

## Research Article

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# Caspar David Friedrich, Ancient Rome and the *Freiheitskrieg*

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**Abstract:** This article considers four paintings by Caspar David Friedrich of a national romanticist nature. It examines the role of Rome and Germania's ancient conflict in these, and briefly considers what may have influenced the artist's national take on ancient history, including his personal experience of the Napoleonic invasions of his homeland. Friedrich's transformations of the ancient in his national paintings are an important example of the reception of classical literature in German romanticism.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Caspar David Friedrich, Nationalism, Rome.

## Introduction

The artist Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) is best-known for his often twilit paintings of the landscapes of his native Saxony, of the coastal region of northern Germany and the sea, and for the rocky and mountainous features of other parts of Germany and Bohemia. While human figures play a role in these compositions, Friedrich frequently frames humanity as minuscule within a potent and overawing, a beautiful, but at times also frightening, natural world. The artist's Christianity was a powerful influence on his work, where nature may often be read as an allegory of the power of God. Friedrich's impact on the direction of later nineteenth-century German and European art (after a period of initial unpopularity) was significant.<sup>2</sup>

Yet Friedrich's conception of the power of nature and God is not the sole preoccupation of his painting. Nationalism also plays a subtle but important role. Occasionally this amounts to an aggressive rejection of foreign, particularly French, presence in Germany. In the early nineteenth century, the artist was profoundly affected by the Napoleonic invasions of his homeland and what is known in German as the *Freiheitskrieg* ["War of Liberation"]. These invasions precipitated a sea change in the way writers and artists thought about the German nation, something which would have a long-lasting impact throughout the nineteenth century (including in debate over Germany's eventual political unification). In the search to define the nation and its people, and above all to show its virtues over the Napoleonic oppressor, recourse was had to ancient literature. Tacitus' *Germania* and other writings were mined for historical information about the ancient ancestors of modern Germans.<sup>3</sup> In line with prevailing romantic nationalist historiography, Friedrich indirectly prefigured the French aggressor as Rome, Germany's ancient adversary, equating the heroic resistance of his countrymen against Napoleonic France with that of their ancient forebears against the Roman Empire. In this essay, we consider four of the artist's paintings where his attitude towards both France and Rome can be seen. And we explore how the nationalist milieu from which the artist emerged

1 All translations in this article are the author's own.

2 See Koerner (1990) and Rosenblum (1994) on Friedrich, and Grewe (2009) for background on how we might situate Friedrich and his contemporaries in German romanticism.

3 For the background to the reception of Tacitus' *Germania* see Krebs (2011).

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helped shape his own convictions. The case will be made that Friedrich's conception of Rome as a figurative anti-Germany is important to our overall understanding of the artist and his painting.

## The National Paintings

Friedrich directly engages with classical literature in only one of his paintings. This is in his *Felsental* (*Das Grab des Arminius*) ["Rocky Valley (The Tomb of Arminius)"].<sup>4</sup> This painting dates from 1814, at the close of the Napoleonic wars, and shows a tomb embowered by a natural formation of rock in the valley floor of a woodland. At the base of the rock inside the cave is a slab of stone, besides which a small figure stands. This latter is dressed in the costume of a *Chasseur*, one of the invading French soldiers that had been a common sight during Napoleon's invasion of Germany in the years before this painting was made.<sup>5</sup> As ever in Friedrich's painting, the natural landscape is the dominant feature with the small lone figure overshadowed by its verdant grandeur.

