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**Harvest of Memories:
National Identity and Primitivism in
French and Russian Art, 1888-1909**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyses the convergence of primitivism and nationalism in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century French and Russian art. The discourse of primitivism has yielded a number of critical studies focusing on the artistic appropriation of aesthetics derived from "tribal" arts, Asian arts, medieval icons, outsider art, and peasant arts and crafts. Within that scholarship, modern European art that appropriates the aesthetics of folk arts and themes of the peasantry is frequently considered to be representative of national identity and myth. The artistic elucidation of the peasantry as emblematic of national identity combined with their incorporation into primitivism produces a tension that complicates the conventional, binary structure of the discourse. It is therefore necessary to examine artistic expressions of national myth and the peasantry's absorption into the primitivist discourse, as this indicates a critical point at which issues of nationalism and primitivism converge. In the cultural realm, that juncture is located in the artistic idealisation of peasant cultures, which is indicative of a mythical state of being from which national identity could be rearticulated.

The myth of the peasantry as developed in nineteenth century European thought centres around the premise that rural populations were an unchanging element of society whose traditional customs, religious beliefs, and modes of production contrasted sharply with the accelerated changes in urban culture. A critical examination of selected paintings by the French artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), the Russian Neoprimitivist Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962), and the French Fauve painter Othon Friesz (1879-1949) within their specific, social contexts reveals the ways in which the modern, artistic maintenance of the rural myth elucidates current political and social issues of nationalism. This underscores the peasantry's symbolism within the nation as representative of a national, collective consciousness and ancestry. The peasantry's incorporation into the primitivist discourse and the cultural articulation of the rural myth are revealed in the paintings The Vision After the Sermon (1888), Yellow Christ (1889), Fruit Harvest (1909), and Autumn Work (1908). The paintings and their respective social contexts situate the peasantry both as constructions within the primitivist discourse and symbols of national identity, thereby disrupting the structure of alterity upon which primitivism is predicated.

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SOMMAIRE

Cette dissertation est une analyse de la convergence du primitivisme et du nationalisme dans l'art français et russe à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle. La dissertation du primitivisme a donné lieu à plusieurs études critiques centrées sur l'appropriation artistique de l'esthétisme découlant des arts «tribaux», arts asiatiques, icônes médiévales, arts marginaux, et arts et artisanat paysans. Dans cette école, l'art moderne européen qui s'approprie l'esthétisme des arts folkloriques et des thèmes de la paysannerie est souvent considéré comme représentatif de l'identité et des mythes nationaux. L'élucidation artistique de la paysannerie comme emblème de l'identité nationale combinée avec leur incorporation dans le primitivisme donne lieu à une tension qui complique la structure conventionnelle, binaire de la dissertation. Il est donc nécessaire d'examiner l'expression artistique des mythes nationaux et de l'absorption de la paysannerie dans le discours primitiviste, puisque ceci est indicatif d'un point critique où les questions de nationalisme et de primitivisme convergent. Dans le domaine culturel, cette jonction est située dans l'idéalisation artistique de la culture paysanne, ce qui indique un état d'être mythique à partir duquel l'identité nationale pourrait être redéfinie.

Le mythe de la paysannerie tel de développé dans la pensée de l'Europe du XIXe siècle est centré sur la croyance que les populations rurales étaient un élément immuable de la société et dont les coutumes traditionnelles, les croyances religieuses et les modes de production contrastaient vivement avec le changement rapide de la culture urbaine. Un examen critique d'oeuvres choisies de l'artiste français Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), la néoprimitiviste russe Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962), et le peintre fauve français Othon Friesz (1879-1949) au sein de leur contexte social spécifique révèle les façons dont le maintien artistique moderne du mythe rural clarifie les questions politiques et sociales du nationalisme. Ceci souligne le symbolisme de la paysannerie au sein de la nation comme représentatif de la conscience et de l'ancestralité nationale et collective. L'incorporation de la paysannerie dans le discours primitiviste et la définition culturelle du mythe rural sont révélées dans les oeuvres La Vision après le sermon (1888), Le Christ jaune (1889), La Récolte des fruits (1909), et Le Travail à l'automne (1908). Ces oeuvres et leurs contextes sociaux respectifs aident à situer la paysannerie tant comme élément du discours primitiviste que comme symbole de l'identité nationale et, ce faisant, perturbant la structure d'altérité sur laquelle le primitivisme est fondé.

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INTRODUCTION

Myth is the crucial nexus in which the European discourses of nationalism and primitivism converge. As a set of beliefs held by a community about itself and others, the national mythic system comprises perceptions that developed through both imperial and domestic structures. The theoretical underpinnings of these discourses emerge from a strategic negotiation with processes of remembering, forgetting, fabrication, ritual, and hegemony that reinforce images of identity and difference as mechanisms through which to structure the world. The two branches of thought developed along parallel lines from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, both evolving as instrumental processes of classification and self-definition. Nationalism emerged as an archetype of unity, an abstract notion around which people ideally shed the trappings of specificity and procured certain rights and duties as equal citizens of a nation-state. Primitivism evolved from imperial exploration, travel literature, and philosophy as established constructions formed about the people and cultures of 'tribal' societies, Asia, the European peasantry, and the historical past.

I take as my point of departure the idea that these two phenomena are closely linked – the growing cognisance of a national identity united Europeans and provided them with a standard against which they could view others as well as themselves. Corresponding to this doctrine,

European tropes and stereotypes of the Oriental, the African, the American Indian, and the Peasant coalesced into specific constructions. That is to say, certain perceptions of the 'primitive' were formulated or extended amidst an increasing, collective awareness of belonging to a particular nation-state.

With the evolution of this self-aware community, people then created different identities for those who were not considered included. And in establishing numerous tropes of the 'primitive,' both positive and negative, it became possible to further strengthen national identity because perspectives were being shaped within the framework of political, social, and psychological changes that emphasised the community rather than the individual. As this framework extended, people began to divide the world into separate communities, each of which was viewed as representative of a distinct, *different* culture and then approached as such. The constructions of primitivism thus helped reinforce the perception of Europe as a distinct entity, a notion which was further divided according to national boundaries.

These complex processes germinated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, incorporating modernisation as a vital aspect of their nuclei. Elements of modernisation such as fluidity of social structures, industrialisation, technological advances, and increased education and literacy generated a heightened awareness of collectivity structures. The growth of nationalism has been inextricably tied to developments of capitalism and industrialisation that contrast with an idealised past, while primitivism is frequently constructed as the product of an increasingly

complicated society from which people sought to escape.¹ The modern and the primordial are therefore intrinsic dualities of both nationalist and primitivist thought.

The artistic manifestation of these dualities is often located in the tension between their two extremes, as artists negotiated the boundaries of past/present and us/them.² Within this context, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century interest in folk arts and appropriation of their motifs reveals a significant juncture in which primitivism and nationalism intersect both as a response to modernity and as a rearticulation of identity through a mythic structure. These are the issues that inform my readings of Paul Gauguin's Vision After the Sermon (1888) and Yellow Christ (1889), Natalia Goncharova's The Fruit Harvest (1909), and Othon Friesz's Autumn Work (1908), all of which provide distinct formal and thematic programs that elucidate questions of national identity, rural and ancestral myths, current social issues, and gendered, primitivist constructions.

¹ See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London and New York: Verso, 1983), Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and Chris Bongie, Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

² There is substantial art historical and sociological scholarship focusing on the relationship between visual arts and architecture, the state, and nationalism. See Nicola Gordon Bowe, ed., Art and the National Dream: The Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-of-the-Century Design (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993); Stephen Daniels, Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Richard A. Etlin, ed., Nationalism in the Visual Arts (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991); Kate Flint, "Blood and Milk: Painting and the State in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy," The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance, Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 109-128; Griselda Pollock, "Van Gogh and Holland: Nationalism and Modernism," Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) 103-114. An issue of ArtsCanada (Dec.-Jan. 1979-80) is devoted to articles about nationalism and the visual arts. Two issues of History of European Ideas, vol. 15, nos. 1-3, and vol. 16, nos. 4-6 are likewise devoted to numerous essays on European nationalism in relation to politics, arts, economies, war, and historical perspectives.

PRIMITIVISM AND IDENTITY IN ART HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

European primitivist stereotypes and tropes constituted perceptions of those who either remained on the boundaries of the urban centre or who were excluded from European society altogether. These constructions ranged from positive to extremely negative and were partly dependent upon prevailing political policies toward the societies that were then under classification. From the sixteenth century onward, Africans and Native Americans were considered savage, bestial, cannibalistic, and evil, as well as innocent, happy, noble, and commendable for their closeness to nature.³ In 1724, the missionary Joseph-François Lafitau demonstrates this ambivalence in his views of American Indians, as he deprecates them for being "sans lettres, sans sciences, sans lois apparentes, sans temple pour la plupart, sans culte réglé, et manquant des choses les plus nécessaires à la vie," yet also admires their nature: "Ils ont l'esprit bon, l'imagination vive, la conception aisée, la mémoire admirable."⁴ Diderot's Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville (1796) enforces the idea that white man has more

³ See William Cohen, The French Encounter With Africans: White Response to Blacks 1530-1880. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) for a comprehensive account of the development of primitivist constructions and their theoretical and empirical bases.

⁴ Joseph-François Lafitau, Mœurs des Sauvages Américains: Comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps. Intro. by Edna Hindie Lemay, originally published 1724. (Paris: François Maspero, 1983) 67.

intelligence and courage than 'tribal' peoples, but that they surpass him in robustness and lack of greed.⁵

As I discuss further in Chapter One, European peasant cultures were subject to the same ambivalent perceptions and were often identified as repositories of moral values that had been lost in urban cities. This historical parallelism partly explains the reason why scholarship has consistently catalogued peasant cultures underneath the inclusive and unwieldy discourse of "primitivism." The term itself carries numerous definitions, referring to structural constructions of the 'tribal,' historical, or rural Other that developed in European thought from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, and modern art tendencies that have appropriated the aesthetics, ideas, or presumptions of instinctiveness within 'primitive' arts and cultures.

In his book Primitivism in Modern Art (1994), Colin Rhodes writes, "Primitivism in modern art is predominantly about making the familiar strange or about maintaining the strangeness of unfamiliar experiences as a means of questioning the received wisdom of European culture."⁶ His definition is problematic in an analysis of modern, artistic primitivism that focuses on rural cultures, particularly since I interpret the "strangeness" of the peasantry as representative of self-identity. Daniel Miller adds a further meaning in which he defines the foundation of primitivism as "the conflation of time and space." In primitivism, non-Western and rural

⁵ Denis Diderot, Supplément au voyage de Bougainville (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1955) 47.

⁶ Colin Rhodes, Primitivism and Modern Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) 74-75.

societies are employed as a reference point in which spatial distance is conflated with temporal distance "so that they appear to us as present visages of our own pasts."⁷ Miller's definition is particularly relevant to my examination of the ways in which Gauguin, Goncharova, and Friesz's works reveal the ancestral and collective myth of the nation through the guise of the contemporary peasantry.

As Edward Said has demonstrated in Orientalism (1978), the discourse of primitivism implies a hegemony of West over East that is constructed through European art and literature. A similar authority exists in primitivism that focuses on 'tribal' cultures, as through sociological, artistic, philosophical, scientific, and political means the West dominates and restructures that which they define as 'primitive.'⁸ This is also applicable to primitivism that centres on rural cultures, except that the authority structure is one of upper-class over peasantry rather than West over East. However, one of the underpinnings of this study centres on the idea that this authority is not unilateral, but consists of an exchange and transference of constructions that produce a hybrid space in which conceptions of identity are situated. The paintings under analysis exemplify this complication.

⁷ Daniel Miller, "Primitive Art and the Necessity of Primitivism to Art," The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991) 50-112: 52.

⁸ Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: the Early Twentieth Century, eds. Charles Harrison and Francis Frascina (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 3-85: 4. See also Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Random House, 1978).

My purpose here is not to seek new terms of reference or definitions, but to critically examine one aspect of the primitivist discourse – specifically, to reframe within the context of national identity and myths the branch of primitivism that pertains to peasant cultures. I therefore retain the use of the term "primitivism" to denote codified, European constructions as well as to position my thesis within current scholarship since the overall discourse of primitivism provides a number of ideological issues effective for a critical examination of the artistic appropriation of the folk aesthetic and its relationship to national identity.⁹ I do not want to disengage the analysis of this aesthetic from prevailing scholarship, but rather to view it as a distinctive field of critical study that is simultaneously informed by established theories and deserving of an independent, methodological approach.

One of the motivations for this analysis derives from the relatively recent idea that studies of primitivist art are more effective when examined in relation to the dynamics of alterity between the European 'centre' and the cultures from which primitivist motifs are derived. This conjecture developed primarily as a result of the 1984 MOMA exhibition, 'Primitivism' in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, which relied on formal affinities between modern and 'primitive'

⁹ In regards to the use of the term 'primitive,' I agree with William Rubin's statement that the term does not refer to the 'tribal' arts themselves, but to the "Western interest and reaction to them." 'Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, exh. cat., William Rubin, ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984) 5. In Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics 1725-1907 (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), Frances S. Connelly also adheres to this definition, as she writes, "The real need is not for neutralised substitutes, but for recognition that the term does not describe a Yoruba figure or an Egyptian relief, but a set of ideas belonging to Europeans." 5.

arts to the detriment of the political, historical, and colonial implications underlying the artistic absorption of 'primitive' motifs. This methodology then belies the basic foundation upon which 'primitive' constructions were created within European discourse.¹⁰ It also negates the complex system of colonial and national identity constructions inherent in imperial encounters, a deficiency that recent scholarship is attempting to redress.¹¹ With this premise in mind, I situate the artistic interest in peasant cultures as a historical phenomenon inextricably anchored to late-nineteenth century social and political developments that impacted the visual arts throughout Europe on a universal level, yet also bore the marks of cultural specificity. Further, instead of attempting to address all branches of primitivist discourse, I want to focus on the idealisation of peasant culture

¹⁰ For criticism of the MOMA exhibition, see Yves-Alain Bois, "La Pensée sauvage," *Art in America* 73 (April 1985) 178-188; James Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," *Art in America* 73 (April 1985) 169-70, reprinted in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass. 1988); Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October* 34 (1985) 45-70, reprinted in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, eds. Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 199-209; Rosalind Krauss, "Preying on Primitivism," *Art and Text* 17 (April 1985) 58-62; Thomas McEvelley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief: 'Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art' at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984," *Artforum* 23 (November 1984).

¹¹ See Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Connelly (1994); Stephen Eisenman, *Gauguin's Skirt* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997); James Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); Susan Hiller, ed. *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* (London: Routledge, 1991); Patricia Leighton, "The White Peril and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," *Art Bulletin*, 72, (December 1990) 609-630; Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago, 1990); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native," *Art in America* 77 (July 1989) 118-129, 161, also reprinted in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) focuses specifically on stereotypes derived from colonial interactions with India.

as indicative of a mythical state of being from which national identity could be rearticulated.

The impetus for this thesis derives from the observation that current primitivism scholarship tends to overlook critical issues of national identity in the relationship between modern art and primitivist aesthetics.¹² At the beginning of the twentieth century, artists such as Picasso incorporated the 'tribal' primitivist aesthetic into their work as a response to academic classicism rather than as an elucidation of national identity.¹³ This latter objective was more often affiliated with the creations of the peasantry, due to in part to their geographical and historical association with the 'modern' world. However, contemporary scholarship not only elides the sociological dimensions of national identity, but focuses heavily on 'tribal primitivism' to the virtual exclusion of what I term 'folk primitivism.' Two major works heavily responsible for opening up primitivism as a scholarly dialogue, Robert Goldwater's Primitivism in Modern Art (1938) and the MOMA exhibition catalogue (1984), both include peasant arts in their definition of primitivism but fail to examine

¹² Robin Reisenfeld corrects this discrepancy in "Cultural Nationalism, Brücke, and the German Woodcut: The Formation of a Collective Identity," Art History, vol. 20, no. 2, (June 1997) 289-312, which examines how artistic practice relates to the formation of collective identity in Germany. Michelle Facos, in Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), addresses the idea that primitivism in Sweden deserves independent study, as it is not embedded in the colonial discourse that informs primitivism in France and England. Herbert (1991) includes a chapter on the ways in which the Golden Age myth relates to French national discourse in the Fauve pastoral program, but not in relation to primitivism. Perry (1993) writes that the myth of the rural peasant took on different meanings in different national contexts (p. 10), but only briefly discusses the nationalist discourse in which the paintings are contextualised.

¹³ See Connelly (1995) for an examination of how Picasso incorporates elements of the 'idol' in relation to the classical centre rather than as a reaction to it.

the implications or development of that inclusion as it pertains to modern or contemporary art.¹⁴

One of the reasons for the sparse examination of why and how the productions of rural societies were designated as 'primitive' might pertain to their relatively late classification. Art historian Frances S. Connelly cites Giambattista Vico's treatise New Science (1725) as possibly the earliest construction of primitivism because it articulated the framework around which later Europeans would understand 'primitive' expression.¹⁵ In contrast to this early construction of primitivism, both art historians Kurt Varnedoe and Colin Rhodes state that folk arts weren't designated as 'primitive' until the late nineteenth century,¹⁶ which might explain the reason for their lack of critical examination within art historical scholarship. This comparatively late designation also emerged at a time when the term 'nationalism' was coming into wider usage due to increased international communication.¹⁷

¹⁴ In his essay on Gauguin, Kurt Varnedoe writes that the late nineteenth century had a broader definition of the label "primitive" "designating early Renaissance art as readily as peasant crafts." p. 181. Yet Varnedoe fails to examine this inclusion. In his "Introduction," Robert Goldwater also places peasant arts and crafts under the 'primitivism' label, but only cursorily examines their appropriation into modern art via German Expressionism and the Blue Rider. Primitivism in Modern Art (New York: Vintage Books, 1967). His book was originally published in 1938 as Primitivism in Modern Painting. The exception to this trend is Rhodes (1994), which includes a chapter on the modern artistic interest in folk arts.

¹⁵ Connelly 5.

¹⁶ Varnedoe 181 and Rhodes 23.

¹⁷ Peter Altar writes that the earliest mention of the term 'nationalism' is found in Johann Gottfried Herder's 1774 work, although it did not enter into general linguistic usage until the mid-nineteenth century. Nationalism, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) 7.

These concurrent developments reinforced the inclusion of rural populations into the ideology of nationalism. Just as national identity is composed of political, emotional, territorial, and ethnic components, so too are constructs inscribed within primitivism. Yet a basic dynamic within primitivist discourse is a structure of opposition. The Self is posited in opposition to the 'primitive Other,' which is classified due to biological, spatial, or temporal distance from the European 'centre.' As a critical category, the Other implies a misrepresentation of a group or society, in addition to a self-image from which those relations of difference are incorrectly perceived.¹⁸ The distinction in classifying rural populations as 'primitive' shifts this dynamic since the Other is a constituent of the same nation-state and thus blurs the lines between a clear opposition of Self and Other. Peasant cultures were grounded within the same historical consciousness as urban societies, making them an intrinsic part of national identity. Essentially, the Other *is* the Self.

In this light, folk primitivism reveals the basis for inter-societal conceptions of primitivism that were structured around the relationship between the peasantry, the governing society, and current nationalist discourse. The convergence of European issues regarding peasant cultures in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries produced both a rearticulation of nationalism and a cultural 'revival' of folk arts. These simultaneous developments informed the artistic practice of employing visual and thematic elements of the 'folk primitive' as an expression of ancestral ties and staticism. By analysing the ways in which folk

¹⁸ Perry 5.

primitivism and its relationship to national identity were expressed, I hope to clarify the theoretical and historical foundations that underlay the paintings and to reveal that this intersection involved specific conceptions of unity in which the peasantry became emblematic of a collective, mythical past.

DEFINITIONS: FOLK PRIMITIVISM AND AESTHETICS

The word "folk" derives from the German "volk," which etymologically can be understood in its original meaning of "nation" in a cultural rather than a political sense. From "folk," tradition, society, and culture developed.¹⁹ This semantic conjecture underlies the premise of this thesis in terms of the myth of the nation discovered in folk culture. Rather than implying the creation of a backward, undeveloped society, I use the term 'folk aesthetic' to differentiate the characteristics of peasant art from other arts historically classified under the primitivist rubric, such as African and Asian arts, children's art, Egyptian sculpture, outsider art, and medieval icons. One of the most basic reasons for the singular classification of such diverse art forms involves the perceived overlapping of their formal qualities, which are frequently defined as simple and

¹⁹ Robert J. Smith, "Introduction: The 'Folk' in American Folkloristics," The Folk: Identity, Landscapes, and Lores, Robert J. Smith and Jerry Stannard, eds. (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1989) 1-8. 5. Also see Ernst S. Dick, "The Folk and Their Culture: The Formative Concepts and the Beginnings of Folklore," The Folk: Identity, Landscapes, and Lores, 11-28. For further examination of the linguistic basis of the word "nation," see Eric J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Leah Greenfeld, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

decorative. While one of the allures of 'primitive' attributes for modern artists revolves around this perception, the influence of each tradition upon modern art generates different theoretical and empirical discoveries. The unravelling of the European appropriation of an aesthetic derived specifically from domestic, rural cultures reveals layered systems in which visual characteristics simultaneously enforce and are enforced by prevailing political and philosophical discourse.

By giving priority to 'tribal' forms and non-European traditions, artists were instilling value in elements that had previously been relegated to the edges of classical discourse or that lay outside its boundaries altogether.²⁰ And in doing so, they often sought to both detach modern painting from the corruption of the European order and to replenish it with an authentic essence that had long ago been lost in the "civilised" art world. Artists frequently found this essence, both iconographically and thematically, in societies and eras around which the primitivist discourse developed. Medieval, Tahitian, Asian, Egyptian, African, and American-Indian societies were placed under the 'primitive' rubric due to their spatial, societal, or temporal distance from the European centre.

There is a critical tendency to separate the historical primitivist arts from 'tribal' or oriental arts with the term 'archaic,' but it is important to note that the European artistic appropriation drew from all these traditions with the belief that they were moving towards the origins of art, religion,

²⁰Connelly (1995) advances the thesis that the classical tradition actually provided the framework for European conceptions of 'primitive' arts, as the nomenclature employed within the discourse (specifically words such as 'ornament,' 'grotesque,' 'arabesque,' and 'idol') came from the periphery of classicism rather than outside of it.

or human nature. Historical cultures are further distinguished from extant 'primitive' societies on evolutionary grounds. Medieval icons and archaic Greek sculpture "evolved" into the preferred narrative and illusion of European high arts, unlike 'tribal' arts, which stagnated in their original state.²¹ Folk arts, which blur the lines between 'archaic' and 'savage' within primitivist discourse, play a distinct role in this ideology because of their specific position within the historical sensibility of a nation.

The arts and crafts of peasant society are generally referred to as "folk art" in comparison to academically-produced or marketable, elite art. The scope of "folk art" includes genres such as woodcuts, signboards, quilting, crafts, and folklore, as well as art produced for festivals and religious processions, and designs on toys, furniture, and tools. The functionality of the objects is often considered to separate "high" art from "folk" craft. While this is by no means a universal designation, the function of an object frequently determines its material and shape, and thus its aesthetic intention.²² The vast range of these arts and traditions resists a singular definition, but "folk art" can simplistically refer in a historical sense to the anonymous arts and crafts produced by rural, less industrialised, or non-elite communities. One of the reasons for the very broad definition arises from the fact that the academic demarcation among artistic genres didn't include arts traditionally associated with peasant and lower classes. The creators of folk art worked within the political and

²¹ Connelly 62.

²² Jean Cuisenier, French Folk Art (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1977) 28.

economic frameworks of specific nations, but remained disassociated from the artistic developments and manifestos of elite society.

The terms 'folk primitivism' and 'folk primitive' extend beyond formalism, referring to the intellectual conceptions formed about peasant cultures and the discourse underlying the visual aesthetic with which rural arts and crafts were generally associated. A modern artistic appropriation of the 'folk primitive' (or 'folk primitivist' painting) implies not only an adoption of a specific aesthetic, but also depictions of or references to rural cultures. This allows for an analysis of the art in relation to the broader framework of primitivism and corresponding philosophical theories. In this respect, the early twentieth century Russian Neoprimativists, German Expressionists, American rural painters, and French Fauve painters exemplify to varying degrees the ideologies of folk primitivism. As with 'tribal' societies, the peasantry in many countries was differentiated from the modern, urban bourgeoisie on a wide scale – sometimes considered uncivilised and savage, and yet often praised for their apparent simplicity. Within nineteenth century philosophical formulations, peasant traditions frequently became symbolic of a people's collective consciousness. This ideology unfolded in both literary and artistic circles during an era when industrialisation began to encroach upon established traditions and means of production.

In the late-nineteenth century, the increase in communications and technology also provoked a greater awareness of other cultures.

Imperialism gave impetus to the growth of ethnology museums, and arts from colonised countries were exhibited as objects of scientific value. In

this sphere, folk arts also appeared as ethnographic displays and attracted the attention of people who viewed them as worthy of both preservation and appropriation. Artists were among the first Europeans to recognise the aesthetic value of primitive arts and began to incorporate them both stylistically and conceptually into their own paintings.²³ This isn't meant to imply that 'primitive' arts somehow lacked value prior to their incorporation into the high art realm, but that modern artists found their visual characteristics to be effective for the propagation of certain tenets. As evidenced in the British Arts and Crafts movement, the Nazarene interest in medieval art, the Scandinavian efforts to preserve folk arts, and other parallel developments, both artists and writers attempted to unearth what they considered to be national, cultural sources threatened by increasing industrialisation. The negotiation between tradition and modernity characterised the European folk arts "revivals" that dominated the end of the nineteenth century.

From these practices, folk arts began to share a broad classification with other 'primitive' arts that have historically been grouped under monolithic categories. As an Ashanti mask is frequently displayed as "African, 19th century," an embroidered tapestry is also labelled as "Germany, 18th century." While this is understandable given the potential difficulties of specifying dates and provenances more precisely, the comprehensive classifications underscored prevailing tropes and stereotypes within primitivist discourse. Writing about the MOMA exhibition in which African arts were broadly labelled or not labelled at

²³ See Goldwater (1967), chapter one.

all, Hal Foster writes that such decontextualisation reinforce the idea that 'primitive' societies exist in a timeless realm outside history and often outside time itself. While folk arts existed within a specific, confined history and culture, they were often designated with the same sense of timelessness as a way to extol ancient roots and thus exemplify national oneness, as I discuss in following chapters. Foster also questions the practice of displaying the 'tribal'/primitive apart from specific referents, which allows them to be defined in wholly Western terms.²⁴ Similarly, I recognise that the encyclopaedic grouping of "folk arts" in critical discourse – and the very practice of displaying them in museums – potentially disrupts the contextual basis upon which their meaning is signified.

In spite of the general categorisation, scholarly studies of folk culture throughout the world have identified regional, provincial and religious styles, each of which contains its own cultural and political history. Another problematic element in defining "folk arts" arises when one confronts these distinctions and begins to locate differentiating characteristics in the arts and crafts of Basque, Breton, Catalan, or other "ethnic" societies. While my intention is not to examine the nuances of folk art styles, it is important to note that groups in the midst of struggles for autonomy frequently used specific aesthetics as indicators of their own identity separate from the governing nation.

²⁴ See Foster (1992).

With that in mind, the sentiment behind folk primitivism pertains in many cases to an overarching conception of a common unity that the actual situation often belies. This is the point at which national myth comes into play, as both writers and artists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century sought the preservation of very diverse art forms and customs as a way to retain or denote an integrated and thus an imaginary national heritage. Considered to be a repository of religious beliefs, customs, visual themes, musical motifs, and superstitions, rural cultures were thought to possess a stability that urban societies lacked; thus, they retained ancestral art forms, and traditions. Women have been designated as the biological and social transmitters of this culture, providing them with a symbolic position within national identity constructions. In locating a mythic, shared heritage in indigenous traditions and incorporating them both concretely and thematically into their paintings, artists drew upon these ideologies as they sought to define and declare those elements that made them unique among cultures.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The artistic result of this national rearticulation varied in terms of the cultural and historical contexts in which folk primitivism and its relationship to identity were expressed. French, German, British, American, and Russian artistic traditions were all influenced by the philosophical conceptions surrounding peasant cultures, and they appropriated a folk aesthetic or theme to break from academic dictates or

to extrapolate the roots of their own national culture. The specific ideologies underlying both the visual and thematic aspects of European folk primitivist paintings were thus predicated upon the juncture of myth at which the two main discourses of primitivism and nationalism meet.

In Part One, my first chapter addresses this artistic expression of myth as it pertains to the European construction of national identities in relation to established theories of 'primitive' arts and the cultures that produced them. I also examine how rural populations were absorbed into the primitivist discourse in part through the colonial framework, thus incorporating the peasantry and their art forms into extant constructions that served to reinforce rural myths. Artistic realms in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (specifically, Art Nouveau and revival movements) helped lay the formal and theoretical basis for the subsequent valuation of folk productions and their relationship to national myths of identity.

In Chapter Two, I situate two of Gauguin's Breton paintings, Vision After the Sermon (1888) and Yellow Christ (1889) within the theoretical convergence of nationalism and primitivism as works that underscore the location of national identity within peasant cultures. Gauguin's paintings further reveal the association of women with the land, a metaphor that forms one of the bases of the folk primitivist discourse. My interpretation of this symbolism centres on the ways in which it complicates women's position within the context of national identity. I also examine theories of hybridity and ambivalence as intrinsic components of the interaction between folk primitivism and nationalism.

In setting forth my initial ideas within an expanded framework, I establish the foundation for the specific analyses of early-twentieth century art in Part Two. Chapter Three focuses on Goncharova's Fruit Harvest, which encapsulates both the widespread constructions of folk primitivism and the more specific aspects of Russian national identity. One component of Russian nationalism involved a complex and ambivalent relationship with Western Europe, particularly France, that informed the Neoprimitivist turn towards rural and Eastern cultures. Through an analysis of Fruit Harvest, I examine the ways in which Goncharova both adheres to and disrupts French modernist influences and prevalent constructions of peasant women within the context of Russian nationalism.

In Chapter Four, I interpret Friesz's Autumn Work through a similar framework. As a representation of peasants working during harvest, the painting elucidates a common, Golden Age theme and the ancestral myth of France, which was situated within the context of a conservative, nationalist assertion of classical origins. His painting, like Goncharova's, exemplifies the idea of a "Third Space" in which the meanings and structures of national identity and the rural myth are complicated.

The paintings I have selected for close examination of these ideas, particularly in Part Two, are not arbitrary choices. The historical and political relationship between Russia and France is critically informed by issues of identity and difference that are frequently manifest in the hybrid space of artistic dialogue between the two countries. They also provide models of the political/cultural nation structure around which nationalist scholarship revolves, an issue I address in Chapter One, and bear

similarities in terms of the relationship of the state to the peasantry. The emancipation of the peasant from serfdom also impacted French and Russian national sensibility on a deeper level than it did in other countries such as England.²⁵

In my attempt to analyse the convergences of complex ideological systems, I recognise that my initial focus on the vast stratum of society classified as 'the European peasantry' belies the major social and political differences that altered culturally-specific notions of rural populations and the hierarchical structures within those communities. My reason for this approach is three-fold:

I first want to demonstrate that the extensive artistic dialogue in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe was informed by strikingly similar discursive constructions of the peasantry. Not only were these constructions founded upon the existing set of primitivist ideas as formulated through imperialism, but they were also appropriated on cross-cultural levels as rearticulations of national identity. These issues emerged in part from expansive processes of industrialisation throughout Europe, which are likewise comparable in terms of basic structures and economic results. My second objective is to establish a framework through which to interpret more precise examples of national mythologies in representations of the peasantry. Situating Gauguin's, Goncharova's, and Friesz's paintings within the context of well-established theories and of rural cultures and

²⁵ This is partly due to the fact feudal relationships in France and Russia were transformed by sweeping political reform rather than economic and technical processes as they were in England. See D.W.S. Gray, "Idylls of the Soil," Peasantries: 19th Century French and British Pictures of Peasants and Field Workers (Newcastle: New

their art forms will illustrate that their particular premises were still bound to constructions that proliferated in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth European literary and artistic circles. Finally, the paintings under examination provide exemplary models of the substratum of this study. My primary hypothesis is that these visual representations of folk themes and aesthetics articulate national myths of unity while simultaneously complicating conventional structures of opposition.

As a component of that interpretation, I propose that the paintings also reveal symbolic images of peasant women and their metaphoric association with the earth, ancestry, and identity. The artistic expression of that metaphor, however, differs in terms of the situation in which the work is contextualised. Through specific analyses of these works in their cultural contexts, I hope to demonstrate that the symbolic value of the peasantry and peasant women in particular bears both similarities and culturally-determined differences that form the underpinnings of identity constructions. Through a synthesis of aesthetics and themes, the paintings underscore the hybrid nature of political, social, and cultural dialogues inherent in the deployment of rural and national myths.

PART I

Chapter One:

National Myths and Folk Primitivism

I want you to understand, then, that there is nothing nobler, stronger, healthier, and more helpful in life than a good remembrance.

– *Fyodor Dostoevsky (1880)*¹

The native land is dear to one's heart not because of the beauty of its landscapes, its clear sky, or its pleasant climate, but on account of the enthralling memories that enfold, so to speak, the dawn and cradle of manhood.

– *Nikolai Karamzin (1802)*²

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.

– *Ernest Renan (1882)*³

The peasant's functions in the social scale bring him into close contact with nature; he lives a purely material life, very much like the life of a savage.

– *Honoré de Balzac (1844)*⁴

Have all tribes of men invented their own mythology, and thus become attached to it as their own property? By no means. They have not invented, but inherited it [...] Most national fictions spring from verbal communications, and are instilled into the ear.

– *Johann Gottfried von Herder (1784)*⁵

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Bantam, 1980) 934.

² Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, "Love of Country and National Pride," *Russian Intellectual History*, ed. Marc Raeff (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966) 107.

³ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" *Nations and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 11.

⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Les paysans*, in *The Works of Honoré de Balzac*, vol. XIX-XX (New York: The Kelmescott Society, n.d.) 49.

⁵ Clive Christie, *Race and Nation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998) 29.

MYTH AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Myths of origin and heritage underlie both nationalist and primitivist ideologies in their respective establishments of Self and Other identities. I first want to address the critical position and artistic expression of national mythologies in the construction of identity, and then examine how they pertain to perceptions of rural cultures and the peasantry's absorption into the primitivist discourse. Roland Barthes defines myth as a form of depoliticised speech – a system of communication, and a message. He adds that a myth is defined by the way in which it utters a particular message and that it is sustained by human history.¹ Composed of material already made suitable for communication, mythical speech lacks fixity and therefore possesses the function to distort. Owing to its depoliticised character, myth fabricates, purifies, and justifies things at the expense of "political" human relations in their real, social structure.² In his essay "The Great Family of Man," Barthes critiques a photography exhibition held in Paris that attempted to show the universality of people's lives in all countries throughout the world. Rather than celebrating this "eternal lyricism of birth," Barthes advocates focusing on the "modes of birth" and a deeper examination of history rather than the surface of

¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973) 109-110. Scholarship has also focused on the function of myth as poetic speech beginning with Herder's idea of language as a changing historical phenomenon through which one can understand "national genius." See S. Mark Lewis, *Modes of Historical Discourse in J.G. Herder and N.M. Karamzin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); and John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, trans., *J.J. Rousseau and J.G. Herder: On the Origins of Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

² Barthes 110, 120-121, and 143.

nature, as such an approach overlooks the underlying "truth."³ For him, the exhibition reveals the very principle of myth, the fact that it "transforms history into nature."⁴

Although myth may possess a transformative character, it is inextricably bound to history. The dispersal of a myth through history lends it weight and substance; it must be transmitted in order to be effective and, further, it must be consistently reinforced via symbols and rituals. Myth is ultimately not only sustained by history, as Barthes argues, but is a component of history; it shapes the ways in which people view the past and structure the world.⁵ A myth does not always empty itself of history and contingency when it becomes form, as Barthes claims, nor is it always, in Mieke Bal's definition, "an empty screen [...] ready to be filled" by the individual subject. A changing signifying system does not distort myths, writes Bal, only because there is nothing to be distorted.⁶ The distortion in a visual representation of myth therefore does not derive from the myth itself, but is produced via the exchange and transference between the projections made by the artist and the possibilities of

³ Barthes 100-102.

⁴ Barthes 129.

⁵ In Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), Hans Kellner alludes to the idea that, in many respects, history is a construction of myths. "Historians do not 'find' the truths of past events," Kellner writes, "they *create* events from a seamless flow, and invent meanings that produce patterns within that flow." 24. My italics.

⁶ Barthes 139 and Mieke Bal, Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 98. Abigail Solomon-Godeau refers to Barthes' premise as a cautionary note that is exemplified in the myth of Gauguin and the history that it occludes. See "Going Native," Art in America 77 (July 1989) 118-129, 161, also reprinted in The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

misrecognition offered by the myth.⁷

In the artistic expression of national myth, the exchange about which Bal writes is crucial in establishing the transmission and validity of mythic content. Allowing for the acknowledgement that misrecognition is an inherent aspect of this transmission does not preclude my contention that the national mythic system, packed as it is with pseudo-historical events, theories, personages, and themes, can become a dynamic operative in the evolution of socio-political ideologies. "Emptiness" is not intrinsic to national myth because of the very fact that it must be established on substantial and, more importantly, believable content that is then manipulated or disavowed according to social circumstances or innovative perspectives. While a national myth does allow for infinite variations and interpretations in terms of what it includes and excludes, it is not, even at the point of inception, completely devoid of meaning or history.

Barthes and Bal further criticise the mythic conceptions of universality and eternity. Barthes critiques the photography exhibition's emphasis on the universal myth of a 'natural' human community, and Bal writes that the universality purported by myth is an illusion that helps the subject obliterate time and space and thus its own contingent nature.⁸ While I fully acknowledge myth's powerful capacity to distort and exclude, the universal premise of myth is itself a historical phenomenon both in terms of specificity and commonality. The myth of human community is a central theme in nationalist discourse,

⁷ Bal 99.

⁸ Bal 98.

which uses it to establish the civic heritage or ethnic ancestry of a specific people. In the late-nineteenth century, the French historian Ernest Renan refers to this notion of community in the establishment of the nation:

A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates the kind of moral conscience which we call a nation. So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist.⁹

In primitivist theories, as I discuss in the following section, this idea of collectivity is used as a way of situating communities or postulating the evolutionary origins of humankind. The content of myth, and the degree to which people come to accept it as valid, is crucial in establishing identity constructions that bind people to a nation-state and that allow them to see themselves as authenticated by nature or history or both.

In this respect, my focus is not on the omissions of mythic narrative,¹⁰ but on its qualitative constituents; that is, what elements of the discourse are actively productive in establishing the collective and historical consciousness so vital to national identity. A national myth essentially centres on convictions that a collectivity holds about its origins, purpose, and thus its identity. It is a shifting and unstable premise of both remembering and forgetting upon which

⁹ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" *Nations and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 8-22: 20.

¹⁰ Solomon-Godeau (1989) further addresses the racial and sexual absences of the "productive discourse" of mythic speech in relation to Gauguin's assumed role of a savage and the

a group of people predicate their imaginary, shared heritage, thus providing themselves with the psychological grounding of a nation.

"A given account is a myth not by the amount of truth it contains," writes sociologist Henry Tudor, "but by the fact that it is *believed* to be true and, above all, by the dramatic form into which it is cast."¹¹ This attempt to create an aggregate memory has political and social as well as emotional dimensions, each of which is subject to alterations at any given moment in history. These dimensions are inscribed into commemorative, public activity that re-enacts moments of "new beginning."¹² All collectivities have myths of origin that explain how the world was first created, and they also possess more specific myths of origin that explain the ways in which their own nation or people were created. This thesis is primarily concerned with the latter set of myths, which contains a structure of alterity in which those who are 'descendants' of the myth are posed against those who are not.¹³

National myths are frequently grounded in a nebulous but plausible idea of a historical event or era that marked the boundary between the old and new worlds. The "truth" of the myths is validated by the mere fact that the culture

structural paradoxes of internal/external that surround his mythology.

¹¹ Henry Tudor, Political Myth (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972) 17.

¹² See John R. Gillis, ed., Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), which includes essays on how memory operates within the construction of national identities in early modern England, modern Iraq, civil war America, and twentieth century Germany, among others.

¹³ William A. Lessa declares all myths culturally bifurcated when he writes, "Almost anyone except the actual collector of a non-Western folktale [...] has experienced boredom and frustration in trying to comprehend its content [...] The *outsider* understandably needs an exegesis by someone in a position to analyze the tale." "Discoverer of the Sun: Mythology as a Reflection of Culture," Mythology, Pierre Maranda, ed. (New York: Penguin Edition, 1972) 71. My italics. I find his premise too inflexible since myths are not born as premeditated, intellectual constructions and thus do not require scholarly interpretations for comprehension.

which constructed it is still in existence. I hold that this type of myth is central to the construction of national identity because it concerns so many other aspects of collective belonging – politics, religion, language, history, memory, culture, traditions – and also because it is so often sustained in visual imagery and literature. As with political ties and geographical boundaries, myth serves to differentiate members of collectivities from each other on a strong, psychological level because of their historical association. In a similar vein, tropes of primitivism primarily revolved around beliefs displaced onto "other" groups of people, which subsequently reinforce either the superiority or the flaws of one's own collectivity.

Both national myths and primitivist tropes are sets of ideas that construct and reinforce identities of both Self and Other. They are founded upon complex systems of power in which the exchange between urban/rural, coloniser/colonised, government/people, high/low endows the constructions with an ambivalence that both reiterates and undermines agency. As Judith Butler writes, power is not only about subjugation to an external force, but also about the formation of the subject:

Power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are. The customary model for understanding this process goes as follows: power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalise or accept its terms. What such an account fails to note, however, is that the "we" who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for "our" existence [...] Power that at first appears as external, pressing upon the subject, pressing the subject into

subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity.¹⁴

Through this type of exchange, national myths seek to determine the legitimising basis for the nation and the identity of its constituents. "We" – the people for whom a myth is accepted or imposed – depend on the terms developed throughout the historical transmission of the myth. Similarly, 'primitives' can derive agency from the constructions that develop around their own collectivities. I return to these points in subsequent chapters.

National myths and primitivist constructions both also involve an implicit inclusion of distance, temporal or spatial, which serves to bolster this structure of opposition and power. In nationalist discourse, myth does not solely reduce common ties to nature, as Barthes charges in relation to mythic speech, but is buttressed by the *idea* of history rather than historical accuracy. Rather than being separate entities, myth and history merge and overlap to create a sense of belonging, which is consistently reinforced by rituals and symbols – parades, commemorations, flags, re-enactments of "historical" moments, and paintings. Through this fortification, myths assist in the creation of a national identity, which is based on both a collective affiliation with the political state and cultural commonalties with other members of the state.¹⁵

¹⁴ Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 2 and 3.

¹⁵ Anthony D. Smith writes that the features of national identity include a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, public culture, and common legal rights and economy. National identity can be combined with other forms of identity, such as class, religious, or ethnic, and it cannot be reduced to a single element. National Identity (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 14.

The focus of national identity shifted according to cultural and political tides, often depending upon the relationship of the state to the general population. In thirteenth century France, this identity was primarily an association with the Catholic king; in eighteenth century Russia, it was based on a loyalty to the tsar and pride in belonging to such a vast empire; and in revolutionary America, it became a communal devotion to concepts of democracy and liberty from European domination. The extent to which the state allows the culture to freely enunciate ideas and theories also influences the concentration of national identity, which can sometimes be articulated as a reaction against prevailing political structures. The artistic representation of nationalistic sentiment reveals these different contextual developments. For example, American artists often adopted non-classical formal qualities in order to express an independent imagery that had no ties to the European and therefore British academic tradition. The content of myth and its social expression of the nation as a new, progressive, or an eternal entity, correspond to the basic structure of twentieth century nationalist scholarship, which is configured around the concepts of the modern and the primordial nation.

The idea of nationalism as a modern construction is a predominant theme in sociological discourse, most evident in Elie Kedourie's statement that nationalism is "a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century."¹⁶ Benedict Anderson advances the thesis that the nation is an "imagined political community," both limited and sovereign. He views

¹⁶ Elie Kedourie, Nationalism (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1960) 1. For a modernist interpretation of nationalism, see also John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

nationality and nationalism as cultural artefacts *created* towards the end of the eighteenth century due to crossing historical forces.¹⁷ Their respective theses pertain to the classic debate within nationalistic scholarship involving two schools of thought, one of which believes that nationalism is a modern, post-sixteenth century construction, and the other which claims that nations are natural, ethnically-based forms of human association that have always existed. A proponent of the latter view, sociologist Anthony Smith denies that nations are "invented," arguing that they emerge from ethnic identities.¹⁸ The modern school has won more allies than the primordialist school, although most scholars acknowledge the enduring existence of forms of human association.¹⁹

These two schools of thought also generated overly-deterministic theories within nationalist scholarship in which the nation was posited as either a "political" or "cultural" mythic entity. The emphasis on the civic, "Western" conception of unity centred on common historical memories, secularism, traditions, laws, and civic ideology. By contrast, the "ethnic" conception of the

¹⁷ Anderson 4. My italics.

¹⁸ Smith 71. Smith writes that "as an ideology and a language nationalism is relatively modern, emerging into the political arena over a period in the late-eighteenth century. But nations and nationalism are no more 'invented' than other kinds of culture, social organization, or ideology."

¹⁹ John Armstrong adheres to the idea that ethnic identity is more durable than national identity, but he does not distinguish between the *ethnie* and the nation. See Nations Before Nationalism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Dominique Schnapper refutes this idea. She defines the "ethnie" as "groups of men who live as heirs of an historical and cultural community." Like national identities, she writes, *ethnies* are products of a political situation, but they lack political organization. She adds that the desire to belong in a collectivity has always existed among humans, but that only in modern times have the collectivities found a particular form of political organization. The political aspect of a collectivity in terms of an organized, cohesive state separates time-honored "ethnies" from modern manifestations of nationalism. Community of Citizens: On the Modern Idea of Nationality, trans. Séverine Rosée (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998) 16-19.

nation primarily pertained to Asian and Eastern European communities, emphasising ancestry, language, customs, and religion as indicators of belonging.²⁰ The ideological establishment of the former idea centred on a definition of the nation as a way to incorporate the free individual into a wider, political unity that was formed by consent. The latter idea defined the nation as a cultural, linguistic community.²¹ Both models are frequently posited as the 'political' and 'cultural' nation, although recent scholarship has acknowledged that these are by no means restrictive designations.²² Renan recognised that the qualities of both models are symbiotic and constitute the foundation of a single nation:

²⁰Smith 11-12. See Joseph Llobara, The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994) for a discussion of how Rousseau and Herder establish the modern beginnings for the ideas of political and cultural nationalisms. Llobara presents Rousseau as the founder of political nationalism with his emphasis on "the nation as a political community of a state," while Herder defined the nation in terms of its ethnic features. In spite of this distinction, Llobara writes that both authors are "well aware of the two dimensions of the nation." pp. 151-174. Smith qualifies too stringent a division between Eastern cultural and Western political nations, although he notes that in the early-nineteenth century, Central and Eastern Europe bore little resemblance to Western "developments." The Ethnic Origins of Nations (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 141. A negative perception of the cultural nation has persisted in twentieth century scholarship. According to Hans Kohn, civic nations like France and England looked "towards the city of the future" and the universal conceptions of political liberty and the rights of man. Cultural nations, like Germany and Russia, were instead founded on "history, on monuments and graveyards" and look towards "the mysteries of ancient times and of tribal solidarity." The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background (New York: MacMillan Company, 1961) 574.

²¹ Llobara 151-152.

²² See Bernard Yack, "The Myth of the Civic Nation," and Kai Nielsen, "Cultural Nationalism, Neither Civic nor Ethnic," in Theorizing Nationalism, Ronald Beiner, ed. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999; and Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen, and Michel Seymour, eds. Rethinking Nationalism (Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 1998). Dominique Schnapper examines how and why the modern nation has been structured around these two interpretations. Community of Citizens: On the Modern Idea of Nationality (1998), chapter five. I apply quotation marks when referring to the political vs. cultural model to indicate their use as abstract models rather than rigid definitions.

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which are in truth but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, the other in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.²³

The strict division of the 'political' versus the 'cultural' nation is a construction that further served to emphasise the differences between collectivities. The general framework and characteristics of the 'political' and 'cultural' nation are also embedded in national myth. The themes of secular, civic virtue and cultural ties appear in the rhetoric of nationalist movements as well as artistic expressions of national myth. Both 'political' and 'cultural' nations rely on myth as a foundation of collective belonging:

Myth is one of the ways in which collectivities [...] establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own systems of morality and values. In this sense, therefore, myth is a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself. Centrally, myth is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths [...] Myth creates an intellectual and cognitive monopoly in that it seeks to establish the sole way of ordering the world and defining world-views.²⁴

²³ Renan 19.

²⁴ George Schöpflin, "The Function of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths," Myths and Nationhood, Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997) 19-35: 19. France is normatively upheld as the "political" model of the nation due to the secular, democratic impetus of the French Revolution, while Germany is considered to be the "cultural" model based on linguistic and religious ties. Schnapper writes that the French national myth centers around the idea that the revolution was the universal model for legitimacy and rights of all men. p. 49. John Armstrong addresses the Germanic "myth of descent" from heroic ancestry as critical in the establishment of national identity. Nations Before Nationalism, pp. 27-31.

Both "modern" and "primordialist" nationalism scholars recognise the significance of myth in the construction of national identity. Sociologist Ernest Gellner and Anderson both base their theories on the notion that modern developments gave rise to national communities. Gellner's theory posits industrialisation as the impetus for the nation. He writes that the increased ease of communication, which required a homogenous language, expanded markets, education, and social mobility that reinforced people's communication with each other and thus their identification with a particular community. A consequence of this growth is the fabrication of myths. "Generally speaking," Gellner writes, "nationalist ideology suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society when in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society."²⁵ Anderson rejects this belief in a nationalism which falsifies, claiming instead that it is a creation and an imagining. His theory is premised on the idea that the decline of religion and the rise of 'print-capitalism' and literacy enabled anonymous individuals to experience a sense of national consciousness and belonging.²⁶ He also recognises that such monuments as the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, emblem of the modern culture of nationalism, is "saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings."²⁷ In other words, his hypothesis of the modern nation is founded

²⁵ Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) 124. For critical essays of Gellner's theories, see John Hall, ed. The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁶ Anderson 44-45.

