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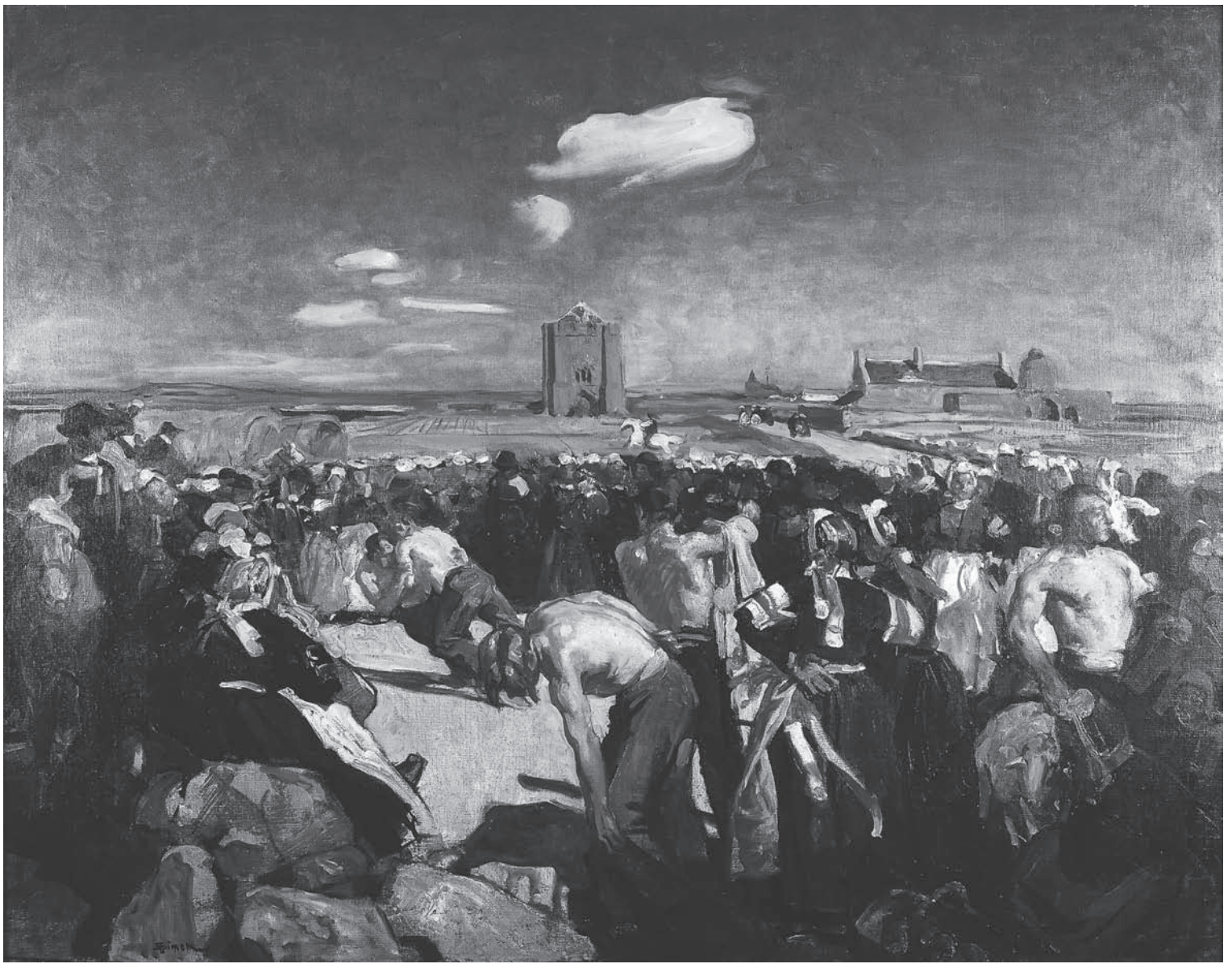


Regionalism and High Culture: the Case of Painting, 1890-1914

Eric Storm

Around 1890, regionalism underwent a fundamental change throughout Europe. Until then it had been a quite limited phenomenon that only appealed to a small group of notables. The historical and geographical background of a region was studied in a wider context as an indispensable but not always fully recognised contribution to the nation's greatness. The results of these studies were generally presented to the members of learned societies or to a limited local audience. We could even ask whether the term 'regionalism' is appropriate to describe this phenomenon. Around 1890 this situation changed as young, well-educated members of the local elite attempted to reach a broader public. This meant that they had to develop other forms of social contact and of expression. In order to mobilise the middle and lower classes, they founded new associations that were essentially oriented towards recreational activities. Instead of giving lectures, organising banquets and publishing erudite studies, they now undertook excursions, organised festivals, and opened local museums. They also started to appreciate local dialects or vernacular languages, not only as an object of study but also as a vehicle for their publications. At the same time the attention shifted from a distant past, where the roots of the regional and national identity were to be found, to the actually existing cultural and natural heritage that distinguished the region from the rest of the nation. Thus excursions were undertaken to particular landscapes, to historical and natural sights and to typical villages, small towns and buildings. Local museums began to display local handicrafts, old tools, traditional costumes and other items of folklore, and vernacular art, architecture, literature and other expressions of traditional popular culture became a focus of attention.[1]

The rise of this new kind of regionalism had an enormous impact upon European society. The new appreciation of typical landscapes, natural sights, historic monuments, traditional buildings and customs led to attempts to protect the highlights of regional and national heritage. As a result, national parks were created, the preservation of natural and historic sites received massive support and all kinds of traditional artefacts were collected by both individuals and museums. Even the existing high culture was affected as ethnology became a new branch of science and as composers, writers, architects, sculptors and painters increasingly included popular motifs in their works. Even a new artistic current - which could best be defined as regionalist - came into being and flourished until the 1930s. Not all of this was completely new; however, the scale was entirely different. Some isolated precursors now became part of a broad movement and a highly influential public discourse.[2]

Regionalism disappeared almost as fast as it arrived, as it was appropriated and finally perverted by the various Fascist movements in the 1930s and 1940s. Its populist traditionalism was adopted as part of Fascist ideology and, it has to be admitted, many regionalists felt attracted to or even openly collaborated with the new Fascist regimes.[3] Thus with the

10.1 *Lucien Simon,* Les luttes (The Werstling Match)*, 1898; 111 x 146 cm. [Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Brest métropole océane]*

1 Storm, "Regionalism in History"; Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*; Ditt, "Die deutsche Heimatbewegung 1871-1945"; Thiesse, *Écrire la France. Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste;* Marfany, *La cultura del catalanisme. El nacionalisme català.*

2 Storm, "Regionalism in History".

3 Applegate, "A Europe of Regions"; Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts*; Ditt, "'Mit Westfalengruß und Heil Hitler'. Die Westfälische Heimatbewegung"; Faure, *Le projet culturel de Vichy*; Cavazza, *Piccole Patrie.*

fall of the Fascist states in 1945, regionalism almost completely disappeared as an influential movement and its pre-Fascist past was relegated to historiographic limbo. Until recently, therefore, regionalism was generally seen as a backward looking, particularistic, reactionary movement of provincial petty bourgeois opposing the inevitable modernisation of society. The same applied to most variants of regionalist art, as these did not fit into the triumphant story of the rise of avant-garde modernism and even seemed to embody opposing values such as tradition, skill, populism, order and a preference for recognisable representations.

