Emil Nolde's Changing Reputation

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the changing reputation of the Expressionist artist Emil Nolde, both during his lifetime and after his death in 1956, in relation to historical, political, and cultural events. It also examines critical reactions to Nolde's work and deals with his persona in a context that considers both the "Nolde myth" and the revision of his image.

My discussion about the development of Nolde's reputation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter traces his rise to fame during the Wilhelmine era and Weimar Republic (from the 1890s to the early 1930s). The second chapter describes the attack on his reputation by the National Socialists who included his work in the Degenerate Art Exhibition in 1937 and issued him a *Malverbot* and *Ausstellungsverbot* (painting and exhibition prohibition) in 1941. The third chapter examines the construction of a Nolde myth, which took place after 1945. After the Second World War, the artist's reputation was not only restored, but also enhanced by his romanticized self-image articulated in his four volume autobiography and in publications written by his friends and patrons. In addition, Siegfried Lenz's novel, *Die Deutschstunde*, (1968) and the subsequent film version (1971) portrayed the artist protagonist as a victim and a survivor of National Socialism. The final chapter involves an examination of the revision of the Nolde myth. A study of scholarly contributions since 1945, of selected exhibitions, and of the role of the Nolde Museum and Foundation in Seebüll as the main sponsor of Nolde research and exhibitions are surveyed in order to trace the gradual revision of Nolde's image and to define a more comprehensive understanding of the myth and reality that make up his reputation today.

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Introduction

In North Schleswig-Holstein, near the border between Germany and Denmark, stands the former home of Emil Nolde (1867-1956). Built on a man-made hill, the house, now home of the the Ada and Emil Nolde Foundation, overlooks the flat, marshy landscape of the North Sea region. This remote destination in the village of Seebüll has become a virtual pilgrimage site. On average, 100,000 visitors[1] come every year to see the exhibits in Nolde's self-designed house, the extensive flower-filled garden that inspired his expressive flower paintings, and perhaps even to visit Nolde's gravesite.[2] These visitors may also have read Siegfried Lenz's novel *Die Deutschstunde* (The German Lesson) (1968) or seen its subsquent popular film version, released in 1971, which are partly based on Nolde's experiences during the National Socialist regime. Perhaps, too, they have learned of the artist's treatment at the hands of the Nazis, who branded him a "degenerate" artist and forbade him to continue painting. Manfred Reuther, the current director of the Nolde Museum, describes the effect of the house at Seebüll on the viewer:

> The remote location, and the effect of the architecture and the garden in combination with the high skies and wide horizons of North Friesland, are not mere accessories: this is a structured sensory experience, in which nature and Nolde's art form a close, living unity. The outer world becomes the inner world; it enables us to understand the art, and vice versa.[3]

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[1] According to Michael Stitz, in the first year the Nolde Museum opened, in 1957, approximately 12,000 visitors came to Seebüll, and over the next five years the number grew to an average of 40,000 per year. Michael Stitz, "Stätte des Glücks," *Schleswig-Holsteins Kultursommer Festival-Zeitung* (August 16, 1997) : 1. Manfred Reuther, Director of the Nolde Museum, gives the following statistics for the last five years: 121,797 visitors in 1992 ; 111,304 visitors in 1993 ; 97,326 visitors in 1994; 97,433 visitors in 1995 ; and 92,052 visitors in 1996. (Personal correspondence with Reuther, letter dated September 10, 1997).

In the August 16, 1997 edition of the *Schleswig-Holsteins Kultursommer Festival-Zeitung* Erich Maletzke calls the Nolde Museum a *"Pilgerstätte"* (pilgrimage site). He writes, "Nearly 3 million visitors have come to Seebüll since Nolde's death, and for the hundred-and-thirty year anniversary of his birth [he was born in 1867] the throngs were particularly large." Erich Maletzke, "Emil Nolde," *Schleswig-Holsteins Kultursommer Festival-Zeitung* (August 16, 1997) : 3. Translation into English is my own.

[2] Nolde and his wife are buried in a bunker that was built on their property as an air-raid shelter in World War II. Dale Harris, "The Emil Nolde House in Germany," *Architectural Digest* 48, (April 1991) : 74.

[3] Manfred Reuther, "Nolde and Seebüll," in *Emil Nolde*, eds. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn, trans. David Britt, (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 69.

Similarly, Peter Selz comments on Nolde's legacy:

> The studio-house of Seebüll has now become the Nolde Museum and is a fitting memorial to a great painter. There in Nolde's own countryside, which was so essential to his art, the visitor can concentrate in quiet contemplation upon the unique pictorial language Nolde created: a language which endowed the mystical spirit of the North and a turbulent personal fantasy with a command of colour, unprecedented in its power.[1]

Reuther and Selz, like many other writers, construct an image of Nolde as a kind of Romantic artistic prophet, who created a unity of art and nature and was able to capture "the mystical spirit of the North." Nolde's reputation since 1945 is that of a leading German Expressionist artist, and over the past five decades, numerous scholars have celebrated his image. In 1953, for example, B.S. Myers wrote in *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt*, "No other painter expressed so forcefully as [Nolde] the underlying and intuitive character of Expressionism, its anguish, and its religious feeling. . ."[2] Georges Boudaille in *Expressionists* (1976) claims, "Emil Nolde was not only the most uninhibited and 'German' of the Expressionist painters, but also the most aloof and original . . ."[3] And Robert Pois states in *Emil Nolde* (1982), "In the end, Nolde stood out as an embodiment of those massive forces, almost tectonic in grandeur and fury, that constituted the life-blood of German Expressionism and, in large measure, the history of the country that gave it birth."[4]

Nolde himself embraced this kind of Romantic artist image and articulated it in an extensive four-volume autobiography and in his letters, many of which have also been published. He saw himself as a "primeval," "primitive" soul who was spiritually bound to the people and places of his homeland, and who followed a higher calling for a new German art, free from foreign influences. Until recently,

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[1] Peter Selz, *Emil Nolde* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1963), 72.

[2] B.S. Myers, *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 128.

[3] Georges Boudaille, *Expressionists* trans. I. Mark Paris, (New York: Alpine Fine Arts, 1976), 94.

[4] Robert Pois, *Emil Nolde* (Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 1982), 18.

Nolde's autobiography, which is characterized by the artist's exaggeration, self-dramatization, and mythologization, has been used as the major source of information on his life and work.