²⁷ Anderson 9. His italics. Anderson adds that this "national imagining" is the reason that many tombs do not specify the nationality of the soldiers, since the general belief is that they could only belong to the nation where they are buried.

in part on the acknowledgement that mythic imaginings of sacrifice and solidarity, symbolised by the soldier's tomb, are important components of collective belonging.

A national myth can serve numerous purposes within the collective psyche. By relying on 'nostalgia' for a time past, people can combat the forces of modernity in capitalist and bureaucratic institutions that corrode individuality and induced feelings of estrangement.²⁸ Moreover, a myth theoretically "belongs" to everyone. Sociologist Boyd Shafer writes, "A common past, *except for folk song and legend*, is chiefly the possession of but the literate individuals in any nation."²⁹ The function of myth also aligns with the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel's (1770-1831) conception of the role of art as a mechanism for humans to construct the external world:

The universal and absolute need from which art springs has its origin in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness [...] he must see himself, represent himself to himself, fix before himself what thinking finds as his essence [...] This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and [...] finds again his own characteristics. Man does this in order [...] to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realisation of himself.³⁰

This recognition of self is a critical reason for not only the establishment

²⁸ Smith, Ethnic Origins 175.

²⁹ Boyd C. Schafer, Nationalism: Myth and Reality (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1955), *My italics*.

³⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, Aesthetics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 31.

of myth, but its conveyance through time. Myth allows an individual to recognise and identify him or herself and also to establish a form through which collective belonging is validated. Barthes writes that a characteristic of myth is to "transform a meaning into form,"³¹ which can equally be designated as a characteristic of art. The architect and theoretician Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) alludes to the same idea of man's need to control the world when he writes, "Man is surrounded by a world full of things which are amazing [...] his sensibility is kept in unresolved tension [so] he conjures up for himself, in play, the perfection which he misses."³² Art and myth bear strong similarities as symbolic constructions with which to structure the world and deploy meaning. Art can also function as a means of transmission for myth. A painting can articulate the content of a national myth so that it can, among other things, be interpreted as relevant on both an 'ancient,' timeless level and a contemporary one. "The fixed scene of a painting," writes Bal, "reflects the ambivalent attitude toward time inherent in most representations of myth."³³ The interpretation of a particular meaning through pictorial form encapsulates the dual components of eternity and modernity.

The artistic expression of national myth, as in Jacques-Louis David's Oath of the Horatii (1784) (Fig. 1), reveals the importance of both ancient and modern correlations for self-definition and the tension of looking to the past as a model for the future. In his use of a neo-classical framework to evoke a

³¹ Barthes 131.

³² Gottfried Semper, Der Stil, vol 1, (Munich, 1860-63) xxi, cited in Michael Podro, Critical Historians of Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982)7.

³³ Bal 97.

heroic, Roman myth, David relates the theme of the work to the current situation of the French Revolution and to a more universal conception of civic ideology. The austere, theatrical setting and dramatic lighting emphasise the heightened drama of three brothers prepared to go to battle for the glory of Rome. The taking of an oath to defend their collectivity was a theme that resonated with revolutionary ideology of civic virtue and working toward the good of the state. Art historian Albert Boime relates the painting to Rousseau's Social Contract (1762) in terms of how it references Rome as a model of morality and obedience to the commonwealth. In First Discourse, Rousseau reiterates his notion of privileging public good and civic duty over private gain: "In politics as in ethics, it is a great evil to fail to do good, and every useless citizen may be considered a pernicious man."³⁴

David's painting visually expresses Rousseau's philosophy in the figures of the men, as the father of the Horatii becomes a symbol for the nation and the taut unity of the three brothers expresses their dedication to action.³⁵ The sheer musculature of the men, contrasting with the supine postures of the women, enforces their stature as heroes. The sharp clarity of David's painting increases its dramatic impact, thus appealing to the emotions inherent in an affiliation with national identity. Moreover, it poses the issue of consent, a critical theme in the theoretical notion of the 'political' nation, which is based on the idea that all citizens choose their allegiance to the state just as the Horatii choose to

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The First and Second Discourses, Roger D. and Judith R. Masters, ed. and trans. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964) 49.

³⁵ Albert Boime, Art in an Age of Revolution 1750-1800 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 392-393.

defend Rome. This is one of the myths upon which revolutionary ideology was structured; as the brothers are called to duty to save Rome from its rival, so too must the French fight to defend their nation from tyranny. Of his paintings of revolutionary 'martyrs,' David said, "True patriots should eagerly seize every opportunity for enlightening their fellow citizens and for presenting to them sublime examples of heroism and virtue."³⁶

In locating these examples in ancient Rome, David reveals one of the ambivalent aspects of national myth – the model of virtue is not to be found in one's own contemporary society, but in the distant past. The scene is bound to both ancient and contemporary history and situates the national collectivity as represented by three men against an unseen, but nonetheless threatening force. This depiction also reveals the instability of national myth through the elision of references to what Barthes terms "human relations in their real social structure."³⁷ David's depiction of the narrative does indeed sanitise and reinterpret it on a level relevant to late-eighteenth century France in order to justify revolutionary activities. Transcending the specificity, the initial surface view of the painting posits a more universal notion of unity – a notion belied by the gender issues inherent in the separate and stratified depiction of the pliable women in relation to the men. The visual depiction omits more than it includes about history and social structures, but as a narrative system, it upholds, enforces, and transmits the central qualities of the myth of the

³⁶ Jacques-Louis David, from a speech in 1793. Neoclassicism and Romanticism 1750-1850: An Anthology of Sources and Documents, ed. Lorenz Eitner (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) 133.

³⁷ Barthes 143.

"political" nation – civic duty, voluntary action, unity, secularism, and democracy.

A similar reading can be applied to Henry Fuseli's Oath on the Rütli (1780) (Fig. 2), which expresses a Swiss national myth through the dramatic impact of three, majestic figures taking an oath of unity in 1291. Representatives of the three cantons, the men swear allegiance against Hapsburg dominance. The figures possess more unrestrained postures in contrast to the controlled tension of the Horatii, but the message of unity in defence of the nation is the same. The painting refers to the Franco-Swiss pact of allegiance in 1777, which guaranteed the union of the Swiss confederacy.³⁸ Swiss patriotism "concentrated on a nostalgic view of the past and on general, romanticised notions of unity,"³⁹ which heavily informed general ideas of nationalism. Fuseli's dramatic scenario, the monumental figures barely contained by the edges of the picture frame, heightens its message as both heroic and primordial. According to legend, the three men met in an Alpine meadow at dawn to swear their allegiance. Fuseli's adherence to this theme intensifies the myth's association with primordial themes and also of myths of territory in establishing the *Vierwaldstättersee* as a revered site within collective consciousness. The specificities or omissions of the event are less important than the reinforcement of unity against a force threatening to disrupt it.

David and Fuseli both draw from the historical formulations of national

³⁸ Boime 275.

³⁹ Boime 277.

myth in order to reinforce a current development. Their paintings pertain less to myths of descent or ethnic origin than they do to myths of 'birth' and military valour – the idea that there was a specific time, a specific act of heroism that resulted in the formations of France and Switzerland as unified, independent nations. The commemoration of that act, as well as the perpetual retelling of the story behind it, is a vital element of establishing its potency within national consciousness. The evocation of this type of myth also venerates the future, since it marks the birth of a new system that has eliminated whatever made the old system unacceptable.⁴⁰ The scenes in the paintings, while glorifying the mythic-historical past, also designate a point in time that marks the boundary between the former, unacceptable state and the new, emancipated one. This manipulation of time in visual representations of national myth strengthens the unity of a contemporary group by emphasising the idea of a shared memory or value, while simultaneously denying that commonality to those who are not considered to be part of the same, mythical history.

MYTH AND PRIMITIVIST DISCOURSE

Inherent in the development of a national identity is the process of self-definition, whether through myth or other commonalities. In order to view themselves as citizens of a particular nation-state, a group of people must first form a collective sense of belonging to a particular, demarcated place and being constituents of its political establishments. This initial solidarity can

⁴⁰ Schöpflin 33.

stem from various factors, such as shared language, religion, customs, history and territory, and it allows a group to define themselves as *us*. An accompaniment to this evolution, by default, is the process via which other groups that lack the same characteristics, such as a shared mythic history, are subsequently defined as *them*. This binarism produces a series of exchanges and subsequent meanings through which unity is enforced. The Napoleonic occupation of Germany in the early-nineteenth century intensified anti-French sentiment among the middle class and subsequently sharpened German nationalism by postulating the particularities of the German nation, religion, and language as the legitimising basis for the nation.⁴¹ The nature of processes such as these often results in a positive self-definition for *us* and, by contrast, a negative one for *them*.

This isn't always the case, of course, since people did attribute positive moral values to other collectivities, sometimes to the diminishment of their own. In the eighteenth century, the French identified the English monarchy as morally superior, but this did not lead to a rejection of the high values inherent in the French *patria*.⁴² Historian Orest Ranum writes that each national identity produces what he terms a "counter-identity;" that is, an identity deposited onto the people of other countries constituted of the perceived opposite qualities of one's own people.⁴³ His examples consist primarily of

⁴¹ Hagen Schulze, The Course of German Nationalism: From Frederick the Great to Bismarck 1763-1867 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 49-50.

⁴² Orest Ranum, "Counter-Identities of Western European Nations in the Early-Modern Period: Definitions and Points of Departure," P. Boerner, ed., Concepts of National Identity: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue (Baden-Baden, 1986) 63-78. 64.

⁴³ Ranum 64.

inter-European identities, although his thesis can also be applied to the identities that the Europeans placed upon non-Western or indigenous, rural cultures. The specific process of sorting out qualities, values, and morals with which to categorise both *us* and *them* provides nationalism with the psychological foundation of collective belonging. This structure of opposition is a main underpinning of European primitivism, but more complex in relation to rural cultures since those under classification belong to the same collectivity as those doing the classifying.

I want to briefly discuss the relevance of primitivism to national myths, since this correlation provides the framework for my subsequent examination of the ways in which the peasantry was incorporated into the primitivist discourse and how the artistic appropriation of the folk aesthetic relates to national identity. Since imperial encounters were often the mode through which Europeans encountered otherness, the tropes of difference were established through a complex system of power. In the process of formulating collective identities as citizens (*us*), Europeans also identified non-Western cultures (*them*) with certain characteristics. If I adopt Ranum's term "counter-identities," this would indicate that the qualities given to non-Western cultures were in contrast to the qualities Europeans believed themselves to possess. In many cases this is true, for written accounts describing the African or the Native American often provide an indication of the European self-image. For example, Voltaire fortifies notions of European superiority when he wrote that the nature of blacks was not only different from that of whites, but was also

inferior.⁴⁴

In his book about national character, L'Esprit des nations (1753), Abbé François-Ignace d'Espiard denotes both physical and moral changes as the two primary causes of differentiation between Africans, Americans, Chinese, and Europeans. By contrast, he upholds the virtues of the French: "L'éducation Française est célèbre dans toute l'Europe, qui envoie sa Jeunesse prendre nos élémens."⁴⁵ The French also took pride in their school system,⁴⁶ yet the missionary Lafitau deprecates the lack of sciences, laws, and letters within Native American societies.⁴⁷ Art discourse contributed to this type of antithesis, as Johann Winckelmann wrote in History of Ancient Art (1764), in which he posits a high level of whiteness as an indicator of ideal beauty: "A beautiful body will, accordingly, be the more beautiful the whiter it is [...] A Negro might be called handsome, when the conformation of his face is handsome. A traveller assures us that daily association with Negroes diminishes the disagreeableness of their colour."⁴⁸

This structure of opposition is the primary element around which primitivism is structured. It is based on constructions that revolve primarily around collectivities, both within national boundaries and exterior to them, that

⁴⁴ Voltaire, Oeuvres de Voltaire (Paris: Lefèvre, 1829-1840) 483, cited in Henry Vyverberg, Human Nature, Cultural Diversity, and the French Enlightenment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 59.

⁴⁵ François-Ignace d'Espiard de la Borde, L'esprit des nations. Vol. I (The Hague: Beauregard, Gosse, Van Dallen Librairies, 1753) 167.

⁴⁶ Greenfeld 99-100.

⁴⁷ Lafitau 67.

⁴⁸ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, History of Ancient Art (1764). Neoclassicism and Romanticism 1750-1850: An Anthology of Sources and Documents, ed. Lorenz Eitner (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) 15.

were considered to be 'Other.' Primitivist constructions are composed of tropes and stereotypes derived from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries from a body of European literature, travel reports, political treatises, and philosophies. The constructs of the noble savage, the cannibalistic African, the simple peasant, the peaceable Native American, dominate primitivist discourse. These constructions are not pejorative *per se*, but they do assert the 'primitive' as a counter-identity to the European – civilised/savage, light/dark, good/evil, rational/irrational, culture/nature, masculine/feminine, active/passive. I do not use the term 'myth' to describe these primitivist constructions because myth is more often a narrative that has some grounding, however nebulous, in the imagined, historical past. While tropes and stereotypes make up constructions through which the primitivist discourse operates, national myths are buttressed by professed acts of heroism, the ideal past, the moment of national birth, which are intended to glorify the past, venerate the future, and provide people with a meritorious, psychological connection.

Primitivist constructions also serve to enforce a European connection, but they do so by setting European identity against the qualities of the 'primitive.' Where national myth is based on a premise of historical destiny, primitivist constructions are frequently based on negative classification. National myths are also often contained by geographical boundaries, while primitivist constructions can extend beyond those boundaries in order to reinforce a self-identity. This identity, based on an image of European rationality, culture, civilisation, and reason, is not self-contained because it often involves spatial distance as an indicator of temporal distance. In this

respect, Europeans could use primitivist constructions to create a conjecture of human evolution. 'Tribal' societies, which lay beyond the boundaries of Europe in geographical landscapes unknown to most Europeans, were considered to be a tangible representation of the evolutionary origins of humankind.

Originally meaning the initial, primary level, Europeans applied the word "primitive" to these societies that were believed to live at stages comparable to those of early Europe.⁴⁹ In 1783, the historian Pierre-Charles Levesque alludes to the idea of universal, human origins when he writes, "De même, pour bien connaître l'humanité, il faut d'abord l'étudier dans son berceau, c'est-à-dire dans l'état de l'homme sauvage."⁵⁰ In the eighteenth century, biology and science were cited as evidence that Africans possessed a lack of intelligence and morality, thus indicating that they were less evolved than Europeans. The jurist Charles De Brosses asserted that Africans were still living in 'childhood,' while others had been able to raise themselves to higher levels.⁵¹ Folklorist Edward Tylor also refers to this predominant trope of the immature "savage": "We may, I think, apply the often-repeated comparison of savages to children as fairly to their moral as to their intellectual condition."⁵²

⁴⁹ Cohen 77. In her discussion of Gauguin, Connelly discusses how Europeans viewed the ornamental quality of "tribal" arts as indicative of their developmentally thwarted status. See Sleep of Reason, 55-77.

⁵⁰ Pierre-Charles Levesque, Histoire des différents peuples soumis a la domination des russes, ou suite de L'histoire de russie. (Paris: de Bure l'aîné, 1783) 2.

⁵¹ Cohen 77.

⁵² Edward B. Tylor, Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871) 31.

Montaigne brings up to this trope in relation to Native Americans when he writes:

Our world has just discovered another world [...] no less great, full and well-limbed than itself, yet so new and infantile that it is still being taught its ABC; not fifty years ago, it new neither letters, nor weights and measure, not clothes, nor wheat and vines. It was still quite naked at the breast and lived only on what its nursing mother provided.⁵³

In his 1857 incipient theories of Social Darwinism, Herbert Spencer also equates the intellectual progress of the child and "savage" when he writes, "That progress in intelligence which takes place during the evolution of the child into the man, or the savage into the philosopher, is commonly regarded as consisting in the greater number of facts known and laws understood."⁵⁴ The evolutionary view "was a convenient way to account for the humanity of non-Europeans and yet to explain their differences. Africans were viewed as living in an era similar to that of the European Middle Ages. Just as Europe had made progress since then, Africa too would evolve."⁵⁵ This tension between the ideas of progress and the mythic past heavily informed primitivist discourse just as it did national mythologies. The evolutionary view of humans was likewise applied to nations, as Karl Pearson in 1907 conflates both primitivist and nationalist thought:

⁵³ Michel de Montaigne, "Of coaches," Complete Works of Montaigne, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957) 693.

⁵⁴ Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Causes," The Westminster Review, Vol 67 (April 1857) 445.

⁵⁵ Cohen 210.

The path of progress is strewn with the wreck of nations; traces are everywhere to be seen of the hecatombs of inferior races, and of victims who found not the narrow way to the greater perfection. Yet these dead peoples are, in very truth, the stepping-stone on which mankind has arisen to the higher intellectual and deeper emotional life of today.⁵⁶

The expansion of both imperialism and international economies in the latter half of the nineteenth century intensified competition among nations and thus their anthropomorphic association with either weakness or strength. The military supremacy of colonising countries was translated into actual conquest and annexation between 1880 and 1914, which resulted in a major partitioning of territories outside Europe and the Americas.⁵⁷ This heightened imperialism served to solidify primitivist constructions of infantileness, as well as the ideological hegemony of European nations. The theory of European superiority was diffused into popular culture through propaganda such as the 'colonial pavilions' at International Expositions and the unsavoury practice of exhibiting peoples from colonised countries.⁵⁸ Ethnography museums and colonial exhibitions, in addition to serving as symbols of national rivalry, were

⁵⁶ Karl Pearson, National Life from the Standpoint of Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907) 64. See Ian Cummins, Marx, Engels, and National Movements (London: Croom Helm, 1980) for an examination of views of non-European worlds in Marx's and Engels's writings of the 1850's. Cummins makes the point that Engels saw certain non-Europeans as being "semi-barbarians" who were "outside the historical evolutionary process." A justification for European colonial domination, thus, was that these communities could be drawn into that process. 49-82.

⁵⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Empire 1875-1914 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) 59.

⁵⁸ The most well-known example of this is the display of Saartjie Baartman, the so-called "Hottentot Venus," a South African woman who was displayed in London and Paris. Other examples include ethnographic exhibitions at the Jardin d'Acclimatation, which included displays of Zulus, Ashantis, Andean Indians, and Native Americans. See Schneider (1982).

the physical embodiments of imperial ideologies. The exhibitions served as 'spectacles' through which to preserve the cultural divide and to make colonised societies appear both available and contained.⁵⁹

Accompanying the belief in the "survival of the fittest" conception of nations was the idea that the closer people were to Europe, the more advanced and perfect they were. In the future, 'primitive' societies would one day reach a higher level of advancement and civilisation, a theory reinforced by Condorcet's writings. According to Condorcet, the progression of the world would lead to liberation from ignorance and tyranny:

Will all nations one day attain that state of civilisation which the most enlightened, the freest, and the least burdened by prejudices, such as the French and the Anglo-Americans have attained already? [...] These vast lands [of Africa and Asia] are inhabited partly by tribes who need only assistance from us to become civilised.⁶⁰

The counter-identity conjecture that 'tribal' societies were at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder enforced Europe's image of itself as the most civilised and fully-developed people. National myths contributed to this self-

⁵⁹ Annie E. Coombes, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1988) 57-58. I find it pertinent that Coombes uses the term 'spectacle' to refer to colonial exhibitions, just as Orton and Pollock (1980) do to refer to the Breton tourist industry. See also "From Popular to Official Image," (Chapter Eight) in Schneider (1982) for an analysis of the ways in which an "official" image of African colonies were disseminated through colonial pavilions at the world's fairs. See also Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1998) for essays how colonialism has influenced the ways in which objects are understood.

⁶⁰ Antoine Nicolas de Condorcet, "The Progress of the Human Mind," *Classics of Western Thought: The Modern World*, Edgar Knoebel, ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988) 191 and 192.

definition, particularly when they converged with primitivist tropes and stereotypes on the level of constructed history. The myth of the 1492 voyage of Christopher Columbus and his 'discovery' of America is an example of a constructed 'historical moment' that has been incorporated into national consciousness. Columbus's voyage is well established in American national psyche as the conception of the nation, and the rhetoric surrounding it involves constructions of the rational, European traveller who brings enlightenment and civilisation to the 'primitive,' untamed tribes. In his diary, Columbus evokes common, ambivalent constructions of "tribal" societies: "These people are very gentle and fearful, naked as I have already said, without weapons and without laws" (4 November, 1492), and "They have no religion nor are they idolaters" (27 November, 1492).⁶¹ He further writes, "They are the best people in the world and the most peaceable" (16 December 1492). Yet in 1503, Columbus saw himself "surrounded by a million savages filled with cruelty and inimical to us." (*Lettera Rarissima*, 7 July, 1503).⁶² The myth of his 'discovery' and the constructions surrounding it are reinforced every year during the ritual of Columbus Day.

Such myths and underlying perceptions of Native American and African cultures are often, although of course not exclusively, sustained by visual imagery.⁶³ Frances K. Pohl examines how paintings such as the American

⁶¹ Cited in Tzvetan Todorov, *Conquest of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) 35. See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994) for a critical analysis of how the Columbus myth has been perpetuated through film into the colonial paradigm. 61-70.

⁶² Cited in Todorov 36 and 38.

⁶³ See Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century*

artist John Vanderlyn's The Death of Jane McCrea (1804) (Fig. 3), in which the young, colonial woman is about to be killed by two Mohawks, are emblematic of a social system that sought to justify Native American suppression. Pohl reads Jane McCrea as a symbol of the colonial woman and the nation as a whole, as one justification for genocide was the belief that Native Americans posed a threat to both women and the entire nation.⁶⁴ Her thesis is buttressed by the common view of nations as symbolically feminine. The identity of the white, colonial woman is posited against the counter-identity of the dark, 'tribal' male, representing asserted differences of both biology and environment in order to provide a standard against which European identity and hegemony could be reinforced.

Antoine-Jean Gros's painting Harangue du Général Bonaparte avant la Bataille des Pyramides, 1798 (1810) (Fig. 4), commissioned for the purpose of glorifying Napoleon and hence France's military strength, depicts the young general delivering a speech to his troops prior to commencing the Egyptian Campaign. The painting exemplifies the mythic cult of Napoleon, situating him heroically and centrally upon a white horse, surrounded by his loyal troops as he points toward the ancient pyramids. Below him along the right foreground of the painting, an African slave lays dead, while two wounded Egyptians reach toward the general. Their inclusion in the painting ostensibly

(Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); Hugh Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art, vol. II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); and William H. Schneider, An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa 1870-1900 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982) for more comprehensive analyses of the different ways in which blacks were portrayed in nineteenth century visual arts.

⁶⁴ Frances K. Pohl, "Old World, New World: The Encounter of Cultures on the American Frontier," Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History, Stephen F. Eisenman, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) 144-162. 147.

refers to the outcome of the battle rather than its inception, symbolising the vanquished forces of savagery and barbarism as indicated by their nudity and turbans.⁶⁵ While serving a vainglorious purpose to venerate the military achievements of the emperor, the composition of the painting also clearly emphasises the superiority of Europeans over non-Western nations. As Napoleon points toward the pyramids, he draws the viewer's eye toward a symbol of antiquity while calling his troops to "go forth." This simultaneously reinforces his own image as preserver of an eternal glory as well as deliverer of France's future destiny, both of which are crucial components of national myth.

Conflated with this dual mechanism are images of supplicant Egyptians and a dead African, all three visually linked in the lower right corner, their supine bodies a stark contrast to the erect forms of the French soldiers. The outstretched hands of the Egyptians reflect the gesture of Napoleon's hand, which serves to emphasise the contrast of imploring submission versus valiant gesture. Their inclusion enforces the necessity of subduing non-Western peoples for the grandeur of France, again positing identity and counter-identity as mechanisms of self-definition. European military glory is set against Egyptian passivity, the spears of the African no match for the arms of the French soldiers, the nakedness of non-Western cultures contrasted with the decorated uniforms of European troops. This reinforcement of imperial power was a critical element of Europe's ruling myths. The structure of colonialism heavily impacted the perceptions of what constituted national identity, as it reinforced primitivist conceptions that were then transposed onto domestic

⁶⁵ Honour 28.

populations.

The conflation of national myths and primitivist constructions appears throughout European art and literature as a mechanism of community reinforcement. The same process is elucidated in the philosophical turn toward peasant cultures during the latter half of the nineteenth century, but it diverges from the visual systems discussed above. In the discourse of folk primitivism, the European upper-class identity is frequently postulated against a constructed Other (the Peasant), but that Other is simultaneously regarded as exemplary of specific, cultural origins. In blurring the lines between self-identity and counter-identity, this tension reveals itself in the differing views of the peasantry that proliferated in late-nineteenth century literacy and artistic circles. This convergence of rural myths and primitivist constructions does not revolve around historical moments or heroic individuals, but is based on an idea of an archaic heritage exemplified in modern, rural culture. As such, it is my contention that the upper-class perceptions of the peasantry in the late-nineteenth century, while revealing the critical juncture at which primitivism and national identity converge, also disrupt the structure of alterity upon which primitivism is predicated.

PRIMITIVISM AND THE PEASANTRY

The tension between the two extremes of difference and similarity generated ambivalent perceptions of the peasantry among literate circles – perceptions which are manifest in scholarly accounts, travel reports, literature, and the visual arts. The mode of difference through which these perceptions

developed is derived from European imperial encounters, a system that impacted myriad developments within the colonising country.⁶⁶ Their consistent reproduction and rearticulation outside of European geographical boundaries simultaneously allowed for ease of absorption within those boundaries.

Benedict Anderson defines the nation partly in relation to empire, while Anne Laura Stoler writes that it is also necessary to examine how empires were defined in relation to contiguous as well as noncontiguous territory. While France was expanding into West Africa and Southeast Asia during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was also contending with a revival of imperial imagery "at home" and extensive industrialisation that ostensibly helped to "turn peasants into Frenchmen." The myth of France was thus centred around a country where less than half of the population lived in the "hexagon" or spoke French.⁶⁷ In spite (or perhaps because) of these concurrent conditions, domestic populations became strongly associated with national imaginings of mythic origins partly through the imperial framework.

The colonial encounter with non-Western cultures generated an increasing acceptance of an evolutionary view of the world, leading people to search for both their biological and cultural past in rural populations. In The

⁶⁶ In "Race, Gender, and Citizenship in the German Colonial Empire," Lora Wildenthal analyzes German citizenship law in relation to the political context of a colonial empire organized by gender hierarchy and race. She also looks at how the sexual freedom of German men in colonies undermined the German woman's cultural ideal of marriage as a fundamental unit of society. Her essay is indicative of the ways in which colonial relationships and politics impact social institutions and perceptions "at home." Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in the Bourgeois World, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 263-283.

⁶⁷ Stoler 22.

History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1788), Edward Gibbon aligns the 'savage' with both universal and specific rural origins: "The discoveries of ancient and modern navigators, and the domestic history, or tradition, of the most enlightened nation, represents the *human savage*, naked both in mind and body, and destitute of laws, of arts, of ideas, and almost of languages. From this abject condition, perhaps the primitive and universal state of man, he has gradually arisen."⁶⁸ As recently as 1966, historians spoke of rural villages as being "direct descendants of Neolithic agrarian settlements."⁶⁹ This concept romantically links the rhythms of peasant culture with the eternal history of the past, but belies any sense of migrations, population and economic changes, and border modifications – sustaining instead the view of the peasantry as a static, unchanging segment of the population.

This also reiterates a common theme in national myth that the eternal, primeval heritage of a people is manifest in rural cultures. Smith writes that this rootedness in the past is critical to the survival of a nation, as it ensures a nation's uniqueness against modernity and competition with other nations.⁷⁰ His postulation further associates nations with Darwinian theories; if a nation is to survive among other nations, it must somehow be stronger. Part of that strength requires that the culture be grounded in a sense of shared history and

⁶⁸ Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. David Womersley, vol. 4 (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1994) 515. His italics.

⁶⁹ Marc Bloc, French Rural History, trans. Janet Sondheimer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 1.

⁷⁰ Smith, Ethnic Origins 213-214.

legends that expound the specific distinction of the nation, which is often found in 'primitive' rural culture. In examining the different modes of storytelling among nations, nineteenth century scholar Edwin Sidney Hartland locates this distinction in the "sum total of arts, knowledge, organisation and customs which we call the *civilisation* or the *stage of a civilisation*, of a people."⁷¹ The peasantry represents one stage in a nation's progression towards civilisation. James Frazer, in his thirteen-volume collection and analysis of myths, The Golden Bough (1890), views the peasantry as immutable evidence of the past:

The popular superstitions and customs of the peasantry are by far the fullest and most trustworthy evidence we possess as to the primitive religion of the Aryans. Indeed the primitive Aryan, in all that regards his mental fibre and texture, is not extinct. He is amongst us to this day. The great intellectual and moral forces which have revolutionised the educated world have scarcely affected the peasant.⁷²

In structuring the peasant as a symbol of cultural ancestry due to his or her 'primitive' way of life, Europeans were informed by both existing formulations as well as industrial changes that allowed for less-delineated, socio-economic categories. The industrial phenomenon throughout Europe also determined the direction of the expansions of colonial relationships in the late-nineteenth century and thus the intensification of primitivist

⁷¹ Edwin Sidney Hartland, The Science of Fairy Tales (London: Walter Scott, 1891) Reprinted in Peasant Customs and Savage Myths, Richard M. Dorson, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 362.

⁷² James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, vol. 1, originally published 1890. (London: MacMillan, 1935) xii.

constructions.⁷³ As Rhodes and Varnedoe have pointed out, peasant arts were incorporated underneath the European primitivist rubric toward the end of the nineteenth century,⁷⁴ although the process had roots a hundred years earlier in the Industrial Revolution.

Few scholars have critically analysed peasant cultures in relation to primitivism, although recent progress has been made in Rhodes' Primitivism in Modern Art (1994) and Robert L. Herbert's exhibition catalogue Peasants and 'Primitivism': French Prints from Millet to Gauguin (1995). While both works are highly beneficial in postulating the peasantry as a viable and important component of primitivist studies, they ultimately overlook the significance of the colonial framework through which folk primitivism was structured. Rhodes writes that modern artists looked first to interior Europe for 'primitive' sources as a means by which to revitalise Western art and culture. While acknowledging that Europeans had been turning to 'tribal' societies for a model of the simple life since the sixteenth century, Rhodes writes that for modern artists, the peasant was eventually found "to contain too much of the culture that the Primitivist wanted to escape." Thus, artists had historically been turning "outward to 'tribal' peoples" to locate qualities and attributes opposed to European civilisation.⁷⁵

The organisation of Rhodes' book reinforces his hypothesis about

⁷³ See Woodruff D. Smith, European Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982) for examples of the ways in which industrialization impacted European imperialism.

⁷⁴ Varnedoe 181 and Rhodes 23.

⁷⁵ Rhodes 22 and 68.

modern artists – the second chapter focuses on "Primitives Within" by examining representations of peasant culture in the early-twentieth century works of German Expressionists, French Fauves, and Russian Neoprimativists. Subsequent chapters focus on Gauguin's Tahitian-themed paintings and Picasso's 'tribal' primitivism. However, this organisation is problematic in that Rhodes postulates representations of rural cultures as *anterior* to those of non-Western cultures, yet from a basic chronology, the paintings discussed in the "Primitives Within" chapter were created later than Gauguin's work and around the same time as Picasso's. From that perspective alone, it is difficult to substantiate Rhodes' claim that modern artists first looked towards rural cultures before turning their gaze "outward."

In referring to contemporary, art-historical scholarship's minimal examination of the peasantry's position within the primitivist discourse, Herbert also writes that the artistic myths of peasant life preceded those that revolved around non-Western cultures.⁷⁶ He premises his notion on the idea that as colonialism expanded, non-Western societies displaced the peasantry as "the Others who were the chief source of primitivist ideas." As the peasantry became more assimilated into national culture and "fully enrolled as members of French society," colonised persons usurped their role as models of simplicity, timelessness, and instinctual creativity.⁷⁷ He intimates that the peasantry was absorbed with minimal ideological ramifications into the urban system, when the continued depiction of peasant life in the early-twentieth

⁷⁶ Robert L. Herbert, *Peasants and 'Primitivism': French Prints from Millet to Gauguin* (South Hadley, Mass.: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1995) 19, n. 4. My italics.

⁷⁷ Herbert 17-18.

century clearly attests to the importance of the rural myth in national and cultural identities.

"Primitivism that looked toward peasant culture did not entirely disappear in twentieth century modernism," Herbert writes in quite an understatement, then briefly mentions depictions of the peasantry in the works of German, Russian, Mexican, and American artists.⁷⁸ His statement implies that early-twentieth century folk primitivist painting was a departure from a proliferation of 'tribal' primitivist works in paintings such as those of Picasso. This belies the fact that folk primitivism was a critical element in the cultural realm, particularly within cross-cultural, artistic dialogues. Moreover, the fusion of rural-based representations with innovative, "primitivist," aesthetic programs holds an important position within art-historical discourse, a conjecture that Herbert fails to acknowledge since he views the peasant/primitivism equation as having declined at the beginning of the twentieth century.

While Herbert also recognises that non-Western primitivism was "already in the minds of Parisians whenever they pondered the world of the peasant,"⁷⁹ his and Rhodes' ultimate premises locate the foundation of modern artistic primitivism in rural cultures rather than the imperial system, which had historically been the primary lens through which Europeans viewed 'primitive' cultures. Rather than being the source from which non-Western primitivism radiated, the folk primitivist paintings of German Expressionists, French

⁷⁸ Herbert 18.

⁷⁹ Herbert 12.

Fauves, and Russian Neoprimativists are a fusion of multiple artistic traditions and aesthetic philosophies derived from both colonial encounters and domestic changes. Further, neither Herbert nor Rhodes analyse the social transformations that influenced the peasant's incorporation into the primitivist discourse, nor do they examine the supposition that the colonial structure was well-established in European thought prior to the twentieth century and thus provided a viable model upon which Europeans could premise their constructions of indigenous, rural cultures.

With those omissions in mind, I would suggest that the primary reason for the peasant's absorption into primitivism was a basic pattern of European industrialisation and the easing of rigid social structures, which brought people of different economic classes into closer contact and thus contributed to more sharply articulated classifications. Nineteenth century anthropologists viewed peasant communities as remote, isolated entities, a perception that began changing with augmented contact between urban and rural societies.⁸⁰ Throughout Europe, late-nineteenth century urban populations were growing as peasants moved to cities in search of work and higher wages; one statistic cites that the urban populations of Russia grew from 5.2 million in 1856 to 12.2 million in 1897.⁸¹ Until 1870, the peasantry made up the largest constituent of the French population; then between the years 1881-1891,

⁸⁰ See Robert Redfield, The Primitive World and Its Transformations (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953) and The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

⁸¹ Steve Smith and Catriona Kelly, "Commercial Culture and Consumerism," Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution 1881-1940, Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 107. Smith and Kelly cite the growth of commerce in Russia rather than large-scale industry as the most significant force behind the

85,000 and 100,000 people per year moved into cities and towns due to declining incomes and prices for farm goods.⁸² The penetration of industrial, "outside," influences into self-sufficient, rural economies intensified discontent among the peasantry, as they began to perceive a strong disparity in living conditions between city and town.⁸³ Discontent in the countryside thus heightened the involvement, or at least the question, of the peasantry within the European political realm.

The expansion of roads and railways allowed for greater transport of machine-fabricated goods, depleting the economies of rural communities, while industrial advancements gradually made traditional modes of production obsolete. The factory system proved to be a far more efficient and cost-effective method of manufacture, while steam engines overtook human and animal power in agriculture. This shift to industrial-based production was a geographically uneven, but extensive process in which objectives of agricultural production shifted from an emphasis on local consumption to a wider, market economy that was supported by urban demand.⁸⁴ The transmission of information attained a new level with expanded means of communication in newspapers, telegraphs, mail-couriers, and eventually the telephone. Modernist nationalism scholars attribute the growth of nationalism

expansion of towns and cities. p. 108.

⁸² Annie Moulin, Peasantry and Society in France since 1789, trans. M.C. and M.C. Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 101.

⁸³ David Blackbourn, "Peasants and Politics in Germany 1871-1914," European History Quarterly, vol. 14, no. 1 (January 1984) 47-75. 53.

⁸⁴ See Tom Kemp, Industrialization in Nineteenth-century Europe (London: Longman, 1985) for a survey of the European shift from agrarian-based to industrialized communities.

to these same factors,⁸⁵ which reveals a particular dichotomy. In the process of establishing a lateral, national consciousness, industrialisation also contributed to intensifying hierarchical categories that frequently cast lower classes in an unflattering light.

"Social mobilisation," writes political scientist Karl Deutsch, "thrusts people into the political life of a nation."⁸⁶ It also thrusts people into the social life of a nation, making them subject to the processes inherent in sharpening definitions. In the course of nineteenth century modernisation, people's view of reality changed alongside their attitude to the legitimacy of the state order. In an agrarian-based society, their lives were bound to the agricultural cycle and were generally unaffected by historical developments. With an onslaught of new technologies and communications, people began to change their perceptions and seek new forms of association, viewing the world in terms of movement and progress rather than immutable traditions.⁸⁷ As a result, peasant migrations to the city were accompanied by a growth of tourism to rural areas in search of those traditions that were being undermined by industrial growth. As Griselda Pollock and Fred Orton have argued, this creation of a tourist industry in turn informed picturesque, artistic representations of the Breton peasantry that provided a "spectacle for the viewer to consume" and conformed

⁸⁵ See Anderson (1983) and Gellner (1983).

⁸⁶ Karl W. Deutsch, Nationalism and its Alternatives (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969) 25.

⁸⁷ Schulze 39. This is also the premise upon which Benedict Anderson (1983) basis his thesis of nationalism. He writes that people's altered perceptions of the world, in terms of such modes of communication as newspapers and serialized novels, created an anonymous sense of community. The distinction between the past and the present also contributed to a growing awareness of national unity.

to a constructed view of peasant culture as primitive, pious, and superstitious.⁸⁸ I will return to their hypothesis in my discussion of Gauguin's work.

As increased urbanisation aided in grouping the peasantry under entrenched tropes, expanded travel and imperialism during the second half of the nineteenth century served to solidify perceptions about non-Western cultures. Gellner cites the emergence of a European, industrial society not only as an impetus for nationalism, but also for the "virtual conquest of the entire world."⁸⁹ The result of this process was that the peasantry was subject to many of the same dichotomous classifications, particularly those pertaining to savagery and morality. Historian Eugen Weber writes that in nineteenth century France, both the urban poor and the peasantry were often thought of as "savage," and that this perceived lack of civilisation made them barbarians in the eyes of many writers, politicians, and travellers. He cites numerous examples in which the peasantry are referred to as timid, ignorant, dirty, lazy, suspicious, vulgar, hardly civilised, and filthy. A landowner in 1865 wrote that peasants are "animals with two feet [...] The wild, dull gaze betrays no flicker of thought in the brain of this being, morally and physically atrophied."⁹⁰ Balzac reiterates this view of savagery in his novel Paysans (1844), which

⁸⁸ Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, "Les données bretonnantes: La prairie de représentation," Art History, vol. 3, no. 3 (September 1980) 326. Pollock also addresses patterns of tourism in relation to Dutch cultural nationalism and Van Gogh in "Van Gogh and Holland: Nationalism and Modernism" in Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed (1996).

⁸⁹ Gellner, Nations and Nationalism 42.

⁹⁰ Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976) 4. See Views of the Irish Peasantry 1800-1916, Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes, eds. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977) for essays on the perception of the peasantry in Ireland as expressed through the poetry of Yeats, folksongs, and mythic figures such as Finn MacCool.

criticises the social and political ramifications of the land-owning peasant, a phenomenon that developed after the Revolution when the Republic took over private and Church-owned land and offered it for sale. In Balzac's novel, the Parisian journalist Émile Blondet first sees a peasant and compares the man to a "Hindoo fakir," then thinks, "That is one of Fenimore Cooper's Redskins. There is no need to go to America to study the savage."⁹¹ He further links both the peasant and savage with low moral values and intellect when he writes, "The savage and his near relation, the peasant, never make use of articulate speech except to lay traps for their enemies."⁹²

This perception of rural savagery is not unlike the perceptions of African savagery that abounded in European travel literature. A late-sixteenth century traveller known as Leo Africanus wrote of Africans that they behave as if they live in a forest with wild beasts, "By nature, they are a vile and base people [...] They are a rude people, and (as a man may say) born and bred to theft, deceit, and brutish manners [...] They lead a savage and bestial life, are devoid of reason, wit, and arts."⁹³ Contradictorily, Leo Africanus also refers to tropes of innocence and simplicity among Africans, claiming that they are devoid of fraud and guile and embracing of all simplicity and truth.⁹⁴ The infantile view of Africans also made its way into perceptions of the peasantry.

⁹¹ Honoré de Balzac, Les paysans, in The Works of Honoré de Balzac, vol. XIX-XX (New York: The Kelmscott Society, n.d.) 27.

⁹² Balzac 103.

⁹³ Leo Africanus, The History and Description of Africa and Of the Notable Things Therein Contained, trans. John Pory, ed. Robert Brown, vol I (London: Hakluyt Society, 1600) 185-187.

⁹⁴ Leo Africanus 183.

In addition to viewing the peasantry as "immoral and lazy to the core," the doctor and traveller Howard P. Kennard writes that they possess a "cunning borne of ignorance, [which] is blended with an enormous admixture of astounding and childlike credulity."⁹⁵ The association of "savages" and peasants with an puerile mind-set further established them, along with children and the mentally ill, as components of the primitivist discourse.

Just as the necessity of "civilising" Africans was the predominant motive behind many imperial activities, much of the impetus for rural laws and inspections was intended to "civilise" the peasants. Further, the quest for linguistic unity throughout France was designated by republicans as a *mission civilisatrice* to assimilate the "far reaches of the Republic [...and] to tame 'unenlightened,' 'savage,' and 'backward' France."⁹⁶ The same terminology was used in the context of French imperial activities, which occurred simultaneously or prior to attempts at domestic integration. As Weber writes, the inspection reports "reflected the prevailing belief that areas and groups of some importance were uncivilised, that is, unintegrated into, unassimilated to French civilisation: poor, backward, ignorant, savage, barbarous, wild, living like beasts with their beasts."⁹⁷

The postulated lack of morality among Africans also found its way into views of the peasantry. Donald Mackenzie Wallace, a late-nineteenth century

⁹⁵ Howard P. Kennard, The Russian Peasant (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907) 42 and 45. The vast majority of Kennard's perceptions are negative, although he does admit that the Russian peasant possess admirable qualities, including patience, kindness, hospitality, and "simple faith." p. 79-80.

⁹⁶ Caroline Ford, Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 17.

⁹⁷ Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen 5.

traveller and historian, discusses a prevalent notion that the Russian peasantry had become "lazy, careless, addicted to drunkenness, and shamelessly dishonest with regard to their obligations." "All this is undoubtedly true," Wallace writes, "whatever biased theorists and sentimental peasant-worshippers may say to the contrary."⁹⁸ In the early-nineteenth century, the British artist Joseph Farington drew a stronger parallel between Africans and peasants when he wrote in his diary that two Africans were "as decent and well regulated as well ordered Country people of our own could be."⁹⁹

Constructions such as these were premised on the same qualifications as non-Western primitivist tropes and stereotypes. The tension of colonial relationships lies in the idea that the otherness of colonised persons was neither inherent nor stable, thus requiring that their difference be defined and maintained.¹⁰⁰ The same premise applies to perceptions of the peasantry, as they were sustained within the realm of visual and literary arts during an era when rural economies and cultures were radically altering. The issue of the peasantry was also heightened in intellectual circles due to the publication of literary works and histories that focused on peasant life.

Eugène Bonnemère's three-volume Histoire du Paysans (1856) emphasises the hardships of rural life throughout the centuries, corroborating their status as a specific, socio-economic category in contrast to urban classes.

⁹⁸ Donald Mackenzie Wallace, Russia (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1905) 458.

⁹⁹ Joseph Farington, The Diary of Joseph Farington, vol. 6, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus MacIntyre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978-84) 2186-87.

¹⁰⁰ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in the Bourgeois World, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 1-

Bonnemère writes that the mere existence of the peasantry is sufficient for historical codification, and he too associates the peasantry with national ancestry, "Ces serfs étaient des hommes, après tout, et ces hommes sont nos pères. Ils existaient, cela suffit pour légitimer notre curiosité. Il est vrai que c'est moins une histoire, à bien dire, qu'une passion et un long martyre."¹⁰¹ In his history published during the same year, Achille Leymarie recognises the ambivalent notions and treatment of the peasantry, "Ces hommes des champs, dont les poètes célébraient la félicité, les vertus [...] étaient tombés à l'état de voleurs ou de bêtes de somme, sous l'influence d'une organisation sociale parvenue à la dernière limite de son déclin."¹⁰² In Nos paysans: étude de physiologie sociale (1894), Louis de la Garde refers to Balzac's novel and Émile Zola's La Terre as he premises his hypothesis on the idea that the peasant's life is not unlike that of the savage, being based on both ignorance and fear. "Le paysan, comme nous le verrons ailleurs, a une existence qui se rapproche sur bien des points de celle du sauvage," la Garde writes, "Le paysan a peur de tout [...] Toujours la peur: la peur de religion, la peur du gouvernement; la peur d'une révolution." At the end of the book, he concludes, "Nous avons suffisamment démontré que le paysan est éminemment peureux [...] parce qu'il est ignorant."¹⁰³

56. 7.

¹⁰¹ Eugène Bonnemère, Histoire des paysans (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1886) v.

¹⁰² M. Achille Leymarie, Histoire des paysans en France (Paris: Librairie de Guillaumin, 1856) xi.

¹⁰³ Louis de la Garde, Nos paysans: étude de physiologie sociale (Aix: Imprimerie J. Nicot, 1902) 19, 42-46.

These histories ran parallel to an increased interest in the peasantry among literary circles. Writers such as the Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral drew upon the language, history, and traditions of rural Provence as a means of inspiration and in order to preserve rural traditions, but his motivation was not always positively received. In the poem Mirèio (1859), Mistral focused on the relationship between a peasant girl and a basket-weaver. One critic found such subject matter highly objectionable and unfitting for literature:

What possible interest, I ask you, can there be in this bare-foot basket-weaver, as coarse as his own work, and this red-faced peasant-girl, both of them sunburned and smelling of garlic and rancid oil? Literature is an art which, if it is not to end up in mud and manure, must seek its inspiration in other surroundings, taking into account the gains of Progress and the refinements of civilisation.¹⁰⁴

This perception again, like certain non-Western primitivist constructions, locates the peasant as antithetical to civilised, urban life.

FOLKLORISTS, SAVAGES, AND THE NOBLE PEASANT

In addition to visual and literary constructions that parallel constructions of 'tribal' primitivism, the nineteenth century study of folklore contributed heavily to situating the European peasantry underneath the primitivist rubric. The study of folklore began in Germany during the end of the eighteenth

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Richard Aldington, Introduction to Mistral (Melbourne and London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1956) 103.

century and was particularly advanced by Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744-1803) Folk Songs (Volkslieder) (1778) and his belief in the value of language and folk poetry as embodiments of the national spirit.¹⁰⁵ The compilation of popular fairy tales by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm celebrated the anonymous origins of such creations rather than individual genius. Similarly in England, the essayist and poet Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and his close friend, the playwright Richard Steele (1672-1729) elevated old ballads into the realm of high literature. These activities became intrinsic to the Romantic belief that creations of the uncultivated, popular imagination could equal or even surpass those of educated classes and that instinct, feeling, and legend were more of value than intellect, reason, or history.¹⁰⁶

The creations of the peasantry were upheld as exemplary of a simplicity and unaffectedness that stood in direct contrast to the complexity of "cultured" arts and that represented natural, creative instincts. The axiomatic concept of the Grimm brothers centred on the idea that all nations possessed a mythic origin; thus it was of great importance to collect the oldest possible records of the early stage of a nation, which were found in the folk tradition.¹⁰⁷ The idea of a mythical past is crucial to the proliferation of a nationalistic sentiment, as it validates the idea that a nation's people are grounded in common roots and history. From this commonality springs shared language, customs, traditions,

¹⁰⁵ Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas (London: Hogarth Press, 1976) 179.

¹⁰⁶ Will and Ariel Durant, From Rousseau to Revolution (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967) 887.

¹⁰⁷ Ernst S. Dick, "The Folk and Their Culture: The Formative Concepts and the Beginnings of Folklore," The Folk: Identity, Landscapes, and Lore, 11-28: 21.

religion, and territories, all of which form the basis for the emotional ties of national identity. The Grimm brothers compilation of oral traditions advanced the objective for the later nineteenth century preservation of folk arts, which likewise sought cultural origins in the characteristics of the arts as well as their modes of production.

The later study of folklore continued to structure oral traditions within a cultural framework, but also contributed to their pejorative classifications. Late-nineteenth century folklore scholars who studied the mythologies and beliefs of non-Western societies often sought to locate analogies between 'savage races' and European folklore and traditions as found in rural societies. This parallelism developed from nineteenth century anthropological studies that began to view 'primitive' cultures as self-contained entities that consisted of basic patterns of living and social structures. Anthropologists also conceived of peasant societies as integrated, isolated, and remote entities that were comparable to 'primitive' societies in structure and composition.¹⁰⁸

In 1893, Andrew Lang explicitly aligned the peasantry with both cultural origins and barbarity when he wrote, "The student of folklore is thus led to examine the usages, myths, and ideas of savages, which are still retained, in rude enough shape, by the European peasantry."¹⁰⁹ He further sought a comparative study of 'savage' myths and peasant customs in relation to the

¹⁰⁸ Redfield, The Little Community 6-9. Redfield cites the "abstract primitive isolate" as the primary conception of the early anthropologist, but in the twentieth century, they began studying local communities as part of a much larger society, p. 10 and 16.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Lang, Custom and Myth (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901) 11.

