

HANS THOMA'S LANDSCAPES & THE CONSTRUCTION OF GERMAN IDENTITY WITHIN THE MODERN NATION STATE.

Christine Bentley, PhD

Missouri Southern State University

ABSTRACT

In this paper I will examine Hans Thoma's role as an intercessor in creating regional and national identities within his landscape paintings during the later part of the nineteenth century.

I will question how his work affirms and contests the German republic's cultural milieu of "Germanness" and modernity within art. I will also attempt to identify the meaning of the figures within Thoma's landscapes. Questioning whether they represent a desired (ideal) German identity, symbolic and allegorical like Thoma's predecessors, or grounded in emerging realist traditions. Much of this inquiry will focus on whether Thoma was attempting to present German identity through an objectively real portrayal of German life or feed into growing national sentiments of a collective German persona?

Keywords: Nationalism, Landscapes, Regional Identity

Thoma's series of landscape and genre images speak loudly toward a German character and appear to reflect the identity of the collective whole. They also confront issues of German modernity, nationalism, and the role of the peasant within these images. My inquiry will expand on the representation of these landscape scenes and their reflection (construction) of a German national; or potentially anti-national/ regionalist identity during this period. I concur that Thoma's landscapes are reflective of changes within German culture and are representative of a desire to both create a sense of national unity and pride, while also asserting his loyalty to the region of Bad-Württemberg. In centering these ideals of German identity within the region of Bad-Württemberg, Thoma's images are then saturated with regionalist overtones. These landscapes, and the peasants within, appear to act as vehicles toward securing this region as the center of German morality, stability, and serenity.

Through locale, custom, and landscape, Thoma affirms the notion that Bad-Württemberg; its traditions, customs, and people are the epitome of German life and modernity within urban

centers. These characteristics are presented as beneficial to a “German” collective identity in creating a modern German state. I believe it is within Thoma’s landscapes that we are offered a new perspective toward German identity, one hidden within the various regionalist and nationalist overtures.

Lyrical and serene, Hans Thoma's late nineteenth-century landscape paintings appear to reflect a national longing for a cohesive German state. The frequent appearance of national concerns within paintings from this time demonstrates the dream of a unified nation. Prior to the unification of the German empire in 1871, artists produced scores of images attempting to demonstrate and define a national identity. The idea of nationhood, and its merging of regional ideas and customs, loaded a heavy burden on art and its artists. Art assumed the role of mediator, leading the German people from its regionalist past into a unified, equitable future. Art functioned as a vehicle to show Germans, "who they were now, had been, and wanted to be become."¹ This paper will attempt to identify the meaning (historiography) of the figures of German peasantry within Hans Thoma’s landscapes and will explore the question of whether such figures represent a desired (ideal) German identity, symbolic and allegorical like Thoma’s predecessors, or instead were grounded in emerging realist traditions. Much of this inquiry will focus on whether Thoma was attempting to present German identity through an objective portrayal of German life or to contribute to a growing desire for a collective German identity?

German Romanticism: A Noble Ideal

Many artists during the first half of the century adhered to the style of German romanticism, and it was during this period that artists began to participate in a dialogue about German identity.² The figures within these compositions typified the German romantic spirit, one of an inner strength and quiet spiritualism. Romantic painters such as Casper David Friedrich frequently portrayed tiny silhouettes within a serene, expansive landscape. These figures often appear meditative and isolated within the composition; they tend to evade the viewer’s gaze while facing into, rather than out of, the painting. This (somewhat) excluding gesture enables viewers to participate on their own terms witnessing the scene as if standing in the proscenium of a theater. The viewer is positioned to experience the spectacular view and spiritual encounter by proxy. As seen in Friedrich’s *Wanderer at the Sea* (1818) his figures often observe nature rather

¹Hoffmann, J. "Der Geist der Romantik in der deutschen Kunst 1790-1990"; *Kunstforum International*, May/July 1995, no. 130, p. 360-1. Hoffman's review discusses the spirit of German Romanticism and how it is defined in art of the second half of the nineteenth century.

