der Schule zu suchen, welche allein eine gleichmässige Ausbildung der verschiedenen künstlerischen Fähigkeiten hervorbringt; diese fehlt jedoch gänzlich in der
While Raczynski does not believe that his century has yet witnessed the great blossoming of art he hopes for, he does suggest that Peter Cornelius will be able to bring it about:

I know no height of art, however sublime it may be, which Cornelius would not like to or could not reach....Cornelius marks [art's] rebirth in history; he is the beginning of a new age, and in Germany this name will become known, perhaps even above all others, as one of the greatest geniuses of painting.\(^{19}\)

In comparison to Cornelius, in whose art "the imperfection... lies only in the area of execution," Overbeck, Raczynski

\(^{19}\)Ibid., II, p.163: "Ich kenne keine Höhe der Kunst, wie erhaben sie immer sein mag, welche Cornelius nicht erreichen möchte oder könnte....Cornelius wird ihre Wiedergeburt in der Geschichte bezeichnen; er ist der Anfang eines neuen Zeitalters, und in Deutschland wird dieser Name vielleicht immer vor allen anderen genannt werden, als der des größten Genie's der Malerei." Frank Büttner questions Raczynski's optimism on this point: "His expectation that German art in the very near future should experience its most brilliant period, must have appeared to the following generation as a drastically mistaken judgement." (Büttner, "Athenasius Graf Raczynski," p.58: "Seine Erwartung, daß die deutsche Kunst schon in allernächster Zukunft ihr glänzendstes Zeitalter erleben sollte, mußte der unmittelbar folgenden Generation als ein krasses Fehlurteil erscheinen.")
implies, works according to a faulty principle. Unlike Cornelius, who goes through his Nazarene phase before developing a more mature style of German painting, Overbeck is wholly defined by the Nazarene movement and never matures beyond it.

(1.2) FÖRSTER

This view of Overbeck continues in the chapter of Raczynski's Geschichte entitled "Die deutsche Kunst in Rom," written by Ernst Förster, art historian and Cornelius biographer. Like Raczynski, Förster believes that the rebirth of modern German painting began with the Brotherhood of St. Luke. Concerning the Bartholdy frescoes, he writes:

Every time I stepped over the threshold of the small room I felt as if I was standing before the cradle out of which the new German art, that child, born in poverty but rich in holy spirit, appeared to me with eyes full of life.21

The rebirth of every great artistic period is signalled, according to Förster, by the arrival of two artists who complement one another.

---

20Ibid., I, p.52: "[Cornelius'] Geist ist so universeller Art, dass es schwer ist, zu sagen, in welchem Felde der dichterischen Darstellung derselbe vorzüglicher sei. Die Mängel seiner Kunst liegen allein im Gebiete der Ausführung...."

It is a phenomenon which often repeats itself in the history of the fine arts, that in certain epochs as a rule two personalities, which are mutually oppositional and mutually complementary from one another, step in front of all others, as if against the natural order, so as to unite into one the missions of art.22

The theme of two individuals merging to produce a complete being is common in Romantic theory.23 Friedrich Schlegel, for example, saw Jean Paul and Ludwig Tieck as complementary opposites, in that "each one formulates, better than the other, some part of the same single doctrine."24 For Förster, such is the case with Overbeck and Cornelius: "Cornelius was born a Catholic with the soul of a reformer, while Overbeck was born a Protestant with the soul of a Catholic." Furthermore, fate assigned them complementary spheres of activity: Cornelius, the stronger one, was called back to the fatherland to engage in the present, while Overbeck, "the quieter, more withdrawn one, stayed behind in Rome to live an almost monastic existence."25

22Ibid., III, p.324: "Es ist eine Erscheinung, die sich in der Geschichte der schönen Künste häufig wiederholt, dass in bestimmt ausgesprochenen Epochen in der Regel zwei Persönlichkeiten mit gegenseitigem, scheinbaren Widerspruch und gegenseitiger Ergänzung vor den Andern als Höhepunkte hervortreten, gleich als ob es gegen den Organismus der Seele wäre, die Aufgaben der Kunst für eine einzige zusammenzufassen."


24Ibid., p.165.

remains in Rome, according to Förster, in an attempt to preserve the purity of life attained in St. Isidoro. This opposition between Overbeck and Cornelius emphasizes Overbeck's fidelity to the Nazarene programme.

In Raczyński's Geschichte, Förster is somewhat complimentary of Overbeck's art, describing it as possessing gentleness, tenderness, and spirituality (Sanftheit, Zartheit, Innigkeit).26 In his Geschichte der deutschen Kunst of 1855, Förster undergoes a rather drastic change of opinion and now frowns upon the Catholic and revivalist features of Nazarene art. It was "an unclear feeling" (ein unklares Gefühl) that led these painters to make a "life-long bonding" (Lebensverband) with the faith of the middle ages.27

The double mistake which lies at the foundation of every conversion is not difficult to recognize in its unfortunate consequences. One cannot appropriate an entire worldview. Just as Thorwaldsen could not successfully return his art to polytheism, so a citizen of the nineteenth century cannot acquire fourteenth-century eyes.

...The second mistake was that medieval art was successful in its conformity to the ruling ideas of the day....[A]ttention to the ruling ideas of our day and creative power must come diligently from itself, which is the thing that made medieval

26Raczyński, Geschichte, III, p.327.

The two criticisms levelled by Förster, that of being anachronistic (trying to see with fourteenth-century eyes) and that of growing unnaturally (straying from one’s own Zeitgeist), are developed more fully later in the century.

Förster’s reversal of opinion concerning Overbeck can best be seen in his discussion of Overbeck’s Triumph of Religion in the Arts (fig.32). In his own Geschichte of 1855, Förster quotes large passages of his description of the painting from Raczynski’s Geschichte, but changes the order of the description. Rather than moving from the earthly to the heavenly figures, as he does in 1841, Förster now goes from the heavenly to the earthly. Rather than raising the viewer to the religious realm, he brings the viewer down to earth, so to speak. In Raczynski’s Geschichte, Förster praises Overbeck’s work and states that even before this painting was completed, Ludwig I, King of Bavaria, was so

\[28\] Ibid., p.171: "Der doppelte Irrthum, welcher jenen Uebertritten zu Grunde liegt, ist samt seinen nachtheiligen Folgen nicht unschwer zu erkennen. Die Gesammtanschauung kann man sich nicht aneignen, und so wenig Thorwaldsen zu Gunsten seiner Kunst zum Polytheismus zurückgreifen konnte, so wenig konnte ein Bürger des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts sich die Augen des vierzehnten einsetzen lassen.

...Der zweite Irrthum war: das, was der mittelalterlichen Kunst in Uebereinstimmung mit den herrschenden Ideen gelungen war, diesen selbst zuzuschreiben, anstatt der Macht der Uebereinstimmung; woraus von selbst die Achtung vor den herrschenden Ideen unserer Zeit und die gestaltende Kraft fließen mußte, die die mittelalterliche Kunst so groß gemacht."

impressed with its beauty that he sent Overbeck the Order of St. Michael. In 1855, Förster fails to mention this fact and, furthermore, charges the work with "a complete monotony and lifelessness [that] rules in the motives and gestures, which, due to their details, lessens, rather than increases interest." 

(1.3) KUGLER

Like Förster, Franz Kugler goes from a supportive to a more critical position vis-à-vis Overbeck's work. His short notices provide a good overview of Overbeck's critical reception from the early 1830s until Kugler's death in 1858. From his vantage point within the Prussian Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Education, and Medicine (the so-called Kultusministerium), where he was responsible for artistic matters and which he entered in 1843, Kugler closely observed, as Peter Paret points out, "the changes in character that historical painting in Germany had undergone since the Napoleonic era, and did not hesitate to define the goals for its continuing development." 

In a note of 1833 on a lithograph by J.C. Koch after 

---

30Raczynski, Geschichte, III, p.338.

31Förster, Geschichte, p.193: "Dagegen herrscht eine fühlbare Monotonie und Leblosigkeit in den Motiven und Geberden, was beim Eingehen auf die Einzelheiten die Theilnahme schwächt, anstatt sie zu steigern."

Overbeck's Assisi fresco, Kugler writes that the "draughtsman of the lithograph in question has aptly reproduced the precision and tenderness, the simplicity and piety, which is in Overbeck's work itself." And in the same year, he writes of Spekter's lithograph after Overbeck's *The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 30):

From Overbeck's paintings we derive a sense of peace, as is conveyed only by the creations of a pious Christian past: every great, old ecclesiastical style, which the master follows, already speaks to us as a holy tradition. Nevertheless Overbeck is sufficiently independent and finished, as an artist, that every figure created by him does not appear, as is the case for every old master, without meaning in itself, without characteristics or independent life, only as a member of a greater whole; in his work, everything has life and at the same time character.

By 1836, Kugler is less complimentary of Overbeck's

---


work, accusing it of being of a different world, of failing
to take part in the progress of the present, and of lacking
energy. His criticism becomes even sharper in the 1840s.
Concerning Overbeck's Triumph, he writes that it is "too
outwardly conventional in tone, too dull in movement, too
sober in thought; yet it always remains individual in

35 Kugler writes: "Overbeck's genius found its home on a
far-away, peaceful island and thence he sent us his
greetings, which move us like an old beautiful fairy tale.
But also only like a fairy tale. The interests of the
present have become great and significant; we long to see
before us life in its complete truth and greatness, we do not
want to stand apart shyly and resignedly from the storms of
life, but rather we want to be led straight to the summit,--
and Overbeck neglected to take part in such activities and to
attain the crown that was prepared for him. He stays near to
the old master Fra Angelico--not copying the child-like
deficiencies of his forms, for there is much more of the
complete beauty of Raphael in his figures--but it is as much
a deep peace, a quiet purity of character which speaks from
his pictures, as the lack of energy, when it comes to decided
animation in the handling of the representation of
significant characters and passionate moments." (Kugler,
"Fragmentarisches über die Berliner Kunstaustellung vom J.
1836," Museum 30 [1836], Kleine Schriften, p.177: "Overbeck's
Genius hat auf einer fernen frießseligen Insel seine Heimat
gefunden, und sendet uns von dort seine Grüsse herüber, die
wie ein altes schönes Märchen unsern Sinn berühren. Aber
auch nur wie ein Märchen. Die Interessen der Gegenwart sind
gross und bedeutend geworden; wir verlangen das Leben in
seiner vollen Wahrheit und Grösse vor uns zu sehen, wir
wollen nicht schüchtern und entsagend den Stürmen des Lebens
aus dem Wege geleitet, sondern mitten hindurch auf dessen
Gipfelpunkt geführt werden,--und Overbeck hat es versäumt, an
solcher Wirksamkeit Theil zu nehmen und den Kranz zu
erringen, der für ihm bereit war. Er steht dem alten Meister
Fra Giovanni da Fiesole nahe,--nicht als ob er das kindlich
Mangelhafte in dessen Formen nachahmte, vielmehr schwebt ein
Hauch der vollkommenen Schönheit Raphaels über seinen
Gestalten,--aber es ist ebenso der tiefe Friede, die stille
Lauterkeit des Gemüthes, die aus seinen Bildern sprechen,
ebenso der Mangel an Energie, wo es sich um entschiedene
Belebung, um die Darstellung bedeutender Charaktere und
leidenschaftvoller Momente handelt.")
contrast to the meaningful total." This is the same type of criticism that he levelled at pre-Raphaelite painting in his positive evaluation of Overbeck’s *Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (quoted above), according to which Overbeck had overcome such deficiencies. Finally, in a notice of 1846 on an engraving after Overbeck’s *Ego dilecto meo, et dilectus meus mihi* (fig.40), Kugler suggests that Overbeck has become a Mannerist:

we search in vain in the abstract beauty of [the Virgin’s] facial characteristics for that inner warmth which comes from a personal character, from a complete feeling of the moment. Being satisfied with general schemas often works against the artist in the end, as it leads him directly away from nature, i.e. from truth, and this is what has occurred here. Following only the harmony of line, Overbeck has given the Holy Virgin a neck of immoderate length, like the one possessed by Parmigianino’s notorious Madonna with the long neck. I’m sorry that I feel this way about so beautiful a work in such an exhibition. But one must confront a false principle, one that is not without influence, just at the moment when it tries to validate itself.37


Once again we have with Kugler a reversal of opinion. From a painter of simplicity and piety, who works in the old ecclesiastical style and surpasses the quattrocento masters, Overbeck becomes a painter who shies away from nature and who produces Mannerist works based on a "false principle."

(1.4) VISCHER

Förster's and Kugler's change of heart regarding Overbeck's work took place around the time that the latter exhibited his *Triumph of Religion in the Arts* (fig.32) and published his commentary. The change in Overbeck's critical reception is perhaps best illustrated in Friedrich Theodor Vischer's sharp attack on this painting.

In his 1841 essay on Overbeck's *Triumph*, Vischer connects Overbeck's depiction of the female figure to his feminine nature, a connection that had only been hinted at before. In Meyer's and Goethe's "Neu-deutsche religiöspatriotische Kunst," the one mention of Overbeck is when the

---

authors state that the painter, following Italian models, "knows how to communicate to his figures, especially the female ones, much charm and sweetness." That Overbeck is described as a painter of the female form does not necessarily identify him and his style as feminine. But Vischer does just this in his description of Overbeck's representation of the Madonna in the Triumph: "Here Overbeck's mild feminine genius shows itself in its element." He further comments on Overbeck's relation to Raphael:

Raphael had at that time and from the beginning more masculinity and completeness than Overbeck can and will ever reach. His genius is that of a blossoming virgin, whose bud is not yet entirely broken, whose forms pause in embarrassment at the threshold of manhood.

While Raczynski viewed Overbeck as not fully developed, Vischer maligns him for being prepubescent.

In his polemic against Overbeck's Triumph, Vischer


40Ibid., p.28: "[A]ber Raffael hatte doch schon damals und von Anfang an mehr Männlichkeit und Sättigung, als Overbeck jemals erreichen kann und will. Sein Genius ist eine aufblühende Jungfrau, deren Knospe noch nicht ganz gebrochen ist, deren Formen verschämt vor der Schwelle zur Mannbarkeit innehalten."
condemns Overbeck’s painting primarily because it is an allegory. Vischer’s rather sarcastic remarks near the end of the essay make this clear: "But how is it possible? Did his brush slip? Or--stop, I have it, it comes to me as if the scales had fallen from my eyes, there is something behind it, a meaning, a thought, an idea--it is an allegory."  

Vischer, in derogatorily labelling the Triumph an allegory, is using a distinction between symbol and allegory developed by an earlier generation of writers from Goethe to Schelling. In this tradition, the meaning of an allegory is determined as much by something outside the work of art (usually a text or doctrine), as by the work itself. The text or doctrine mediates between the work and its meaning. In a symbolic representation, on the other hand, the signified does not exist outside of the sign. The meaning of the symbol is an integral part of the work itself. The preference of symbol to allegory in most early nineteenth-century writers stems from the fact that allegory, because it consists of that which is finite and expressible, has a meaning which is completed and dead. Symbol, on the other hand,

---

41Ibid., p.34: "Oder--doch halt, ich hab’s, es fällt mir wie Schuppen vom Auge, dahinter ist etwas, ein Sinn, ein Gedanke, eine Idee--es ist eine Allegorie." For a discussion of Vischer’s use of the term allegory, see Monika Wagner, Allegorie und Geschichte (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1989), pp.14ff.

42The following discussion of the allegory/symbol opposition in Romantic theory is indebted to Todorov, Theories of the Symbol, pp.198ff.
hand, consists of that which is inexpressible and infinite, and so its meaning is evolving. Overbeck's Triumph, according to Vischer, is an allegory, because its meaning is determined as much by Overbeck's Catholic doctrine as by the painting itself. The viewer is confronted by a work with a set meaning, rather than being called upon to create meaning.

In his essay, Vischer is deriving terms not only from the earlier writers mentioned above, but also from Hegel. For Vischer, Overbeck puts an idea into pictorial form without thinking in pictorial language.

That distinguished word, idea, has raised many ghosts. 'Art must represent ideas.' Entirely false!...Art should be the outward realization of the ideal conception of the imagination, in which the idea is united with itself and inseparable from the material body.

Here Vischer is following Hegel, who argued that philosophy, religion, and art all have the same content, Absolute Spirit, but that they differ "in the forms in which they bring home to consciousness their object, the Absolute." For Hegel, as for Vischer, the work of art is an embodiment of Absolute

---

43While Hegel does not oppose the terms allegory and symbol in his Aesthetics (Todorov, Theories, p.219n10), his conception of art is in general agreement with this opposition.


Spirit in sensuous form. The artist’s aim is "to achieve the interpenetration of the rational content and the external shape." According to Vischer, Overbeck’s Triumph, because it is the pictorial translation of an idea, bears the same meaning as the painter’s written commentary. There is no difference between idea and image. Hegel would have questioned such an enterprise:

To embark on art and poetry with an ideal is always very suspect, for the artist has to create out of the abundance of life and not out of the abundance of abstract generalities, since, while the medium of philosophy’s production is thought, art’s is actual external configurations.

A Hegelian reading of Vischer’s essay is important for understanding why he claims that the work fails to communicate through its formal means; it is also important for understanding his other criticisms. Because it conveys a predetermined concept and is not a representation, according to Vischer, the painting fails to communicate ideas relevant to its time. His attack on Overbeck’s Triumph is as much an attack on allegorical painting in general as it is an attack on Overbeck’s very Catholic allegory.

I now go to the root of the matter and say: the principle of the Reformation, only incompletely set up in the church, carried out by science and by worldly culture, emptied itself completely of the Olympus of the middle ages once and for all. Our God is an immanent God; his home is everywhere and nowhere; his body is the entire world, his true present the spirit of man....Here churchly-

---

46 Ibid., pp.282-283.

47 Ibid., p.281.
Following principles set down by David Friedrich Strauß and others, Vischer, the Young Hegelian, attacks Overbeck for believing in a Christian God when in fact the next stage of development of Absolute Spirit has been reached: God is no longer transcendent, but immanent.49

Overbeck’s attempt to reclaim an earlier era, according to Vischer, can only lead to failure. The painting of a Madonna, which was possible for the old masters, "is for us an impossibility."50 Overbeck’s historicizing artistic language does not have the masculine strength of its original formulation:

The saints which surround Maria are themselves depicted in a shy, pious tone. Much beauty...