Grimm Brothers Household Tales (1884).¹¹⁰ Hartland likewise finds among the peasantry similar ideas and customs: "I might cite case after case to show you [...] many other customs and institutions, ay, and ceremonies, practised both by savages and by the uneducated classes of Europe."¹¹¹ While privileging the peasantry as a member of 'civilised' nations, the anthropologist Edward Tylor most ambitiously seeks to document a correspondence between the beliefs of 'savages' to the folklore and practices of contemporary, European peasantry in his 1871 work Primitive Culture:

Even when it comes to comparing the barbarous hordes with civilised nations [...] Look at the modern European peasant using his hatchet and hoe [...] If we choose out this way things which have altered little in a long course of centuries, we may draw a picture where there shall be scarce a hand's breadth difference between an English ploughman and a negro of Central Africa [...] It is more to the purpose to notice [...] how the isolated life of wild country districts seems sometimes tending towards savagery [...] But they seem to be more often the relics of ancient unchanged barbarism.¹¹²

In viewing "the primitive condition" as the "remains of an early state of the human race,"¹¹³ Tylor postulates the theory that civilisation exists in

¹¹⁰ Grimm Brothers, Household Tales, Introduction by Andrew Lang, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1884). Lang's premise is that the origins of the European peasantry tales are derived from the 'savage' state of man and his perceptions of the world.

¹¹¹ Edwin Sidney Hartland, Folklore: What is It and What Is the Good of It? (London: David Nutt, 1899). Reprinted in Peasant Customs and Savage Myths, Richard M. Dorson, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 238.

¹¹² Edward B. Tylor, Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom, vol. I (London: John Murray, 1871) 6-7 and 43-44.

¹¹³ Tylor 21.

different grades, with Europe and America at one end of the social stratum and 'savage tribes' at the other. The rest of humankind is arranged within those limits according to how closely they align to "savage" or "cultured" life.¹¹⁴ His thesis situates the peasantry far closer to the "savage" on the scale, but a step above them on the "barbaric" level due to the peasant's existence within civilised nations. He also critiques the ethnographic notion of 'primitive' cultures as representative of an admirable society whose inhabitants are courageous, brave, gentle, and hospitable – the main underpinning of the noble savage motif. In a further reference to primitivist constructions, Tylor writes that "savages" are on their best behaviour when confronted by foreigners, when in fact their character is apt to be foul, brutal, and fierce when "they have nothing to expect or fear."¹¹⁵

This persistent nineteenth century affiliation of the peasantry with 'savages' and often children finds another juncture in the issue of evolution. Race was an underlying theme of folkloristic study, just as it was in primitivist and imperial discourse. Nineteenth century scholars frequently viewed the arts and oral traditions of non-Western societies, particularly Africans, as evidence of biologically-determined characteristics,¹¹⁶ and peasant folklore was thus designated as indicative of Aryan, cultural roots. In 1898, Alfred Nutt argued that folklore, particularly the artistic element, expressed most clearly the artistic temperament of a race and a "national mode of conception and

¹¹⁴ Tylor 26.

¹¹⁵ Tylor 30.

¹¹⁶ See Cohen (1980) and Connelly (1995).

expression."¹¹⁷ The perception that the products of rural cultures somehow indicated racial, and thus national, origins has a strong bearing on the historical equation of the peasantry with primitivist constructions and national identity. However, Nutt's definition of race is far closer to contemporary scholars's definitions of the 'ethnie' as based on culture rather than biology:

When I speak of [...] race I have in view a community which for a definite number of centuries has manifested itself in clearly defined products of the mind [...] Such a manifestation is by no means necessarily conditioned by blood-kinship, by descent from a common ancestor; in modern Europe, it results from community of speech and cultural-traditions [...] It may be found, as in France and England, in countries inhabited by peoples of demonstrably different origins.¹¹⁸

This race (or ethnie, to use the contemporary term) retains the distinct individuality of a particular nation, one that has been with them "since man passed out of the folklore and entered into the civilised stage." Nutt also argues that the sustenance of certain rural traditions and folklore is evidence of the "survival" of the dominant race, which explicates the issue of evolutionary origins and Darwinian theories.¹¹⁹ This theory also pertains to the idealist view

¹¹⁷ Alfred Nutt, "The Discrimination of Racial Elements in the Folklore of the British Isles," Folk-Lore, IX (1898) 30-52. Reprinted in Reprinted in Peasant Customs and Savage Myths, Richard M. Dorson, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 411. This mode of thought has since been strongly dismissed in twentieth century scholarship, which denies the idea that nationalism, or even the 'ethnie,' is premised on racial foundations. See Smith (1991), Anderson (1983), and Montserrat Guibernau, Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

¹¹⁸ Nutt 419.

¹¹⁹ Nutt, "Ethnological Data in Folklore: A Reply to the Foregoing Criticism," Folk-Lore X (1899) 143-149. Reprinted in Reprinted in Peasant Customs and Savage Myths, Richard M. Dorson, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 431-436. 431. Also Nutt, "Discrimination," 405.

of the peasantry, to which Tylor and Wallace refer in quotations above.

In addition to sustaining tropes of the savage peasant, European writers and philosophers upheld both non-Western societies and peasantry as emblematic of moral values. With roots in the eighteenth century and Romantic philosophies, this conjecture spread in intellectual circles both as a reaction to increasing contact with the peasantry and the belief that industrialisation was destroying established traditions. The 'primitive' state of civilised nations, both spatial and temporal, was thus to be found in both rural and non-Western populations. "Au dix-neuvième siècle," writes Achille Lestrelin in 1861, "nous retrouvons encore les serfs russes dans toute la simplicité des mœurs du temps passé [...] Pour connaître le Russe dans sa naïveté primitive, il faut se tourner vers le serf laboureur."¹²⁰ Similarly, the botanist Michel Adanson wrote in 1756 of a village in Senegal, "I seemed to contemplate the world in its primeval state."¹²¹

The concept of peasant cultures as repositories of moral values and goodness evolved from the Romantic idea of the noble savage, which developed within literary and philosophical circles to remind Europeans of the virtuous life found in more natural states of being. In First Discourse, Rousseau privileges the "simplicity of earliest times" with the modern corruption of civilised, enlightened society. "Our souls," Rousseau writes, "have been corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our sciences and arts

¹²⁰ Achille Lestrelin, Les Paysans Russes: Leurs Usages, Mœurs, Caractère, Religion, Superstitions, et les Droits des Nobles sur Leurs Serfs (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861). 103 and 127.

¹²¹ Michel Adanson, A Voyage to Senegal, the Isle of Gorée, and the River Gambia, trans. from the 1756 French edition (London, 1759) 54, cited in Cohen 70.

toward perfection [...] Luxury, born like them from the idleness and vanity of men, is such an evil."¹²² In his 1578-80 essay on *les cannibales* of Brazil,

Montaigne writes:

I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation [...] except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and patter of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. Those people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that nature has produced [...] whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially [...] that we should rather call wild.¹²³

Although the noble savage concept enjoyed a "literary vogue," it never conquered European thought since the majority of people continued to view "tribal" societies as savage or brutish and found no attractive qualities in them.¹²⁴ European writers evoked these negative and positive perceptions as a means of social criticism.

In *A Sportsman's Sketches* (1852), the Russian author Ivan Turgenev doesn't explicitly idealise the peasantry, but focuses on a young nobleman who learns to appreciate the wisdom of the serfs who live on his land. He also criticises pejorative constructions of the peasantry, as through the character of the highly refined, landowner Arkady Pavlitch Pyenotchkin, who treats the

¹²² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, Roger D. and Judith R. Masters, ed. and trans. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1964) 39 and 50.

¹²³ Montaigne, "Of Cannibals," *Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957) 150-159. 152.

¹²⁴ Cohen 72-3.

peasants abominably and punishes them "for their own good:" "One has to treat them like children," he says on such occasions, "their ignorance, *mon cher; il faut prendre cela en considération.*"¹²⁵ In an overall criticism of the feudal system, Turgenev characterises another landowner as "man of really exceptional stupidity," while the narrator criticises the living conditions and treatment of the peasants.¹²⁶

George Sand in particular was known for expostulating the view of peasants as honest and pure in contrast to the corruption of civilisation. In the preface to La Mare au Diable (1844), she alludes to the same idea of returning to nature: "The dream of a rustic life has at all times been the ideal of townsmen [...] I have done nothing new in following the slope that leads back the civilised man to the charms of a primitive life [...] Look at simplicity [...] and especially at all that is good and true in the peasants."¹²⁷ Sand's work aligns with the theme of the peasantry as a repository for not only moral values, but specifically national customs, traditions, and languages that have been lost with the advent of urbanisation. Despite the reality of numerous, linguistic dialects in French provinces, Sand writes that peasants speak a more pure language than that which is spoken in intellectual circles: "[The peasants] talk French that is too French for us [...] the advances of the language have robbed us of much of our old wealth."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ivan Turgenev, A Sportsman's Sketches, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Macmillan, 1906) 196.

¹²⁶ Turgenev 262 and 271.

¹²⁷ George Sand, The Devil's Pool (La mare au diable) Hamish Miles, trans. (London: Scholaris Press, 1929) 12.

¹²⁸ Sand 133. See Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen for an analysis of the linguistic diversity

And despite the reality of strife between the peasantry and the church, as well as clerical beliefs that peasants were indifferent to the tenets of their faith¹²⁹, they were still often considered among upper classes to be examples of devout morality. The German poet Friedrich Wilhelm Gleim glorified rural faith in "Song of the Peasant," which emphasises that the peasant's supreme loyalty belonged to God. A review of the 1887 Salon painting Pardon in Brittany by P.A.J. Dagnan-Bouveret claims that the peasants are "seen in their piety and in the radiance of their faith, just as they are [...] and their belief in prayer is reflected in their faces [...]. That's the good and only realism: the *pensée* of the hereafter and the *idéal supérieur*."¹³⁰ Millet's Angelus (Fig. 5) exemplifies the construction of the devout peasant within a setting unmarked by the intrusion of industry.

ART NOUVEAU AND REVIVAL MOVEMENTS

Nineteenth century modes of thought involving primitivism and nationalism became conflated in part due to the temporal proximity of their development and their inevitable convergence at numerous junctures. As constructions of the European peasant were situated into the discourse of primitivism during the late-nineteenth century, domestic populations thus became a component of the increasing nationalism that proliferated alongside

of late-nineteenth century France.

¹²⁹ See Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen 339-374.

¹³⁰ Le Monde, May 7, 1877, cited in Michael Orwicz, "Criticism and Representations of Brittany in the Early Third Republic," Art Journal, vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter, 1987) 291-298.

colonial expansion. Prior to being thwarted by the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Russia was involved in imperial activities in Siberia, the Caucasus region, and East Asia as far south as the Korean peninsula. China and Africa were both partitioned by European countries. By 1900, the African continent was almost wholly controlled by European powers, producing colonial territories such as French Algeria, the Belgian Congo, French Equatorial Africa, Tanganyika (German East Africa), and South Africa. Two intrinsic outgrowths of this new wave of imperialism was a rise in nationalist sentiment and a further sustenance of primitivist tropes (and hence, rural myths) due to augmented contact with non-Western societies.

The equation between coloniser/colonised and urbanite/peasant, while bearing multiple analogies, also clearly diverges at the issue of national identity. This is the point that disrupts primitivism's system of opposition and underscores the importance of rural mythologies in the construction of identity. The power structure still exists in the relationship between urbanite and peasant, but it is no longer a premising of French, British, Russian, German, or Spanish hegemony against countries exterior to European boundaries. Simplistically, is not an attempt to legitimise rule over another nation and its people through military, aristocratic, or economic force or through the maintenance of sharply demarcated differences.¹³¹

291.

¹³¹ I recognize that my definition is problematic considering the complexities of colonial relationships, but I retain its use to enumerate the basic difference between the systems that formulated constructions of the 'primitive' and constructions of the peasant. To avoid embarking on a tangent that would detract from my focus on the peasantry and nationalism, I would suggest Cooper and Stoler (1997) for a far more refined and erudite examination of colonialism. The anthology contains essays on the ways in which Europe was shaped by its colonial encounters and conceptual frameworks.

The differences of the peasantry were less readily sustained in European thought than those of the non-Western 'primitive.' This was primarily because there was a consistent thread in folk primitivist thought, beginning with Herder and the Brothers Grimm, that associated the peasantry with a nationalist (or at least, a collective) sentiment. This thread particularly intensified throughout European visual arts in the late-nineteenth century and strengthened the correlation of the peasantry with national sentiment. Unlike imperial myths that sought to validate ruling authority, the rural myth emerged into an assertion of collectivity among the citizens of a nation, both for internal and external purposes. The palpable evidence of internal cohesion as located in peasant arts and crafts reinforced a consciousness of unity, which was then imparted to other European countries.

The complexity of these dynamics is found in late-nineteenth century, European art movements that impacted the absorption of the peasantry and their cultural productions into the discourses of nationalism and primitivism. Through an emphasis on ornamentation and design, Art Nouveau and arts revival movements also provided the theoretical framework for the specific valuation of peasant culture and its relationship to myth. The movements both overlap and diverge in theories and practices, but are united by a nationalist factor that would impact the philosophies of later artists.

"National identity," wrote the sociologist Max Weber, "is generally anchored in the superiority, or at any rate, the irreplaceability of the 'cultural goods' whose distinctive character is being preserved and cultivated."¹³² This

¹³² Max Weber, Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft (Tübingen, 1922) 629, cited in Wolfgang Mommsen, Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian

is the premise that underscores the Art Nouveau and revival movements' relationship to nationalism. In locating national identity in rural cultures, early-twentieth century artists were drawing upon established constructions of the peasantry as well as ideologies expressed by proponents of earlier art movements that celebrated the ostensibly national force behind rural creations and their decorative characteristics. While Art Nouveau movements are more frequently concerned with 'historical primitive' arts, vegetative motifs derived from nature, and Asian art forms, they advanced the equivalence of a specific, decorative style with a nation's cultural superiority.

In seeking to break down barriers between fine and applied arts, movements in Britain, France, Ireland, Russia, North America, Germany, Austria, and Scandinavia all possessed an elemental framework that revolved around the valuation of craft and the desire to eradicate artistic hierarchies. Their employment of materials such as ceramics, glass, cast iron, wood, paper, and cloth laid the foundation for the appreciation of folk arts, whose tangible quality was considered to be part of its value. (Figs. 6 and 7). "Primitive peoples, however, create their works with the material itself in the artist's hand," wrote the German painter Emil Nolde (1867-1956), "held in his fingers."¹³³

It is no accident that the Art Nouveau and revival movements proliferated throughout Europe and America during an era that was characterised by an extensive increase in communications, imperialism, and

State, trans. Richard Deveson (London: Arnold, 1995) 119.

¹³³ Emil Nolde, "On Primitive Art," Art in Theory 1900-1990, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) 101-102: 102.

international relationships. The motion of machines, science, and technology are as much an aspect of the Art Nouveau aesthetic as the turn toward nature, 'lost' cultures, and traditional modes of production. The hybrid nature of the Art Nouveau "style" involved a complex negotiation with new perceptions of the world and increased contact with 'other' societies. The offshoot of this contact was a somewhat paradoxical response in which artists and critics absorbed the consequently heightened, artistic dialogue between countries, while also attempting to identify and validate the cultural elements that designated their own nation's singularity.

This latter attempt was based on a positive value of the decorative – basically, the privileging of colour, line, shape, and material over representation – which emerged concomitantly with a growing appreciation of the formal qualities of "tribal" arts. The Belgian architect Henry Van de Velde advocated the practice of decorative and applied arts, both of which were a result of the changing evaluation of "tribal" arts due to German colonial expansion after 1896.¹³⁴ Julius Meier-Grafe wrote of the German Art Nouveau, "A single issue dominates the applied arts [...] It concerns the character, or rather the elements, of ornament."¹³⁵ This aesthetic of flat, unmodulated blocks of colour and linear rhythms was appropriated by artists such as Émile Bernard as an indicator of modernity. (Fig. 8a and b) At the same time, the 'tribal' emphasis on the decorative, as Connelly points out, was also considered to be a

¹³⁴ Jill Lloyd, German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 4.

¹³⁵ From Meier-Graefe's "Floral-Linear," Dekorative Kunst, vol. 4 (1899). Cited in Kathryn Bloom Hiesinger, ed. Art Nouveau in Munich: Masters of Jugendstil (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1988) 19.

mark of the developmentally thwarted status of "tribal" societies. Because the European conception of African and Native American cultures involved the idea that their art hadn't progressed from ornamental decoration into naturalistic illusion, the art as well as the people were considered to be incipient.¹³⁶

Lang postulates a similar idea in Custom and Myth (1893) as he attempts to demonstrate "how savage decorative art supplied the first ideas of patterns which were developed in various ways by the decorative art of advanced civilisation. The same progress might be detected in representative art."¹³⁷ The architect Owen Jones's influential Grammar of Ornament (1856), a book of patterns and motifs from different cultures and eras, advanced the positive value of "primitive" designs. (Fig. 9) He links the human 'instinct' for ornament with the desire to imitate the forms of nature and with societies that are "in an early stage of civilisation":

There is scarcely a people, in however early a stage of civilisation, with whom the desire for ornament is not a strong instinct [...This desire] grows and increases with all in the ratio of their progress in civilisation. The pleasure we receive in contemplating the rude attempts at ornament of the most savage tribes arises from our appreciation of a difficulty accomplished; we are at once charmed by the evidence of the intention, and surprised at the simple and ingenious process by which the result is obtained.¹³⁸

In contrast to Jones, John Ruskin decried "primitive" ornament as

¹³⁶ Connelly 56.

¹³⁷ Lang, Custom and Myth 302.

¹³⁸ Owen Jones, Grammar of Ornament (London: Studio Editions, 1986) 13-14.

degenerate in comparison to the morally healthy ornament of Scottish and British design, a premise that was embroiled in the colonial power structure of British infiltration into India. In The Two Paths: the Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations (1858), Ruskin advanced the traditional idea that design based on nature (Scottish and British) was superior to design based on abstraction (Indian). The "meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line" in Indian designs indicate the corruption, lack of knowledge, and base character of the Indian nation.¹³⁹ Ruskin heightens the idea of decorative, nature-based design and the importance of colour in art, a theory also advanced by Gauguin: "Get rid, then, at once of any idea of Decorative art being a degraded or separate kind of art. Its nature or essence is simply its being fitted for a definite place; and [...] forming part of a great and harmonious whole."¹⁴⁰ For Ruskin, colour possesses more power than form, and "discordant" colours should be juxtaposed in order to best express the power of colour-harmonies.¹⁴¹ The critic Herbert Read later rearticulated the idea that the spontaneous, unconscious origins of form, a concept frequently associated with "tribal" arts, are the most significant aspect of art: "Form [...] is really intuitive in origins; it is not in the actual practice of artists an intellectual product. It is rather emotion directed and defined."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ John Ruskin, "The Two Paths: the Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations." The Two Paths: Being Lectures on Art Delivered in 1858-1859 (New York: Merrill and Baker, n.d.) 19.

¹⁴⁰ John Ruskin, "Ornament," The Art Criticism of John Ruskin, ed. Robert L. Herbert (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1969) 186-200. 194.

¹⁴¹ John Ruskin, "Color and Color-Light," The Art Criticism of John Ruskin 46-63.

¹⁴² Herbert Read, The Grass Roots of Art (New York: Wittenborn, 1947) 10.

The creation of a decorative, national style in Art Nouveau art, furniture, and architecture expressed itself primarily in the idea of a returning to a country's roots, whether those roots were located in the past, peasant cultures, or nature. The extensive Art Nouveau search for a national style of design found an outlet in the arts 'revival' movements. The principles underlying the importance of applied arts and crafts appealed to revival movements that were seeking a national self-expression, particularly those in Scandinavia, Austria, and Germany. Even if the movements were not implicated in specifically colonial relations, they were often a result of territorial disputes. In Scandinavia, the late-nineteenth century witnessed political struggles as Norway sought independence from Sweden, and Finland sought independence from Russian control. The threat of foreign dominance and shifting territories gave impetus for an examination of national qualities that were found in folk literature, arts, architecture, and languages.

The Scandinavian movements in particular were influenced not only by the desire to break down barriers between art and craft, but also by the proliferation of "Romantic Nationalism," which sought to locate the essence of that which was specifically Swedish, Finnish, or Norwegian. The "Friends of Finnish Textiles Association" was established in 1879 to revive traditional methods of production and styles, while open-air ethnography museums sought to recreate peasant culture. A major cornerstone of Finnish national identity was Elias Lönnrot's Kalevala ("The Land of Heroes") (1849), an epic work based on folk poetry from the country of Karelia, where legendary heroes were thought to have resided. The myth of this supposition lies in the Finnish belief

that Karelia contained the most exclusively Finnish components, when the country's border with Russia had actually resulted in a mixture of Slavic and Finnish traditions and aesthetics.¹⁴³

The conflation of folk productions with nationalistic sentiment and myth proliferated in different branches of Art Nouveau and revival movements. The effort to re-establish traditional production in workshops and designs is evidence of a desire to create a tangible representation of a theoretical axiom. The elusiveness of "national identity" as a mechanism of collective consciousness provokes the necessity for its constant reinforcement through perceptible media, whether elements of style or design, rituals, ceremonies, parades, museums, anthems, or any number of activities. I would connect the need for this tangibility with Anderson's concept that the nation is an *imagined* community because its members will never know all of their fellow-members and because, despite actual inequalities, it is conceived of as a "deep, horizontal comradeship."¹⁴⁴ As imagined, it requires substance in order to be effective. For Anderson, that substance is found in such cultural products as the ritual of newspaper reading, which each individual knows is being simultaneously replicated by millions of others. The imagined world is thus visibly *rooted* in everyday life.¹⁴⁵

Political myths, military myths, myths of origin, and myths of territory also all serve to support the idea of a particular community, but people require

¹⁴³ John Boulton Smith, "Art Nouveau and National Romanticism in Finland," Apollo, vol. 115, no. 243 (May 1982) 380-387. 382.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson 6-7.

¹⁴⁵ Anderson 35-36. My italics.

evidence of the validity of those myths. If reading the morning newspaper is a ceremony to create "that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity,"¹⁴⁶ so too is the attempt to locate specific, visual qualities of "nation-ness" in ornament and other aspects of peasant societies. The apparent anonymity of folk art production, as well as peasant society's theoretical containment within geographical boundaries, makes it particularly effective as a reservoir for nationalistic origins. Folktales, crafts, and legends rarely bear the distinct mark of an individual author or artist; instead, they evolve into products of a collective memory or tradition. Romantic philosophers expounded the idea that folk art is created from the spiritual strength of a people, thus giving it an improvised, collective power. In The Philosophy of Art History (1959), Arnold Hauser denies this, writes that every piece of folk art, legend, and lyrical motif had a moment of origin and a originator and the folk art is thus "not the creation of a 'people' in the sense of some homogeneous psychic force."¹⁴⁷ Both theories have merit, as certainly these creations sprang from individual creativity at one point in time, but they were by no means isolated from the communal influence and importance of peasant society:

Fine art perpetuates itself from change and is innovative because it is based on a system of interchange peculiar to the elite that governs world society. Folk art can flourish only when its makers and users are in immediate contact with one another, a relationships that may assume innumerable forms and be part of thousands of separate networks.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Anderson 36.

¹⁴⁷ Arnold Hauser, The Philosophy of Art History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959) 286.

¹⁴⁸ Cuisenier 204.

This emphasis on anonymity unfortunately tends to belie the notion of individual creativity, although it is also one of the qualities that attracted modern artists. Because history does not generally grant authorship to the various forms of the 'folk primitive', its aesthetic can be infused with a broad, civic meaning pertinent to all social classes. Unlike David's revolutionary neo-classicism, Manet's contemporary, urban scenes, or Picasso's intellectual cubism, the 'folk primitive' could serve as a means by which to cut through social structures and appeal to a broad sense of community. Nationalism sought to fulfil the same task. This isn't to say that all artists who appropriated the folk aesthetic did so with the intention of propagating nationalistic sentiment, but that the ideological underpinnings of this artistic tendency frequently pertain to the issue of community identity.

Because the decorative, whether found in "tribal" or folk arts, is qualified in part by its de-individualised production, it furnishes a group of people with perceptible evidence, however mythic, of their collective nature. The act of designating certain characteristics as indicative of a community's nature *against* another community also provides people with a tactile representation of their own aggregate identity. This point reinforces Ranum's premise of identity versus counter-identity. The desire for a national style appeared not only in an appraisal of what compromised specific, cultural aesthetics, but more explicitly in a basic reaction against foreign designs and the idea of an international style. German critics derided John Ruskin and William Morris's socialist vision of art "for the people" by claiming that it

resulted in expensive products that "the people" could hardly afford.¹⁴⁹ French designers repudiated the British emphasis on medievalism as archaic and inelegant, advocating instead a national style based on rococo grace that would express French superiority.¹⁵⁰ The French concern with British competition was the subject of an 1851 work by Comte Léon de Laborde.¹⁵¹ Controversy erupted in England over a donation to the Victoria and Albert Museum of several pieces of French furniture, as critics perceived this importation as a foreign threat to British design.¹⁵² The British search for a national style was a recurring topic in the late-eighteenth century, also posited against the alleged lack of character in French art.¹⁵³ The very nature of these movements was based not only on a fostering of ostensibly national characteristics, but also a rejection of anything perceived as foreign.

This structure of opposition is vital to inter-European collectivities and the colonial underpinnings of both Western and non-Western identities. Peasant cultures, ostensibly untouched by industrialisation, must therefore also be untouched by the rise in international communications and cultural dialogues. As a result, they were thought to represent indigenous, national traditions. Because folk art did not produce obvious stylistic changes as

¹⁴⁹ Hiesinger 19.

¹⁵⁰ Debora L. Silverman, Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 9.

¹⁵¹ Léon de Laborde, De l'union des arts et de l'industrie (Paris, 1856)

¹⁵² Hiesinger 19 and Judith A. Neiswander, "'Fantastic Malady' or Competitive Edge? English Outrage at Art Nouveau in 1901," Apollo, v. 128, no. 321 (Nov. 1988) 310-313.

¹⁵³ William Vaughan, "The Englishness of British Art," Oxford Art Journal, vol. 13, no. 2 (1990) 11-23. 18.

academic art did, it was considered to be a contemporary manifestation of an ancestral artistic inclination.¹⁵⁴ The folk emphasis on material contributed to this differentiation, particularly since materials such as straw, wood, metal, cloth, and even hair gave folk arts a direct tangibility. Modern artists could adopt this characteristic by emphasizing the material qualities of paint, brushstrokes, and the surface of the canvas (Fig. 10 and 11). In appropriating the formal qualities attributed to folk arts, modern artists sought to instil in their work a sense of vital simplicity that had been lost in the confines of academic classicism and frequently with an aesthetic that expressed national uniqueness. Throughout Europe, national myths were intertwined with the search for distinct visual qualities that would represent not only a nation's cultural identity, but that would also repudiate the idea of an "international" style. This premise, established by the Art Nouveau and revival movements, would come to particular fruition among certain artists under the artistic rubric of folk primitivism.

FOLK PRIMITIVIST PAINTING

Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century artists and critics articulated folk primitivist painting to varying degrees as an intentional mode of nationalistic expression. Russian Neoprimitivist artists, as I discuss in Chapter Three, were particularly definitive about employing forms derived from folk arts as a specific method of proclaiming national identity. In France, Gauguin's

¹⁵⁴ See Lang (1901).

use of the folk aesthetic was not an overt expression of nationalism, but a representation of the hybrid nature of national myths that centred on the quest for unity while simultaneously rendering difference. I will return to this question of ambivalence in the following chapters, but I first want to briefly discuss the prevalent impetus underlying folk primitivist painting.

Although there was no one school of artists that sought to incorporate the folk primitive form and/or content into their paintings, artists frequently sought the same goal in terms of returning to either a psychic or aesthetic "source." Often classified as "naïve," "neo-primitive" or "modern primitive" painters, artists from European, North American, and Slavic countries drew upon the folk tradition in order to express the idea of an untaught, instinctual simplicity unmarred by academic manifestos. Artists such as Gauguin were attracted to the conception of the folk aesthetic with the reasoning that it would prove to be more emotionally compelling and intuitive, thus appealing to viewers on a universal level. The simplicity, according to Robert Goldwater, was the element of value. For him, primitivism is based on the assumption that the further back a person goes, whether historically, psychologically, or aesthetically, the simpler things become, and that because they are simple they are more profound, important, and valuable. The direct, stylistic influence of "primitive" arts is less important than the desire to return to elementaries.¹⁵⁵

The diverse breadth of folk primitivist painting resists attempts to locate common attributes, particularly since artists who found inspiration in peasant

¹⁵⁵ Goldwater 251. Rubin also writes that his conversations with Picasso frequently revolved around the notion of 'simplicity,' which was used as an antonym for the complexity of salon illustrations. p. 75, note 28.

cultures did so within uniquely specific cultural and historical contexts. Yet the reasoning behind their use of the 'folk primitive' is similar in that it concerns national, religious, psychological, artistic, and emotional fundamentals. The task of modern art, said the artist Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980), was to "give back to man his lost place in nature" and to reveal the relationship of nature with the inner life of humans.¹⁵⁶ Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), in reference to the Blue Rider group, wrote in 1910 that artists must revive the external forms of an earlier age to express inner feeling: "Our sympathy, our understanding, our inner feeling for the primitives arose partly in this way. Just like us, those pure artists wanted to capture in their works the inner essence of things, which of itself brought about a rejection of the external."¹⁵⁷ (Fig. 12) In France, the interest was emphasised by playwright Alfred Jarry and the poet Remy de Gourmont's magazine L'Ymagier, which was intended to inspire contemporary artists to adapt traditions of the woodcut and lithography: "Here, therefore, we shall profit from the old imagery and, through drawing, reflect [...] the joy of a peasant."¹⁵⁸

The association of folk arts with a nation's artistic heritage is a common theme in primitivist discourse, as is the association of other primitivist genres with a source from which to regenerate modern art. (Fig. 13) Medieval art, as seen through the icon tradition, revealed the origins of a religion uncorrupted

¹⁵⁶ August Wiedmann, The German Quest for Primal Origins in Art, Culture, and Politics 1900-1933 (Lewiston: The Edward Mellon Press, 1995) 82.

¹⁵⁷ Wassily Kandinsky, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," Art in Theory 1900-1990, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) 86-94: 87.

¹⁵⁸ Roger Shattuck, "Object Lesson for Modern Art," Henri Rousseau, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1985) 11-22: 24-5.

by the modern world. The art of the insane portrayed the unconscious, uncontrollable instinct at the root of human nature. Children's art represented the exposure of the unconscious instinct that lay at the basis of thought and emotion – the genesis of psychological thought to which the artist must return. "We have to become children again," wrote Philipp Otto Runge in 1801, "if we want to achieve the best."¹⁵⁹ In regard to German thought, August Weidmann labels this search for the origin "primalism":

Provisionally defined, and as the name itself implies, primalism denotes man's tendency to penetrate to the presumed primal layers of existence. Primalism is based on the belief that the deeper one cuts through the historically accumulated 'crusts' of thinking, sensing, feeling – of society, culture, religion – the closer one approaches the original core of things, the truth and mystery of life.¹⁶⁰

Twentieth century scholarship has sought to cultivate the image of folk primitivist artists as emblematic of this return to the source. The folk aesthetic in France is considered to have bloomed with Henri Rousseau, who fused symbolic worlds with the flat, geometric forms of folk art. (Fig. 14a and b) Movement and narrative give way to the stable tradition of icon painting, as Rousseau forgoes spatial harmony and proportion for the conveyance of a dream. Rousseau's work has been critically examined as indicative of 'instinct' – that quality frequently associated with folk, "tribal," and certain historical arts. Art historian Oto Bihalji-Merin writes that Rousseau, devoid of

¹⁵⁹ Philipp Otto Runge, Considerations About Art and Life (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, 1924) 12.

¹⁶⁰ Wiedmann 4.

calculated intellectuality, painted "from the heart" with a spontaneous creativity that mirrors the processes of peasant and "tribal" artisans. "At Rousseau's child-like, magical touch," Bihalji-Merin writes, "nature becomes the promised land, an act of creation takes place, a prodigal returns."¹⁶¹ The art critic Maurice Denis (1870-1943) wrote an essay in 1909 in which he privileged the importance of the artist's feelings and emphasised the qualities of the "primitive" that had been appropriated by Gauguin and Van Gogh:

At the time, the critics reproached us for wanting to babble like children. Actually, we did return to childhood, we played the fool, and that was without doubt the most intelligent thing to do. Our art was an art of savages, of primitives. The movement of 1890 proceeded simultaneously from a state of extreme decadence and from the ferment of renewal.¹⁶²

This notion of "primitive" naiveté and innocence has coloured critical examinations of both folk arts and their aesthetic appropriation. Implying an untaught, unconscious, involuntary expression, this estimation carries both positive and negative values. The positive aspect alludes to an immediate relationship between the work and the creator, as if the work were a pure product of the artist's nature. The negative aspect implies that the work was created without the benefit of method, training, or adequate skill.¹⁶³ The latter

¹⁶¹ Oto Bihalji-Merin, Masters of Naïve Art: A History and Worldwide Survey, trans. Russell M. Stockman (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971) 9.

¹⁶² Maurice Denis, "From Gauguin and Van Gogh to Neo-Classicism," Art in Theory 1900-1990, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) 47-53: 48.

¹⁶³Cuisenier 98.

idea sometimes extended to the critical reception of primitivist painting, but the former was especially cultivated by the artists themselves as indicative of their innate creativity and its ties to the primordial instinct of "primitive" peoples.

These modern artists considered themselves to possess a spontaneous, creative impulse, like that of the child, the peasant, the savage, and the insane, that manifested itself in forms and themes diametrical to sophisticated classicism. Picasso fabricated this image when he stated that he painted Demoiselles d'Avignon (Fig. 15) prior to ever seeing African masks, as if the 'savage' forms were created intuitively, when in fact documentation proves that he had been previously exposed to African art.¹⁶⁴ Gauguin sought to cultivate a similar image, as evidenced in his correspondence: "I live like a peasant and am known as a savage," he wrote, "I am one of the artists who astonish people the most."¹⁶⁵ Folklorists contributed to connecting the myth of the artist with the characteristics that the primitive discourse had given to non-Western societies. Andrew Lang writes that the modern artistic 'innate instinct' to imitate nature was inherited from savage ancestors.¹⁶⁶ This idea of a modern artist's innate 'primitiveness' is as much a construction as the perceptions that constitute primitivist theories, but it frames a critical juncture at which national identity and primitivism converge. From a sociological perspective, the impulse for human association is located in timeless "ethnies" which form the

¹⁶⁴ Goldwater (1967) states that despite his professions to the contrary, Picasso saw "tribal" masks in 1906 in the studio of André Derain. p. 145. Rubin (1984) writes that Picasso viewed African art at the Palais du Trocadéro in July 1907, prior to completing only the first version Demoiselles d'Avignon. p. 254

¹⁶⁵ Paul Gauguin, The Writings of a Savage, Daniel Guérin, ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1978) 27.

cultural basis of a nation. And according to art discourse, the tangible representations of this unity, also products of apparent impulse, can be located in the thematic and aesthetic qualities of folk primitivism.

¹⁶⁶ Lang, Custom and Myth 291.



Fig. 1 – Jacques-Louis David, Oath of the Horatii (1784)



Fig. 2 – Henry Fuseli, Oath on the Rütli



Fig. 3 – John Vanderlyn, The Death of Jane McCrea (1804)



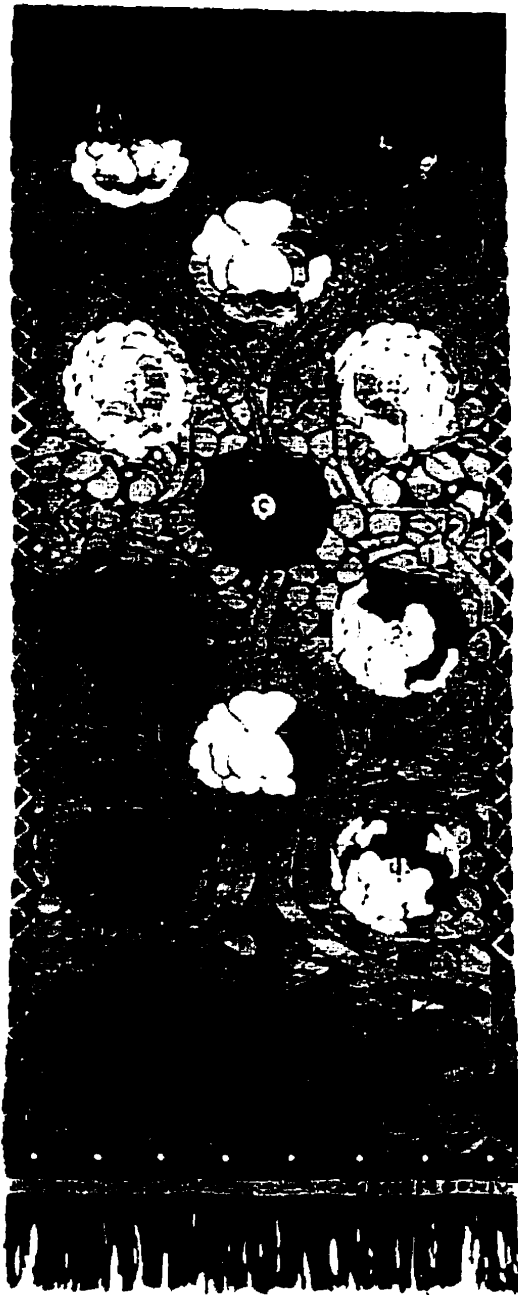
Fig. 4 – Antoine-Jean Gros, Harangue du Général Bonaparte
avant la Bataille des Pyramides, 1798 (1810)



Fig. 5 – Jean-François Millet, Angelus (1859)



**Fig. 6 – William de Morgan, Group of Three Vases
Earthenware with lustre glaze
English (1888-1889)**



a.



b.

Fig. 7 – a. Frida Hansen, woven tapestry, Norwegian (1900)

b. Otto Eckmann, Five Swans, woven tapestry, German (1896)



a.



b.

Fig. 8. – a. Henry van de Velde, Angel's Wake, wall hanging, Belgian (1893)
b. Émile Bernard, Breton Women at a Pardon (1888)

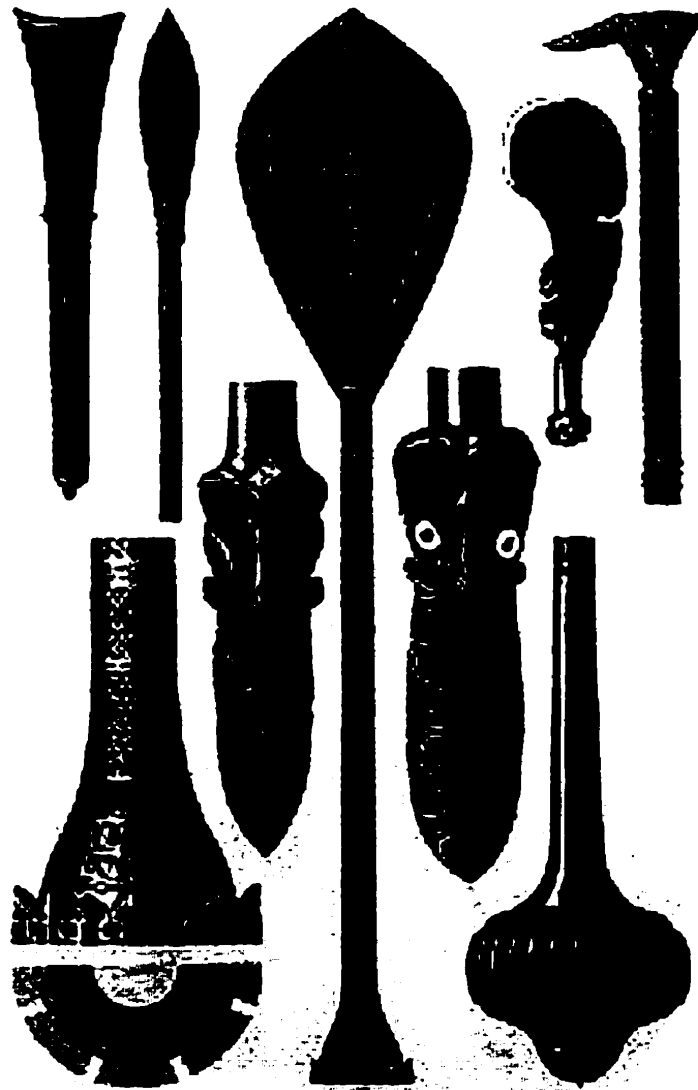


Fig. 9. – Owen Jones, "Savage Tribes #3," Grammar of Ornament (1856)



Fig. 10 – a. Whetstone sheath, carved wood
b. Archery trophy plate, inscribed 1701
c. Cap and hammer pistol, late 19th century
d. Powder flask, inscribed 1793



Fig. 11 – a. Glass painting, early 19th century
b. Marriage chest, 1789-1795



Fig. 12. – Wassily Kandinsky, Couple Riding a Horse (1907)



Fig. 13 – Franz Marc, Blue-Black Fox (1911)



a.



b.

Fig. 14 – a. Accident to a Child, glass painting, Provence, 1882
b. Henri Rousseau, Father Juniet's Gig (1908)



Fig. 15 – Pablo Picasso, Demoiselles d'Avignon (1907—08)

Chapter Two:

Gauguin, Folk Primitivism, and the Rural Myth

It is in the rustic clothes of a farmer and not beneath the gilt of a courtier that strength and vigour of the body will be found.

– *J.J. Rousseau (1750)*¹

Earth in the spring looks gay and joyous, a dark-haired maid who hopes and looks forward; Earth in the autumn, grown melancholy and mild, is a fair-haired woman who remembers.

– *Balzac (1844)*²

The popular tradition of today hangs by threads which ultimately link it without a break to ancient times.

– *Jacob Grimm (1844)*³

Patriotism has retained only two places of refuge: the land and tradition. To realise that France exists and to love her a man must live close to her soil and must know her history.

– *Antoine Redier (1915)*⁴

Pont-Aven is associated with agreeable memories.

– *Dorothy Menpes (1905)*⁵

Originally, religion had to do with the very existence of the social group, which was itself an extension of the family.

– *Ernest Renan (1882)*⁶

If we seek to revive our country, we must revive the sources of love of country: religion, traditions, national memories and ancient dialects.

– *Frédéric Mistral*⁷

¹ Rousseau 37.

² Balzac 323.

³ Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (1844), cited in Smith (1989) 5.

⁴ Antoine Redier, *Méditations dans la tranchée* (1915), cited in Martin 252.

⁵ Mortimer Menpes, *Brittany*, with text by Dorothy Menpes, cited in Pickvance 23.

⁶ Renan 17.

⁷ Cited in Martin 242.

GAUGUIN AND THE RURAL MYTH

Paul Gauguin's (1848-1903) Harvest in Brittany (1889) (Fig. 16) draws upon a long tradition of artistic representations that exemplify prevailing beliefs about the peasantry. The myth of the peasantry as developed in nineteenth century European thought centres around the premise that rural populations were an unchanging element of society whose traditional customs, religious beliefs, and modes of production contrasted sharply with accelerated changes in urban culture. "Modern civilisation has not had time to disfigure the simple silhouette of a village clustered about its quiet bell-tower, amidst a sea of wheat fields," wrote the painter Jules Breton, "Here they are, the peasants [...] On they go, thanking Providence whose image they piously follow."¹ This construction provides one of the foundations of both primitivism and nationalism, which deployed the rural myth as, respectively, the epitome of the simple, pure life and the tangible evidence of cultural unity and ancestry. In this chapter, I reinterpret Gauguin's work within the juncture of these two ideas, as this reveals the position of women in the rural myth and the ways in which they both symbolise and complicate ideologies of national unity. I also address them in relation to issues of hybridity and ambivalence, providing the theoretical foundation for my analyses of Goncharova's and Friesz's paintings in Part Two.

Harvest in Brittany, with its depiction of peasants working during harvest, both maintains the myth of an unchanging, rural culture while

¹ Cited in Richard and Caroline B. Brettell, Painters and Peasants in the Nineteenth-Century (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1983) 99.

simultaneously disrupting the realist tradition through the incorporation of decorative, formal qualities and unconventional perspectives. The scene is a common one of peasant working during a harvest, engaged in an activity that formed the basis of rural life. The women are articulated against the flat piles of hay that dominate the composition and virtually obscure the house behind it. The burst of vegetation on the centre-left helps unify the scene by repeating the green form of trees in the background and also decentres the composition with a distinct colour contrast. In the foreground, a man leading a team of oxen appears at an odd angle, their unadorned forms truncated sharply by the picture frame. The distorted plane of the painting both reiterates and undermines antecedent artistic programs in which peasants were depicted as submissive to the rituals of nature, their lives undisturbed by the rapid industrialisation of urban cities.

Gauguin's representations of Breton peasants and Tahitian culture were produced at the end of the nineteenth century when the peasantry became absorbed into the primitivist discourse. This temporal parallelism combined with his 'decorative' aesthetic has generated a substantial body of art historical scholarship about the "primitivism" of his work.² For him, the primitivist appropriation was a reaction against corrupt Western culture in all its aspects and also a method of promoting himself into the very art market he reviled.

² Jody Blake refers to Gauguin as "the founder of primitivism," while Connolly's thesis refutes this prevalent idea. See Blake, p. 28, and Connolly (1995). For recent criticism regarded Gauguin's primitivism, see Peter Brooks, "Gauguin's Tahitian Body," Yale Journal of Criticism 3 (Spring 1990), also reprinted Broude and Garrard (1992); Connolly (1995); Fereshteh Daftari, The Influence of Persian art on Gauguin, Matisse, and Kandinsky (New York : Garland Publishers, 1991); Stephen Eisenman, Gauguin's Skirt (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern," Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993);

Critic of "putrefied" European society, Gauguin claimed to find primitivism to be expressive of both purity and naturalness. His paintings are rendered with respect to the formal qualities normally associated with 'primitive' arts, particularly the ornamental emphasis on colour, line, and shape fused with motifs based on folk arts, wood-cuts, and "tribal" arts. His emphasis on Breton peasants is frequently included in criticism about the 'primitive' character of his work, particularly in reference to his often-quoted letter to the painter Émile Schuffenecker in 1888: "The country life is for me. I like Brittany; here I find a savage, primitive quality. When my wooden shoes echo on this granite ground, I hear the dull, muted, powerful sound I am looking for in painting."³

Gauguin's use of the word "primitive" in relation to rural societies is neither radical nor unprecedented, as it refers to a predominant supposition among literary and artistic circles that the peasantry harboured 'primitive' customs, traditions, superstitions, and modes of production. Prior to the modern artistic appropriation of the folk aesthetic, European realist artists depicted peasants with either a positive or ostensibly neutral eye, often privileging their symbolic value as archetypes of devotion and durability. This mythic image evolved gradually, having been propagated since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.⁴ The myth of the peasantry as immutable is comparable to European perceptions that non-Western cultures were stuck in a regressive state of being, which generated views of Africans and Native

Solomon-Godeau (1989); Rhodes (1994).

³ Gauguin 22. Also cited in Perry 8, Rhodes 26, and Rubin 187.

⁴ Linda Nochlin, Realism (London: Penguin Books, 1971) 115.

Americans as infantile as well as pure and unsullied by civilisation. Similarly, the primitivist framework of positing non-Western cultures as passive and feminine parallels constructions of rural societies.

These sets of ideas pertaining to origins, gender, and immutability provide one of the contexts in which national myths and primitivist constructions converge. Both were mechanisms through which Europeans could structure and classify the world as well as reinforce a collective consciousness. Just as primitivism locates the evolutionary origins of humankind in "tribal" cultures, nationalist thought frequently locates the origins of a specific nation in peasant cultures. "The nationalist appeal to the past is therefore not only an exaltation of and summons to the people," writes Smith, "but a rediscovery by the alienated intelligentsia of [...] a living community of presumed ancestry and people. The rediscovery of the ethnic past furnishes vital memories, values, symbols, and myths, without which nationalism would be powerless."⁵ In maintaining constructs of unchanging timelessness, the primitivist discourse employs contemporary societies as a reference point, conflating spatial distance with temporal distance so that "they appear to us as present visages of our own pasts."⁶

There is also a substantial amount of art historical scholarship analysing the ways in which visual culture has sustained these myths of the peasantry and "primitiveness" by representing rural societies as constant and untouched by

⁵ Anthony D. Smith, Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 45.

⁶ Miller 56.

industrialisation.⁷ The scholastic tendency, however, is to address the issue of the rural 'primitive' as exemplary of otherness without examining the underpinnings of this association. In regard to the criticism of Millet's The Sower (1850) (Fig. 17), T.J. Clark writes that there was "muted but definite approval. The writers are aware of the savagery of Millet's imagery, but for the most part they call it melancholy, sober, strange powerful. There is nothing wrong with ugliness as long as it is not one's own – as long as it is, without a doubt, an ugliness elsewhere."⁸ Clark does not analyse this issue of "elsewhereness," in spite of the fact that the Millet's painting represents a person who was an integral aspect of French society and upheld as representative of national ancestry. Analysing Jules Breton's Le Chant de l'alouette (1884) (Fig. 18), Maureen Ryan writes that tracing Gaulish and Celtic ancestry to the modern peasant "was an important aspect in the

⁷ See Monica Juneja, "The Peasant in French Painting: Millet to Van Gogh," Museum (Paris), vol. 36, no. 3 (1984); Christopher Parsons and Neil McWilliam, "Le Paysan de Paris: Alfred Sensier and the Myth of Rural France," The Oxford Art Journal II (1983) 33-58; Orton and Pollock (1980); Pollock (1988); Maureen Ryan, "The Peasant's Bonds to Gaul, God, Land, and Nature: The Myth of the Rural and Jules Breton's Le Chant de l'alouette," Canadian Art Review, vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (1992) 79-96. For sociological essays on the multiple issues involving the peasantry, see Peasants and Peasant Societies, Teodor Shanin, ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971). Exhibition catalogues on images of the peasantry in European art include Kenneth McConkey, Peasantries: 19th Century French and British Pictures of Peasants and Field Workers, Polytechnic Art Gallery (Newcastle: New Castle Upon Tyne, 1981); Hollister Sturges, ed. The Rural Vision: France and America in the Late Nineteenth Century, Joslyn Art Museum, (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); James Thompson, et al. The Peasant in French 19th Century Art, Douglas Hyde Gallery (Dublin, Trinity College, 1980).