As subject for his painting Friedrich uses the ancient German Arminius from Tacitus' *Annals* (1.55). In this work, the Roman historian describes how the leader of the Cherusci tribe led a German confederation against the occupying legions of the Roman emperor Augustus and his general Quinctilius Varus, ultimately destroying those legions—according to legend—in the Teutoburger forest in Germany in 9 AD.<sup>6</sup> Arminius (whose name became conventionally Germanicised as "Hermann") had had a long reception history since the Renaissance. Martin Luther (1483-1546), Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523) and others had employed him for rhetorical purposes in their polemics against the Italian bishops, modelling him as a sort of German progenitor. Several German playwrights, most notably Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), subsequently dramatised his life story. Nor was Friedrich the first to depict Arminius in art, where the theme of his triumphant return from battle (*Siegesfeier*) had gradually grown more popular in painting towards the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Friedrich's painting is, however, an early example of the use of Arminius in a national romanticist context. On the side of the tomb are inscribed the words: "Deine Treue und Unüberwindlichkeit als Krieger sei uns ewig als Vorbild" ["May your loyalty and invincibility as a warrior be ever an example to us"]. Wolf (2003 40) suggests that these words are based on Kleist's theatrical rendition of the life of Arminius, *Die Hermannschlacht* (1809), which greatly influenced many representations of the ancient German leader: "Die Worte beziehen sich auf den germanischen Heerführer und Sieger über die Römer Arminius bzw. Hermann den Cherusker (möglicherweise in der Version der Kleistschen Hermannsschlacht) oder allgemeiner auf einen Gefallenen der Freiheitskriege" ["The words refer to the German commander and victor over the Romans Arminius, or Hermann the Cheruscan (possibly in the version of Kleist's *Hermannschlacht*) or more generally to one of the fallen of the War of Liberation"]. Kleist's play of a few years before—which was also strongly influenced by the Napoleonic invasions of Germany—presents Arminius as a valiant patriot and liberator, willing to sacrifice all for a higher cause, even his own crown if necessary, and prepared to use any means to achieve this—even misleading the Romans in a treacherous alliance. Antipathy towards Rome is intense in this work.<sup>8</sup>

Friedrich's use of Arminius at this time is not an arbitrary choice and inherits a degree of nationalist symbolism from his existing receptions, such as that of Kleist. This is of Arminius primarily as a German hero—by picturing Arminius entombed in the landscape that he defended, and with which he has become

<sup>4</sup> C. D. Friedrich, *Felsental* (*Das Grab des Arminius*), oil-on-canvas, 49,5 x 70,5 cm, 1814 (Kunsthalle, Bremen).

<sup>5</sup> Meaning "hunter" in French, the term denoted soldiers belonging to certain French regiments of light infantry and cavalry. First formed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they wore blue cloaks and golden helmets. Napoleon's Imperial Guard included a regiment of cavalry, which was employed more generally in the invasions of the German states.

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of Arminius' reception in later history see Winkler (2016).

<sup>7</sup> For example: J. H. Tischbein, *Hermann and Thusnelda*, oil-on-canvas, 68,3 x 84 cm, 1782 (Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt); A. Kauffman, *Hermann and Thusnelda*, oil-on-canvas, 44,8 x 61,9 cm, 1786 (Kunstgeschichtliche Sammlungen, Vienna).

<sup>8</sup> In jest, Hermann at one stage describes the ugliness of Roman women's hair to Thusnelda: "Nein, sag ich! Schwarze! Schwarz und fett, wie Hexen! Nicht hübsche, trockne, goldne, so wie du!" ("No, I say! Black! Fat and black, like witches! Not fair, dry, and golden, like you!") Kleist (1821), Act 3, Scene 3.

one in death, the artist is able to comment on the eternal values of freedom that he represents and to characterise those values as essentially German.<sup>9</sup> This symbolism is mirrored in other paintings by Friedrich, whose significance the observer is expected to understand from similarly coded national messages. The iconography of his slightly earlier painting of 1812, *Gräber gefallener Freiheitskrieger* ["Graves of fallen Freedom Fighters"],<sup>10</sup> is in many ways compositionally similar to that of the Arminius painting. It also features a cave in a local landscape where this time that landscape is spotted with assorted gravestones. These are of different styles, an idealised national chronology of German freedom fighters through the ages, now gloriously unified in death and—like Arminius—at one with the German landscape they defended. Here Friedrich's iconography is deliberately evocative of the ancient world. At the entrance to the cave he picks out a stele in white highlights, upon which we see youthful and heroic figures standing in contrapposto after the fashion of classical sculpture. An impression of ancient pedigree for the freedom fighters of today is thereby created, and the message here is much the same as in the later Arminius painting. Once again two small *Chasseurs* stand at the entrance to the cave.<sup>11</sup>