48Vischer, "Overbecks Triumph," pp.24-25: "Ich fasse die Sache jetzt an der Wurzel und sage: das Prinzip der Reformation, in der Kirche selbst nur unvollständig aufgestellt, von der Wissenschaft, von der Weltbildung durchgeführt, hat den Olymp des Mittelalters ein für allemal rein ausgeleert. Unser Gott ist ein immanenter Gott; seine Wohnung ist überall und nirgends; sein Leib ist nur die ganze Welt, seine wahre Gegenwart der Menschengeist....Hierdurch ist die kirchlich-religiöse Malerei, die man sonst als den höchsten Zweig der historischen Malerei ansah, offenbar von dieser Stelle vertrieben, ja sie ist aufgehoben."


but...nothing powerful. The heads of David and Solomon are reminiscent of the excellent figures in Raphael's Disputa in the upper semicircle, but the contour is missing, they are flat and tame. This is castrated Raphael....Here we have neither Raphael's high, masculine freedom nor the strong, typical strictness of the old masters, but a neatness, cleanliness, preciousness, cleverness, in which masculinity is everywhere missing.\(^{51}\)

Vischer's characterization of Overbeck as unmanly should be seen within the context of his aesthetic theory, in which "he assigned to beauty and manliness the task of preventing chaos."\(^{52}\) For Vischer, the true artist is in touch with the Absolute Spirit and thus has the masculine strength and power to put forward an art that is relevant. Overbeck, because he copies an older style and preaches an out-of-date Catholic doctrine, has no such strength. His art is that of a "castrated Raphael."

---

\(^{51}\)Ibid., p.31: "Die Heiligen, welche Maria umgeben, sind in demselben schüchternen, frommen Tone gehalten. Viel Schönes; wie trunken andächtig der malende Lucas! Aber nichts, was trifft und packt, nichts Mächtiges. Die Männerköpfe Davids und Salomos erinnern an die herrlichen Gestalten auf Raffaels Theologie in dem oberen Halbkreise, aber die Schneide fehlt, sie sind matt und zahm. Es ist kastrierter Raffael....So hat man weder Raffaels hohe, männliche Freiheit, noch die kräftige typische Strenge der Älteren, sondern jene eigene Reinlichkeit, Sauberkeit, Kostbarkeit, Gewiegtheit, der die Ecken der Männlichkeit fehlen."

(2) OVERBECK CRITICISM AFTER HIS DEATH (1869-1920)

The critical reception of Overbeck’s work, after his death in 1869, can be divided into two categories. Authors writing biographies and eulogies praise Overbeck for his consistency of belief and for his continuous striving after a more moral (and Catholic) art and world. Other authors, most of whom are writing general histories of art, are more concerned with Overbeck’s contribution to the art of the nineteenth century. These authors, following in the path of Raczynski, Förster, Kugler, and Vischer, continue the construction of Overbeck’s identity as undeveloped, feminine, and non-German.

(2.1) OVERBECK’S CHAMPIONS

Overbeck’s identity as the monk-artist is unquestioningly reiterated in a series of articles and books published in the two decades after his death. The unconditional praise of Overbeck in these sources is certainly related to the writers’ agendas and to the circumstances of publication. Johann Nepomuk Sepp’s "Friedrich Overbeck" (1869) was a commemorative speech given to the Künstlerversammlung zu München on the occasion of Overbeck’s death. Franz Binder’s four-part article, "Zur Erinnerung an Friedrich Overbeck," (1872) and Paul Keppler’s "Zum Centenarium der Geburt Friedrich Overbecks" (1889) were both published in the Historisch-politische Blätter für das
katholische Deutschland, a Catholic journal, which was founded by Joseph Görres and which Binder edited. Binder also acted as editor for the two-volume documentary biography of Overbeck (1886) by Margaret Howitt, a protestant who converted to Catholicism.

The main theme of these Catholic writers is the agreement between Overbeck's pure life and work. Thus, Sepp states that Overbeck's work is a "pure expression of his being." And Howitt summarizes the Nazarene artistic doctrine as follows: the artist's "inspiration must create from the living sources of truth and holiness," and he must banish everything that is "impure." Moreover she characterizes Overbeck as having a pure disposition ("reines Gemüt") and the mission of the Brotherhood of St. Luke as a purification and elevation of art ("eine[] Läuterung und Erhebung der Kunst"). Similar sentiments are voiced by Binder, who writes:

53 Sepp, "Friedrich Overbeck," p.11: "Overbecks Kunstschöpfungen sind der reine Ausdruck seines Wesens er hat sie alle innerlich durchlebt und sie mit dem Hauche seiner gottseligen Frömmigkeit beseelt."

54 Howitt I, p.252: "Als Vorbedingung galt ihnen, Herz und Seele zu bilden, in der Erkenntniss, daß ein Künstler, der auf seine Mitmenschen wirken wolle, seine Inspiration aus der lebendigen Quelle der Wahrheit und Heiligkeit schöpfen müsse. Alles Unreine sollte verbrannt, die leeren Formen sollten wieder mit geweihtem Gehalte belebt werden."

55 Howitt I, p.284; I, p.94. She also asks rhetorically: "Didn't they [the Brothers of St. Luke] endure poverty, striving nobly after purity?" (Howitt I, p.504: "Hatten sie nicht in Armut ausgeb<highlight>harrt, nach Reinheit ehrlich ge<highlight>trachtet?")
Overbeck stands alone as an artistic character through the beautiful accord between life and art, through the pure unbroken harmony between the man's way of thinking and the artist's way of creating, through the pleasant inner and outer continuity of his entire career, the crystal-clear outpouring of his being.  

Binder's four-part article contains the correspondence between Overbeck and Emilie Linder of Basel, his patron and an artist in her own right. Overbeck's letters, according to Binder, serve as "a view into his inner life, into his thought and will, the creations and prayer of a Christian artist in the most distinguished sense." The pure, Catholic nature of Overbeck's art is reflected in his paintings and in his letters: "As his work characterizes the artist, so his letters do the man." And just as constancy characterizes Overbeck's pursuit of his original artistic direction, which he took "up with ardour, following it


58Ibid., p.858: "So war seine Kunst. Und so war der Mann selber. Wie seine Werke den Künstler, so charackterisiren seine Briefe den Menschen."
through to its consequences," so a consistency characterizes his handwriting.\(^{59}\) Overbeck's letters were written in a "strong, pleasantly free and clean hand, which changed only a little in old age."\(^{60}\) The agreement between written word and painted image is also pointed out in Keppler's essay. Switching from the third to second person in his praise of Overbeck in order to make his message more personal, Keppler writes: "For not only through images, but also through the word, not only with the brush, but also with the pen, you have worked for the regeneration of art."\(^{61}\) Overbeck's work and life, his "example" as Keppler calls it, are co-extensive: "his art was he himself."\(^{62}\)

\(^{59}\)Ibid., p.574: "[Overbeck] ist wie wenig Andere sich selber treu geblieben, er hat die ursprüngliche Richtung, wie er sie mit Inbrunst ergriffen, am beharrlichsten innegehalten, am consequentesten durchgeührt, und so wird er als das eigentliche Haupt der neudeutschen religiösen Malerei für alle Zukunft gelten und gefeiert werden."

\(^{60}\)Ibid., p.575: "Vor uns liegen dreißig Briefe Overbeck's an Fräulein Linder, die gerade einen Zeitraum von ebensoviel Jahren ausfüllen, der erste aus dem J. 1831, der letzte aus dem J. 1861, alle mit derselben festen, angenehm freien und saubern Hand geschrieben die auch im hohen Alter sich nur wenig änderte."


\(^{62}\)Ibid., p.817: "...denn seine Kunst war Er selbst...."
(2.2) THE ART HISTORIANS

The consistency between Overbeck’s art and life is also taken for granted by art historians writing general histories of art between 1869 and 1920. During this period, which begins with the unification of Germany under Bismark (1871), two models for the analysis of nineteenth-century art are established in German art history, one nationalistic, the other Modernist. When the former is used, the emphasis is squarely on the development of German art. It is assumed (and here I am borrowing from some of these writers a metaphor of organic growth) that while the seeds were sown in Rome, it was only in Germany that modern German art blossomed. In Raczynski’s and Förster’s writings, where this model of German painting originates, we saw how Overbeck’s art was located within the Nazarene movement and thus seen as part of the first stage in the development of modern German painting. According to this model, around 1820, when Cornelius and others moved back to Germany, they took German art with them.

Within the framework of the second model, French naturalism is the dominant artistic force of the nineteenth century. The Nazarenes (Cornelius among them) are linked to the Classicists in that both schools show a preference for an art based on an ideal, rather than one grounded in the study of nature. And because they do not work after nature, the Nazarenes are frequently belittled. In general, the first
model dominates up to the 1890s, at which time, in the writings of Richard Muther and Julius Meier-Graefe, the second view comes to the fore. But it should be noted that while the second view may dominate after 1900, it does not uniformly replace the first in these histories of art. Many authors, especially those who champion Cornelius as the great German painter, continue to construct modern German art along the lines of the first model. When it comes to Overbeck, however, most of these authors, no matter what model they follow, defame him and his art using a similar litany of terms.

In what follows, I show how the first model goes hand in hand with discussions of Overbeck as an enthusiastic (schwärmerisch) artist and one who stands in opposition to Cornelius. I then discuss the categorization of Overbeck's painting as idealist and out of step with his time, two ideas which accord well with the second model.

(2.2.1) OVERBECK THE SCHWÄRMERISCH PAINTER

Overbeck and the Nazarene movement are often described as schwärmerisch in opposition to classicism and the enlightenment. Niebuhr, as early as 1816 wrote: "Among those who accepted Catholicism, Overbeck is a Schwärmer and entirely unfree; a very amiable disposition and gifted with an excellent imagination, but unfit by nature to stand up by
himself, and in no way as intelligent as he is poetic.\textsuperscript{63} Acting according to schwärmerisch principles means that one is guided more by feeling and emotion than reason. In Meyers Konversations-Lexikon of 1874-78, Schwärmerei is described as a "diseased direction of temperament, whereby man is ruled by his feeling and imagination; intelligent reflection and rational sense cannot arise with regard to the subject of Schwärmerei."\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, it is connected to religious enthusiasm, and in this context it borders on fanaticism.\textsuperscript{65}

In the Overbeck literature of this period, schwärmerisch does not necessarily have negative connotations. In fact this term frequently occurs in passages that either praise Overbeck or merely classify him in opposition to Classicism or the Enlightenment. P. Albert Kuhn, for example, writes

\begin{quote}


Ibid., p.433: "Insbesondere aber arten die religiösen Empfindungen oft in Religionsschwärmerei aus, in welcher der Mensch in einem unmittelbaren Verhältnis zu Gott zu stehen glaubt, so daß er ihn schauen zu können meint und besondere Offenbarungen sich rühmt. Ausflüsse religiöser S. waren zum Theil die Religionskriege der Mohammedaner, die Kreuzzüge des Mittelalters, die Auswüchse der Reformationszeit u[sw]."
\end{quote}
that the "stiff, dry, soulless style of the classicists... was answered completely [by] the young, schwärmerisch voice, which was expressed in Romanticism." According to Friedrich Pecht, Overbeck had a "schwärmerisch disposition" (schwärmerisches Gemüth) and Adolf Rosenberg writes that already in his youth, Overbeck "leaned towards mystical Schwärmerei." In viewing Romanticism as schwärmerisch and as related to a religious fervour in general and to the spate of conversions to Catholicism in particular, these authors oppose the principles of Romanticism to those of the Enlightenment. Overbeck and his colleagues consequently act according to a principle that is deemed feminine. In the above quotation from Meyers Konversations-Lexikon, Schwärmerei is connected to feeling and opposed to reason.

---

66P. Albert Kuhn, Geschichte der Malerei, v.3 of Allgemeine Kunst-Geschichte (Einsiedeln, Waldshut und Köln a. Rhein: Druck und Verlag der Verlagsanstalt Benziger & Co. A.-G., 1909), II, p.1097: "Die hohle Bravour des auslebenden Barocco befriedigte sie ebensowenig wie die steife, trockene, seelenlose Manier der Klassizisten. Dagegen entsprach ihnen vollkommen die jugendlich schwärmerische Stimmung, welche in der Romantik zum Ausdruck kam." By "Romantics," Kuhn means the Nazarenes. It should be noted that up to the 1920s, Romantik and Nazarenertum were virtually synonymous.

and in the article "Geschlechtseigentümlichkeiten" in Meyer, this opposition is clearly gendered: "In the female, emotion and sensibility predominate, in the male, intelligence and thought." Furthermore, in the Allgemeine Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste of 1856, Schwärmerei is associated with women and youthful men. At the time of puberty, the male "likes to surrender himself to Schwärmerei, falls into a dreamy state, or sinks into a melancholic mood, until with progressing maturity everything becomes clearer in him, thereby graver and stronger."

We have already seen Overbeck described as feminine in Vischer's essay on the Triumph. In A. Hagen's 1859 history of modern German art, Overbeck is connected to the feminine through his painting of New Testament scenes:

No artist has seized, contrary to the old-testament spirit, the feminine essence of Christianity...more inwardly than Overbeck.....[H]e likes to draw the

---


essence of femininity, full of innocence and piety.\textsuperscript{70}

In the histories of art under discussion here, Overbeck, the schwärmerisch painter and the essential Nazarene, is frequently feminized and described as not fully developed. Berthold Daun makes all these connections explicit in his description of Overbeck as a "noteworthy youth with a feminine disposition and full of schwärmerisch desire."\textsuperscript{71}

For A. v. Zahn, Overbeck succeeds in making beautiful pictures where there is this "'feminine' side of the feeling for life," for example in his Holy Family in Munich, which "will always be counted among the pearls of modern German art."\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70}A. Hagen, \textit{Die deutsche Kunst in unserem Jahrhundert} (Berlin: Heinrich Schindler, 1857), I, p.141: "Kein Maler faßt das, dem alttestamentlichen Geiste entgegengesetzte, weibliche Wesen des Christenthums...inniger auf als Overbeck. Das bekundet sich auch bei Erfindungen, die das enge kirchliche Gebiet überschreiten, wenn er den Triumph der Religion in den Künsten, wenn er Vorstellungen aus dem befreiten Jerusalem darstellt, das zeigt schon darin, daß er gern weibliche Wesen voll Unschuld und Frömmigkeit zeichnet."


As the above quotation from Meyer indicates, Schwärmerei also connotes disease, an idea that may have originated in Goethe's dictum: "The healthy is classical, the sick romantic."\(^{73}\) Accordingly Overbeck's health is frequently

Gemüthslbens fallendes Motiv der Handlung anziehend werden, da gelingen auch Overbeck die ergreifendsten und schönsten Gebilde. Es ist zu beklagen, daß das unerschöpfliche Motiv der 'Mutter mit dem Kinde' und der 'Heiligen Familie' von ihm nur selten behandelt worden ist. Die schöne Komposition der h. Familie in der neuen Pinakothek...wird immer unter die Perlen der neueren deutschen Kunst gezählt werden." Zahn furthermore writes: "We are not mistaken, if we find the innermost satisfaction and true creative joy of the artist moving in two directions: into the area of the life of feeling, of the emotional, suffering, feminine movement of the soul on the one side, and into the 'rhythm of sweetness' of line and form on the other." (Zahn, p. 229: "Wir täuschen uns wohl nicht, wenn wir die innerste Befriedigung und eigentliche Schaffensfreude des Künstlers in zwei Richtungen finden: dem Gebiete des Gefühlslebens, der empfindenden, leidenden, weiblichen Seelenregungen auf der einen, dem "Rhythmus der Anmuth" in Linien und Formen auf der andern Seite.") Meanwhile Friedrich Haack, in a criticism of Overbeck's imitation of earlier art, writes: "Generally, this epigone easily turned the softness [Weichheit] of his models into effeminacy [Weichlichkeit], their sweet reverie into a muddied blur." (Haack, Die Kunst des XIX. Jahrhunderts, 5th ed., part of the 16th ed. of Grundriss der Kunstgeschichte von Wilhelm Lübke [Esslingen a. N.: Paul Neff, 1918], p.105: "Überhaupt verkehrte der Epigone die Weichheit seiner Vorbilder gar zu leicht in Weichlichkeit, ihre zarte Träumerei in trübe Verschwommenheit.")

called into question. Pecht regards the conversions to Catholicism as "a veritable epidemic sickness." Daun writes that the Nazarene's "Schwärmerei for Italy assumed a religiously sentimental, almost a diseased bent." In Overbeck's depictions of the Madonna, "the paler the cheeks and the more schwärmerisch and sentimental the expression, the more pious Maria appeared to him. Thus there originate Madonnas of a superficiality which seems to us, in comparison with Raphael's quietly simple figures of Mary, a serious error of a diseased nature."

---

74 Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, p.87: "[S]o wurde der Uebertritt zum Katholizismus eine förmlich epidemische Krankheit, bisweilen allerdings auch eine Spekulation." Pecht also writes: "a truly healthy art can only be developed in a healthy time, within a strong national life." Romanticism, because of French influences, was necessarily unhealthy. (Pecht, pp.76-77: "Eine wahhaft gesunde Kunst kann eben nur in einer gesunden Zeit, inmitten eines kräftigen nationalen Lebens entstehen. Die tiefe Verderbniß und Ehrlosigkeit des unsrigen zu Anfang dieses Jahrhunderts drückte der bei uns so viel früher als bei den Franzosen auftauchenden romantischen Richtung notwendig von vornehmein etwas Krankes auf, eine unnatürliche Entsagung bei allen freieren und tieferen Gemüthern....")


76 Ibid., p.124: "Je blasser die Wangen, je schwärmerischer und sentimental der Ausdruck, desto frommener erschien ihm die Maria. So entstanden Madonnen von einer Seichtheit, die uns im Vergleich zu Rafaeis rührend einfachen Mariengestalten wie schlimme Verirrungen einer krankhaften Natur vorkommen." Stahr, as quoted in the introduction, similarly states that Overbeck's work is "full of a hectic asceticism, which appears wraithlike to a healthy man of our day, as does the appearance of the master himself."
As the quotations above suggest, critics liked to contrast the unhealthy quality of Overbeck's work to the robustness of German art. In the literature written after Overbeck's death, this opposition frequently appears when Overbeck is compared to Peter Cornelius, a comparison which is made in one of two ways. In some cases, Overbeck and Cornelius are perceived as complementary opposites, as we saw above with Förster; the work of one is not judged against the work of the other. Hermann Becker, for example, writes:

One cannot admire enough how in Overbeck's works the spirit and the form are so entirely united; there is not one line which is superfluous, not one form which serves any consideration other than the purest expression of the most deeply pondered subjects. In this respect, Overbeck is entirely Cornelius's equal, and both masters deserve rightly to be known always together as the first among the masters of the new German school, which originates in both of them.  