⁸ T.J. Clark, Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) 145. While Courbet's work was frequently subject to the criticism that it was "ugly," Champfleury wrote in a letter to George Sand that the artist's themes and landscapes "show how closely M. Courbet is bound to his native soil, his profound nationalism, and the advantage he can derive from it." The letter is reprinted in Eugen Weber, Aspects of European Thought from Romanticism to Existentialism (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1960) 135-141. See also Meyer Shapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery: An Essay on Realism and Naïveté," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, vol. 4, nos. 1-2 (1940): 164-191.

construction of the peasant as a primitive 'other' in relation to France's urban population."⁹ Clark's and Ryan's statements both fit within the oppositional structure of the primitivism discourse and the deployment of tropes as a strategy of exclusion, although the very process of finding in Le Chant de l'alouette a Gaulish rather than Greco-Roman heritage, which Ryan very successfully illuminates, is indicative of a nationalistic ideology that seeks to establish a (mythic) collective ancestry rather than exclusively 'otherness.' Ryan addresses Breton's association of a young woman with the land as important to the construction of a Gaulish past, which also bears strong implications for her as an embodiment of the nation.

A similar omission occurs in scholarship dedicated to analysing Gauguin's paintings of the Breton peasantry. Contemporary criticism that centers on the folk primitivism of Gauguin's work has not addressed the ways in which his Breton peasant paintings relate to the critical position of national identity and myths through symbolic images of women.¹⁰ As I suggested in the previous chapter, the colonial structure in the second half of the nineteenth century helped provide the framework through which Europeans could situate the peasantry and reinforce constructions of national identity. If one were to adhere to Rhodes's theory that the overall discourse of primitivism is a Western event that does not imply a direct dialogue between the West and the "Other,"¹¹

⁹ Ryan 82.

¹⁰ See in particular Perry (1993) and Rhodes (1994). Perry does discuss the "feminine other" in different national contexts, but not in relation to nationalist discourse. Brettell and Brettell briefly and uncritically discuss the image of the peasant as a symbol of the nation in relation to a few works of the Czech painter Josef Mánes and the French painters Auguste Herlin and Gustave Brions.

¹¹ Rhodes 8.

the branch of folk primitivism is also an event that appears to take place wholly on upper-class terms and literate circles. Similarly, Susan Hiller writes that the appropriation of non-Western art forms into the body of European culture is an assimilation that takes place entirely on Western terms so that Western preconceptions are not shifted.¹² Following her thesis as well, tropes and stereotypes of the peasantry are established entirely on upper-class and literary terms, a practice that would disallow for any interference in their validity. The peasant and the 'savage' are ostensibly both denied an active role in the establishment of tropes and stereotypes that formulate the primitivist discourse.

While Rhodes's and Hiller's hypotheses are certainly valid, they neglect to take into account recent colonial and post-colonial studies, such as the criticisms of cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, which refute the prevalent idea that colonialism, and thus the primitivist discourse, is a unilateral control system in which the colonised bears little if any accountability. To expand that proposition, the internal power structure of a nation sustains the same theory – the relationship between urban and rural cultures is one of flux and exchange, producing a hybrid space of ambivalence and shifting hegemony braced by national identities.

With that premise in mind, I will focus on an interpretation of two of Gauguin's most well-known Breton paintings, Vision After the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1888) and Yellow Christ (1889) (Figs. 19 and 20) within this contextual convergence. His fusion of rural myths with a modernist aesthetic reproduces the tension between tradition/modern, while also

¹² Susan Hiller, "Editor's Introduction," The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art, Susan Hiller, ed. (London: Routledge, 1991) 11.

complicating the us/them binarism and gendered underpinnings of primitivist and nationalist discourse.

**THE CONCEPT OF THE DECORATIVE
IN VISION AFTER THE SERMON AND YELLOW CHRIST**

Prior to situating Gauguin's paintings in relation to national identity and myth, I want to address the ways in which they exemplify the formal aspects of the decorative since this situates them in relation to both primitivist and modern, artistic discourse. First, the visual composition of Gauguin's Breton paintings are grounded in flatness and the reduction of form found in arts such as Épinal woodcuts, Japanese prints, stained glass windows, and peasant arts and crafts. His Tahitian paintings similarly express a formal synthesis that fuses simplified aesthetics from woodcuts, Egyptian sculpture, Christian motifs, and Japanese prints. As I discussed in the last chapter, an overriding idea of primitivism was rooted in the belief that simplified forms would result in a more direct and impact method of communication. "Don't sweat over a painting," Gauguin wrote to Schuffenecker in 1885, "A great sentiment can be rendered immediately. Dream on it and look for the simplest form in which you can express it."¹³

His interest in simplification as found in the formal qualities of folk arts heightened during his stay in Pont-Aven from 1886-1891, an "escape" from urban society that was an inherent aspect of primitivism for modern artists. As

¹³ Gauguin 5.

art historian Gill Perry points out, the idea of escaping from urban society was rooted in assumptions about the avant-garde artist's role as a rediscoverer of a more direct, 'primitive' mode of expression. This 'going away' or escaping to the margins of civilisation was a crucial aspect of late-nineteenth century avant-gardism.¹⁴ Ideologically, Gauguin emphasised the need to escape from civilisation as a means of finding inspiration:

I only want to do simple, very simple art, and to be able to do that, I have to immerse myself in virgin nature, see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts forming in my brain and to do this with the aid of nothing but the "primitive" means of art, the only means that are good and true.¹⁵

Gauguin initially chose to remain in Pont-Aven due to the inexpensive living conditions, but his acquaintance with painters like Émile Bernard further instigated his interest in the woodcut aesthetic of flattening and simplification, as well as the incorporation of religious motifs. Bernard also influenced Gauguin with the theory of using pure, unadulterated blocks of colour and strong borders to convey the maximum amount of vigour and impact in a painting.¹⁶ Gauguin recognised this simplicity and the value of decoration both in rural, French societies and in Marquesan art, writing that the Maori possessed an "extraordinary sense of decoration" and an "innate sense of

¹⁴ Perry 8.

¹⁵ Gauguin 48.

¹⁶ Wladyslawa Jaworska, Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972) 20.

decorative beauty."¹⁷ The emphasis on colour patterns and simplification as opposed to illusion or imitating nature became fundamentally linked to primitivist ideas of ornament and decoration. The decorative was frequently associated with 'primitive' arts as an example of their impulsive subjectivity, as the critic George Albert Aurier wrote: "decorative painting as [...] the primitives understood it, is nothing other than a manifestation of art at once subjective, synthetic, symbolic, and ideist."¹⁸

The association in critical theories and Gauguin's own philosophies of ornament with the 'primitive' and that which is "good and true" embodies recurrent themes in artistic primitivist discourse. His emphasis on the decorative was noted by artists and critics, as his work was often described in the same terms that designated 'primitive' arts. In his 1909 essay, Denis furthers the association of Gauguin with primitivism: "We are indebted to the barbarians, to the primitives of 1890, for having highlighted some essential truths."¹⁹ He also defined Gauguin as a decorator, "a term which is crucial in his characterisation of the artist's Primitivism."²⁰ Gauguin did not, according to Denis, reproduce nature, but represented it in harmonious forms and colours. In endowing his work with an ornamental, decorative aesthetic, Gauguin sought to both underscore artistic fundamentals and to "find a vehicle for

¹⁷ Gauguin 280 and 281.

¹⁸ H.B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) 32, cited in Perry 21.

¹⁹ Denis, in Harrison and Wood 51.

²⁰ Perry 31.

meaning other than narrative."²¹

The Russian critic Iakov Tugendhold, recognising Gauguin's appropriation of primitivist motifs, refers to the prevalent constructions linking peasant and children's art, as well as the notion of artistic origins in the preface to the 1913 *Salon d'Automne* catalogue:

[Gauguin] cherchait, à travers leur pauvre apparence enfantine, dans le plus petit bibelot primitif, dans l'art le plus anonyme, les racines du grand art, du style. Les calvaires bretons, les arabesques, maories et l'imagerie d'Épinal lui ont enseigné la simplification et la synthèse, au même titre que les dadas puérils – car l'art de l'enfant et l'art du peuple se ressemblent non seulement par leur gaucherie, mais aussi par leur langue laconique et leur esprit de synthèse.²²

Gauguin and the other artists of the Pont-Aven school came to be known by this "synthetic spirit" as they were interested in forming a new ideological and aesthetic approach to art that would explore the interpretation of an object in a way that would reflect an inner state of being.²³

Representative of a number of artistic communities springing up throughout Europe and Russia, the artists of the Pont-Aven school sought to express a form of synthesis in art which broke from the Impressionist aesthetic and conveyed ideas through formal means.

The idea of Synthecism, both in terms of fusing various artistic elements

²¹ Connelly 69 and 71.

²² Iakov Tugendhold, preface to the 1913 *Salon d'Automne* catalogue, cited in Jean-Claude Marcadé, *L'Avant-Garde Russe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995) 36.

²³ Jaworska 7.

and representing a universal idea, played a key role in the overall development of European folk primitivism. A rebuttal to the "analysis" of Impressionism, Synthecism focused in part on the idea that the artist should convey emotion through colour – a direct reaction to the classical dictate that colour should be an supplementary mechanism of subtle enhancement. In emphasising colour, shape, and line, the synthecist artist could relate the imagery to human perception, while simultaneously revealing the mystical basis of sensation.

The folk 'primitive' proved to be an effective means by which these artists could eliminate detail and "go to the heart of things, manifesting their essence and content, instead of merely exhibiting their external appearance."²⁴ The elevation of the formal qualities of folk arts went hand in hand with the establishment of the rural myth within national identity since the cultural productions of peasant cultures were the tangible and symbolic evidence of ancient stability and moral values. "The simplest and most naïve peasant," wrote Sand in 1849, "is still an artist; and I even believe that their art is superior to ours."²⁵ Concomitant with the appropriation of 'primitive' art forms are the overlapping perceptions of non-Western and peasant cultures that constitute mythic constructions of Self (national) and Other identities. Gauguin's paintings conflate these constructions with the decorative aesthetic. Vision After the Sermon was his first attempt to convey the idea of visually expressing a world of feelings and subjective emotions. The fact that he chose a peasant scene to convey intuition rather than reason aligns with the prevalent

²⁴ Jaworska 227.

²⁵ George Sand, François le Champi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910) 8, cited in

primitivist opposition in which the rational Western/urban/masculine realm is set against the emotional Eastern/rural/feminine realm, although as I will discuss, both Vision After the Sermon and Yellow Christ complicate the conventional binarisms of nationalist and primitivist discourse.

Vision After the Sermon depicts a group of peasant women confronted by a vision of the sermon they have just heard at Sunday mass. As written in Genesis 32, the visionary Jacob is engaged in wrestling with an angel in order to prove his strength with God, after which he was blessed and granted the name and land of Israel as a prize. The world of inner revelation is conveyed through the double-vision of the women and Jacob's own imaginative powers. The concept of the decorative is evident not only in the stylisation of form and the cloisonné effect of colour and line, but also in the truncated edges and lack of proportion, both of which heighten the fusion of the painting's themes. The figures are painted in heavy blocks of black and white with outlines that recall the lead borders of stained glass windows. The women, dressed in Breton costumes that emphasise their construction as peasants, appear to weigh down the left side of the painting. Their grouping is counterbalanced by the movement of the wrestling and the angel's golden wings and blue robe. The colours visually place the angel in a different realm than the humans and further balance the scene by drawing viewer's eye towards the vision. The women's clothing contrasts sharply with the vivid red background, which serves to bring together the composition and unite the women with the vision. Rather than relying on depth and perspective, Gauguin emphasises the flatness of the canvas and the material qualities of paint, referencing the qualities

associated with 'primitive' arts.

The visual pattern in Vision After the Sermon of synthesising influences from primitivist arts parallels the amalgam of interpretations. In transposing a religious scene of Jacob wrestling with the angel into a specifically Breton setting, Gauguin not only references biblical themes, but also provincial religious beliefs, superstitions, social activities, and the parallels of rural women to both nature and piety. He expresses the unreality of the scene through the lack of clearly-defined space and the forceful, diagonal breadth of the tree that separates the women and a priest from the vision. He also provides the viewer with an investment in the scene by grouping the women in the foreground and making the viewer part of the crowd, thus blurring the line further between the space of the viewer's world and that of the painting.

Gauguin was clearly aware of the iconographic force of his constructed aesthetic, as evidenced by his letters to Shuffenecker. Of Vision After the Sermon, he wrote to Van Gogh, "I believe that in my figures I have achieved a great simplicity, which is both rustic and superstitious. The whole thing [is] very severe." He adds that the disproportional landscape reveals the fact that the struggle exists only in the imagination of the "people whom the sermon has moved to prayer."²⁶ The fusion of the vision and ritual, both prominent themes in European constructions of primitivism, conforms to the iconic emphasis of Gauguin's work.

He employs a similar technique in Yellow Christ, in which the strong lines and broad, flat areas of colour emphasise the image of the Crucifixion

²⁶Gauguin 24.

transported to provincial France. The crucifixion was inspired by a polychrome, eighteenth century image of a Crucifixion that Gauguin had seen in the chapel of Trémalo near Pont-Aven (Fig. 21), indicative of his continued interest in rural arts and crafts. In his painting, a symbolic icon takes the place of narrative, and the visual characteristics associated with folk art replace linear perspective and illusion. In emphasising the 'primitive' simplicity of rural religious beliefs, Gauguin situates the women in contemplative poses around the cross. Rather than individualised portraits, the women appear as symbolic representations of the pious peasant, a conception also intensified by their distinctive Breton clothing. The cross is set slightly off-centre in an asymmetry that undermines earlier, balanced images of the Crucifixion and that enhances the viewer's ambiguity about whether the women are experiencing a vision or whether the cross is actually there.

Gauguin furthers the sense of ambiguity by structuring the cross in an iconographic reiteration of Renaissance "sacred space." Within the context of art historical discourse, Yellow Christ alludes to the Renaissance tradition of *sacra conversazione* paintings, as Domenico Veneziano's St. Lucy Altarpiece (Fig. 22), in which the architecture of the Virgin's throne does not converge; the top arches are pressed against the picture plane and do not correspond to the positions of the columns that frame the Virgin. In Yellow Christ, Gauguin copies this disjunction of illusionistic space as a representation of an enclosed space inhabited by the holiest of the holy. The top of the Cross is pressed against the picture plane, while the lower half of the painting provides a sense of depth that disunites the image.

Gauguin's re-creation of disproportionate and thus sacred space alludes to a historical, pictorial technique while altering it through the primitivist, decorative aesthetic in a negotiation between tradition and modernity. The flat, yellow hills contrast with the dark, patterned colours of the women's clothing and the reddish shapes of the trees. The painting has more visual depth than Vision After the Sermon, but the primary emphasis is on the formal qualities of painting and surface of the canvas. Composed of planes of colour that distort any sense of naturalism, the painting also reflects the Symbolist idea of "abstracting" from nature²⁷ as well as the sacred, inner world of meditation and vision. This approach was symptomatic of a literary and musical tendency throughout Europe involving a change in perception whereby people sought to reveal the hidden aspects of reality instead of simply imitating nature.²⁸

In art criticism, the decorative as exemplified in Vision After the Sermon and Yellow Christ has vacillated between a demarcation as a pejorative concept and a positive one. While ornament has commonly been associated with the shape and material of the object it embellishes, nineteenth century critics also distinguished between ornamental motifs and styles, then judged them on their aesthetic merit.²⁹ At the same time, classical academia strictly regulated the usage of ornament due to its sensual, "feminine" attraction, which could distract from the dramatic narrative of a work.³⁰ In

²⁷ Perry 20.

²⁸ Eugen Weber, France, Fin-de-siècle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986) 146.

²⁹ See Connelly, Chapter three, and Stuart Durant, Ornament: From the Industrial Revolution to Today (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1986).

their reworking of classical themes, such as bathers or landscapes, modern artists used the decorative as a formal indication of modernity while attempting to elevate its value in art historical discourse. The concept of the 'decorative' has been constantly redefined in modern aesthetic theory, and through its association with the discourses of primitivism, it "has consistently informed the theory and practice of a *modern art*."³¹

Gauguin's emphasis on line and colour in order to express 'primitive' rural devotion through Breton women also took place during an era when the artisan industries throughout Europe were under increasing pressure from technological manufacturing and international competition. This heightened the artistic awareness of an interest in rural productions and their aesthetic values. Textile and wood workers, glass-makers, and metal workers were facing changes in the labour structure that threatened their relatively autonomous status and their control over the production process.³² The threat to the artisanal industry impacted middle and upper-class circles through retail enterprises such as department stores, which increased demand that was more quickly and cost-effectively met through machine manufactured goods.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the artisanal industry had featured more active involvement by women, unlike the previous century's "corporate" structure in which the hierarchy was more firmly centred on male authority in

³⁰ Connelly 58.

³¹ Perry 62.

³² See Michael P. Hanagan, The Logic of Solidarity: Artisans and Industrial Workers in Three French Towns 1871-1914 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); H.U. Wehler, Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte (Munich, 1987); J. Kocka, "Craft Traditions and the Labor Movement in Nineteenth-Century Germany," The Power of the Past: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm (Cambridge, 1984)

both the workplace and household.³³ Although women's involvement in workshops and guilds was rarely independent, they participated in enterprises with their husbands on a partnership level.³⁴ The textile industry in particular became an avenue for working women; in 1891 in the French town of Saint-Chamond, 96.4% of the textile workers were women, a statistic that is more a result of low wages than any sense of emancipation.³⁵ The decorative aesthetic of Gauguin's work reveals the visual aspects associated with artisanal industries, particularly the patterns of textile weaving, thus advancing the concepts of both change and tradition. As women began to play a more active role in artisanal industries, Gauguin conflates this shifting, social position with the maintenance of their folk primitivist constructions.

The rural myth was sustained as a counterpoint to these kinds of industrial changes, which aided in enforcing constructions of the peasantry. Industrialisation also spurred a growth in tourist resorts intended to provide wealthy urbanites with a place to escape the city and find "protection from the harassing activities and the discomfoting sight of the miserable"³⁶ – in other words, a sanitised representation of the countryside. Gauguin's paintings allude to these developments not only in their thematic evocation of rural, female piety and biblical visions, but also through their formal aesthetic that encapsulates the decorative qualities associated with the tapestries and

³³ Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe 1780-1914 (London: Routledge, 1995) 17.

³⁴ See Crossick and Haupt 92-107.

³⁵ Hanagan 144.

³⁶ Weber, France 182.

woodcut forms of artisanal industries.

The formal qualities of Gauguin's paintings are indicative of this modernist appropriation of the decorative, particularly the emphasis on flatness. The importance of the plane of the canvas was a concept vital to modern art, as derived from nineteenth century design theory and the applied arts. Conventionally posed as antithetical to the features of painting, design and colour serve in works such as Vision After the Sermon as an indicator of modernity.³⁷ Gauguin relies on the "concept of a painting as a coloured configuration responsible to the flatness of its format," which emerged from the increasing attention to oriental carpets and non-Western designs through art criticism and exhibitions.³⁸ This concept of flatness is bound to colour, pattern, and formal values, and is important to the contextualisation of Gauguin's paintings within a nationalist and primitivist convergence since it undermines the very constructions advanced by theme of the rural myth.

LAND, AMBIVALENCE, GENDER

In employing the term 'mythology' to the social history of art, Griselda Pollock writes that the canon of art history is a "mythic structure" that "naturalise(s) a particular range of meanings for masculinity, femininity, sexual and cultural difference." Pollock seeks to examine this structure in relation to

³⁷ Joseph Masheck, "The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness," Arts Magazine, vol. 51, no. 1 (Sept. 1976) 82-109: 82.

³⁸ Masheck 83.

"why women are Other to/within it."³⁹ The discourse of nationalism yields a similar difficulty in relation to rural myths that reinforce archetypal constructions of women and also in relation to the position of women within contemporary nationalist scholarship. In redressing the minimal examination of gender power within that scholarship, theorist Anne McClintock writes that all nationalisms are gendered in the sense that they represent relations to political power:

Nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimise people's access to the resources of the nation-state, but despite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to sanctioned institutionalisation of gender *difference*. No nation in the world grants women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state.⁴⁰

One of the functions of national myth is to reinforce this conception of unity despite the realities of "difference." This is the structure upon which European artists and writers were premising the articulation of rural and national myths. A major dimension of this articulation is the symbol of woman as an allegorical figure intended to embody the nation. Within both nationalist ideology and the rural myth, peasant women are maintained as the primary transmitters of a nation's customs and traditions. As such, they are often

³⁹ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 9.

⁴⁰ Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 89-112: 89.

envisioned as the symbolic form of the nation, while men are represented as its chief agents through the state, leading to a woman/nation and male/state affiliation.⁴¹ In many cultures and histories, women are associated with Mother Earth and Mother Nature metaphors that reinforce their alignment with national territory and culture.

The "feminine" land holds an important position within nationalist discourse since land binds the peasantry to the *ethnie*, which Smith and Schnapper define as historical communities held together by shared memories.⁴² *Ethnies* also require an association with a particular territory, either physically or in memory, which emphasises the interdependence between the community and land.⁴³ The immutable constancy of land in opposition to urban society was affiliated with seasonal cycles, rituals, religion, and traditions that provided the mythical underpinnings of a nation. Within primitivism, women are also situated as the nature-based, 'primitive' Other in contrast to the logical, civilised Self, a construction that has often been interpreted as a threat to male and Western subjectivity.⁴⁴

An analysis of Gauguin's representations of rural women within the juncture of nationalism and primitivism underscores the complexity of this

⁴¹ Rick Wilford, "Women, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Surveying the Ground," Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition, eds. Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 1-22: 1.

⁴² Smith, Ethnic Origins 25 and Schnapper 16. Smith and Schnapper diverge in their respective definitions with regard to the *ethnie's* political structure. Smith does not differentiate between "ethnie" and "nation," while Schnapper determines that an *ethnie* is not a nation because it lacks political organization.

⁴³ Smith, Ethnic Origins 28-29.

⁴⁴ See Foster (1985) and Griselda Pollock, Avant-Garde Gambits: Gender and the Colour of Art History 1888-1893 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

symbolism. He sustains the position of women within the rural myth as passive, religious, and connected to the land – a construction of the 'primitive' Other that simultaneously serves as a representation of national unity. As I discussed in the previous chapter, similar artistic and literary constructions existed between 'savage' and peasant, including land-related metaphors. Gauguin's association of the androgynous, Tahitian 'savage' with nature parallels the rural myth's association of woman with the earth: "And it seemed to me that I saw incarnated in him, palpitating and living, all the magnificent plant-life which surrounded us [...] Was it really a human being walking there ahead of me? [...] Was it not rather the Forest itself?"⁴⁵ He extends this affinity to the 'primitive' site of French peasant culture in Yellow Christ and Vision After the Sermon, where the land is specifically tied to national sensibilities.

In Yellow Christ, the straight, angular lines of Christ's body and the cross contrast sharply with the rounded shoulders and heads of the women in a visual reiteration of feminine emotionality and suppleness, as seen in David's Oath of the Horatii (Fig. 1). In Gauguin's work, the women's static poses are offset against the movement of the three men in the background, one of whom is climbing the fence and providing the composition with a sense of balance. The women are further associated with the land and soil as the background hills and trees repeat their curved forms, while the striated sky mirrors the horizontal line of the cross and visually places Christ on a higher plane. The yellow of his body associates him with the hills and strengthens his affiliation

⁴⁵ Paul Gauguin, Noa Noa: The Tahitian Journal, trans. O.F. Theis (New York: Dover Publications, 1985) 19.

as a product of the women's meditation, while his body is outlined in blue that reflects the sky and links him with the heavenly realm. By contrast, the women are all positioned well below the horizon line, situating them in direct contact with the earth and the viewer. Although they do not physically interact with each other, they are joined through complementary colour patterns and through the rock at the lower right that establishes visual continuity.

A similar metaphor is played out in Vision. The women are linked together in an uneven triangle through the diagonal shape of the tree branch, identified by Gauguin as an apple tree,⁴⁶ situating them below the divine vision. The tree joins them to the green, stretch of land that crosses the top of the canvas and represents Jacob's future entrance into the promised land,⁴⁷ in addition to strengthening the women's association with the earth. The dark colours of their clothing and the presence of a cow further associates them with peasant society in opposition to the heavenly realm as represented through the angel's golden wings. Gauguin's positioning of several women with their backs to the viewer, as in Yellow Christ, intensifies their grounding in the mortal realm. At the same time that they are separated from Jacob and the angel, the tree branch helps to unite them with the vision, as the foliage at the top of the canvas provides a visual link and a sense of balance to the composition. Gauguin includes the priest in the scene at the lower, right corner, but the overwhelming impact of the painting is of colour patterns, a vision produced by peasant women, and their association with a rural setting.

⁴⁶ Mathew Herban III, "The Origin of Paul Gauguin's Vision After the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1888)," Art Bulletin, vo. LIX, no. 3 (Sept. 1977) 417.

⁴⁷ Herban 417.

Gauguin's depiction of women affiliated with the landscape also pertains to a pervasive metaphor in which the land is associated with female fertility and national regeneration. In their anthology dedicated to exploring the relationship of women and nation, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias discuss the ways in which women have participated and are symbolised in national processes. They argue that women are cast into five major patterns, the first three of which are "as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities," "reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups," and central participants in the "ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture."⁴⁸ By "reproduction," Yuval-Davis and Anthias mean both human and social reproduction in terms of both biology as well as the reproduction of national, ethnic, and racial categories.⁴⁹ As biological and cultural "producers," rural women in particular fit these categories due to their closeness to the land.

This metaphor was evident in late-nineteenth century literary and artistic circles. Sand refers to the linkage of woman and land in La Mare au Diable: "And yet nature is forever young, forever lovely and generous. She pours beauty and poetry on all creatures and all plants that are left to live and grow in their own way. She holds the secret of happiness and none has ever robbed her of it."⁵⁰ While Balzac's Les Paysans and Zola's La Terre (1887) both address the agrarian problems in terms of the peasantry's war with both landowners and

⁴⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds. Woman-Nation-State (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1989) 7.

⁴⁹ Yuval-Davis and Anthias 8.

⁵⁰ Sand, La Mere au Diable 22.

the uncontrollable forces of nature, Zola's novel in particular focuses on the erotic and obsessive implications of the peasant's relationship with the land. Further, he endows the earth with humanistic qualities and underscores its symbolism as fickle and female:

And this lust of ages, this coveted possession perpetually receding from the peasant, explained his love for his field, his passion for the land [...] And yet, how indifferent, how ungrateful, was the earth itself. Worship it as one might, it would get no warmer, would not bring forth one grain more [...] He had worn out every muscle of his body, had given himself heart and soul to the earth, who in return had barely nourished him, and left him now, poor and unsatisfied, in the humiliation of his senile impotence, while she passed into the possession of another male.⁵¹

Zola's reference to "impotence" alludes to the image of the male peasant as sexual partner to the earth. In contrast to Gauguin's work that visually advances the passivity of rural women's association with the earth, Millet's The Sower expresses the metaphor of the male peasant as inseminator of the fertile land. It is an image of a monumental, almost threatening male sower scattering grain – at once a depiction of a very commonplace, rural activity, but also one that posits the peasant as a generalised emblem of action. The forward, purposeful motion of the sower endows him with a sense of dynamic force entirely lacking in Gauguin's representations of Breton peasant women. The apparent passivity of the women in Vision After the Sermon and Yellow Christ is reinforced by their placidity in contrast to the movement of the men in, respectively, the vision and the background hills. In spite of the fierceness of

⁵¹ Émile Zola, La terre (The Earth), trans. Ernest Dowson (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924) 81.

Zola's prose, the relation of the peasantry to the land more frequently provided artists with a positive and sympathetic image of rural life.⁵²

The opposition of active versus passive compositions also pertains to the basic structure within primitivist discourse that places the masculine, Western world against the feminine, Eastern world. Gauguin's paintings situate the 'primitive' countryside within this same framework, placing the urban, masculine world of industry and progress against the rural, feminine world of piety and privateness. This paradox is represented, in Edward Said's phrase, through a vision of domination in a demand for identity and stasis and the counter-pressure of the change and difference of history.⁵³ In this respect, the paintings also represent the basic, contradictory elements of culture as outlined by Yuval-Davis – the tendency for stabilisation and continuity (Gauguin's reconstruction of peasant women within the rural myth) juxtaposed with the desire for change (the contextually progressive aesthetic).

The "demand for identity" in nineteenth century, European nationalist ideology comprised a gender division that was both reinforced and undermined by the "counter-pressure" of change in the countryside. In my contextual reading, Gauguin's paintings embody these contradictory elements. On the one hand, Yellow Christ and Vision emphasise the fixed aspect of identity through the static poses of the women and their traditional affiliation with religion, while the modern, primitivist aesthetic reveals notions of change and progress

⁵² Nochlin 115.

⁵³ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 85-92: 86.

as evidenced in the artisanal industry and modern, artistic discourse. As sociologist George Mosse argues, the European bourgeoisie sought to create national collectivities through specific notions of morals and respectability that was grounded on a strict categorisation of society. Within that system, women were the guardians, protectors, and mothers of morality and tradition within both the private and public spheres, with community and religion being major aspects of that construction.⁵⁴ In Gauguin's paintings, these dual roles are represented through the individual nature of the women's worship; they are each confined to their own, personal space, their heads either bowed or focused on the vision. Simultaneously, their unity through the land and religion serves to enhance their embodiment as the nation. This allegory discloses the ambivalence of the relationship between woman and nation within the rural myth, which attempts to conflate roles of passive domesticity with those of the epitomatic.

Bhabha discusses ambivalence in colonial discourse as central to the concept of the stereotype. In his definition, ambivalence revolves around an uncertainty between the fixity of the ideological construction of "otherness" and the improbability of the stereotype, which vacillates between what is already known and what must be consistently repeated.⁵⁵ The same theory holds valid in the representation of the peasant as "Other" within the rural myth. The stability of the countryside as a mechanism for retaining traditional

⁵⁴ George L. Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) 17.

⁵⁵ Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 66-84. 66.

values, morals, and spiritual beliefs conflicts with the actual realities of industrial change and the erosion of strong, religious observances. These realities undermine the fixity of the rural myth. This conflict then produces the consistent literary and artistic "repetition" of such rural stereotypes as the private, pious women in Gauguin's paintings.

Bhabha theorises the nation in a similar manner, writing that the nation's ideological ambivalence "emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality."⁵⁶ In other words, national myths of origin, unity, and timelessness conflict with conceptions of newness, modernity, and transformation – the paradox represented in Gauguin's paintings through the articulation of the rural myth through the modernist aesthetic.

Further, as I discussed in Chapter One, nationalism is based on a precept of cohesive unity, a notion that Bhabha recognises as mythic: "The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it simply be seen as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it." Thus, just as the ambivalence of colonial relationships produces a "Third Space" of hybridity, the nation possesses composite, transgressive boundaries that incorporate "new people" into the body politic and generate other sites of meaning, such as "*in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated."⁵⁷ The Third Space is a metaphoric

⁵⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," Nation and Narration, Homi K. Bhabha, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 1-7: 1.

⁵⁷ Bhabha, "Introduction," 4.

location in which social differences and identities are complicated and new structures of authority are set up:

The intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process [...] quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenising, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation.⁵⁸

Bhabha adds that the Third Space is unrepresentable in itself, but that it constitutes elements which ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity and that they can be appropriated, translated, and read anew.⁵⁹ While he finds the origins of the Third Space within the colonial system, this space of hybridity is equally valid within the domestic, social system, particularly the intersection of upper-class and rural cultures. In fact, I suggest that the Third Space is the crux of my interpretation of folk primitivism and nationalism – while primitivist stereotypes of the 'tribal' or 'oriental' Other develop in opposition to European self-identity, *folk* primitivist constructions frequently develop as a component of European identity, complicating the basic framework of the discourse and creating a new site through which to interpret meaning.

⁵⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1995) 206-209: 208.

⁵⁹ Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity," 208.

Gauguin's representations of Breton culture reveal this very intersection between upper class and peasant societies in which rural and national myths function through modes of ambivalence and hegemony. His paintings reproduce the rural myth through truncated, decorative forms that displace the notions of "primordial unity" and a "fixity" of tradition. He situates women as the epitome of piety and national unity in part through their affiliation with the land – common constructions that are rooted in social circumstances and yet nonetheless complicated by the women's transcendence of gender boundaries and social frameworks.

WOMAN AS NATION AND FEMINISED RELIGION

As I mentioned earlier, one of the complexities of the folk primitivist discourse revolves around the ways in which it disrupts primitivism's structures of opposition through the lens of national identity. Nationalism, however, also contains its own structures of opposition. Gauguin's emphasis on female piety, and the metaphoric association of women with the earth reveals the gendered difference within the nationalist underpinnings of both the colonial and urban/rural structures. Yet the women's participation in a unified act, their production of a vision, and their position as symbols of the nation transcends the narrowness of their construction within the rural myth.

The identity negotiations through the rural myth bear similarities to those within the colonial system. Nationalism holds an important position

within the relationship between colonised and coloniser, as it is a primary impetus for the imperial activities of the former and resistance of the latter. The convergence of these systems allows people to reinforce national myths of legitimate rule, territorial ownership, military valour, and historical destiny that are central to their conceptions of identity. Through these myths, both coloniser and colonised place emphasis on the idea of the past, which according to Franz Fanon, "does not only rehabilitate the nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture," but can also lead to a national consciousness that is "only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been." By emphasising retrogressive determinants such as the ideas of "race" and "tribe" and failing to understand the reasons behind popular action, the national consciousness can thus be in danger of reproducing the imperial framework from which it sought freedom.⁶⁰

A similar possibility exists among the relationships between domestic populations, particularly since the peasantry can be implicated in the constructions of folk primitivism that sustain the rural myth. The difference is that the coloniser seeks to separate himself from the imperial structure and achieve an independent mode of self-government, while the peasant remains part of the political, economic, and social system of the nation and even might seek further integration into it. One of the junctures at which urban and rural societies meet is that of the tourism industry.

Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock have examined the ways in which French artistic representations of Breton life in the late-nineteenth century are

⁶⁰ Franz Fanon, "National Culture," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1995) 153-157:

affected by the growth of tourism in the region which provided a "spectacle for the viewer to consume."⁶¹ One of the mechanisms of this construction is through illusionistic representations or in the case of Gauguin, through a conscious primitivization of form intended to convey a more direct mode of expression.⁶² Through these different aesthetics, paintings inspired by Breton culture reveal a picturesque area of France that retained the quaint customs and superstitions of rural life, a construction that belies the actual circumstances of Breton life. Orton and Pollock argue that such paintings conform instead to a constructed view of peasant culture in which life is primitive, pious, and superstitious – a construction in which the peasantry is actively involved through the tourist industry.⁶³ Henry Blackburn, a British traveller and art editor, refers to this participation in his 1880 book about Brittany: "Pont-Aven has one advantage over other places in Brittany; its inhabitants in their picturesque costume (which remains unaltered) have learned that to sit as a model is a pleasant and lucrative profession, and they do this for a small fee without hesitation or *mauvaise honte*."⁶⁴

This involvement, like the colonised person's potential pitfall of duplicating the imperial structure, helps to sustain the myth of the peasantry as a stagnant and 'primitive' segment of the population and also as a crucial

154 and 156.

⁶¹ Orton and Pollock 326.

⁶² Perry 17-18.

⁶³ Orton and Pollock 326.

⁶⁴ Cited in Ronald Pickvance, Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven, exh. cat. (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1994) 20.

element of a nation's past. Nineteenth century visitors to Brittany perceived the distinctive, Breton clothing as exemplary of the archaic nature of peasant culture, when in fact the costumes were relatively recent developments.⁶⁵ In his pictorial appropriation of the clothing juxtaposed with images of piety, Gauguin furthers the mythic construction of rural permanence. The involvement of the peasantry in activities such as re-enactments of religious pardons and awareness of what their costume signifies, as Orton and Pollock point out, is central to the maintenance of this myth. This reciprocal involvement elucidates the theory that folk primitivism is not a one-sided system of authority and that the peasant bears accountability within primitivist and nationalist constructions.

Part of this accountability involves mimicry as a strategy of power or resistance; that is, a form of imitation that disrupts the conventional structure of authority. Orton and Pollock's discussion of the involvement of the Breton peasantry in constructing urban expectations can be determined as a form of mimicry. In colonial discourse, Bhabha writes that "mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite [...it] 'appropriates' the Other as it visualises power."⁶⁶ This exchange, then, produces the stereotypes and tropes intrinsic to the primitivist discourse and can be utilised by the colonised as a mechanism of either endurance or resistance. Upon his arrival in Tahiti, Gauguin expressed disappointment with the culture he encountered, which reveals a form of

⁶⁵ Orton and Pollock 327.

⁶⁶ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry," 86.

mimicry as a way to contend with the French colonial presence: "It was Europe [...] which I had thought to shake off and that under the aggravating circumstances of colonial snobbism, and the imitation, grotesque even to the point of caricature, of our customs, fashions, vices, and absurdities of civilisation."⁶⁷

Mimicry is also part of the exchange between urban and rural cultures, generating the numerous constructions of the peasantry that I discussed in the last chapter. It is also the function through which I read Gauguin's two paintings – he "appropriates" the female peasant (the "recognisable Other"), adhering to the mythic constructions of folk primitivism and enacting an authority of urban over rural and male artist over female subject. Yet these are not unilateral structures of power. Just as Breton peasants were involved in the tourist industry, the construction of the religious, female peasant was repeated within rural societies through women's re-enactments of pardons and spiritual rites. In other words, mimicry on the part of the peasantry served as a means by which to attain some form of agency in the onslaught of industrialisation and subsequent tourism. The women in Gauguin's paintings, while representative of the rural myth, do not appear as passive ciphers onto whom perceptions are displaced because their association with religion and the nation is also a form of active involvement with identity and myth. They are "almost the same" as the prevalent, primitivist construction, "but not quite."

How do Gauguin's paintings reveal this complication? First, they are firmly grounded within the social context of late-nineteenth century France and

⁶⁷ Gauguin, Noa Noa 2.

the conflict between progress/tradition and urban/rural. The peasantry became so closely identified with national identity due in part to their patterns and practices of life. Communal activities, represented through the collective unity of the women in Yellow Christ and Vision After the Sermon, were a central aspect of nineteenth century rural life, centring on the notion of kinship ties through marriage or biological descent – concepts that are also closely tied to national identity. The necessity of maintaining those ostensible ties through obligations of mutual assistance formed the basis of village etiquette.⁶⁸ Weddings, funerals, festivals, Sunday mass, games, and even activities such as cutting of firewood were community activities in which entire villages participated "virtually as a body."⁶⁹ At the same time, personal space existed, as individual groups such as families consisted of a relatively enclosed hierarchy.⁷⁰

Yellow Christ and Vision After the Sermon reveal both the communal and individual nature of rural society. Gauguin integrates the women physically through complementary colours, emphasising the shared nature of church-going and the family unit. The women in both paintings are physically linked, forming the foreground patterning of the picture, which engages the viewer as a participant in the scene. They are involved in unified act that has the same result of producing a religious apparition. At the same time, they appear psychologically isolated from each other, each situated within a

⁶⁸ Tina Jolas and Françoise Zonabend, "Tillers of the Fields and Woodspeople," Rural Society in France: Selections from the Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) 126-151: 132.

⁶⁹ Jolas and Zonabend 147.

personal space. They do not interact, focusing their attention instead either on the phenomenon of the vision or their individual worship and experiences. This association of women with religion further reflects the attributes of rural life.

The construction of women as the embodiment of moral and national values was particularly enforced by religious transitions in rural areas, in which women played central roles. The increased visibility of women in the artisanal industry and the perceived threat to traditional modes of production occurred concurrently with religious changes. Church officials were increasingly concerned with the role of the Church in the countryside, and priests profited from an increasing religious pilgrimage business that both brought income to certain areas and sustained peasant belief in the divine. The pilgrimage was primarily a female activity, a sanctioned means of travel from home and its daily routine.⁷¹ The increase in pilgrimages went hand in hand with an eagerness for miracles in the French countryside (possibly due to the impending turn of the century), which involved rituals, healing miracles, visions, and prophecies.⁷²

Sociologists and historians have considered the Brittany region in particular to contain a profound religiosity, manifested in such phenomenon as the *culte des ancêtres* and the *pardon*, a penitential ceremony dedicated to

⁷⁰ Jolas and Zonabend 151.

⁷¹ Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen, 350-352.

⁷² Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen, 352-356.

confession and absolution.⁷³ Governmental reports in the 1880s and 1890s associated religion with women by claiming that "peasant women" were particularly loyal to the Church and compliant with authority, while men were mentioned as less devout than their wives. The reports associate the growing impiety of the countryside with increasing industrialisation.⁷⁴ This additionally emphasised the symbolism of women as bearers of religious and thus national faith. The extensive growth in the number of women entering religious vocations during the nineteenth-century attests to the increasing feminisation of religion.⁷⁵ In 1889, Émile Bernard conflated the religious nature of the peasantry with the artistic interest in folk arts when he wrote, "Brittany has made a Catholic of me again, capable of fighting for the church. I was intoxicated by the incense, the organs, the prayers, the ancient stained glass windows, the hieratic tapestries."⁷⁶ Bernard's words refer to the two elements encapsulated in Gauguin's paintings – the construction of rural piety and the modern, artistic interest in the arts and crafts of peasant cultures. The paintings also represent the devotional meditation that was an intrinsic aspect of the *pardon*, as well as the idea of the "mystery" play in which individuals enacted episodes derived from the Scriptures.⁷⁷ Both of these customs, as well as the

⁷³ Ford 70-71. Ford adds that the pardons "broke down physical boundaries between parishes and contributed to a regional sense of community." p. 72.

⁷⁴ James R. Lehning, Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France During the Nineteenth-Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 160.

⁷⁵ Ford 94. See also Claude Langlois, Le catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations française à supérieure générale au XIX siècle (Paris, 1984).

⁷⁶ Émile Bernard, "Récits d'un passager voyageant au bord de la vie," Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Émile Bernard, 1888-1891 (Paris, 1954) 30, cited in Ford 67.

⁷⁷ Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Vestiges of the Past: The Brittany 'Pardons' of Late Nineteenth-Century French Painters," Arts Magazine, vol. 55, no. 3 (Nov. 1980) 138.

traditional Breton clothing, interested a number of other artists who had a predilection for folklore, "the past," and the Symbolist idea of personal mysticism.⁷⁸

Yuval-Davis situates the religious domain as critical to national identity, as religion supplies the individual with explicit or implicit answers to basic questions about the meaning of existence. Because of this role, religion serves as a symbolic "border guard" of specific collectivity boundaries and cultural traditions. That is, the mythic unity of a people is sustained in part by ideological systems ("border guards") of customs, behaviour, dress, language, and religious beliefs, which can help identify people as members or non-members of a collectivity. Religion is one of the most inflexible border guards and socially cohesive acts.⁷⁹ Both Yellow Christ and Vision After the Sermon encapsulate the association of rural women with religious values. The cow and the apple tree underscore this symbolism, as the former alludes to the promise of redemption and the latter to humankind's fall from grace as well as a possible return to paradise.⁸⁰ Also within the rural myth, the women's clothing signifies their membership within the national community, which implies the appropriate language, behaviour and customs required of that community.

The paintings further rely upon the belief of internal vision – a vision that is both individual and collective. In addition to reproducing the structure of rural life, this internal/external division replicates the very position of

⁷⁸ Weisberg 135.

⁷⁹ Nira Yuval-Davis, Gender and Nation (London: Sage Publications, 1997) 41-41 and 23.

⁸⁰ Herban 417.

women within rural society, which was centred on a dichotomy between their role within the household and their involvement in collective processes of labour production. Gender operated in the countryside through a distinction between public and private, with women's positions limited to domestic areas and men's to broader physical and cultural spaces.⁸¹ While the actual degree of women's involvement in farm work and village life varied significantly from region to region,⁸² Gauguin's religious paintings reflect the social expectation of a pattern of gender division. Harvest in Brittany, by contrast, reveals the actual practice of working women while also sustaining the mythical association of women with the land.

Gauguin's paintings and the historical conflation of women and land further cast them into the very patterns laid out by Yuval-Davis and Anthias by associating women with fecundity and thus "reproducers" and "transmitters" of culture and generations. The nationalist sentiment at the end of the nineteenth century continued to situate women within this limited pattern of social expectations. They were given a "peripheral position in this project of national construction, their national role consisting of essentially private activities viewed as essentially female."⁸³ This positioning, like that of the colonised, is not by default one of passivity since the exchange between women and the precepts of national constructions produces a hybrid space in which meanings

⁸¹ Lehning 111. See also Lucienne Roubin, "Male Space and Female Space within the Provençal Community," Rural Society in France: Selections from the Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) 152-180.

⁸² See Ford 58 and Lehning, Chapter five.

⁸³ Lehning 129.

are both generated and complicated. As Bhabha writes:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.⁴⁴

This is precisely the theory that my contextual reading of Gauguin's two, religious paintings illuminates: within their world of private meditation, an arrangement that replicates their separated sphere of the household, the women simultaneously take part in a more universal event that subverts the private/public boundaries and that provides a visual metaphor for one of the intrinsic foundations of national identity constructions. The women in the paintings conform to stereotypes of the superstitious, reverent, docile, female peasant, while they are also productive agents in the visionary symbolism of the nation's future. This is a central concept in nationalist rhetoric – the mythic unity provides the basis for a people's vision of their nation's destiny. This destiny is as crucial to national identity as the idea of a collective past. As Renan writes:

More valuable by far than common customs posts and frontiers conforming to strategic ideas is the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, and of having, in the future (a shared) programme to put into effect [...] A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by

⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha, "Introduction: Locations of Culture," The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 1-18: 9.

the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future.⁸⁵

In their production of a cooperative, biblical vision, the women articulate both these concepts of solidarity and sacrifice. This underscores their position within the national project as the link of continuity between past and future and as keepers of the religious and moral values that configured the foundation of the nation. In the paintings, they also undermine that position by complicating the "political" nation of France. Although France has consistently been upheld as the model of the "political" nation which relies on the concept of secularism as a means of unity, the consciousness of a French identity was founded on the precepts of Catholicism and of being a "good" Christian.⁸⁶ The nation, in fact, adopted a sacred status as an abstract entity, undefined and yet capable of empowering individuals through liberty and authority.⁸⁷ This mythic religious affinity did not dissolve with the advent of the Revolution, remaining a strong foundation of national identity – a fact most evident in the pious values that the upper-classes attributed to the peasantry and their construction as emblematic of national ancestry.

In this respect, Gauguin's paintings reveal the ambivalence of the stereotype, as hypothesised by Bhabha, within the Third Space of hybridity. In both Vision and Yellow Christ, the fixity of the stereotype of the devout, female peasant, grounded in historical circumstances, is disrupted through the

⁸⁵ Renan 19.

⁸⁶ Greenfeld 94.

⁸⁷ Greenfeld 167-168.

"modern," disproportionate aesthetic and also through the theoretical linkage of women with the religious underpinnings of national identity. Although religion was ostensibly "feminised" in the provinces, it remained a general and extensive ideal of the ethical values that had been eroded in urban centers. The women in the paintings reiterate a common construction of the peasant women, while simultaneously elucidating the ambivalence inherent in the continuous repetition of that unstable stereotype.

The paintings further negotiate the space between tradition and modernity by emphasising these mythic conceptions of religious unity and staticism among rural cultures, while also disrupting the ideology of a line of unbroken ancestry through the use of decorative aesthetics. Gauguin's appropriation of the folk aesthetic reveals this "temporal paradox," which Walter Benjamin designated as a central feature of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism – the "use of archaic images to identify what was historically new about the 'nature' of commodities."⁸⁸ Gauguin refers to this very paradox in discussing his attraction to "primitive and simple" arts: "In order to produce something new, you have to return to the original source, to the childhood of mankind."⁸⁹

In Vision After the Sermon and Yellow Christ, he employs the mythic "original source" of peasant cultural productions to create "something new" in the modern aesthetic conveyed through the distorted plane of the composition, flat surfaces of colour, and lack of illusionistic space. The persistent emphasis

⁸⁸ McClintock 92.

⁸⁹ Gauguin, Writings 110.

on the idea of rural cultures as a repository of eternity co-exists with the visual break from the academic, artistic tradition. Furthering the temporal dimension, the paintings attempt to span the gap between past and present – exemplifying Benjamin's notion of turning to an emblem of the past in order to express "something new." This representation of a temporal continuum, an "uninterrupted tradition of unity of past and present and projection into the future," is central to the national consciousness.⁹⁰ Gauguin's elucidation of this idea also pertains to the quasi-sacred status of the nation. "Consciousness of belonging to a nation," writes sociologist Neil MacCormick, "is one of the things that enable us as individuals in some way in this earthly existence to transcend the limitations of time, space, and mortality, and to participate in that which had meaning before us and will continue to have meaning beyond us."⁹¹ The same principle holds true for religion and the family unit, both of which provide individuals with a sense of belonging to a community and immortality and both of which are represented in Gauguin's paintings.