² Keith Hartley (ed.). *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 41.

than actively participate within it; they appear to seek inspiration and spiritual awakening from these great expanses. Thoma's early landscape paintings are similar in style to the romantics. In his *Summer Meadow* (1872) human forms are also dwarfed by the landscape and often set deep within the painting. They are surrounded by fields of flowers or grand forests; in contrast to Friedrich's figures, however, they are frequently participating in these environments through a variety of physical activities. One can contend that there is a physical bond within Thoma's images that is absent in romantic painting. Nearly enmeshed within the expansive landscape or great forests, the figures and the surrounding expanse appear to share a nutritive relationship, one that is symbiotically healthy and vital.

Like the figures within German romantic painting, Thoma's figures in *Meadow* (1880) *In the Forest* (1893) and *On the Rhine* (1890) are embraced by lush fields and towering trees. The figures within these paintings are typical of many within Thoma's body of work. Much like those in *Summer Meadow*, they are actively engaged in activities defined and dependent upon an engagement with the land. Whether farming, picnicking, walking, or sitting, they appear to be at one with their surroundings. They are not the quiet, introspective figures of the romantics, whose reflective gazes and meditative glances direct the viewer into their surrounding salient landscapes. Thoma's figures act in conjunction with the land, in direct contrast to the passive actions of the figures within romantic paintings. The meanings of these figures are of concern here, as they are somewhat elusive. Did Thoma intend for these figures to symbolize and define a German national identity, or one that was filled with regionalist pride? Additionally, are we to interpret this constructed identity through a portrayal of an objective reality or one that is subtly constructing a (universal) German identity?

As seen in Thoma's *Hay Harvest* (1868) the artist seems to construct a regionally specific identity through costume and rural landscape. As seen in the regionally specific attire, Thoma seems to define a national identity tied to regionalist traditions. This is also seen in Thoma's depiction of figures engaged in regional activities and customs (hence the rituals of the harvest.) This identity is distinctly separate from a growing national (unified) sentiment. These reflections of the German peasantry are saturated in ideas reflecting the idyllic life of rural communities. The idea of the "pure and untouched" peasant, as well as the purity of the industry-free landscape, was heavily promoted by the newly emerging German state. It was suggested at the time that through this purity, and the undivided landscape within these rural panoramas, Germany would find unity. In this way, the land becomes not only a tribute to the state but the state itself.³

³ Hartley, 5-7.

Realists & Pure Painting

Thoma presents his figures as indistinct and their ambiguity suggests a collective identity, one that is uncertain of how the German nation would emerge. Of primary concern here is the meaning of Thoma's representation of local peasantry and his (presumed) attempts to define "art and nation" through the use of regionally specific locale, ritual, and peoples. Stylistically inspired by the romantics, Thoma has been defined by German scholars as part of the "Pure Painting/ Realist" tradition within German art of the nineteenth century.⁴ That Thoma may have considered the style and theory of the French realists seems likely.⁵ Thoma met with Gustav Courbet on a number of occasions, visiting Courbet's studio in Paris in the spring of 1868, even attending his independent show outside the Universal Exposition.⁶ It appears that Thoma, like Courbet, used subject matter for its pictorial value rather than for an overtly emotional impact. Courbet saw the realist's mission as a pursuit of truth, one that would help erase social contradictions and imbalance. He depicted the incongruities and imperfections of life through loose brush work and a spontaneous/rough handling of the paint. Courbet's observation of the harshness of life and his challenging of academic traditions brought about criticism, as well as a cult following.

Thoma's landscapes are similarly staged to challenge academic traditions in painting and pursue a truth about the social reality for the German peasantry. To conclude that Thoma was trying to establish visual cues and symbolism within his landscape paintings, that the figures and locale are more symbolic in meaning than mere transcripts of everyday life, is tempting. German romantic painting, along with many of Thoma's contemporaries, established precedents for painting with such resonance.⁷ Typical was the fusion of these sweeping panoramic landscape scenes with imprints of humanity scattered throughout. The figures in Thoma's paintings, however, appear to reveal a variety of regionally specific cues and meanings specifically directed at the German viewer.

Considering Thoma's academic background and its strictures in defining painting, the use of allegory and symbolic content was expected and almost necessary to obtain success as a

⁴ Kramer, M. "Nineteenth-century German Paintings- Spirit of an Age"; *The Magazine Antiques*, March 2001, v. 159 no.3.p.404.