Recent research, however, has shown that regionalism, at least at its start, should be considered as a reform movement. Like other reform currents at the end of the 19th century it criticised the dominant laissez-faire ideology for ignoring local differences and declining state intervention. It also represented a new phase in the process of nation-building, providing the nation with local roots and increasing its popular appeal. Furthermore, the regionalist movement with its stress on participation and its anti-elitist stance, had a clear democratic component and, as its participants were essentially drawn from the modern urban middle classes, it played a considerable role in the rise of contemporary leisure culture.[4] As a consequence, the question arises whether regionalist art also should be interpreted as an innovative movement. A brief look at regionalist painting in some major European countries from 1890 onwards will make clear that this was the case, at least until about 1914.[5]

Regionalist painting

Artistic regionalism rose to prominence all over Europe at about the same time as the various regional movements. It seems that the Scandinavians - or more generally the Northern and Eastern European countries - took the lead. This might be explained by their lack of both an internationally recognised cultural Golden Age functioning as an attractive source of nationalistic and regionalistic rhetoric, and of a strong, state-supported art market. Painting folkloric themes for a dominantly bourgeois public, instead of creating increasingly out-of-date, historical paintings, became a good option. Around 1890, a new international generation of painters, most of them born between 1855 and 1875, started to translate regionalism into highly successful pictures. Some of the best-known painters who produced regionalist paintings for at least part of their career were the Norwegian Erik Werenskiold (1855-1936), the Swede Anders Zorn (1860-1920), the Finn Akseli Gallén-Kallela (1865-1931) and the Czech Alfons Mucha (1860-1939). Other lesser known regionalists included the Pole Jacek Malczewski (1854-1929), the Czech Jozef Uprka (1861-1940), the Bulgarian Jean Mrkvitchka (1856-1938), the Belgian Victor Gilsoul (1867-1939) and the Italian Ettore Tito (1859-1941).

In order to analyse some painters in depth, I will focus on regionalist painting in three significant and interesting countries: France, Germany and Spain. The first two were leading European countries, although the artistic situation in each was quite different. Paris was the international capital of art and the only major French artistic centre. Germany, on the contrary, had various regional cultural centres such as Munich, Düsseldorf, Dresden and Berlin which all had an ambivalent attitude towards the artistic dominance of Paris. Spain constitutes a

4 For references see: Storm, "Regionalism in History".

5 The main sources for this paper are the major international art magazines of this period. In the following footnotes I only refer to the most significant articles on the specific issue. Many topics are repeated too often to be referred to in their entirety. I also consulted the relatively scarce art historical studies on these painters and autobiographical material, such as some of their published letters and publications. This made it clear that regionalist painters generally shared the views of those critics who sympathised with their work.

***10.2** Charles Cottet,* Repas d'Adieu (Farewell Dinner)*, 1898. [Paris, Musée d'Orsay / Photo RMN, © Hervé Lewandowski]*

somewhat different case, as, artistically speaking, it was peripheral and strongly French oriented. Nevertheless, the regionalist movement in Spain was influential and in some regions, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country, not only wanted to assert its own identity, but also began to seek political autonomy. It is thus interesting to compare Spain with the strongly centralised France and the culturally decentralised Germany.

All three countries produced internationally renowned regionalist painters, including Lucien Simon (1861-1945), Charles Cottet (1862-1924), Carl Bantzer (1857-1941), Ludwig Dettmann (1865-1944), Otto Heinrich Engel (1866-1949), Fritz Mackensen (1866-1953), Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945) and, in some ways, Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923). Some secondary figures were Charles Milcendeau (1872-1919), Fernand Maillaud (1863-1948), Louis-Marie Désiré-Lucas (1864-1949), Jean Roque (1880-1926), Julien Lemordant (1878-1968), Mahurin Méhuet (1882-1958), Felix Borchardt (1857-1936), Richard Hoelscher (1867-1943), Wilhelm Thielemann (1868-1924), Paul Schultze-Naumburg (1869-1949), Marceliano Santa María (1866-1952), Eduardo Chicharro (1873-1949), Manuel Benedito (1875-1963), Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor (1875-1960) and the brothers Valentín (1879-1963) and Ramón de Zubiaurre (1882-1869).

Most of these regionalist painters were born into provincial, middle-class families, received a good education and thus belonged to the same social strata as the leaders of the regionalist movement. The main exception to this was Lucien Simon, who came from a distinguished Parisian bourgeois family. Nevertheless, most of them were not involved in a regionalist movement and many even preferred to paint regions in which they had not been born. Thus Cottet - who was raised in the Savoy - and Simon mainly painted themes from Brittany. Engel and Mackensen originated from hilly central Germany, but favoured depicting the Northern German coastal planes, whereas Zuloaga, who was native to the Basque Country, preferred to paint in Castile. Only minor artists like Maillaud, Lemordant, Méhuet, Schultze-Naumburg, Santa María and Sotomayor restricted themselves primarily to representing their own native region, and few of them became active in the local regionalist movement. Regionalist art, therefore, should not be seen as a mere branch of the regionalist movement, but as a new art form that was largely drawn from the same ideological well.

However, a few words have to be said on the use of the term 'regionalist art'. The regionalist painters did not produce manifestos, nor did they present themselves as a formal movement with its own exhibitions or publications. Yet neither the public nor critics had any difficulty distinguishing them as a coherent and influential group. Nevertheless, as they chose their subjects mostly from a specific part of their fatherland, at the time they were known by a different name in each country. In France, for example, these painters were seen as painters of a specific region. Thus Lucien Simon and Charles Cottet, who were the most influential French representatives of this current, were called painters of "Breton life and scenes", whereas a minor painter like Fernand Maillaud was called the "painter of the old French Province of Berry". In Germany artists like Carl Bantzer, Fritz Mackensen, Otto Heinrich Engel and Ludwig Dettmann were known as *Heimatkünstler*, although some of them disliked this term's provincial undertone. In Spain, on the other hand, the name *regionalista* was used to characterize the paintings by Ignacio Zuloaga, Marceliano Santa María, Eduardo Chicharro, Manuel Benedito and Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor.[6] As the Spanish term is the most general and can easily be applied to the same artistic current elsewhere, the term 'regionalist painting' seems best suited when referring to this artistic current. This is even more the case if we take into consideration the close relationship that existed between the painters's ideals and the ideology of the wider regionalist movement.

In general, regionalism was a reaction to the optimistic and rationalist outlook of both classical liberalism and late 19th-century positivism. Young intellectuals started to criticise widely accepted theories of modernisation for not taking into account inherent differences between individuals, regions and nations. They also doubted that human beings were essentially rational and mainly guided by economic self-interest. Man was not a *tabula rasa*, able to be educated or socialised into a responsible and active citizen. Rather, each person was born into a family and society, with a particular background and context. Therefore, improvement of human society would only be possible using specific measures that were adapted to the given situation. A thorough study of the natural environment, the historically grown traditions and the resulting psychological equipment was a primary necessity. Thus regionalism's task was, on the one hand, to draw up an inventory of the region's natural, historical and mental peculiarities, and on the other to increase the awareness that the population and policymakers had of the region's unique identity.

However, regionalism was not only a reaction to the undifferentiated modernisation theories of liberals and positivistic social reformers. It also found little appeal in the optimistic internationalist ideologies of the socialists and anarchists and the subsequent growth of the workers' movement. The regionalists dismissed these revolutionary ideologies on the same ground as they did positivist reform schemes. Nevertheless, they feared the Marxist and revolutionary alternative more than a civilised cosmopolitan bourgeois society. To these unrealistic dreams, which they thought would turn out to be chimera or even outright nightmares, they opposed their own solution. Instead of a loose collection of decadent, egoistic individuals or of an uprooted, degenerate mass, they strove for a harmonious, organic society that respected its environment and historical traditions. This does not mean that all regionalists opposed socialism. Many even hoped to achieve a form of fraternal co-operation between the classes - a hope which they often labelled 'socialist'.

6 Bénédite, "Lucien Simon"; Segard, "Charles Cottet, painter of Breton life"; Uzanne, "Fernand Maillaud. A Painter of the Old French Province of Berry"; Küster and Wittstock, *Carl Bantzer*; Reyero and Freixa, *Pintura y escultura en España,* 464-467; Tusell, *Arte, historia y política en España,* 73-155. The German regionalist movement accordingly was known as the *Heimatbewegung*.

Regionalism was not the only movement that reacted against the optimistic and rationalistic outlook of progressive liberals, positivistic scientists and revolutionary labour organisations. With its appreciation of differences, tradition, inner feelings and non-rational elements, regionalism took part in the international anti-positivistic or subjectivist turn that took place during the *fin-de-siècle*, and of which vitalism, neo-idealism, symbolism and art nouveau were other cultural expressions.

The general ideological background of regionalism would manifest itself in regionalist art as well. However, while regionalism should be interpreted as a political movement that generally expressed itself with cultural means, regionalist painting was primarily a cultural tendency with some political undertones. Artistically speaking, it was clearly an innovative movement, despite operating almost without manifestos and formal or informal groupings. The innovative attitude of the regionalist painters became manifest in their negative opinion of academic art and their adaptation of most of the innovative aspects of *plein air* realism and impressionism.