The aesthetic of Gauguin's paintings replicates Bhabha's notion of a "divided and disorienting" vision. The women in Vision After the Sermon are strongly separated from the phenomenon of Jacob wrestling with the angel, and the women in Yellow Christ are in part psychologically isolated from each other. Gauguin's tilted field in Vision and his imprecise placement of the cross in Yellow Christ enhances the sense of unreality and the confusion of

⁹⁰ Neil MacCormick, "Nation and Nationalism," Theorizing Nationalism, Ronald Beiner, ed. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999)189-204: 191.

⁹¹ MacCormick 193.

boundaries between the women's private realm and the public, national affiliation with religion. In confusing those boundaries as well as the boundaries of past and present, the paintings generate a set of complications that displace the traditional, social oppositions between public/private and individual/collective while at the same time maintaining the gendered nature of the rural myth inherent in national identities.

"Public and private, past and present, the psyche and the social develop and interstitial intimacy," writes Bhabha, "These spheres of life are linked through an 'in-between' temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image in the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge [...] bridging the home and the world."⁹² The women in Gauguin's paintings conflate those spheres and represent a national integration in which folk primitivist constructions are both sustained and disrupted. This "aesthetic distance" is even more acutely elucidated when the rural myth converges with Russian national identity constructions that produce a hybrid space of ambivalence as an inherent aspect of their social and political framework.

⁹² Bhabha, "Introduction," 13.



Fig. 16 – Paul Gauguin, Harvest in Brittany (1889)



Fig. 17 – Jean-François Millet, The Sower (1850)



Fig. 18 – Jules Breton, Le Chant d'alouette (1884)

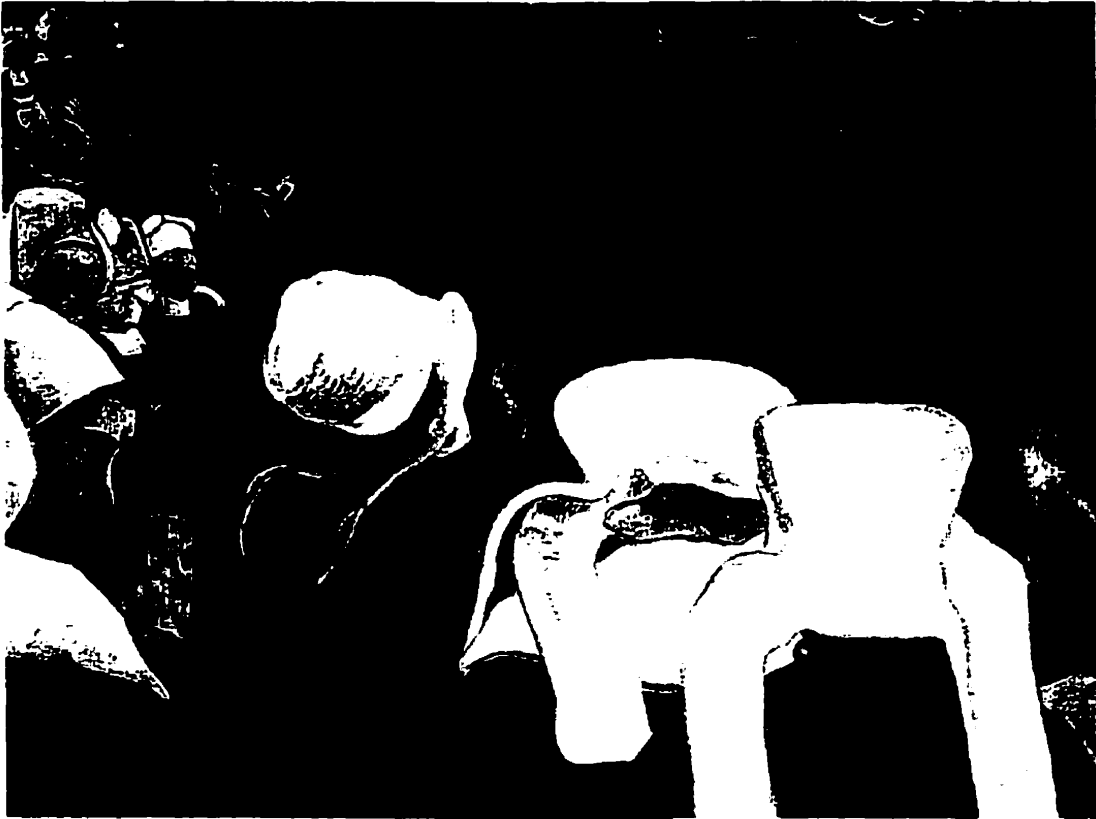


Fig. 19 – Paul Gauguin. The Vision After the Sermon (1889)



Fig. 20 – Paul Gauguin. Yellow Christ (1889)



Fig. 21 – Crucifix from the chapel of Trémalo near Pont-Aven, 18th century



Fig. 22 – Domenico Veneziano, St. Lucy Altarpiece (1440-42)

PART II

Chapter Three:

Natalia Goncharova's Fruit Harvest and the Rural Myth in Russia

Ainsi que l'aigle impérial, symbole de l'ancien Empire, a deux têtes, l'une tournée vers l'Est et l'autre vers l'Ouest, l'art russe est bipolaire.

– *Tatiana Loguine (1971)*¹

Your first mother is Mary, your second is the earth, your third is your own mother.

– *Russian proverb*²

I'm not European at all. Eureka.

– *Natalia Goncharova (1911)*³

Thus in the tiller of the soil there is not a step, not an action, not a thought which does not belong to the earth.

– *Gleb Uspensky (1908)*⁴

Our misfortune is that we all want to speak French and do not think of taking the trouble to cultivate our own language.

– *Nikolai Karamzin (1802)*⁵

The material of the work, and, beyond that, its creative spirit, lies not on the individual, but in the people, in the nation to which the individual belongs, in its earth and nature.

– *Natalia Goncharova (1914)*⁶

¹ Tatiana Loguine, *Goncharova et Larionov: Cinquante ans à Saint Germain-des-Prés* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) 9.

² Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 21.

³ Natalia Goncharova, "Album," cited in Bowlt (1999) 309.

⁴ Cited in Donald Fanger, "The Peasant in Literature," Vucinich (1968) 251.

⁵ Raeff 111.

⁶ Natalia Goncharova, "Letter to Boris Anrep," cited in Bowlt (1999) 315.

BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST

Constructions of peasant women and the significance of the feminine, rural myth as intrinsic components of Russian national identity are inscribed in Natalia Goncharova's (1881-1962) The Fruit Harvest (1909) (Fig. 23). The four paintings furnish us with a visual and thematic program that encapsulates multiple dimensions of identity and cultural hybridity. Each of Goncharova's paintings consists of an isolated representation of peasant women working in an orchard, but together they form a unified polyptych that strengthens the notion of collective labour as part of national myth. While the landscapes of the paintings, particularly those of the far right, do not entirely correspond, the imagery is composed of rich, earthy colours of yellow, ochre, green, and brown that consolidate the scenes into a synthesised whole.

The compositions are further balanced by the relationship of the women to the landscape and their various stages of labor. Reading the paintings from right to left, the first two women, one working and the other reclining, represent the completion of one stage of work. The next two women appear to be approaching the orchard with empty baskets to begin a new course of labor, which is alluded to by the working women in the backgrounds of the far-right and central-right paintings. The young woman in the central-left painting more clearly indicates the initial stage of picking fruit, while the two women on the far-left are engaged in the process of sorting. The bare-footed women are clothed in generously patterned skirts and blouses whose deep colours integrate them with their surroundings and further establish a linkage between woman and land.

This aspect of Goncharova's painting evokes the collective association with "Mother Russia" that formed a strong, psychological underpinning within the establishment of a Russian self-definition, while the decorative aesthetics of the work and Goncharova's own philosophies reveal aspects of the cultural exchange between Russia and the West. Since the age of Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725), the course of Russian nationalism was distinctly marked by an ambivalence toward the scope of foreign influences that had permeated Russia on political and social levels. As in Western Europe, expansive industrialisation in Russia also increased communications with other states and heightened the growing location of a national consciousness in rural cultures. These issues heavily impacted the early-twentieth century cultural realm and form the crux of my analysis of Goncharova's painting, in which a synthesis of ideologies and pictorial conventions reflect inter-cultural dialogues and the elucidation of peasant women as symbolic of the Russian landscape and national psyche. Fruit Harvest also references the desire to establish through the common ties of the folk aesthetic and the myth of ancestry a sense of homogeneity within the boundaries of a vast, multi-ethnic empire.¹

¹ The scope and depth of Goncharova's oeuvre is extensive, consisting of experimentations with numerous artistic styles such as Cubism, Futurism, Impressionism, Rayonism, and including stage sets and costumes for the *Ballets Russes*. For recent criticism of Goncharova's work and women artists of the Russian avant-garde, see Amazons of the Avant-Garde, exh. cat., eds. John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999); Valentine Marcadé, L'Avant-Garde au féminin: Moscou, St. Petersburg, Paris (1907-1930) (Paris: Artcurial, 1983); Anthony Parton, Natalia Gontcharova and the Ballets Russes, exh. cat. (London: Julian Barran, Ltd, 1996); Jane A. Sharp, "Redrawing the Margins of Russian Vanguard Art: Natalia Goncharova's Trial for Pornography in 1910," Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture, eds. Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Nathalie Gontcharova, Michel Larionov, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995); Jane A. Sharp, Primitivism, Neoprimitivism, and the Art of Natalia Goncharova 1907-1914 (unpublished diss., Yale University, 1992). Sharp's dissertation includes an extensive list of Russian-language sources for Goncharova and the avant-garde; Myuda Yablonskaya, Women Artists of Russia's New Age (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990). Biographical literature includes Marina Tsvetaeva's 1929 work, Nathalie

The effort to define what constituted Russian identity induced a strong turn toward the peasantry in the years following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, a theme that attracted many of the Neoprimitivist artists. With the free peasantry constituting the vast majority of the Russian population, they became the subject of traveller reports, ethnographic studies, fictional writings, political doctrines, scientific analyses and visual arts. Within these explorations, artists and writers began to formulate certain archetypes of rural societies that ranged from idealised perceptions of the peasantry to a view of them as ignorant and superstitious.² The establishment of tropes and stereotypes strongly paralleled similar developments in France, although in Russia the constructions of the peasantry were more solidly imprinted on national sensibility as a mechanism through which to react against the West, in addition to defining a Russian heritage.

The tension between Russia and the West came to characterise the basic nature of Russian nationalistic philosophies. Western ideas and customs were associated in literature and philosophies with the corrupt, metropolitan world of the city and the upper class, while rural cultures, which had escaped these influences, retained the qualities of a more pure Russian character. In light of this division of loyalties, the Neoprimitivist movement's interest in rural culture can be interpreted on one level as a reaction against Russia's rapid technological progress "and hence as a symptom of disillusionment in a

Gontcharova (Paris: Éditions Clémence Hiver, 1991) and Mary Chamot, Gontcharova (Paris: Bilibiothèque des arts, 1972).

² See Cathy A. Frierson, Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 9.

positivist, materialist society."³ The impetus for admiring the standard of the West was set by Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796) and Peter the Great, both of whom saw themselves as extensions of the state and identified their own interests and glory with those of Russia. Part of their legacy was to move Russia in a Western direction and to make the nation "European" through the institution of new school and governmental systems modelled after France and through a proliferation of European philosophies. Most people initially greeted this idea with admiration, viewing the West as the model to which their own nation must strive. However, Russians soon began to resent the political systems and cultural advances of the West and rejected them as an adequate model for Russia.⁴

The dichotomy of the development of Russian nationalism came to the attention of Western European philosophers. Jean-Jacques Rousseau even deplored the efforts of Peter the Great to "westernise" Russians, claiming that had they rejected the false civilisation of the West, they would be much closer to the virtuous, primitive man.⁵ Rousseau's idealisation of the village and the peasant was a common trend in eighteenth century European literature, but while Russian authors appropriated the same theme, they recognised that the development of a specifically national literature required a shedding of Western literary influences:

³ John Bowl, "Neo-Primitivism and Russian Painting," Burlington Magazine, vol. CXVI, no. 852 (March 1974) 134.

⁴ Greenfeld 250.

⁵ Hans Rogger, National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960) 128.

Whenever and wherever a national literature wanted to come into its own, it had first to shed the confinement of European classicism as defined in France, to rediscover and to reassert its own literary and historical tradition. The decline and final unseating of classicism was a necessary prerequisite for the full emergence of the folk and the nation in the history of Russian literature and national consciousness.⁶

A parallel requirement occurred in the realm of the visual arts as Russian artists sought to displace the formal and ideological precepts developed in France because to them they represented the negative influence of the West. Yet while seeking the origins of distinctly national art forms in peasant and religious cultures, Russian artists remained affected by Western aesthetics. Like French and German painters, Russian avant-garde artists frequently drew upon folk themes and constructions while emphasising the decorative qualities of colour and line, all of which contribute to the visual weight of Fruit Harvest. The synthetic nature of Goncharova's work maintains parallels with the overall scope of the avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century and Russian nationalism. As Russian art historian Dimitri Sarabianov writes, Russian art in the pre-Revolutionary decade was characterised by an exchange between new and the old, a "synthesis of centuries and different stages of evolution," and a "superimposition" of western and indigenous influences. He situates this phenomenon within the composite nature of Russian philosophy, religion, society, and politics that occurred at the

⁶ Rogger 139.

same time.⁷ As stated by the poet Alexander Blok, Russian culture consisted of a synthesis of elements whereby the artists should remember the painter, musician, and architect. This cultural fusion mirrored the fusion of philosophy, religion, and politics within Russian society, creating a "footprint" of national culture.⁸ What makes the Neoprimitivist branch of Russian art both culturally specific and dynamic is that the concentration of disparate elements was transformed into artistic systems that both absorbed and shaped national identity in the early twentieth century.

Within that context, Neoprimitivist artists were often caught in the shifting force fields of attraction to and revulsion from European culture (the condition Bhabha sets forth for the relationship between colonised/coloniser) as they sought to simultaneously redefine their dialogue with the West and promulgate their own visual representations of national identity. As I suggested in the last chapter, Bhabha's theory of the colonial Third Space can also be applied to the juncture between urban and rural cultures, particularly since the folk primitivist discourse derives its framework in part from the constructions of non-Western peoples and their art forms. I would add that within the context of Goncharova's work and Fruit Harvest in particular, the Third Space bears further significance as a composite site in which the Russian-Western cultural dialogue brings to light pertinent issues of national identity and complicates the construction of rural myth through the symbolic

⁷ Dimitri Sarabianov, "Noveishie techeniia v russkoi zhivopisi predrevoliutsionnogo desiatiletiia: Rossiia i zapad," (Newest Tendancies in Russian Painting of the Pre-Revolutionary Decade: Russia and West). Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie. No. 1 (1980) 117-160: 117.

figures of peasant women.

NEOPRIMITIVISM AND ARTISTIC DEBATES

Prior to narrowing my focus on Goncharova's Fruit Harvest and issues of cultural hybridity, I want to briefly examine some of the ways in which issues of nationalism and ambivalence with Western traditions affected the artistic realm at the beginning of the twentieth century. Goncharova's art and philosophies of the period from 1907-1912 were influenced by the numerous ideologies, both historical and current, that developed around the relationship of art to national identity.

Born in 1881 in the village of Nagaevo in the Tula province, Natalia Goncharova possessed an early interest in the arts, crafts, tales, and music of the peasantry. When she was eleven, her architect father sent her to school in Moscow, where she entered the *Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* in 1901. The shift from Nagaevo to Moscow would come to affect her artistic oeuvre, as the contradictions between country and city life appear in many of her paintings.⁹ At the Moscow school, she met her life-long partner, Mikhail Larionov, and became associated with the artists of Sergei Diaghilev's *World of Art* movement, a conglomerate of artists, writers, and critics which eventually came to represent the Russian avant-garde in the early-twentieth century. One of their main goals was to establish Russia as a major

⁸ Sarabianov 121-122.

⁹ Jane A. Sharp, "Natalia Goncharova," Amazons of the Avant-Garde, eds. John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999) 156.

international art centre; thus, they sought to renew ties with German, French, and British art movements as well as encouraging an interest in Russian national heritage.¹⁰ This dual purpose was a component of a wide-spread ambivalence towards Western artistic culture.

Founded as an alternative to the Imperial Academy, the curriculum of the Moscow school grounded both Goncharova and Larionov in this debate between the value of Russian arts and those of the West. The school tolerated an eclecticism among students and faculty in terms of encouraging modernist, painterly techniques and an emphasis on the individuality of the artist, both of which were unacceptable at the classical-based academy.¹¹ The influence of modern, French painting (particularly Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, and Impressionism) among the students of the Moscow school enhanced debates about the legitimacy of new trends in Western art and their significance for Russian culture. "One can only hope that 'student impressionism' will not hold out for long among our youth," wrote a reviewer for the 16th student exhibition of the Moscow school, "and that those with true ability [...] will recognise its cheapness and will leave it to complete and indiscriminate use by charlatans."¹² Writers further criticised the influence of "alien or foreign" forms given the rich heritage of Russian art traditions to which artists should look for inspiration.¹³

¹⁰ Camilla Gray, The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962) 39.

¹¹ Sharp, "Primitivism," 60-62.

¹² Sharp, "Primitivism," 78 and 80.

¹³ Sarabianov 129.

These debates about the cultural expression of national identity shaped the development of Russian Neoprimitivism, an artistic discourse and practice that came to fruition in the early years of the twentieth century with Goncharova as one of its principal artists. The term "Neoprimitivism" was coined retrospectively in 1913 by the artist and critic Alexander Shevchenko (1888-1978) who, inspired by Goncharova's œuvre,¹⁴ sought to codify the movement's theories in his essay Neoprimitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements. He advocated a turn towards the East as a mechanism of separating Russian art from Western traditions and makes it clear that Neoprimitivist art should not be derivative of only one tradition, but should be composed of a synthesis of elements:

Hence, neoprimitivism, while deriving its genesis from the East, is nevertheless not the repetition or popularisation of it - which always so debases any art; no, it is entirely original. In it, to a great extent, is reflected the East, for example, in interpretation and in traditions, but one's own national art also plays a large part, just as children's art does - this unique, always profound, genuine primitivism; art in which our Asiatic origin is evident in its entirety [...] Nor is neoprimitivism alien to Western forms.¹⁵

This fusion of elements was the primary element of Goncharova's work of this period, which is characterised by its integrative qualities; that is, that she and other avant-garde artists sought to promote national identity via a visual synthesis of Russian folk arts, the icon tradition, Eastern art forms, and

¹⁴ Sharp, "Natalia Goncharova," 159.

¹⁵ Alexander Shevchenko, Neo-primitivizm. Ego Teoriya. Ego vozmozhnosti. Ego dostizheniya. (Moscow, 1913). In Russian Art of the Avant-Garde, Theory and Criticism 1902-1934, ed. and trans. John Bowlt (New York, Viking Press, 1976) 41-54: 49.

French influences. However, this syntheicism was not limited to her Neoprimativist period; for example, her war graphics series of 1914 recalls her earlier work combined with new iconographical systems.¹⁶ Varsonaphie Parkine refers to the synthetic nature of Goncharova's art when he wrote in 1913 that her work "comprend des compositions réalistes, religieuses et paysannes, ainsi qu'un cycle d'œuvres de styles divers: vénitien, chinois et futuriste, égyptien et cubiste, byzantin et style loubok russe, de la broderie russe et des plateaux peints, sans compter le style des peintres d'enseignes et le style rayonniste."¹⁷ The critic Iakov Tugendhold both acknowledges and praises Goncharova's immense productivity (she contributed close to 800 paintings to her 1914 retrospective exhibition), while at the same time remarking that her obligation to pay tribute to one "ism" after another from Monet to Gauguin to Van Gogh failed to allow her to deepen her own talent.¹⁸ "Le malheur est que ces 'ismes' prennent de l'importance," Tugendhold writes, "qu'ils nuisent à l'art de Gontcharova."¹⁹

Tugendhold's remark is characteristic of the contentious debate surrounding Western influences, as critics saw the artistic reliance on Western

¹⁶ Nina Gurianova, "Voennye Graficheskie Tsikly N. Goncharovoi i O. Rosanovi" (War graphic series of Natalie Goncharova and Olga Rozanova) Panorama Iskusstv (Moscow), vol. 12 (1989) 63-88: 64.

¹⁷ V. Parkine, "Les Expositions La Queue d'Ane et La Cible," Une Avant-Garde Explosive, eds. and trans. Michel Hoog and Solina de Vignerat (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1978) 53. Jane Sharp writes that Parkine might be a pseudonym for Larionov. See Sharp, Amazons of the Avant-Garde, p. 159.

¹⁸ Iakhov Tugendhold, "L'Exposition des tableaux de Natalia Gontcharova," In Art et Poésie Russes 1900-1930, Textes Choisis, eds. Olga Makhroff and Stanislas Zadora (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979) 82.

¹⁹ Tugendhold, "L'Exposition," 85. His italics.

models as a threat to the Russian art world and the ability of painters to establish their own points of view.²⁰ The harsh critical reaction to a 1908 exhibition entitled *The Link* reinforced the call for artists to turn away from Russian models. Organised by the artists Alexandra Exter and the Burliuk brothers, the exhibition was crucial in establishing "the young Russians' dialogue with French modernism, a dialogue that continued until 1914," and one that identified Van Gogh, Cezanne, and Gauguin as their chief source of inspiration.²¹ Many Russian paintings exhibit the formal influences of these artists, as in Larionov's *The Gypsy*, whose broadly-outlined forms and planes of colour can be traced to Gauguin (Fig. 24). *The Link* exhibition also created an important connection between the Russian arts-and-crafts movement and the fledgling avant-garde, as artists like Exter exhibited embroidery alongside their paintings.²²

In 1910, Goncharova and Larionov formed the *Knave of Diamonds* exhibition society, which was consciously intended to create new art forms and traditions that were based on Russian folk culture, including toys, embroidery, signboards, popular prints, folklore, and icons.²³ At the same time, the work of many Neoprimitivist artists bore a sustained influence from French art,

²⁰ Anthony Parton, *Mikhail Larionov and the Russian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 17.

²¹ Parton 16.

²² Charlotte Douglas, "Six (and a few more) Russian Women of the Avant-Garde Together," *Amazons of the Avant-Garde*, eds. John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999) 39-57: 41.

²³ Bowlt writes that the title *Knave of Diamonds* most probably derived from the diamond-shaped designs on the uniforms of civil prisoners. This association was in keeping with the social position of avant-garde artists "who were themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, revolutionaries." "Neo-primitivism and Russian Painting," 138.

particularly Matisse and Cubism, as well as German expressionism. The continuing reliance on the West eventually led Goncharova and Larionov to break from the *Knave of Diamonds* and form a new organisation called *The Donkey's Tail*, which included the artists Kasimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin. Dismissing the continued reliance of the *Knave of Diamonds* on Western art traditions, *The Donkey's Tail* was intended to be solely grounded in Russian artistic traditions. In a response to the influences of French Cubism on Russian avant-garde artists, Goncharova wrote that the same formal principles could be found in earlier 'primitive' art forms:

Cubism is a positive phenomenon, but it is not altogether a new one. The Scythians made their stone maidens in this style of blessed memory, wonderfully painted, wooden dolls are sold at our fairs. These are sculptural works, but in France, too, it was the Gothic and Black sculpture representations that served as the departure-point for Cubist painting.²⁴

The criticism regarding the artistic influence of Western modernism had wider roots. Goncharova's affiliation of folk and 'primitive' arts with national "memory" and the avant-garde employment of Impressionist, Cubist, and Fauve techniques was a phenomenon that paralleled the larger scope of Russian nationalism. Russian intellectuals had been vaguely divided for

²⁴ Natalia Goncharova, from a speech at the 'Knave of Diamonds' debate in 1912 which she later transcribed as "Pismo k redaktoru 'Russkogo slova,'" ("Letter to the Editor"). This letter to the journal *Russkoe slovo* (Russian Word) was published in a Moscow newspaper on 3 March, 1912. Reprinted in *Amazons of the Avant-Garde*, eds. John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999) 131. A French translation by Tatiana Loguine and Tessa Radjine is in *Tatiana Loguine, Gontcharova et Larionov: Cinquante ans à Saint Germain-des-Prés* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) 21-23. A shorter English version appears in *Bowlt* (1976) as the "Knave of Diamonds" speech. The translation I use is by Thea Durfee, "Natalia Goncharova," *Experiment*, vol. 1 (July 1995) 159-67. 162.

centuries between Westernisers and Slavophiles, with the former believing in the value of Western historical developments, and the latter assuming a basic distinction between Russia and the West. The two modes of thought in the nineteenth century together elucidate the continuing ambivalence that characterised Russian nationalism. Both ideas were based on a feeling of *ressentiment* and rejection of the West, but Westernisers saw fulfilment of Russian ideal following the method developed by Europe as the only way towards progress. They saw Russia as a Western country, but one that would bring to fruition the principles that had been lost in the current, decadent Europe. Continuing the ideological train of Peter the Great's reforms, the movement sought the continuing Westernisation of Russian society.²⁵

Slavophiles, on the other hand, thought the superiority of Russia lay in the fact that it was *not* a Western nation. Rather than individual freedom and liberty in a political sense, Slavophiles advocated the principle of the individual's dissolution in community, a principle that expressed itself in true, perfect nations. Russia had already proven its superiority via the Russian Orthodox Church and the collectivity of the peasant commune, which was made up of people who had theoretically renounced their individuality and egoism.²⁶ The effect of the Slavophile movement led to an increased interest in the Slavic past, ethnographical preservation of folk arts and customs, and archaeological expeditions. Aleksei Khomiakov, a Slavophile leader, asked of state-sponsored arts: "What is there in common between the Russian soul and

²⁵ Greenfeld 267.

²⁶ Greenfeld 266.

Russian art? Nourished on alien thought, foreign examples, under foreign influence, does it show any signs of Russian life?"²⁷ Rather than relying on Western developments, Slavophiles called for artists to unite themselves with the Russian land and people, a philosophy that would strongly impact Neoprimitivist artists.

Unlike nationalism in most Western countries, nationalism in Russia ultimately did not serve as a strong, unifying factor because of the disparate relationship between the tsarist state and the people. The popular nationalist movement could not view the state as the embodiment of national purpose, while the state viewed all autonomous expressions of nationalism with fear and suspicion.²⁸ The Russian nationalist ideology thus remained a cultural or psychological phenomenon rather than a political one,²⁹ which subsequently meant that it lent itself more conveniently to artistic manifestations, as I will discuss in relation to Goncharova's work. By contrast, the ostensibly political character of Western nationalisms such as France was transformed into more muted and ambiguous visual references that referenced national identity on a less premeditated level.

Despite this difference, much of the philosophical foundation of Russian nationalism developed as a result of Western influences or because the West provided a standard of judgement. "The West was an integral, indelible part of

²⁷ Cited in Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, "The Intelligensia and Art," Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 153-171: 156.

²⁸ Hans Rogger, "Nationalism and the State: A Russian Dilemma," Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 4 (1961-2) 253.

²⁹ Rogger, "Nationalism," 254.

the Russian *national* consciousness," writes sociologist Liah Greenfeld, "There simply would be no sense in being a nation if the West did not exist."³⁰ Part of this consciousness rested on the notion that Russian foundations might be in jeopardy – the rise of nationalism had given a degree of internal cohesion to Western states that was threatening to dynastic, more traditional governments.³¹ With Europe consistently upheld as a standard of judgement, writers and critics both extolled the West as an ideal model and also criticised it for tarnishing Russian society. Within this context, the ideological foundation of Russian nationalism was essentially hybrid in nature, composed of a synthesis of imported and indigenous ideas that flourished in the nineteenth century. Romanticism helped transform intellectual discourse during this time, as it allowed for the idea that the creative philosopher or artist represented the consciousness of the nation.³²

Russian avant-garde artists followed this very path in their simultaneous absorption and denial of Western precepts. In his book on Larionov and the avant-garde, Anthony Parton writes that the folk primitivism of French and German artists influenced Larionov in the sense that within artistic discourse, primitivism appeared to be a question that should be addressed by modern artists. Therefore, in an effort to analyse the same issues as Western European artists, Russian artists turned to indigenous art forms.³³ Sarabianov states that

³⁰ Greenfeld 254.

³¹ Rogger, "Nationalism," 255.

³² Nicholas Riasanovsky, "Notes on the Emergence and Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia," Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 12.

³³ Parton 26.

while Neoprimitivism was a strong incentive for cementing national trends and moving away from Western art, the movement was paradoxically "closing in on" it through expressionist aesthetics.³⁴ The Neoprimitivist movement, like nationalism in general, thus developed in part from an assimilation of Western and particularly French ideologies. The synthetic nature of both nationalism and Neoprimitivism then allowed Russian artists to use some of the precepts as a reaction against the very cultures from which they derived. Goncharova exhibits this ambivalence in the preface to her own 1913 exhibition, where she severely dismisses the West while continuing to acknowledge its aesthetic influence in her work:

Contemporary Western ideas (mainly of France; it is not worth talking of the others) can no longer be of any use to us. And the time is not far off when the West will be learning openly from us [...] I shake off the dust of the West, and I consider all those people ridiculous and backward who still imitate Western models [...] I express my deep gratitude to Western painters for all they have taught me [...] I aspire toward nationality and the East, not to narrow the problems of art but, on the contrary, to make it all-embracing and universal.³⁵

Goncharova also issued a press statement in 1911 in which she responded to the debate about the value of Western influences and called for the preservation of Russian folk arts and industries. "I do not mean to say that foreign influences are harmful," she said, "But the foreign must be merged with one's own. Only in this manner will that great force be created which will

³⁴ Sarabianov 130.

³⁵ Natalia Goncharova, "Preface to Catalogue of One-Man Exhibition, 1913," in Bowlt (1976) 54-60. 57 and 60.

move art forward."³⁶ Her statement is the first by a Russian avant-garde artist arguing for the need to elevate the qualities of the popular and ancient arts of Russia.³⁷ Rather than purely imitating French and German aesthetic forms, Goncharova reinterpreted them within the context of Russian indigenous arts, thus deliberately instilling the aesthetic with nationalistic values. A pictorial and philosophical synthesis, a "deepening of cultural remembrance" combined with the desire to visually transcend temporal boundaries were fundamental characteristics of Neoprimitivist discourse.³⁸ This event takes place squarely within Bhabha's conception of the Third Space where the unstable symbols of culture are appropriated and read anew.³⁹ "Larionov and Goncharova sought to assimilate the pictorial language of Russian visual culture and express it afresh," writes Parton, "For Larionov, the peasant tradition represented the complete integration of art with life and his call to march 'hand in hand with our ordinary housepainters.'"⁴⁰

In Neoprimitivist discourse, the question of a modern, national art pertained less to reviving traditional methods of artistry and more to fusing folk art forms with modern ideologies in order to reveal a basic truth about what consisted the foundation of society. In folk arts, Goncharova and Larionov found the starting point to new formal systems that were based on the

³⁶ Natalia Goncharova, "Press Statement, December 24, 1911." Translated in Sharp (1992), Appendix I.

³⁷ Sharp, "Primitivism," 212.

³⁸ Gurianova 65.

³⁹ Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity," 208.

⁴⁰ Parton 78.

essentials of colour and line, which provided them with the underpinnings of an aesthetic that was unencumbered by historical experience.⁴¹ As in French representations of Breton villages, the Russian Neoprimativists sought out examples of extant folk art to use as their models, rather than products of vanishing cultures.⁴² The Neoprimativist thematic and formal turn toward the peasantry as sources of value epitomised two of the main points of Russian nationalism and in particular the Slavophile movement – the conflictual dialogue with the West and the simultaneous desire to preserve and appropriate elements of folk culture. They were caught, in Sarabinov's words, between the "influential older brother" of the West and the desire to prevent their own traditions from being swallowed up by international trends.⁴³

The association of Neoprimativism with national identity derived in part from the stated intentions of the artists, as well as the development of Neoprimativism within the context of the Russia-West debates and a general resurgence of nationalism. Critics and scholars throughout the twentieth century have associated Neoprimativism with national identity. In 1913, Shevchenko claimed that Neoprimativism was a "profoundly national phenomenon."⁴⁴ "The [Neoprimativist] interest in socially engaged subject matter," writes Rhodes, "might also be conceived in nationalistic terms."⁴⁵ Of Goncharova in particular, Myuda Yablonskaya writes that her reasoning

⁴¹ Alison Hilton, Russian Folk Art (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 248.

⁴² Hilton 249.

⁴³ Sarabinov 123.

⁴⁴ Shevchenko 48.

⁴⁵ Rhodes 50.

behind experimenting with different artistic styles lies in her status as a "deeply national painter" who sought to discover a "new painterly language" through Neoprimitivism.⁴⁶ Sarabianov pinpoints nationalism as a point of departure between Western and Russian avant-garde arts, in addition to determining formal and thematic differences. He writes that the most profound difference between the two traditions is the visible concentration of energy in style and clearer acceleration, and simultaneously reiterates the hybridity of avant-garde art in assimilating international and indigenous styles.⁴⁷

These perfunctory statements fail to analyse in depth the precise meanings of "national identity" and the underpinnings of its articulation through Russian avant-garde art. My intention is to contextualise Goncharova's Fruit Harvest within prevailing artistic and social ideologies in order to elucidate the specific ways in which it operates as an expression and construction of "national identity." The painting exists within the Third Space of cultural hybridity, as it visually manifests the sources of Western and indigenous traditions while sustaining and complicating the construction of peasant women within the rural myth.

FRUIT HARVEST AND THE LOUBOK AND ICON TRADITIONS

In addition to the theme of ritualistic harvest that dominated the lives of the peasantry, Fruit Harvest visually coalesces certain tropes of folk

⁴⁶ Yablonskaya 54.

⁴⁷ Sarabianov 118. Sarabianov writes further of the need to study "national particularities" in Russian art rather than comparative studies with Western art.

primitivism. Within a decorative, modern aesthetic, the paintings align with Gauguin's work in the sense of displaying a tension between modernity and myths of eternal timelessness, and thus between the urban and rural.

Goncharova depicts the women as solid figures composed of patterns and rough outlines that were frequently associated with peasant arts and crafts. She places the figures in the foreground plane and strengthens the force of the composition through contrasting planes of colour and attenuated, geometric forms. The immediate effect is one of colour and pattern that displaces an academic reliance on perspective and naturalism, an aesthetic that mirrors parallel developments in France, particularly the art of Gauguin, and yet is inscribed with a strong, nationalistic emphasis on collectivity and specific influences from Russian folk arts.

Goncharova was familiar with Gauguin's work through private collections and created several series of paintings that idealised the peasant-worker much as Gauguin idealised the Tahitian. Her paintings further represent peasant life as a utopian idyll and the symbol of a lost past that served as an antidote to urban civilisation; thus, they epitomise her personal attempt to reconcile city and country.⁴⁸ While this negotiation was an idea partly inherited from the West, the Russian variation was influenced by two features; namely, Peter the Great's reforms, which had created a greater distinction between Westernised upper classes and rural peoples than existed in other countries. In Russia, there also existed a linguistic thread that strengthened the perception of the peasantry as the embodiments of national

⁴⁸ Sharp, "Primitivism," 295.

identity. The term *narod* can mean both "nation" and "people," in the sense of "common people," and thus the term *narodnost*, variously translated as "nationalism," "national identity," and "folklorism," referred in the nineteenth century to literature that possessed a folkloristic character. Thus, folklore, folk arts, and the peasantry came to be seen as the truest examples of Russian national character.⁴⁹

In an aspiration towards nationality and a turn away from the West, Goncharova and other Neoprimitivist artist saw Russian folk culture and identity as represented most clearly through the artistic forms of the loubok and icon.⁵⁰ They were among the first in Russia to evaluate loubki as objects with specific, aesthetic values rather than as anthropological artefacts, much as Western European artists did with 'tribal' arts.⁵¹ Shevchenko pinpointed the loubok, a popular print either hand-drawn or engraved from copper or wood, as the "password and slogan" toward a new artistic path. He also designated icons, signboards, Eastern fabrics, and trays as emblematic of "genuine value and painterly beauty," and uses similar terminology that had been employed by French artists to denote the characteristics of the folk primitive: "The simple, unsophisticated beauty of the loubok, the severity of the primitive, the mechanical precision of construction, nobility of style, and good colour [...]"

⁴⁹ Maureen Perrie, "*Narodnost*: Notions of National Identity," Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution 1881-1940, eds., Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 28-36: 28.

⁵⁰ See Parton (1993), Sharp (1992), Loguine (1971), and Gray (1962). Also see John E. Bowlit, "A Brazen Can-Can in the Temple of Art: The Russian Avant-Garde and Popular Culture," Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990) 135-158.

⁵¹ Sharp, "Primitivism," 248 and Goldwater 11.

Beauty is only in the harmony of simple combinations of forms and colours."⁵² Shevchenko also places great importance on the East, particularly the icon tradition. Icons are "saturated with the East, with Byzantium" and emphasise the fact that the whole of Russian culture is an Asiatic one.⁵³

Throughout her œuvre, Goncharova appropriated and retranslated the aesthetics of these traditions, while also incorporating visual references to embroidery, textiles, and 'primitive' sculptures. Rather than depicting intricate, illusionistic detail in Fruit Harvest, she places her primary emphasis on the qualities of painting – the texture of brushstrokes and contrasting planes of colour that emphasise the surface of the canvas and the tactile, thick paint. Goncharova asserted that the weakness of colour, texture, line, and distribution of form and colour masses results in ugliness in art,⁵⁴ the corollary implying that strength in those elements results in beauty. For her, line and drawing were two of the most important aspects of a painting, which she frequently employed through folk art techniques fused with her personal expressiveness.⁵⁵ In his essay, Shevchenko also highlights the importance of tactility, as he writes that texture should play a distinctive role in art by emphasising the visual impression of brushstroke, density of paint and colour, and the surface of the painting.⁵⁶ In Fruit Harvest, the brushstrokes are particularly evident in the patterns of the women's clothing. The designs on the women's skirts,

⁵² Shevchenko 45.

⁵³ Shevchenko 48.

⁵⁴ Goncharova, "Letter to the Editor," 163.

⁵⁵ Gurianova 80.

⁵⁶ Shevchenko 46.

particularly those of the women in the far-left and central-right paintings, exhibit the viscous paint strokes and the grain of the brush. The landscape also reveals the presence of the materials, as the layers of paint and rhythms of the brush creates the gradations of colour in the foreground grass and soil.

These qualities in particular reflects the folk arts tradition. The material of folk arts, whether it was a certain type of wood, metal, or cloth, often strongly determined the characteristics of the finished product, as occurred with the loubok. Dating to the seventeenth century, the loubok was used for barter and illustrative purposes, often containing moral, spiritual, or political messages (Fig. 25). In the eighteenth century, loubki began to feature images from the peasantry with hunting and harvest scenes, interiors of cottages, and tavern life.⁵⁷ This was also the period in which a clearer demarcation was drawn between "high" and folk arts, with loubki becoming the "mainstay" of the lower classes and an exemplary model of indigenous, Russian art.⁵⁸ Russian art historian G.S. Ostrovskii writes that the Russian loubok was the ultimate synthesis of literature and graphics, but like many other art forms were not isolated from the influence of Western trends.⁵⁹ Loubki also absorbed influences from church paintings and engravings, thus endowing it with a plasticity that conformed to the tastes of the general population.⁶⁰ In the early part of the twentieth century, the loubki became known as an "art for the

⁵⁷ Alla Sytova, The Loubok: Russian Folk Pictures 17th to 19th Century (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1984) 7-8.

⁵⁸ G.S. Ostrovskii, "Lubok v sisteme russkoi khudozhestvennoi kul'ture XVII-XX" (Native Graphic Prints in Russian Artistic Culture from XVII-XX). Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie. No. 2 (1980) 154-168: 157.

⁵⁹ Ostrovskii 154.

masses" due to their fusion of text and art that was considered to be universal and understood by all.⁶¹

Like many genres of folk art, loubki in the nineteenth century began to be produced in factories to meet demands. Despite the absorption of the loubok into industrialised production, the art form epitomised for Goncharova and Larionov the essence of popular Russian culture. Larionov in particular not only appreciated the formal qualities of loubki, but also their disassociation with cultivated art traditions and their expressive rhythm, which was closer to gesture and oral intonations.⁶² He owned a large collection of loubki, many of which he exhibited in a 1913 Moscow exhibition alongside Japanese, French, Chinese and other prints. In his introduction to the catalogue, he examines the structural principles of the loubok and the variety of perspectives that the artists employed on a single plan. The aesthetics of the loubok relied on flat, geometric compositions in which naturalistic proportion and depth yielded to broad planes of colour and line. The loubok generally contained distorted figures in the foreground plane, as well as a mixture of text and image, a feature assimilated by some Neoprimitivist artists. In drawing from the rich tradition of oral culture that formed the basis of rural society, loubki contained narrative references to political and social events or illustrated folktales and nursery rhymes. Through their production and themes, loubki established both

⁶⁰ Ostrovskii 154.

⁶¹ Gurianova 64. Gurianova adds that the native prints became particularly widespread during WWI and were created after both traditional and futuristic styles.

⁶² Marcadé 38.

direct and indirect contact with Russian arts, literature, and science.⁶³

Neoprimitivists particularly admired the idea that children's and folk arts represented the subjectivity of the artist transformed into pictorial form.⁶⁴ Larionov, who wrote several essays codifying the influences and aims of avant-garde artists, reveals in an article on the loubok the ambivalent attitude of Neoprimitivist artists, while also referencing the "intuitive" sensibility associated with 'primitive' arts. Acknowledging that artists such as Picasso and Braque were working with similar principles, he writes, "Le loubok nous révèle le côté artistique de notre époque. La concentration de nos émotions artistiques acquiert une force si expressive que l'œuvre d'art, à l'instant de sa perception intuitive, apparaît avec la même netteté qu'au moment de sa réalisation."⁶⁵ He further writes that the broadsheet not only allows for more complex constructions than those of Braque and Picasso and acknowledges the importance of its contours and materials: "Le loubok peint sur les plateaux, les tabatières, sur verre, sur bois, céramique ou fer blanc, nous est parvenu également par des enseignes, surprenantes par la diversité des procédés employés."⁶⁶ The Neoprimitivist association of the loubok with national foundations sprang in part from historical, governmental policies regarding the broadsheet. In 1721, the tsarist regime passed regulations pertaining to the loubok market, which developed into censorship laws in the first half of the

⁶³ Ostrovskii 155.

⁶⁴ Gurianova 79.

⁶⁵ Michel Larionov, "Icones et Loubki," *Une Avant-Garde Explosive*, eds. and trans. Michel Hoog and Solina de Vigneral (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1978) 115-119: 117.

⁶⁶ Larionov 118.

nineteenth century. Government censorship of the loubok was designed to limit the influence of art on the people and reframe it around official nationalism's rubric of orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.⁶⁷ While this didn't entirely diminish the satirical aspect of the loubok, the fusion of popular prints with official ideologies evolved in the early-twentieth century into the loubok's "new life" as a model of native, national art.⁶⁸

In Fruit Harvest, Goncharova's emphasis on texture and brushstrokes reveals her personal interest in not only Russian loubki, but also Persian and Indian loubki that express an underpinning of artistic freedom. In the different traditions, she found not only an oriental love of synthesis, comprehension of the surrounding world, and decorative style, but also the "primordial" qualities of liberty and expressive force of the composition, ornamentation, and the beauty of colour. These qualities, according to Goncharova, revealed the cultural depth of the Eastern people who created them.⁶⁹ Fruit Harvest exhibits the flat qualities of canvas and the emphasis on pattern derived from Eastern and loubki art styles. The figure of the woman in the central-right painting particularly reveals the influence of loubok aesthetics; her body is a solid volume situated in the foreground of the composition. Goncharova also relies on pictorial qualities that had been associated with the folk aesthetic, particularly the use of geometric shapes. The woman's skirt is composed of a

⁶⁷ Ostrovskii 163.

⁶⁸ Ostrovskii 166.

⁶⁹ Nathalie Gontcharova, "Le Loubok Hindou et Persan," trans. Tatiana Loguine, Gontcharova et Larionov: Cinquante ans à Saint Germain-des-Prés (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) 36.

rough triangle that mirrors the position of her arm and contrasts with the circular sweep of her apron and shape. Similarly, the skirt and apron of the woman beside her consist of solid triangular shapes mediated by the circular form of her torso and the basket. The landscape is made up of triangular forms; for example, the shades of brown and yellow in the central painting consist of oddly-shaped triangles and squares.

These qualities are evident in the image of a peasant woman from a mid-eighteenth century loubok that narrates the tale of a thief stealing a rooster from a woman. (Fig. 26a and b) The figures, like those in Goncharova's work, are situated in the foreground plane with a hint of foliage on the left and right frames enforcing the sense of depth as the leaves along the top of Fruit Harvest do. The composition is also constructed through geometric shapes. The woman's skirt and apron echo the forms of the clothing in Fruit Harvest, while her body bears a similar bend in posture. The pattern of the woman's facial features resemble those of the women in Fruit Harvest, as their noses are composed of a simple triangle and their eyes of two parenthetical arcs joined by a large dot. In borrowing from folk art traditions, Goncharova simultaneously sought to create her own "canon" by mixing traditional iconography with her own expressive techniques.⁷⁰

Goncharova's emphasis on geometric shapes and solid figures also derived from the Neoprimitivist interest in icon conventions, which were similar to those of the loubok. In addition to being influenced by Western trends, loubki production in the early-seventeenth century was closely tied to

⁷⁰ Gurianova 78.

Orthodox church paintings and icons.⁷¹ Both icons and loubki further provided artists with a new awareness of the formal qualities of folk arts and also of the physicality of the object, "its value as a thing in itself, as an indivisible cult object where image is unthinkable without the wooden board."⁷² The Russian icon tradition was integral to Goncharova's ideology of turning toward Russian "nationality and the East." As a symbol of an ideal past, the icon was intrinsically tied in the early-twentieth century to national characteristics and a religious sense of purpose in both individuals and the nation.⁷³ Representing communal faith and a direct means of contact with the spiritual world, the icon was a pictorial form that the illiterate peasantry could understand.⁷⁴ It was also a prolific art form that churches often commissioned from provincial artists and one that, like the loubok, was inextricably tied to the daily life of both urban and rural people as an "art for the masses."

Not only did all Russian homes and churches have icons, but they were frequently exchanged at fairs and markets and bore regional and stylistic variations. Larionov particularly appreciated the schematic abstraction of icons, which for him represented the mysticism of life: "C'est à travers les

⁷¹ Ostrovskii 156.

⁷² Nicoletta Misler, "Apocalypse and the Russian Peasantry: The Great War in Natalia Goncharova's Primitivist Paintings," *Experiment*, vol. 4 (1997) 62-76: 76. See also G. Galavaris, *The Icon in the Life of the Church: Doctrine, Liturgy, Devotion* (Leiden, Brill, 1981) and W. Christopher, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London: Variorum Publications, 1982).

⁷³ Margaret Betz, "The Icon and Russian Modernism," *Artforum*, vol. 15, no. 10 (Summer 1977) 39. Henri Matisse was also taken with the aesthetics of the icon during his visit to Russia in 1911. In a common view among folk primitivist artists, he is alleged to have said that icons were an "authentic popular art" and "the primary source of all artistic endeavor." See Yu. A. Rusakov, "Matisse in Russia in the Autumn of 1911," *Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXVII, no. 886 (May 1975) 284-291.

⁷⁴ Parton 89.

nuances de la couleur et la finesse des formes graphiques que se manifeste l'état mystique et religieux que nous éprouvons en contemplant les icônes."⁷⁵

As an ideological basis, the icon represented the beginnings of abstraction and the artistic principle in which the most expressive aspect of life is rendered according to the taste of the artist.⁷⁶ In some of her works, Goncharova obviously reproduced the icon aesthetic of situating the top half of a figure within the enclosed, box-like frame of the canvas (Fig. 27 a and b). Both the loubok and icon bore similarities in style and techniques, having been frequently copied and distributed under the guise of collective authorship – a quality that served the synthetic aims of Goncharova's work.⁷⁷

In other works, particularly Evangelists (1911) (Fig. 28), Goncharova appropriates the idea of the icon with figures that bear the same, weighty quality of the women in Fruit Harvest. In one sense, both paintings are a departure from icon aesthetics due to their size, which disallowed for the intimacy of contact provided in smaller works.⁷⁸ Evangelists posits the four evangelists as monumental, weighty figures whose presence fills the entire picture plane, widening the icon convention to full-length bodies. In their monumental nature and compression by the boundaries of the frame, the evangelists also refer to the iconostasis aesthetic. A large screen placed between the nave and altar in Russian churches, the iconostasis bore lavish

⁷⁵ Larionov, "Les Icones," Une Avant-Garde Explosive, eds. and trans. Michel Hoog and Solina de Vigneral (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1978) 131-133. 132.

⁷⁶ Larionov, "Les Icones," 132.

⁷⁷ Sharp, "Primitivism," 254-255.

⁷⁸ Gurianova 78. Gurianova references Goncharova's war graphics series as emblematic of small, icon conventions that establish direct contact with the viewer.

Painted and carved images of saints often surrounded by ornamental metal work. In the painting, Goncharova forgoes decoration in favour of solid, frontal forms draped in heavy robes that reflect her interest in the expressive use of colour. The gradations of colour give a sense of rhythm to the forms, while their hands and faces are painted in blunt outlines that echo the carved nature of woodcuts and the loubok aesthetic. The large, expressive eyes of the evangelists are composed of simple arcs and circles that reinforce the directness of the imagery. The stylised, sharp folds of icon imagery is further reflected in the vertical folds of the evangelists' robes, which endow the works with a direct sensibility characteristic of the icon tradition.

The works also epitomise Goncharova's notion that religious art is the most majestic because "such art, first and foremost, is not theoretical, but traditional. Hence, the artist could see what he was depicting and why, and [...] his idea was always clear and definite."⁷⁹ The evangelists point toward Heaven and the Word of God, yet their abstracted silhouettes are bound to the earth by the strong brushstrokes and texturing that contributes to their materiality.⁸⁰ They are individualised by both colour, their gestures, and their facial features, yet they are exhibited as a collectivity. They are unnamed, referred to only by the colour of their robes, and visually placed on the same plane by their monumentality, scrolls, and halos. In this respect, they generate a communal sensibility that relates to the cooperative nature of faith as represented by the icon tradition.