Here and in other of Friedrich's patriotic paintings, the natural world itself always remains the compositionally central feature, but nature may be made to function as allegory. This allegory frequently relates to the same concept of a transcendent national cause, which may span more than one generation or involve an idea of national re-birth. Friedrich again returns to the figure of the *Chasseur* in an eponymous painting of the same period.<sup>12</sup> In this, we see a wintry woodland scene, in which a French soldier stands alone in a clearing. Before him is a dark pine-wood forest. The trees that loom up before him are so densely packed together that no light passes through them. The serried ranks of pine seem to form an impenetrable mass before which the figure of the soldier appears disproportionately small and isolated. In his discussion of this painting, Wolf highlights how it is replete with national symbolism, whose meanings are meant to be read and understood by Friedrich's audience (43). He argues that the great forest before the *Chasseur* itself represents the unity of the German people and that the stump in the foreground symbolises that, although the French may try to oppress Germany now, a future generation will rise up against them indefatigably: "möglich, dass darüber hinaus der hohe Fichtenwald das geschlossene Zusammenheit der deutschen Patrioten und die jungen Fichten neben den Baumstümpfen im Vordergrund die Nachkriegsgeneration symbolisieren sollen" ["it is also possible that the tall pine forest is meant to symbolize the close unity of the German patriots and the young pines beside the tree stumps in the foreground are meant to symbolise the post-war generation"]. The raven is often a bird of ill omen in art,<sup>13</sup> and its prominent presence in the foreground, sitting on a stump, likely portends the death of the French soldier. It is another coded message that the days of the French presence in Germany are numbered. It is also likely a reference to Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht* (Act 5, Scene 7), in which the despairing Roman general Varus' doom is heralded by a raven as he wanders lost in the darkness of the Teutoburger forest: "Hier war ein Rabe, der mir propheziert,/ Und seine heisre Stimme sprach: das Grab!" ("There was a raven here who made a prophecy to me,/ And his hoarse voice said: the grave!") As Wolf comments, the morbidity of this painting was not lost on Friedrich's contemporaries (43). On seeing it the Prussian governor of Pomerania Prince Wilhelm Malte I zu. Putbus commented: "Es ist eine Winterlandschaft, der Reiter, dessen Pferd schon verloren ging, eilt dem Tod in die Arme, ein Rabe krächzt ihm das Totenlied" ["It is a winter landscape, the rider, whose horse is already lost, hastens

9 Cf. Smiles (1994 34): "The modest sarcophagus, installed on a rocky cleft at the base of a cliff, allows Friedrich to present Hermann as though fused with the land he had defended."

10 C. D. Friedrich, *Gräber gefallener Freiheitskrieger*, oil-on-canvas, 49,3 x 69,8 cm, 1812 (Kunsthalle, Hamburg).

11 Wolf (2003 38-39) argues that there may be a more direct reference to the contemporary struggle against France in this painting too: "Die Buchstaben GAF auf dem Obelisk sind möglicherweise die Initialen eines im Freiheitskrieger Gefallenen. Solche Verschlüsselungen waren wegen der Zensur der französischen Okkupation oft notwendig" ["The letters GAF on the obelisk may be the initials of one of the fallen of the War of Liberation. Such cyphers were often necessary on account of the censorship of the French occupation"].

12 C. D. Friedrich, *Der Chasseur im Walde*, oil-on-canvas, 65,7 x 46,7 cm, 1813/1814 (Private Collection, Bielefeld).

13 Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art: "The raven, which fed Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs. 17; Vg. 3 Reg. 17 or 3 Kgs. 17) also fed hermit-saints like Anthony Abbot and Paul the Hermit. In the context of Elijah, it is a symbol of the bringing of the Eucharist for mankind's salvation. On the other hand, its blackness and its raucous croak caused it to be regarded as a bird of ill-omen" (62).

into the arms of death, a raven croaking to him his death song”]. The allusion to Napoleon’s defeat in the Russian winter would have been hard to miss.<sup>14</sup>

In his later painting after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, *Huttens Grab* [“Hutten’s Grave”],<sup>15</sup> Friedrich alludes more directly to contemporary German nationalism. The painting is both a dedication to the humanist and patriot Hutten, whose tomb it depicts and another monument to the fallen of the *Freiheitskrieg* and the ideals that they fought for. A ruined chapel is shown, all overgrown with trees, by the side of which stands a man who leans on his staff as he pauses to contemplate the tomb. He wears the old German costume that the freedom fighters had adopted as a patriotic affectation during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>16</sup> On the near side of the sarcophagus are inscribed several names, in addition to Hutten’s own.<sup>17</sup> The roof of the tomb and its Gothic windows (themselves symbols of the north) have long since disappeared, and the walls are weathered and dilapidated. Yet there is nonetheless something vital about the scene. Trees have grown on the tomb in a way that seems to complement it, as if they were reclaiming Hutten—as Arminius—for the natural landscape. Moss, flowers, and verdant plants have grown on the stone, breathing new life into it, while the sun rises behind and a statue appears to turn towards the light, cross-in-hand. There is a strong sense of re-birth here. Friedrich draws upon many conventions of his broader painting in this work—for example, the sunrise, the power of nature, and man’s mortality—even if the message is not an explicitly religious one.