All regionalist painters openly rejected academic art with its conventions and strict rules for composition, chiaroscuro, and its preference for dignified subjects and a finished surface. Its technique was considered too dogmatic, lifeless, unrealistic and lacking spontaneity, while its representations were found to be theatrical and lacking authenticity. For this reason none of the important French regionalists visited the Parisian Academy of Art. Instead they learned their *métier* in small academies set up by well-known painters. Thus Simon and Cottet studied at the Academie Julian. Cottet was for some time a pupil of Roll and Puvis de Chavannes, and Zuloaga, who also spent his formative years in the French capital, studied at the so-called Académie de la Palette. In Germany, however, nearly all painters visited one or several of the academies that existed throughout the country, and most went from one professor to another. However, none were very positive about the education they received. Cottet, Simon and Zuloaga did not consider themselves pupils of one particular master, nor did they recognise a serious debt to the education they had received. The German painters all abhorred the traditional academic training and many declared to have learned nothing worth mentioning. Instead, they claimed to have learned most by observing nature. Many also felt inspired by the old masters: Simon admitted that studying the technique of Hals and Velázquez had been very important to him, most German regionalists admired Rembrandt, and Zuloaga openly adored El Greco and Goya.[7]

The regionalists liked the *plein-airism* as practised by the painters of the École de Barbizon (especially Millet) and other artists' colonies much better than academic art. They shared their love of nature and the simple country life, their aversion to academic conventions and their preference for direct observation, simple compositions and realistic subjects.[8] However, regionalist paintings were clearly distinguishable from these predecessors, as they mostly chose different places to live, other subjects to paint and employed a different technique.

Although the regionalists also moved to the countryside, they generally went to more remote areas and avoided the main existing artists' colonies. Instead of establishing themselves in Pont-Aven or Concarneau, Simon bought a house outside the village of Bénodet, whereas his friend Cottet preferred to stay in the small port of Camaret or on the tiny islands of Sein or Ouessant, all western outposts of Finistère.

7 Thiébault-Sisson, "La vie artistique. Un peintre de la vie et de la réalité. Lucien Simon"; Copeau, "Charles Cottet", 266; Kahn, "Gaston Hochard", 265; Deibel, *Ludwig Dettmann*, 3-4 and 33-34; Overbeck, "Ein Brief aus Worpswede", 23; Krummacher, "Die Malerkolonie Worpswede", 17-22; Vauxcelles, "Félix Borchardt", 113.

8 See for example: Krumacher, "Die Malerkolonie Worpswede", 19-20; Chantavoine, "Artistes contemporains. M. Charles Cottet", 106.

Zuloaga avoided the more typical sights of Andalusia and the Central Spanish mountain range and went to live for some years in a popular quarter of Seville. Some years later he moved to the small provincial towns of Segovia and Pedraza on the Castilian *meseta*. Most German regionalists, on the contrary, preferred the company of other artists. Bantzer, Dettmann and Engel mainly stayed in established artists' colonies such as Willingshausen, Ekensund and Nidden. Bantzer, however, was also involved in the founding of a new colony in Göppeln near Dresden, while Mackensen, accompanied by a few friends, discovered the discreet beauty of Worpswede, a village in the moors north of Bremen.[9]

Generally, the regionalist painters did not produce romantic, mountain or lakeside pictures, nor paint charming hills or woods. The regionalist painters seemed to prefer quite unimpressive, flat landscapes of coastal planes and arid plateaux. Further preconditions for their work were untouched villages and traditionally dressed people. More than the *plein-airistes*, who mainly painted landscapes, they depicted the inhabitants and buildings of the countryside. These had to be clearly recognisable as representing a specific area or region. Traditional costumes, vernacular architecture, typical landscapes and specific local types thereby functioned as indispensable signifiers. Thus, whereas the *plein-airistes* painted anonymous peasants, from an unspecified region, who were dressed in ordinary working clothes, the regionalists depicted clearly identifiable types - of whom we often even know the name and profession - dressed in the traditional dress of a specific village, which could often even be recognised in the background.

However, the regionalist painters distinguished themselves from their *plein-airiste* predecessors more by their technique than by their choice of subject, for they absorbed most of the innovations of the impressionists. They adapted the impressionists' virtuoso use of colour and their way of representing effects of light and shade, techniques with which they were able to suggest a particular moment of the day, with its own fleeting atmosphere. They also used the unconventional compositions of the impressionists, which were especially meant to highlight a significant moment that seemed to form part of a sequence. In this way, the impressionists were able to suggest movement and thereby to transmit the sensation of directness and presence that made their pictures so realistic and full of life.[10]
With their innovations the impressionists had abolished almost all academic conventions, such as the stress on a finished surface, the subdued colours, the traditional division into fore-, middle- and background, the chiaroscuro to highlight the central motif, and the ordered compositions that guided the view of the observer. The regionalists did not want to return to the old-fashioned practices of the academicians.

The anti-academic stance of the regionalist painters also manifested itself in their participation in various secessionist movements that mostly occurred in the 1890s after dissatisfaction with the policies of the traditionalist artists' associations had led to a break. Simon, Cottet and Zuloaga did not present their works at the traditional salon, but instead participated, almost from the start, in the slightly more elitist and innovating salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (National Society of Fine Arts). Dettmann and Mackensen maintained good contacts with various secessions, while Engel was a member of the Munich Secession and one of the founders of the Berlin Secession. Bantzer was involved in the foundation of the secession in Dresden and, during its most active years, was even its president.

9 Wietek, *Deutsche Künstlerkolonien und Künstlerorte*; Pese, ed, *Künstlerkolonien in Europa;* Lübbren, *Rural artists' colonies in Europe*.

10 For the adaptation of impressionistic techniques see: David, "Lucien Simon", 32, Saglio, "Lucien Simon", 355; Rosenthal, "Jean Roque", 28; Deibel, *Ludwig Dettmann*, 4-5.

10.3 *Ludwig Dettmann,* Heimfahrt vom Kirchdorf (Return Home from the Church Village)*, 189. [Braunschweig, Städtisches Museum]*

Although regionalist painters adopted impressionistic painting techniques and compositions, they generally defined their own artistic point of view in opposition to that of the impressionists. They especially criticised the impressionists as being superficial on a theoretical level. With their preference for depicting atmospheric effects, reflections of light and movement - often even only in a rapid, sketchy way - the impressionists were merely interested in representing superficial, external appearances. This fascination with the rendering of atmosphere also meant that the impressionists generally chose to depict a contingent, floating moment. In this way the subject became a vehicle for a particular incidence of light, converting the theme of the painting into a secondary affair. Any motif would do. This was clearly visible in their paintings, as they preferred simple motifs from their direct surroundings, or people at leisure in and around Paris. However, these almost arbitrarily chosen 'snapshots' recorded only some outward aspects of nature or of modern urban life. As both moral lessons and implicit metaphysical references were banned from their work, art became a kind of senseless exercise in virtuosity, at least in the eyes of many regionalist painters and their supporters.[11]

For the regionalist painters, art was a serious matter. Therefore, subjects should be meaningful and the way of depicting them dignified. Regionalist painters could not content themselves with depicting outward reality in a merely sketchy way. They wanted to look behind the visual appearances and penetrate into the essence of things. Instead of mirroring nature, as the impressionists and realists had done, they wanted to interpret reality by distilling its essence - its inner truth. However, they did not want to lose themselves in individual, dreamlike fantasies as did the symbolists and the German *Phantasiemaler*. Because they were striving for the essence behind reality, their art has sometimes been called 'subjective realism' or 'synthetic realism'.[12] In philosophical terms, however, it could be defined as neo-ideal-

11 See for the differences from impressionism: Mourey, "Charles Cottet's 'Au Pays de la Mer' and Other Works", 240; Marcel, "Lucien Simon", 123-125; Krumacher, "Die Malerkolonie Worpswede", 20 and 24; Bartning, "A Decorative Landscape Painter: Paul Schultze-Naumburg", 210 and 212.