⁵ Skrapits, J. C. "Realists & Romantics "; *American Artist*, May 2000, v. 64, no. 694, p. 22-24.

⁶ Belting, Hans. *The Germans and Their Art- A Troublesome Relationship* (London: Yale University Press), 97-100.

⁷ Peer, Larry (ed.). *Inventing the Individual : Romanticism and the Idea of Individualism* (Provo: Brigham Young University), 25.

professional artist.⁸ Thoma, however, left the academy having developed his own style. According to Danielle Knafo, "he disregarded the academic rules and therefore failed to comply with familiar tastes."⁹ Thoma's fresh and naturalistic depictions of German landscape were considered raw and unskilled, resulting in a public and critical rejection of many of his early paintings. Many saw Thoma's style as revolutionary; "it is his honest and spontaneous paintings which belonged to the avant-garde and were regarded as revolutionary art."¹⁰ Evidently aware of his presumed defiant status, Thoma once wrote in his memoirs, "I did not want to be a revolutionary."¹¹

Considering Thoma's apparent rejection of the academic style within his landscape paintings, one might assume that his figures reflect a subjective observation of German life. These images may simply provide insight into day to day activities of those living within his hometown of Bernau. It is difficult to decipher whether the meaning of these figures move beyond "a truthful investigation of the everyday." It could be that Thoma, much like Courbet, was inspired by constructed visions of the peasantry to reflect everyday life. Thoma's landscapes appear to claim a regionalist identity through these idyllic scenes of the village, demonstrating a loyalty to his ties to the black forest and Bad-Württemberg. Thoma's vision of southern Germany offers a harmonious interchange between the figure and the land. The landscape is universal in scope; however, Thoma's images possess qualities that are distinctly German.

The result of Thoma's exposure to French realist painting may be seen in paintings such as *Hay Harvest* (1868), *Offenstal* (1872), and *Black Forest* (1872). These images are representative of numerous styles of landscape paintings throughout Thoma's oeuvre. There appears to be two distinct categories of landscape painting within Thoma's work: the panoramic scene of the countryside, and genre-like images of the peasantry. Within the latter there are further distinctions, images of men working within the land, solitary men and women, women and children, and those of children. They are all representations of figures engaging in a variety of work related and leisurely activities within the various regions of Bad-Württemberg, particularly Bernau. The local hills and forests are frequently used as a backdrop to these casual observations of daily life. The question remains as to the interpretation of these figures, are we to

⁸ Knafo, Danielle. "Thoma and Homer- A Case Study", *Masters Thesis*, Louisville: University of Louisville, 1987, p. 18-21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰ *Hans Thoma Und Sein Kreis- Gemälde Aus Der Staatlichen Kunsthalle Karlsruhe*. Staatsgalerie: Stuttgart, 5.

¹¹ *German Masters of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 8.

take their actions as literal transcriptions of everyday life within this region of Germany or look to a variety of Thoma's contemporaries who were attempting to forge a German identity through the idyllic lives of the peasant, whose traditions and conservatism defined the German persona. It is with caution that this paper explores the meaning of Thoma's figures, as the social history of the peasantry within Thoma's hometown of Bernau in Bad-Württemberg is scarce. Therefore, this study will investigate the life of the peasantry in the regions surrounding Bernau within southern Germany.

Bad- Württemberg

Alon Confino questions the social history of Bad-Württemberg and the formation of a collective memory within German culture at this time. He presents this collective identity as one that was represented through everyday perceptions of the past and its construction/ endurance through material objects.¹² The idea of *Heimat* (homeland) was explored during the nineteenth century through visual images of the nation that "represented interchangeably the locality, the region, and the nation."¹³ Images were fundamental vehicles for "internalizing the impersonal nation by placing it within the familiar local world."¹⁴ These images of the German *Heimat* were essential in creating a sense of national patriotism on a local level and appeared within various local and national publications throughout the emerging nation. These publications were used in public campaigns to advertise everything from vacations and tourism to creating a unifying symbol of the First World War. These very public and physical images were ultimately internalized and used to create a private image of the *Heimat* that Germans called upon from their imaginations.¹⁵ Of concern here is the use of the visual to create and establish a collective memory that constructed an imagined (and unified) historic past.