Although there is no direct reference to ancient Germany and Rome here, Friedrich again signals that the contemporary national struggle has a long pedigree. Hutten had himself authored a political dialogue which he entitled *Arminius* (1529). As Walker (2008 19) puts it: “The concept of patriotism, or, as seems more appropriate here, ethnic chauvinism linked to landscape, customs, and traditions, is a sub-text of the *Arminius* dialogue.”<sup>18</sup> As he would later have in the twentieth century, in Friedrich’s day Hutten already had a certain status as a nationalist icon. By directly naming contemporary figures such as Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852), the gymnast and founder of the Lützow Free Corps in 1813, or Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769-1860), the author, poet and seminal nationalist ideologue, in a painting of Hutten’s tomb, he places them within the same tradition. The sense of a continuous German national pedigree stretching back from the present day through the Middle Ages to the ancient is complete. Friedrich indirectly asserts his place within that tradition too.

## North and South

Friedrich exhibited the first three paintings discussed above in March 1814 at the Russian General Nikolai Grigorjewitsch Repnin-Wolkonski’s (1778-1845) Dresden exhibition of patriotic art, which followed the withdrawal of Napoleonic forces from the city in September 1813. For Friedrich, this was a source of great joy. The occupation had proven an ordeal for many, and something of this may be gleaned from the tone

<sup>14</sup> Schama has also accepted that Friedrich makes allusion to the Teutoburger theme in this painting. The French soldier serves Napoleon, “the new emperor and, by virtue of his conquests, the king of Italy, too.” He “is seen from the rear, as if to emphasize his vulnerability,” and is “the new “Latin” invader,” whose armour itself belies his Romanness: “Even his helmet, accurately described from the French military, seems strangely Roman, as if borrowed from one of Varus’ lost centurions. Perhaps there were even echoes in their respective weapons, for a while the ancient Germans carried javelins and spears not much different from the lance that pierces the dragon, the Romans used swords, represented in Friedrich’s paintings by the weapon trailing clumsily beneath the chasseur’s cape . . . Like Varus’s centurions, the chasseur is surrounded and dwarfed by the impenetrable line of evergreens, the massed troops of the reborn Germania” (Schama 106).

<sup>15</sup> C. D. Friedrich, *Huttens Grab*, oil-on-canvas, 97 x 73 cm, 1823-24 (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Weimar).

<sup>16</sup> This costume also features in another of Friedrich’s paintings, *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes*, oil-on-canvas, 35 x 44 cm, c.1819/20 (Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden).

<sup>17</sup> Wolf reads these as names of figures closely associated with the *Freiheitskrieg*: “Jahn 1813,” “Arndt 1813,” “Stein 1813,” “Görres 1821,” “D . . . 1821,” “F. Scharnhorst” (59).

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 5 (“Hutten in Cultural and Political Contexts”) in Walker (2008) for an overview of Hutten’s nationalist reception.

of a letter of Friedrich's to the Danish philosopher Frederik Sibbern (1785-1872)<sup>19</sup> in the aftermath of the occupation: "Lieber Doktor, wir haben schreckliche Dinge hier erlebt, doch Gott sei dank es ist vorüber!" ["My dear doctor, we have experienced dreadful things here, but thank God it is over!"] (Zschoche 87). As for many others who saw the French invasion of Germany as a sort of violation, the occupation and *Freiheitskrieg* had done much to intensify Friedrich's nationalism. The predominant context of that nationalism, however, and of Friedrich's painting, was romanticism. The artist's patriotism appears to have been primarily based upon a fierce love of the natural beauty of his homeland and, as we have seen in the paintings discussed, it is through this prism that he visualises his particular brand of national romanticism on canvas.