Other writers use Overbeck and his art as a foil to Cornelius's healthy, masculine, and strong German art and demeanour. This is especially the case in monographs on

---

Cornelius. In 1841 (in Raczynski's *Geschichte*) Förster does not want to judge between the different paths taken by Overbeck and Cornelius: "The writer of history... will not want to prefer one over the other; he must recognize how both, following separate paths, have given to the art of our day direction and content and, according to the measure of the time in which we live, perfection." Later, however, in his *Peter von Cornelius* of 1874, Förster is very critical of Overbeck, mostly, it seems, in order to better praise Cornelius. Förster wants to make it clear that while the German artists in Rome, in particular Overbeck, with their Nazarene "effusiveness" (*Ueberschwänglichkeit*), "could not have remained without influence on Cornelius," Cornelius was nevertheless "a dam against the hyperromantic flow" due to "his healthy, entirely German, true nature." In fact, "we must recognize that without the entry of Cornelius into this society of 'monks' the newly revived German art would

78Raczynski, III, p.325: "Der Geschichtsschreiber...wird nicht Einem vor dem Andern den Vorzug geben wollen; erkennen muß er, wie beide, auf gesonderten Wegen, der Kunst unserer Tage Richtung und Inhalt und, nach Maasgabe der Zeit, in der wir Leben, Vollendung gegeben haben."

79Ernst Förster, *Peter von Cornelius* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1874), I, p.121: "...und daß sie, am entschiedensten von Overbeck vertreten, nicht ohne Einfluß auf Cornelius bleiben konnte...."

80Ibid., I, p.126: "Bald aber hatte er sich selbst wieder gefunden und wurde mit seinem weit überwiegenden Talent, mit seiner freien, allem Großen und Hohen in Kunst und Leben zugewandten Bildung, seiner gesunden, grunddeutschen, wahrhaftigen Natur ein Damm gegen die hyperromantische Flut...."
have fallen into lamentable one-sidedness, and would have atrophied into nervous reverie and self-deception."\(^{81}\)

Forster continues,

It is no wonder that not only academic painters from David’s school but also men, for whom true art lies in their hearts, for whom a new life for German art emerged in Carstens, Wächter, Schick, Koch, and Reinhart, pronounced themselves against the unhealthy and weak drive of the new Romantics of St. Isidoro with harsh speeches, serious warnings, and sharp ridicule....\(^{82}\)

In other monographs on Cornelius, he is distanced from Overbeck through reminders that, although Cornelius was in contact with the "Klosterbrüder," he lived with his painter friend Christian Xeller and did not actually move into St. Isidoro.\(^{83}\) Furthermore, Christian Eckert claims that Cornelius felt "somewhat foreign" in the Nazarene circle,\(^{84}\) and David Koch wonders how such a strong personality as

---

\(^{81}\)Ibid., I, p.125: "Ja, wir müssen erkennen, daß ohne den Eintritt von Cornelius in diese Gemeinschaft der 'Klosterbrüder' die neuauflebende deutsche Kunst in klägliche Einseitigkeit verfallen, in nervenschwacher Träumerei und Selbsttäuschung verkümmert sein würde."

\(^{82}\)Ibid., I, p.126: "Kein Wunder, daß nicht nur die alten Akademiker aus Davids Schule, sondern daß auch Männer, denen ächte Kunst am Herzen lag, denen für deutsche Kunst in Carstens, Wächter und Schick, in Koch und Reinhart ein neues Leben aufgegangen, dem nach ihrer Ansicht ungesunden und schwächlichen Treiben der Neuromantiker von S. Isidoro mit unwilliger Rede, ernster Warnung und scharfem Spott entgegen traten...."


\(^{84}\)Eckert, Peter Cornelius, p.37.
Cornelius's could have been influenced by that of the weaker Overbeck:

There has been much philosophizing about how it was possible that Cornelius should give himself up to Overbeck. I believe--and this has been only too little observed--that Cornelius did not relinquish his entire self to brother Overbeck....

The strongest proof that Cornelius was from the beginning inwardly untouched by the unhealthy, affected piety of the Klosterbrüder, the group that would later historically become the "Nazarenes," lies for me in the task that Cornelius...proposes for a new German national work--the Nibelungen.\(^{85}\)

The German quality of Cornelius's art is also used as a criterion to distinguish him from Overbeck in more general sources. Pecht states that Cornelius was patriotic, while Overbeck was given to dreaminess, liked to proselytize, and was limited to his Catholicism.\(^{86}\) Heinrich Bergner similarly writes that Overbeck denied his fatherland, while Cornelius "revealed a strong German sense even early on in his somewhat awkward drawings for Goethe's Faust."\(^{87}\)

---

\(^{85}\) Koch, Peter Cornelius, p.49: "Man hat viel darüber philosophiert, wie es möglich war, daß Cornelius unter Overbeck sich gab. Ich glaube,--und das ist noch zu wenig beobachtet worden--Cornelius gab sich keine Hand breit unter den Bruder Overbeck....

"Der stärkste Beweis, daß Cornelius innerlich anfangs ganz unberührt von der ungesunden Frömmelheit der Klosterbrüder, der nachmals als "Nazarener" geschichtlich gewordenen Gruppe, liegt für mich in der Tatsache, daß Cornelius...ein neues deutsch-nationales Werk anträgt--die Nibelungen."

\(^{86}\) Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, p.77.

\(^{87}\) Heinrich Bergner, Grundriß der Kunstgeschichte (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1911), p.300: "Peter Cornelius (1883-1867) hatte eine kräftige Deutschgesinnung schon vorher in etwas linkischen Zeichnungen zu Goethes Faust und zum Nibelungenlied offenbart...."
Whether or not these authors make an explicit judgement of the relative worth of each of these two painters, one finds an assumed opposition that is based on a series of binary opposites: healthy/unhealthy, German/non-German, and of course masculine/feminine.88 Carl Friedrich von Rumohr,

88In some ways, Cornelius takes over from Franz Pforr as the masculine counterpart to Overbeck's so-called femininity. After the death of Pforr, Overbeck writes to his parents that he "can only think of [Cornelius] as the replacement for one whose loss is so bitter." (Overbeck, letter to his parents [Day of St. John the Baptist, 1812], Hasse, p.49: "...und dann weil ich mit ihm [Cornelius], der meines Pforr ganzen Werth erkennt und ihn von Herzen liebt und achtet, recht nach Herzenslust an ihn denken kann, was ja der einzige Ersatz für einen so bittern Verlust ist.") And a few days later: "My friend Cornelius is before all others, he who replaces him (Pforr) for me, the same striving also binds me with him in a spiritual friendship...." (Overbeck, letter to his father [20 August 1812], Hasse, p.49: "Mein Freund Cornelius ist es vor allem jetzt, der mir ihn [Pforr] ersetzt, gleiches Streben verbindet mich auch mit ihm zu inniger Freundschaft....") In their friendship, Pforr and Overbeck saw themselves as complementary opposites, but this is not often mentioned in the literature of the period under consideration. This omission is probably due to Pforr's early death from tuberculosis, a disease whose symptoms (paleness, weakness, and exhaustion) can be said to emasculate its male victims. For a discussion of consumption as a feminine disease in the nineteenth century, see Bram Dijkstra, "The Cult of Invalidism," Idols of Perversity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.25-63. Now and again, however, the two painters are contrasted one to the other. Rosenberg describes Overbeck as quiet and dreamy, as compared to the energetic Pforr, while Gurlitt writes that "Overbeck proved himself weaker [than Pforr], less certain in aim." (Rosenberg, p.231: "Alle Neuerer, die klassizistischen wie die romantischen, fanden sich in der Abneigung gegen das akademische Treiben, und selbst der stille, träumerische Overbeck liess sich durch den energischen Franz Pforr mit fortreissen." Gurlitt, Die deutsche Kunst des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, p.199: "[Pforr] ist kein Nachahmer, sondern ein wahrer Künstler, der alle Hoffnung gewährte, daß er aus dem Eindenken in andere zur persönlichen Freiheit gelangen werde. Overbeck erwies sich weicher, minder sicher im Ziel, als ein Künstler von feinen Sinnen und von wunderbarer Klarheit der zeichnerischen Darstellung.")
as early as 1820, writes:

If it can be said correctly of Friedrich Overbeck, whose name is already often mentioned with high esteem, that his type of feeling is Christian in the purest sense, so contrarily Peter Cornelius appears to penetrate history and nature in all directions, and he apparently succeeds better in the characterizing of the moral, powerful, and great than the good and loving.89

Rumohr’s language implicitly establishes a distinction based on gender roles: Overbeck is Christian and pure, while Cornelius is more robust. Overbeck’s first biographer, J. Beavington Atkinson, makes this distinction explicit:

If Overbeck were as a lamb, surely Cornelius was a lion, each indeed supplied what was lacking in the other. Cornelius in after years said to Rudolf Lehmann, "I am the man, he is the woman."90


90J. Beavington Atkinson, Overbeck (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1882), p.20. This gendered comparison between Overbeck and Cornelius is a constant in the Overbeck literature, whether the author be an opponent or a supporter. Binder (a supporter, as I mention above) writes: "It is certain, that in these truly great artistic natures the most significant characteristics complete one another side by side, here the dry masculinity and titanic greatness, there the mild spirituality, virginal purity and poetical depth of artistic perspective and feeling." (Binder, "Zur Erinnerung," pp.573-574: "Gewiß ist, daß in diesen wahrhaft großen Künstlernaturen die bedeutendsten Eigenschaften sich gegenseitig ergänzen, dort die herbe Männlichkeit und titanenhafte Größe, hier die milde Innigkeit, jungfräuliche Reinheit und poetische Tiefe künstlerischen Anschauens und Empfindens.") In 1923,
A binary opposition that parallels the masculine/feminine pair is strong/weak. Rosenberg, for example, uses this criterion to rank Cornelius above Overbeck:

It appears that Cornelius's influence on [Overbeck] was so strong that the latter's energy in the practice of fresco painting deteriorated after Cornelius was finished with the group work and left Rome. Overbeck then returned, in his compositions, to the tame and energyless language of form, which corresponded more closely to his essential nature, as compared to the dramatic mode of expression of his old friend.\(^{91}\)

The division that we saw earlier in Förster, between the painters who left Rome and those who stayed, is now made more explicit: those who left kept their energy and those who stayed lost it. According to Rosenberg, for whom creative energy is transferable from a stronger artist to a weaker one, in Overbeck's case the loss of energy is due to

---

Schmidt, who is critical of Overbeck, writes: "The head of the Nazarenes and the feminine opposite of Cornelius was Overbeck." (Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, *Biedermeier-Malerei* [München: Delphin, 1923], p.167: "Das Haupt der Nazarener und das weibliche Gegenstück zu Cornelius war Fr. Overbeck....")

\(^{91}\)Rosenberg, *Geschichte*, p.247: "Es scheint doch, dass Cornelius' Einfluss auf ihn so mächtig gewesen ist, dass seine Thatkraft in der Ausübung der Freskomalerei nachliess, nachdem Cornelius sich von der gemeinsamen Arbeit zurückgezogen und Rom verlassen hatte. Overbeck ging dann auch in seinen Kompositionen auf die zahme und energielose Formensprache zurück, welche seinem Wesen besser entsprach, als die dramatische Ausdrucksweise seines älteren Freundes." Hermann Grimm, in comparing the power of Cornelius's work to that of Overbeck's, states that he knows of no figure by Overbeck bigger than half-lifesize which was not mechanically enlarged from a smaller figure. On the other hand, Grimm knows of no figure created by Cornelius, during his strongest period, which was not colossal. (Hermann Grimm, "Cornelius und die ersten fünfzig Jahre nach 1800," [1875] *Deutsche Künstler*, ed. Reinhard Buchwald [Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1942], pp.61-62.)
Cornelius's departure. Once again we have a distinction between Overbeck the weak and feminine Nazarene and Cornelius the strong and masculine German painter.

The opposition of Overbeck to Cornelius is frequently supported by the comparison of these painters to other pairings of famous men, an instance of which is provided by Atkinson:

At the risk of pushing the analogy too far, it may be added that Cornelius was positive as Aristotle, impetuous as St. Peter and Luther, defiant as Michelangelo; while in contrast, Overbeck shared with Plato idealism, with St. John love, with Melanchthon gentleness, and with Raphael grace.\(^\text{92}\)

In particular, the comparison of the two to Raphael and

---

\(^{92}\)Atkinson, Overbeck, p.20. Another quite thorough list is cited in Ambros: "Posterity will unite the name Overbeck with the name Cornelius, as we customarily regard Raphael and Michelangelo, Mozart and Beethoven, Schiller and Goethe, as double stars, which must not be separated." A.W. (Ambros, "Zur Erinnerung an Friedrich Overbeck," Bunte Blätter [Leipzig: Leuckart, 1872], p.140: "Denn Namen Overbeck wird die Nachwelt mit dem Namen Cornelius vereinigt nennen, wie wir uns gewöhnt haben, Rafael und Michel Angelo, Mozart und Beethoven, Schiller und Goethe als Doppelsterne anzusehen, die man nicht trennen darf.") Such comparisons seem to have begun early. Ludwig I of Bavaria, then Crown Prince, in his poem "Den Deutschen Künstlern zu Rom" (1818) compares Cornelius to St. Paul, and Overbeck to St. John the Evangelist:

You [Cornelius], the highest who glows, like Paul glows,
Whose zeal is the same as yours,
And even you [Overbeck] with child-like feeling,
You who are as innocent as John.

(As quoted in Förster, Peter von Cornelius, I, p.214:

Dir, der hoch Du glühst, wie Paulus glühte,
Dessen Eifer Deinem gleichend ist,
Und ja Dir mit kindlichem Gemüthe,
Der Du wie Johannes schuldlos bist.)

Ludwig's comparison of the two painters to the two saints is often cited in the literature. See, for example, Hagen, Die deutsche Kunst, p.183; Sepp, "Friedrich Overbeck," p.14; Binder, "Zur Erinnerung," p.573.
Michelangelo is the one most commonly repeated and one which most strengthens the binary opposition.\(^93\) Sepp, for example, states:

Raphael’s meeting with Michelangelo could not be more logical than Cornelius’s meeting with Overbeck.... Next to the powerful masculine nature of Cornelius one discovers Overbeck, certainly more feminine; he represents conciliatory feeling next to critical understanding, holy poetry next to philosophy, belief next to science.\(^94\)

In this comparison, Sepp clearly sets out a whole array of oppositions which were explicitly connected to the Renaissance

---

\(^93\)This comparison was stated earlier in the century in Nagler’s Lexikon: "Overbeck and Cornelius must be seen from the standpoint of their specific merit, and then each is greatest, this one through sweetness and spirituality of feeling, and the other through the power and range of spirit-like Raphael and Michelangelo." (Nagler, "Overbeck," X, p.440: "Overbeck und Cornelius müssen vom Standpunkte ihrer eigenthümlichen Grösse betrachtet werden, und dann ist jeder der erste, jener durch Zartheit und Innigkeit des Gefühls, dieser durch Gewalt und Umfang des Geistes, -- Raphael und Michel Angelo.")

\(^94\)Sepp, "Friedrich Overbeck," p.6: "Raffaels Zusammentreffen mit Michel Angelo konnte nicht folgewichtiger sein als Cornelius' Begegnung mit Overbeck.... Neben der männlichen Kraftnatur des Cornelius empfindet Overbeck allerdings mehr weiblich; er repräsentirt das allversöhnende Gemüth neben dem kritischen Verstand, die heilige Poesie neben der Philosophie, den Glauben neben der Wissenschaft." For the comparison of Overbeck and Cornelius to Raphael and Michelangelo, see also Hagen, Die deutsche Kunst, I, p.182; Binder, "Zur Erinnerung," p.573. The first comparison of Overbeck to Raphael seems to have been made by a Dr. Meyer of Hamburg. Overbeck’s father writes to his son (26 August 1816; Howitt I, p.341) that Meyer saw a Madonna painted by Overbeck and was so impressed by it that he resolved to write an article on him in his book and call it "the young German Raphael in Rome." Meyer discusses some of Overbeck’s work in his Darstellungen aus Norddeutschland (Hamburg, 1816), cited in Howitt I, pp.341-343.
The comparison of Overbeck and Cornelius to Raphael and Michelangelo is also intimated in the description of Overbeck as a slow painter who prefers oil painting in contrast to Cornelius who is by nature a fresco painter. H. Knackfuß is most explicit on this point:

In general, fresco painting, which requires a fast, resolute, and strong hand, was not Overbeck's domain. He preferred what Cornelius detested, oil painting, which permitted him to work patiently, slowly, and carefully.96

Vasari writes that fresco painting requires "a hand that is dexterous, resolute and rapid, but most of all a sound and perfect judgement." Many painters may excel in oil or tempera painting, but fresco is "truly the most manly, most

95Philip Sohm explains that Vasari categorized Michelangelo's style as "ardito, bravo, erculeo, fiero, forte, franco, risoluto, and robusto, that is, one that is described only with male attributes," while Raphael's "grazia and leggiadria most perfectly embodied the feminine qualities of beauty." See Sohm, "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia," Renaissance Quarterly 48 (1995), p.774.

96H. Knackfuß, Deutsche Kunstgeschichte (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1888), p.466: "Im allgemeinen war die Ferskmalerei, die eine schnelle, entschlossene und kräftige Hand erfordert, Overbecks Sache nicht. Er bevorzugte die von Cornelius geringgeschätzte Ölmalerei, die ihm ein stillgeduldiges, langsames und sorgfältiges Arbeiten gestattete." Hermann Riegel, Cornelius, der Meister der deutschen Malerei (Hannover: Carl Rümpler, 1866), states that Cornelius was called to be a fresco, rather than an oil painter: "He absolutely had to paint a fresco" (p.53). Overbeck is frequently described as a slow painter: Nagler, "Overbeck," p.437; Förster, Geschichte, p.180; Springer, Die Kunst von 1800 bis zur Gegenwart, p.29; Binder, "Zur Erinnerung," p.598.
assured."

And Michelangelo, the most manly of painters for Vasari, admonishes Sebastiano del Piombo because he prepared the wall of the Sistine Chapel to be painted in oil:

"[P]ainting in oils was an art for women and for leisurely and idle people like Fra Sebastiano," proclaimed Michelangelo, according to Vasari. Oil painting tended to be associated with the feminine and graceful Raphael, and fresco painting with the powerful and masculine Michelangelo.

One writer who disagrees with the comparison of Overbeck and Cornelius to Raphael and Michelangelo is, curiously, Wilhelm Schadow, a fellow Nazarene in the 1810s and the director of the Düsseldorf Academy from 1826 to 1859. In his Der moderne Vasari, Schadow argues against the validity of the comparison on two grounds. Firstly, he does not believe that the Zeitgeist of the early nineteenth century was on a scale with that of the sixteenth: "even if the natural talents of each of these great artists counterbalance one another, their unfavourable time has not permitted the

---


99Sohm, "Gendered Style," p.790
achievement of a similar artistic height."  