The region of Bad-Württemberg is used as an example of independent factions throughout the *Grossvaterland*, whose local identities were fiercely guarded.¹⁶ The actual physicality of Württemberg took up a vast majority of the south west portion of present day Germany, encompassing Swabia, the Black Forest, Baden, and Bavaria. During the aftermath of the French

¹² Confino, Alon. *The Nation as a Locale Metaphor* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶ Hertz, David. *The German Public Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield), 57.

Revolution, Napoleon awarded Württemberg more territory and the title of kingdom. During the Napoleonic Wars Württemberg gained a solid reputation as a significant stronghold as tension between Württembergers and their fellow Germans continued, during the Battle of Nations in 1813. This resulted in a variety of conflicts, both literal and symbolic, ultimately paralleling the identities of Württembergers and those throughout the rest of Germany.

From 1805 to 1871, Württembergers resisted inclusion and posed a challenge in forging a new German identity. Even upon unification in 1871, Württemberg entered the German Empire retaining its own political systems, coins (portraying the profile of their king), regional symbols, stamps, and independent postal and railway systems.¹⁷ Educational texts and systems were unchanged and the Empire's power within and concerning Württemberg's legislation was limited. When the Prussian army attempted to incorporate Württemberg's troops into their military it was met with resistance and the (separatist) Württemberg Army Division was created.¹⁸ These young men were not permitted to mix with those soldiers from outside of their home region.

Württemberg society as a whole was divided over the national issue and continued to be so after unification in 1871.¹⁹ With a history of peaceful communities and solidarity, it was difficult for Württembergers to imagine unification with other German states with which it had previously been in conflict. This new German identity was unimaginable for many of those living within the region. Thoma's images, like those of his contemporaries appear to have created an imagined community for Württembergers, a fixed vision of the peasantry and its surrounding community. The language established within Thoma's paintings both affirmed the values and worth of such a community and its regional pride, but was also useful in constructing Württemberg's identity within the national community at large.

The Peasantry and Social Morality

The study of peasant life, *Volkskunde*, emerged during the nineteenth century as a combination of folklore, ethnology, and cultural anthropology. The German peasant and the countryside represented a reservoir of traditionalism.²⁰ The German peasant was the poster child of morality and due to his noble labor and frugal life-style he was generically attributed a collection of

¹⁷ Confino, 18.

¹⁸ Hertz., 42.

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

²⁰ Evans, Richard and Lee, W.R. 9.

personality traits: nobility, humility, piety, natural wisdom, simplicity and goodness. These characteristics were seen as positive and in direct contrast with the moral and social degeneration of industrialization and the corrupt and immoral proletariat within the cities. During the early part of the nineteenth century this image of the peasant evolved and imbedded itself into the German conscience. This was reinforced by various contemporary publications and literature which also promoted a negating image of the peasant as a “retarded, conservative and tradition conscious group.”²¹

Thoma's image of *The Sower* illustrates the visual dialogue that was being constructed of the rural classes during the later half of the nineteenth century. Thoma's image is similar to Millet's *Sower* in its monumentalization of the peasant. Thoma mimics Millet in emphasis, and movement, of the previously under-represented rural figure. He also quotes Millet through a similar use of pose and positioning of the figure in the center of the composition. With Thoma's interpretation of the subject, however, we lose the anonymity and universality so apparent in Millet's. Here one can identify and realize the personality of the sower. The view of the local village and surrounding village, the workers in the back ground, and distinct features of the figures offer a glimpse into the world of the peasantry. Here the figure is recognized by his hard work, and through the implied repetition of this labor, a glimpse into the seasoned traditions of rural communities. Thoma seems to further solicit contemporary ideas surrounding the rural class and its seeming representation of tradition and pre-industrialization, as the ultimate image of morality.

The rural community within Germany was divided into nucleated villages.²² These villages functioned independently from one another and were controlled by their own separate municipalities and constructed (as well as implied) laws.²³ The villages were settlement communities that offered security and a sense of stability this sense of community offered each individual a certain degree of social security as well. This security was limited, however, as there was a very restrictive social order within these communities. To deviate from the rules of the village and the strict tenants of life and work, subjected one to village gossip; potentially resulting in social isolation. Most villages valued hard work, and one's own productivity in animal husbandry, farming, or practical trades attested to one's character as a laborer. An individual's work ethic was ultimately translated as a direct reflection of both individual and

²¹ Ibid., 45.