⁷⁹ Goncharova, "Letter to the Editor," 163.

⁸⁰ M.N. Yablonskaya, Women Artists of Russia's New Age 1900-1935, ed. and trans. Anthony Parton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) 54.

This is the point at which works such as Evangelists intersects with Fruit Harvest. The women in Fruit Harvest represent the same, anonymous communality that formed a strong underpinning of nationalist discourse. As with the loubok conventions, the evangelists and the peasant women possess facial features that are composed of geometric circles and lines. Similarly, their hands and feet are proportionately large in relation to their bodies, emphasising their physicality of form. Both Evangelists and Fruit Harvest exude a sense of a common goal; while the evangelists focus their attention on the heavenly realm, the women concentrate diligently on their field work. The visual difference of the paintings separates their function within national identity; the women in Fruit Harvest are clearly located in a rural, natural setting, while the evangelists are positioned only within the tight, enclosed frames of the paintings. Their lack of an apparent setting further elevates them, while the women are securely grounded on earth. This juxtaposition does not, however, undermine the women's association with religious sources, a point to which I will return in the final section.

The icon, as a representation of the saint's materialised image and a direct means of contact with the spiritual world, served for artists as a way to express the spiritual in art through abstracted forms.⁸¹ In the first decade of the twentieth century, the interest in national heritage was reinforced by a movement to clean away centuries of grime from icons and restore them to their former glory. The art collector Ilya Ostroukhov linked icons with historically 'primitive' arts when he wrote, "[Icons are] so joyously close and

⁸¹ Parton 89.

connected to the Russian people of old [...] the equal to which must be sought only in the art of ancient Egypt."⁸² The icon revival spurred debates about the relation of contemporary Russian art to the heritage of icon painting, to which Neoprimitivists manifestos responded by declaring their loyalty to Russian folk art.⁸³ Goncharova's use in Evangelists of the Western, high art medium of oil on canvas relates to the linkage between a nation's past and future. The medium signifies a departure from the tradition of "original" icon images of tempera on wood, restoring to the high art tradition in Russia "traces of its Byzantine origins" and indicating the relevance of the origins of Russian art to its future.⁸⁴ This negotiation between past and future continued to affect Goncharova's œuvre, as she drew upon apocalyptic themes and Christian mythos to expression the tension in war between the death of an epoch and the advent of the unknown "new."⁸⁵ In addition, her use of biblical sources as an expression of unity runs counter to the emphasis on secularism found in politically-based nationalisms. Unlike Evangelists, Fruit Harvest is not a direct appropriation of icon aesthetics, but the religious underpinnings of Russian nationalism appear alongside the rural myth as a thematic source and elevate the position of the women as symbols of national origins.

While the Neoprimitivist interest in loubok and icon aesthetics was appropriated as an articulation of national identity apart from Western

⁸² I.S. Ostroukhov manuscript, cited Betz 39.

⁸³ Betz 40.

⁸⁴ Sharp, "Primitivism," 395-397.

⁸⁵ Gurianova 64.

aesthetics, it was situated within the much larger historical relationship between Russian nationalism and the arts. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Russian art and architecture, as in France, was governed by the Academy of Arts in which the rules of classicism, anatomy, linear composition, drawing, and illusionistic perspective were major aspects of the curriculum. In Russia, however, where the cultural realm was dominated by literature and music, the Academy helped establish painting as a profession rather than a craft. Artists relied upon similar themes and formal methods that were extensive in Western Europe, yet remained tied to a framework in which civic virtue was rewarded above all other qualities.⁸⁶ The state control within the cultural realm and the lack of private patronage meant that visual artists were frequently subject to government ideologies, particularly when nationalism was involved.

"Official" nationalism in Russia was proclaimed in 1833 under the reign of Nicholas I with the intention of retaining dynastic power over an increasingly diverse society. As Benedict Anderson puts it, official nationalism was a way of "stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire."⁸⁷ The trouble was that the skin eventually tore, leading to dissent against "Russification" language policies and even strengthening non-Russian popular nationalisms. The artistic association with official nationalism took the form of paintings intended to express the triple

⁸⁶ S. Frederick Starr, "Russian Art and Society 1800-1850," Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 87-112: 104-5.

⁸⁷ Anderson 86.

theories of "Autocracy, Nationality, and Orthodoxy," which were designed to affirm the absolute power of the tsar and the church. In emphasising "Nationality," the doctrine asserted the particular nature of the Russian people and their dedicated support to the dynasty and government.⁸⁸ The monarchy considered each of the three tenets to be visually manifest in certain art forms. Autocracy was associated with history paintings and monumental sculpture, Nationality with genre painting and indigenous arts, and Orthodoxy with icon painting.⁸⁹

Official nationalism's emphasis on reviving musical themes and visual motifs of folk culture were intended to express the government's position on what constituted the underpinnings of Russian society. Frederick Starr writes that one of the reasons this state-sponsored ideology failed was because it ultimately "came to exclude as much as it embraced and hence narrowed the range of symbolic language available to officially accepted artists."⁹⁰ While official nationalism was unable to sustain itself in the face of an increasingly secular society, it reinforced in one sense the idea that certain art forms related to the peasantry constituted the foundation of Russian "nationality." This along with the Slavophile interest in folk arts, discussed above, is the premise upon which Neoprimitivist artists were basing their own articulations of national identity, although the artistic advancement of similar themes was by

⁸⁸ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 324.

⁸⁹ Starr 105-6. Starr also notes that music and literature were subject to the same themes. Symphonic works and national theater incorporated "folkish ideals" as a tribute to Nationality, while ecclesiastical architecture and liturgical music flourished under state and church support.

⁹⁰ Starr 107.

no means a maintenance of governmental ideologies. Rather, it was based in part on a desire to break from current laws and practices.⁹¹

The Russian avant-garde appropriation of icon aesthetics and themes as representative of national culture, an ideology which Goncharova elucidated in her press statements, indicates a fundamental distinction between Russian and French nationalism. While nationalism in France had developed out of a Catholic identity and association with the king, it evolved during the French Revolution into a secular form of unity based on political and democratic rights. Sociologist Dominique Schnapper defines the basis of the nation as "the ambition of transcending particular belongings by means of citizenship." Identities based on economic or social status and by religion are no longer relevant in the neutral, public domain where bonds are political and national,⁹² although as I discussed in relation to Gauguin's work, this does not mean that religion was not a component of the structure of the "political" nation. By theoretical contrast, the Orthodox religion had constituted a major aspect of Russian official nationalism and served as a form of "belonging" closely tied to national identity.

However, the position of religion within the state doctrine was based on practical reasons in the sense that it was an easily defined attribute. Religion served as a theoretical way of keeping the empire together, since the religious affiliation of all Russians was kept in official records and could only be

⁹¹ Sarabianov 118.

⁹² Schnapper 17.

changed with difficulty.⁹³ The importance of Orthodoxy was significant to the Slavophile movement as well, since it bore similarities to the peasant commune in representing "unity in multiplicity" in contrast to the individualism of Western churches.⁹⁴ Goncharova emphasises both of these ideas in Evangelists and Fruit Harvest through the similar clothing patterns, facial features, and sense of a common purpose. The stress on Orthodoxy as an integral element of Russian civilisation strongly differentiated the scholarly construction of a "cultural" nation from the "political" nation.

The prevailing Russian emphasis on religion, whether as part of official or popular nationalisms, resulted in artistic expressions throughout all levels of society. One of the standard perceptions of European folk arts involves their association with both Christianity and pagan cults. Pagan imagery eventually evolved into the Christian tradition, just as oral traditions and folklore were codified and appropriated into the written literary realm. These two levels of belief pervaded Russian folk culture and were given particular visual presence in domestic icon corners, where an array of sacred icons was draped with embroidered towels.⁹⁵ In a similar absorption, avant-garde art such as Fruit Harvest fused the pictorial characteristics of folk and icon art in an elucidation of modernity. Goncharova employs the compositional rules of folk and canonic art, while also allowing herself freedom of expression through a lack of continuity. She departs from the main loubok convention of fusing graphics

⁹³ Theodore Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996) 8.

⁹⁴ Greenfeld 266.

⁹⁵ Hilton 135.

and text, relying on the viewer to bond "the visions into one continuous cycle."⁹⁶ The painting further epitomises the collective nature of both traditions and the ideologies of the commune within national sensibility.

**FRUIT HARVEST, THE PEASANT COMMUNE,
AND THE KUSTAR INDUSTRIES**

Goncharova's appropriation of the basic conventions of the icon and loubok situate the work within the context of national ideologies as also asserted in both official nationalism and the Slavophile movement. Like Evangelists, each of the four paintings of Fruit Harvest can exist as a whole within itself. The tree branches and leaves that border the tops and side of each canvas are truncated by the frames of the canvases and set against the bright, yellow background. They are each framed further by the soil and grass along the bottom border, but even when viewed as a whole, the paintings do not form an entirely unified scene. The landscapes of the far-left and central-left paintings correspond, as the brown and golden background converges to form triangular shapes and the grass appears to continue from one painting to the next. The branches of the tree also appear to cross the borders of the paintings to unite the scenes. By contrast, the scenery of the two central paintings does not converge; the central-left painting is bordered on the right by a solid block of reddish-brown soil, while the central-right scene is composed of grass and a hint of foliage. The central-right scene also has a hint of trees in the

⁹⁶ Gurianova 78.

background that are fully revealed in the far-right painting. Again, the landscapes do not correspond from one painting to the next, as the green grass of the central-right painting breaks off into a solid block of yellow in the far-right. Further, the women do not traverse the picture plane to interact with each other; they are situated within the double-private space of their thoughts and individual paintings.

At the same time, the women visually and thematically express the central feature of the rural myth in Russia, which revolved around the ideal of the peasant commune. This particular construct and the environment of rural society could be used by avant-garde artists to question the validity of Western superiority and challenge Western artistic culture. The cooperative nature of the peasant commune thus became a strong underpinning of Russian Neoprimitivist discourse. The critic Ossip Brik wrote that the emancipation of the individual in the commune allows for the liberty of artistic creation: "Créer, avoir une activité indépendante, c'est le devoir de tout communard [...] Dans la Commune, tout le monde est créateur." He also gives accordance to the shoemakers, tailors, and carpenters, who create according to need and who contribute to artistic endurance: "C'est un gage que l'art ne disparaîtra pas, qu'il trouvera sa place dans le système de la vie communale."⁹⁷

In seeking a compromise between foreign influences and Russian art, *World of Art* co-founder Alexandre Benois refers not only to the appropriation of folk art forms, but also to their value as a mechanism of commonality:

⁹⁷ Ossip Brik, "L'Artiste et la Commune: L'effort de l'artiste," *Izobrazitelnoe Iskousstvo (Les Arts Plastiques)* (Petrograd, 1919). In *Art et Poésie Russes 1900-1930, Textes Choisis*, eds. Olga Makhroff and Stanislas Zadora (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979) 120-121.

"Indeed, the significance of those artists who have preserved the mystic unity with the esthetic of folk art is enormous. These chosen ones are seeking out the very *language* of art, they make folk art a common property."⁹⁸ Larionov wrote in his 1913 manifesto, "Nous refusons toute valeur à l'individualité dans l'analyse d'une œuvre d'art. Il faut faire appel uniquement à l'œuvre d'art."⁹⁹

Although this ideal was advocated at the beginning of the twentieth century, the idealisation of the commune had much earlier roots in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Deriving from the organisation of the peasant commune (*mir*), the superiority of the collective was posited as a fundamental basis around which identity should develop. In the late-nineteenth century, communes varied in size from twenty to several hundred households governed by three units of authority: the male head of the household, the elected, village elder who served as an arbitrator, and the assembly composed of household heads. These units were essentially responsible for land allocation, legal issues, administration, and crop and harvest organisation. The rights to the land were held in common, but the cultivation of the plots was individual.¹⁰¹ The commune system was also one of intensive inter-dependence and socialisation based "exclusively on oral, direct transmission of experience from one generation to the next." This included a form of social control, unnoticed

⁹⁸ Alexandre Benois, "Russkaia zhivopis," 262, cited in Janet Kennedy, *The Mir Iskusstva Group and Russian Art 1898-1912* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1977) 143.

⁹⁹ Michel Larionov, "Le Manifeste des Rayonnistes et Aveniristes," *Une Avant-Garde Explosive*, eds. and trans. Michel Hoog and Solina de Vignerol (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1978) 77.

¹⁰⁰ See Rogger (1960)

¹⁰¹ Jules Koslow, *The Despised and the Damned: The Russian Peasant Through the Ages* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1972) 11.

by the peasant, in which there was no distinction between the individual and the group – the "I" merged with the communal "we."¹⁰²

In upper class circles, the ideology of the dissolution of the individual merged with European romantic philosophies centring around the notion that peasants were essentially superior to those in urban society because they lived closer to nature and soil. The peasant evolved into an exemplary type who embodied the moral and religious values that formed the basis of Russian society. The individual spirit was submerged into the collective of the community, where rural man was identified as a supremely moral being who approached life in accordance with the well-being of the group.¹⁰³ In years following the Emancipation of the serfs, writers and travellers who travelled to the countryside to decipher the "peasant soul" did so with the intention of seeking moral or spiritual healing "to close the national wound of serfdom and individual wounds of alienation within a profoundly divided culture."¹⁰⁴ Following the political trauma of Russia's defeat in the 1904 war with Japan and the 1905 revolution, the government began to promote the peasant and products of peasant-labor as representative of national, cultural elements, including the exportation of decorative arts to exhibitions in the West to show that Russian arts had a distinct, national identity.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Boris Mironov, "The Russian Peasant Commune after the Reforms of the 1860s," The World of the Russian Peasant: Post-Emancipation Culture and Society, eds. Ben Eklof and Stephan Frank (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 7-43: 18.

¹⁰³ Frierson 101.

¹⁰⁴ Frierson 9.

¹⁰⁵ Sharp, "Primitivism," 99.

The paintings of Fruit Harvest are situated within this idealisation context, generating an impression of communality and closeness to nature. The women express an attention to labor, while their facial features are not particularly individualised, relating the imagery both visually and thematically to the ideology of the cooperative. The harmonious idyll is enhanced by the balance of the composition. The two women in the far-right painting complement the paired group on the far-left. Each painting consists of a standing and a crouching woman, a juxtapositioning that provides a visual anchor on either side of the composition. The four paintings are similarly structured with most of the women posited in the foreground and delineated through the overlying foliage. Each one is in the process of motion, but the solid forms of their bodies create density rather than movement. However, the paintings as a group provide a sense of progress towards a goal.

As I mentioned above, the women on the far-right represent the completion of work in one section of the orchard, as the trees are bare of fruit and the standing woman carries a full basket on her shoulder. The progression of work is depicted through the women in the next painting, who are approaching to begin a new cycle of work, while the central-left girl picks fruit, and the women on the far-left sort the day's intake. Although they can exist within their own space, together they represent the literal stages towards a common purpose of completing the daily harvest. The far-left and central-left paintings further represent this communality. The single girl picks one piece of fruit, which is then heaped into a pile in the far-left painting, symbolising the dissolution of the individual into the community. This is underscored by the postures of the women in all four paintings, as they each possess a

inclination towards the left and the completion of their work. Their leftward postures are balanced by the reclining woman in the far-right painting, who is the only person looking towards the right.

The women are further balanced and linked together through a visual, sweeping line that crosses all four pictures. In the far-left painting, the woman crouching next to the pile of fruit forms a pyramidal structure that weights the composition. She is physically connected to the second woman by the circular basket, which extends the line in a curved diagonal up the woman's arm and across the tree branches and leaves. This line then spans to the central painting, linking the two women with the central-left girl through her uplifted arm. The line continues through the horizontal stretch of land and leaves in the upper half of the composition, connecting on a downward slope with the background tree in the third painting and the woman standing on a ladder. This then descends to the two women in the foreground, curves in an arc across their bodies, up to the tree in the background right, and over to the far-right painting. The line descends again through the trees to the standing woman and over her form to the reclining woman. The fallen leaf in the lower, left corner of the painting forces the viewer's eye to complete the rhythmic movement. The right-to-left line contrasts with my reading of the scenes from left-to-right and provides the composition with an intercrossing sense of movement. It also underscores the connection of the women and the four scenes within an environment free of discord.

This myth of the idyllic peasant commune was an important component of the Russian cultural realm. Russian nationalists like Fyodor Dostoevsky (1818-1888) adopted the myth as a manifesto against the Westernised

corruption of "civilised" urbanity, while other writers upheld them as exemplary due to their simple way of life. In Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (1877), Konstantin Levin finds spiritual happiness when he works in the fields alongside the peasants, thus realising that he has something to learn from them. "The longer Levin mowed, the oftener he felt the moments of unconsciousness in which it seemed that the scythe was mowing by itself," Tolstoy writes, "a body full of life and consciousness of its own [...]. These were the most blissful moments."¹⁰⁶ During his field work, Levin feels "as though some external force was moving him" and later seeks ways to renounce his old life and to begin a new life involving "the simplicity, the purity, and the sanity" that he witnessed among the peasants.¹⁰⁷ The Slavophile editor Konstantin Aksakov wrote of the commune as a means to spiritual harmony:

A commune is a union of the people who have renounced their egoism, their individuality, and who express their common accord; this is an act of love [...] in the commune the individual is not lost, but renounces his exclusiveness in favour of the general accord – and there arises the noble phenomenon of a harmonious, joint existence of rational beings (consciousness): there arises a brotherhood, a commune – a triumph of human spirit.¹⁰⁸

Goncharova's elucidation of collectivity fused with loubok and icon aesthetics paralleled the social processes of a folk arts "revival" that took place

¹⁰⁶ Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, trans. Constance Garnett, eds. Leonard J. Kent and Nina Berberova (New York: Modern Library, 2000) 289.

¹⁰⁷ Tolstoy 292 and 316. For further discussion of the ways in which nineteenth-century authors depicted the peasantry, see Donald Fanger, "The Peasant in Literature," The Peasant in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Wayne S. Vucinich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968) 231-262.

at the end of the nineteenth century. The creations of the peasant commune were upheld as exemplary of a harmonious spirit that was echoed in the collective nature of folk art workshops. In the same manner that this ideology emerged in intellectual circles, the late-nineteenth century arts-and-crafts revival started as an upper-class movement. In the 1870s, private workshops funded by affluent landowners and frequently upper-class women arose as a direct response to the perceived declining of peasant arts in the face of increasing factories and machine production. Embroidery, toys, spinning, lacework, and woodcarvings were the central features of the four major workshops which, intriguingly, were patronised by professional artists who then taught local peasants how to incorporate an "authentic" rural aesthetic into their crafts. The goal of the cottage (*kustar*) industry revival in the late nineteenth century was to instil in an increasingly Westernized Russia the "an aesthetic sensibility expressive of its eastern and rural roots."¹⁰⁹

In What is Art? (1898), Tolstoy advocates folk arts as representative of universal emotion and religion, thus endowing them with a true beauty lacking in high arts. The artistic canon, he writes, is favoured by a small circle of people who designate the aesthetic judgement and worth of all cultural productions.¹¹⁰ Instead, he argues for a reversal of the standard high/low canon so that art which conveys collective feeling and religious consciousness can be

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Greenfeld 266.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Exhibiting *Kustar*' Industry in Late Imperial Russia/Exhibiting Late Imperial Russia in *Kustar*' Industry," Transforming Peasants: Society, State, and the Peasantry 1861-1930 (Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995), ed. Judith Pallot (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 42.

¹¹⁰ Leo Tolstoy, What is Art?, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Penguin Books, 1995) 33.

recognised as "true" art. Everyday art that expresses the "simplest feelings common to all" can serve the function of uniting people:¹¹¹

As soon as the art of the upper classes became separated from the art of the whole people, there arose the conviction that art can be art and yet be incomprehensible to the masses [...] Besides, it cannot be said that the majority of people lack the taste to appreciate the highest works of art. The majority understand and have always understood what we, too, consider the highest art: the artistically simple narratives of the Bible, the Gospel parables, folk legends, fairy tales, folk songs are understood by everyone. Why is it that the majority suddenly lost the ability to understand the highest of our art?¹¹²

The ideology of elevating art-and-crafts in Russia heavily impacted both the art and philosophies of Goncharova and other Neoprimitivist artists.

Between 1882 and 1913, four exhibitions of Russian *kustar* crafts indicate a space in which aspirations for modernity and attempts to define "Russianness" met.¹¹³ This merging of traditional folk arts and modern tendencies not only characterised the ambitions of the *kustar* industry, but would continue to shape the artistic response to the Western influences in the realm of "high art."

Kustar exhibitions both within Russia and in Paris and America exemplifies the dichotomy of Russian identity and its desire to prove itself original in spite of the Western influx:

The *kustar* exhibits [...] worked on many levels to reinforce certain representations of 'self' and 'other.'

¹¹¹ Tolstoy, What is Art? 131.

¹¹² Tolstoy, What is Art?, 78 and 80.

¹¹³ Siegelbaum 38.

By assembling a plethora of handicraft objects, some of great delicacy and 'charm,' the exhibits represented the Russian people not as dark and threatening, but as possessing 'amazingly original capabilities, nurtured in the course of centuries.'¹¹⁴

The exhibitions also served to market a cultivated aesthetic to both Westerners and Russians. In the construction of a Russian national identity, artists and architects turned to the motifs of peasant culture in order to elicit a new, decorative ornament that could be directly traced back to Russia's pre-Western roots.¹¹⁵ While this taste for ornament was associated with traditional folk arts, in the *kustar* industry it was also imposed upon the workers by private owners and professional artists as exemplary of authenticity. The expanding middle class in the nineteenth century fed the demand for the constructed Russian tapestries, glasswork, lace, loubki, and other decorative arts produced by the *kustar* workshops.

Contrary to common opinion, folk arts throughout Europe and Russia were not stagnant, although the pace of stylistic changes was slower than that of urban centres. The *kustar* workshops, by virtue of imposing specific themes and aesthetics on artistic production, disallowed for individual artistic variations.¹¹⁶ This then enforced the prevailing and widespread notion that folk arts were based on a repetition of form rather than innovation. However, the

¹¹⁴ Siegelbaum 48.

¹¹⁵ Wendy R. Salmond, Arts and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia: Reviving the *Kustar* Art Industries 1870-1917 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 7.

¹¹⁶ Alison Hilton, "Russian Folk Art and 'High' Art in the Early Nineteenth Century," Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 245.

very practices of the industries required an interaction with folk and "native" art traditions, particularly loubki, that then influences *kustar* aesthetics.¹¹⁷ The late nineteenth century *kustar* revival indicates the beginning of the intersection between the "high" arts and folk arts, which would come to particular fruition in the twentieth century as artists began to incorporate the folk aesthetic into their paintings.

In Fruit Harvest, Goncharova establishes the visual and thematic precepts of *kustar* industries by relying resolutely on the basic underpinnings of composition – colour and line. Larionov writes of the importance of colour as a primary decorative element:

La tâche essentielle du peintre consiste à trouver une expression et un moyen d'étendre et de disposer les couleurs sur une toile [...] la passion des formes et couleurs, talent et vocation, ainsi qu'une prédisposition particulière à observer la vie des couleurs et des formes, voilà ce qui constitue l'originalité d'un peintre.¹¹⁸

In a letter to Goncharova, Larionov recorded methods that artists should use to create a specifically Russian art. His words also indicate the importance of colours and patterns, as well as the continuing desire to disassociate themselves from Western art methods and return to indigenous sources:

It is much better to keep creating new forms and colour combinations. You can combine and invent them forever [...] The effect will be the same as in popular prints if [...] you use a new brush to continue the line over the white in the same way that black lines

¹¹⁷ Ostrovskii 161.

¹¹⁸ Michel Larionov, "Pensées sur l'Art," reprinted and trans. in exh. cat. Rétrospective Larionov Gontcharova, (Bruxelles: Musée d'Ixelles, 1976)

in a popular print are covered in certain places by green and other colours [...] You can do this so that the surfaces of the objects border each other, a dark surface bordering a light one, and vice versa, so that they are not divided by lines (as in Picasso's work) or so that they border each other with thin lines.¹¹⁹

Goncharova's Fruit Harvest landscape is simplified into blocks of colour, which serves to unify the four compositions and endow the paintings with a direct clarity unencumbered by superfluous detail. Colour serves to help balance the compositions and unite with women with each other in an underscoring of their collective purpose. The flat white and dark blue colours of the women's skirt, kerchief, and blouse on the far-right corresponds with the same colours of the crouching woman on the far-left. The second woman in the central-right wears an orange blouse patterned with dark flowers, complementing the blouse of the central-left girl and forming an opposing visual theme to the orange-on-brown pattern of the far-left woman's kerchief. The central-left girl also forms a contrasting visual balance with the background woman in the far-right painting, who wears an opposing magenta blouse and orange skirt. Their skirt patterns, emblematic of the embroidery of *kustar* industries, further balances the composition, as the women in the far-left and central-right paintings wear skirts decorated with circular motifs that provide a visual contrast to the unadorned skirts of the central-left girl and women on the far-right. This endows the compositions with an alternation of pattern and solid blocks of colour. The colour patterns of the tree leaves

¹¹⁹ Natalia Goncharova, excerpt from untitled "Album," reprinted in Amazons of the Avant-Garde, eds. John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999) 311.

further link the four scenes and enhance the decorative qualities through opposing light and dark greens and curvilinear shapes.

As I discussed above, Goncharova also emphasises the surface of the canvas and qualities of paint, which additionally connects the painting with a folk aesthetic, in which the shape of the object governed the ornamentation. "Toute peinture est décorative," Goncharova said, "vu qu'elle décore, qu'elle colore, qu'elle *embellit* [...] Le décoratif est inclus dans la notion même de peinture."¹²⁰ This reliance on the decorative was an ideology particularly espoused by Gauguin in his desire to find meaning in ornament rather than narrative.¹²¹ Like Gauguin, Goncharova's emphasis on a modern, decorative aesthetic and collectivity also reveals the social processes and roles of women within industry.

The Russian avant-garde appropriation of this idea led to a sustained ambivalence with such theories. Shevchenko clearly denies the notion that Russian artists have imitated the Western artistic tradition, writing that French impressionists didn't properly sense the idea of "flowing colour" in which the same colour or shade is reiterated to give an impression of movement.¹²² While he allows the French artists such as Gauguin, Cezanne, and Rousseau have influenced Russian art, he believes they have done so because they are not part of the norm of Western art; in fact, they represent the aspiration

¹²⁰ Marina Tsvetaeva, Nathalie Gontcharova: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, trans. Véronique Lossky (Paris: Clémence Hiver, 1990) 137.

¹²¹ Connolly 71.

¹²² Shevchenko 51.

toward Eastern traditions and forms.¹²³ In reference to Goncharova, Guillaume Apollinaire wrote in 1914, "Ce contact sublime avec la vraie tradition *occidentale* a donné à la grande artiste russe le goût et le secret de la riche tradition *orientale* qui paraissait s'être fixée définitivement dans l'art populaire de l'Empire russe." He adds that Goncharova's work reveals the decorative elements of form and colour that had guided oriental painters.¹²⁴

The emphasis in Fruit Harvest on colour patterns and shapes exemplifies a synthesis of prevailing ideologies and debates, while visually accentuating the complementary and collective underpinnings of the rural myth. This motif bears strong importance in the theme of the painting, which fuses pagan and religious ideologies in a visual appropriation of current discourse. In this fusion, Goncharova replicates the rural myth's constructions of peasant women, which serves to both complicate and enforce their symbolic position within national identity.

THE MYTH OF MOTHER RUSSIA AND PEASANT WOMEN

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian national identity had been linked to the idealised values of the peasant commune for over a hundred years, a connection particularly espoused by the Slavophiles. While Westernisers saw the commune as the result of recent governmental practices, Slavophiles claimed that it had roots in the tribal organisation of ancient

¹²³ Shevchenko 53.

¹²⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, "Nathalie Gontcharova," reprinted and trans. in exh. cat. Rétrospective Larionov Gontcharova, (Bruxelles: Musée d'Ixelles, 1976) 15.

Slavs.¹²⁵ The latter view designated the main framework around which artists and writers could postulate the myth of the peasantry as an embodiment of ancient, national foundations. Within that myth, women were signified symbols of rural purity and national qualities, but also judged by the upper-class as a victim and a threat to the patriarchal structure.¹²⁶ The women in Fruit Harvest complicate these constructions through a linkage of the symbolic aspects of peasant women with their essential role as reproducers of culture.

The peasantry sustained an important position within Russian national identity. Serfdom lasted a great deal longer in Russian than it did in European countries, which made the 'peasant question' (including problems relating to agriculture, grain prices, taxation, and land tenure) more acute.¹²⁷ The Western ideas that were transmitted to Russia were shaped to this specific context, thus providing the basis for the definition of a specifically Russian national identity, which consisted of three fundamental ideas. First, the basis of the identity was defined as a collective individual; second, it was formed by ethnic, primordial factors such as blood and soil; and third it was characterised by the enigmatic

¹²⁵ Francis M. Watters, "The Peasant and the Village Commune," The Peasant in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Wayne S. Vucinich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968) 133-157: 137.

¹²⁶ Frierson 161-162.

¹²⁷ Perrie 29. The feudal structure in Russia contributed to sustained European views of Russia's backwardness and 'otherness', even years after the emancipation of the serfs. In 1891, the Vicomte Combes de Lestrade wrote an essay discussing the ways in which peasant remained under the yoke of tyrannical authority. "Russia is a great country with great people," he claimed, "but she will remain an alien in Europe until that hour in which her august sovereign of today shall realize the truth [...] and shall give to his thirty millions of serfs [...] a liberty that shall be real." "The Present Condition of the Peasants in the Russian Empire," Annals of the American Academy of Political Science, vol. 2 (July 1891-June 1892) 225-235: 233.

soul or spirit.¹²⁸ Goncharova's work visually articulates the first two concepts by linking the women through complementary colours and patterns, and also through their placement in a pure landscape untouched by industrial encroachments. The third concept pertains to the Russian soul as embodied in the construct of Mother Russia, as I will discuss.

In contrast to the more prevailing symbolism in France of the peasant as inseminator of the fecund land, the Russian land was viewed as self-generating, with the peasant as offspring rather than the procreator.¹²⁹ The sheer variety of geographical terrain and the centrality of agriculture to social, political, and economic life intensified its significance in nationalist discourse. The idea of land as a female, fertile entity is a common premise throughout world cultures, but in Russia it carries a particularly strong maternal association that impacted nationalist discourse in the late imperial era, serving both as a polarity and a complement to the patriarchal structure of commune units and the father-figure as represented by the Tsar.

The relationship between peasant and land in Russia appears more reciprocal, as Turgunev writes of the peasantry as both owner and ownee: "The land is theirs beyond dispute, they've been bound to it for ages and ages."¹³⁰ The Russian peasants' love for the land was legendary, as they referred to it themselves as "mother" or "little mother."¹³¹ The idea of the peasant as offspring is most expressively symbolised in Russian *matreska* toys, which are

¹²⁸ Greenfeld 261.

¹²⁹ See Chapter Two for more details on the metaphor of the land as female and peasant as male in French culture.

¹³⁰ Turgunev 107.

painted, wooden dolls composed of concentric, female figures generally decorated with brightly-patterned clothing and kerchiefs. (Fig. 29) The dolls can be broken apart to remove the increasingly diminutive dolls on the interior until the smallest one is revealed at the very centre. As a typical, Russian folk art, the dolls symbolise the nurturing nature of Russia while also premising that nature as an essential component of peasant culture. The dolls are associated with numerous legends involving female deities who were thought to contain all elements within their bodies.¹³²

These legends were a vital component of the national psyche and also served as an impetus for peasant arts and crafts. As discussed above, upper-class women played an primary role in the *kustar* industries, while the actual production of clothing and textiles fell under the domain of village women. The embroideries frequently contained images of "goddess figures" who were considered to be the protector of home and families, as well as the bringer of harvests and fertility.¹³³ Russian figurines and ceramics with images of the goddess as a fertility symbol extend to the Palaeolithic era, and she is frequently considered to be a single goddess who possesses multiple aspects and attributes, such as that of a water goddess, springtime goddess, and harvest goddess.¹³⁴ In many nineteenth century textiles, she appears with elements of

¹³¹ Koslow 36.

¹³² See Joanna Hubbs, Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), Introduction. Hubbs cites the ancient goddess Jumala as an example of this, as her exterior 'shell' was thought to contain figures within it.

¹³³ Mary B. Kelly, "The Ritual Fabrics of Russian Village Women," Russia, Women, Culture, Helena Gosciolo and Beth Holmgren, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 152-176: 152.

¹³⁴ Kelly 155-157.

nature, such as a tree of life, a sun disk, a sprouting field, and floral or vegetative ornaments that emphasise the productive nature of her various aspects.¹³⁵ The proliferation of goddess imagery on textiles reveals a further dimension of the maternal theme, as spinning was associated in folk belief with birth-giving and nurture. Embroidery thus "provides the visible basis for a cosmology suggesting the continuous creativity of the divinity spinning all living things out of her own body."¹³⁶ (Fig. 30a and b)

Throughout her œuvre, Goncharova drew motifs from the tradition of embroidery and textiles, as well as the growing interest in ethnography at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to Fruit Harvest, the goddess motif appears in her painting Pillars of Salt (1908), (Fig. 31) which also references the notion of the collective through a very different aesthetic. Although the two paintings are not complements, they bear similarities in both composition and theme. The narrative of Pillars of Salt refers to the biblical story of Lot's wife and emphasises the ancient primitive association of women with nature and the earth. As in Fruit Harvest, the statue-like, female figures in Pillars of Salt exist in their own, individual spaces, yet are grouped into a collective through the uniform colour scheme and through a connection to the landscape. The sharp lines of the background extend across the top of the canvas, linking the figures much like the foliage links the women in Fruit Harvest. The figures are also positioned similarly; the crouching woman and pile of fruit in the far-left scene of Fruit Harvest resemble the figure of a mother and child in Pillars of Salt,

¹³⁵ Kelly 158-160.

¹³⁶ Hubbs 25.

while the next figure echoes the upright posture of the central-left girl in Fruit Harvest. The other two figures are paired like the women in the central-right and far-right scenes in Fruit Harvest. The corresponding colour scheme of pale blues and whites of the figures in Pillars of Salt further unites them, much as the colour patterns and shapes of their clothing unite the women in Fruit Harvest.

These similarities in spite of the vastly different aesthetics underscore Goncharova's interest in associating female figures with both each other and the landscape, as well as premising her work on indigenous, Russian sources as an elucidation of national identity. Goncharova based the schematised, anthropomorphic figures in Pillars of Salt on stone statues (*babas*) dating to the eleventh century AD that were found on the Russian steppe. Scholars and artists expressed a renewed interest in such statues during the nineteenth century expansion of archaeological and ethnographic expeditions.

Goncharova clearly associated the stone *babas* with the fundamental basis of national identity. In her statement (quoted above) about the Russian roots of Cubist forms, she writes, "The Scythians made their stone maidens in this style of blessed memory," evoking the idea of shared memories as a foundation of collective consciousness. She finds the inspiration for her work in ancient art forms that represent unity within the context of the early-twentieth century, a merger that parallels one of the functions of national myth in seeking contemporary validation in the emblems of the past. As art historian Jane Sharp writes, Goncharova, "collapses historical time by merging the present (contemporary orthodox Russia) with the scythian prehistoric past to achieve a

sense of present unity and continuity with the past."¹³⁷ This negotiation between "old and new" was a fundamental characteristic of avant-garde art.¹³⁸ In Neoprimitivist "logic," the contemporary era is layered with historical memory, acting as a "prism of the epoch and traditionalism."¹³⁹

In an elucidation of the ambivalence of Russia's dialogue with the West, Goncharova's use of ancient imagery both reiterates and undermines the French interest in 'primitive' forms, particularly that of the idol tradition. Both Gauguin and Picasso appropriated the aesthetics of the three-dimensional idol, which Europeans had consistently referred to as "grotesque" and which were considered to be the most reviled of the primitive arts.¹⁴⁰ The idol was offensive because it was considered to embody pagan superstitions, carnality, irrationality and to deform the human figure.¹⁴¹ Picasso most famously fused the imagery of the idol with female sexuality in Demoiselles d'Avignon. By contrast, Goncharova's Pillars of Salt refer to the pagan Russian stone maidens that for her represented female fertility and an ideological model of femininity in terms of procreation rather than eroticism.¹⁴² By associating the images with a biblical theme in what art historian Nicoletta Misler terms an "audacious

¹³⁷ Sharp, "Primitivism," 270.

¹³⁸ Sarabianov 122.

¹³⁹ Gurianova 79.

¹⁴⁰ Connolly 80.

¹⁴¹ Connolly 81.

¹⁴² Nicoletta Misler, "Dressing Up and Dressing Down: The Body of the Avant-Garde," Amazons of the Avant-Garde, eds. John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999) 101.

displacement,"¹⁴³ Goncharova underlines the importance of religion and its connection not only to nature and ancient motifs, but also as a counterpart to the Western notion of "secular" democracy.

The women in the far-right, central-right, and far-left paintings of Fruit Harvest descend from this motif in terms of representing the epitome of matrilineal ancestry and fertility. Russian art historian Gleb Pospelov writes that their facial features are "nearly oriental" and "Scythian," linking them with the nationalist predilection towards the East as well as the stone *babas*.¹⁴⁴ They also symbolise the role of peasant women as "keepers of popular culture" through textile work, as well as the transmittal of songs, proverbs, lullabies, rituals, and folklore that formed the basis of national consciousness.¹⁴⁵ The clothing of the women in the paintings reflects the archetypal decorations of textiles and *matreska* dolls, with strong patterning and deep colours of red, magenta, orange, indigo, and brown. Thick layers of paint lend weight and substance to their bodies, strengthening their association with the earth and their physiological symbolism as nurturers. The intellectual association of the peasant woman with Russia itself developed around a female linkage with fertility, nurturing, and purity.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Mislér, "Apocalypse," 69.

¹⁴⁴ Gleb G. Pospelov, Moderne russische Malerei: Die Künstlergruppe Karo-Bube (Modern Russian Painters: The Karo-Bube Artist Group), trans. Irene Faix (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1985) 59.

¹⁴⁵ Christine D. Worobec, "Victims or Actors? Russian Peasant Women and Patriarchy," Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921, eds. Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 177-206: 182.

¹⁴⁶ Frierson 163.

As in Fruit Harvest, the figures in Pillars of Salt are not differentiated but are grouped together through pattern and composition. Like Evangelists, they also surpass temporal specificity, synthesizing humanity and a more transcendental world into layers of meaning.¹⁴⁷ The solid figures, geometric arrangement of facial features, emphasis on line and gradations of colour echo the historical absorption of pagan beliefs into Christian theology as well as the dissolution of individuality in favour of collectivism. (Fig. 32) The density and expressiveness of the painting bears compositional differences from Fruit Harvest, but both paintings retain a theme of female fertility. In Pillars of Salt, the fertility motif is expressed through the image of a woman nursing a child, while in Fruit Harvest, it is revealed through the association of the women with the land.

The women in Fruit Harvest bear close visual affiliations with the landscape. As I have discussed, they are affiliated with each other through a visual movement that includes the horizontal stretch of land and overhanging trees. The patterns of their clothing also mirror the elements of nature; the dotted pattern of the skirt and kerchief of the woman in the far-left painting and blouse of the central-left girl resembles the patterns of the fruit in the trees. Each of the women is in physical contact with the earth both through their bare feet and their situation within the painting. In the far-right painting, the trees almost blend with the top of the standing woman's head, while the reclining woman's body is almost fully aligned with the earth. The bordering trees appear to touch the heads of the women in the central-right, while the central-

¹⁴⁷ Gurianova 65.

left girl touches the fruit in the tree. Similarly, the background trees and leaves converges with the standing woman on the far-left as her companion bends to sort the fruit.

The composition of their bodies also bears similarities to the landscape. The motion of the central-left girl in reaching for fruit mimics the upward stretch of the two trees in the other paintings, establishing a link between her and nature as well as between her and the other scenes. The crouched posture of the woman on the far-left resembles the pile of fruit, while the curved branch above her head reiterates the movement of her companion's arm. In the central-right, the triangular shape of the women's skirts is reflected and reversed by the v-shape of the trees behind them, which also resembles the bent position of the arm of the woman on the right. The reclining woman in the far-right also resembles the pile of fruit, establishing a visual balance among the compositions, while her upright companion reiterates the vertical position of the trees. Even further, the landscape is composed of triangular shapes (the yellow portion in the central-left painting) and circles (the pile of fruit and ground underneath the trees) that echoes the roundness of the women's heads, aprons, and baskets.

The collective sensibility and fertility symbolism is enhanced by the subtle configuration of the scenes. The painting on the far-right bears the least amount of detail; the women's clothing is more simplified than the skirts and blouses of the other women, and the landscape is reduced to larger blocks of colour. There is less delineation of the shapes of the tree leaves and structure of the land. At the same time, the painting offers the strongest sense of depth, as the perspective extends to the inverted triangle shape of the sky and the tall

fir trees in the distance. The middle ground is represented by the fruit trees, while the women are positioned in the foreground. This provides the most expansive view, which is then narrowed in the following painting. The women in the central-right are more closely framed by the trees and the land, as well as the border of the canvas. The focus narrows further on the young girl in the central-left painting, a fact most evident in the larger shape of the overhanging leaves and the compressed patterns of the trees. The most confined perspective appears in the far-left painting. The women in that scene have very little space in which to move, as their bodies are tightly enclosed by the edges of the canvas. This narrowing of vision among all four paintings is accompanied by an increased focus on the object of their labor. The trees in the far-right painting are bare of fruit, while the following two paintings have, respectively, two and four fruits in the trees. The final far-left painting has the most fruit both in the trees and the pile, which concludes a progressive emphasis on fecundity.

These visual suggestions sustain the position of the women both in relation to each other and the fertile earth. Through their ties to the stone *babas* and maternity, the women represent national ancestry. Scholars and archaeologists have showed that the archaic family of Russia was based on matrilineal succession and rights. Ancient Slavic society was not headed by a male, but was an egalitarian unit in which decisions were made by all members and possessions could be handed down from mother to daughter.¹⁴⁸ Ancient Slavs viewed the earth as a maternal figure nourishing her children, as well as

¹⁴⁸ Hubbs 14.

the source of political authority and fertility – her generative force underlaid all wealth and power, a cult that was carried on through the traditions of the peasantry.¹⁴⁹ Further, birth among the peasantry was not only viewed as a medical phenomenon, but a magical event to be accompanied by rituals, prayers, and a great deal of superstition.¹⁵⁰ The association of the peasantry with national ancestry and mystical, popular belief fortifies the linkage of peasant women with the genealogical mother-figure. Goncharova's maintenance of this particular construct in Fruit Harvest serves as a rebuttal to the late-nineteenth century pejorative image of the *baba* that centred on her wickedness (as in the folklore crone Baba Yaga) and lack of both worth and intelligence.¹⁵¹

The maternal construction of peasant women as an embodiment of fertility and national ancestry also developed in part from the reality of women's position within village life. Women's primary responsibility was to produce offspring, a role corroborated in the transfer of reproductive rights from the bride's family to the groom's as part of a marriage agreement.¹⁵² As a wife, a woman was required to obey her husband, perform domestic tasks, and raise children. While she was subject to the laws of the commune and household, her position as wife and mother did give her a certain amount of respect within the village community, evidenced by the acceptance of women

¹⁴⁹ Hubbs 21 and 23.

¹⁵⁰ Samuel C. Ramer, "Childbirth and Culture: Midwifery in the Nineteenth-Century Russian Countryside," Russian Peasant Women, eds. Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 107-120: 114.

¹⁵¹ Frierson 162.

¹⁵² Worobec 178.

as head of the household if their husbands died. As ostensibly non-reproductive members of society, unmarried women were not afforded the same respect and were considered to be a burden on the family and community.¹⁵³ While women's roles were primarily related to domestic tasks, they frequently worked in the fields binding sheaves, spreading fertiliser, collecting potatoes, or gleaning. Their work was divided along gender lines, as men were responsible for ploughing and sowing.¹⁵⁴

Goncharova's depiction in Fruit Harvest of several women working without the presence of men is thus representative of a typical practice in rural communes. In the painting, however, their segregated location serves as a stage on which Goncharova negotiates more complex constructions of peasant women. Through a representation of women at different stages of labor and life, Fruit Harvest encapsulates prevalent constructions of peasant women as maternal and as temptress, two views that simultaneously idealised and subjugated them. The former view derives from the visual and literary representations of the symbolic association of peasant women with earthly fertility and thus the root of national culture, which was posited against the perception of urban women as Westernized and corrupt.

This construction of rural women pertained to notions of female beauty. Just as Russian society was theoretically stratified in terms of a binarism between East/West, city/country, and high/low, cultural perceptions of female beauty was separated into two categories. Evidenced through women

¹⁵³ Worobec 179.

¹⁵⁴ Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar, Women and Work in Russia, 1880-1930 (London and New York: Longman, 1998) 56.

characters in literature such as Tolstoy's War and Peace (1869), the first conception of beauty extolled petite, pale, delicate women associated with the educated, sophisticated segment of society, while the second image of a plain, natural, and "lasting" appearance was rooted in popular values and the countryside.¹⁵⁵ This latter image appears in Fruit Harvest – the peasant women are solid, compact figures with broad feet and hands and weighty bodies that root them securely to the earth. Goncharova's direct association of the "simple" image of female beauty with peasant culture and the land strengthens the affiliation of these elements with national identity.

Within the context of rural society, Goncharova depicts both married and unmarried women in Fruit Harvest, which elucidates not only their maternal and national symbolism, but also their stages of life and female lineage. Prior to marriage, women wore their hair in a single plait without a head-dress, while after marriage, they were required to braid their hair into two plaits, which were then wrapped around their heads and covered with a kerchief. The covering of her hair represented a woman's complete submission to her husband, while an uncovered head meant that a woman was unprotected, susceptible to evil spirits, and to the attractions of other men.¹⁵⁶ The women in the far-right, central-right, and far-left paintings all wear kerchiefs, while the young woman in the centre is bare-headed and has one plait, emphasising their marital status and the connotations of maternity and sexual availability.

¹⁵⁵ Nadezhda Azhgikhina and Helena Goscilo, "Getting Under Their Skin: The Beauty Salon in Russian Women's Lives," Russia, Women, Culture, Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 94-121: 96.

¹⁵⁶ Worobec 191.

In a further literal emphasis on the women's situations, Goncharova depicts the young woman alone with a dog as a companion, while the married women are grouped in pairs to express their spousal status. She bears further importance as a representation of the common Eve theme. Just as the icon and loubok aesthetics appealed to Goncharova for their synthetic qualities, her allusion to Eve represents the fusion of religious and pagan themes that were a component of Russian, nationalist ideologies. Alluding to Eve's original sin in Garden of Eden, the peasant woman reaches to pick fruit, possibly even an apple, from the tree. The presence of the dog enforces this symbolism, as the animal appears in a version of the Creation from the Kiev province. According to the story, God created man out of earth and woman out of dough, emphasising the fact that woman was made from different and non-durable material. After God placed them in the sun to dry, a dog escaped the watchful eye of St. Michael and ate the dough-woman. God then created another woman out of Adam's rib and named her Eve.¹⁵⁷ In Fruit Harvest, the young woman's association with this theme is underscored by her structural affinity with the dog. The vertical posture of her body forms the side of a right-triangle, the hypotenuse of which stretches from the dog's tail to the fruit about to be picked. Visually, the animal and the girl are inextricably linked. (Fig. 33)

The young woman's exposed hair proclaims her sexuality and her status as an available woman, both of which disappear after marriage. Also, unmarried women frequently wore a red ribbon on their hair to symbolise their

¹⁵⁷ Christine D. Worobec, "Temptress or Virgin? The Precarious Sexual Position of Women in Postemancipation Ukrainian Peasant Society," Russian Peasant Women, eds. Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 41-53: 44.

virginity.¹⁵⁸ The pale blue ribbon on Goncharova's unmarried woman appears as a sly wink to the contrary. She is buttressed on both sides by married women who have ostensibly lost their sexual attractiveness and thus their potential as temptresses. In popular culture, the association of peasant women with Eve took on a connotation of evil driven by vanity, lust for money, and powers of seduction that could disrupt patriarchal society.¹⁵⁹ Goncharova's placement of a young Eve juxtaposed by respectable matrons undermines this pejorative construction of woman-as-temptress by placing her on the same plane as the esteemed mother and depicting all women as productive agents of the harvest. Together, the women are not only symbols of collectivity and earth, but progenitors of the main underpinnings of national consciousness – the soul as embodied in Mother Russia and the life cycles of agriculture.

This Mother Russia construction both contrasts and complements the Father Tsar, a ruling myth intended to legitimise the autocracy while continuing to emphasise the importance of land. The image of the tsar as a saintly prince merged with the tyrant-tsar, a myth that descended from the brutal reign of Ivan IV and his creation of a centralised state under the authority of a single ruler. At the end of Ivan's reign, a new myth emerged that expressed the wish for a protector of the land; thus, Mother Russia was juxtaposed to the image of an all-powerful tsar whose sovereignty rested upon

¹⁵⁸ Worobec, "Victims," 191.