Secondly, the versatile (vielseitig) art of Raphael, in its great range, is contrary to that of Overbeck, who is one-sided (einseitig) in that he confines "himself to the representation of holy subjects." On the other hand, Michelangelo the painter treated "almost exclusively Old Testament subjects," as compared to Cornelius, whose "poetic construction is of a true universality" in that "he moves with the same ease in his compositions in romantic, mythical and holy areas."  

The issue of Overbeck's lack of versatility is an interesting one, because, as will be seen below, it suggests purity inasmuch as Overbeck stays within the limits of religious


101 Ibid., p.180: "Ferner giebt es in der Kunstgeschichte nicht leicht einen vielseitigeren Künstler, als Rafael; er bewegt sich mit gleicher Kraft und Anmuth auf dem symbolischen und historischen Gebiete, in der antiken Mythe wie in der heiligen Offenbarung, in den verlockendsten wie in den ernsthaftesten Gegenständen; dahingegen Overbeck sich, wenige Ausnahmen abgerechnet, auf die Darstellung heiliger Gegenstände beschränkt und somit in der Wahl derselben einseitig genannt werden könnte."

102 Ibid., p.180: "Michel Angelo aber behandelte als Maler fast ausschließlich alttestamentarische Gegenstände....Cornelius hingegen ist, sowenig auch seine künstlerische Ausbildung mit der des Michel Angelo verglichen werden kann, in seinen dichterischen Anlagen von wahrer Universalität, er bewegt sich mit gleicher Leichtigkeit in seinen Compositionen auf dem romantischen, mythischen und heiligen Gebiete."
representation.

(2.2.3) OVERBECK THE IDEALIST PAINTER

Two sources published in the decade and a half after Overbeck's death, A. v. Zahn's commemorative article on Overbeck in the Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst (1871), and J. Beavington Atkinson's Overbeck (1882), praise the painter albeit in a qualified manner. Zahn, like Overbeck's champions, emphasizes the agreement between Overbeck's art and life: "With Overbeck, more than with any other painter, one would like to point emphatically to the boundary which separates but also inseparably binds creation and theory, toil on the work of art and the thoughts and worded formulations." However, while Zahn praises Overbeck's early work (up to the frescoes for the Casino Massimo) for its "living feeling for nature," and its "easy, idealizing truth to nature," he criticizes Overbeck's later work using fidelity to nature as a criterion: "We know that Overbeck in his later years almost never used nature, and this only demonstrates more clearly how much was gained in the early

---

years of joint study in St. Isidoro.\textsuperscript{104} His avoidance of nature studies in his later years led to works which had "conventional forms" and which were mere expressions of ideas. This is especially the case with Overbeck's \textit{Triumph}, on the subject of which Zahn follows Vischer's lead:

To give philosophical and historical truth sensual form is certainly not the task of art....Overbeck wanted to represent an idea, which falls mostly into the area of historical and philosophical research....Here the boundary of the fine arts has been overstepped; the great masters did not displace this boundary by committing similar mistakes.\textsuperscript{105}

Atkinson claims "Overbeck as the most perfect example, in our time, of the Christian Artist," but also believes that his devout piety both "made" and "marred" his art.\textsuperscript{106}

The purist painter then proceeds to express his invincible reluctance to study from the side of life; models he had carefully avoided, because he feared that a single glance at nature would destroy the whole conception. It is with sincere regret that I have to record so pernicious a doctrine.\textsuperscript{107}

According to Atkinson, Overbeck, due to his "super-sensuous"

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., p.226: "Daß wir wissen, wie Overbeck in späteren Jahren fast nie die Natur benutzte, macht nur um so sichtbarer, wie viel in der jugendlichen Epoche der gemeinsamen Studien in St. Isidoro gewonnen wurde."

\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., p.232: "Philosophische und geschichtliche Wahrheit zu versinnlichen, ist einmal nicht Aufgabe der Kunst, deren Flug von der Phantasie geleitet wird....Overbeck wollte einen Gedanken darstellen, der ganz und gar in das Gebiet der geschichtlichen und philosophischen Forschung fällt....Hier ist eine Grenze der bildenden Kunst überschritten, die auch dadurch nicht verrückt wird, daß die größten Meister ähnliche Mißgriffe begangen haben."


\textsuperscript{107}Ibid., p.62.
art theory, limited his "pictorial range" and "his art fell short of the largeness of nature and humanity." Atkinson emphasizes this point when he tells a story, which I have encountered nowhere else in the Overbeck literature, concerning his "remarkable" memory: "It is recounted how on Sunday evenings, after the reception of fifty or a hundred guests, the meditative artist would recall and describe the visitors one by one...." This story is a variation on the one told by Cicero in his De oratore (II,lxxxvi,350) about Simonedes of Ceos, who, because he could remember where everyone was seated at a banquet, became known as the inventor of the art of memory. In the context of Atkinson's discussion of Overbeck, this story suggests that his memory was so good that he did not have to work from nature. It thus intimates that he is more of an idealist than a naturalist painter.

108Ibid., p.64.

109Ibid., p.101. The only other reference to the importance of memory I have come across in the Overbeck literature is in Howitt, when she describes life in the monastery of St. Isidoro. She writes: "according to their axiom whereby it is the soul which must speak to the soul, they made such studies only in the academy [what they called the refectory], and then painted their pictures, 'in order not to become too naturalistic,' in the solitude of their cells from memory." (Howitt I, pp.256-257: "[A]ber gemäß ihrem Axiom, daß es die Seele ist, die zur Seele sprechen müsse, machten sie solche Studien nur in der Akademie, und malten dann ihre Bilder, 'um nicht zu naturalistisch zu werden', in der Einsamkeit ihrer Zellen aus dem Gedächtniß.")

The theme of Overbeck's preference for ideas over nature stems from his monk-artist persona with its ascetic attributes. But this reoccurring claim also relates to a change in ideas concerning imitation. For Overbeck, as we have seen, imitation meant following the proper models, that is, those who best reflected the nature of one's inner self. During the second half of the nineteenth century, with the rise of naturalism in art and literature and materialism in science, the debate surrounding imitation came to centre on the question of whether one should use artistic models or work directly from nature. And most art historians, if not all, sided with nature.

After this change in the terms of the debate, the Nazarenes' work was no longer seen as contrary to that of the Classicists but rather as presenting similarities with Classicism. Raczyński was well aware of this similarity between Overbeck and the Classical school, but he nevertheless kept Overbeck separate from the Classicists, claiming that he was one of the artists to initiate modern German painting. Richard Muther, on the other hand, argues that the Romantic and Classicist painters were similar, only differing in the choice of their models:

[The Nazarenes], too, were imitators, and only changed their master when they fled from the antique to the Middle Ages, and copied the old Italians in lieu of the Greeks. The Classicists had imitated with a certain cold erudition; so they

---

111Raczynski, Geschichtte, I, p.104.
imitated out of the depths of their emotion. As the former used Greeks, so they used the fourteenth-century painters, as patterns of calligraphy from which they did their copies, cut their stencils after the Italian form and like Mengs, were able to reproduce only a very weak reflection of those departed spirits in their works. As eclectics they would stand on the same rung with the academics of Bologna, except that the confession of faith of these was a combination from Leonardo, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Correggio, and Titian, and that they possessed an incomparably greater technical facility.112

Anton Springer draws a similar comparison between the Nazarenes and the Classicists. Both reacted against the academy; both developed an intellectualized art; and both shied away from nature. "So despite all oppositions, they appeared closely connected, and it is not surprising that the two currents touch one another directly, that certain personages felt obliged to both in their artistic development."113


Of all turn-of-the century critics, Julius Meier-Graefe was the most effective in promoting a view of nineteenth-century art privileging French naturalist painting. His condemnation of the Nazarenes accords well with the importance he places on naturalism and the sensual element of art.

The Nazarenes made fun of the New Greeks and became New Florentines. The Classicist aversion to colour remained roughly the same, but it was demonstrated differently. David declared the cleverness of the eighteenth century fraudulent, Ingres the colouring of Rubens. The Germans went much further. The entire sensuous apparatus, which had belonged to painting according to the view of earlier times, was evil. Sensuality and thought did not belong together. Overbeck was ashamed to use female models. The brush was a phallus and only lost this dubious symbolism, if one purified it with holy

historian and critic, writes that the distinction between Classicism and the Nazarene movement "is not absolute and its importance is almost insignificant in comparison to the resemblance between the techniques employed by one and the other school." The Nazarenes and the Classicists had "the same hesitant and limp line, the same muted or strident colour, the same absence of direct observation of nature, the same clumsy imitation of Raphael, Michelangelo, and the Bolognese." He concludes that it is "incontestable" that "the Christian school was born as a reaction against the classical school," but that unfortunately the Nazarenes, like the classicists, removed "all value from a work of art," and held "living nature" in "contempt." (T. de Wyzewa, Les Chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art au XIXe Siècle. v.4: La Peinture étrangère [Paris: Librairie illustré, n.d. {1901}], p.14: "Mais la distinction n'a rien d'absolu, et son importance se réduit à peu de chose en comparaison de la ressemblance des procédés employés dans l'une et l'autre école. C'est de part et d'autre le même dessin hésitant et mou, le même coloris étouffé ou criard, la même absence d'observation directe de la nature, la même imitation maladroite de Raphaël, de Michel-Ange et des Bolonais....l'école chrétienne est née d'une réaction contre l'école classique. Chacun de ses principes était l'opposé des principes de Winckelmann, excepté malheureusement celui qui suffit à ôter toute valeur à une œuvre d'art, le mépris de la nature vivante.")
On these grounds, Meier-Graefe excludes the Nazarenes from the canon of modern art: "The Nazarenes belong perhaps less in a history of the development of worthy modern art than in a history of modern mistakes." The art of Overbeck and the Nazarenes (including Cornelius) is also marginalized in Die deutsche Jahrhundertausstellung, held in Berlin in 1906. Like Meier-Graefe's work, the exhibition catalogue ranks French art over German: "it should not be forgotten that for nineteenth-century painting, France is the classical ground, as Italy was for the Renaissance and Holland for seventeenth-

---


115 Ibid., p.115: "Die Nazarener gehören vielleicht weniger in eine Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen künstlerischen Werte als in eine Geschichte der modernen Irrtümer."
century painting." But while the conditions for an undertaking of German art in the nineteenth century may have been unfavourable, there was nevertheless much progress. In particular, Runge and Friedrich are praised as the great German Romantic painters. The Nazarenes, on the other hand, do not fare as well: "The germ of a new art, which lay hidden here, was not successfully developed." The art of Cornelius and his cohorts was "clothed in a foreign cultural world, a bloodless 'thought-art' (Gedankenkunst)."

The tradition of treating the Nazarenes as idealists culminates in the work of Karl Scheffler, who, in his Deutsche Kunst of 1915 and in his Deutsche Maler und Zeichner im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert of 1923, categorizes all painting according to two poles: perception (Anschauung) and conception (Begriff). "Perception seizes the world of appearance with living strength of feeling, while conception thinks of the appearance as a means....One can say that the principal difference is that perception paints and conception

---


117 Ibid., xvi: "Die Keime einer neuen Kunst, die hier verborgen liegen, sind nicht zur Entwicklung gelangt."

118 Ibid., xi: "Bald war es eine in die Gestalten einer fremden Kulturwelt gekleidete, blutlose Gedankenkunst, wie sie von Cornelius und den Seinigen zur Geltung gebracht wurde."
draws." The former uses colour and tones, while the latter uses line, clear form, and architectonically ordered compositions.¹¹⁹ For Scheffler, the Nazarenes, like the Classicists, were thought-painters, out of touch with their times:

The Hellenism of these men and even of Goethe is in no way in opposition to the Raphaelism of the Nazarenes. The contrast of this Hellenistic and that Christian organization of thought-painting lies much more in the fact that the original creative powers of the Baroque and Rococo had dried up by that time. These aristocratic creative powers did not fit the early democratic age.¹²⁰

The classification of Overbeck and the Nazarenes together with the Classicists is based on criteria that attest to the rise of formalism in the art-historical discourse of this period. Like the Classicists, the

¹¹⁹Karl Scheffler, Deutsche Maler und Zeichner im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert (Leipzig: Insel, 1923), p.3: "Die Anschauung erfaßt die Welt der Erscheinungen mit lebendiger Gefühlskraft; der Begriff aber denkt mittels der Erscheinung und produziert die Idee....Prinzipiell unterschiedend, kann man sagen: die Anschauung malt, der Begriff zeichnet. Jene bedarf der Farbe, des Tons und der Darstellung der Wunder von Licht und Schatten; dieser bedarf der umschreibenden Linie, der deutlich erklärenden Form, der architektonisch ordnenden Komposition und abstrahierender Stilisierungen." Scheffler also uses the terms realist and idealist to oppose the two groups. See also Scheffler, Deutsche Kunst (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1915), p.83.

Nazarenes were weak in colour, neglected chiaroscuro, and did not work after nature. Furthermore, both schools worked from older artistic models and stayed within a tradition (sometimes called eclectic). The result is an art that is inorganic. Hamann describes Overbeck's work as sterile. Pecht states that Overbeck "heaped scorn on naturalism, the unmediated copying of nature" and this led to his execution of figures, like his Italia and Germania, which are as if cut from wood. For Daun, a declining art

---


122 Janitschek, Geschichte der deutschen Malerei, p.692; and Gurlitt, Die deutsche Kunst, p.201.

123 Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, pp.85,92; Janitschek, Geschichte der deutschen Malerei p.691; Muther, History, p.225; Kuhn, Geschichte der Malerei, II, p.1099; Springer, Die Kunst von 1800 bis zur Gegenwart, pp.28-29; and Schadow, Der moderne Vasari, p.176.

124 Hamann, Die Deutsche Malerei, p.137: "Aber während dort die kirchliche Tradition noch nicht abgerissen, und vor allem die Naturanschauung eine ganz eigene und frische war, hielten sich die Nazarener in Stil wie Inhalt an diese Kunst, um so eine Kunst zweiter, ja dritter Hand zu schaffen, ein Produkt von absoluter Sterilität."

imitates earlier artistic forms rather than nature. "The greatest mistake the Nazarenes made was their fundamental rejection of the use of models. They feared that the ideal presentation of holy figures would be secularized." This resulted, in the case of Overbeck, in "dull shadows of figures, which are all bloodless."\footnote{Daun, Die Kunst des XIX. Jahrhunderts: "Gewiß ist es ein Beweis sinkender Kunst, wenn ein Meister sich an alte Vorbilder mehr als an die Natur hält" (p.117). "Den größten Fehler begingen die Nazarener damit, daß sie grundsätzlich die Anwendung des Modells verwarfen. Sie fürchteten, die ideale Vorstellung von den Heiligen könnte dadurch verweltlicht werden" (p.124). "Hatte Rafael kräftige Idealgestalten von der schwarmerischen Jugend ab bis zum studienreichen Alter geschaffen, so haben Overbecks matte Schattengestalten, die alle blutleer sind, eine überschwänglich religiöse Empfindsamkeit und Symbolik angenommen" (p.119). Muther (History, p.225-226) similarly writes that "the Nazarenes abandoned on principle the employment of the model, from fear lest it might entice them away from the ideal representation of the character to be depicted," and that the result was anaemic painting: "As the Catholicism of Schlegel was an anaemic system, so the painters, too, deprived their figures of blood and being in order to leave them only the abstract beauty of line. They are beings who are exalted above everything, even above the correctness of drawing, and who must expire of a lack of blood in their veins. (For the original German, see Muther, Geschichte der Malerei im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert, I, pp.196-198.)

The idea of sterile, anaemic, or wooden thought-painting suggests an art that does not grow and develop, that is confined to pre-established artistic practice. Rather than sallying forth into the great outdoors, in a manly way, to investigate the huge expanses of nature, the thought-painter keeps to his enclosed (and feminine, as we saw earlier) sphere. For Overbeck, this confinement is especially
limiting because of his choice to stay within the pure limits of Catholicism. A much-repeated remark of Niebuhr helps to confirm this view. He writes that "the yoke has grown onto [Overbeck]." Pecht repeats the claim that Overbeck voluntarily took the "yoke of Roman Catholicism," and continues: "the original power of his talent lost more than it gained through the voluntary confinement to religious material."

(2.2.4) THE ANACHRONISTIC OVERBECK

In 1876, F. Reber writes that, taken together, Cornelius and Overbeck appear like a modern Janus figure: Cornelius looking to the future and Overbeck looking to the past. The criticism of Overbeck as "anachronistic," as Wilhelm Lübke and Bruno Meyer put it, appears frequently in the literature of this period. Earlier, we saw Vischer put

\[127\] Niebuhr, letter to Savigny (1813), as quoted in Rosenberg, Geschichte der modernen Kunst, II, p.252: "Ihm ist das Joch angewachsen."

\[128\] Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, p.77; p.101: "Die urspüngliche Kraft seines Talentes hat durch die freiwillige Beschränkung auf religiöse Stoffe offenbar mehr verloren als gewonnen." The "yoke" remark is also repeated in Howitt I, p.409; and Hagen, Die deutsche Kunst, p.142.


\[130\] Wilhelm Lübke, History of Art, tr. F.E. Bunnett (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1868), p.440 (for the original German, see Lübke, Grundriss der Kunstgeschichte, 10th ed.)
forward this type of condemnation of Overbeck, writing that the painting of a Madonna "is for us an impossibility."

Muther argues in a similar vein when he states that the religious nature of Overbeck's work does not express the worldview of the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century was the heir of the eighteenth, the heir of the revolution. Its entire striving was away from the earlier aristocratic culture; from the culture for the few would come a culture for all. "Work and create" sounded the new Gospel, "search to establish an existence worthy in human terms through the power of work." It is thus not by accident that pictures of workers found their proudest expression in the nineteenth century. In Millet's and Meunier's work the worldview of our time is as purely embodied as in the creations of medieval mosaics.\(^{131}\)

But religious painting was not left "peacefully in the grave" in the nineteenth century.