²² Ibid.,78.

²³ Jeggle, Litz. “Rules of the Village.” *The German Peasantry* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 267.

familial success. Those residing on the outskirts of the village and the weekly rounds of “Friday Beggars” were living testaments to what could happen if the rules were disobeyed.

Within and around these communities, property was heavily guarded and in many instances one’s land was considered more important than one’s own family. In “Rules of the Village”, Litz Jeggle describes the village universe as having two dimensions, “that of the citizen who belonged to the village and had equal rights and duties as such, and that of the property owner.”²⁴ The shared community of the village was defined through those shared experiences and worries that applied to the welfare and well-being of the village as a whole. There was a clear distinction, however, between those who owned land and those without such property. These distinctions were also seen through the various sub-cultures that emerged from such division. Those villagers with either inherited or earned property were regarded as essential to the economy of the village, as they both produced product and employed those without property.

Panoramas

Thoma’s expansive panoramas in and around Bernau appear to represent a shared community, one without such division. For example in both his *Schwarzwaldbaechlein* (1872) and *Schwarzwaldhoehe* (1868) there is a nearly endless presentation of the land. Both compositions unveil deeply recessed spaces with an infinite horizon, rolling hills parceled and separated only by the contrasts between forested and open land, as indicated by the varying planes of light and color. In appearance the land is open and free for all to enjoy and participate in, for all to claim some type of leisure, work, or identity from. This idyllic and seemingly democratic vision of Bernau is misleading and ultimately a betrayal of those realities extant within the village.

By the mid-nineteenth century, space in Germany was limited to those whose families had generational claim over very specific parcels of land. Space was narrowly defined and precisely distributed with “invisible fences” of which every villager would have been aware.²⁵ There were rules regarding the use of private fields hesitantly available for public passage during harvest, or other moments deeming that “communal” use was necessary, even use of the few public footpaths was monitored. Thoma’s seeming impartial landscape is simply fictitious and misleading, offering a view of Germany that is unavailable outside of its pictorial representation.

According to Utz Jeggle ownership of property was the single most determining factor of life for the peasantry. Land determined the perimeters of villages and the sizes of homes, marital

²⁴ Ibid., 273.

²⁵ Ibid., 270.

relationships, and the ultimate success/ survival of villagers.²⁶ It was a point of conflict for many land-owning families within small rural communities. The distribution of land to various heirs was dependent upon regional practices and norms, with inheritance frequently going to the eldest son.²⁷ The extent to which an owner willed land to a single heir was also variable; Germany was among those countries in which one was able to will a greater percentage to a single heir than in many other nations. Inheritance of land was one of the greatest points of contention within nineteenth-century European families with two conflicting aims: to keep the family property intact and to provide for younger children.

Women and Children

Equally misleading are Thoma's representations of women and children. These images tend to emphasize the maternal and nutritive qualities ascribed to women. In Thoma's *Offenestel* (1872), a woman and two children are situated in the foreground of the composition. They appear relaxed and content with their surroundings, enjoying the tranquil view while lolling through the day's activities. One child picks flowers while the woman and second child are seated in the lush green field. The field is sprinkled with white flowers that carpet the hill far above the apparent pedestrian path. These figures appear connected and natural within this landscape. They are free of work-and school-related duties, with no apparent worries or connections to the activities of the nearby village. This is misleading as the figures are freely accessing land that may have not been available due to tightly controlled land regulations and definitive (public) divides in the landscape. It is also deceptive as the young woman appears to be taking care of the young children, potentially representing a mother and her children, in reality most village woman were not able to care for their young children on a full-time basis. Working long hours during the day, most peasant women did not have the free-time to loll about and enjoy the unscheduled days of their children.

During the beginning of the nineteenth century in Germany the roles of peasant women were changing due new agricultural processes and technologies.²⁸ During the eighteenth century in southern Germany, labor between men and women was divided primarily in terms of interior domestic work and agricultural field work outside of the home. Peasant women generally

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 277.

²⁷ Habakkuk, H.J. "Family Structure and Economic Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe." *The Journal of Economic History*, March 1955, vol. 15, no. 1, p.10.