More recently, other events in Nolde's lifetime have cast a different light on his reputation. Questions about his anti-Semitism and his alleged involvement in the National Socialist Party have sparked debate among scholars about previous characterizations of Nolde as a victim of National Socialism and a hero of the avant-garde Expressionists. For example, Nolde's clash in 1910 with the Berlin Secession's Jewish leaders Paul Cassirer and Max Liebermann contributed to his generally anti-Jewish sentiments, which he expressed in no uncertain terms in his autobiography (especially in the second volume, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, first published in 1934) and in his letters. Nolde also tried to adapt his image to gain the approval of the National Socialists, as the many anti-Semitic and nationalist statements in the first edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* reveal.[5] One of his letters, written on July 2, 1938, to Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Information and Propaganda, even proclaimed the "world-historical significance" of National Socialism and vaguely suggested that Nolde became a member of the Danish National Socialist party in 1920.[6] Thus, his anti-Jewish statements and his National Socialist leanings as well as the image presented in his autobiography have contributed to Nolde's complex reputation, which today, as Peter Vergo states, is a combination of "myth and reality."[7]

The political climate in Germany during Nolde's lifetime had much to do with the reception of his art and with the fluctuations in his popularity. During his lifetime, Nolde experienced the unification of Germany in 1871 and the founding of the Wilhelmine Empire

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[5] Subsequent (i.e. post-1945) editions of *Jahre der Kämpfe* have all overtly anti-Semitic statements expurgated.

[6] Victor H. Miesel, ed. *Voices of German Expressionism* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970), 209. Nolde wrote "When North Schleswig was ceded to Denmark [i.e. in 1920], I became a Danish citizen and as part of the German minority there joined the NSDAPN."

[7] Peter Vergo, "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality," in *Emil Nolde*, eds. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 38.

(1871-1914), a time of rapid increase in industrial and scientific progress and of economic instability and social change. He experienced the trauma and destruction of World War I (1914-1918) and the internationalist and modernist outlook of the subsequent Weimar Republic (November 1918 to 1933). And he witnessed the rise of political and social mass movements, epitomized by Adolf Hitler's National Socialist regime (1933 to 1945) and the persecution of all modernist artists during this time. Nolde's reputation during his lifetime was also shaped and changed by these events. For example, during the Weimar Republic, his popularity grew steadily within artistic circles and with the public. Weimar culture embraced internationalism, cosmopolitanism, modernism, and democracy, and Expressionism came to dominate Weimar culture during its formative years. In stark contrast, public and critical reaction to Nolde and to the Expressionist style in general changed drastically under National Socialism, to the point where Nolde was forbidden to paint entirely after the "Degenerate Art Exhibition" of 1937.

The development of Nolde's reputation can be divided into four phases. The first phase, his rise to fame, involves his gradual struggle for recognition during the Wilhelmine era and his success under the Weimar Republic. The second phase involves the attack on his reputation connected with the rise of National Socialism, Hitler's declaration of all Expressionist art as "degenerate", and the painting prohibition *(Malverbot)* aimed at Nolde personally. The third phase mainly encompasses the post-war years. Nolde's reputation was not only restored to its former status in the pre-Nazi era, but also enhanced. During this phase Nolde's image took on a mythic quality, which celebrated the artist as a Romantic, pantheistic, "primeval" loner in tune with higher forces that guided his art. Both Nolde's autobiography and the writings of some of his contemporary biographers and critics celebrated his mythic image. The final phase reveals the revision of Nolde's image and the move toward a more objective assessment of his work and his stature as a German Expressionist.

The structure of this thesis will follow these four phases. Chapter One will focus on Nolde's image and reputation in his early years as an artist as he struggled for and gained public recognition. Chapter Two will examine the dramatic "fall" of Nolde's

reputation connected with National Socialist policies on art. Chapter Three, which is entitled "The Nolde Myth," will attempt to shed light on Nolde's self-image as constructed in his autobiography and perpetuated by some of his earliest biographers and critics. Chapter Four will document a gradual move from scholarship based on Nolde's personal myth to scholarly assessments coming from more objective points of view. Recent exhibitions in Europe such as the exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1995 and the exhibition at the Kunstforum Bank in Vienna the year before have brought forward new interpretations of Nolde's work and have shed additional light on who the artist really was and his actual contribution to twentieth century art.

Chapter One

The Origin of Emil Nolde's Reputation (1880s to the early 1930s)

The changing nature of Emil Nolde's early reputation had much to do with the different political situtations and artistic climates in Imperial Germany and under the Weimar Republic. His rise to fame was characterized as a struggle for recognition during the Wilhelmine era (1871 to 1914) followed by success and widespread fame under the Republic (1918 to 1933). This chapter will trace the initial ascent of Nolde's reputation from the 1880s to the early 1930s and reveal how these political situations to a large extent dictated the reception of Nolde's art.

Nolde's reputation as a leading German Expressionist took shape slowly. He was thirty years old before he began to pursue his artistic career seriously. Born Emil Hansen on August 7, 1867, he was the fourth and youngest son of a farming family who lived in the village of Nolde in northwestern Schleswig-Holstein. From 1884 to 1889 the young Emil Hansen completed an apprenticeship as a wood-carver and draftsman in Flensburg and for the next three years worked in furniture factories in Munich, Karlsruhe, and Berlin. From 1892 until 1898 he worked as a drawing teacher at the Museum of Industry and Crafts in St. Gall, Switzerland.[1]

Nolde's first brush with artistic fame came in 1897 while he was living in St. Gall and produced a number of grotesque caricatures of human faces and of Alpine mountains as comical giants. According to Peter Selz, Nolde was also fascinated with "peasant types" whom he sketched and caricatured,[2] and faces with similarly exaggerated features appear in the Swiss Alps series. One of these Alpine images and two images of distorted faces which he called "Masks" were reproduced in an 1897 issue of *Die Jugend*, a popular Jugendstil journal[3] (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The Alpine images were so well received that

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[1] Peter Selz, *Emil Nolde* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1963), 10.

[2] Ibid., 11.

[3] *Die Jugend* was an art and "lifestyle" periodical *("Kunst und Leben")* published in Munich and Leipzig. Peter Selz calls it "an interesting mixture of a humourous popular tabloid and an art journal with cultural pretensions." Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 56.

Nolde printed the whole series in an edition of 100,000 postcards.[4] Within ten days the edition sold out and earned Nolde 25,000 Swiss francs.[5] Selz explains Nolde's commercial success and the images' appeal in terms of their "crude and simple anti-art quality, which made no demands on intellect or esthetic sensibility."[6]

Because of his financial success and encouraged by *Jugend*'s publisher Georg Hirth, Nolde gave up his teaching position in St. Gall and moved to Munich in 1898, where he pursued painting full time. At this time, Munich was considered the cultural centre of Germany while Berlin was the *"Kaiserstadt."* [7] Nolde applied to the studio of Franz von Stuck at the Munich Academy but was refused entry.[8] Had he been accepted, he might have studied with students such as Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Paul Klee.[9] Instead, he studied privately with Friedrich Fehr in Oberpolling near Munich and produced his first etchings.