The proof, that from the elements of a dead worldview something new cannot be formed, could not be given more strikingly than through these pictures. First came the Nazarenes....After the days of the revolution, which had destroyed the old God, the restoration followed....Thus Overbeck,

Schnorr, and Cornelius tried to found through the connection with the primitive Italians a new German religious art. But how dull it all is, how like stale lemonade! How the Berlin cathedral, in comparison with the Cologne cathedral, seems merely a dumb harlequin; the Nazarenes appear, next to [Fra Angelico], Perugino, and Francia, merely as shallow copyists.\textsuperscript{132}

The retreat of Overbeck and his "brothers" into the past is often explained by the fact that they fear the progress of the present age. Scheffler describes this retreat as a flight into "ancient religious conventions," while Pecht describes it as a flight into distant times and places.\textsuperscript{133}


\textsuperscript{133}Scheffler, Deutsche Maler, p.12: "Inmitten dieser Zeit erhob sich der Geist des Nazarenertums mit reaktionärem Nachdruck, zurückflüchtend zu alten religiösen Konventionen und doch zugleich mit dem Anspruch auf revolutionäre Modernität auftretend." Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, p.76: "Ist diese ganze deutsche Romantik doch so grundverschieden von der französischen, theilt mit ihr nur die Flucht vor der Gegenwart in die zeitliche oder räumliche Ferne...." Similarly Hamann states that the ecclesiastical art of the Nazarenes "was a flight from the present into the past, which could never become the present; these Romantics should not have felt it necessary to make their ideal so remote."

(Hamann, Die Deutsche Malerei, p.137: "Ihre kirchliche Kunst war eine Flucht aus der Gegenwart in eine Vergangenheit, die nie Gegenwart werden durfte, sollten sich diese Romantiker nicht von ihrem Ideal zurückgestoßen fühlen.")
Meyer also believes that one should not attempt to go backwards in time:

Progress in all branches of human endeavour is carried out in all areas of achievement that are ripe, and even the most insignificant and, indeed, what appears as regression or confusion, becomes a useful, conducive link in a continuous chain. It was therefore a vain, false endeavour in the nineteenth century to see again with the eyes of the fourteenth, to learn to feel with the sentiment of the fourteenth, and this path rigidly followed, necessarily diverted the highest goal of art.¹³⁴

Cornelius Gurlitt, one of the harshest critics of the Nazarenes, also wields the accusation of anachronism, but in a slightly different manner. His viewpoint can be compared to that of Vischer, whose essay on Overbeck's Triumph Gurlitt praises as "written with the verve of a man who stakes his ego in order to destroy a view that appears false to him....A critique unlike most others written in the German language, Lessing notwithstanding." However Gurlitt also realizes that Vischer's critique was ineffectual:

But it didn't damage Overbeck. For countless people, the Magnifikat [the Triumph] stands as the greatest work of all time. Vischer was not able to destroy religious painting in Overbeck's sense, just as his friend David Friedrich Strauß was not able to destroy the belief in miracles with his

¹³⁴Meyer, "Johann Friedrich Overbeck, die sieben Sacramente in Bildern," p.40: 'Der Fortschritt in allen Zweigen menschlicher Thätigkeit vollzieht sich auf Grund aller Errungenschaften, die bereits gemacht sind, und selbst das Unscheinbarste, ja was als Rückschritt oder Verwirrung erscheint, wird ein brauchbares, fördersames Glied in einer continuirlichen Kette. Es war also ein vergebliches, falsches Bestreben, im XIX. Jahrhundert wieder mit den Augen des XIV. sehen, mit der Stimmung des XIV. empfinden zu lernen, und dieser Weg, mit Starrheit verfolgt, musste vom höchsten Ziele der Kunst ablenken."
spontaneous introduction of myth in his commentary on the New Testament.\textsuperscript{135}

Unlike Vischer, who was writing as a critic, Gurlitt writes as an art historian. He is able to critique Overbeck's art more effectively than Vischer, because, as an historian, he has the mandate and the power to include or exclude him from the canon of modern German painting. In contrast to Vischer, who attacks Overbeck's premises, Gurlitt begins by accepting them:

Since Overbeck had converted to Catholicism in 1813, he found therein complete happiness....His creation is prayer, prayer for salvation and, in the sense of good works, for the salvation of others....No one has ventured to doubt his pure piety, the sincerity of his conviction, or to represent his mildness and devotion to faith as inauthentic or contrived....

....He went through the world with piously parted locks, but also with an intentionally preserved child-like spirit under them.\textsuperscript{136}


\textsuperscript{136}Ibid., pp.209-210: "Seit Overbeck 1813 zum Katholizismus übergetreten war, fand er in diesem sein volles Glück....Sein Schaffen ist Gebet, Gebet um das eigene Heil und im Sinne der guten Werke um das Heil anderer....Keiner hat es je gewagt, an seiner reinen Frömmigkeit, an der
Gurlitt then argues that Overbeck’s monk-artist persona and historicist art had little effect on the church’s attempt to regain power in the nineteenth century:

The church did not share the enthusiasm for the fifteenth century.... It also did not share this enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, not even for its art. There has not been one Gothic church built in Rome, for Rome was and still is in the first place the seat of the papal state, the capital of the successors of the Imperatoren.... [The church] realized that the time did not call for a womanly, childlike piety, but a manly, systematic political action. Not Francis of Assisi with his wonderfully selfless humanity, but Ignaz of Loyola, with his reform efforts directed at inner fortitude and unerring volition, gave the renewed church its content. And Ignaz of Loyola had been no friend of art....  

Gurlitt’s use of the anachronism argument is much more biting than that of other critics. Rather than suggesting that Overbeck is out of touch with the secularized and modern world, a statement that Overbeck himself would have accepted, Lauterkeit seiner in Überzeugung schlummernden Seele zu zweifeln, seine Milde und Hingabe an den Glauben als unecht, gemacht hinzustellen.... 

.... Er ging mit fromm gescheitelten Locken durch die Welt, aber auch mit einem absichtlich kindlich erhaltenen Geiste unter diesen."

Gurlitt argues that, even in relation to the needs of the Catholic church, Overbeck, due to the feminine nature of his art and demeanour, is out of date. Overbeck's art was thus useless not only to those of a progressive bent, but to those of a reactionary one as well.

2.2.5 THE EXILED OVERBECK

Just as Overbeck is isolated from his time, so he is exiled from his place of birth. Earlier, Förster, in his discussion of Overbeck' Italia und Germania (fig.18), wrote that "the intimate and urgent comforting by the blond virgin [Germania] of her clever, doubtful sister...remained without success: Overbeck never returned to his German fatherland; Italy held the upper hand in his heart." In the literature here under discussion, Overbeck's decision to become Catholic and his "Roman seclusion," as Pecht and Knackfuß put it, are viewed as a denial of the progress of Germany and its art. Wilhelm Lübke, for example, writes: "Only one of the party, Overbeck, remained in Rome, renouncing his country and his faith, henceforth in his

---

138 Förster, Geschichte der deutschen Kunst, p.185: "Die trauliche und dringliche Zusprache der blonden Jungfrau auf dem oben erwähnten Bilde ist bei der sinnigen, zweifelnden Schwester ohne Erfolg geblieben: Overbeck ist in sein deutsches Vaterland nicht zurückgekehrt; Italia hat in seinem Herzen die Ueberhand behalten."

139 Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, p.94; Knackfuß, Deutsche Kunstgeschichte, p.472.
artistic style wholly alienated from modern efforts."\footnote{Lübke, \textit{History of Art}, II, p.440. In this vein, Bruno Meyer writes: "The fatherland ordered sons back, and willingly they all responded. Only Overbeck remained in Rome; he had forfeited his fatherland along with the belief of his forefathers." (Bruno Meyer, "Johann Friedrich Overbeck, \textit{die sieben Sacramente in Bildern}," p.39: "Das Vaterland forderte seine Söhne wieder, und willig folgten sie Alle. Nur Overbeck blieb in Rom; er hatte mit dem Glauben der Väter auch sein Vaterland eingebüßt.") And Karl Woermann suggests that Overbeck "was and remained a Roman-German with heart and soul. Rome, which he left only for short periods, remained his artistic home." (Woermann, \textit{Die Kunst der jüngeren Neuzeit}, p.186: "Romisch-Deutscher war und blieb er mit Liebe und Seele. Rom, das er nur vorübergehend verließ, blieb seine künstlerische Heimat.")

And P. Albert Kuhn suggests that the less they were instructed by teachers and by living nature, the more they longed for a foreign art theory.\footnote{Bergner, \textit{Grundriß}, p. 299: "Was sie später an Altartafeln nach Deutschland sandten oder dort in Fresken schufen, ist sehr innig und aufrichtig gemeint, aber kraftlos, eine fremde Sprache."}

\footnote{Kuhn, \textit{Geschichte der Malerei}, II, p.1099: "Je weniger die begeisterten Kunstjünger aus dem lebendigen Verkehr mit tüchtigen Lehrern und der lebendigen Natur schöpften, um so mehr suchten sie aus eigenen und fremden Kunsttheorien zu gewinnen." Henri Focillon similarly writes: "It should be noted that the preraphaelite aesthetic, as such suggested by the principles of Friedrich Schlegel, succeeded in producing an expression Catholic and Roman more than German." (Focillon, \textit{La Peinture au XIXe Siècle} [Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1927], p.106: "Il est remarquable que l’esthétique préraphaélite, telle que l’avait suggérée dans son principe Frédéric Schlegel, aboutisse à une expression catholique et romaine bien qu’allemande.")}
allying Overbeck’s renunciation of his faith with his rejection of his homeland and his acceptance of foreign artistic principles, most of these writers isolate Overbeck from the modern world of Germany.\textsuperscript{143}

It should be noted that Overbeck’s interest in things foreign is sometimes justified as a German trait. For example, Springer states: "The German likes to praise as a national asset the idea of being easily accustomed to a foreign world. [The Nazarenes] went too far in their aversion to nature studies."\textsuperscript{144} This is a theme that goes back to Mme de Staël, who wrote that in "literature, as in politics, the Germans have too much respect for foreigners and not enough for national prejudices."\textsuperscript{145} On the other hand, other writers believe that Overbeck, despite the fact that he stays in Rome, remains German. Binder is of this opinion, and he cites a letter from Emilie Linder, who

\textsuperscript{143}The degree of condemnation, however, depends upon the author. Sepp, one of Overbeck’s champions, for example, merely compares Overbeck’s Italianicity to Cornelius’s Germanity: "The severely dogmatic Overbeck took on perhaps more from Italy; Cornelius remained entirely German." (Sepp, "Friedrich Overbeck," p.7: "Der streng dogmatische Overbeck hat vielleicht mehr vom italienischen Wesen an sich, Cornelius ist ganz deutsch geblieben.") Pecht (Deutsche Künstler, p.87) on the other hand believes that Overbeck’s conversion was a "fanatical and anti-national moment."

\textsuperscript{144}Springer, 

\textit{Die Kunst von 1800 bis zur Gegenwart}, p.28: "Das leichte Einleben in fremde Welten rühmt ja der Deutsche gern als einen nationalen Vorzug. Sie haben indessen die Scheu vor dem Naturstudium zu weit getrieben."

\textsuperscript{145}Mme de Staël, \textit{Germany}, tr. from the French (London, 1818), I, p.17.
praises Overbeck's letters as "written from the disposition of a man who belongs to the German nation." These supporters of Overbeck attempt to reclaim his Germanity in order to re-establish him in the canon of German art history. Other writers assert that Overbeck remains German so that they can ridicule him further. Gurlitt, for example, claims that "despite all its enthusiasm for Italy, [Overbeck's art] remains German."  


147 Gurlitt, Die deutsche Kunst, pp.214-215: "Das Bezeichnende aber an Overbecks Kunst ist, daß sie sich zwar in der Zeit vor der Kirchenspaltung versetzt, daß sie aber trotz aller Begeisterung für Italien deutsch bleibt." Pecht similarly writes: "Nothing would be more incorrect to assume than that Overbeck in Rome would be as changed as the many Germans who in Paris become French. On the contrary, Overbeck remained in thought and feeling thoroughly German and it is a truly tragic fate which forced him, like so many others, through a misleading, religious feeling, to act as an apostle of the spiritual tyranny in Germany and so become an instrument which the Roman clergy were not afraid to ridicule quietly, yet which they also knew how to put to excellent use." (Pecht, Deutsche Künstler, p.94: "Nichts wäre denn auch unrichtiger als anzunehmen, daß Overbeck in Rom so verwälscht worden sei, wie so viele Deutsche in Paris sich französiren. Er blieb im Gegentheil im Denken und Fühlen durchaus deutsch und es ist ein wahrhaft tragisches Geschick, das ihn wie so viele Andere durch ein mißleitetes, religiöses Gefühl zwang, als Apostel der geistigen Knechtung in Deutschland aufzutreten und so eines jener Instrumente zu werden, welche die römische Clerisei im Stillen zwar zu verlachen sich nicht scheute, aber doch immer vortrefflich zu benützen verstand.")
The characterization of Overbeck in the literature between 1869 and 1920 is quite consistent no matter what the individual author's agenda. Whether an Overbeck supporter or detractor, a nationalist or Modernist historian, each writer confirms the characterization of Overbeck as pure, feminine, and marginal in terms of contemporary ideas and artistic trends. This process of marginalization continues into the 1920s and 1930s, when Overbeck is expelled from German Romanticism by art historians, who link Romanticism to a Northern German spirit.

(3) OVERBECK CRITICISM IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

In the 1920s and 1930s, the characterization of Overbeck as weak, non-German, and feminine continues. R. Seiffert-Wattenberg, for example, writes:

Overbeck is no natural fighter, in that he is too weak; he prefers to be led. And so do most of his friends. They all search for refuge and protection and find them—or believe they have found them—in the scorched sun of Raphael and in the bosom of absolution bestowed by the Catholic church.148

Overbeck's art also continues to be deemed unimportant because it is not after nature, and because, like academic

art, it merely imitates older forms.\textsuperscript{149} One difference in
the literature of this period though is the added
derisiveness with which Overbeck's defects are rehearsed.

(3.1) KUHN

Alfred Kuhn continues the tradition of Cornelius
monographs, discussed above, in which Overbeck is distanced
from Cornelius; the venom of his attack on Overbeck's
character, however, is unprecedented. In his discussion of
the Nazarenes, Kuhn comes to the Veit brothers, who were born
Jewish but converted to Catholicism. He writes:

There have always been two types of Jews, which
emerge in history, the thick-headed, fat-cheeked
type with a brutal neck and clawing hands. These
are the ones who are fit for life, who make money
and get along in the world; and then there are the
thin-nosed, narrow-skulled ones with a high
forehead and ecstatic eyes, [the mystical-intellectual ones]....

He then goes on to place Overbeck in the second category of

\textsuperscript{149}Frank Jewett Mather, for example, argues about the
impossibility of the Nazarene programme: "They proposed
nothing less than to glorify God and His Son and the Blessed
Virgin, with the simplicity of the early Italian artists.
The ideality of a Fra Angelico, the serenity of a Perugino
were their models. It was a sincere but impossible
enterprise. No one can safely imitate an archaic art, for no
one can recover the state of mind that produced it. These
Nazarenes, as they were jestingly called, were after all
merely academically trained youngsters playing earnestly at
being primitive. Very few of them in any sense survive.
Overbeck, their leader, enjoys at best a pale and dubious
immortality from the fact that his wall paintings are in one
or two famous tourists' resorts in Italy, as in St. Mary of
the Angels at Assisi. All the works of the Nazarenes are
similarly timid and bloodless and imitative. It has the
graver defects of its pietism." Mather, Modern Painting (New
Jews:

Overbeck, the patrician's son from Lübeck with the narrow forehead, thin blond hair, with the characteristics of a young girl, with little vitality, with the wish already awakened in his youngest years for absolute monachism, is the typical tired product of an old race. One usually says: a decadent....It is not without significance that later Philipp Veit in Frankfurt was Overbeck's only true heir....One says, therefore,...that Nazarenesness is non-German, Jewish, and this is as true and false as such formulations usually are.\textsuperscript{150}

In comparison, Cornelius "arrived in Rome full of Germanity, even with a certain prejudice against Italy and its art....Next to the mildness and sweetness of Nazarenesness Cornelius brought something heroic, robust...."\textsuperscript{151} But,


\textsuperscript{151}Ibid., p.90: "Voll Deutschheit kam Cornelius in Rom an, ja von einer gewissen Voreingenommenheit gegen Italien und seine Kunst.....Neben der Milde und Süßigkeit der Nazarenesmus brachte Cornelius etwas Heroisches, Derbes, gegenüber der auf ihn eindringenden italienischen Kunst ein Gegengewicht in einem Thema, dessen Geist ihn zu einer ganz
according to Kuhn, Cornelius's masculinity floundered, due to Overbeck's influence: he executed more oil paintings and his style changed from one that was "boiling, expressive" into one that was "consciously soothing, one may even say, nonsensual, enervated, depleted, emasculated."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p.107: "Die religiöse Erschütterung, der er durch Overbeck ausgesetzt wurde, wandelte seinen Stil aus einem kochenden, expressiven, in einen bewußt beruhigten, ja man darf sagen, in einen unsinnlichen, entnervten, ausgelaugten, entmannten."}

Kuhn's attack on the Nazarenes continues with the intimation that the close ties binding the brothers of St. Luke are homosexual in nature:

In the Nazarene circle, sex had no place....The entire eroticism of the Nazarene circle was an eroticism of male alliance. They kissed each other often, treated each other with the sweetest consideration, gave each other pet names, and wrote each other affectionate love letters.

In order to distance Cornelius from such behaviour, Kuhn immediately describes the masculine prowess of the painter:

This could not shackle Cornelius for long....If the Klosterbrüder were sweet men with little vitality, inclined to devotion, to Schwärmerei, to religious intoxication, to the Platonic cult of the Madonna, thoroughly geared to a communal life, so Cornelius's true nature was exactly opposite. Above all he was a man of strong vitality....He possessed a robust Rhineland sexuality, which always broke through. In June 1813,...he met the daughter of a minor papal officer, with whom he had an intimate affair....Only the threats of her brothers, who took the artist by surprise on the occasion of a tête-à-tête in their father's vineyard, made him marry the girl, Carolina Grossi, on 3 February 1814. Six weeks later she gave birth to a daughter. Cornelius married three times in
his lifetime....Nevertheless he was no homme à femmes. Fundamentally he held women in contempt.\textsuperscript{153}

In describing Overbeck, the protestant turned Catholic, as Jewish, non-German, feminine, weak, and homosexual, Kuhn reiterates earlier characterizations as well as adding new personality traits. The effect is to position Overbeck clearly as an "other" with respect to the strong, masculine German ideal of the 1920s.

This harsher attitude towards Overbeck is implicit in much of the literature of this period, throughout which, as Kuhn’s work demonstrates, the history of German art is seen

\textsuperscript{153}Ibid., pp.107-108: "In Nazarenerkreis hatte die Geschlechtlichkeit keinen Platz....Die ganze Erotik des Nazarenerkreises war Männerbunderotik. Man küßte sich oft, behandelte sich mit zärtlichster Rücksicht, gab sich Kosenamen und schrieb sich innige Liebesbriefe.