²⁸ Sabean, David. "Small Peasant Agriculture in Germany at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Changing Work Patterns"; *Peasant Studies*, Fall 1978, vol. 7, no. 4., 219.

centered their lives on tending to domestic responsibilities including cooking, cleaning, educating their children, and other more “naturally feminine” pursuits. These pursuits limited peasant women to the home and fixated their interests on the bearing and nurturing of their children. When living in rural communities these women were also given responsibility for small labor duties such as distilling, brewing, and preserving.²⁹ Peasant women were also responsible for light farm chores, tending to the dairy and garden, along with chores related to the nourishment of the family. Peasant women’s labor, of course, varied from region to village and would sometimes include such heavy labor practices as the harvest, which would frequently rely upon help from everyone within the family. With the intensification of agriculture during the early nineteenth century, the sexual division of labor began to change and peasant women were included more frequently in the field work outside of the home. Women in Württemberg in particular were given increasing responsibility for crop maintenance and by the mid-nineteenth century had nearly completely been integrated into the schedules of field work.

During peak labor months, for two to four months each summer, peasant women frequently worked in the field for nearly twelve to sixteen hours at a time.³⁰ This work was difficult and required a significant amount of skill, arduous hours, and repetitive devotion to tending to the crops. During this time, work within the home was either additional or neglected, as there were no reliable substitutes for the older women within the home, and unless there were older children (who were often used within the field) the home was neglected. It goes without saying that the rearing of younger children was also put on hold and women were forced to put young children in the care of slightly older siblings. David Sabean presents this dilemma as “the internal conflict of peasant women at this time who felt themselves highly exploited due to the increased work load.” Women struggled in juggling work and home duties, and began escape into a highly pietist religion with strong overtones of future rewards which was centered on the Book of Revelations. This new emphasis on religious piety appears to have changed the dynamics within the home; it is also seen with Thoma’s images of the peasantry. As will be discussed later in the paper, these changes were a site of contention with young couples and were often the cause of conflict within many marriages.³¹ The tranquility of Thoma’s images of women slowly begins to dissipate within the arduous realities of social life during this period of agricultural intensification.

²⁹ Ibid., 220.

³⁰ Blackbourn, David. “Peasants and Politics in Germany 1871-1914”; *European History Quarterly*, January 1984, vol. 14, no. 1, 49.

³¹ Sabean, 224.

Children

Much like his images of young women and children, Thoma's paintings of frolicking, happy groupings of children, as seen in *Children Dancing* (1874) and *Round Dance in Spring* (1885), also provide a façade for the harsh realities of village life. At this time the infant mortality rates in Bad Württemberg were the highest throughout the nation, nearing a staggering 30% in 1870.³² These figures include both rural and urban communities. As mentioned, peasant women from both land and non-land owning families were burdened with chores and duties preventing women from mothering full-time.³³ The care of young children was frequently assigned to older siblings, whose young bodies were unable to handle the rigors of farm work. Young infants were more often either left in the care of their older siblings, and potentially aging grandparents, or strapped into carriers and brought into the fields or around the farm to tend to the various duties. For those unmarried, single parents, a common and seemingly accepted occurrence, the ability to maintain custody of their young children was nearly impossible. This was due to the realities and harsh life of female laborers. Most illegitimate children were then raised by their grandparents or foster mothers. They were given financial support from both their mother and father, if the couple remained unmarried; these children were permitted to visit with their parents on work-free days. Thoma's images of young children with rosy-cheeked, fresh-faced young women, is an apparent idealization of maternity. They are apparently part of a growing desire to promote an ideal life within these smaller rural communities, one that was untouched by the growing urban centers, seemingly offering a placid vision of life not available within the cities.

Women

Thoma frequently painted landscape scenes that featured not only woman with children but also women alone within the countryside. The women within both *Summer Sunshine* (1867) and *Woodland Meadow* (1876) are not only alone but apparently free of the laborious activities strictly divided within most village homes. One's work ethic was valued and, in most instances, could be the decisive factor when choosing a spouse.³⁴ Many men weighted heavily the opinion of older women within the home concerning a prospective spouse and frequently based their decision on the younger woman's knowledge of running the household and ability to perform chores around the home. For those young women of non-land owning families, many either

³² Schulte, Regina. "Peasants and Farmer's Maids: Female Farm Servants in Bavaria at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *The German Peasantry*. (New York: St. Martin's Press), 131.