According to B.S. Myers, Nolde's real development as a painter in terms of "emotional force and anti-naturalism"[10] began when he went to Dachau in 1899 and studied under Adolf Hölzel. Hölzel was one of the first German artists to recognize the importance of the French Post-Impressionists' style, which Nolde also adopted in his early work.[11] According to Robert Pois, Nolde also shared Hölzel's interest in exploring form and colour.[12] Hölzel's students were made to analyze the works of popular artists such as Böcklin, Constable, Goya, Liebermann, Millet, and Whistler in terms of formal qualities. Nolde's work from this time shows copies of various famous works reduced to broad, flat

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4 William S. Bradley, *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in His Own Land* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), 40.

5 Ibid., 40.

6 Selz, *Nolde*, 11.

7 Manfred Reuther, *Das Frühwerk Emil Noldes* (Cologne: Dumont, 1985), 124.

8 According to Selz, von Stuck emphasized drawing "almost to the exclusion of colour." Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* , 86.

9 Emil Nolde, *Das eigene Leben 1867-1902* (Cologne: Dumont, 1967), 206.

10 B.S. Myers, *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 130.

11 Bradley, 41.

12 Robert Pois, *Emil Nolde* (Washington: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), 39.

planes and areas of light and dark.[13] But Nolde studied only a few months in Dachau because Hölzel's approach did not meet his goals. Hölzel believed that the artist should approach creativity with a "scientific detachment," whereas Nolde believed that art was an intuitive and individual endeavour.[14] He wrote in 1898: "Whoever loses himself in influences has not been born strong. . . The art of the artist must be *his* art. . . Whoever has much to learn is no genius!"[15] This remark is reminiscent of the Romantic concept of the artist as genius, a concept which Nolde embraced fully and which will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

In 1899, Nolde, like many other art students at this time, made a trip to Paris. He enrolled at the Académie Julian to study with Toni Robert-Flouri and Jules Lefèvre, and also spent time in the Louvre copying paintings of Renaissance masters such as Titian.[16] Though he stayed in Paris for nine months, Nolde claimed in the first volume of his autobiography *Das eigene Leben*, "Paris gave me very little, and I had expected so much" (*"Paris hatte mir wenig nur gegeben und ich hatte doch so viel erhofft."*)[17] But he does mention that he became interested in the art of Daumier, Delacroix, Millet, and Manet during this time. He found that Manet's work, for example, had a quality of "bright beauty"[18] and that Daumier's work had "dramatic grandeur,"[19] with its large planes of light and dark. He also wrote about his dislikes: "The sweet, often sugary paintings of Renoir, Monet and Pissaro [*sic*] did not appeal to my Nordic, harsh taste; but their art, because it meets the taste of the mean, has become the chosen darling of the world."[20]

Already in these comments, one can see glimmers of Nolde's mature artistic philosophy. In particular, Nolde's main artistic concern became the communication of a

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13 Bradley, 41.

14 Ibid.

15 Emil Nolde, *Das eigene Leben: Die Zeit der Jugend 1867-1902* 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff), 238.

16 Bradley, 41.

17 Nolde, 249.

18 Ibid., 240.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid. Translation in Bradley, 41.

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17 Nolde, 249.

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strong German identity characterized by an intuitive and spiritual connection between the people and landscape of Northern Germany. He wanted to establish a "strong German art,"[21] free of foreign influences, particularly that of French art . These ideas took shape over the next decade, between 1899 and 1910.

Nolde was not unique in his desire to create a new art. Like other German Expressionists at this time, he wanted to communicate a need for social change to the conservative, primarily bourgeois leaders of Wilhelmine society. The late 1800s and early 1900s saw tremendous industrial and scientific progress in Germany, as people left their traditional rural homelands for the cities. Existing bonds within communities were severed, and people had to deal with a new sense of isolation and new values based increasingly on material wealth.[22] The Kaiser was generally hostile to the modern art movement and advocated a politically and culturally conservative society. Academic history painting set the standard for artists, and art academies were centres of resistance to the new in art.[23] Peter Gay refers to state institutions, particularly the universities, as "nurseries of woolly-minded militarist idealism . . . which were closed to Jews, democrats, socialists, in a word, outsiders."[24] However, Gay points out that Imperial Germany was not a dictatorship,[25] and the modern movement, in fact, fed on opposition to the bourgeois society of the Empire. As a result, Expressionism, though not accepted by the state, developed to full maturity during the Wilhelmine era. Gay characterizes the artistic climate among the avant-garde: "Everywhere young artists broke away from the pomposity of academic art and sought to rise above the bombast of their surroundings to cultivate their inner life, articulate their religious yearning, and satisfy their dim longing for human and cultural renewal."[26]

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[21] In a letter to Joseph Goebbels written in 1938, Nolde defended his art as strongly nationalistic and "German, strong, austere and sincere." Nolde in Victor H. Miesel, ed. *Voices of German Expressionism*, 209.

[22] Peter Gay, ***Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*** (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), 3.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 4.

According to Peter Selz, around the turn of the century Nolde began to see himself as a "missionary" whose duty it was to create a "vital and intense art of the North."[27] William Bradley characterizes Nolde as a "prophet of a new German art" and the artistic and literary climate of the time as that of a "proliferation of prophets."[28] Expressionist artists, such as Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Wassily Kandinsky, all produced prophetic statements at some point before 1914.[29] However, the German Expressionists, who according to Joan Weinstein, included the artists of *die Brücke*, *der Blaue Reiter*, Cubism, Futurism, and abstraction, were diverse in styles and philosophies. Weinstein explains that what tied them together was "a concern with the expression of inner feelings rather than with any verisimilitude to nature."[30] Their expression of intensely subjective and powerful emotional extremes was communicated through the distortion of colour and form. Weinstein maintains that what linked the seemingly different styles of German Expressionists was the strictures of the German art world: "[The Expressionists] . . . all shared a common fate in pre-war Wilhelmine Germany; they were rejected by the state and its official institutions and scorned by most of the art-buying public."[31] The German Expressionists were also unified in their attacks on the conventions of art and of a society they found materialistic and dehumanizing.[32] They believed in philosophical ideals of social change, anti-industrialism, anti-materialism and new visions of the future.