"Dies konnte auf die Dauer Cornelius nicht fesseln....Waren die Klosterbrüder zarte Menschen von geringer Vitalität, geneigt zur Hingabe, zur Schwärmerei, zum religiösen Rausch, zum platonischen Madonnenkultus, durchaus auf ein Gemeinschaftsleben abgestellt, so war die ursprüngliche Natur des Cornelius dem just entgegengesetzt. Vor allem war er ein Mann von stärkster Lebenskraft....Er besaß eine derbe, rheinische Geschlechtlichkeit, die immer wieder durchbrach.

Im Juni 1813...trat er mit der Tochter eines päpstlichen kleinen Beamten in intime Beziehungen. Erst die Drohungen ihrer Brüder, die den Künstler bei einem Stelldichein im Weinberge ihres Vaters überraschten, brachten ihn dazu, das Mädchen, Carolina Grossi, am 3. Februar 1814 zu heiraten. Sechs Wochen später genas sie einer Tochter. Dreimal heiratete Cornelius im laufe seines Lebens....Trotzdem war er kein homme à femmes. Im Grunde verachtete er die Frau." It should be noted that Fritz Herbert Lehr (p.59), as early as 1924, rejects Kuhn’s suggestion of homoeroticism in the Brotherhood of St. Luke.
in terms of race. When Germanity was thus emphasized, Overbeck's place in the canon was frequently questioned. This was due, in particular, to two important shifts of opinion that occurred in the 1920s vis-à-vis German Romanticism. Firstly, the canon was fundamentally altered inasmuch as Caspar David Friedrich and Philip Otto Runge replaced Overbeck and Cornelius as the leading proponents of this school. Secondly, the art of Franz Pforr was revived (most notably in Fritz Herbert Lehr's monograph).

The displacement of Overbeck and Cornelius by Friedrich and Runge had already begun at the turn of the century, in the 1906 Berlin Jahrhundertausstellung. Opinion became more entrenched, however, in the 1920s, when German Romanticism was being defined in terms of artists who express a Northern German spirit. This view gradually came to replace the predominant nineteenth-century one whereby German Romanticism was a revival of things medieval in opposition to the classicism championed by enlightenment authors, an opinion expressed, for example, by Bergner in 1911:

The pure Romantics, as they were described in Wackenroder's "Herzensgießungen" as schwärmerisch and unclear, found their home in Rome, in the group

---

Heinrich Wöfflin wrote in 1931: "However, only brief reflection is needed to realize that the various styles of a country do contain a common element that stems from the soil, from the race." This quotation is from Wöfflin's Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl, whose title, perhaps because of sensitivity to issues of race after the second world war, is rendered in the English as The Sense of Form in Art, tr. Alice Muehsam and Norma Shatan (New York: Chelsea Publishing Company, 1958), p.18.
of the "Nazarenes," who had been settled since 1810, under Friedrich Overbeck, as a quiet artist colony in the vacated monastery of St. Isidor....

By 1926, in the chapter on Classicism and Romanticism in H. and O. Luckenbach's history of German art, a sharp division is made between on the one hand "Die Nazarener und Peter Cornelius," the title of the third section of the chapter, which deals with artists who travelled to Rome, and on the other "Die Romantiker in der Heimat," the title of the fourth section, which deals with artists, such as Friedrich and Runge, who remained in Germany. Similarly in A. Grisebach's history of German art Overbeck is affiliated with a southern rather than a northern lineage:

But the artistic creed of the Nazarenes, whose leader Overbeck became in Rome— he left his city of birth before he was twenty years old—had no longer its exclusive roots in northern German soil. The Lukas Brothers are in the majority of southern German blood: Führich, Scheffer von Leonhardshoff, and Steinle came from Vienna. A lineage distinct from Overbeck's is not recognizable.

---

155 Bergner, Grundriss, p.299: "Die reine Romantik, wie sie in Wackenroders "Herzensgießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders" schwärmerisch und unklar verkündigt wurde, fand ihr Heim in Rom, in der Gruppe der "Nazarener", die sich seit 1810 unter Friedrich Overbeck als stille Künstlergemeinde in dem verlassenen Kloster St. Isidoro angesiedelt hatte...."


It is no coincidence that also at this time Goethe's views on Romantic art are re-examined by two art historians, Kurt Karl Eberlein and Richard Benz, both instrumental in changing the German Romantic canon. These writers use Goethe, who, as we have seen, was against the Nazarenes, to support their re-assessment of the Romantic period.\(^{158}\)

(3.2) EBERLEIN

The art historian who contributed most to the canonical süddeutschen Geblüts: Führich, Scheffer von Leonhardshoff und Steinle kamen aus Wien. Ein Stammesunterschied zu Overbeck wird nicht erkennbar." The opposition between a German art of the north and an Italian art of the south also occurs in a small booklet, *Art and Germany*, published in 1928. The art of the south, exemplified in the work of Raphael, "remains fettered to the earth," while in the art of the north, exemplified in that of Dürer, "the spirit lifts itself above the earthly....He, therefore, who measures German art with the values derived from predilections which have grown out of formal and southern conception [sic] of Art, will not do justice to its nature." (Art and Germany, ed. Karl Kiesel and Ernst Thiele [Bremen: The University Travel Department of the North German Lloyd, 1928], p.9)

shift noted above was Kurt Karl Eberlein, who remained quite consistent in his project of determining the nature of German art, from his early essays of the 1920s to his Was ist deutsch in der deutschen Kunst?, published—-with a swastika on the cover—in 1934. In pursuance of his goal, Eberlein develops a notion of the lineages (Stämme) of German art based upon artists' drawing styles. One of the important distinctions that Eberlein makes is between the old and the new lineage, a distinction, he believes, that will solve a confusion between the "concepts 'Nazarene' and 'Romantic.'" For Eberlein, Romanticism is "the historical, spiritual elevation of the new clan of northern Germany, the Pommeranians, the Silesians, the Prussians," while the Nazarene spirit is southern, that is Italian:160

Above all they [Cornelius and Overbeck] were not Romantics. The true "Romantics" were seldom in Rome, and rejected Nazarene and old German activities....They were friends and inheritors of Tieck, the students of Boehme, the only ones who searched for and found a new symbolism of form and colour, a new religious landscape painting. They lived mostly in Dresden under Goethe's benevolence and light, ridiculed, misunderstood, soon forgotten, far from the church and court. And they did not have as fellow soldiers, like the Nazarenes, art historians (Kestner, Passavant, Boehmer, Mosler, and Rumohr), but rather poets and


thinkers (Kleist, Brentano, Arnim, Görres, Carus, Müller). The "Rheinfrankish restoration", whose symbol was the rebuilding of the Cologne cathedral, is not Romanticism.\footnote{Eberlein, "Zur neudeutschen Zeichenkunst," pp.269-271: "Vor allem waren sie [Overbeck und Cornelius] keine Romantiker. Die wahren 'Romantiker' waren selten in Rom, lehnten auch das ganze nazarenische und altdeutsche Treiben ab. Pommern (wie Runge, Friedrich, Kersting), Preußen und Schlesier, waren sie die Freunde und Erben Tiecks, die Schüler Boehmes, die einzigen, die eine neue Form- und Farbsymbolik, eine neue religiöse Landschaftsmalerei suchten und fanden. Sie lebten meist in Dresden, in Goethes Gunst und Licht, veracht, mißverstanden, bald vergessen, fern von Kirche und Hof und hatten als Kampfgenossen nicht, wie die Nazarener, Kunsthistoriker (Kestner, Passavant, Boehmer, Mosler, u. Rumohr), sondern Dichter und Denker (Kleist, Brentano, Arnim, Görres, Carus, Müller). Die 'rheinfränkische Restauration', deren Wahrzeichen der Neubau des Kölner Domes war, ist keine Romantik."}

Eberlein argues that Romanticism has been relegated to the category of the aesthetic, when it should in fact be seen as an "historical concept."\footnote{Ibid., p.271: "'Romantik' ist ein historischer Begriff, der leider ein ästhetischer geworden ist."} Consequently, Romanticism and the Nazarene movement can be distinguished through their "relation of the new and old lineages to art and religion":

The classicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was communicated through line in engravings and drawings, and it is no accident that at the turn of the century Flaxman's "outlines" were frequently used in Rome and Vienna. But since one had been taught out of artistic and art-historical interests to trace the outlines from the old originals...it was such "tracings" which disseminated and taught publicly the formal language of the middle ages. Even Overbeck learned to love this line....However it was not scholarly outline drawings of this type, but rather a new study of nature, the rejection of the academic manner, the new feeling and worldview, that allowed...
the new essence of art to ripen.\textsuperscript{163} Eberlein separates the Nazarenes from the Romantics using the already established distinction between an art that copies older forms and one that originates in the study of nature. While Eberlein never explicitly condemns Overbeck, he does cast him out of the canon of German Romanticism and connect him with an older, decadent form of art that had not been renewed through the study of nature. The Romantics Runge and Friedrich on the other hand developed a romantic-symbolic art with a new mythology, attempting to create a society for the future.\textsuperscript{164} Such distinctions are important for Eberlein, for he does not want to sully Romanticism: "I emphasize once more that 'Romanticism' is not an aesthetic, but an historical concept, which must be and remain absolutely

\textsuperscript{163}Ibid., pp.271-275: "Das Verhältnis der Neu- und Altstämme zu Kunst und Religion kann im einzelnen das hier Gesagte nur bestätigen.

"Der Klassizismus des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts war durch die Linie in Stich und Zeichnung vermittelt worden, und es ist kein Zufall, daß um die Jahrhundertwende Flaxmans 'Umrisse' in Rom und Wien mannigfaltig ausgebaut wurden. Seitdem man aber aus künstlerischen und kunsthistorischen Interessen gelernt hatte, auf den alten Originalen die Umrisse durchzuzeichnen,...waren es solche 'Durchzeichnungen'..., die verliehen und veröffentlicht die Formensprache des Mittelalters lehrten. Auch Overbeck lernte so die Linie lieben....Und doch waren es nicht solche lernbare Typen der Umrißzeichnungen, sondern das neue Naturstudium, die Abkehr von der akademischen Manier, die neue Gesinnung und Weltanschauung, die das neue Kunstwesen reifen ließ."

\textsuperscript{164}Eberlein, \textit{Deutsche Maler der Romantik}, p.122.
Eberlein's use of the term "pure" suggests that even though he may attempt to distinguish between the Nazarenes and the Romantics along formal lines, his distinction is fundamentally racial in character. "Looking back from an historical distance," Eberlein writes, "a specific art-geography is offered to us, and the phylogenetic history of art, as always, helps to clarify this great epoch [Romanticism]." The task of the German art historian, according to Eberlein, is to determine which art is German and which is not. In his Was ist deutsch in der deutschen Kunst?, he explains that "the art historian is not a specialist, but a national personality, a seer, an interpreter, a translator at the same time, not a connoisseur of the art market, but a connoisseur of the spirit of art, of the national worth of art and life, of the signs and language of art, watcher and warner, teacher and defender of the

---

165Ibid., p.122: "Ich betone es immer wieder, daß "Romantik" kein ästhetischer, sondern ein historischer Begriff ist, der unbedingt rein sein und bleiben muß."

empire of art and its politics of art."\textsuperscript{167}

(3.3) LEHR

Fritz Herbert Lehr, like Eberlein, believes that Romanticism "has not yet been able to become a clear historical concept," but his analysis is made more along formal rather than racial lines.\textsuperscript{168} Lehr attempts to historicize Romanticism by arguing that there exists a type of line that is specific to Romantic painting. "Pure or abstract line" signifies in itself; there is a unity between meaning and form that is conveyed through this type of line, which "corresponds to the Romantic synthesis of feeling and understanding, individual and universe."\textsuperscript{169} It is this type


\textsuperscript{168}Lehr, p.223: "...daß 'Romantik' noch kein bestimmter historischer Begriff werden konnte."

\textsuperscript{169}Ibid., pp. 246-247: "Es gibt in der bildenden Kunst eine Linie, die durchaus nicht Einzelabschließung, sondern gerade Zusammenfassung bedeutet. Sie bindet eine Gesamtheit zur Einheit, ohne die Bestimmtheit der eingeschlossenen Teile zu beeinträchtigen, sie präzisiert des Einzelne, ohne es im Zusammenhang des Ganzen zu isolieren. Diese reine oder abstrakte Linie entspricht der romantischen Synthese von Gefühl und Verstand, Individuum und Universum, sie ist von jener Totalität, die ein scheinbar unbestimmt erfühltes All mit geistiger Bestimmtheit zu durchdringen und zu formen vermag." Lehr, using a Wöfflinian methodology, focusses his attention on formal characteristics of works of art in order to determine historical categories. But against Wöfflin's
of line that true Romantic painters employ:

Pforr's work...represents next to the creations of Karl Philipp Fohr and Caspar David Friedrich the purest realization of abstract line. These three artists represent the fine art of Romanticism in its highest perfection. For them design is pure line, which determines the planes, and which corresponds in the planes to contrasting, abstract colours.\(^{170}\)

Lehr, in almost a direct criticism of Eberlein, does not divide the Nazarenes from the Romantics along a north/south border, for he does not believe that "Nazarene" is a stylistic concept.

An attempt has been made to draw a sharp line of division between Fohr, Pforr and their circle and the group around C.D. Friedrich: here 'Nazarenes'--

statement that line has "the function of being closed off in itself and of separating the appearance from its surroundings" (Lehr, p.246), Lehr argues that in the abstract line of Romanticism form and meaning reside together. Lehr furthermore chastises F. Strich's Deutsche Klassik und Romantik: Ein Vergleich (Munich, 1922), for trying to separate classicism from romanticism using the Wöflinian categories of closed and open form (Lehr, p.238n1). Walter Friedlaender, in his David to Delacroix (original German edition, 1930), similarly uses the standard Wöflinian categories of Romantic and Baroque to distinguish between French Neo-Classicism and Romanticism. For Friedlaender, the work of the Nazarenes is classified with that of the Barbus or Primitifs as an "anticlassical, linear abstraction": "though filled with a sincere faith, the French group entirely lacked the catholicizing, 'monasticizing,' and reactionary tendencies of Overbeck and his circle." (Friedlaender, David to Delacroix, tr. Robert Goldwater [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952], p.49.)

\(^{170}\)Ibid., p.250: "Dennoch stellen die Werke Pforrs... neben den Schöpfungen Karl Philip Fohrs und Caspar David Friedrichs die reinste Verwirklichung der abstrakten Linie, des romantischen Stiles dar. Diese drei Künstler repräsentieren die bildende Kunst der Romantik in ihrer höchsten Vollendung. Formgebend ist bei ihnen die reine Linie, der die durch die Fläche bestimmte, in der Fläche kontrastgebundene abstrakte Farbgebung entspricht."
there Romantics. The communality of their rudimentary stylistic forms makes this separation illusory. On the whole, one would do well to limit considerably the term 'Nazarene' as a stylistic concept, if not give it up entirely. If one takes the concept 'Nazareneness' in the strictest sense, that is as a description of an art which serves to express, only as a secondary means, an already specialized religious feeling, than there is in general only one real Nazarene: Overbeck....There is next to Overbeck no other case so pronounced of a tendency to misuse form. The Overbeck type, [imitating] old-master form solely in order to take over the emotional values that are associated with it and to insert them into one's own pictures without formal requirement, is quite simply an unparalleled characteristic.¹⁷¹

Just as "Nazarene" is not a stylistic category, so Overbeck, the only true Nazarene, does not have a "style in the singular and pure sense. Style is to him not a matter of creative development...but more a matter of being able to select among already established forms."¹⁷²


¹⁷²Ibid., p.130: "Allerdings, von Stil im eigentlichen und reinen Sinne kann bei Overbeck gar nicht gesprochen werden. Stil ist bei ihm nicht Angelegenheit schöpferischer Entwicklung, nicht eigengeistiges Gebilde, nicht formal-
Unlike the work of Pforr and the other true Romantics, in whose works there is a unity of form and content derived from abstract line, Overbeck's work exhibits disharmony. Form, instead of being intimately connected to content, is merely a means to express a religious feeling extraneous to the work proper.

This invisible element, the content of religious feeling that he wants to communicate, is to him the highest task, becomes to him the crux of his art; with it he destroys the foundation of the artwork even before it is created. For the unassailably established basis of all the fine arts is the visual. Pforr, like every true artist, defended it as a positive element. Overbeck gives it solely a negative meaning, he uses it only in order to achieve through its means an effect which is entirely different from the artistic, that is the visual one. He cannot, of course, entirely renounce the visual, because he undertakes to convey his religiosity to others through his paintings.173

Pforr, on the other hand, privileges the visual, and "with artistically formulated means reaches...an expression of productiver Sinn, sondern mehr ein Vermögen, die Auswahl zu treffen unter bereits anderweitig gegebenen Formen."

173Ibid., p.130: "Dieses Unsichtbare, der religiöse Empfindungsgehalt, den er vermitteln will, ist ihm die Hauptsache, wird ihm zum Mittelpunkt seiner Kunst; damit zerstört er das zu schaffende Kunstprodukt bereits in den Grundlagen. Denn die unangreifbar bedingende Basis aller bildenden Kunst ist Sichtbarlichkeit. Pforr hat sie wie jeder wirkliche Künstler als positives Element gewahrt. Overbeck gibt ihr lediglich negative Bedeutung, er benutzt sie nur, um durch ihre Vermittlung eine ganz andere als künstlerische, überhaupt sichtbare Wirkung zu erreichen. Absolut kann er natürlich auf das Sichtbare nicht verzichten, da er es einmal unternommen hat, durch Gemälde seine Religiosität anderen zu übermitteln."
feeling, which lies at the basis of his conception."\textsuperscript{174} For Lehr there is a metonymic relation between Pforr's work and Romanticism: "The investigation of the form of Pforr's work represents nothing other than the clarification of the Romantic stylistic principle."\textsuperscript{175}

Although Lehr does not employ the terms symbol and allegory, his criticism of Overbeck is essentially the same as Vischer's. In Overbeck's work, there is disharmony (Zwiespalt): there is no unity between the form and meaning of his paintings. In Pforr's work, on the other hand, such unity (Einheit) exists. In fact, when, at his most helpless after a bout of depression, he comes under Overbeck's influence, there is a weakening of his stylistic strength (Erlahmen der Stilkraft):

Now [Pforr's] life spirit had failed, and it strove, under Overbeck's aegis, to anchor itself anew in feeling, in faith. But with this complete shift in deliberate emphasis to the side of feeling the same disharmony had to creep into his art as did into Overbeck's. The disharmony in Pforr's work never became so pronounced as in Overbeck's, because a part of the old spirit of form was able to remain in existence and in effect. But the great unity of his art, which had revealed itself in his painting of "Graf Habsburg with the Priest,"

\textsuperscript{174}Ibid., pp.130-131: "Bei Pforr ist das Sichtbare das Erste seiner Kunstwerke. Er erreicht mit künstlerische formalen Mitteln im fertigen Gemälde den Ausdruck des Gefühles, das der Konzeption zugrunde lag. Overbeck hingegen sucht, mit Gefühl das Formale zu bezwingen; die Form, die Pforr zugleich Wesen bedeutet, ist ihm nur Widerstand gegen das Wesen, das er als ein bestimmtes Gefühl verkünden will."