Friedrich had a clear conception of the purpose of his art, something he sets out in a letter to the professor Johannes Karl Hartwig Schulze (1786-1869) in 1809:

Der Effekt, oder um teutsch zu reden, die Wirkung eines Bildes, beweist viel für die Güte desselben; wenn die Wirkung wahr; die Wahrheit des Edle beabsichtigt hat. Wenn ein Bild auf den Beschauer seelenvoll wirkt, wenn es sein Gemüth in eine schöne Stimmung versetzt; so hat es die erste Forderung eines Kunstwerkes erfüllt. Wäre es übrigens auch noch so musterhaft in Form und Farbe; so kann es keinen Anspruch auf den Namen eines wahrhaftigen Kunstwerks machen, wohl aber auf den, einer schönen Künsteley. Aber ein vollendetes Kunstwerk vereinigt beides in sich. (Zschoche 52)

The effect (*Effekt*), or to render it Germanically, the impact (*Wirkung*) of an image, proves much of its worth; if the impact is true, then the truth of nobility has intended it to be so. If a picture has a meaningful (*seelenvoll*) impact on the beholder, if it moves him to a beautiful mood, then it has fulfilled the first requirement of a work of art. Should it just have a fashionable form and colour, no claim can be made for it to bear the name of a true work of art, though it may well be a piece of fine art. But a finished work of art unites both in itself.<sup>20</sup>

Like his nationalism, Friedrich's approach to his painting was uncompromising.<sup>21</sup> His novelty and intransigence in the face of the prescriptive artistic trends of his time are well-known. At times this made him enemies within the art establishment and led to an eventual feeling of a certain ostracism.<sup>22</sup> This considered, and given the often hard realities of Friedrich's impoverished circumstances (particularly during the period of the occupation), we can appreciate why the ideal of the struggle for a brighter national future might have appealed to him. In Friedrich's case, it is difficult to pinpoint at what stage exactly his romantic nationalism coalesced into a more aggressive and xenophobic outlook. However, it appears that even before the occupation of Dresden we can find similar ideas in Friedrich's correspondence. In a letter to his brother Christian he chides him for living in France and in fairly strong terms endeavours to persuade him to return to his homeland (Zschoche 47): "Du fühlst es selbst daß es nicht recht ist, daß Du als Teutscher in Frankreich bist, und das tröstet mich: noch einigermaßen; denn sonst würde ich ganz an deiner Teutschheit zweifeln." ["You feel it yourself that it isn't right, that you as a German are in France, which consoles me; because otherwise, I would greatly doubt your Germanness."] As is clear here, for the artist there was something so alien about France to the essence of being German, that even setting foot on French soil could be reckoned as a sort of national transgression.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Sibbern and Friedrich had studied together in Copenhagen. In 1811, Sibbern travelled through Germany to attend the lectures of Henrik Steffens (1773-1845) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814).

<sup>20</sup> The phrase, "oder um teutsch zu reden," seems to implicitly justify the use of the latter alternative over the former, as if this added some special value by virtue of its Germanic, as opposed to Latin, etymology. It is as if Friedrich when talking about what he considers most essential in art, would prefer to use the Germanic form as more valid.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich's approach to his art should be seen within the context of the romantic thought of the time. Concerning the romantic conception of the national spirit, Herder argued that: "In the works of imagination and feeling the entire soul of the nation reveals itself most freely" (58).

<sup>22</sup> A turning point for Friedrich was the dispute with the Kammerherr Friedrich Wilhelm Basilius von Ramdohr (1752-1822) over his painting *Das Kreuz im Gebirge* (1808). Ramdohr, who was opposed to the "mysticism" of Friedrich and other contemporary artists, criticised this work in an essay. For Friedrich's lengthy and detailed response, see his letter to Schulze of February 1809 (Zschoche 51).

<sup>23</sup> Something of the national mood around this time can be seen in Heinrich von Kleist's poem, *Germania an ihrer Kinder* ("Germany to her children") (1803) (lines 81-84): "Frei auf deutschem Boden walten,/ Laßt uns nach dem Brauch der Alten!/ Seines Segens selbst uns freun,/ Oder—unser Grab ihn sein!" ("Free on German soil,/ Let us be after the custom of our ancestors!/ Our own blessing be our joy,/ Or—let that be our grave")