Nolde's personal reaction to the artistic scene at this time was to cling to the traditions and people of Northern Germany and to shun what he considered to be the

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27 Selz, *Nolde*, 19.

28 Bradley, 6.

29 Ibid.

30 Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918-19* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3.

31 Ibid. I have used Weinstein's fairly loose definition of German Expressionism here because the purpose of this thesis is not to debate the origin nor the varied meanings and stylistic definitions of Expressionism. For an example of the complex history and various meanings of the term "Expressionism" see Donald Gordon, "On the Origin of the Word 'Expressionism,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966) : 368-85.

32 Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed. *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xxi.

decadent lives of people in the cities. Some of the themes central to Nolde's art are the notions of homeland *(Heimat)* and of blood and soil *(Blut und Boden)*, where the German landscape was the source of German culture and the focus of national pride. These themes include a Romantic pantheistic relationship to nature based on innate religious feeling, the notion of the German people, particularly the peasants *(das Volk)*, as the purest of the German "race." Particularly after meeting the*Brücke* members in 1906, he saw the art and culture of "primitive" peoples as an embodiment of the purest kind of art.

Although Nolde's artistic style is clearly Expressionist and part of the modern art movement of his time, his aspirations and artistic theories also corresponded with some of the conservative ideals found in *völkisch* thought, about which German scholars such as Julius Langbehn and Paul de Lagarde wrote around the turn of the century. Like the young avant-garde artists of this time, these politically and ideologically conservative thinkers also identified and voiced concern over a perceived cultural crisis in imperial Germany. According to Fritz Stern,*völkisch* thinkers attacked liberalism as "the cause and incarnation of all evil . . . it seemed to them the principal premise of modern society; everything they dreaded seemed to spring from it: the bourgeois life . . . materialism, parliament and the parties, the lack of political leadership."[33] Instead, they looked back to the pre-industrial German state with its focus on rural agrarian life and pantheistic attitude toward nature as an ideal. This mode of thought harkens back to the nineteenth century Romantic concept of nature, as expressed by artists such as Caspar David Friedrich and Philip Otto Runge, who sought to portray a mystical and spiritual connection between people and their specific regional landscape. Nature and the land were essential in defining the people in the *völkisch* "blood and soil" view of the world. William S. Bradley's study *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in his Own Land* (1986) confirms that Nolde identified with *völkisch* thought early in the twentieth century.[34]

In his personal life, one of the most obvious assertions of Nolde's desire for a connection to his homeland came in 1902, when he changed his surname. The young Emil

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[33] Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), xii.

[34] Bradley, 31.

Hansen had been travelling extensively in northern Germany for the previous two years and was struggling with depression and confusion over what direction his art should take.[35] Fortunately for him, he met Ada Vilstrup in Copenhagen in 1901. After returning from a painting excursion in Lildstrand on the northwest coast of Denmark, he married her early in 1902; at the same time he adopted the name of his birthplace, the village of Nolde.[36] He wrote about this change in his autobiography, explaining that his marriage signified a break with his past life and the beginning of his new life as an artist.[37] Clearly he was aware of some of the Romantic connotations of this decision as well. On the final page of the first volume of his autobiography, *Das eigene Leben,* he wrote:

> With the vicissitudes of life, one thing seemed unavoidable: there were too many people with the name Hansen. There had to be a change. Not only because of the many endless mix-ups, but also because we, following a romantic feeling, wanted this: Hansen had been my name in the first preparatory half of life; the second artistic part started with a fresh free spirit and the 'bureaucratically approved' name: Emil Nolde.
>
> *(Im Wechsel des Lebens schien uns eines unumgänglich: Träger des Namens Hansen waren gar zu viele. Eine Änderung mußten geschehen. Nicht nur der vielen dauernden Verwechselungen wegen, sondern auch, weil wir, einem romantischen Zug folgend, gern es wollten: Hansen war bisher -- in der ersten, vorbereitenden Hälfte des Lebens -- mein Name gewesen, der zweite, künstlerische Teil jetzt begann frisch und freimütig mit dem 'behördlich bewilligten' Namen: Emil Nolde.)* [38]

William Bradley also emphasizes the parallels of Romantic and *völkisch* ideologies in Nolde's personal choice: "In taking the name of Nolde the artist was no longer identifying himself only with the narrow tradition of his own family, which extended back for generations, he was identifying himself with the land itself, a limitless entity whose life spanned and circumscribed an infinity of human lives that had inhabited it."[39]

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[35] Ibid., 46.

[36] There is some discrepancy over the exact date and year when Emil Hansen and Ada Vilstrup were married. Nolde himself wrote about his marriage and changing his name but gave no date (*Das eigene Leben,* 294). Selz gives 1902 as the date for both events (*Emil Nolde,* 12); Bradley writes "toward the end of 1901" (*Emil Nolde*, 46); Hans Fehr, a close friend of the Noldes, states that they were married in Copenhagen in 1902. Hans Fehr, *Ein Buch der Freundschaft,* (Munich: Paul List, 1960), 34.

[37] Bradley, 46.

[38] Nolde, *Das eigene Leben*, 294. Translation from German to English is my own. Nolde's phrase "bureaucratically approved" refers to the fact that he changed his name officially.

[39] Bradley, 46.

Though Nolde now regarded himself as a professional artist and had seriously pursued his artistic training for five years, public recognition of his work was slow in coming. He had achieved tremendous popular success with his caricatures in Switzerland, but his more serious and experimental works were largely ignored. After their marriage in 1902, the Noldes settled in a small fisherman's shack on the remote island of Alsen.[40] At this time, Nolde had yet to sell any of his paintings, and the couple lived in poverty for several years.[41] In 1903 and 1904, their friend Hans Fehr supported them financially, and Ada, who had some theatrical training, went alone to Berlin to work as a music-hall entertainer to supplement their income. There she became completely exhausted, and the couple went on a recuperative trip to Sicily for the winter of 1904 to 1905.[42]

Just before their Italian excursion, in the summer of 1904, Nolde's painting style took a new turn. His interest turned to the power of colour, an interest which lasted for the rest of his career. A passage in "Alsen-Berlin 1903-1904," a chapter in the second volume of his autobiography, *Jahre der Kämpfe. 1902-1914*, typifies his many exuberant entries about colour:

> Colours, the materials of the painter: colours in their own lives, weeping and laughing, dream and bliss, hot and sacred, like love songs and the erotic, like songs and glorious chorals! Colours in vibration, pealing like silver bells and clanging like bronze bells, proclaiming happiness, passion and love, blood and death.
>
> (*Farben, das Material des Malers: Farben in ihrem Eigenleben, weinend und lachend, Traum und Glück, heiß und heilig, wie Liebeslieder und Erotik, wie Gesänge und herrliche Choräle! Farben in Schwingungen wie Silberglockenklang und Bronzegeläute, kündend Glück, Leidenschaft und Liebe, Seele, Blut und Tod.*)[43]

Nolde's painting of 1904, *Harvest Day*, an image of peasants working in a field, is one of the first examples of the bright pigments and broad, vigorous brushstrokes which became the basis of his mature style (Figure 4).