³³ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁴ Jeggle, 258.

moved to the city to find work as domestic servants or traveled the region in search of farm-maid positions.³⁵

Most farm maids were sent off for service and work around thirteen years of age, remaining on the farm of another family until approximately twenty-six years of age. The goal for most young women was to acquire enough money and material objects (which were given as rewards for hard work) to attract a spouse and provide a small dowry for themselves.³⁶ This dowry was then used to purchase a house with a small parcel of land attached. There was an apparently strict code of conduct for farm maids and men, as village gossip and reference were given the ultimate role in match making. If a young woman was too idle, ignorant to the ebb and flow of both the domestic sphere and farm life, she was seen as incompetent and considered flawed in the most serious of ways. The ultimate objective was to find a spouse who was hard-working and frugal, ensuring a life within the land-property owning sector within the village.

Women and Men

Harvest was a time when everyone on the farm participated in long days and hours of work. It was expected that both men and women would work doing nearly the same type of labor. There were harsh judgments against those who did not work during harvest, and one could lose a position or reputation over it. In Thoma's harvest scenes there is an interesting divide between the men and women. This is apparent in both the 1868 and 1872 versions of *The Harvest*. In the second version, there is a lone figure of a woman in the foreground, as compared to a group of women in the first version. These compositions portray women as unnecessary within the workings of the field. The women's roles are somewhat unidentifiable and seemingly insignificant. They gaze out toward the men, who pause from the intense labor, possibly to address the women or break for lunch. The women carry baskets and small items and are dressed in luxurious costumes, the fabric of which does not appear durable enough or appropriate for field work. With ribbons in their hair and unmarked/ unstained clothing, they appear more appropriately dressed for a community picnic and unprepared to work a twelve-hour stint in the field. The division of labor within these paintings seems appears to reflect sexual labor roles more appropriate for the eighteenth century than the more arduous realities of the nineteenth century.

These images also do not reflect the increasing tension between men and women at this time. Such tensions are discussed by Sabeen as a direct result of agricultural intensification, which was

³⁵ Schulte, 148.

³⁶ Ibid., 152.

initially presented in Maria Bidlingmaier's (largely neglected) book from 1918, *Die Bäuerin in zwei Gemeinden Württemberg's*. Sabean builds on Bidlingmaier's research and comparisons of peasant work patterns, furthering the discussion of the effects of intensification on grain, dairy, and small wine farming industries. Sabean concludes that the meaning of intensification for the roles of men and women varied depending on the type of production and technology used in each family or village. These increasing changes affected the way the land was cultivated, the care of livestock, and potentially required greater skill and attention than previous labor. These technological and agricultural shifts created new labor roles between the sexes within these small peasant farming communities, causing tension and strain within marital relations and home-life of the peasantry.

Thus intensification established new divisions of labor between men and women.³⁷ This ultimately effected women to a much greater degree than men and forced women to adopt new work patterns and roles within the family. Women were required to perform arduous tasks and take on labor roles previously reserved for men, while men were required to obtain new skills and roles requiring knowledge in the new technologies. The results within small agricultural communities were staggering (albeit difficult to document and quantify), with divorce rates skyrocketing nearing 20% women demanding more equitable divisions of labor and share in the profits of family businesses. In some instances women are documented in church records as questioning family finances and investments for the future. In Sabean's case study of the small village of Neckarhausen, from 1800 to 1850 more than fifty cases of divorce or threatened divorce occurred, many of which were a result of tension related to financial or work related hardship. All points of conflict were repetitious: men did not pay attention to business, did not consult women in economic matters, and drank too much; equally, women did not cook or clean well enough. These were all results of changing roles within the family and these new divisions of labor. These areas of contention were listed in a number of church documents as reasons for marital strife and separation.