Ultimately such strong feelings can be seen to have reached their fullest extent in a poem by Friedrich, *Gebete: Nach der Befreiung Dresdens von den Franzosen* ["Prayer: After the Liberation of Dresden from the French"],<sup>24</sup> written just after the departure of French forces. The poem—which is in the form of a prayer—describes the defeated French in flight, imploring God that such an occupation never happen again and asking for the return of peaceful and plentiful times to his homeland. It is in fact, we learn, God's own wrath which pursues the French in their flight: "Aber der Zorn Gottes ruht schwer auf ihnen" ["God's wrath bears down heavily upon them"]. God is addressed directly throughout the poem, its last paragraph directly invoking his mercy:

Laß uns auch in deiner Liebe sehn, daß du der  
Allgütige bist,  
Und sei uns gnädig, sei uns gnädig, o Herr,  
und erhöre uns.  
Let us see in your Love, that you  
Are the All-Good one,  
And be merciful to us, be merciful to us, o Lord  
And hear us.

In its title and content, the poem assumes a devout and near ceremonial tone. Yet in other respects it also sounds like a victory song, as the opening lines indicate:

Lasset uns singen ein hohes Lied, ein Lied voll Dankbarkeit  
und Liebe.  
Let us sing a high song, a song full of thanks  
And love.

Furthermore, references to swords, enemies, yokes, sceptres and regiments give the poem a strongly militaristic feel. Friedrich's censure of the French is strong, for whom there is little love, despite the lines cited above. They are "die Schnöden" ["wretches"], and "Flüchtigen" ["fugitives"], their very existence pernicious and pursued by God. Indeed the rhetoric of the poem is so strong as to recall, perhaps deliberately, Tacitus' criticisms of imperial power:

Schnöde Willkür führt das Zepter, und die Habsucht  
führt das Regiment.  
Wretched caprice leads the Sceptre, and greed  
Leads the regiment.

The French are characterised by despotism and greed, which very closely recalls Arminius' attacks on Roman corruption in Tacitus.<sup>25</sup> The enemy, under whose yoke they have laboured, has denied them all joy:

Die Freude ist von uns gewichen seit Jahren, unter dem Druck  
der Fremdlinge seufzen wir.  
For years joy has left us, beneath the strain  
As we bemoaned the strangers.

Friedrich appears to derive a vengeful joy from the abject suffering of the French soldiers in flight:

Aber der Zorn Gottes ruht schwer auf ihnen,  
Vom Hunger gequält, ohne Obdach und Hilfe,  
Ohne Mitleid und Erbarmen

<sup>24</sup> Originally written in 1814. Printed in Hinz (79).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.15, where Arminius exhorts his men as follows: "Meminissent modo avaritiae, crudelitatis, superbiae: aliud sibi reliquum quam tenere libertatem aut mori ante servitium?" ["That they remember only their greed, cruelty and arrogance: Nothing was left but to uphold their freedom or die before becoming slaves."]

Hauchen sie des Lebens letzten Atem aus.  
 But God's wrath bears down heavily upon them,  
 Tormented by hunger, without shelter or help,  
 Without pity or compassion  
 They breathe out life's last breath.

The very death of the French soldiers—the *Chasseurs* of his national paintings—is the essence of victory for Friedrich, and divinely sanctioned. God is with Germany.<sup>26</sup>

Friedrich did not develop these ideas in isolation. They were very much the product of the company that he kept during this time. As Vaughan points out, Friedrich was close to Kleist and his circle:

Friedrich was himself . . . deeply concerned with the contemporary political situation, and it was such interests that seem to have brought him into association with the “second generation” of Dresden Romantics, the circle around Kleist and Müller’s “Phoebus” magazine. Throughout the wars Friedrich remained a sympathetic supporter of the movement of pan-Germanic patriotism whose objective was not merely the expulsion of the French, but also the creation of a liberal German state. (33)

Aside from Kleist, a key figure who had been very influential for Friedrich was Ludwig Gotthard Kosegarten (1758-1818), the Lutheran pastor and poet. Kosegarten was an early example of a thinker who argued for the existence of a specific northern spirit which characterised German and Nordic peoples. Vaughan has argued that some of the ideas in Kosegarten’s writings influenced Friedrich in his formative years, finding the link between the two in Johann Gottfried Quistorp (1755-1835), Friedrich’s first art teacher and a close friend of Kosegarten’s. As he comments:

While Kosegarten is the most likely person to have brought Friedrich into contact with an eschatological interpretation of nature, he could have been even more directly influential in the development of some of Friedrich’s most recurrent nature images. For, inspired by ‘Ossian’ and books on Scottish travels, Kosegarten came to see in the elemental and primeval landscape of the large island of Rügen that lies off the Pomeranian coastland a setting for the protagonists of a nordic heroic past. While the large dolmens on the island (still commonly known as “Hünengräber”—“Giant’s graves”) were believed to be the memorials of such heroes, the abundant weather-beaten oaks could also be interpreted as symbols of Teutonic manhood . . . Nor were contemporaries unaware of Friedrich’s relationship to the literary reappraisal of this part of Germany. The writer Heinrich von Kleist, for example, when reviewing Friedrich’s “Monk by the Sea” spoke of its “ossianic or Kosegarten-like effect.” (19)

It is unclear to what extent Friedrich can be said to have been directly influenced by someone like Kosegarten, but when we consider the artist’s fascination with the island of Rügen and how he situates Arminius and other national heroes’ tombs amidst a similar rocky landscape, it is likely that he is at least drawing on similar ideas. Kleist’s comments of Friedrich’s painting *Der Monch am Meer* (“The Monk by the Sea”) show that such allusions were identified in the artist’s work by his contemporaries. The reference to the Scottish poet James Macpherson’s (1736-1796) *Ossian*, a poem purporting to record the ancient deeds of Scottish heroes which strongly influenced the outlook of many artists of Friedrich’s generation, is also significant. Another contemporary German romantic artist who was affected by Kosegarten’s ideas was Phillip Otto Runge (1777-1810). Friedrich and Runge first met in Greifswald in 1801-2 and for the following three years until 1805 Runge lived in Dresden, working on his *Times of the Day* cycle.<sup>27</sup> The proximity of the artists

<sup>26</sup> It is worth however noting that Germany is never directly referred to as an entity in the poem, “Die Heimat” being preferred. Friedrich’s religious scheme in this poem goes as far as to imagine the French as originally sent by God as a form of chastisement for the Germans: “Deine Hand, o Herr, züchtigt uns hart, aus Süden und Osten/ sendest du Peiniger zu uns.” [“Your hand, o Lord, greatly chastises us, from the South and East/ you send us tormentors”] Here again, the generalisation of the French enemy into a southern/eastern one has Tacitean echoes, for example at *Annals* 1.59, where the Roman presence in Germany is seen as fundamentally wrong: “Germanos numquam satis excusaturos, quod inter Albim et Rhenum virgas et securis et togam viderint” [“The Germans would never forgive the fact that they had seen the rods, axes and toga between the Rhine and the Elbe.”]

<sup>27</sup> P. O. Runge, *Die Zeiten* series, copper engraving, each engraving 71,2 x 47,5 cm, 1805 (Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden).

should not be overstated,<sup>28</sup> but there is some evidence of influence from Runge's work in that of Friedrich.<sup>29</sup> It is at least likely that the two artists shared common inspirations. Works of Runge's in Hamburg show that he was engaged on various projects in these years on the themes of "Ossian" and "Fingal" (one of the Ossianic heroes), and there are extant designs for an unfinished project involving twin canvases on the themes of *Fall des Vaterlands* ["Fall of the Fatherland"] and *Not des Vaterlands* ["Need of the Fatherland"].<sup>30</sup> Friedrich did not work in isolation of the nationalist literary and artistic output of the Dresden of his time.

It was common in Friedrich's time for aspiring artists to spend a period of time studying the ancient and Renaissance masters in Rome, and many other German artists did so. Friedrich did not, however, take any interest in Rome or in working with the other foreign artists there at the time. His reasons for this are interesting, as is clear from a letter of 1818 he sent in response to his student friend Johann Ludwig Lund (1777-1867), who was at that time living in the city and had invited Friedrich to go out there to join him:

Dank für die freundliche Einladung nach Rom zu kommen, aber ich gestehe frei daß mein Sinn nie dahin getrachtet. Aber jetzt da ich einige der Zeichenbücher des Herrn Faber durchblättere bin ich fast anders Sinnes worden. Ich kann mir es jetzt recht schön denken nach Rom zu reisen und dort zu leben. Aber den Gedanken von da wieder zurück nach Norden könnte ich nicht ohne schauern denken; daß hieße nach meiner Vorstellung so viel: als sich selbst lebendig begraben. (Zschoche 111)

Thank you for the friendly invitation to come to Rome, but I freely admit that I have never been minded to go there. But now as I leaf through some of Mr Faber's drawings I almost change my mind. Right now I can imagine travelling to Rome and living there. But I cannot think of making the journey back from there northwards without shuddering. In my imagination that would be like being buried alive.