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[40] Selz, *Nolde*, 12.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe 1902-1914* 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff), 185. Translation is my own.

Harvest Day proved to be the key to his acceptance to the prestigious Berlin Secession's annual exhibition of 1906. The Secessionists, including president Max Liebermann and members Lovis Corinth and Max Slevogt, were German Impressionists with established reputations. Their business manager was Paul Cassirer, a successful Berlin art dealer. Originally founded in 1898, the Berlin Secession was formed to protest the domination of the academic and history painting favoured by the Kaiser.[44] Its annual juried exhibition was open only to invited participants. In his book on the Berlin Secession, Peter Paret demonstrates that, from its beginnings, the Berlin Secession prided itself on its inclusion of many different styles and new talent; the German Impressionists just happened to be the most prominent.[45] However, Paret points out that the leadership's awareness of the need for change did not mean it approved of new styles: "To Liebermann and to most of the men who served on the executive committee during the Secession's first decade, French Impressionism was the decisive achievement in modern art; it set the standard for their own work and, they believed, for the work of the yet untested new generation."[46] In other words, the Secessionists believed that change should build upon earlier examples rather than work against it. Cassirer appears to have been the only one interested in the early work of more avant-garde artists like Nolde, Kokoschka, and Barlach.[47] Against the votes of other selection committee members, Cassirer personally hung Nolde's painting in the 1906 exhibition.[48] Nolde does not appear to have been too insulted that it was hung in the only available space, skied above the entrance to a toilet.[49]

Thus, by 1906, Nolde's work began to become more widely known, despite the fact that criticism of his art was generally hostile. The Berlin press's latest reviews of

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44 Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1980), 201.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Bradley, 52.

49 Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 81. Nolde wrote, "We were a bit taken aback at this 'place of honour' but when we found out later that after the jury had finished and left and my pictures had been refused Cassirer carried the painting in himself and could only find this place. . ."

Nolde's work described him as a "madman", a "charlatan", and as showing "clumsiness and brutality."[50] But, at the same time, Nolde also started to attract the attention of several collectors of modern German art. 1906 was the year he met two men who would become his strongest supporters and patrons, Dr. Karl Ernst Osthaus and Gustav Schiefler.

Osthaus, an art historian who inherited a fortune from his industrialist grandparents, founded the Folkwang Museum in his hometown of Hagen in 1902.[51] As director, he hoped to give people in this industrial town "a place to experience the wonder and unity of the natural world."[52] According to Jill Lloyd, Osthaus was acquainted with Julius Langbehn's *völkisch* thought and was particuarly interested in promoting German art as well as German culture in modern cities.[53] Lloyd tells us that Osthaus encouraged Nolde to formulate a distinctive national style in the context of the European avant-garde.[54] In 1906, Osthaus bought Nolde's post-Impressionist style portrait of Ada Nolde, entitled *Spring Indoors* (1904), for his personal collection. He also mounted an exhibition of Nolde's most recent paintings in March 1906. A number of other purchases of Nolde's work for the museum followed, and four exhibitions featuring the artist's work were mounted over the next decade.[55]

The other important contact for Nolde was made in the spring of 1906. Gustav Schiefler, a Hamburg lawyer and print connoisseur, became aware of Nolde's work and asked to meet with him. Schiefler bought Nolde's 1904-5 etching series entitled *Phantasien*, eight scenes of fanciful creatures. Schiefler knew Edvard Munch personally and arranged a meeting between the two artists late in 1906. But the encounter was not a

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50 Ibid., 86-87

51 John Willett, *Expressionism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 8.

52 Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism:Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 8.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Osthaus died in 1921, but the Museum continued his mandate (Herta Hesse-Frielinghaus et al., eds. *Karl Ernst Osthaus: Leben und Werk* (Essen: Bongners,1971), 9). Osthaus mounted a number of exhibitions of Nolde's work: March 1906 paintings by Nolde; June/July 1907 paintings and drawings by *die Brücke* (including Nolde); 1912 Nolde's Berlin paintings; 1916 watercolours by Nolde (Hesse-Frielinghaus et al., 511-515).

success. By this time Munch was in poor health from years of alcoholism; the two artists never met again.[56]

Schiefler's and Osthaus's support came at the right time. In *Jahre der Kämpfe*, Nolde recorded an entire page of criticisms that had recently appeared in the Berlin press, among them "bloodied beginner; sickly youngster; meaningless wildness; barbarism; a crime against art; frightening examples of modern art" (*"Blutiger Anfänger; gekränkter Jüngling; sinnlose Wildheit; Barbarei;Verbrechen wider die Kunst; abschreckendeste Beispiele moderner Kunst"*).[57] Schiefler helped to bolster Nolde's reputation by publishing the first scholarly article on his graphic art in the 1907 edition of *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*.[58] Shortly thereafter, a brief article on Nolde by Rosa Schapire, an art historian and critic, appeared in the June 1907 issue of *Hamburg: Zeitschrift für Heimat und Fremde*.[59] Later Schiefler edited the first edition of Nolde's collected graphic works, which was published in 1911.[60] Schiefler's publication has been updated by Christel Mosel in 1967; the most recent edition was published in 1995.[61]

Nolde also had his first one-man show in Fritz Gurlitt's Berlin gallery in 1906.[62] Gurlitt's gallery was one of the first art galleries, in the modern sense of the word, in Germany; and he himself had much to do with popularizing the work of artists who exhibited there. Most of Nolde's exhibited paintings were brightly coloured landscapes.[63] A review in *Die Kunst für Alle* in June 1906 opined: "From Monet and Van Gogh a Schleswig painter has developed a style of painting for himself in which a strong colour effect and brilliance cannot be denied. The results, however, are only conditionally

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56 Pois, 74.

57 Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 86-87. Translation into English is my own.

58 Gustav Schiefler, "Emil Nolde," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 19 (1907) : 25-32. This journal was published in Leipzig between the years 1866 to 1932 by the E.A. Seemann Company.