The Intelligent Peasant

Despite the seeming contradictions within Thoma's representation of the German peasantry, there is one area where he appears to abandon fictitious portrayal, that of the reading peasant. Thoma's oeuvre is dotted with small paintings of peasants reading; they read in the garden, the landscape, throughout the home. Thoma's "reading peasants," such as those in *Mother and Sister* (1872), *Evening Hour* (1884), and *a Peaceful Sunday* (1876), are literate and educated; they are actively pursuing knowledge. They appear aware and capable of gathering information; not

³⁷ Sabean, 222.

vulnerable or easily manipulated by falsehoods. Thoma's images dismantle the idea that the peasantry was "a retarded, conservative and tradition conscience group."

This mentality was the result of early studies on the German peasantry which discussed the ways in which "agrarian elites manipulated the peasantry through various interest groups."³⁸ Current scholarship emphasizes the proactive role of the peasant and the importance of grassroots groups in shaping national policy (no matter how indirect.) David Blackbourn discusses the politicization of the peasant within Württemberg during the mid-nineteenth century and how the "radicalization of the peasant" pushed the Central Party toward "introducing more radical policy."³⁹ Blackbourn discusses early theories responsible for shaping and pigeon-holing ideas of the peasantry during the first half of the twentieth century. These theories were polarized between historians and both conservative and liberal politicians. During these early inquiries into rural Germany, Christian conservatives felt the peasant was "historically essential for the stability of political conditions," while more progressive scholarship "scorned the conservatism and provincialism of rural life."⁴⁰ There were even those, such as Theodor Adorno who believed that the level of consciousness in these rural communities remained well below that achieved by the "bourgeois cultural liberalism of the nineteenth century."⁴¹

During the past century, scholarship on German peasantry has continued to critically examine German social and agrarian history.⁴² Robert Moeller recognizes the political conservatism of German peasants, however, does not agree that political conservatism and economic backwardness coincide.⁴³ Moeller contends that peasants were market savvy and orientated and "produced with methods that were economically rational." Moeller, and many of his contemporaries, believe peasants adjusted accordingly to changing agrarian trends and technologies, and their support of tariffs demonstrates an economic awareness and independence that disputes theories that rural communities were manipulated by conservative interest groups.

³⁸ Catt, Cathleen. "Farmers and Factory Workers."

³⁹ Blackbourn, 48.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁴¹ Ibid., 56.

⁴² Farr, Ian. "'Tradition and the Peasantry' - On the Modern Historiography of the German Peasantry"

⁴⁴ Moeller, Robert. "How Backward were the *Bauren*" *Agricultural History*, October 1981, vol. 55, no. 4, p. 382

Arthur Wynn analyzed the effects of tariffs on German agriculture and “peasant country” from 1924 to 1933. Wynn concluded that peasants during the early twentieth century benefitted greatly from the implementation of tariffs and that grain tariffs were “detrimental to the peasant, whose market-produce is live-stock products.”⁴⁴ Wynn concluded that its abolishment could raise grain prices and affect the delicate balance within these small rural communities. He assumes that these tariffs were equally, if not more so, detrimental during the nineteenth century and that those within rural communities would have been prudent to support them.

One must keep in mind, of course, that due to limited resources it is difficult to hold specific trends to any one particular area or village. Many of these studies are focused on one particular village or portion of a much larger region and are judiciously used to evaluate surrounding areas. The study of German social history is still quite new and continues to hold onto previously held prejudices and presumptions regarding the German peasantry. New scholarship, however, has begun to create an image of a pro-activity and autonomous peasant...quite uncharacteristic of past interpretations.

Conclusion

I contend that Hans Thoma's series of landscape and genre images speak loudly toward a German character and appear to reflect the identity of the collective whole through the voice of regionalist pride. Thoma's landscape scenes appear to reflect (and aid in the construction of) a German national identity during this period. This identity is overtly subjective and reflects the growing conscience and reservation of Württembergers toward the expanding German nation. Thoma's paintings are reflective of these changes within German culture and are representative of a desire to both create a sense of national unity and pride, while also asserting his loyalty to the region of Bad-Württemberg. In centering these ideals of German identity within the region of Bad-Württemberg, Thoma's images are ultimately saturated with regionalist overtones. They appear to act as a vehicle toward securing this region as the center of German morality, stability, and serenity. Through locale, custom, and landscape, Thoma affirms the notion that Bad-Württemberg and its traditions, customs, and people are the epitome of German life. These characteristics are presented as beneficial to the German collective identity and nation as a whole.

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