This letter is undoubtedly ambiguous, but it is true that in his whole life Friedrich never went to Rome.<sup>31</sup> Instead, in 1794, he had travelled to Copenhagen for his artistic training at the Akademi for de Skønne Kunster, the most distinguished school in northern Europe at the time. Here he had come under the influence of the history painter and Nordic romanticist Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard (1743-1809). Abildgaard, who had worked in Rome with Henri Fuseli (1741-1825) and was equally occupied with classical themes, was also fascinated by themes from Norse mythology and history and, as Runge, illustrated *Ossian*.

It is likely that Friedrich would have been influenced by other artists too, including Jens Juel (1745-1802), the Danish portraitist who had painted Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803) (the playwright and author of another play about Arminius), the neoclassical painter Christian August Lorentzen (1749-1828) and the sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt (1731-1802), who were all working in Copenhagen at the time. All shared a certain interest in Nordic mythology and with Germany and Scandinavia's ancient past. Given his immersion in this intellectual and artistic milieu, and the psychological effects on him of the Napoleonic occupation in the years that followed, it is perhaps unsurprising that Friedrich's orientation ended up being firmly towards the north, and in no way towards the south.

<sup>28</sup> Wolf (2003 21): "Die für den Sommer 1806 geplante, aber nicht zustande gekommene gemeinsame Rügenreise setzt jedenfalls eine relativ nahe menschliche Beziehung voraus. Von einem engen Freundschaftsverhältnis, wie gelegentlich behauptet, ist allerdings nicht zu sprechen" ("The joint expedition to Rügen, planned for the summer of 1806, but not undertaken, suggests a relatively close acquaintance. However, there is no close friendship to speak of, as is sometimes asserted").

<sup>29</sup> Vaughan (1972 29): "Echoes of Runge's mythology are rare in Friedrich's works. His interest lay further in the direction of pure landscape than Runge's combination of natural forms with allegorical figures. However, while having little relationship to Friedrich's own cycle of nature, the hieratic character of Runge's "Times of the Day" seems in many ways to prefigure the conception of the "Cross in the Mountains."

<sup>30</sup> P. O. Runge, *Fingal*, oil-on-canvas, 1805; *Ossian* (et al. from *Ossian*), oil-on-canvas, 1805; *Fall des Vaterlands* (planned work), 1809; *Not des Vaterlands* (planned work), 1809 (Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Vaughan (1972 20): "The northern aspiration that for the Nazarenes, in such works as Pforr's "Sulamith and Maria," grew into a yearning for the paradisaic south became for Friedrich directed towards a contemplation of the spirituality that could be felt in the extremities of nature. Indeed, in 1817 he refused to visit Rome for fear that the experience of a richer landscape might destroy his spiritual asceticism. Like his collaborator, Semler, he remained firm in the belief that "the gloomy and meagre nature of the north is best suited to the representation of religious ideas."



## Conclusion

In the paintings we have discussed here Friedrich returns to his favourite subjects of mortality and re-birth, and the power of nature and God, combining these into a very personal expression of national romanticism.<sup>32</sup> At the twilight of the French occupation of Germany, he looks forward to a brighter future for his homeland, but also one rooted in its innate strengths. Yet in defining those virtues, he as other of his contemporaries turns in part back to the classical world for inspiration. The heroes of the past were needed to create the necessary pedigree for those of the *Freiheitskrieg*, and in this process recourse to the ancient—and to Arminius—was a key element. It would remain so for more than a century to come. Meanwhile the Frenchman, as the Roman before him, would forever be an intruder lost in the might and beauty of the German landscape. German nationalism would of course soon mature into the political project of unification, but Friedrich's paintings are a clear reminder that its roots were firmly in romanticism, and in an idea of the ancient past.

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<sup>32</sup> The question of why Friedrich returned to mortality so frequently in his paintings cannot be addressed here. He gave his own answer as follows (Hinz 82): “Warum, die Frag’ is oft zur mir ergangen, wählst du zum Gegenstand der Malerei so oft den Tod, Vergänglichkeit und Grab? Um ewig einst zu leben muss man sich oft dem Tod ergeben” [“Why, the question is often put to me, do you so often choose death, transience and the grave, as subjects for your painting? To live eternally, you must yield to death”].