59 Rosa Schapire, "Emil Nolde," *Hamburg: Zeitschrift für Heimat und Fremde* 2, no. 16 (June 1907) : 767-770.

60 Bradley, 53.

61 Gustav Schiefler, ed. Updated by Christel Mosel. *Emil Nolde: Das graphische Werk* (Cologne 1995).

62 Bradley, 53.

63 Ibid.

satisfying. His desire is much greater than his accomplishment."[64]

A more modest showing of eight paintings and etchings in February 1906 at the Galerie Ernst Arnold in Dresden resulted in one of the most important artistic and personal connections of Nolde's career. These works caught the attention of a group of young artists who called themselves *die Brücke* (the Bridge). This was a group of young students, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Erich Heckel, and Fritz Bleyl, who banded together in Dresden in 1905. Other members, Max Pechstein, Cuno Amiet, Otto Mueller, and Nolde, joined the group the following year. After seeing Nolde's work, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff wrote a letter inviting him to join the group, which, in Schmidt-Rottluff's words, "strove to draw to itself all revolutionary and surging elements."[65] In the *Brücke* manifesto Ernst Ludwig Kirchner wrote:

> We believe in development and in a generation of people who are both creative and appreciative; we call together all young people, and -- as young people who bear the future -- we want to acquire freedom from our hands and lives, against the well-established older forces. Everyone belongs to us who renders in an imaginative and unfalsified way everything that compels him to be creative.[66]

Schmidt-Rottluff evidently recognized Nolde's style as fitting these criteria, praising his "tempests of colour" *(Farbenstürme).*[67] He explained in the letter that the group organized several annual exhibitions and had future plans to establish a permanent exhibition hall.[68]

Nolde's association with *die Brücke* certainly contributed to his reputation as one of the foremost German Expressionists. Most major surveys of German Expressionism, beginning with B.S. Myers's *The German Expressionist: A Generation in Revolt* and

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[64] Hans Rosenhagen, "Von Ausstellungen und Sammlungen," *Die Kunst* XI (June 1906) : 406, quoted in Selz, *German Expressionist,* 88.

[65] Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, quoted in Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 92. Schmidt-Rottluff is credited as naming the group after a passage in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883): "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in a man is that he is an overture and a going under. I love those who do not know how to live except by going under, for they are those who cross over." Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 127.

[66] Dietmar Elger, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art* (Cologne: Benedikt, 1994), 17.

[67] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe,* 93.

[68] The full text of the letter is included in *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 92-93.

Peter Selz's *German Expressionist Painting* (both 1957), group Nolde together with the other *Brücke* members despite the fact that he was a member for only a year and a half. When Nolde belonged to *die Brücke* in 1906-1907, the group exhibitions in Dresden were either ignored or criticized harshly by the press. No private gallery was interested in displaying their work, and because of a lack of funds they were unable to rent exhibition space.[69] However, in December 1906, Heckel arranged to have the group mount a show in a lamp factory in Dresden.[70] Journalist and art critic Paul Fechter, one of the group's earliest followers, wrote the only positive review of this show, in the *Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten*. He remarked that their art "made one feel real terror when looking at things."[71]

The emotional content of the work of *die Brücke*, as well as its style and philosophical outlook drew Nolde to the group. He wrote in *Jahre der Kämpfe* : "I was not alone! There were other young painters, optimistic about the future, with aspirations like my own."[72] Like many Expressionist artists at this time, the *Brücke* artists felt that art in Imperial Germany lacked a sense of passion and commitment.[73] They rejected Impressionism and academic realism in favour of personal expression and emotional content. They especially admired the simplified, rough forms of African sculpture and Oceanic art, and, in terms of philosphical inspiration, they embraced the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Nietzsche's philosophy significantly influenced early-twentieth-century German thought. He called for a re-evaluation of all values upon which the whole of Western civilization was based.[74] For example, he criticized Christianity and Christian morality and

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69 Carmen Stonge, *"Die Brücke*: Perception and Reception" (M.A. Thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1986), 45.

70 Ibid.

71 Paul Fechter quoted in Barry Herbert, *German Expressionists: Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter*, (London: Jupiter Books,1983), 8.

72 Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 93.

73 Stonge, 7.

74 Ivo Frenzel, "Prophet, Pioneer, Seducer: Friedrich Nietzsche's Influence on Art, Literature and Philosophy in Germany" in Christos Joachimedes, et al. eds. *German Art in the Twentieth Century. Painting and Sculpture 1905-1985* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1985), 75.

saw European decadence as a sign of the decline of Western tradition and the emergence of nihilism.[75] He believed the regeneration of society was possible only through individual moral strength and desire for power. *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), his first major work, articulated the idea of artistic creation as involving a struggle between the opposing forces of the Dionysian, which represents "vitality, intoxication, and ecstasy," and the Apollonian, which represents "beauty, harmony and intellectual clarity."[76] According to Nietzsche, "Christianity is most profoundly nihilistic, whereas the Dionysian symbol expresses the most extreme limits of a yes-saying to life."[77] Nietzsche also formulated the concept of a new kind of human being which he called the *Übermensch*. This generation of superhuman beings would dominate others by sheer will. He praised individualism and the virtues of the strong, free, and creative individual over the ordinary man. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), the *Übermensch* represents those that triumph over human nature and inject new values into society as they rise to lead the masses.[78]

The ideal of a strong, creative individual who had the courage to live outside convention and moral social restrictions gave justification to the anti-bourgeois, anti-conventional avant-garde of the time. The *Brücke* members wanted in particular to give German art a revolutionary new meaning and demonstrate the need for social reform.[79] Their paintings typically use harsh, intense colours, simplified and often exaggerated forms, and distorted or flattened perspective. The subject matter typically conveys a sense of tension, struggle, or a desire to return to an idyllic utopia. Nolde shared many of these social, political, and philosophical concerns, in particular, a desire to create a new German art and to warn about the dangers of an ever more industrialized society.

Nolde exhibited with the *Brücke* in the fall of 1906, and, shortly thereafter, he and Ada moved to Dresden. Although his goals were similar to those of the other members of

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75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Hans Kohn, ed. *The Modern World: 1848 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: 1968), 173 quoted in Stonge, 10.