12 Bénédite, "Charles Cottet", 112; *Carl Bantzer 1857-1941*.

ism, as they understood that ideas were more important for comprehending reality than visual observations, which in any case, according to Kant, originated in the human mind as well.

However, a good picture not only required a meaningful method of depiction, but also a relevant subject. Depicting air or light could not be the highest aspiration of art. The impressionists' world of pleasure and vice, and the landscapes devoid of any intrinsic metaphysical references seemed insignificant to the regionalist painters. They preferred the countryside to the cosmopolitan urban world depicted by most of the impressionists. Yet the mere outward representation of landscapes or village scenes could not satisfy them either. Like the regionalists generally, they saw the countryside as the essence of the nation. But this was no generic countryside. Every region had its particular characteristics and precisely through this uniqueness constituted an indispensable part of the greatness of the nation. Exploring the character of a particular region was thus considered to be a patriotic deed.

Furthermore, regionalists saw humans as social beings and as products of both nature and history. Therefore, a society should be an organic unity and live in harmony with its natural environment and historical roots. This situation - although mostly in a somewhat rudimentary stage - could still be found in some remote areas of the fatherland, where ancestral traditions continued to be cherished, where the bond with nature was not loosened, and where ancient beliefs still functioned as an infallible guide. The simple lives of the people in these rural areas could function as an example of virtuousness to the uprooted, decadent or degenerate people from cosmopolitan cities. This does not mean that all regionalists wanted to return to this almost innocent and primitive state. They strove for a more harmonious relation with the historical and natural background which these people seemed to symbolise. After all, humanity was more than the barbaric child of nature; it was also the product of civilisation. A civilisation that lost contact with its environment and roots was doomed to disappear. A reorientation upon the almost original state of its specific form of human civilisation - where the original harmony was still intact - could help the nation find a new, healthy equilibrium. So painting the virtually primitive ways of some remote areas of the country could be helpful to the fatherland. Discovering the true personality of its regions could increase the national self-awareness and indirectly strengthen the whole nation.

The guiding principle behind this way of reasoning was the idea that every people had its own genius, spirit or soul. The idea of a *Volksgeist*, as it was best known, dated at least from the late 18th century and had been very popular during the Romantic Era. Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century the concept of a 'popular spirit' made a strong comeback and was also applied to regions. Every region had its own genius and together they formed a national spirit. This mode of thinking became entwined with the equally popular biological terminology, especially with the term 'organicism'. The nation was now seen as a body and the regions its organs. If one organ was missing or had been amputated the whole organism suffered. Such a loss would even threaten its existence. The health of the whole could only be guaranteed by the well-being of the parts. As well, health, considered in terms of *Volksgeist*, meant being faithful to its unique personality.

This kind of reasoning did not necessarily lead to a reactionary or extremely conservative attitude. A popular spirit was, after all, the historical product of a people living in a certain area. Within the natural and

geographical limits set by the environment, the people tried to adapt themselves to the circumstances and in their turn tried to exploit nature to satisfy their own ends. The result of this historical process of a growing adaptation to and dominance of nature became the specific cultural form of a certain area, and it was clear that this process should not be halted or undone. Only if necessary should it be rectified, in accordance with the voice of the collective soul, in order to maintain its true course.

Now we understand that the regionalist painters hoped to find an early and pure expression of the popular spirit in these authentic villages. Unspoiled by decadent internationalist urban civilisation, the true collective genius or soul could be captured here. As a result, the regionalist painters tried to represent the *Volksgeist* of certain regions in their pictures. This meant that both humanity and nature should be depicted, preferably in a harmonious relation.[13]

A short discussion of the main regionalist painters of France, Germany and Spain should show how this attempt was manifested in their work. Although regionalist painters were not extremely numerous, it should be remembered that the regionalist discourse appealed to many other artists as well and appeared in many critical appraisals of a whole range of artistic expressions.

France

Most French regionalists specialised in Breton subjects. This was the case of Désiré-Lucas, Lemordant and Méhuet, who were native from Brittany, but also of Simon, Cottet, Milcendeau and Roque, who came from other, mostly distant parts of France. Brittany was generally seen as one of the most primitive and picturesque regions of France, with its prehistoric megalithic monuments, its peculiar, untouched landscape, its folklore, traditional costumes, processions and pilgrimages, and its ancient Celtic language. As early as the 1860s and 1870s Brittany had attracted many painters, mainly French, British and American, who established major artists' colonies in Pont-Aven and Concarneau.[14] However, the regionalist painters did not paint just any villager and landscape; they tried to unveil the true Breton 'soul', painting traditionally dressed people in a typical landscape, engaged in a characteristic local activity.

This preference for Brittany may seem strange, as this westernmost part of the country could hardly be considered the heartland of France. It did not play a fundamental role in French history, economically it was quite backward, and culturally it was completely peripheral. However, as the Bretons still spoke an ancient language that was not derived from Latin and they still cherished old traditions that had disappeared elsewhere, Brittany was seen as one of the few authentic French regions where vestiges of a pre-Roman culture still survived. In Brittany, therefore, the remains of an original civilisation could be found, one that had formed the basis of the French nation. Thus, precisely because of its peripheral place and primitive ways, it was considered as perhaps the most authentic French region. In this way, Brittany performed the same function as other backward regions in other

13 See for example: Bénédite, "Charles Cottet", 112; Aubert, "L'œuvre de Charles Cottet", 762-766; Crucy, "Le pays bigouden et son peintre. Julien Lemordant", 391-392; Morice, "Ignacio Zuloaga", 22-23; Warncke, "Worpswede", 147-148 and 185; Deibel, *Ludwig Dettmann,* 24-25.

14 Puget, "Die Künstlerkolonie von Pont-Aven und Le Pouldu"; Cariou, "Die Künstlerkolonie von Concarneau"; Delouche, *Peintres de la Bretagne*.

countries, such as the Scottish Highlands for Great Britain, Dalarna for Sweden, Karelia for Finland, Kalotaszeg for Hungary and Podhale for the Poles.[15]

Another characteristic of French regionalist painting was that some regionalist painters were seen as part of a group. During the second half of the 1890s the term 'La Bande noire' (the Black Band) was frequently used to refer to a group of young painters, of which Cottet, Simon and their friend René Ménard were considered the most important members. Surprisingly, it was not their subject choice that attracted attention, but their painting technique. In contrast with the dominant light colours of the impressionists and their followers, these young painters preferred rich and full colours and frequently used black. Their compositions were well worked out and their technique was not sketchy. Thus they were seen as an alternative to impressionism. However, it was not their regionalist ideology that was important, as Simon and Cottet were the only regionalists in this informal Black Band.[16]

From about 1895, Lucien Simon and Charles Cottet were seen as very talented and interesting painters. Their paintings, which were mostly hung in a prominent place at the yearly salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, were reviewed in the press, received medals and were acquired by the French state and foreign museums. They participated in international exhibitions and later on would be honoured with monographic exhibitions in one of the major Parisian art galleries. From about the turn of the century their work was also discussed in monographic essays in most international art magazines. Simon and Cottet were thus numbered with the most important and influential French artists of their time. Other painters followed in their footsteps and regionalist painting became a clearly distinguishable artistic tendency. Nevertheless, as Paris was the international art centre where at the various salons and galleries thousands of French and foreign painters exhibited their work, French regionalism was only one of the many styles that vied for public attention.

Although the paintings of Simon, Cottet and the other regionalists shared many salient features, the works of each also had clear individual characteristics. Lucien Simon, for example, succeeded in transferring the psychological depth and intimacy of his portraits of family members into sympathetic collective portrayals of Breton village life.

Simon only discovered the beauty of Brittany through his in-laws, who spent their summer holidays in Bénodet, a small coastal village to the south of Quimper. From 1892 onwards Simon would spend most of the summer there, making sketches and looking for motifs in the surrounding areas. Until then he had especially painted intimate family portraits and he continued to do this while he slowly became famous for his paintings of Breton folk life. Most of these paintings depicted typical Breton people, traditionally dressed and celebrating a local holiday or engaged in a characteristic activity. The visit of a small travelling circus and a traditional wrestling match, both organised on the occasion of a local feast, resulted in *Cirque forain* (1898) and *Les luttes* (1899). Processions and church-going presented the motifs for *Procession à Penmarc'h* (1900), *Le menhir* (1900) and *Coup de vent* (1902). In later years he would also paint scenes representing traditional activities related to farming and fishing.[17]

Simon's choice of subjects was very specific. He did not just depict a contingent moment, but always chose a meaningful event in which people, nature and tradition seemed to form a harmonious union. This was especially the case in the open-air

15 Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales,* 23-67 and 113-133; Howard, *Art Nouveau: International and National Styles in Europe*, 113 and 128-129.