¹⁵⁹ Frierson 165. Frierson cites Tolstoy's play Power of Darkness (1887) as a literary example of this perception. The play focuses on the death of an infant in a peasant village. While the father actually kills the child, Tolstoy presents the women as responsible for planning the murder and forcing the father to commit it, thus presenting peasant women as the source of evil, p. 169-170.

her well-being.¹⁶⁰ This myth was reinforced by coronation rites in which the tsar was crowned in the Holy Mother Church of the Kremlin and assumed the throne through a union with Mother Russia. Further, the marriage of the tsar to the female land symbolised an appeal for agricultural abundance under his reign. "The autocratic rite of the sacred marriage between tsar and motherland, whom he promised to serve and protect," writes Joanna Hubbs in her book Mother Russia, "defined the role of the ruler as a son dependent on earth for his power."¹⁶¹

This construction mirrors the image of the peasant as offspring of the land, reiterating the idea that both peasant and tsar derive their sustenance from the earth despite their structural authority. Goncharova emphasises this theme by placing the women within the context of rural labor, indicating that they exist within the patriarchal framework of the commune and society in general. At the same time, their association with Mother Earth and genealogy endows them with an autonomy that undermines that very structure since they epitomise the source of life. This exposition, like Goncharova's fusion of Western and Russian influences and the rural myth with urban modernism, exists within a hybrid space. The women are positioned in-between idealisation and subjugation and in-between their constructions as mother and temptress, while their affiliation with the earth serves as a mimetic form of agency. They challenge both the patriarchal, tsarist society and late-nineteenth

¹⁶⁰ Hubbs 186-187. See also Michael Cherniavsky, Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths (New York: Random House, 1969).

¹⁶¹ Hubbs 188-190.

century images of the sterility of women and earth¹⁶² by returning to a theme in which women are more positively symbolised in both social and national discourse.

Through Fruit Harvest, Goncharova underscores the fundamental ambivalence inherent in various dimensions of Russian national identity. The rejection of the West was accompanied by an absorption of its philosophical and aesthetic ideals. Goncharova predicates that ambivalence upon a representation of the dual perceptions of peasant women, enforcing their status as bearers of ancestral lineage. Through this temporal connection, the women symbolise the myth of unity that Slavophiles in particular found within the commune. This location and the desire of Neoprimivist artists to appropriate and reinterpret the aesthetics of folk arts indicate a point at which the nation is written "as the event of the everyday and the advent of the epochal."¹⁶³

On one level, the women in the painting represent the "everyday," while on another, they represent the ancient beginnings of national unity. They are both specific and universal. They are both 'Woman' as a cultural and ideological Other constructed through diverse representational discourses (literary, linguistic, artistic, scientific) and 'women,' the subjects of their collective histories.¹⁶⁴ Structured within those liminal cultural locations, the women blur the parameters between not only urban/rural and ancient/modern,

¹⁶² Frierson 179-180.

¹⁶³ Homi Bhaba, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," Nation and Narration, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 291-322: 293.

¹⁶⁴ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 259-263: 259

but also the fundamental trajectories of national identity. The women in Fruit Harvest embody recurrent themes in Russian nationalist discourse, while simultaneously premising that construction against the framework of patriarchal society.

In this respect, Goncharova appropriates and absorbs the precepts of current artistic and nationalistic discourse, yet turns the oppositional structure of primitivism back on itself. She asserts the prevalent metaphor of woman-as-earth through a synthesis of visual and thematic motifs, grounding Fruit Harvest securely in its temporal context. This very assertion positions rural women within the more universal conception of national identity, endowing them with an agency that subverts the rigid constructions within the rural myth.

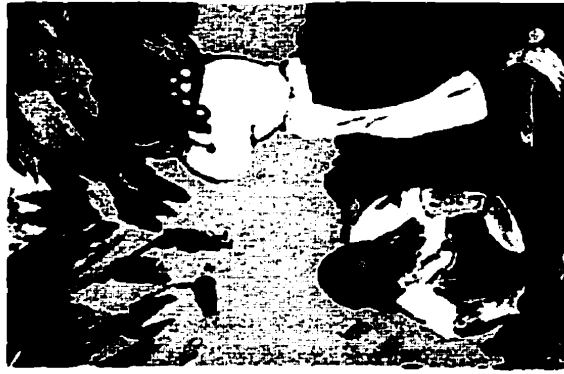


Fig. 23 – Natalia Goncharova, Fruit Harvest (1909)



Fig. 24 – Mikhail Larionov, The Gypsy (1909)



Fig. 25 – Russian loubok, "Oh, send for the guard, there's a thief in my yard!"
mid-18th century



a.



b.

Fig. 26 - a. Loubok. detail

б. Fruit Harvest, detail



a.



b.

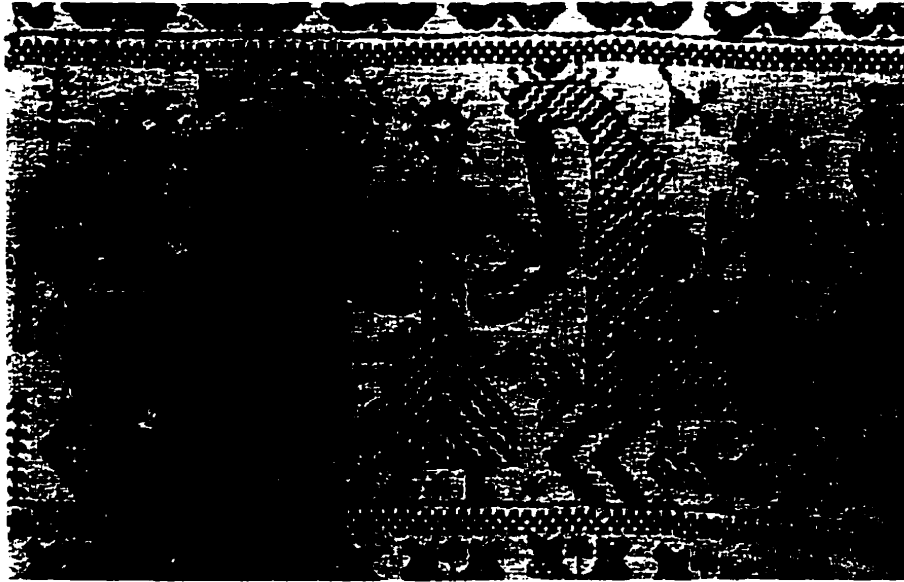
Fig. 27 – a. Russian icon, St. Thomas the Apostle, 14th century
b. Natalia Goncharova, Virgin and Child (1912-13)



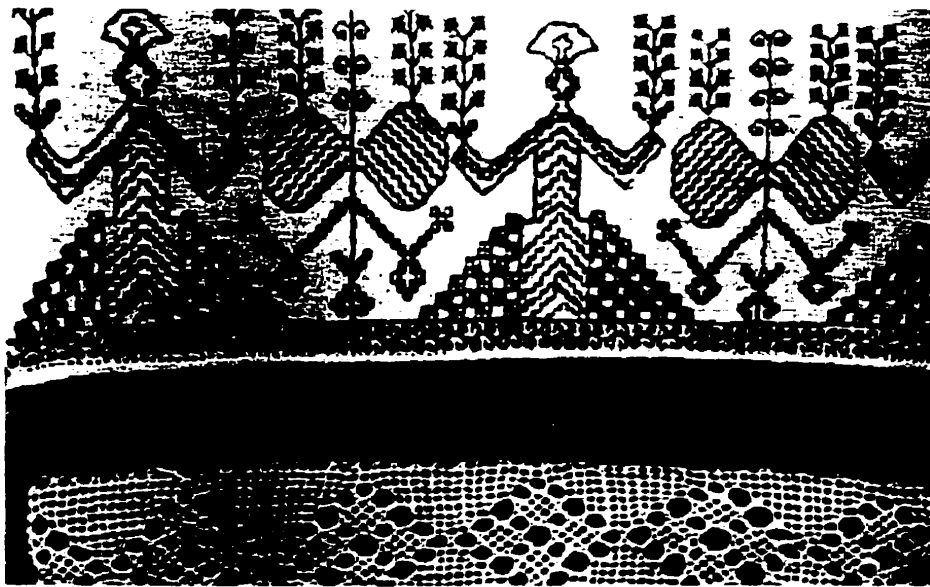
Fig. 28 – Natalia Goncharova, Evangelists (1911)



Fig. 29 – Russian matreshka dolls, 20th century



a.



b.

Fig. 30 – a. Border of wedding towel, detail of female figure, riders birds (1886)
b. Border of towel, detail of female figures with trees, 19th century

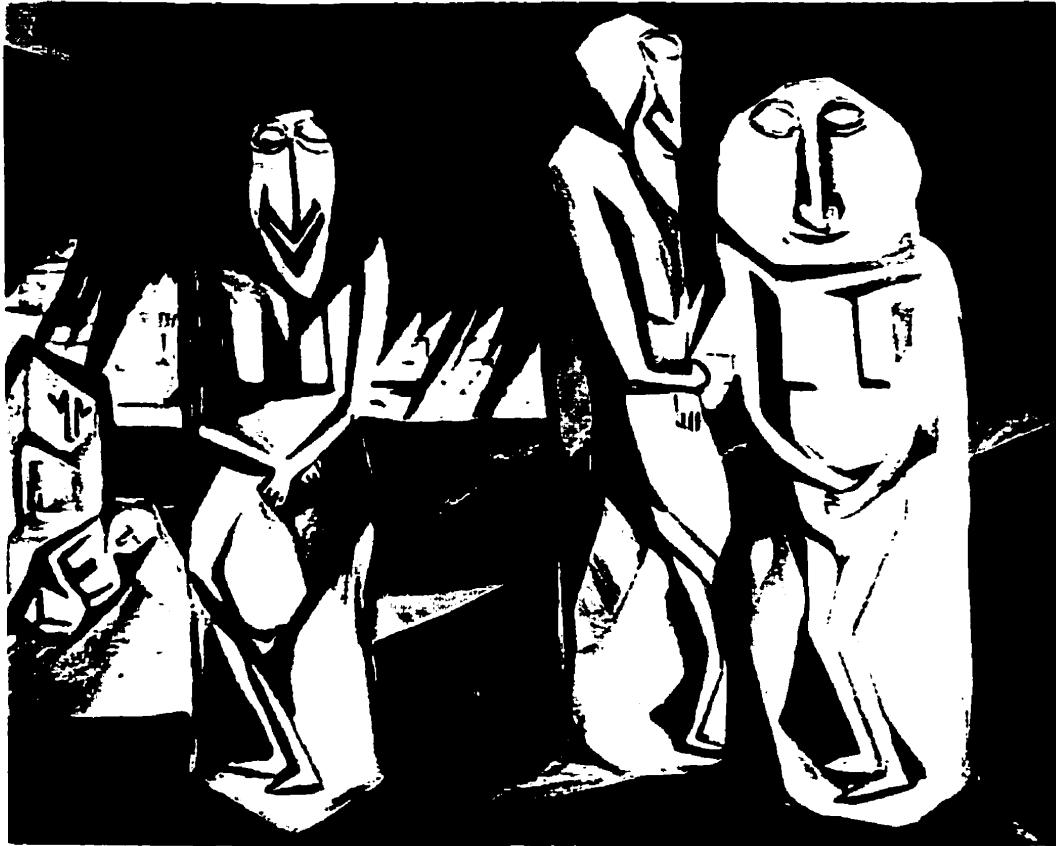


Fig. 31 – Natalia Goncharova, Pillars of Salt (1908)



Fig. 32 – Fruit Harvest, detail



Fig. 33 – Fruit Harvest, detail

Chapter Four:

Othon Friesz's Autumn Work and Ancestral Myths in France

A man's memory may almost become the art of continually varying and misrepresenting his past, according to his interest in the present.

– *George Santayana*¹

The mother-country is the material and non-material domain acquired and transmitted by our ancestors.

– *Paul Déroulède (1909)*²

Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are.

– *Ernest Renan (1882)*³

En un mot, la national occupe le sommet de la hiérarchie des idées politiques.

– *Charles Maurras (1937)*⁴

The Revolution affected some districts much more deeply than others; and in this strip of Burgundy lying so near to Paris, the significance of that movement was felt to be the triumph of the Gaul over the Frank.

– *Honoré de Balzac (1844)*⁵

In time we all admit our relatives and our neighbors, our fellow townsmen and even, perhaps, at last our fellow nationals to the threshold of tolerance. But the man living one inch beyond the boundary is an inveterate foe.

– *Dorothy Dunnnett (1961)*⁶

All the nations of Europe are therefore closely connected to the Aryan race, which has been the origin of all the great civilisations.

– *Edmond Drumot (1886)*⁷

¹ www.quoteworld.org

² Paul Déroulède, *Discours* (1909), cited in Martin 250.

³ Renan 19.

⁴ Charles Maurras, *Mes idées politiques* (Paris: Éditions Albatros, 1986) 281.

⁵ Balzac 89.

⁶ Dorothy Dunnnett, *The Game of Kings* (London: Penguin Books, 1961) 498.

⁷ Christie 132.

A GLORIOUS PAST

Since at least the fourteenth century, debates about the ancestral origins of the French had been employed by writers and politicians as a means by which to either resist or legitimise the aristocracy. One component of these debates centred on the idea that the French were descended from Greco-Roman ancestry, a theory that emerged alongside the belief that the institutions and philosophies of classical antiquity could provide valuable examples for France. This theme was sustained throughout the centuries and frequently manipulated for political or social reasons. Winckelmann's positing of the supremacy of Greek art is but one aspect of a European, ideological tradition that scientists and writers would eventually seek to confirm through racial and ethnographic studies. At the turn of the twentieth century in France, an amalgam of these theories merged with both a nationalistic revival and a nostalgia for the classical Golden Age of harmony and equanimity.

Painted within this ideological context, Henri-Achille-Émile-Othon Friesz's (1879-1949) Autumn Work (1908) (Fig. 34) contains a pictorial framework that references both the classical tradition of French art and the modern, decorative aesthetic so significant to primitivist artists. Born in Le Havre, Friesz possessed an early interest in painting, having discovered a paint-box at his uncle's home at the age of twelve. "I forced the lid and squeezed the tubes," he wrote, "Blues, reds, greens squirted forth [...] I was astounded."¹ Possibly from Scandinavian or Dutch descent, Friesz came from

¹ Youngna Kim, The Early Works of Georges Braque, Raoul Dufy, and Othon Friesz: The Le Havre Group of Fauvist Painters, unpublished PhD dissertation (Ohio State University, 1980)

several generations of sea captains and ship-builders and planned to become a captain himself. However, not wanting her son to become a sailor, Friesz's mother encouraged his artistic tendencies and brought him to study with the painter Charles Lhullier (1824-1889) at the *École Municipale des Beaux-Arts*. Under Lhullier's tutelage, Friesz learned the principles of academic methodology through life drawing and studying the works of Delacroix, Chardin, Poussian and Géricault, while also experimenting with open-air painting and Impressionist styles.²

As one of the peripheral Fauve painters, Friesz, along with Raoul Dufy and Georges Braque, focused primarily on depicting scenes from the working port areas of Le Havre and surrounding Normandy towns. Unlike Matisse, who was influenced by direct contact with 'primitive' arts, Friesz was exposed to the formal qualities of ornament through the work of his fellow artists. While he possessed a more traditional tendency in terms of privileging drawing, composition and the internal structure of a painting over the use of colour as a means of expression,³ Friesz was nonetheless strongly influenced by the Fauve emphasis on colour and by Impressionism. Having established an acquaintance with Camille Pissarro, he was initially attracted to the

35. Also see Roger Brielle, *Othon Friesz* (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1930), Fernand Fleuret, et al., *Friesz 1901-1927* (Paris: Éditions Chroniques, 1927), and Marcel Giry, *La jeunesse d'Othon Friesz 1879-1914* (Lyon: Thèse, 1951).

² Kim 34-40.

³ Jean-Paul Crespelle, *The Fauves*, trans. Anita Brookner (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1962) 164. Catalogues dedicated to Friesz's œuvre include Robert Martin and Odile Aittouarès, *Émile Othon Friesz: L'œuvre peint* (Paris: Éditions Aittouarès, 1995); J. Busse, *Rétrospective* (Genève: Musée de Genève, 1953); *Exposition Rétrospective: Othon Friesz (1879-1949)* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Musée Municipal, 1979); Waldemar George and C. de Richter, *Catalogue de la Rétrospective Friesz* (Genève: Galerie Motte, 1950), André Salmon, *Émile Othon Friesz et son œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1920), Charles Vildrac, et. al. *Catalogue de l'Exposition Rétrospective* (Paris: Galerie Charpentier, 1950)

Impressionist techniques of broad, thick brushstrokes and use of broken, vivid colours, which he fused with the brilliant patterning of the "principal" Fauvist artists and the volumetric interest of Cezanne.⁴

However, while Friesz believed that Impressionism had led artists in the right direction, he ultimately concluded that their paintings "were not constructed, but amounted only to an active documentation of nature; they were arrangement and not composition." He sought instead to escape from the "mediocrity of direct emotion" and return to the "orchestrations of colour."⁵ Autumn Work, exhibited to critical acclaim at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1908, reveals this interest in the decorative aspect of colours as derived from the Fauvist program. It also underscores Friesz's negotiation between the primitivist assumption of 'tribal' and folk arts as indicators of spontaneous, immediate subjectivity and the classical approach to art through reason and intellect.

This negotiation and Friesz's employment of a scene of working peasants in order to express a specific, Golden Age theme reveals a major aspect of French nationalist discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century, which centred on a reevaluation of what constituted French national identity. Industrialisation and increased colonialism brought France into closer contact with "primitive" societies and contributed to a proliferation of theories that focused on the superiority of one collectivity over another. With studies of race heightening the interest in physiological attributes, European scientists

⁴ See Alvin Martin and Judi Freeman, "The Distant Cousins in Normandy: Braque, Dufy, and Friesz," The Fauve Landscape, Judi Freeman, ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990).

⁵ Kim 99-100.

and writers began to associate perceived differences among people with their national identities and origins. These studies augmented the significance of the peasantry as exemplary of French ancestry.

The rural myth that had influenced the realm of visual arts at the end of the nineteenth century takes on a heightened importance in Friesz's work. The function of myth is in part to reveal *models* that give meaning to the world. These models remind people that grandiose events once took place on earth and that this "glorious past" is recoverable.⁶ This ideology had particular significance in early-twentieth century France. Autumn Work represents a convergence of theoretical and thematic motifs that historically revolved around the genealogical and cultural underpinnings of the French nation. Friesz's composition further complicates the boundaries inherent in primitivist and nationalist discourse by premising the rural myth on ideologies of Greco-Roman ancestry and thus racial superiority. The rural myth as an example of a unified, immutable collectivity contrasts with the exclusionist nature of racial theories that became a component of the nationalistic assertion of classical origins for the French. In fusing a decorative aesthetic with an idealised scene of the harvest, Friesz not only references primitivist tropes of the peasantry, but also the significance of reviving classical myths of utopia in French nationalist discourse.

⁶ Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 145.

DEBATES OVER FRENCH ANCESTRY

Since at least the sixteenth century, discussions about the "true" origins of the French had centred on the question of whether they were descended from Frankish, Gaulish or Greco-Roman ancestry. These debates impacted the cultural realm, as artists and critics invoked genealogy as a way of denoting which artistic subject matter was symbolic of the "truly French." With its fusion of aesthetics and themes, Friesz's painting must be read in a social context in which debates about ancestral origins are sustained alongside the ideological trajectories of nationalism. His pictorial affiliation of a classical theme and the peasantry is part of a historical tradition in which theories revolving around antiquity, origins, race, and the nation converged and diverged at numerous points. First, I will briefly examine the various strains of thought within the debate over French origins, as this provides the basis for my hypothesis that Autumn Work conflates folk primitivist constructions of the peasantry with the national myth of Greco-Roman ancestry.

Within the ideological context of nationalism, classicism occupied a unique position in relation to myths of descent. The idea that classical antiquity could provide valuable models for the French became a particularly effective tool for republicans during the Revolution. As evidenced in visual arts by the work of David, the cult of antiquity had been a strong aspect of Revolutionary ideology in terms of privileging the Roman Republic as an model for active citizenship. The republican Camille Desmoulins in particular championed

Greek and Roman institutions as models for contemporary society.⁷ One aspect of this valuation was the belief that the ancient Greeks and Romans were the genealogical ancestors of the modern French, a theory asserted alongside the belief that the Third Estate was descended from Gaulish heritage. These myths provide not only an explanation of origins for a specific people, but also a rationale for their similarities and position in the world.⁸ As with all national myths, myths of descent could be used as a mechanism of mobilising either a segment of or an entire population.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, French writers and historians sought to resist the aristocracy by claiming that the general population was descended from a pre-Roman, Gaulish heritage. François Guizot, Amédée and Augustin Thierry as well as the Anglo-French physiologist William Frédéric Edwards claimed that the aristocracy and royalty were genealogically tied to the Germanic Franks, invaders of Gaul in the fifth century. By contrast, the rest of France belonged to the pre-invasion, Gaulish ancestry. In Des caractères physiologiques des races humaines (1829), Edwards sought to establish the physiological basis for Thierry's argument that the ancient Gauls could be traced to the present day. With their connection to the Franks, the aristocracy was considered to be foreign invaders who had no right to govern those who belonged to the original French population.⁹ In contrast to the

⁷ Harold Tabolt Parker, The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries: A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937) 72.

⁸ Smith, Ethnic Origins 24.

⁹ Hannah Franziska Augstein, ed. Race: The Origins of an Idea, 1760-1850 (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996) xxvi-xxvii.

aristocratic connection to the Franks, the peasantry had historically been associated with the Gauls.¹⁰

The basis for these theories extends to the seventeenth century with different ideological foundations, as the nobility frequently used their alleged connection to the Franks as a mechanism by which to legitimise the supremacy of their rule. Because the Franks were the conquerors of Gaul, writes the historian Comte Henri de Boulainvilliers in Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France (1727), they acquired rights over the territory and the Gauls that are the source of noble privilege throughout history.¹¹ Boulainvilliers's views provoked discussions throughout the eighteenth century, as the division between Franks and Gauls became a component of revolutionary and subsequently nationalistic sensibilities as the Third Estate was considered to be of Gaulish ancestry in opposition to aristocratic Franks. "The nobility, wrote J.A. Delaure in The Critical History of the Nobility (1790), were "all foreigners, the savages escaped from the forests of Germany."¹² In 1789, Abbé Sieyès referred to the division in his famous pamphlet Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?, in which he called for the Third Estate to "reconquer" the nobility:

The nation, thus purified, will not regret being reduced to believing itself composed exclusively of descendants of Gauls and Romans [...] the fact that being descendent from the Gauls and Romans is worth at least as much as being descended from Sicambrians, Welch, and other

¹⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 215.

¹¹ Jacques Barzun, The French Race: Theories of its Origins and their Social and Political Implications (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932) 104 and 139. In Interpreting the French Revolution (Cambridge, 1981), François Furet further discusses this theory. 2-3.

¹² Greenfeld 172.

savages [...] but conquest has upset all relations, and the Nobility by birth has gone to the side of the Conquerors. Very well then, it must be made to come back to the other side; the Third will once again become Noble by conquering in its turn.¹³

Thierry continued this strain of thought in Considérations sur l'histoire de la France (1840) in which he drew a line between the Gaulish nationality of the general population and the Frankish aristocracy. Thierry's left-wing critique of the ethnic origins of the French aristocracy influenced a wide range of intellectuals and republicans, including Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Victor Hugo. After Louis Philippe's restoration of Primaticcio's decorations at Fontainebleau as a symbol of dynastic continuity, art critics such as Jules Antoine Castagnary criticised the Italian art and later called upon artists to return to France's Gothic and Realist roots as exemplified by the art of Le Nain, Chardin, Courbet, and Manet.¹⁴ In his review of the 1866 Salon, Castagnary wrote, "The seeds of a national art were beginning to grow [...when] Italian art suddenly invaded France."¹⁵ The structuring of a Gaulish versus a Frankish heritage continued within the Third Republic after 1870, a date which, like the Revolution, furnished a "point of departure" for a new French history. In this vein and with Germans viewed as the enemies after the war, the French sought to redefine Gaulish origins in opposition to Germanic

¹³ Eley 10-11.

¹⁴ Mark Antliff, Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 119.

¹⁵ Jules Antoine Castagnary, "Salon de 1866," Salons, 2 vols., 1892, cited in Antliff 119.

Franks.¹⁶ The historian Fustel de Coulanges, in Les institutions politiques de l'ancienne France (1877) focuses heavily on Frankish enslavement of the conquered Gauls, a "conflict of races" that he equates with a social war and class antagonism.¹⁷

Myths focusing on the idea of Greco-Roman as opposed to Gaulish or Frankish origins had also been a strong, historical component of intellectual thought. This is the context in which I located Friesz's painting, which employs a scene of modern peasants as an elucidation of the bygone, classical golden age – a juxtaposition of past and present that continues a historical, ideological tradition of ambivalence towards the idea of Greco-Roman ancestry. In the sixteenth-century, French writers sought to define their own attitude towards the philosophies of classical antiquity and their position within contemporary society. They both postulated the Greek and Latin languages as models of linguistic order for French, while also attempting to separate France from a dependence on Greece and Rome by turning their attention to Gaul.¹⁸

The former affirmation of Greco-Roman superiority was also used as a means by which to criticise contemporary French society and to espouse the basis of patriotism, as Montesquieu wrote, "Les Anciens devoient avoir un plus grand attachement pour leur patrie que nous; car ils étoient toujours ensevelis

¹⁶ Mona Ozouf, L'école de la France: essais sur la révolution, l'utopie, et l'enseignement (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) 345.

¹⁷ Eugen Weber, "Gauls versus Franks: Conflict and Nationalism," Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War 1889-1918, ed. Robert Tombs (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) 8-21: 12.

¹⁸ Marie-Madeleine Martin, The Making of France: the Origins and Development of the Idea of National Unity, trans. Barbara and Robert North (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951) 126.

avec leur patrie."¹⁹ Continuing this strain of thought years later the right-wing, monarchist editor Charles Maurras (1868-1952), wrote, "le monde moderne ne retarde pas seulement sur l'empire romain, mais sur le Moyen Age, puisqu'il est moins unifié."²⁰ At the turn of the twentieth century, Maurras and his highly conservative newspaper and political organisation *Action française* sought to undermine any history of ethnic division along class lines by subsuming both Gallic-Celts and Franks within a Greco-Roman genealogy.²¹ I will return to a discussion of Maurras in the third section, as his ideologies provide the contextual juncture in which French myths of classical ancestry and nationalism are situated.

AUTUMN WORK AND THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE

The composition of Autumn Work consists of a group of peasants working in harmonious tranquillity during the harvest, each involved in a specific task and united through light colours of purple, blue, and grey and through the golden stretch of land behind them. The painting is compositionally balanced; the central figures, extending to the woman nursing a baby on the left and the crouching woman on the right, form a solid, pyramidal form that contributes to the evocation of stable equanimity. The central pyramid structure contrasts with the arched landscape, which

¹⁹ Montesquieu, Cahiers (1716-1755), ed. Bernard Grasset (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1941) 159.

²⁰ Charles Maurras, Quand les français ne s'aimaient pas (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1916) 236.

simultaneously appears as a womb-like curve over the peasants. This basic structure of Friesz's composition provides a starting point for my analysis, since it alludes to the stable nature of the peasantry as constructed in the rural myth, folk primitivist metaphors of a maternal land, and the congenial aspect of the Golden Age.

A perpetual element of national myth, the theme of a historical, eternal age of bliss centres on the idea that a community of people bound together by ethnic or ideological ties descended from an ancient, uncorrupted world. Classical antiquity in French intellectual thought, particularly as seen through art, literature, and philosophy, satisfied the continuing quest for this idealised past of humanity and of a specific people.²² In the late-nineteenth century, the political manipulation of Greco-Roman themes and their ostensible superiority developed during a period of increased attention to countryside as an escape from the difficulties of urban life, which enhanced the significance of the idyll. Nature thus resides at the crux of the relationship between Golden Age myths and the French peasantry.

The idealisation of the countryside as the location of the Golden Age heightened its significance as a vital link to the sources of the nation. The Golden Age myth, like primitivism, is structured within a framework that posits the past against the present and the country against the city. It is therefore a temporal as well as a spatial system. Friesz's Autumn Work comprises both of these tendencies. By situating the ideal collectivity of

²¹ Antliff 119.

²² Anthony Smith, "The 'Golden Age' and National Renewal," Myths and Nationhood, Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997) 36-59. 39-40.

working peasants within an encompassing, fecund landscape, Friesz mediates between the multiple interpretations of classical themes and the societal veneration of the countryside as a location to escape the political, industrial, and economic difficulties of urban life.

Within the crux of the intersection of nationalism and primitivism, the Golden Age myth operates through this structure of opposition. For both discourses, the myth serves as an opposition to both civilisation and other cultures. In contemporary nationalist scholarship, an analysis of the myth's significance appears in the work of scholars traditionally associated with the "primordialist" school of thought, which holds that nations are "natural" forms of human association that have always existed. John Armstrong states that the Golden Age myth is a "collective memory" and a "nostalgia [which] expresses the yearning to return to a golden age, to halcyon days before corruption and equivocation permeated civilised life [...]. It is also an alleviating response to civilisation."²³ Anthony Smith writes that the "collective appropriation of antiquity, and especially of shared memories of the 'Golden Age,' contributes significantly to the formation of nations" as this mobilises people around a common culture and identity.²⁴ Smith cites several "types" of Golden Ages based on political, military, or economic collective achievement, each of which retained the "original ideas of purity, authenticity, and normative distinctness [...] it defined the 'true character' of a people, or even a humanity."²⁵ The

²³ Armstrong 16.

²⁴ Smith, "The 'Golden Age,'" 39.

²⁵ Smith 40. Schöpflin associates the Golden Age with the "myth of territory," which claims that there is a particular geographic space in which a nation first discovered itself or

further discovery of diverse cultures and languages through both colonialism and increased communications was a testimony to the fact that the ideal, uniform past had deteriorated.²⁶

In nationalist discourse, the myth of the Golden Age is also often constrained by territorial boundaries, thus making both space and time inherent aspects of historical consciousness. This historical identity was crucial to nationalist movements and led to the revival of ostensibly "traditional" customs in the nineteenth century. Smith writes that this idea of the collective past was fundamentally a "moral" quest in the attempt to return to the purity of language and history:

For nationalism may be described as the myth of the historical renovation. Rediscovering in the depths of the communal past a pristine state of true collective individuality, the nationalist strives to realise in strange and oppressive conditions the spirit and values of that distant Golden Age. The roots of the individual are buried in the history and ethos of his group, in its culture and institutions; and from these, and these alone, he can draw purpose and strength for the heroic deeds of the future [...The Golden Age] is an ideal state, not a primordial one [...]. It is an attack on tradition and modernity alike, insofar as they obscure and distort the genuine relationship of man with nature and with his fellow-man.²⁷

The early-twentieth century artistic depiction of scenes alluding to this ideal state appear in the œuvre of the more prominent Fauves, particularly

"assumed the form that it aspires to." He cites the Celtic legend Tir nan Og, land of harmony and plenty, as an example of the merging of territorial and Golden Age myths. p. 28.

²⁶ Olive Patricia Dickason, The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984) 48.

²⁷ Anthony Smith, Theories of Nationalism (London: Duckworth, 1971) 22.

those of Henri Matisse and André Derain. Their paintings of figures reclining or dancing in lush, highly decorative settings evoke the Fauve fascination with landscapes and their desire, in Matisse's words, to create an expressive, harmonious art "of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be [...] a soothing, calming influence on the mind."²⁸ In such paintings as Matisse's Bonheur de vivre (1905-6) and Luxe, calme, et volupté (1904-5), (Figs. 35 and 36) the pictorial elucidation of humans' harmony with nature also quotes from the historical tradition of pastoral scenes in the works of Venetian painters such as Giorgione, Titian, and Correggio, and the later works of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. In alluding to the classical tradition, Matisse's work most evidently refers to the theme of Virgil's Eclogue IV, in which the ideal existence is situated within the halcyon landscape of Arcadia. The paintings also reference the modern practices of tourism developing in the south, thus blurring the line of demarcation between the eternal realm of myth and the contemporary, changing world.²⁹

Friesz's Autumn Work belongs to this pastoral branch of the Fauve program. His complementary painting Spring (1908) (Fig. 37) clearly references Matisse's Bonheur de vivre in composition and theme. Unlike Autumn Work, Spring forgoes a clear representation of the peasantry in favour of nudes existing in a blissful idyll where they are in harmony with both nature

²⁸ Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," Art in Theory 1900-1990, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) 72-78: 76.

²⁹ James D. Herbert, Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 115-116.

and each other. This pastoral theme most commonly references the classical golden age, while representations of the peasantry evoke the virtue, labor, and morality of rural cultures. The synthesis of the two ideas and their antecedent artistic representations – the Golden Age and the rural myth – are inscribed in Autumn Work. Representing a collective, harmonious scene of peasants working during the harvest, the painting bears several compositional similarities to Spring. The woman nursing a baby on the left holds a similar pose as the woman just right of centre in Spring. The bending women in the foreground of Autumn Work are comparable to the crouching figure in the background of Spring, while the distant, standing figure stands in a weight-shifting position that mirrors that of the half-naked, male figure in Autumn Work. The two embracing women in Spring have become a farmer holding a bushel of hay in Autumn Work.

Aside from compositional similarities, the two paintings exude an aura of collective harmony. Several figures in Spring are coupled together in erotic and blissful compatibility, while the focus of Autumn Work lies in the oneness of the group at the centre of the painting. Their stable, pyramidal form echoes the shape of the mountain in the distance, strengthening the peasants' association with and dependence on the land. Several of the figures are visually congruent. The two men in the foreground stand with their backs to each other in opposing stances that lend a sense of balance to the group. The seated women on the far right and left both extend their hands to the ground, an effect that secures the base of the compositional pyramid. The uniform colour scheme adds to the integration of the figures, while the deep gold of the land

creates a literal, illustrative reference to the Golden Age.

The peasants are painted with light, almost pastel colours of violet, blue, yellow, and green, which serve to unite the figures with the landscape rather than separating them from it. They are at once enmeshed in their individual tasks, yet performing them with the intention of working for the collective good. The dark outlines and rhythmic brushstrokes of the background trees and foliage reiterate the ornamental and arabesque qualities associated with 'primitive' arts. The difference between the two paintings lies clearly in their respective titles. Where Spring is a bucolic idyll of indolent relaxation, Autumn Work is an idealised depiction of the ritualistic nature of peasant labor. The latter theme quotes from paintings by Millet and Breton, yet the composition and colour scheme of Autumn Work endows it with an eternal idealism that the earlier paintings lack, placing it within the tradition of employing a specifically rural Golden Age theme to contrast with contemporary society.

Just as writers such as Montesquieu used the idea of an exemplary Greco-Roman history to criticise the French, the classical theme of the nature-based, Golden Age was upheld as a symbol of the ideal society compared to the decline of the present day. In Works and Days, Hesiod evokes the Golden Age as a mythical memory in contrast to his own "age of iron." He locates the pastoral life within the countryside where the practice of agriculture exemplifies the primary virtues of prudence and effort, and where men once "lived as if they were gods, their hearts free from all sorrow, by themselves,

and without hard work or pain."³⁰ In this age, "The fruitful grainland yielded its harvest to them of its own accord, this was great and abundant, while they at their pleasure quietly looked after their works."³¹ For Hesiod, the Golden Ages has a sad connotation, as it belongs to a distant past. After declaring "For here now is the age of iron," Hesiod writes of the misery that follows: hard work and pain, strife between parents and children, siblings, and friends, lack of reverence for the gods, neglect of elderly parents, rule by violence, and "no defence against evil."³²

The Golden Age myth has a similar function in European primitivist discourse as a mechanism of constructing the idealisation of "the Other" :

They are in the Golden Age, neither digging ditches nor building fences to guard their possessions. They leave their gardens open, without law, without records, without judges, but following a natural justice esteeming those wicked who would injure others.³³

The myth also emerged in nationalist and primitivist thought as a means by which to establish the idea that the origins of humans were genuine and unsullied by the trappings of modernity. Moreover, as the anthropologist George Boas wrote in 1935, civilised people would do well to seek out this ideal state of being in contemporary cultures. Boas writes that this "cultural

³⁰ Hesiod, The Works and Days, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959) 31.

³¹ Hesiod 31.

³² Hesiod 39-43.

³³ Pietro d'Anghiera Martire, Extrait ou recueil de Isles nouvellement trouvés, cited in Dickason 53

primitivism" is the discontent of the civilised with civilisation or a characteristic feature of it. The theory further holds that people living in a highly evolved and complex cultural conditions believe that a simpler, less sophisticated life is a more desirable life and that this life can be found in 'tribal' or peasant cultures.

Similarly, "chronological primitivism" locates this simple life in the remote past when humans were said to be more closely attuned to nature.³⁴ Boas writes that the happiest point in time was at the beginning of history before its decline, although there is still possibility for the hope of a future renewal of the primeval mode of life.³⁵ In a nationalistic sense, the key to relocating this ideal past and strengthening collective identity lay in the preservation of peasant cultures and traditions. By referencing a distant, ideal past through a representation of contemporary, peasant culture, Friesz's painting aligns with the nationalist division between country and civilisation, as well as Boas's theories of both cultural and chronological primitivism.

The presence in Autumn Work of a nursing mother and child indicates this hope for the renewal of a distant, ideal past. As Virgil writes, the birth of a boy will end the iron age: "O chaste Lucina, look with blessing on the boy/Whose birth will end the iron race at last and raise/A golden throughout the world."³⁶ He continues Hesiod's tradition of relating the theme of the Golden Age to the entity of the country life: "Earth untilled/Will pour forth

³⁴ George Boas and Arthur Lovejoy, A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1935) 7.

³⁵ Boas 2-3.

³⁶ Virgil 57.

straying ivy rife, and baccaris [...] /Soft spikes of grain will gradually gild the fields./And reddening grapes will hang in clusters on wild brier."³⁷ In addition to the self-yielding earth, Virgil also makes explicit the idea of the collective community that is reflected in Friesz's painting. In Georgics I, Virgil writes of the Golden Age as a time when "no tillers subjugated the land: even to mark possession of the plain; [...] man made gain for the common good, and Earth of her own accord gave her gifts all the more freely when none demanded them."³⁸ The location of the Golden Age in the countryside thus linked the bygone era with not only an abundance of nature, but also with those who worked in close contact with the land.

This theme took strong hold in late-nineteenth century France. The prevalence of debates about French cultural origins throughout the nineteenth-century merged with the increased constructions of peasant cultures, as I discussed in Chapter One. Within that framework, artists and writers soon focused on the peasantry as a bridge between theories of their nation's ancestry and the Golden Age. As living representations of ancestry, the peasantry embodied the idea of the Gaulish, rural heritage fused with Roman blood. Although the emphasis on classical origins had provoked artistic representations of the Golden Age, they were infrequently located within an active, peasant culture. Unlike Friesz, artists such as Millet, Courbet, and Gauguin did not explicitly connect rural cultures with a Golden Age, but several of their paintings, such as Millet's Angelus (Fig. 5), posit peasant

³⁷ Virgil 57.

³⁸ Virgil, Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) 107.

societies as the location for moral values of piety, collective activities, and ritual harvest that are characteristics of the Golden Age. The increasing power of the middle class in the nineteenth century also contributed to the shift from viewing the Third Estate as descendants of the nation's earlier inhabitants to focusing that characteristic on peasant cultures.³⁹

In Histoire des paysans en France, Leymarie refers to the relationship of "du paysan gaulois" with the land as the basis of the history of the peasantry and writes that "la race gallo-romaine" was a fundamental aspect of the formation of the new nation.⁴⁰ The literary realm further expressed the idea of the peasantry as epitomes of cultural origins. The poet and philosopher Charles Péguy (1873-1914) asserts the countryside as a fundamental, shaping entity in contrast to the urban world: "Les tenaces aïeux, paysans, vigneron [...] ils n'en ont pas eu pour longtemps à reconquérir sur le monde bourgeois, sur la société bourgeois, leur petit fils indigne [...] En moi, autour de moi [...] tout concourt à faire de moi un paysan."⁴¹ In his poem Le Chanson du Paysan, the poet Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914) underscores the notion of the peasantry as the epitome of national origins: "Le paysan, en tous pays, – est le support de la nation [...] mais dans le champs le paysan est roi – et cent fois plus heureux qu'il ne le pense."⁴² Mistral also evokes the opposition of city versus country when he writes that the renewal of France requires a turn towards the past as

³⁹ Ryan 82.

⁴⁰ Leymarie 5 and 7.

⁴¹ Charles Péguy, Souvenirs (Paris: Gallimard, 1934) 94 and 97.

⁴² Frédéric Mistral, Oeuvres poétiques: le poème du Rhône, les Olivades (Marseille: Jeanne Laffite, 1980) 137.

found in peasant culture:

France must once again grow green in our memories. It is only by steeping ourselves in the past, by encouraging the new shoots which are budding in folklore, we shall free ourselves from the dangerous weakness of cosmopolitanism [...] The true patriotism springs from one's devotion to one's land [...] if we seek to revive our country, we must revive the sources of love of country: religion, traditions, national memories and ancient dialects.⁴³

Mistral's evocation of this idyll ran parallel to the social tendency of an urban "escape" into nature. The second half of the nineteenth century provoked an increase of tourism to rural retreats and resorts, resulting in further glorification of natural elements as nourishing and rejuvenating. Urban society responded with a proliferation of public parks designed to bring nature into cities wrought with industrialisation. The Bois de Boulogne was entirely rebuilt between 1852 and 1858, resulting in a contrived representation of ideal "nature" in which upper-class society could ice-skate, ride horses, and socialise without venturing too far from the city centre.⁴⁴ Impressionist artists such as Monet and Renoir frequently negotiated the territory between this desire for "nature" and the physical spaces of urban life in cafes, apartments, theatres, and city streets. The increase of tourism contributed to this artistic negotiation, as James Herbert discusses in relation to the Fauve pastoral program. Tourists actively sought out the "primitive mentality" in the south of France, which is

⁴³ Cited in Martin, The Making of France 243.

⁴⁴ Robert Herbert, Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988) 143-149.

pictorially embodied in works such as Matisse's Luxe, calme, et volupté by women, nature, and myth.⁴⁵

Autumn Work embodies these current practices and ideologies by premising the idyllic life within the countryside. In addition to the rural myth of the peasantry as untouched by industrialisation, Autumn Work sustains the gender affiliations and dichotomies of the folk primitivist discourse. The nursing mother and child first of all refer to Virgil's description of the Golden Age as beginning with the birth of an unnamed child.⁴⁶ In Friesz's painting, the mother is more physically aligned with the land on a lateral plane than the other figures, an association that references the metaphor of the earth as a fertile and productive entity. The other women are less fully connected with the land, but they are depicted in crouched positions that endow them with a sense of anchored roundness in contrast to the vertical, male figures. The men are also the ones in possession of tools with which to harvest, while the women all appear to be in direct, physical contact with the earth.

The presence in Autumn Work of the nursing mother also underscores its position within the pastoral program of other Fauve artists. As Herbert points out, the female body could suggest a temporal locus in works such as Matisse's Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra) (1907) (Fig. 38), transcending the historical moment to represent the primordial essence:

The female body, especially when nude, could denote the seemingly nature continuity of humanity from the origin of the species onward, and countless contemporary

⁴⁵ Herbert, Fauve Painting, 119.

⁴⁶ Virgil, The Eclogues, trans. Guy Lee (Middlesex and New York: Penguin Books, 1980) 57.

texts and picture – including the Fauve pastorals – marshalled this understanding of the figure of woman in their construction of images of mythical eternity.⁴⁷

This symbolism in Autumn Work is further sustained by the position of the workers in relationship to the landscape. The immediate, initial effect of the painting alludes to the supremacy of the land over both male and female workers and to the peasantry's submission to the forces of nature. Encompassed by the womb-like curve of the hill, the peasants are not so much working on the land as they are within it. As in Virgil, the land is not only self-generating, but also protective: "Your very cradle will pour forth caressing flowers/The snake will perish, and the treacherous poison-herb perish."⁴⁸ The importance of the land is a crucial element of Golden Age myths within national discourse since the landscape and soil influences the character of the age by giving birth to national heroes and ancestors and by forming the national community.⁴⁹

This idea of regeneration is carried through in Autumn Work, as the figures visually appear to be fully enclosed by the sweeping, dark trees, the arced curve of the land, the distant, cloudy sky and looming mountain. The foreground peasants are all positioned below the elliptical horizon of the landscape, with the exception of the man in the background centre. He forms the peak of the compositional pyramid and is the one worker who breaks the horizon line of the landscape with the perpendicular staff of his rake. The figures in the distance also rise above the horizon line, but they blend in with

⁴⁷ Herbert, Fauve Painting 148.

⁴⁸ Virgil, The Eclogues 57.

the colour scheme of the land so effectively that are almost invisible at first glance. The form of woman does appear above the horizon in the background left, but her body is visually analogous to the curve of the landscape in contrast to the male worker, who vertically breaches the horizon line.

This schema alludes to the prevalent notion of the male as the inseminator of the feminine, receptive land. While this is indicative of a patriarchy, the erotic implications allude to the Golden Age notion of regeneration and the ancestral origins the peasantry was thought to embody. The affiliation of women with the landscape in the pastoral paintings of the Fauves also pertains to the mythical association of women with nature, which was strengthened by the increase in travel to rural areas. In 1852, Michelet wrote of the landscape near Nantes, "It is a luxuriant wilderness rich with fruit trees and vegetables. I am suspended, suckling at the breasts of nature." His statement is structured within a system that immerses the individual into something larger – in this case, an all-encompassing environment that is fertile and feminised.⁵⁰

Michel Epuy in Le sentiment de la nature (1907) writes, "Woman, the great flower [...] in Her our rational race (whose true bonds that attached it to Mother Nature have been shattered since the conquest of language) invigorates and rejuvenates itself through contact with the mystical [...] origin, end, and intermediary of all existence."⁵¹ In L'Année d'un ermite (1870), Jules Levallois

⁴⁹ Smith, "Golden Age," 49.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Green, The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990) 130.

⁵¹ Michel Epuy, Le Sentiment de la nature (Paris, 1907) 107-108, cited in Herbert 114.

contrasts his life in a commercial area of Paris with the "earthly paradise" of the valley of Bressuire and forest of Fontainebleau. He also reiterates the theme of feminine land restoring virility to a man:

In the midst of the country I heard nothing other than
the buzzing of insects and the singing of birds [...]
Never, in the lap of nature, have I felt my being diminish,
weaken, or dissolve returning all the more a man [...] for
the social milieu diminishes and consumes, the natural
milieu nourishes man and brings him back to life.⁵²

The women in Autumn Work and the relationship of the central, male figure to the landscape represent the erotic association to nature, while the mother and child more directly reference the theme of maternalism and regeneration. In Eclogue IV, the birth of a child is prophesied by the Cumaen Sibyl, "The great succession of centuries is born afresh/Now too returns the Virgin; Saturn's rule returns/A new begetting now descends from heaven's height."⁵³ This prophecy is brought to fruition in Friesz's painting. While the mother and child bear a striking, visual similarity to the dead mother and child in Delacroix's Massacre at Chios (1824), (Fig. 39 a and b) which influenced the artist during his first stay in Paris, they clearly allude to revival rather than slaughter. Nevertheless, death is an subconscious element of Golden Age myths since the ideas of life, happiness, and harmony are evoked against the realities of death and war in contemporary society.

Symbolic images of a mother and child appear in antecedent, artistic

⁵² Cited in Green 132.

⁵³ Virgil 57.

depictions of a Golden Age, with the primary difference being that Friesz locates his Golden Age in rural culture. Dominique Papety's Dream of Happiness (1843) (Fig. 40) and Nicolas Poussin's The Andrians (1631) (Fig. 41) depict a redolent, sensual classical landscape where labor appears non-existence and time is arrested. Gauguin set his utopian vision in 'primitive' Tahitian culture far removed from the corrupt civilisation of the Western world. In leaving France for Tahiti, Gauguin wrote, "I do not dream of death [...] but on the contrary of eternal life."⁵⁴ The Fauvist representations of the idyll either centre around Matisse's images of timeless primordialism or the almost Dionysian ecstasy of Derain's The Golden Age (1905) (Fig. 42). European artists rarely located the Golden Age in rural cultures because of the very premise that it is an age free of strife and labor. The question of any kind of labor, let alone peasant labor, is rarely addressed, since a basic characteristic of the Virgilian Golden Age is that work will cease to exist: "The carrier too will quit the sea, no naval pines/Barter their goods, but every land bear everything/The soil will suffer hoes no more, nor vines the hook./The sturdy ploughman too will now unyoke his team."⁵⁵

By contrast, images of peasant work appear frequently in art, but again the rural myth, however idealised, is not often conflated with the notion of a consummate past. Like Friesz's work, paintings such as Jules Breton's The Gleaners (1854) (Fig. 43) and Camille Pissarro's Apple Picking at Eragny (1888) (Fig. 44) evoke the theme of collective, harmonious work. Friesz was

⁵⁴ Paul Gauguin, Letters to his Wife and Friends, Maurice Malingue, ed., Henry J. Stenning, trans. (New York, 1948)

⁵⁵ Virgil 59.

influenced by paintings like Breton's and Pissarro's, with the difference being that the latter artists depict the communal nature of peasant harvests without reference to their bucolic symbolism. The title alone of Breton's work concerns the back-breaking practice of collecting the last residue of the wheat stalks. Moreover, the inclusion in Breton's painting of an armed, uniformed officer lends a threatening air of reality to the scene that is antithetical to the idyllic myth. Pissarro's work, like Friesz's, entirely elides the social and political realities of the peasantry in the representation of an agreeable scene of apple-picking. The workers are likewise encircled by the golden arch of land that dominates the canvas, but lacks further overt reference to the specific motif of the Golden Age.

An exception to this artistic tendency of separating the rural myth from the Golden Age myth is Paul Signac's In the Time of Harmony (1894) (Fig. 45), in which a group of both workers and tourists inhabit a landscape similar to that of the French Riviera. The figures are imbued with a sense of relaxation and peace, yet Signac provides at least a hint of labor through the shovel in the foreground and man sowing a field in the distance. Rather than the exploitative work implied in Breton's painting, Signac's workers perform their tasks with a physical and mental ease that makes their labor nearly indistinguishable from the recreational activities of the other figures. The pointillist technique and the inclusion of modern inventions such as the steam tractor are indicative of Signac's desire to locate his Golden Age not in the past, "but in the future," a statement that was inscribed on the title plate of the

picture.⁵⁶

Friesz's work is a visual and thematic synthesis of these preceding artistic themes. As in previous depictions of the Golden Age, the inclusion in Autumn Work of the mother and child symbolises the perpetual regeneration of that age. By fusing that imagery with the seasonal ritual of the harvest, Friesz enforces the symbolism of the peasantry's reliance on the eternal cycle of nature. The idea of ritual takes on a heightened dimension in the interpretation of this painting within the context of national myth. National myth, as discussed in Chapter One, must be sustained through rituals and symbols in order to ensure their continuance and effectiveness through time. Friesz's employment of a harvest theme to express a component of nationalistic ideology strongly reinforces this ritual dimension of myth. In locating the source of ritual within peasant cultures ruled by the seasonal cycle of nature, Friesz further underscores the myth of the peasantry as an embodiment of cultural origins.