78 Frenzel, 75.

79 Stonge, 10.

the group, Nolde left after a year and a half, mainly because of personal differences. The others were significantly younger than Nolde: all were in their early twenties (Kirchner was the oldest at age twenty-six), whereas Nolde was almost forty. And, with regard to their artistic style, Nolde felt these young artists were still searching, that their group was too closely knit, and that their paintings all resembled one another. At the time of *die Brücke*'s 1907 exhibition at the Kunstsalon Richter in Dresden, Nolde wrote they should "not call themselves *Brücke* but van Goghiana"[80] because of their overall preference for Post-Impressionist style. In addition, Nolde could not adapt to the close, communal environment in which the members lived and worked, engaging in philosophical discussions and sharing different techniques to the point where individual signatures were often omitted and pictures painted by one artist were copied in woodcut by another.[81]

Instead, Nolde cultivated an anti-intellectual image and was very much a loner and individualist.[82] He also fostered an image of naïveté and emotionalism over rationalism. In his autobiography he wrote about an early visit with Schmidt-Rottluff in the summer of 1906: "We spoke together of art and other things, philosophizing as young painters are wont to do. I admired his acumen and knowledge and hardly knew what to say when he spoke of Nietzsche and Kant or other great figures of this kind. How would I know of such things[?]"[83] William Bradley sees this passage as "yet another attempt by Nolde to downgrade the extent of his own understanding of the history of German philosophical thought and present himself as an intuitive, highly individualistic personality."[84] In fact, Nolde's autobiographies are peppered with such statements, in which he tried to cultivate a naive and simple self-image which reflected his modest peasant roots. For example, Nolde claimed to have read only one book all the way through in his entire life, *Ekkehard*, a novel

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80 Nolde in Hans Fehr, *Ein Buch der Freundschaft* (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1960), 53.

81 Selz, *German Expressionist*, 78.

82 Bradley, 54.

83 Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 94.

84 Bradley, 54.

by Victor von Scheffel, given to him by his friend Hans Fehr.[85] This aspect of Nolde's personality, in particular his cultivation of a specific image based on that of the Romantic artist, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, "The Nolde Myth."

The next significant stage in Nolde's artistic development was his focus on religious subject matter. His new and very personal approach to traditional religious iconography embroiled his name and his artwork in controversy. Nolde recorded the events that inspired this new direction in the summer of 1909 in his autobiography. At this time he was experiencing a period of self-doubt with his art, and he also became "deathly ill"[86] from a case of food poisoning. Nolde described this episode with typical self-dramatization. He describes working in an agitated, almost trance-like state until the pictures were complete.[87] In *Jahre der Kämpfe* he wrote:

> I followed an irresistible desire to represent profound spirituality, religion and tenderness, without much intention, knowledge or deliberation. . . Near shock I stood before the drawing. No image of nature was near me, and now I was to paint the most mysterious, the profoundest, most inward event of all Christian religion! Christ, his face transfigured, sanctified and withdrawn, encircled by his disciples who are profoundly moved. I painted and painted, hardly knowing whether it was night or day, whether I was a human being or only a painter.[88]

His first two religious paintings, *The Last Supper* (1909) and *Pentecost* (1909), reveal his very personal approach to this subject matter (Figures 5 and 6). For example, *The Last Supper* shows Christ seated with the apostles crowded around him. Instead of the traditional iconography where Christ announces his betrayal to the disciples seated at the table, Nolde portrayed Christ offering wine to his disciples. The focus of the image, on the head and shoulders of the closely crowded figures, is more intimate. The vivid reds,

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[85] Ibid., 37. According to William Bradley, *Ekkehard*, was a popular novel, first published in 1855, about the tribulations of a monk from the monastery at St. Gallen in the 10th century. Bradley calls it a "prime example of the middle 19th century German fascination with Germany's glorious past and of the attempt to evoke that past through inclusion of lengthy passages describing the landscape" (37).

[86] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 105.

[87] Bradley, 63.

[88] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 105. Translation in Herschel B. Chipp, ed. *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 146.

oranges, and yellows bathe the figures' rough, mask-like faces in a candle-lit glow that contrasts dramatically with the dark background.

According to William Bradley, Nolde himself believed his religious images of 1909 to 1912 to be the best of his career thus far.[89] The artist believed that their power came from "the God inside him" rather than any "rigid dogma" and that these images "marked the change from optical stimuli to values of inner conviction."[90] They were also the first paintings by Nolde to evoke significant critical attention, positive and negative, from the German art world. Max Sauerlandt, Director of the Halle Museum, acquired Nolde's *The Last Supper* (1909) in 1914, but not without having to threaten the museum trustees with his resignation in order to have their support.[91] Karl Ernst Osthaus exhibited Nolde's nine-paneled *Life of Christ* (1912) at the Folkwang Museum in Hagen and in a pavillion devoted to religious art at the Brussels World Fair of 1912. According to Nolde's commentary in *Jahre der Kämpfe*, both the German Catholic and Protestant clergies objected strongly to Nolde's depiction of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and the Apostles as, in Nolde's own words, "powerful Jewish types."[92] The work was removed from the exhibition. Nolde wrote about these reactions in his autobiography:

> At that time I didn't know that Protestants as well as Catholics did not want my pictures. They had kept silent. Naturally I had not asked them how religious pictures should look. I created them instinctively, painting the figures as Jewish types, Christ and the Apostles too, Jews as they really were, the apostles as simple Jewish peasants and fishermen.
> I painted them as powerful Jewish types since the weaklings were certainly not the ones who followed the revolutionary teachings of Christ. . . The fact that during the Renaissance the Apostles and Christ were represented as Aryans, as Italian or German scholars, must have convinced the Church that this practice should continue forever, that this artistic deception -- to be quite frank -- justified further deception.[93]

Although here Nolde thought of "Jewish types" in a positive way, nevertheless his tendency to think in stereotypes led him to make anti-Semitic comments after he became

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[89] Bradley, 70.

[90] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 107. Translated in Herschel B. Chipp, 149.

[91] Selz, *Expressionist*, 123.

[92] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 173.