16 Gensel,"Eine neue Pariser Künstlergruppe", 20-21; Bénédite, "Charles Cottet", 101.

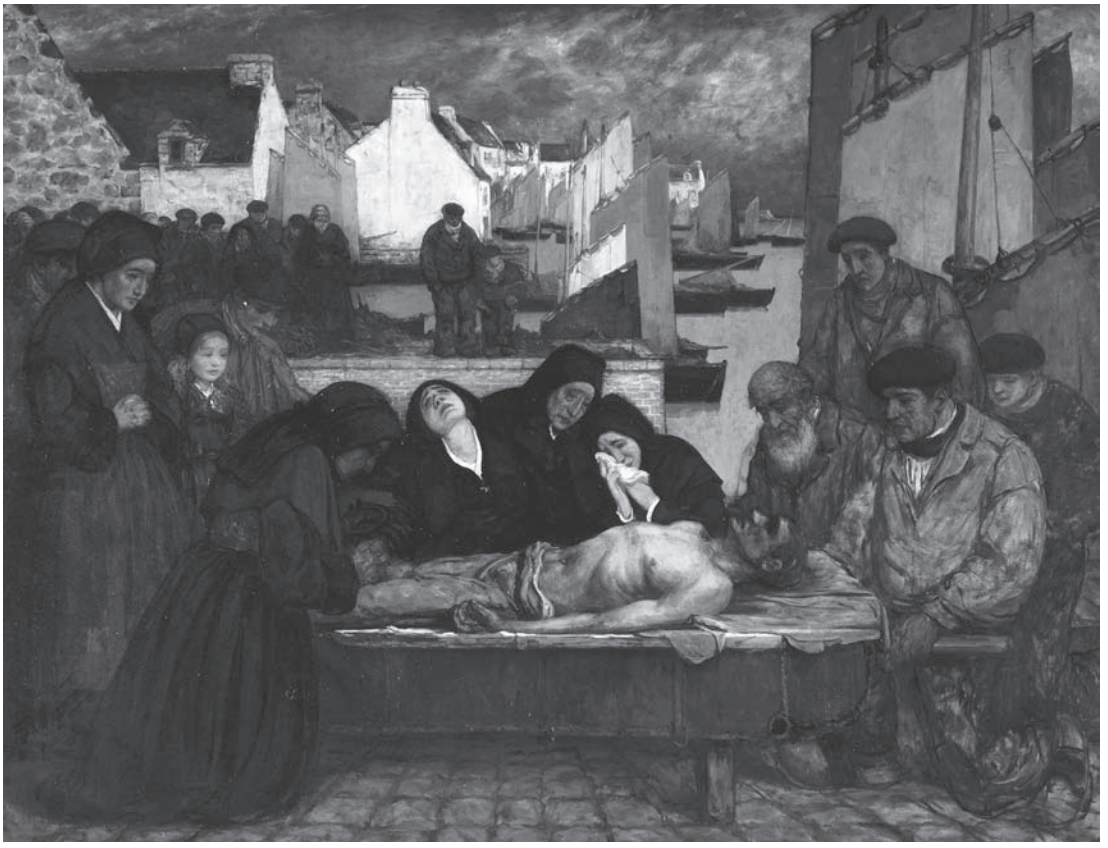
17 See for Simon: Cariou, *Lucien Simon*.

***10.4** Lucien Simon,* Le menhir (The Menhir)*, 1900; 98 x 131 cm. [Paris, Musée d'Orsay / Photo RMN, © Gérard Blot]*

scenes. Thus, in *Les luttes*, the traditionally dressed villagers gather around the wrestlers, who, stripped to the waist, defend the honour of their parish in a primitive game honouring the local patron saint. [10.1] A sheep visible on the right is the trophy. Some women are seated on the rocks in the left foreground, while a few men watch the spectacle from horseback. Although the scene looks a faithful copy of the event, the background has been heavily manipulated. In the centre we see the tower of the ancient church of Saint-Guénolé, a small village not far from Simon's summer residence, and on its right a fortified farmhouse. In reality such a farmhouse could be found only some kilometres further away, whereas a number of ordinary houses, which had been eliminated by the painter, actually surrounded the tower.[18] In this way, both the solitude and desolation of the landscape and the central role of the church were underlined.

In *Le menhir* Simon depicted a small group of adolescents chatting and possibly flirting, seated on the stones next to a menhir. [10.4] In the background we see a few houses, a chapel, the coastline and a small procession. Again, landscape, buildings and people seem to harmonise. Earth, sky, houses and faces all have the same brownish colour and the stones on which the young villagers sit are also used as the main construction material. The bare, flat landscape is subject to the forces of nature, such as the wind that forces the people to bow, that makes the processional banner billow, and also drifts the clouds along the sky. Through fishing and farming these people can make a humble living, but nature is not only beneficial, it can also be a threat. Only guidance from above could save humanity in these circumstances. The presence of the menhir, the seemingly holy megalithic circle of stones around it, the chapel and the procession, bear witness to the ancient and strong religiosity of these simple villagers. By centrally placing the menhir and adding the non-

18 Ibidem, 33.



10.5 *Charles Cottet,* Douleur au pays de la mer (Sorrow at the Land by the Sea), *1908; 264 x 345 cm.*
[Paris Musée d'Orsay / Photo RMN, © Hervé Lewandowski]

existent circle of stones around the menhir - which was present at the actual site[19] - Simon tried to stress the continuity in religious feeling between prehistoric times and the present.

As it was not Simon's goal to represent visual reality truthfully, it was not a sin or fault to add or eliminate some elements from the picture. Some of these manipulations were certainly done from a compositional point of view. However, the most conspicuous changes were done to give the picture a clearer meaning. What Simon intended with his pictures was to represent the essence of reality, thus he chose a significant event and tried to distil its essence by stressing the most important elements and by adding or eliminating others. His picture was not meant to be a copy, but rather a synthesis of reality. These synthesised depictions reflected his personal preference for a stable order, harmony and security both within the family and, on a wider scale, in society. A clear identity, resulting from a close relationship with the collective natural and historical heritage, could at least provide some shelter in a rapidly changing world.

Although the ideological outlook of Cottet was very similar to Simon, he still had his own individual accents. Cottet preferred to stay in small isolated fishing communities in Finistère. Instead of feasts, he sought the essence of life in these small villages, in their tragic moments. Thus he painted many scenes of mourning. These were often intimate portraits of resigned women. However, some major salon painting, like the *Enterrement* (1895), *Repas d'Adieu* (1898) and *Douleur* (1908), were nearly pathetic. Both *Enterrement* and *Douleur* treated the premature death of a fisherman and the subsequent sorrow of his mother, wife and other members of the family. *Repas d'Adieu* depicts a farewell dinner in which it is not

19 See for Simon: Cariou, *Lucien Simon*, 78-79.
20 For Cottet see: Cariou, *Charles Cottet et la Bretagne*.

certain that the women will ever see their beloved again.[20] [10.2] The imminent threat of the sea is a lasting presence in these communities. The sea gives them their daily bread, but at any time, can take whomever it likes. Although the landscape is almost invisible in these pictures, Cottet indirectly shows that the dependence on nature was almost complete, and that this determined almost all aspects of human existence around these small harbours.

Like nature, religious feeling was only hinted at indirectly by Cottet as he stylised many of his pictures in a religious fashion. *Douleur* was clearly modelled on the Lamentation of Christ, with a group of women resembling the three Marys behind the almost Christ-like body of the dead fisherman. [10.5] All the figures are viewed frontally against the background of the village harbour. *Repas d'Adieu* was even given the form of a triptych, depicting those who are to leave on a long fishing trip on the left panel, and those who stay behind on the right. The central scene was fashioned after the many representations of the Last Supper, although again no direct religious signs are visible.[21] Around a table, he depicted thirteen (sic) men and women - the *mater familias* taking the position of Christ - who were perhaps gathered for the last time.