\textsuperscript{175}Ibid., p.224: "Die Untersuchungen über die Form des Pforrschen Werkes stellen nichts anderes dar als die Klarlegung romantischer Stilprinzipien."
was destroyed forever.\textsuperscript{176}

Just as Overbeck weakens Cornelius's creative energy (in Kuhn's Cornelius monograph), so he weakens Pforr's. While Lehr's condemnation of Overbeck is not along racial lines, it nevertheless follows the type of criticism we have seen before. Overbeck's art is not autonomous; it relies upon something external to the work proper. Lehr casts Overbeck out of German Romanticism and isolates him as the only true Nazarene.

In the literature of the 1920s and 1930s, these two themes, the replacement of Overbeck and Cornelius with Friedrich and Runge as the leaders of German Romanticism and the elevation of the status of Pforr, are frequently reiterated. For Overbeck, the result continues to be unfavourable. Gustav Pauli, for example, argues that while the Nazarenes and Runge all felt their German nature strongly, "the difference was that Runge's Germanity manifested itself in an entirely simple and unintentional manner, while that of the Nazarene youths was conscious and

\textsuperscript{176}Ibid., p.134: "Nun war sein Geist im Leben zusammengebrochen und suchte unter Overbecks Ägide im Gefühl, in der Gläubigkeit ein wieder festigendes Gerüst. Aber mit dieser Verschiebung alles willentlichen Gewichts auf die Gefühlseite mußte sich im Kunstbereich nun der gleiche Zwiespalt einschleichen wie bei Overbeck. Der Zwiespalt wurde in Pforrs Werk zwar niemals so kraß wie bei Overbeck, weil ein Rest des alten Formgeistes doch noch bestand und bindend wirksam bleiben konnte; aber die große Einheit seiner Kunst, die das Gemälde des 'Grafen Habsburg mit dem Priester' hatte hervorbringen können, war doch endgültig zerstört."
insistent. And in this lay an element of weakness."\(^{177}\)

Overbeck's Germanity was weakened even more when he converted to Catholicism.

The pious Runge was in the eyes of Overbeck only a heretic. Thus as soon as the Germanity of the Nazarenes faded, there was a proportionate intensification of their Catholicism. In place of the German masters, which they had honoured from a distance, their models became the Italians of the late quattrocento, namely the young Raphael....So grew the art of the Nazarenes, re-animating the decrepit southern form with the ardour of German belief.\(^{178}\)

Franz Landsberger, in the section of his *Die Kunst der Goethezeit* dedicated to the art of the Nazarenes, or what he calls "Late Gothic Painting," frequently upstages these painters by comparing their work to that of Friedrich and Runge. Here is a typical passage from this section of the book:

Runge and Friedrich did not need, like them, the remoteness of the southern country; their small family circles gave them opportunities to paint portraits, their native soil the theme for

---


\(^{178}\)Ibid., pp.105-106: "Der fromme Runge war in den Augen eines Overbeck doch nur ein Ketzer. Ziemlich bald also verbläste das Deutschtum der Nazarener in derselben Maße, wie ihr Katholizismus erstarke. Statt der deutschen Meister, die sie von ferne verehrten, wurden ihre Vorbilder nun die Italiener des späten Quattrocento, namentlich der junge Raffael--so sehr sie von primitiveren Meistern wie z.B. Fra Angelico reden mochten....So entstand das Gewächs dieser Nazarenerkunst, das die abgelebten südlichen Formen mit der Inbrunst deutschen Glaubens neu beseelte."
landscapes. Nor did Runge and Friedrich require impressions of art in order to produce; what they felt was their feeling, what they painted, they saw with their eyes. The Nazarenes, on the contrary, were less immediate; they would thrust impressions of works of art between themselves and nature.  

In the writings of Pauli and Landsberger, Overbeck is condemned for being non-German and for failing to work from nature. The comparison of Overbeck to Pforr also reinforces the basic characterization of Overbeck. Paul Ferdinand Schmidt writes that despite Pforr’s illness, his "nature was more masculine and creative than the other Nazarenes and can be compared to Cornelius’s," and that Overbeck "certainly stood behind Pforr in talent and originality."

For Overbeck, the great attraction of old German forms did not exist as it did for Pforr and Cornelius...His ideal, in which he was steadfast from the beginning with the certainty of a sleep-walker, was the Italianizing type, or to be more specific: the young Raphael up to his Florentine period. This lay in his musically soft nature, which surrendered itself to the rhythm of a noble line.

---

179 Franz Landsberger, Die Kunst der Goethezeit (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1931), pp.261-2: "...brauchten Runge und Friedrich auch nicht, wie jene, die Ferne des südlichen Landes; der engste Kreis der Familie gab Gelegenheit zum Porträt, der heimatliche Boden das unerschöpfliche Thema der Landschaft. Auch benötigten Runge und Friedrich keiner Kunstindrücke, um zu produzieren; was sie fühlten, war ihr Gefühl, was sie malten, hatten sie mit ihren Augen gesehen. Die Nazarener hingegen waren weniger unmittelbar; zwischen sie und die Natur schoben sich die Eindrücke künstlerischer Gestaltung."

And Carl Georg Heise comments that "[e]ven among the first Brothers of St. Luke, Overbeck was the leading but not the most significant artist. Pforr's talent, which matured early, outshone him, especially in terms of originality of invention."\(^{181}\)

(3.4) BENZ

Richard Benz's essay in *Die Kunst der deutschen Romantik* (1939) is a good illustration of the changes that took place in German Romantic scholarship of the 1920s and 1930s. Benz discusses the Romantics (Runge and Friedrich) before going on to the Nazarenes, thus privileging the former and at least implicitly acknowledging Eberlein's distinction. He compares the Nazarenes, who formed an alliance, to Runge and Friedrich, who "fully possessed their own direction."\(^{182}\)


The landscape painting of Friedrich and Runge is by this time so well accepted as the foundation of German Romanticism that Benz uses it (rather absurdly) as the criterion for judging the art of the Nazarenes:

If one would want to formulate the artistic ideal of the Brothers of St. Luke at this time, it would have to be stated first in the negative: for none of the participants did landscape play an essential role or constitute a goal in itself; this means that they all strove, in various ways, towards a new figural art, in opposition to the 'new landscape,' which was the slogan of the northern Germans, Friedrich and Runge....Let it not be said that the brothers of St. Luke had no relation to nature--it played its role, above all with Pforr and later even with Overbeck. But it did not function as a primary inspiration.  

In his discussion of the Nazarenes themselves, Benz weaves a narrative which focusses first on Pforr, then on the development of the landscape painting of Ferdinand Olivier and others connected to the Nazarene circle, and then finally on the art of Cornelius. Overbeck does not rank highly in this exposé. Referring to Pforr's *Entry of Rudolf of...*  

183Ibid., p.89: "Will man das künstlerische Ideal der Lukasbrüder in dieser Zeit auf eine Formel bringen, so ist es wohl am ehesten aus dem Negativum zu erschließen: daß für alle Beteiligten die Landschaft keine wesentliche Rolle spielt und nicht als Selbstzweck erscheint; das heißt, sie streben alle, wenn auch auf verschiedenen Wegen, zu einer neuen Figuralkunst, im Gegensatz zur 'neuen Landschaft', wie es die Lösung der Norddeutschen Runge und Friedrich war....Das will nicht besagen, die Lukasbrüder hätten kein Verhältnis zur Natur gehabt--sie spielt, vor allem bei Pforr und später auch bei Overbeck, ihre Rolle. Aber sie hat keine primär inspirierende Funktion...."
Habsburg into Basel in 1273 and Overbeck’s Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, works begun in Vienna and completed in Rome, Benz argues that Pforr’s work is soundly based in German art, while Overbeck’s already shows the influence of Raphael:

It was not inevitable that Italy would produce a complete rejection of a healthy German style; this is proven not only by Pforr’s, but also Overbeck’s, first Roman works. The deeper reason was that after Pforr’s death, Overbeck, who remained behind, lost his necessary counterweight, his true foothold, and he searched for and found an ersatz outwardly in Raphael and inwardly in the church. But with that, the ‘brotherhood’ ended; then the Roman-German Lukas-guild began, which entered art history, under the term Nazareneness, as a movement only led by Overbeck quietly and steadily.\(^\text{184}\)

For Benz, Pforr is the painter who best represents the intentions of the brotherhood: his art develops from that of Runge; his Sulamith und Maria (fig.19) is a "timeless Sinnbild of Romanticism"; and his death signals the demise of the Brotherhood of St. Luke’s search for a German art.\(^\text{185}\) The flame was then taken up by Cornelius.\(^\text{186}\) Overbeck, the Nazarene painter who rejected a healthy German art, is left

\(^{184}\text{Ibid., p.98: "Es brauchte nicht unbedingt zu sein, daß Italien diese völlige Ablenkung vom gesunden deutschen Stil bewirkte, wie Pforrs aber auch Overbecks erste römische Arbeiten noch beweisen. Der tiefere Grund war, daß nach dem Tode Pforrs, des künstlerisch Stärkeren....der zurückbleibende Overbeck das ihm nötige Gegengewicht, ja den wahren Halt verlor, und äußerlich an Raffael, innerlich an der Kirche den Ersatz suchte und fand. Die 'Bruderschaft' aber war damit zu Ende; es begann die römisch-deutsche Lukas-Gilde, die unter dem Begriff Nazarenertum als eine nur noch von Overbeck still aber sicher geleitete Bewegung in die Kunstgeschichte eingegangen ist."}

\(^{185}\text{Ibid., p.98.}

\(^{186}\text{Ibid., p.108}\)
out of this progression. He lost his way when he converted to Catholicism and fell under the spell of an Italian art of the past.

(3.5) DEFENSE OF THE EARLY WORK

In the 1920s and 1930s, the critics who defended the Nazarenes did so mostly by praising their early work. Carl Georg Heise, who during this period organized the only exhibition devoted exclusively to the work of Overbeck and his circle, tried to undo the damage caused by earlier critics, noting how Gurlitt's "mockery of Nazareneness set the tone for the judgement of Overbeck and his circle up to a short time ago," and how Scheffler, using the condemning slogan Gedankenmalerei, had helped to falsify "an important chapter of German art history." For Heise, the importance of the Nazarenes lies in their youthful attempt to return art to its proper path:

At the beginning of the movement--above all the fruitful second decade of the nineteenth century when the Germans were in Rome--the spirit is pure, the child-like picture-writing of the youngsters full of holy fire. These young masters, disappointed by the antiquated tradition and well-trodden track of the Viennese academy, tried to

---

regain in Rome an aspect of the old masters, something definite and indispensable, which had been lost down the line: the unity of art and life, of creative form and Weltanschauung.  

Heise defends the early works on formal grounds. "Their worth," he argues, lies in a return to clear planarity and to a symbolic use of colour, relying not on chiaroscuro, colour values, or tonal unity, but on clear colour contrast and a bold new type of colour harmony. "These specific painterly effects require a specific technique: preference for a wooden ground, numerous glazes, an application of colour of the greatest purity, and the use of gold—in imitation of the art of the primitives." Heise's formalist argument directly counters Nazarene opponents, who, in viewing their works as a means to an end (not as autonomous) or as allegories (not as


189Heise, Die Malerei der deutschen Romantik, p.8: "Die Werte dieser Malerei liegen eben durchaus nicht da, wo man sie fälschlich gesucht hat. Sie lassen sich etwa so umschreiben: Gleichmäßige Zurückführung aller Bildelemente auf klare Flächigkeit, bis zum Symbolhaften getriebene, gemütsbetonte Auswahl der Farben, Wirkung nicht durch Helldunkel, Valeurs, Gesamttön, sondern durch klar einprägsame Kontraste oder durch kühne, neuartige Harmonien bis zur gewagtesten Kombination....Diese besonderen malerischen Wirkungen bedingen eine besondere Technik: Vorliebe für hölzernen Malgrund, zahlreiche Lasuren, eine Farbenauftrag von äußerster Reinheit, Verwendung von Gold,--Anlehnungen an die Kunst der Primitiven...."
symbols), devalue their formal qualities.

But while Heise may defend the early works of Overbeck and his circle, he is quite critical of their work after 1830: "Just as they destroyed all bridges to the past, so they themselves closed all the gates to the future. There was only truth or betrayal--no development." Even Overbeck, with his "so sympathetically touching, unswerving constancy," executed works that appear to have been "painted fruitlessly against the time." Nevertheless, due to his piety, his decline was not as swift as the others:

The decline even of his spiritual strength also took place, only differently and more slowly than with his companions....He was the only one entirely suited to this special form of artistic expression and entirely able to express his essence within the demands of this ideal program. So his art remained the same up to the end.190

As we have seen many times before, Overbeck's art is justified by the assumed agreement between his life and art.

190Ibid., p.13: "Wie sie zum Gestern alle Brücken abbrachen, so verschlossen sie sich alle Tore zum Übermorgen. Es gab nur Treue oder Verrat--keine Entwicklung. Overbecks menschlich so sympathisch berührende, unbeirrbare Stetigkeit brachte es am Ende nicht zu Leistungen, die im erhabenen Sinne zeitlos geworden sind, sondern die fruchtlos gegen die Zeit gemalt zu sein scheinen."

191Ibid., p.9: "Doch auch bei ihm vollzieht sich ein Verfall der geistigen Kräfte, nur anders und langsamer als bei den Genossen....Er war gewiß nicht der Begabteste--seine Jugendzeichnungen sind ungelenk und erfindungsarm, und auch in reifen Jahren ist der Umkreis seiner künstlerischen Möglichkeiten nie sehr groß gewesen--, aber er war der Einzige, dem diese besondere Form des künstlerischen Ausdrucks ganz gemäß war, dessen Wesen sich innerhalb der Forderungen des idealen Programms restlos aussprechen konnte. So blieb seine Kunst bis zuletzt sich selber gleich."
Other defenders of the Nazarenes share Heise's attitude: they praise the early work and condemn the late work, frequently describing it as dead form. Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, only a lukewarm defender, praises the Nazarenes, as he does Carstens and Runge, for their rebellion against the academy. But he believes that "it was a national misfortune that it was not Runge and his thoroughly German Romantic world that prevailed, but the Nazarene method of combining the old Italian masters with traditional biblical and historical material. For this way led promptly back to academicism, to the copying of dead forms." 192 For Alfred Neumeyer, a staucher defender of the group, "the art of the Nazarenes can only claim a high aesthetic and historical interest in its first period." The work of Cornelius, Overbeck, Schnorr, and Veit, after the 1820s, is marred by "an increasing

---

192 Schmidt, Die Lukasbrüder, pp.5-6: "Vom höheren Standpunkt aus gesehen, war es ein nationales Unglück, daß nicht Runge und seine durch und durch deutsche Romantikerwelt sich durchsetzte, sondern die nazarenische Methode des Anschlusses an altitalienische Meister und die altüberkommnen biblischen und historischen Stoffe. Denn dieser Weg führte rasch zum Akademismus, zur Nachahmung toter Formen zurück, die man selber mit so viel Feuer bekämpft hatte, während Runge mit seinem neuen Ideenkreise zugleich auch eine gründliche Erneuerung des Handwerklichen auf Grund des Naturstudiums begonnen hatte." Schmidt furthermore opines that the Nazarenes may have given back "to art its worth, its true Idealism and an almost mystical working-community," but it did this "according to a centuries old and non-German form," and "in the end this led to their ossification." (Schmidt, p.10: "Sie gaben der Kunst ihre Würde, ihren echten Idealismus und eine fast mystische Werkgemeinschaft wieder; aber sie taten dies auf Grund einer Jahrhunderte alten und nichtdeutschen Form: und so mußte diese...am Ende zur Verknöcherung führen.")
congealment of their line, an increasing drying up of their colour."^{193}

W. Neuss, a convinced champion of the Nazarenes, also limits their contribution to German art's development to their early years. For Neuss the Nazarenes were necessary for the revival of German painting, but their importance faded after 1840. By this time, a new spirit had emerged, evidenced by such factors as the turn to Realism and the appearance of David Friedrich Strauss' *Leben Jesu* (1835) and Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* (1855), which popularized materialism. It was at this time that the Nazarenes began to be isolated from the culture at large.^194

Even with this concession and even after accepting many of the criticisms of earlier writers, Neuss vigorously

---


defends the art of the Nazarenes on historical grounds. In 1917, he agrees with Scheffler and others that these painters were Gedankenmaler, but he believes that "the greatest masters of all time have practiced Gedankenkunst." In 1928, he agrees with Eberlein that Overbeck should not be considered a Romantic, although he defines Romanticism in terms of subjectivity, rather than race.

The distinguishing mark of Romanticism is subjectivity, and indeed even extreme subjectivity, as shown in the philosophy of Fichte and the young Friedrich Schlegel. For Romantic artists, frame of mind is everything. Caspar David Friedrich is a genuine romantic artist among painters, and his painting of the Monk by the Sea was classically described by Heinrich von Kleist as a picture in which one loses oneself. Philipp Runge is also a Romantic and, like Friedrich, comes to landscape painting, which he fills with a mystic-pietist worldview from Theophrast and Jakob Böhme. But Overbeck is no Romantic. His father, who was a declared opponent of Romantic poets, inoculated him early. The objective...character of his essence, that is his unromantic nature, led him directly to historical and indeed to religious pictures.


Neuss sets out to justify the work of the Nazarenes as necessary for the development of modern German art. Unlike Heise, he avoids a formalist position:

Today we are learned and, through books and museums, also instructed to find everything beautiful: Greek sculpture and early Germanic art, Fra Angelico and Boucher, Japanese coloured woodcuts and our *plein-air* painting. But is it a sign of artistic strength to be able to see at every moment with other eyes? And are we really so free as we believe? Is not the eye and understanding of most of those talking and writing about art today, engaged only in colours and forms: how does green relate to brown, yellow to red and blue, how does this line cross that one?197

Neuss prefers a historicist stance: "The Nazarenes were children of their time, a time of searching, not of sure possession, a time of difficult ascents, not of proud walks on sunny peaks."198 In developing an historicist viewpoint, Neuss takes issue with those critics who believe that the


young artists "lost their best selves" in Italy. "How often has it been asked whether it would not have been much better for them to remain, like Runge, in their homeland and to have stayed far away from Rome and its spirit." Neuss is convinced that it was essential for the development of German art that these artists travel to Rome, because "German art in some ways had to link itself with the past." Rather than seeing the flight to Italy as the ruin of their German nature, Neuss argues that it was necessary for the development of German art: "Rome, on the contrary, was, as unbelievable as it may sound, the only city where the German artist was permitted to be entirely German."