FRENCH ORIGINS AND THEORIES OF RACE

The Golden Age motif in Autumn Work is part of an ideological tradition that began at the beginning of the twentieth century to assert a Greco-Roman ancestry for the French as an indicator of national superiority. The proliferation of Golden Age themes was spurred in particular by the

⁵⁶ Herbert, Fauve Painting 140.

"nationalist intellectuals' drive to rediscover the past of every ethnic community for which they wished to secure political recognition," with antiquity being a key element of that discovery.⁵⁷ This is the point at which Friesz's painting fuses rural and French national myths with primitivism since primitivism is based on a framework of identity constructions. As contemporary scholars have asserted, colonialism is intrinsic to non-Western primitivism⁵⁸ and contributed to the structure of us/them identities. My contention has been that the colonial framework provided the system through which Europeans could structure the peasantry, which complicated this us/them opposition as the peasantry was viewed as emblematic of the nation's collective past. Since racial theories were a strong component of both colonial and primitivist discourse, they also impacted constructions of the European peasantry. Friesz's painting exemplifies the conflation of the rural myth and classical origins for the French, which became intimately tied to the notion that the Greco-Roman peoples were the most racially superior.

While the valuation of Greco-Roman models had been a strong aspect of republican, revolutionary thought in the late-eighteenth century, a hundred years later, the classical principle was appropriated by right-wing movements often as an anti-revolutionary tool. By contrast, republican thinkers sought to dissociate themselves from the right-wing by condemning the idea of a Greco-Roman heritage. The republican critic and writer Camille Mauclair defended Impressionism in opposition to classicism, writing that the French artistic

⁵⁷ Smith, "Golden Age," 41.

⁵⁸ Rhodes 7.

heritage should be in opposition to the Italians: "When speaking of origins, one must clearly distinguish the 'Latin' and the 'French' side."⁵⁹

The conservative assertion of a Greco-Roman heritage for the French, as exemplified by the *Action française*, was buttressed by the increasing conflation of "race" with "nation." Classical ideals also became intertwined with the belief in colonialist superiority and adjacent studies of race that attempted to establish a Caucasian linkage between ancient Greeks and the modern French. Increased colonialism along with the growth of physical anthropology and racial theories throughout Europe contributed to the definitions and prerequisites for comprehensive national identities and origins. The search for biological similarities amongst a group of people – skin colour, facial features, body type – led to correlations of physicality with intellect and abilities and the establishment of a hierarchy of races. Within that framework, Aryans and Greeks were classified as belonging to the pinnacle of that hierarchy.

According to the nineteenth century anthropologists Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) and James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848), the Caucasian race ranked at the top of the racial hierarchy, with Greeks and Romans considered to be the epitome of that physical beauty and intellectual superiority.⁶⁰ Aligning with Winckelmann's theories, Prichard wrote that the Greeks possessed the most perfect skulls and profiles, both of which indicate their classification within the Caucasian race and account for the perfection of

⁵⁹ Herbert, Fauve Painting 126-127.

⁶⁰ Athena S. Leoussi, Nationalism and Classicism: The Classical Body as National Symbol in Nineteenth-Century England and France (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd, 1998) 7-8.

their art.⁶¹ The French anatomist and Perpetual Secretary of the *Institut de France*, Georges Cuvier, adhered to the same belief, as he wrote that the Greeks have the physical features of the Caucasian race, which he significantly deemed as "the race from which we descend." "The nations of the Caucasus or the Circassians and Georgians," he wrote, "are even now considered as the handsomest on earth."⁶²

Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines (1853) provided one of the foundations for racist thought in France by emphasising the role of race in the formation of history and the theory that all civilisations derive from the white race. The great, true civilisations and achievements in arts and sciences, writes Gobineau, were founded by Aryan peoples, who are the most noble and intelligent of races.⁶³ The civilisations of Greece and Rome declined due to the infusion of "black blood," an intermixing which Gobineau likewise cites as the reason for the decadence of modern civilisation.⁶⁴ Gobineau's work, along with Gustave Le Bon's Lois psychologiques d'évolution des peuples (1894), interposed the notion of racial hierarchy in France, while the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox's Races of Men (1850) and Nott and Gliddon's Types of Mankind (1854) reinforced racial

⁶¹ J.C. Prichard, Researches into the Physical History of Mankind, 5 vols. (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1836-47)

⁶² Georges Cuvier, The Animal Kingdom: Mammalia, Birds, and Reptiles, Charles Hamilton Smith and Edward Pidgeon, eds. (London: Griffith, 1840) 50.

⁶³ Arthur de Gobineau, Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, originally published 1853 (Nizet: Paris, 1967) 39.

⁶⁴ Gobineau 672 and 164.

determinism in England and America.⁶⁵ The championing of the Aryan race frequently became conflated with nationalistic sentiment, leading to the notion that racism is a component of nationalist ideologies. Le Bon's work contributed to the shifting of race from a physical to a cultural plane, as his hypothesis centred on the idea that race was a matter of cultural traditions rather than bloodlines.⁶⁶

The association of racial thinking with nationalistic ideologies at the end of the nineteenth century took place during a time when national enmities were deepening due to the unification of Germany and European colonial rivalries. Many conservative nationalist thinkers such as Barrès and Edouard Drumont, the co-founder of the *Ligue nationale anti-sémitique de France* in 1890, viewed their national identity as analogous to being an Aryan, a position that was threatened by alleged foreigners. "It is the Jew – he has replaced violence with cunning," wrote Drumont, "Dangerous invasion has given way to silent, progressive, and slow encroachment."⁶⁷ Barrès, in Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme (1903) advocates the expulsion of foreigners in France for the good of the national community, as this sentiment is "in harmony with the deepest feelings of the country."⁶⁸ These postulations were enforced by anatomical studies that were considered to prove the superiority of the Caucasian race. For example, Prichard wrote that the oval-shaped skull of the

⁶⁵ Leoussi 9.

⁶⁶ Todorov 159.

⁶⁷ Edouard Drumont, *La France Juive* (1886), The French Right from de Maistre to Maurras, ed. J.S. McClelland (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1970) 91-92.

⁶⁸ Maurice Barrès, Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1925) 205.

Greek is "the greatest perfection in the form of the head" and belongs to a people who have "exhibited the characteristic traits of the Indo-Atlantic nations to the highest degree."⁶⁹

Theories such as these shaped the formation of national mythologies in that they classified groups of people based on physical or religious differences and thus strengthened myths of descent and memories. This "similarity-dissimilarity" pattern binds members of a collectivity together by focusing on the cultural traits that are different from non-members.⁷⁰ The emphasis on ethnic traits looks back to the pre-modern, *ethnie* communities for validation of the superiority of one group of people – whether that group is based on nationality, race, or both. In the political realm, the presumptions about the societies of ancient Gaul and their conflicting factions developed as a mechanism by which to sanction the original ethnicity of the French over foreigners. In recollecting the national myths of Gaulish, Frankish, or Greco-Roman ancestry, modern writers and politicians could attempt to substantiate their own claims of superiority against those both within and exterior to their national community. "We are the prolongation of our parents," wrote Barrès in his novel Amour et dolori sacrum, "To fortify our own selves we must take our place in a continuous process and link ourselves with those from whom we inherit."⁷¹

The strengthening of national, collective solidarity against those

⁶⁹ Cited in Leoussi 8.

⁷⁰ Smith, Ethnic Origins, 26.

⁷¹ Cited in Martin, The Making of France 242.

perceived as foreign and threatening premised nationalism upon the idea of an Aryan and subsequently a Greco-Roman heritage. After 1860, archaeological excavations carried out under the reign of Napoleon III in Alesia and Gergovia contributed to the French identification with their Gallo-Roman ancestry.⁷² In the European cultural realm, artists drew upon the two modes of thought that posited the French as both as race and a political entity. The fusion of art with scientific studies of anatomy heightened the notion that the Greek physical type was synonymous with a beauty and perfection of intellect, morals, and values. French artists in the latter half of the nineteenth century premised their depiction of national themes on the idea that the French were genealogical descents of Greeks through blood ties with the Gauls. Popular depictions of Greek city-states such as Troy, Athens, Sparta, and Argos provided the model for the French conception of the nation as a civic, democratic society formed by a set of individuals who constituted a race. The foundation of Marseilles by Greeks served as a justification for the French claim to an unbroken connection with the ancient Greeks, which subsequently validated the notion that Greek virtues were inherited elements of the French nation.⁷³

Although Friesz was not politically aligned with the right-wing or their nationalist assertion of Greco-Roman roots, his painting expresses this myth in which the modern French were identified as the descendants of classical antiquity. Unlike Gauguin's paintings, Autumn Work does not rely on religion as the basis for national cohesion, but it, too, complicates the conventional

⁷² Jean-Jacques Hatt, Celts and Gallo-Romans, trans. James Hogarth (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1970) 20.

⁷³ Leoussi 180.

binarism between the "political" nation based on secularism and civic action, and the "cultural" nation based on ancestry. In addition to the expression of the Golden Age and the stability of the pyramidal form, the man to the right of centre bears compositional similarities to classical bodies. His naked torso resembles figures from the works of Ingres and Rubens (both of whom Friesz studied) with its rhythmic movement, weight-shifting stance, and attention to muscular form (Fig. 46). In their alignment with the earth and motherhood, the women represent both the revival of the Golden Age and the conveyance of genealogical characteristics as an aspect of that renewal. This was one of the functions of the Golden Age myth in nationalist discourse, as it established a sense of continuity through generations (in this case, from antiquity to the present-day) so that the nation is established as a linear descendant of a heroic and great past. The Golden Age myth makes the social changes and difficulties of current society more manageable since the national community is united through a glorious and dignified history.⁷⁴

This axiom challenges the nationalist premising of the national community on racial descent, but in Autumn Work, the two ideologies of the Golden Age and racial descent are conflated through a visual replication of the current convergence of philosophies. In spite of scholarly distinction between "nation" as a group of citizens and "race" as a group based on biological characteristics, these two schools of thought have frequently coexisted in the works of nineteenth century French historians. In L'histoire de la France (1833-1869), Jules Michelet writes that progress depends on a mixture of

⁷⁴ Smith, "Golden Age," 50.

races, yet in Le Peuple (1846), he also glorifies the uniqueness of the French nation through xenophobic attacks on the savagery and barbarism of Germans and Russians.⁷⁵ The destiny of the French nation, writes Michelet, began with the Gauls, "the most sympathetic and most perfectible of human races."⁷⁶ Further, he designates the peasant as the person who has retained the specificity of patriotism as opposed to urban "cosmopolitanism": "The peasant alone has preserved the tradition of salvation; to him, a Prussian is still a Prussian, an Englishman still an Englishman."⁷⁷ In Friesz's painting, the peasants preserve the "tradition of salvation" in the sense of cleaving to the ideal revival of the Golden Age, yet through that very theme and their classical characteristics, they are situated squarely within the French national myth.

In What is a Nation? (1882), Renan argues strongly against the conflation of the idea of race with the idea of nation. He writes that substituting an ethnographic principle for a national one is "a very great error, which, if it were to become dominant, would destroy European civilisation."⁷⁸ However, as Zeev Sternhall points out, Renan's argument runs parallel to his classification of humanity through a hierarchy of races with the Aryan at the pinnacle and destined to rule the world. Through comparative portraits of the

⁷⁵ Zeev Sternhall, "The Political Culture of Nationalism," Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War 1889-1918, ed. Robert Tombs (London: HarperCollins, 1991) 22-49: 32.

⁷⁶ Jules Michelet, L'histoire de la France, vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion, 1971) 1, cited in Todorov 210.

⁷⁷ Jules Michelet, The People, trans. John McKay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973) 21, cited in Todorov 209.

⁷⁸ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" Becoming National, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 42-55: 52.

Aryan and the Semite in The Future of Science and L'Origine du langage, he asserted the notion of Aryan superiority," The Aryan language was highly superior [...] The Semitic language, on the contrary, got off to the wrong start."⁷⁹ The "incomplete" Semite race thus declined rapidly and "left the Aryan race to walk alone at the head of the destinies of the human race."⁸⁰ And although in Scènes et documents du nationalisme, Barrès wrote, "It is inaccurate to speak in the strict sense of the term of a French race. We are not a race but a nation," he soon adopted the theory of an irreconcilable opposition between Aryan and Semite, with the inferiority of the latter being the reason for his lack of patriotic feeling.⁸¹

This premise of Aryan superiority became a component of the nationalist assertion of classical origins for the French and enforced the us/them structure of opposition within national identity. The infiltration of "inferior races" could undermine the nation's foundation, and within popular culture, the home of such "outsiders" was the city. This conception further posits the city against the country and situates rural areas as repositories of pure, national origins:

Normality required keeping in touch with the immutable and genuine forces of nature. The quest for rootedness which informed the bourgeoisie set it against its place of origin. Its members feared the impersonal monster they themselves had created: the monumental streets and buildings, the anonymous mass. Thus on one level the

⁷⁹ Ernest Renan, "Histoire du peuple d'Israël," Oeuvres Complètes, vol. 6, 1887-1891 (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1947-61) 35, cited in Todorov 147.

⁸⁰ Ernest Renan, "Histoire général et système comparé des langues sémitiques," Oeuvres complètes, vol. 8, 1855 (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1947-61) 587, cited in Todorov 148.

⁸¹ Sternhall, 32-33.

bourgeoisie sought to establish historical continuity [...] above all the healing power of nature, symbolising the genuine and the immutable, could serve to reinforce human control over a world forever on the brink.⁸²

Autumn Work encapsulates the predominant themes of classicism and a return to nature that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although ideologies of classicism and national origins spilled into the cultural realm, the Fauves were not apparently affected by them until 1908 when Guillaume Apollinaire became preoccupied with "la tradition française" and championed French artists against those of other countries: "Les Français s'exprimèrent plus heureusement et en plus grand nombre dans cet art que les peintres des autres nations."⁸³ Among the Fauve artists, Maurice Denis became known for advocating a return to the classical order in the manner of Poussin, with classicism defined as, "le juste équilibre entre la nature et le style."⁸⁴ Matisse similarly advocated an art of "balance, purity, and serenity" in the manner of classicism, although Friesz was the only Fauve who accepted the label "Neo-Classical."⁸⁵

Friesz was artistically impacted by the preoccupation with classicism through his archaeologist cousin, Georges Perrot, who was the co-author of Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité, and through copying the works of Delacroix,

⁸² Mosse 137.

⁸³ Guillaume Apollinaire, Chroniques d'Art (1902-1918), ed. L.C. Breunig (Paris, 1960) 51, cited in Ellen C. Oppler, Fauvism Re-examined (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976) 227.

⁸⁴ Oppler 262.

⁸⁵ Oppler 282.

Lorrain, and Gros. He also painted a number of landscape scenes of the Bois de Vincennes, which reveal his interest in the Impressionistic effects of light, evident in Autumn Work's gradations of colour on the landscape and figures. Through his encounter with the principal Fauve artists, Friesz was exposed to the aesthetic and practical qualities of 'tribal' art forms. However, he remained more interested in classical purity rather than 'primitive' arts:

La beauté de la statue nègre m'a toujours touché [...] Simple joie. Je n'aimais pas cela comme une curiosité, une fruit exotique, ni comme un exemple esthétique, mais pour l'unique plaisir de la contemplation [...] et je préfère au plus beau fétiche une statue romane ou gothique, plus pure, et, surtout, qui est de notre race.⁶⁵

Friesz's preference of classical art as a product of the French race/nation aligns with early-twentieth century ideologies of nationalism. The proliferation of racial theories throughout Europe underscored the idea of the French nation as a biologically-determined race of people, a theory posited against the Revolutionary idea of the nation as a political, democratic aggregate of citizens. Right-wing political movements in particular championed the former idea as a means of undermining the rights of the individual in favour of the monarchy. Autumn Work elucidates this complex of ideas. On the one hand, Friesz's references to the Golden Age and classical aesthetics enforces the idea of democracy and an equitable society, while on the other hand, the very premising of a specific, racial ancestry disrupts the

⁶⁵ Maximilien Gauthier, Othon Friesz: avec une biographie, une bibliographie, et une documentation complète sur le peintre et son œuvre (Geneva: Editions Pierre Cailler, 1957) 42.

ideology of the "political" nation where all citizens are equal under the law. Within its temporal context, Autumn Work posits a Greco-Roman, Caucasian descent as vital to French identity – an assertion that was a strong component not only of French nationalism, but also colonial activities and primitivism.

THE GRECO-ROMAN HERITAGE AND FRENCH NATIONALISM

In the late nineteenth century, the fusion of these myths of origin, anti-Semitism, and Greco-Roman themes took root in the political realm as an assertion of monarchical superiority. The idea that France possessed a Greco-Roman heritage became a major underpinning of royalist, right-wing thought as exemplified by the highly influential *Action française*. Co-founded by Maurras in 1899, the political doctrine of the *Action française* was based on an overthrow of the parliamentary Third Republic (1870-1940) and the premise that the monarchy was the only institution capable of unifying French society, which was divided in part by the "racial" strife between descendants of Franks and Gauls. The resolution of the current strife, according to Maurras, was a form of nationalism centred on the supremacy of the state and the monarchy as opposed to individuality. In Mes idées politiques, he writes, "Si vous avez résolu d'être patriote, vous serez obligatoirement royaliste [...] La raison le veut. Il faut la suivre et aller où elle conduit."⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Charles Maurras, Mes idées politiques (Paris: Éditions Albatros, 1986) 298.

Where democratic leaders lacked authority due to their need for public approval, the hereditary monarchy was the one institution in which the leaders identified with the interests of their subjects and could undertake long-range policies due to the extent of their reign.⁸⁸ This theory was central to Maurras's highly conservative doctrine of "integral nationalism," which held that the theory of the Rights of Man had separated the individual from the corrective institutions of the family and the nation, and from this stemmed the evils of democracy. The "masses" have no right to rule, wrote Maurras in a referral to prevalent folk primitivist constructions, because they have feelings, but no judgement. Thus, they cannot understand or act upon the interests of the state.⁸⁹ For Maurras, the "golden age" of France was located in the seventeenth century, an era recoverable only through a restoration of the monarchy:

Le dix-septième siècle français monta comme un soleil sur les champs de l'Europe. Il versa, avec sa puissance et sa gloire, le raffinement de l'esprit et la politesse de mœurs, le culte des sciences, l'amour des lettres et des arts, une direction intellectuelle et morale acceptée du monde entier avec joie et reconnaissance. Cela se prolongea bien au delà du temps que dura le bonheur des armes du grand roi.⁹⁰

According to Maurras, the monarchy represented the continuation of hierarchy and order, which was a characteristic toward which artist must also strive. Maurras additionally based the crux of the *Action française* on the

⁸⁸ Weber, "Gauls versus Franks," 29.

⁸⁹ Samuel M. Osgood, French Royalism Under the Third and Fourth Republics (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff: 1960) 59-60.

⁹⁰ Maurras, Quand les français 171.

premise that France was the heir to the Greco-Roman civilisation and its aesthetic program of balance and harmony. "L'influence de la raison athénienne créa et peut sans doute recréer l'ordre de la civilisation véritable," he writes in Anthinéa (1901), a recount of his journey through Greece.⁹¹ Moreover, the beauty and perfection of classical art brought ancient Greeks into the realm of the cultural elite: "C'est la qualité et la perfection de son oeuvre [...] Le propre de cette sagesse est de mettre d'accord l'homme avec la nature [...] elle trace aux endroits où l'homme aborde l'univers ces figures fermes et souples qui sont mères communes de la beauté et du bonheur."⁹² He posited the supremacy of classicism against the philosophies of Rousseau and Romanticism:

L'intelligence devait, non pas régner, mais servir les intérêts de la nation et ceux du classicisme. Ennemie de la démesure et donc du romantisme [...] *l'Action française* voyait dans le classicisme le moyen par lequel l'homme s'éternise en se dépassant: il exorcisait la mort; à l'idée romantique de la bonté naturelle, le nationalisme et le classicisme en substituaient donc une autre, celle de la nature domptée et soumise par l'art humain."⁹³

Although obviously not a literal representation of monarchical authority, Autumn Work adheres on one level to the notion of a patriarchal institution through the pyramidal composition of the figures, which positions the vertical men as a foil to the supine women, and through the structural stability that

⁹¹ Charles Maurras, Anthinéa (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1901) 104.

⁹² Maurras, Anthinéa 104.

⁹³ Colette Capitan Peter, Charles Maurras et l'idéologie d'Action française (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972) 107.

Maurras considered the monarchy to convey. The painting further situates human beings in harmonious accord with the landscape and aligns women with the earth as conveyors of natural beauty and the promise of happiness. The Golden Age and Greco-Roman myths embedded within nationalist discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century served as a means by which to authenticate the French nation and to delineate the original being of the collectivity. As in Friesz's painting, the return in time is accompanied by a return in space (to the countryside) to define and re-root the community in its own historic and generative location so that it can rediscover its "true self."⁹⁴ In Maurras's theories, that rediscovery is only to be found through the reinstatement of the monarchy and the assertion of a Greco-Roman heritage.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, nationalist discourse and scholarship has gendered the state as male and the nation as female. This premise is carried through in Autumn Work within the context of Maurras's theories. The state, the political and legal institution, is represented through the upright and more active male figures, while the nation as the community connected through land is represented by the women. Friesz further elucidates the importance of genealogical descent – for Maurras, the hereditary monarchy – as vital to the French nation through the overall structure of the painting in which the feminine land is pierced by the perpendicular rake, and through the emphasis on women as transmitters of culture. In contemporary theories, the modern nation developed in part due to a shift from hierarchical to horizontal societies that allowed for increased communication and the formation of

⁹⁴ Smith, "Golden Age," 48–49.

national ties.⁹⁵ Friesz's painting represents both of these theories: the maintenance of a pyramidal structure of authority that is undermined by the idealised unity and cooperation of an equitable society.

Within Maurras's theories as well, the painting further complicates the construction of France as the model of the democratic, "political" nation since the pyramidal structure of authority, centring on the supremacy of the peak, can be associated with autocracy as opposed to national unity through law and citizenship. The peasants in Autumn Work are united through their work, but also through land, ancestry, and a vertical structure of authority. The model "political" nation elided the idea of ethnic ties, which Autumn Work suggests through the framework of Greco-Roman motifs in which racial theories were situated. At the same time, the position of the unified peasantry within an idyllic landscape, working the land with apparent consent, suggests the secular, individual sovereignty of the "political" nation. This complication essentially premises French national identity on consent and civic ties as well as a cultural legacy – jettisoning the theoretical division of the "political" and "cultural" nations as contemporary nationalist scholars have done.⁹⁶

The painting further alludes to the qualities Maurras associated with the revival of France – specifically, the dissolution of the individual in favour of the collectivity and the artistic expression of harmony as represented through the unity of the central group and integrating colour scheme. The central

⁹⁵ Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," Theorizing Nationalism, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 219-245: 224. See also Anderson (1983) and Gellner (1983)

⁹⁶ See Neilsen (1999), Schnapper (1998), and Yack (1999).

figures are all linked through a line that extends from the right arm of the nursing mother over her body to the form of the man standing beside her. The visual line continues to form the peak of the pyramid, then descends over the crouching figures and the second man's arm to culminate in the extended arm of the woman on the right. The removal of any one of these central figures would destabilise the balanced structure of the pyramid, enforcing their integral position within the communal unit.

This expresses the type of cohesiveness that Maurras expounded. He was diametrically opposed to the republican emphasis on individuality, believing instead that the family was the basic social unit that provided the ordered foundation of any successful community:

Un patrie est un syndicat de familles composé par l'histoire et la géographie; son principe exclut le principe de la liberté des individus, de leur égalité, mais elle implique [...] une fraternité réelle, profonde, organique [...] vérifiée par les mœurs, et dont le pourtour des frontières fait le signe matériel.⁹⁷

Maurras also constructed the peasantry as the embodiment of this social unit and national identity. He particularly championed Mistral as a promoter of true French culture, since he believed that Mistral associated the French nation with a Greco-Roman heritage. In referring to one of Mistral's poems, Maurras writes, "Oh! le Français est bien 'latin' sur cet article!" In the same poem, Mistral associates the French "race" with the peasant:

⁹⁷ Charles Maurras, Oeuvres Capitales, Essais Politiques (Paris: Flammarion, 1954) 264.

*Tu es la race lumineuse
qui vit d'enthousiasme de joie;
tu es la race apostolique
qui met les cloches en branle;
tu es la trompe qui publie,
tu es la main qui sème le grain.⁹⁸*

Maurras's nationalist theories were based upon the same, oppositional framework as primitivism in terms of an us/them structure as a mechanism of asserting national identity. The racial superiority of the Greco-Roman and thus the French people was posited against other collectivities perceived as inferior. One aspect of the *Action française* doctrine called for a *protectionisme littéraire*, as the right-wing movement viewed the literature of other countries with ambivalence. As he believed that the purpose of art was to save beauty and thus purity,⁹⁹ Maurras's desire for purity in art extended to his view of other areas of the cultural realm. *Action française* proponents thought that the cultural products of Russia, Germany, and northern countries evoked darkness, negativity, and death, yet this pejorative view was tempered with esteem, as the works of Wagner were admired for their overtones of "German imperialism."¹⁰⁰

The former view that foreign works of art, music, and literature possessed a pessimistic tendency is another example of the ways in which

⁹⁸ Maurras, Quand les français 190.

⁹⁹ William Curt Buthman, The Rise of Integral Nationalism in France (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939) 143.

¹⁰⁰ Peter 112.

nationalistic thought became conflated with xenophobia and racial theories – also components of the primitivist discourse. Maurras became a follower of Jean Moréas's *École romane*, founded in 1891, which favoured a turn towards France's Greco-Roman heritage in order to express classical restraint and clarity over emotional expression. Ernest Raynaud, one of the leading members of the school, describes a world of opposing forces in which the chaos of the foreigner is contrasted with French order and beauty: "Nous avons entrepris de défendre le patrimoine des muses latines, d'opposer le goût d'ordre, de mesure et d'harmonie de notre race aux imaginations monstrueuses, à l'inconcevable chaos de l'étranger."¹⁰¹ In Quand les Français ne s'aimaient pas, Maurras both connected the classical heritage with the present nationalism, while also referencing the "pure" state of the French Gaulish heritage:

Notre nationalisme commença par être esthétique. Il tendait à restituer à la France des avantages contestés, ou méconnus, ou négligés. [Maintenant] il existe une noble et pure tradition de la France, bien reconnaissable à ce signe qu'elle réussisse complètement [...] la tradition qui développa, d'abord naïvement, par inclination naturelle et simple noblesse du cœur, mais plus tard avec une intention dessinée, ce que Rome et Athènes nous laissèrent de plus humain.¹⁰²

His statement implicates primitivism constructs and the historical debates about French origins – the "natural, simple, and innocent" state of pre-Roman Gaul aligns with debates that the Roman conquest served to civilise the savage Gauls. History texts by Edgar Quinet in 1855 and the Frères des écoles

¹⁰¹ Richard Shyrock, "Reaction Within Symbolism: The Ecole Romane," The French Review, vol. 71, no. 4 (March 1998) 577-584. 580.

¹⁰² Maurras, Quand les français xiii and 140.

chrétiennes in 1882 mention the Gauls as France's "true ancestors" while also writing that the Roman conquest served to civilise the savage Gauls. As historian Eugen Weber writes, "The example of original ancestors, brave, inspiring, but primitive, uncouth, civilised by Rome [...] explained and rationalised the contemporary civilisation of rural France by urban France."¹⁰³ This association of rural cultures with the pre-civilisation Gauls served not only to strengthen the theory that the French peasantry was the living embodiment of the nation's heritage, but also the idea that the Greco-Roman tradition of reason and erudition was the domain of urban, intellectual society and particularly the monarchy.

In glorifying the Greco-Roman heritage of the French nation, Maurras's right-wing political program paralleled that of other Fauve artists, who through their pastoral paintings were also focused on the idea that French cultural roots were located in a mythical past.¹⁰⁴ Without "mixing styles" of art, an artist must actively utilise the close relationship of reason with beauty, clarity, and harmony in order to create works of perfection as the ancient Greeks did.¹⁰⁵ Friesz adheres to this conservative dictate in Autumn Work with the stability of form and classical allusions, but undermines it through his employment of primitivist aesthetics and themes.

¹⁰³ Eugen Weber, "Gauls versus Franks: Conflict and Nationalism," Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War 1889-1918, ed. Robert Tombs (London: HarperCollins, 1991) 8-21: 15.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert, Fauve Painting 124.

¹⁰⁵ Buthman 136-9.

PRIMITIVISM AND NATIONALISM IN AUTUMN WORK

The underlying theme of my interpretation of Autumn Work has centred on the ways in which it can be contextualised within French, nationalist discourse at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The painting reiterates the prevalent theme of the rural myth as an unchanging aspect of the nation and folk primitivist constructions of the peasantry as simple and uncorrupted in contrast to urban society. More specifically, through an elucidation of the Golden Age and parallels with Maurras's philosophies, it underscores the premise of the French people as descended from Greco-Roman ancestry. As I mentioned earlier, the painting is situated within the pastoral, artistic program of the Fauves. Within that context, it reiterates the primitivist dialogue and appropriations of modern artists, thus complicating its position within the ideologies of classicism.

Autumn Work aligns with the Fauvist emphasis on the decorative, a key aspect of their avant-garde strategy which became the main focus of contemporary debates about the modernity of their work. The unfinished, ornamental appearance of some of the Fauve canvases, particularly the pastoral landscapes, was rooted in the discourse of primitivism with its connotations of untamed, direct expression.¹⁰⁶ While the painting resembles classical aesthetics in the pyramidal form, weight-bearing stances of the men, and observance of physicality, it also expresses the decorative qualities of primitivism. There is less attention to depth and perspective, as Friesz focuses instead on the

¹⁰⁶ Perry 46-47.

arrangement of the peasants in relation to each other and the land. The background trees and house are composed of flat blocks of colour that reference the aesthetics of both folk arts and antecedent primitivist art such as that of Gauguin.

Through the golden landscape overlaid with hints of blue and pink, Friesz emphasises the material qualities of paint and the surface of the canvas. The central figures are grouped together to provide structural stability, but they are not situated within an illusionistic space. The figures are solidly constructed, weighty forms that also reference the realist tradition of French art, yet they possess a less certain grounding in relation to the land – particularly the woman to the right of centre who almost appears to be floating. In quoting from the current practice of modern artists, Friesz conflates the French, nationalist ideal of Greco-Roman origins with the primitivist assumption that the aesthetics of 'tribal' and folk arts were indicators of a more emotional, intuitive response to the world in contrast to the rational European approach.

The facial features of the peasants also align with modern, primitivist aesthetics appropriated from 'tribal' arts. The Fauvist interest in 'primitive' sculpture centred on a desire to achieve a pictorial balance between colour and modelling through a simplification of form. Matisse and Derain were particularly interested in the formal qualities of 'tribal' arts that allowed them to redefine the 'primitive' in relation to a Western, avant-garde artistic code.¹⁰⁷ Friesz's biographer, Maximilien Gauthier, writes that the painting is the most

¹⁰⁷ Perry 57.

representative of the artist's growing self-awareness and maturity. For Gauthier, the painting displays an "orchestration non plus seulement de couleurs, mais aussi d'arabesques et de volumes dont l'enchaînement signifie une conception optimiste de la vie, l'affirmation d'une harmonie secrète, d'une promesse de bonheur au fond de tout."¹⁰⁸ The accentuation of colour, volume, and arabesque rhythms intensifies Friesz's thematic expression of future renewal and harmony through the moral values of the peasantry – a realm that is specific to French national myth, yet transcends specificity to relate to the primitivist ideal of universal origins for humankind.

In Autumn Work, the elongated face and almond-shaped eyes of the man on the left bears remarkable similarities to Matisse's Young Sailor (1906). The rounded face of the central woman also resembles the face of Matisse's Blue Nude, a work frequently read as an example of the gendered structure of colonialism in which the nude woman is symbolic of nature and the feminised 'primitive.'¹⁰⁹ (Fig. 47) Friesz adheres to the same symbolism, but in relation to the rural, national myth rather than the colonised 'primitive.' As I have discussed in Chapter One, the structure of nationalist discourse has historically been configured in relation to a male-oriented framework of power within the state, while women have simultaneously been upheld as symbols of the nation and ancestry.

The women in Autumn Work, as in Goncharova's paintings, are all situated in direct contact with the earth, particularly the standing woman in the

¹⁰⁸ Gauthier 61.

¹⁰⁹ See Herbert, Chapter Five and Perry 58-59.

background who appears to be part of the tree. The shapes of the women's bodies echo the lines of nature; the golden scope of the landscape is repeated in the circular forms of the women's heads and the curves of their hips. By contrast, the men's heads are composed of triangular shapes that reiterate the structure of the pyramidal form. The women, however, extending from the nursing mother to the woman on the right, secure the base of the pyramid with their hands placed directly on the earth. This enforces their symbolism and that of the earth as the national foundation since they are literally supporting the overlying structure.

Autumn Work thus enforces the portrayal of primitivist constructions through the depiction of noble, hard-working, harmonious peasants who are unified with nature, yet complicates their position within French national identity through the incorporation of the aesthetics of "primitive other." Although denying the influence of "primitive" arts, Friesz conflated the aesthetics of classicism and the discourse of "historical" primitivism when he said of the Fauves:

It is a Neo-Classic movement, tending towards the architectural style of Egyptian art, or paralleling it, rather, in development. The modern French impressionism is decadent. In its reaction against the frigidity and insipid arrangements of the Renaissance, it has gone itself to an extreme as bad, and contents itself with fugitive impressions and premature expressions. This newer movement is an attempt to return to simplicity, but not necessarily a return to any primitive art. It is the beginning of a new art.¹¹⁰

Gauthier also writes of the complications inherent in Friesz's conflation

¹¹⁰ Gelett Burgess, Architectural Record (1910) p. 410, cited in Oppler 282-283.

of a classical theme and aesthetic with a folk primitivist theme and modernist aesthetic. He writes that Autumn Work is, "la clef de son classicisme, les principaux traits du type humain qui contribuera à marquer toute son œuvre d'un puissant caractère d'unité: par Le Travail à l'Automne il proclame, une fois pour toutes, sa volonté d'être moderne, à la condition toutefois de ne rien abandonner de l'héritage."¹¹¹ As his biography is based in information supplied by the artist, his words underscore Friesz's own attempt to situate the work within the context of national origins. Louis Vauxcelles also fused perceptions of classical art as rational and "primitive" art as intuitive in relation to Friesz's work when he wrote, "Art complexe, à la fois cérébral et sensuel, qui confère à M. Friesz une place à part dans la génération de nos jeunes peintres."¹¹²

As I discussed in relation to Gauguin's work, the representation of the rural myth within the context of nationalism bears a degree of ambivalence. The modern artist appropriates the peasant, the folk aesthetic, and the rural myth as symbols of national unity and identity, yet the structure of primitivism in which the peasant is located disrupts their symbolic value since primitivism is premised upon an us/them framework of opposition. On the other hand, as I suggested in Chapter One, the peasant's very significance as an embodiment of national identity disrupts primitivism's us/them structure. This is why the aesthetic and thematic program of Autumn Work carries such significance – it adheres to the very ideologies asserted in French right-wing, nationalist discourse, upholding the peasantry as an ideal symbol of Greco-Roman

¹¹¹ Gauthier 60.

¹¹² Le Gil Blas (Nov. 15, 1912), cited in Salmon 13.

ancestry of the French, while at the same time the inclusion of primitivist qualities continues to establish the peasant as Other. They remain situated as, in Bhabha's phrase, as a "subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite."¹¹³

Friesz's emphasis on primitivist aesthetics within an idealised setting reiterates the nostalgic elements of both primitivism and nationalism, which further complicates the painting's position as a representation of national identity. The Golden Age was a component of the discourse surrounding Greco-Roman origins in early-twentieth century France. It was also part of the primitivist discourse, as artists sought the "Utopian dream of a 'return' to some previous state of grace."¹¹⁴ The inclusion in Autumn Work of markedly primitivist aesthetics situates the painting directly within a Third Space in which meanings are complicated through a synthesis of elements. The painting reiterates the rural myth as an element of national identity, while simultaneously complicating the oppositional framework of both discourses. The Self as represented through the classical theme and attention to form merges with the Other as represented through the primitivist attention to colour and arabesque rhythms. This is particularly relevant given the conservative, xenophobic nature of classicism within nationalist discourse. The location of Autumn Work within a hybrid space echoes the synthetic imagery of the painting and the suffusion of both primitivist and nationalist ideologies in early-twentieth century France.

¹¹³ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry," 89.

¹¹⁴ Rhodes 20.



Fig. 34 – Othon Friesz, Autumn Work (1908)



Fig. 35 – Henri Matisse, Bonheur de vivre (1905-06)

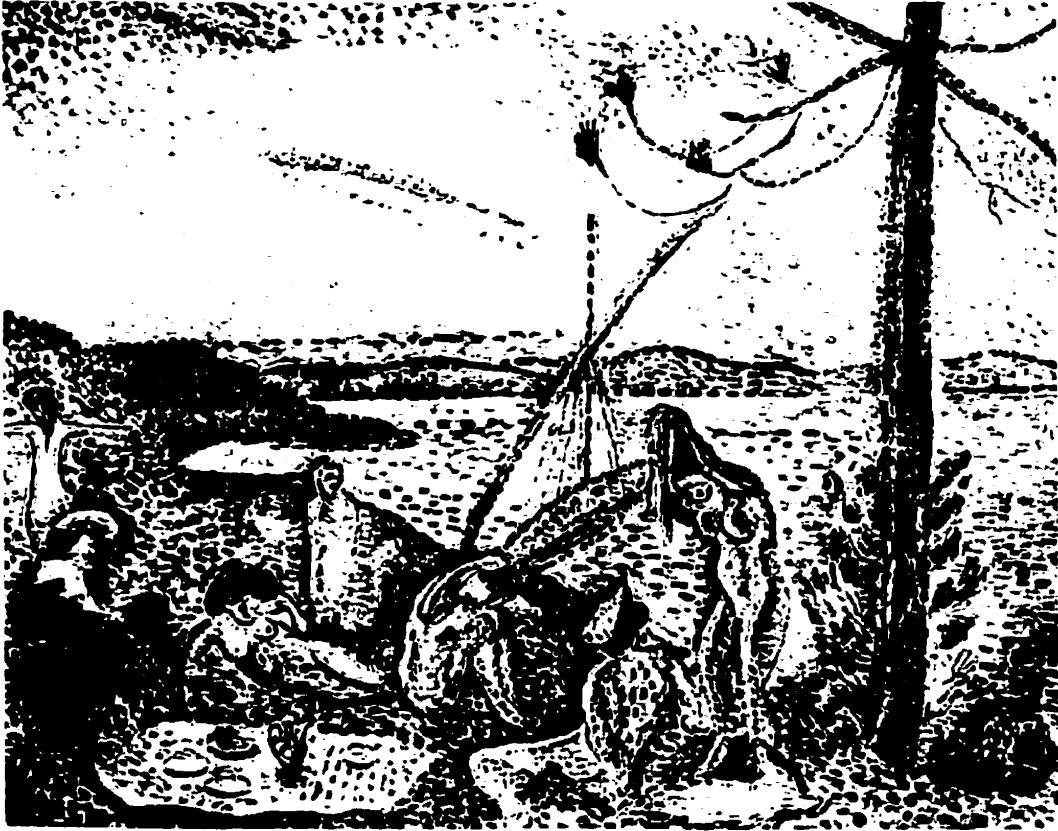


Fig. 36 – Henri Matisse, Luxe, calme, et volupté (1904-05)

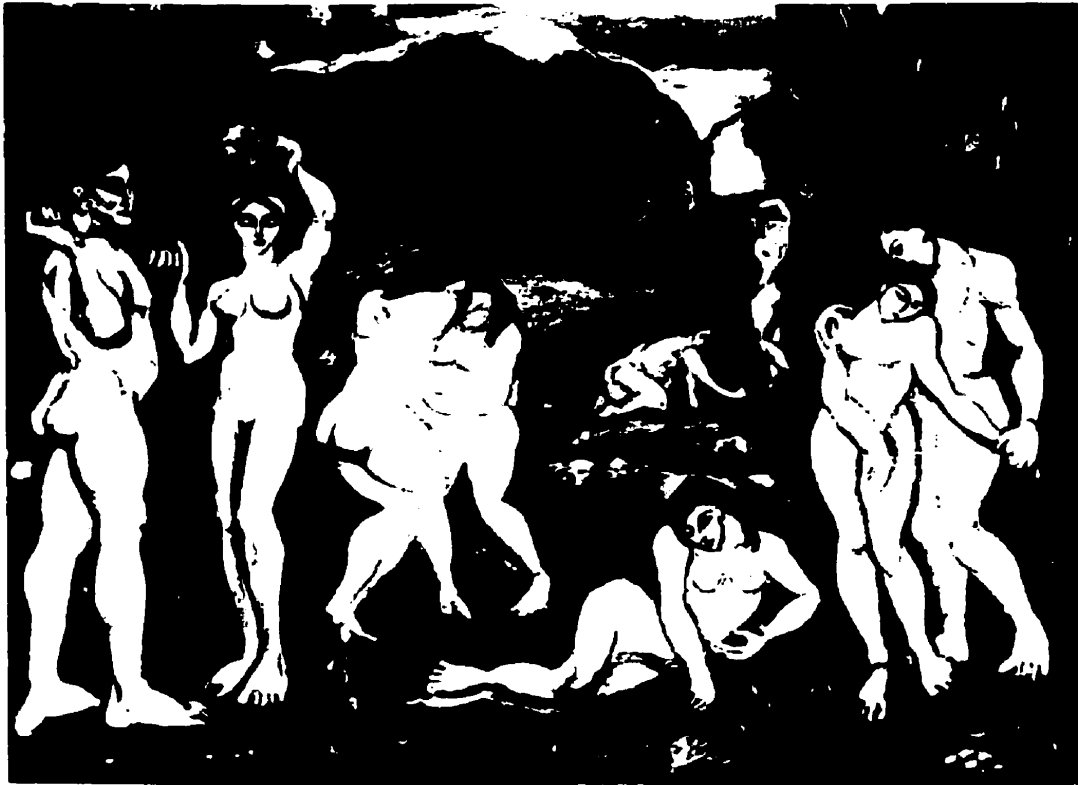


Fig. 37 – Othon Friesz, Spring (1908)



Fig. 38 – Henri Matisse, Blue Nude: Souvenir of Biskra (1907)



a.



b.

Fig. 39 – a. Autumn Work, detail

b. Eugene Delacroix, Massacre at Chios, detail (1824)



Fig. 40 – Dominique Papety, The Dream of Happiness (1843)



Fig. 41 – Nicholas Poussin, The Andrians (1631)



Fig. 42 – André Derain, The Golden Age (1905)



Fig. 43 – Jules Breton, The Gleaners (1854)



Fig. 44 – Camille Pissarro, Apple Picking at Eragny (1888)



Fig. 45 – Paul Signac, In the Time of Harmony (1894)



a.



b.

Fig. 46 – a. Autumn Work, detail
b. Rubens, Union of Earth and Water, detail (1618)



a.



b.



c.



d.

Fig. 47 – a. Autumn Work, detail
b. Matisse, Blue Nude, detail
c. Autumn Work, detail
d. Matisse, Young Sailor, detail (1906)

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have attempted to unravel one branch of the primitivism discourse and to contextualise artistic representations of the peasantry in relation to specific, national mythologies. The constructions and views of the European peasantry in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, which I have termed "folk primitivism," reveal the necessity of the rural myth to national identity and the need for a closer examination of this convergence in art-historical discourse. The rural depictions in Gauguin's, Goncharova's, and Friesz's paintings bear remarkable similarities, as they predicate a construction of the peasantry upon the primitivist ideal of the countryside. On a fundamental level, the four paintings are united in their evocation of peasant life as a pure, moral, harmonious existence in opposition to industrial changes and corrupted city life.

What separates the folk primitivist discourse from other branches of primitivism is the practice throughout Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century of appropriating images of the peasantry and folk art motifs as an expression of national identity. Aside from wanting to examine visual representations of the rural myth within this nationalist context, I also chose to analyse these four paintings in particular, Vision After the Sermon (1888), Yellow Christ (1889), Fruit Harvest (1909), and Autumn Work (1908), because they complicate the conventional structures of opposition within both primitivism and nationalism.

First, as I discussed in Chapter One, the peasantry became absorbed into the primitivist discourse at the end of the nineteenth century when nationalism

was taking stronger root throughout Europe due to increased colonialism and industrial activities. Within that historical moment, the peasantry became subjected to the same constructions that Europeans had displaced onto non-Western peoples, which were formulated within the primitivist opposition of us/them and "Self"/"Other." The paintings I discuss challenge that structure by adhering to the construction of the noble, uncorrupted, pure peasant situated in an idyllic landscape, yet advancing that construction as an integral aspect of European, national identity. The peasant as "Other" in primitivism becomes the national "Self." Yet this representation of national identity is not precise either. The peasant's very association with the "savage primitive," as expounded through late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century literature, histories, political tracts, and scientific studies, sustained the perception of their "otherness."

In my interpretations, the paintings also manipulate the metaphoric association of women with the land. This is an element of both primitivism and nationalism. Primitivism operates through a binarism in which the European, male world is situated against the "primitive" female world. Nationalism constructs women as the transmitters of culture and traditions and as the symbolic image of the nation itself in contrast to the male state. Gauguin's paintings adhere to the rural myth and the symbolism of peasant women as pious, passive representations of national culture, while simultaneously challenging that perception by premising their value on their production of a religious vision that was a strong component of French, national identity.

Goncharova also visually establishes the relationship of Russian, peasant women with the land and as symbols of Mother Russia. The women in Fruit Harvest exist as a cohesive community, aligning with the ideology of the commune and with prevalent constructions of Russian women. At the same time that the women represent land and national identity, they exist as a counter to the patriarchal structure of Tsarist society. The painting undermines the dichotomy within Russian nationalism, which centred on the Westerniser and Slavophile schools of thought. Goncharova appropriates folk primitivist aesthetics of the loubok and icon in the Slavophile tradition, while simultaneously adhering to the primitivist, modern aesthetics and discourses of European artists.

Friesz's Autumn Work visually aligns women with the land and as bearers of French biological and cultural heritage, a construction that is enforced by the pyramidal composition that posits the men as the more active figures. While this symbolism sustains the notion of the male peasant as inseminator of the female land, the composition attests to both the importance and supremacy of national territory, as the peasants are encompassed within the landscape. By situating an idyllic scene of the harvest within rural society, Friesz conflates the classical theme of the Golden Age with the primitivist nostalgia for a lost past and idealisation of the countryside, both adhering to and disrupting its significance as an underpinning of French, nationalist discourse and identity.

The four paintings also all complicate the conventional binarism between the models of the "political" and "cultural" nations as represented through France and Russia respectively. Where the "political" nation was

founded upon ideologies of individual democracy, civic action, and secular ties, the "cultural" nation was ostensibly connected through ancestry, religion, community, and ethnicity. As I have discussed, all paintings represent on one level the ideology of the dissolution of the individual into the collective and working towards the common good. They also premise the notion of ancestry on an affiliation with the land and, in the case of Autumn Work, racial ties through lineage with Greco-Roman ancestry. Gauguin's paintings premise French national identity on religious unity rather than secularism. Goncharova situates the women as bound through land and ancestry, while also alluding to popular sovereignty in contrast to the autocracy and to "political" qualities through the fusion of European, modernist aesthetics and Russian arts.

Although I have limited my discussion to four examples, there are, of course, numerous other paintings that can be analysed within the juncture of nationalism and primitivism. The arts of the *Blaue Reiter* and *Die Brücke* groups are frequently mentioned in contemporary scholarship as representations of national identity,¹ which deserves further consideration within the specific context of German nationalism and its various trajectories. American artists such as Childe Hassam (1859-1935) were situated within a hybrid space between the influences of French Impressionism and the desire to create landscapes or "patriotic" works of art expressive of an American sensibility. Similar objectives took place with the Bloomsbury group in England, which negotiated the ideologies of nationalism with their desire to separate art from politics.

¹ See Rhodes (1994), Frascina (1992), and Rubin (1984).

In addition, the unwieldy discourses of European primitivism as a whole might be better clarified through an examination of its convergences with national identity. As it is heavily informed by the colonial system, issues of "nationness" come into play for both "Self" and "Other," requiring an analysis of the various strains of nationalist thought within specific historical moments. The contextualisation of early-twentieth century painting, including those by Picasso, Matisse and other artists consistently referenced as "primitivist," within specific junctures of primitivism and nationalism might yield further understanding about their relationship to politics, culture, and society as a whole.

The distinct arena of national myth, as I have discussed, provides a absorbing and complex intersection of these ideas. In upholding ideologies of origins, ancestry, traditions, and customs through a variety of mythic constructions – heroic acts, historical moments, the immutable peasantry, imperial rights – artists and writers could predicate their national identity upon a system of beliefs that validated their affinity with a specific territory, state, and fellow constituents. The corollary to the acceptance of myth, particularly when incorporated with primitivism, was the establishment of a oppositional structure of identities and counter-identities. Art was not isolated from these processes. As a dynamic operative in the maintenance of national myth, art helped shape, transmit, and complicate ideologies that were critical to the fortification of a nation's collective consciousness.

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