Compared to the colourful festive events of Simon, Cottet preferred to depict sombre, tragic moments, immediately before or after a major drama. His colour scheme generally was more restrained, the costumes of the villagers were less exuberant and his compositions were more austere. He generally also omitted a clear reference to the exact location of his representations in the titles, as opposed to Simon, and used instead the generic subtitle *Au pays de la mer* for many of his works. Instead of a curious pictorial anecdote, he represented a scene of more general significance, with which the observer could easily identify. He was not so much interested in exotic images as in the visualisation of general human feelings. It was thought that these emotions could probably be found in a pure form among these humble people, who still lived in direct contact with nature. Thus, from within the same ideological framework, both painters followed their own personal preferences, Simon stressing the role of tradition, whereas Cottet underlined the bond with nature.

Germany

In Germany there was no clear preference for one specific region. Most regionalists, however, preferred northern and central German areas, so that the coastal regions seem to be somewhat over-represented. Both Dettmann and Engel preferred the coastal villages, and Mackensen went to the northern moors around Worpswede. Thus, the Germanic part of the country again prevailed over the Romanised southern areas as the heartland of the nation. There were also exceptions, such as, for example, the Berlin-born Borchardt, who painted many Bavarian scenes that he mainly exhibited at the Parisian salon.[22]

In terms of both quantity and quality German regionalist painting was no stronger than its French counterpart. Bantzer, Dettmann, Engel and Mackensen all had more national and international success than the secondary French regionalist painters, but none of them reached the level of Simon, Cottet or Zuloaga, nor received much attention in foreign art magazines. Maybe this was also due to their teaching activities at one of the various art academies that had started to reform their curriculum in the years before the turn of the century, and where, relatively early in their careers, most of them became professors. Thus, Bantzer obtained teaching

21 See also: Aubert, "L'œuvre de Charles Cottet", 778.

22 Vauxcelles, "Félix Borchardt".

10.6 *Carl Bantzer,* Schwälmer Tanz (Dance from the Schwalm Region), *1898; 97 x 167 cm. [Marburg, Universitätsmuseum / © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg]*

assignment at the Academy of Dresden in 1896, whereas Dettmann became a professor in Berlin in that same year and in 1901 was asked to become the director at the Academy in Königsberg. Mackensen was offered a chair at the Art Academy of Weimar in 1904 and six years later would become its director. Only Engel declined a few such offers. However, in 1906 he became a member of the Berlin Art Academy and for some time was in charge of the organisation of the yearly art exhibition. All these activities would absorb much of their time and energy.

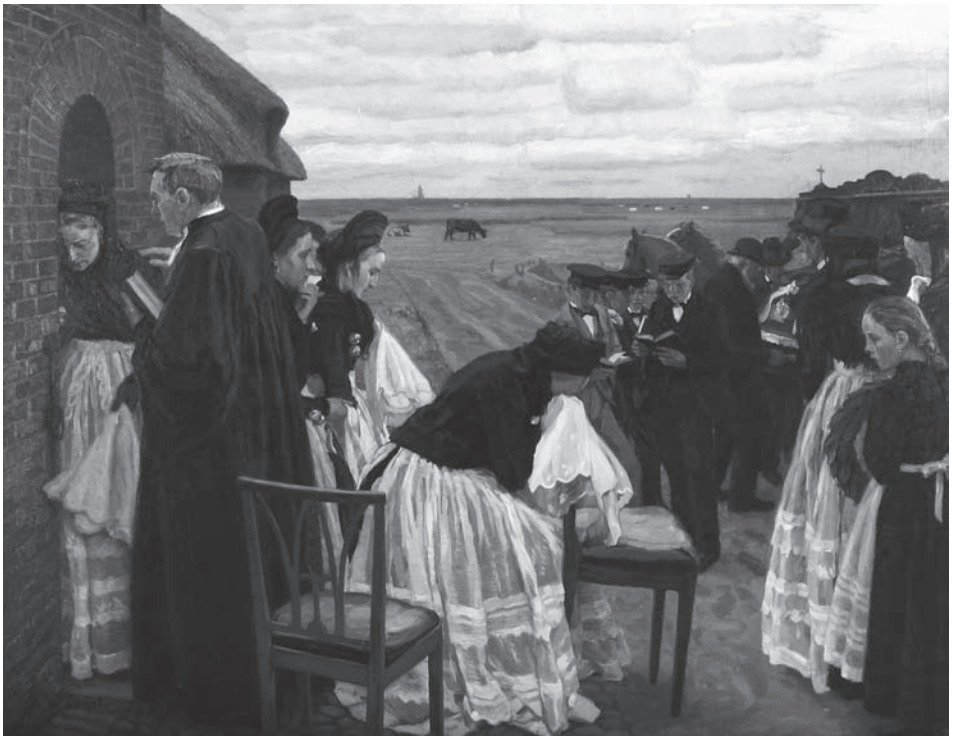
Nevertheless, regionalism and nationalism were almost omnipresent in the German art discourse. As Germany was only recently united and did not possess the prestige or colonies of great powers like Great Britain and France, a kind of national unease - a feeling of undeserved inferiority - was widespread. On a cultural level many Germans also felt that their country did not hold the position it deserved, particularly when its relatively low cultural prestige was compared to its economic and military power. In the visual arts the international dominance of their arch-enemy France was generally recognised. Many critics regretted the secondary position their country occupied in relation to the central position of Paris. This was one of the threads in many art reviews, even in those where nationalism or regionalism did not seem very relevant. For this reason, more than their subject choice, critics commented upon the impressionistic technique of Dettmann and Bantzer. Although most authors did not condemn their adoption of these foreign inventions, they almost always seized the opportunity to lament the existing artistic dependence on France. Thus, whereas regionalist painting was probably not more prominent in

23 See Paret, *The Berlin Secession. Modernism and its Enemies;* Paul, *Hugo von Tschudi und die moderne französische Kunst;* Krumacher, "Die Malerkolonie Worpswede", 17-18; Osborn, "Ludwig Dettmann", 279-280; Schmidt, *Französische Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 159-160.

Germany than in France, the nationalistic discourse, with its regionalist variants, certainly was.[23]

As with 'La Bande noire' some of the German regionalists were singled out for their painting technique, although in this case, not as an alternative to impressionism, but as an importation of it. However, both Bantzer and Dettmann differed from the French impressionists in many ways. Dettmann applied impressionistic techniques to traditional genres, like religious and historical painting and genre scenes. Thus, in his *Überführung der Leiche Kaiser Wilhelms I. vom Palais zum Dom* (1895), he produced a kind of monumental 'snapshot' of a contemporary historical event - the icy-cold winter night when the coffin with the body of the old Emperor William I was conveyed from his palace to the cathedral. Works like *Die Heilige Nacht* (1892), *Arbeit* (1894) and *Das deutsche Volkslied* (1895) were done in the form of triptychs. As well, his many paintings of Frisian themes from the late 1890s onwards show a clear preference for the simple rural world. In these works he tried to penetrate into the regional *Volksgeist* by concentrating upon significant moments in local folk life.[24]

Carl Bantzer also used an impressionistic technique in some of his major paintings. Nevertheless, these were carefully composed and painted, monumental works, which were meant to be exhibited at a salon. Furthermore, his *Abendmahl in einer hessischen Dorfkirche* (1892), *Schwälmer Tanz* (1898) [10.6], *Hessischer Erntearbeiter* (1907) and *Abendruhe* (1912) all represented traditionally dressed people from the Schwalm region near Marburg. He wanted to distil the true character of reality by looking behind the mere outward appearance.[25] Meaningful events like birth, marriage, death, attending church, processions, local feasts, harvesting, fishing and taking a rest after work could give insight into the profound significance of the lives of these villagers, who still felt a living bond with both nature and traditional life.