What the Nazarenes effected in Rome was in fact not a renunciation of things German, but historically the only possible way of re-awakening a German monumental painting. One cannot prize Rethel as the great German history painter and reprimand the Nazarenes; for there would not have been a Rethel, if Cornelius and Overbeck had not earlier paved the way.201

199 Neuss, "Das Wesen der Nazarenerkunst," p.70: "Wieviel ist geklagt worden, dass die jungen Künstler in Italien ihr bestes Selbst verloren hätten! Wie oft hat man gefragt, was nicht alles Besseres aus ihnen geworden wäre, wenn sie etwa wie Runge ganz in der Heimat geblieben wären und sich von Rom und seinem Geiste fern gehalten hätten....Dass die deutsche Kunst in irgendeiner Weise an die Vergangenheit anknüpfen musste, war damals allen klar."

200 Neuss, "Die Kunst der Nazarener," p.8: "Rom dagegen war, so unglaublich es auch klingen mag, die einzige Stadt, so der deutsche Künstler ganz deutsch sein durfte.

201 Neuss, "Das Wesen der Nazarenerkunst," p.71: "Es war in der Tat gar kein Aufgeben des Deutschen, was die Nazarener in Rom vollzogen, sondern die geschichtlich einzig mögliche Art der Wiedererweckung einer deutschen Monumentalmalerei. Man kann nicht Rethel als den grossen deutschen
Neuss's spirited teleological defense of Overbeck and the Nazarenes emphasizes their historical necessity. Unlike so many other writers who cast them out of the canon of German art, Neuss views them as integral to the development of modern German painting. But of course Overbeck is relegated to the early, youthful period of German art, as he was in Raczynski's *History of Modern German Painting*, written almost a century earlier.

Overbeck's characterization in the art-historical literature from approximately 1840 to 1940 plays, to a great degree, on the painter's own construction of his public persona. In chapter two, I argued that Overbeck, in staking a claim to marginality, constructed a monk-artist persona, which, with its emphasis on purity and interiority, takes on characteristics of the feminine in nineteenth-century Germany. In this chapter, we have seen a continuation of the construction of Overbeck's identity along these lines. He is described as pure, feminine, confined or limited, and out of place, both temporally and spatially. The consistency in Overbeck's characterization does not depend upon the writers' agendas. Some authors praise the religious nature of his art and life; others use his religiosity to condemn him as Geschichtsmaler preisen und die Nazarener schelten; denn es konnte kein Rethel kommen, wenn nicht Overbeck und Cornelius vorher die Bahn gebrochen hätten."
anachronistic or non-German; and still others want to connect his purity with an idealist art in opposition to a naturalist one, usually defined as masculine in nature. Over time, the set of descriptive terms is expanded to include such epithets as idealist, foreign, unhealthy, anachronistic, and sterile. These additions, while mostly derisive in nature, are not inconsistent with Overbeck’s own construction. For example, in seeing Overbeck as foreign and anachronistic, some writers disconnect him from the concerns of present-day Germany, a disengagement that was initiated by Overbeck himself, in his retreat from the quotidian world. Or, in seeing Overbeck as idealist or sterile, others absolve him of the sensual aspects of art and life, a separation of which he himself would have approved. The consistency in the literature itself and the congruity between Overbeck’s and the writers’ formulation of his character erect a solid unchanging edifice. Overbeck’s integrity, it seems, overcomes the vagaries of history.
CONCLUSION

I would like to end this examination of Overbeck's life and art with a brief discussion of a claim about Overbeck and the Nazarenes that one frequently comes across in the literature since the end of the Second World War. According to several critics, the Brotherhood of St. Luke was "the first definite artistic secession of modern times."¹ What underlies this claim is a Modernist paradigm, whereby the avant-garde artist is politically rebellious and marginalized. Keith Andrews states that the nickname Nazarene was originally intended to denote some sort of false piety.² This is in keeping with the cliché of the artist who is misunderstood and ridiculed by his contemporaries and cast out from the social centre. Jens Jensen takes this idea even further:


Overbeck, Pforr and his friends [were] radicals. For them the academy [was] the stronghold of a corrupted style.... For the first time in the history of art a group of young artists, who stood up for their personal insights and feelings, for their essential strength, and for their artistically determined well-being, revolted against a prevailing... obligatory style.... What remains is youth and courage, which we must admire; what remains is the purity of motive, the undisputable consequence of the chosen path, which wins us over; what remains finally is magnificent painting and some of the most beautiful German drawing, which gives us an idea of the strength, fire, spirit, and heart of the young revolutionaries, and which convinces us of the legitimacy of their rebellion.3

In the case of Overbeck, the "secessionist" interpretation of his endeavour, with its emphasis on marginality, purity, and constancy, follows the painter’s own construction of his persona, but casts the values he developed in a new light. Overbeck, like avant-garde artists, does subvert the prevailing artistic tendency (in his case, Classicism) "through a return to sources and to the purity of [art’s]

origins," but, as importantly, his historicism links his art to a pictorial tradition, which is precisely what the avant-garde wanted to break away from. Pierre Bourdieu has described the intention of avant-garde poets of the nineteenth century as attempting to take the "poetic" (standard forms, rhetorical figures, and comparisons) out of poetry. Similarly, one can say that avant-garde painters wanted to purify their genre; they wanted to take the "pictorial" out of painting. Overbeck's programme is quite different: what he attempts to exclude from painting is the painterly, that is the sensuous component of art. This exclusion is not anti-bourgeois, as was the late nineteenth-century Secessionist movement that Andrews and others compare retroactively to the Nazarenes. Rather Overbeck's anti-


Ibid., p.188.


The idea of artistic secessionism comes from Vienna, where the Brotherhood of St. Luke was formed. In 1897, a group of artists, the Viennese Secessionists, opposed the ideals of the bourgeois Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Arts and Crafts). Concerning this movement, see Carl Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp.214-215. It should also be noted that the Nazarenes did not really secede. In 1810, the academy was closed, because of the Napoleonic occupation of Vienna, and when it reopened later that year, with much smaller facilities, Overbeck, Pforr, and Vogel were not readmitted (Howitt I, p.109).
sensuousness accords with notions of bourgeois self-control and asceticism. The subversive quality of Overbeck's programme vis-à-vis the aristocratic Academy ought to be understood, not in an absolute sense, but in relation to his particular historical context. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, between the final years of German Enlightenment and the early Biedermeier years, there occurred, according to Wolfgang Kaschuba, "a period of bourgeois 'experimentation'," but after the Wars of Liberation (1815) and the Karlsbad Decrees (1819), "this enthusiasm to experiment and search for new paths seemed to weaken," as Restoration politics and Biedermeier culture "began to adapt [themselves] to a non-bourgeois society." Kaschuba puts "experimentation" in quotation marks to suggest that bourgeois experimentation was perhaps not as subversive as is often claimed. Such is the case with Overbeck. Through a historicist stance, he rejects Classicism as the guide to perfection and replaces it with an ascetic and pure version of Catholicism (an embourgeoisement of pre-Reformation times). Furthermore, he rejects the validity of Academic formulas and replaces them with a belief that one's style can only be developed properly in conjunction with one's inner nature, a claim to individualism that is at the

---

This brief discussion of Overbeck as a secessionist artist provides an apt conclusion to this dissertation, for it focusses on Overbeck's own construction of his self and art (as original, pure, and marginal) and on the new values lent to this construction by later writers. My examination of Overbeck as both socially constructed (through his role-playing) and historically constructed (in the art-historical literature) can perhaps be considered a paradigm for larger issues of art-historical practice in the nineteenth century, the century in which both the modern conception of the self and the discipline of art history became firmly established. In examining Overbeck this way, I hope to suggest a method applicable to other artists' practice in this period. Overbeck is far from being the only artist whose production relates to his socially determined self, and his case illustrates how such a construction can be perpetuated in the art-historical literature not so much through a distortion as through a reassessment of his principles to fit the programme of the historian. This investigation of the issues of history, historicism, and historiography in the construction of Overbeck's monk-artist role gives evidence in support of Wittgenstein's dictum: "Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement." Acknowledged by his contemporaries,

---

Overbeck's persona validates his endeavour; acknowledged by art historians, his persona entrenches his place in nineteenth-century art.
APPENDIX: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF FRIEDRICH OVERBECK

Johann Friedrich Overbeck was born in the Hansestadt Lübeck on 3 July 1789 and died in Rome in 1869. His life thus spans the beginning of the modern era from the French Revolution almost to German unification under Bismarck. He came from a well-established Lübeck family; his great grandfather was a lawyer and his grandfather the rector of the Gymnasium. His father Christian Adolph (1755-1821) studied law at the University of Göttingen and practiced in Bremen before returning to Lübeck. He was a senator when Overbeck was born and would eventually become mayor of the city. Christian Adolph was trained in the classics and published poetry of some renown. Overbeck’s mother, Elizabeth Lang, had been married previously and had one child from her first marriage. With Christian Adolph she had six children, Johann Friedrich being the fifth.

As a child, Overbeck was trained in the classics at the Volkschule and studied piano and the bible with his family at home. In 1804 he began to study drawing under Joseph Nikolaus Peroux, a portrait painter. Since he showed much talent and progress with Peroux, Overbeck was permitted by his father to become a painter, and so was sent to Vienna in 1806 to study at the Imperial Academy, then under the directorship of Heinrich Füger.

While at the Viennese Academy, Overbeck became more and
more dissatisfied with his training. In 1809 he and five other students (Franz Pforr, Joseph Sutter, Johann Konrad Hottinger, Joseph Wintergerst, and Ludwig Vogel), under the influence of Eberhard Wächter, the student and friend of Asmus Jakob Carstens (d.1798), formed the Brotherhood of St. Luke. Every member received a diploma on which appeared the Brotherhood’s device, created by Overbeck (fig.9), and the group’s statement of purpose:

In lasting memory of the highest principle of our order, truth, and of the promise to remain true to this principle all our lives, to work towards it with all strength, and to work enthusiastically against every academic manner....

In May 1809, the Academy was closed due to the Napoleonic invasion of Vienna, and when it was reopened later that year, Overbeck, Pforr, and Vogel were not readmitted. The three of them along with Hottinger decided to travel to Rome, which they all longed to see. On 15 May 1810 they left Vienna and, after visiting Venice, Urbino, and other places of interest, they arrived in Rome on 20 June 1810. The four lived in the Villa Malta for a few months and then moved into St. Isidoro, an Irish Franciscan monastery closed due to the Napoleonic occupation of Rome, for a two-year stay. From 1810 to 1820, the membership of the Brotherhood of St. Luke

1Overbeck’s and Hottinger’s diplomas are in the archives of the Stadtbibliothek Lübeck. The text is reproduced in Howitt, I, p.102: "Zur beständigen Erinnerung an den Hauptgrundsatz unseres Ordens, die Wahrheit, und an das geleistete Versprechen, diesem Grundsatz lebenslang treu zu bleiben, für sie zu arbeiten mit allen Kräften, und hingegen eifrig jeder akademischen Manier entgegen zu wirken...."
expanded to include such artists as Peter Cornelius, Johannes and Philipp Veit, Wilhelm von Schadow, and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. 

Overbeck and his fellow "brothers" Cornelius, Schadow, and Philipp Veit made their mark on the art world in 1816 with a cycle of frescoes depicting the life of Joseph for the Casa Zuccari, the residence of Jakob Salomo Bartholdy, the Prussian consul in Rome. Overbeck painted two works, The Selling of Joseph and The Seven Lean Years. (The Bartholdy frescoes were relocated in the 1880s to the Nationalgalerie in Berlin.) The Bartholdy frescoes earned Overbeck and his brothers much fame not only in Rome but also in Germany. It was at about this time that they began to be called "Nazarenes" because of their religious ideals and because of their appearance, especially the Nazarene haircut (parted down the middle and long in the back), which Overbeck kept until his death. Due to the success of the Bartholdy frescoes, the brothers received another important contract. Marchese Carlo Massimo commissioned Cornelius, Overbeck, and Schnorr von Carolsfeld to paint scenes from, respectively, Dante’s Divine Comedy, Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata, and Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso in three separate rooms of his house. The Dante room was eventually executed by Philipp Veit and Joseph Anton Koch, and Overbeck’s fresco cycle from Tasso was completed by Joseph Führich. 

Before the Bartholdy commission, Overbeck had begun his
first large-scale work, The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (fig. 29; destroyed 1942), started in Vienna, finished in Rome, and sent back to Lübeck in 1824 to decorate the Marienkirche. His first commissioned work was The Adoration of the Magi (fig. 6) for Queen Caroline of Bavaria. Between 1810 and 1830 Overbeck executed many oil paintings, for which he is best known today: Italia and Germania (fig. 18), Portrait of Franz Pforr (fig. 14), Family Portrait (fig. 26) Vittoria Caldoni (fig. 16), and The Holy Family (fig. 28).

While most of the members of the Brotherhood of St. Luke eventually returned to Germany around 1820 (many of them receiving important positions in art schools and academies), Overbeck remained in Rome, only visiting Germany on three occasions, in 1831, 1855, and 1865. On 13 April 1813, Overbeck converted to Catholicism, under the guidance of Father Pietro Ostini, and he remained a devout Catholic the rest of his life. He married Anna ("Nina") Schiffenhuber-Hartl from Vienna on 15 October 1818, and they had a son Alfons, born on 23 August 1819. From 1831 onwards, he was professor at the Academy of St. Luke in Rome.

Overbeck was in no way handicapped by the fact that he remained in Rome. He was awarded numerous commissions both in Italy and Germany and he received countless honours and titles. Among his most important commissions were the Vision of St. Francis for the Portiuncula chapel in the church of Sta. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi (fig. 39), The Marriage of
the Virgin (fig.34) for Athanasius Graf Raczynski, the
Triumph of Religion in the Arts (fig.32) for the Städel
Institute in Frankfurt, the Lamentation (fig.37) for the
Marienkirche in Lübeck, the Assumption of the Virgin
(completed 1857) for the Cologne cathedral, and Christ
Withdrawings from his Followers (1857) for the Pope’s Quirinal
Palace in Rome. Among his many titles were Knight of the
Order of St. Michael of Bavaria (1839), Knight of the
Prussian Order of Merit for Science and Art (1855), and
Commander of the Royal Belgian Order of Leopold (1866). He
was also made an Honorary Member of many academies of art,
among them those of Munich (1829), Amsterdam (1841), Berlin
(1845), and, surprisingly, Vienna (1836). In the 1840s and
1850s, while he was busy working on his large commissions,
Overbeck was also putting together two series of drawings.
His Forty Illustrations from the Gospels (1843-53) was the
fulfillment of a project, the creation of a picture bible, that Overbeck had envisaged during his days in Vienna. His
line drawings of The Seven Sacraments (1847-62) were in a way
a disappointment for Overbeck, who had hoped to have frescoes
or tapestries made after them. In the 1860s Overbeck also
made cartoons for a pictorial cycle of the life of St. Peter
for the cathedral in Djakovo (Croatia).

While Overbeck was achieving much fame in the arena of
religious painting, his family life took a turn for the worse
after 1840. On 27 September 1840, at the age of twenty, his
son Alfons died of consumption, and thirteen years later, on 22 June 1853, Nina Overbeck died of the same cause. After his wife's death, Overbeck was cared for by his friend Caroline Hoffman, whom he adopted in 1855. He lived the rest of his life with her and her husband, the sculptor Karl Hoffman. Overbeck died on 12 November 1869 and was buried in S. Bernardo alle Terme in Rome.
Fig. 1 Wilhelm von Kaulbach, *Modern German Artists in Rome*
Fig. 2 Overbeck, *Self-Portrait with the Bible*
Fig. 3 Overbeck, Self-Portrait
Fig. 4 Overbeck, *Self-Portrait*
Fig. 5 Overbeck, *Self-Portrait with the Bible*
Fig. 6 Overbeck, Adoration of the Magi
Fig. 7 Overbeck, Adoration of the Magi
Fig. 8. Overbeck, Adoration of the Magi.
Fig. 9 Overbeck, Device for the Brotherhood of St. Luke
Fig. 10 Overbeck, *Kneeling Monk*
Fig. 11 Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Friedrich Overbeck
Fig. 12 Joseph Sutter, Overbeck taking Communion
Fig. 13 Kaulbach, *The Fight Against Antiquated Tradition*
Fig. 14 Overbeck, Portrait of Franz Pforr
Fig. 15 Heinrich Füger, *Portrait of Fürstin Gallizin*
Fig.16 Overbeck, Vittoria Caldoni
Fig. 17 Overbeck, Vittoria Caldoni
Fig. 18 Overbeck, Italia und Germania
Fig. 19 Franz Pforr, *Sulamith and Maria*
Fig. 20 Overbeck, *Sulamith and Maria*
Fig. 21 Overbeck, *Sulamith and Maria*
Fig. 22 Overbeck and Peter Cornelius, Double Portrait
FIDEI SYMBOLOM.
EMBLEMA IX.

STET depictus HONOS, Tyrio velatus amictu,
Eiusque ungat nuda dextram VERITAS:
Siet AMOR in medio castus, cui tempora circum
Ros: st Diones-pulchrior Cupidinæ.
Fig. 24 Franz Pforr, Allegory of Friendship
Fig. 25 Overbeck, Study of Three Hands
Fig. 26 Overbeck, *Family Portrait*
Fig. 27 Overbeck, *Portrait of Nina with her son Alfons*
Fig. 28 Overbeck, *Holy Family*
Fig. 29 Entry of Christ into Jerusalem
Fig. 30 Overbeck, *Entry of Christ into Jerusalem*
Fig. 31 Olivier, *Genealogical Tree of Modern German Painting*
Fig. 32 Overbeck, *Triumph of Religion in the Arts*
Fig. 33 Raphael, *Disputa*
Fig. 34 Overbeck, *Marriage of the Virgin*
Fig. 35 Perugino, *Marriage of the Virgin*
Fig. 36 Raphael, *Marriage of the Virgin*
Fig. 38 Overbeck's Lamentation in the Martenkircbe c. 1900
Fig. 39 Overbeck, *The Vision of St. Francis*
Fig. 40 Overbeck, *Ego dilecto meo, et dilectus meus mihi* (The Madonna with the Sleeping Christ Child)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