***10.7** Otto Heinrich Engel,* Trauerfeier in Friesland - Begrabnis auf Föhr (Memorial Service in Frisia - Funeral on the Island Föhr)*, 1904; 174 x 210 cm. [Husum, NordseeMuseum-Nissenhaus]*

Fritz Mackensen and Otto Engel generally used more simplified forms and did not accentuate their virtuoso painting technique. This became manifest in Mackensen's *Mutter und Kind* (1892) - also known as the *Moormadonna - Gottesdienst im Freien* (1895), *Die trauernde Familie* (1896) and *Die Scholle* (1898), whereas Otto Engel produced works like *Von de Waterkant* (1898), *Arm in Arm zum Fest - Friesische Mädchen* (1902) and *Trauerfeier in Friesland - Begräbnis auf Föhr* (1904) [10.7].[26]

With the exception of Bantzer's *Abendmahl* and the paintings of Mackensen, the German regionalists generally had much in common with the mature Simon, producing similar festive and colourful pictures. Mackensen's paintings on the other hand could be better related to the gloomy images of Cottet. Both shared a preference for the hardships and the more tragic moments

24 See for Dettmann: Deibel, *Ludwig Dettmann*.

25 See: Bantzer, *Hessens Land und Leute in der deutschen Malerei*, 37-52; Küster, *Carl Bantzer;* Küster and Wittstock, *Carl Bantzer*.

26 Rilke, *Worpswede*, 23-51; Hamm and Küster, *Fritz Mackensen;* Müller, *Otto H. Engel*.

with which the villagers among whom they were living had to deal. Nevertheless, all focused on the most salient moments of rural life - on the natural and traditional events that regulated human existence in these untouched villages. Birth, marriage, death, local festivities, sowing, harvesting, taking a rest from work and going to church on Sundays, were depicted time and again by these painters. A self-evident, intimate bond with the surrounding nature - which especially came to the fore in working the land - and existing secular and religious traditions gave these people something to hold on to. The warm intimacy of family life and the safe haven of a harmonious, well-ordered community as well as an unshakeable belief protected these people from despair, faced as they were with the inevitable hardships of human existence. It was thought that perhaps this could also be an effective medicine against the nihilistic *fin-de-siècle* scepticism that menaced the cosmopolitan, intellectual elite.

Spain

In Spain it was not a peripheral region that attracted the attention of most regionalists, but Castile. Chicharro and Santa María were born in this centrally located region and represented it many times in their paintings. Nevertheless, Zuloaga and the Zubiaurre brothers, all native to the Basque Country, also had a clear preference for Castilian themes and the same applied to the Valencian Benedito and the Galician regionalist Sotomayor. Unlike Galicia, the Basque Country and Brittany in France, Castile was not especially known for its peripheral location and its pre-Roman cultural heritage. On the contrary, it had played a foremost role in Spanish national history as it had led the way in the discovery of America and subsequently acquired enormous economic wealth. As such, the region had been the centre of the Spanish Golden Age in the 16th and 17th centuries and the nucleus around which Spanish national identity had crystallised. Afterwards, a rapid decline had deprived the region of its prosperity and in the more remote areas life seemed to have stagnated. Thus in many parts of Castile the past seemed to be still alive. At the same time, Castile had for some time resisted Roman occupation and it had led the struggle against the Arab domination in the Peninsula. So, as it had not suffered a long occupation or a profound foreign influence, it was often seen as the most authentic and profoundly Spanish part of the country. In this way it performed the same function as Brittany in France and the coastal areas in Germany.[27]

A further characteristic of Spanish regionalist painting was that the two best known Spanish painters of the time could be seen as regionalists. This was clearly the case with Ignacio Zuloaga, who after about 1900 probably grew to become the most internationally famous regionalist painter. Joaquín Sorolla was somewhat an exception as he only turned to regionalism after already having had a very successful career. He was internationally appreciated for his luminous images, especially from his native region of Valencia. He was a supporter of pictorial realism and was deeply influenced by impressionism. His work showed more similarities to that of foreign impressionists of a second generation like Sargent, Liebermann, Krøyer and Serov, than with that of the regionalists. Around 1911, however, Sorolla decided to switch over to the then highly successful regionalist mode when he was invited to decorate the huge library of the Hispanic Society in New York. Originally he was asked to paint the most important scenes from Spanish history. However, Sorrolla

27 See also Varela, "El mito de Castilla".

10.8 *Joaquín Sorolla,* Las regiones de España: Castilla (The Regions of Spain, Castille)*, 1911-1920; 351 x 1392 cm. [New York, Hispanic Society]*

convinced the commissioners that it would be better to represent his native country through its regions. [10.8] As a consequence he started travelling through the country and dedicated about eight years to painting the various regions of Spain on huge canvasses.[28]

Whereas the quality of Spanish regionalist painting was at least equal to that of their French and German counterparts, quantitatively it was substantially more important. Compared to the relatively small scale of the Spanish art scene - limited to a national salon in Madrid only every two years - the number and importance of regionalist painters was very impressive. For some years around 1910 it probably was even the dominant artistic tendency.[29]

Strikingly, in Catalonia, where the regionalist movement was extremely strong, regionalist painting was almost non-existent. In the Catalan capital Barcelona there was a flowering art scene that had a strong bond with Paris. Impressionism, naturalism, symbolism and art nouveau were all rapidly absorbed and the Catalan representatives of these Paris-born movements were collectively known as *modernistes*. Although regionalist motives and arguments were not absent, most Catalan artists chose to connect their collective identity with international modernity, whereas a conservative minority tightened relations with Catholicism. In the rest of Spain, artistic life was focused on the fairly provincial art scene of Madrid, where the national salon was not organised by the artists themselves, but by Government officials.[30] Therefore, outside Catalonia, regionalist painting was, compared with the still widely diffused academic painting, seen as a very innovative art movement and was not, as happened elsewhere, rapidly overrun by new, more revolutionary artistic currents.

In general, Spanish regionalist painting started somewhat later than elsewhere and its representatives were slightly younger. This does not mean that it was more backward than in other countries. Zuloaga, for example, only turned to regionalism around 1896, but as he took part in some of the most innovative Parisian art circles he produced paintings that differed clearly from those regionalists who still remained under the spell of impressionism. Zuloaga maintained close contacts with Degas, Carrière, Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, and became a friend of Emile Bernard and Rodin. In his early years he was somewhat influenced by the arabesques of art nouveau and later on did not hesitate to use deformations to stress the expressive strength of his pictures.

28 For Sorolla see: Jiménez Burillo, *Joaquín Sorolla*.

29 Bernal Muñoz, *La mirada del 98*; Tusell, *Arte, historia y política en España*.

30 Fontbona and Miralles, *Del modernisme al noucentisme;* Diercks, "Die Kunst im heutigen Spanien".

10.9 *Ignacio Zuloaga,* Víspera de la corrida (On the Eve of the Bullfight)*, 1898; 222 x 302 cm. [Brussels, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium / © IRPA-KIK, Brussels]*

His work, therefore, was more stylised than that of Simon, Bantzer and Dettmann. He also refused to paint outdoors, or even to make *plein air* sketches as many regionalists still did. A painter, according to Zuloaga, should be guided by his intellect and not only by his eyes, as his task is to interpret reality and not copy it.[31]

In 1895, in the same year that Gauguin decided to return to the authentic and primitive society of Tahiti and two years after Bernard went to Egypt, Zuloaga left Paris for Seville in order to live between beggars, dancers and bullfighters in a 'corral' - a traditional tenement house around a common patio. Here he found the material for his paintings. One of the first major results of his new style was *Víspera de la corrida* (1898), in which he painted eight elegantly dressed Andalusian women, accompanied by a picador and a greyhound, who are taking a look at the bulls on the eve of the bullfight. In the background we can discern a village, dominated by a church and a castle. [10.9] Zuloaga, who himself unsuccessfully tried to become a torero, was fascinated with the bullfight, but instead of painting the fight itself, he preferred to paint the expectations and the atmosphere on the eve of the event.

In the same year that he received a gold medal in Barcelona for this huge painting, Zuloaga discovered the beauty of Segovia and the surrounding countryside. His uncle, Daniel Zuloaga, tried to revive the traditional pottery handicraft in this small Castilian town and Ignacio decided to join him there. Here, most of the paintings, such as *Gregorio en Sepúlveda* (1908) and *El Cristo de la Sangre* (1911), which would cause such a stir at the Parisian salon and other exhibitions, were completed. In these pictures Zuloaga usually painted one or more local, life-size types in front of a characteristic village or small town that was embedded in the landscape thus underlining the harmony between man, history and nature.

31 For Zuloaga see: Lafuente Ferrari, *La vida y el arte de Ignacio Zuloaga*.

10.10 *Ignacio Zuloaga,* El Cristo de la Sangre (The Christ of Blood)*, 1911; 248 x 302 cm.*
[Madrid, Centro de Arte Reina Sofia]

As with Simon and most of the other regionalist painters, this image was intended as a synthesis, picturing the soul of the specific region. In *Gregorio en Sepúlveda* for example, the painter had initially placed two taller villagers in the right foreground, next to Gregorio, a somewhat grotesque and deformed wineskin maker positioned on the left. For whatever reason, he decided to cut off part of the foreground and to eliminate these figures in favour of the ancient town and landscape, adding a non-existent crowded bullring in the valley near the river Duratón.[32] Zuloaga thereby stressed the unity between the old town of Sepúlveda, which was draped across the rocky hills of this part of Castile, and its inhabitants, its ancient traditions and surrounding nature. The added bullfight could also be seen as a symbol of the struggle between man and nature, moulded into an elaborate cultural form. Tradition, man and nature were united in this *fiesta nacional*.

The same formula was applied to *El Cristo de la Sangre*, where a priest and five members of a brotherhood are gathered around an enormous macabre crucifix showing a bleeding Christ with real hair and a crown of thorns against the background of the walled town of Ávila. [10.10] Whereas this kind of painting brought Zuloaga enormous success in Paris, where he was seen as the sensation of the *Salon de la Société Nationale*, at home in Spain the reception was much cooler. In general, Zuloaga's paintings were heavily criticised for giving a very dark and backward picture of Spain, for highlighting a barbaric game like bullfighting and for depicting uncivilised degenerate villagers and pathetic, almost primitive religious

32 *Ignacio Zuloaga 1870-1945*, 174-175.

ceremonies. However, authors and critics who favoured the regionalist ideology praised his work as a forceful inquiry into the essence of the fatherland.

At the same time, the at times gloomy images of Zuloaga were compared with the cheerful works of his rival Joaquín Sorolla. Even before Sorolla started to paint the regions of Spain for the Hispanic Society, a debate started over the question of whose pictures better reflected national reality - the luminous and lively Mediterranean impressions of Sorolla or the traditional and dark Castilian scenes of Zuloaga. Sorolla's series consequently gave a much more festive image of the various Spanish regions, as he mostly depicted a group of traditionally-dressed people merrily engaged in a characteristic activity against the background of a bright, sunny local landscape. Strikingly, those writers and critics who were most receptive to the regionalist ideology preferred Zuloaga's Castilian view to the more superficial Mediterranean outlook of Sorolla.[33]

Regionalism and the avant-garde

It has now become clear that, at least in the initial stages, regionalist painting should be seen as an innovative artistic movement that styled itself in opposition to tendencies such as realism, naturalism and particularly impressionism that had dominated the art scene in the 1880s and early 1890s. It adopted most of the painterly innovations of these earlier movements, and used the regionalist ideology to distance itself from its predecessors and to take art along a new and promising path. Along the way, some regionalist painters also incorporated other artistic trends. Thus Zuloaga, Simon and Bantzer produced some very decorative, almost flat pictures in which they omitted drawing in favour of colour, as did Vuillard and Bonnard.[34] Zuloaga also adopted art nouveau arabesques and Gauguin-like deformations and simplifications, and in this was followed by the brothers Zubiaurre and the Austrian regionalist Albin Egger-Lienz.

After about 1900 regionalist painting was increasingly accepted and successful and slowly became part of the artistic establishment. In Germany this became clear with the appointment of many regionalist painters as professors at the various art academies. Many also began to receive official commissions. The most fortunate in this aspect was Dettmann, who had already won a contest for the decoration of the town hall in Altona in 1898. In the following years he also received commissions for mural paintings in the town hall of Königsberg, the Polytechnic of Dantzig and the University of Kiel. Bantzer would start a huge painting for the town hall of Dresden in 1908 and later on would also do some major decorations in Marburg. In France, Simon was asked to decorate the Veterinary School in Lyon in 1904 and after the First World War received other commissions, such as the painting of the stairwell of the Senate in Paris. As Zuloaga had a somewhat complicated relationship with Spanish authorities, it was only in 1918 that he received a commission to paint a portrait of King Alfonso XIII and, except for some juvenile attempts at a club in Bilbao and the Casino in Bermeo, he would never produce major decorative paintings. However, in Spain the regionalist painters also started to form part of the cultural elite.

Around 1910 regionalist painters and their supporters started to become concerned about the future. At the Parisian *Salon d'Automne* and other international exhibitions, new artists such as the fauves, the cubists, the expressionists and the futurists, started to make a furore and their revolutionary works did not please the regionalists at all. Their representations were thought

33 Lafuente Ferrrari, *La vida y el arte de Ignacio Zuloaga*, 301-325; Calvo Serraller, *Paisajes de luz y muerte. La pintura española del 98*, 195-233.

34 See for example Zuloaga's, *Toreros de pueblo* (1906), Simon's *Portrait de Charlotte Simon aux tulipes* (1912) and Bantzer's *Waldspaziergang* (1913).

to be incoherent and arbitrary, their style anarchic and their paintings lacking in all positive moral value.[35] Nevertheless, within a few years the avant-garde had almost relegated regionalism to oblivion. Although, after World War I, regionalist painting still continued to exist, was present at the various salons and continued to sell well, it no longer attracted much public attention. The international art magazines dedicated only a few pages to the work of some of the regionalists. Most regionalist artists were no longer considered very relevant in the national and international art debates and some of them almost disappeared from public view, appearing only at local exhibitions and in rare reviews in the regional press.

Nonetheless, regionalist art and discourse were taken seriously by its opponents. It could even be argued that the avant-garde in the first decades of the 20th century defined itself largely as a response to regionalism; or maybe it is better to say that it has been defined this way *a posteriori* by art historians. Thus the avant-garde opposed modernity to tradition, internationalism to regionalism, artistic freedom to the contextual determination of cultural expressions, spontaneous creativity to organic growth, form to content, individualism to collectivism, town to countryside, and a leading elite to populism. However, the avant-garde artists also adopted part of the regionalist heritage. For example, they radicalised the view that art should be more than a mere copy of reality. Like regionalists, symbolists and other idealist currents they claimed that truth could only be found beyond visible appearances. Art should therefore give an interpretation and transmit corresponding emotions. Many avant-garde artists also shared this interest in feelings, spirituality, authenticity and expression of the regionalist painters and sometimes even shared their hope that it could be possible to overcome the gap between the artist and the people. However, regionalists and avant-garde artists were in fundamental disagreement on one issue - the representational function of art. The regionalists argued that if outward reality, whatever its nature, did not function as a reference anymore, then there would be nothing to interpret. As a result, art, as produced by the avant-garde, was a senseless exercise. According to the regionalists, if the only goal of art was art itself, then painting had lost its fundamental relevance.

With this overview of the rise, flowering and demise of regionalist art we can conclude that it was one of the main successors of impressionism, a highly influential artistic trend from about 1890 to 1914 and probably the most important tendency against which the new avant-garde movements defined themselves. Its importance, therefore, not only lies in the art works it produced, but also in its indispensable role in the genesis of modern art. As regionalist art embodied many values that were contrary to avant-garde modernism, it was later on generally seen as a reactionary movement, its historical role was forgotten and it gradually slid into oblivion. However, as I hope to have shown, without a proper understanding of regionalist art we get a very incomplete picture of the cultural developments of the first decades of the 20th century and an extremely biased image of the rise of the avant-garde and the subsequent triumph of artistic modernism.

35 Bouyer, "L'oeuvre de Lucien Simon", 530; Uzanne, "Fernand Maillaud"; Deibel, *Ludwig Dettmann,* 1 and 34; Michel, "Fernand Maillaud", 454-455.