[93] Translation in Victor H. Miesel, ed. *Voices of German Expressionism*, 33.

involved in a controversy in the Berlin Secession, of which he had been a member since 1908.[94] After he was accepted into this organization, Nolde found that his paintings, along with the artwork of other young avant-garde artists, were consistently refused for exhibition. For example, the 1908 winter exhibition included mainly the work of the German Impressionist Secession members and only a small showing of graphic works by *die Brücke*. Even so, the inclusion of their work was a bone of contention among some of the more conservative members.[95] Lovis Corinth wrote in his autobiography, "The Secession was ruined in 1908."[96]

Two years later, in 1910, the tensions between the conservative and more avant-garde factions of the Secession came to a head. At the annual general meeting in January 1910, a group of members who were opposed to the "tyranny" of Liebermann and Cassirer elected Max Beckmann and Leo von König to the executive committee.[97] Liebermann, Cassirer, Slevogt, and a number of others resigned in protest, claiming they could not work with men who would open the Secession to "the worst in modern art."[98] By December 1910, a compromise was reached and Liebermann and his associates were reinstated to their former positions.[99] The president called a meeting to provide an opportunity for Secession members to air their grievances over the committee's past conduct. Nolde himself was outraged because his *Pentecost* (1909) was refused for the annual exhibition of 1910. According to Nolde, Liebermann declared, "If that picture is exhibited, I'll resign."[100] Nolde chose not to attend the meeting but wrote an angry letter addressed to Liebermann, who, as Nolde believed, had launched a personal attack on his art. He then sent copies of the letter to Karl Scheffler, an art critic and editor of *Kunst und Künstler*

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[94] Nolde exhibited with the Berlin Secession in 1903 and in 1906-1907 but was not asked to be a member until 1908. Rudolf Pfefferkorn, *Die Berliner Secession: Eine Epoche deutscher Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: Haude und Spenersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983), 102.

[95] Selz, *Expressionist*, 38.

[96] Lovis Corinth, *Selbstbiographie* (Leipzig, 1926), 149 quoted in Selz, *Expressionist*, 38.

[97] Paret, 209.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Vergo, 45.

[100] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 141.

(December 1910), the "semi-official" publication of the Secession, and circulated copies to the Secession members and the daily press.[101] In it, Nolde accused Liebermann of "not knowing his limits," of self-promotion, and of producing "weak kitsch." An excerpt of this letter reads as follows:

> Dear Mr. Scheffler,
> . . . As far as the clever old Liebermann is concerned, the same applies to him as to many a clever man: he does not know his limits . . . He has people write as much as possible about him; he paints and exhibits as much as he possibly can. The result is that the whole young generation is fed up, and cannot look at his work any more and recognizes how intentional all this is, how weak and kitschy his present work and also much of his earlier works are . . .
>
> *(Sehr geehrter Herr Scheffler!*
> *. . . Dem so klugen alten Liebermann geht es wie manchem klugen Mann vor ihm: er kennt seine Grenzen nicht; . . . Er veranlaßt, daß so viel wie möglich über ihn geschrieben und publiziert wird, er macht, malt und stellt aus, so viel er nur kann. Die Folge davon ist, daß die ganze junge Generation, übersatt, schon nicht mehr seine Arbeiten ansehen kann und mag, daß sie erkennt, wie absichtlich dies alles ist, wie schwach und kitschig nicht nur seine gegenwärtigen Arbeiten, sondern auch so manche seiner früheren sind. . .)* [102]

Scheffler in turn, published an editorial attacking Nolde for publicly insulting the Secession's president. An emergency meeting was held on December 17, 1910, where Nolde was informed of his expulsion. Though he tried to gain support from younger artists, they were, according to Vergo, "seemingly so alienated by his intemperate behaviour that they voted against him."[103]

In his description of this event in his autobiography, Nolde interpreted his expulsion from the Secession as part of a perceived Jewish conspiracy (both Liebermann and Cassirer were Jewish) that threatened to undermine German art. He presented himself as a spokesperson for the young [104] (even though he was forty-three years old at the time) and a fighter for his notion of a true German art free from foreign influences, especially that

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101 Vergo, 45.

102 Werner Doede, *Die Berliner Secession* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1977), 63. Translation from German to English is my own.

103 Vergo, 45.

104 Ibid., 46.

of France. He also made his personal situation into an ideological confrontation between Jews and Germans and between the conservative Secession leaders and the avant-garde. This comparison recalls Richard Wagner's essay *Judaism in Music* (1850) in which the author attempted to demonstrate the destructive effect of Jewish participation in artistic endeavours. Like Nolde, Wagner's personal opinions and rivalries (in Wagner's case with the Jewish composers Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer) became the basis of his anti-Jewish essay.

Anti-Semitism and intense German nationalism were quite common in the later years of Imperial Germany. Already in the years prior to the formation of the Secession, Emperor Wilhelm II had tried to exert a strong influence in the workings of the official state-sponsored art organizations. The Secessionists, who had broken away from the Berlin Academy, were seen by the Kaiser and his supporters as traitors. Therefore, as Elizabeth Tumasonis notes, "modernism came to be perceived as akin to treason and because Liebermann was Jewish (along with other leaders of the Secession), it became equated in the fuzzy minds of some, with a kind of Jewish conspiracy against the state."[105] In fact, this event seems to have solidified some of the generally racist and anti-Semitic ideas that Nolde personally held. Later, during the National Socialist regime, Nolde tried to make these ideas work in his favour. However, his anti-Semitic statements came back to haunt him, particularly in post-war assessments of Nolde's work. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Assessments of the impact of the events of 1910 on Nolde's career vary. William Bradley sees the circumstances surrounding what he calls "the Nolde conflict" as "by far the most serious and important critical reaction to Nolde's religious paintings. The circumstances would have a decisive effect on the course of Nolde's career and the development of his art from that point on."[106] In contrast, Peter Vergo views this event in a different light. Vergo acknowledges that Nolde saw this as a "decisive moment in his career," but Vergo believes the Secession affair of 1910 was "in the end, little more than an

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[105] Elizabeth Tumasonis, "Böcklin's Reputation: Its Rise and Fall," *Art Criticism* 6, 2 (1990) : 63.

[106] Bradley, 72.

unseemly personal wrangle, having mainly to do with internal art-political issues and with the conduct of the association's executive committee."[107] Peter Paret's book *The Berlin Secession* supports Vergo's contention. According to Paret, as early as 1906 Lovis Corinth vaguely mentioned an "outbreak of discontent" after the Secession moved to a new location.[108] The following year, Karl Scheffler described the Secession as "an extended family who politely masked their hatred for each other."[109] Paret believes the causes of this discontent had mostly to do with the increasing bureaucratization of the Secession as it became more successful and attempted "to be all things to all members."[110]

Though much has been made of Nolde's role in this "controversy," mostly by Nolde himself, the Berlin Secession affair does not appear to have hurt his artistic reputation. After his expulsion, Nolde joined the New Secession in Berlin in 1910. This group of avant-garde artists formed as a result of the Berlin Secession's rejection of new artists' work, and the members tried to dislodge the Berlin Secession as the rallying centre for modern art.[111] Nolde participated in its exhibitions over the next two years, and in 1912 he was to succeed Max Pechstein as chair of the group. But the society disbanded when all the *Brücke* artists withdrew.[112]

In terms of public reception, Nolde's expulsion from the Berlin Secession had little impact on his reputation. He still exhibited widely. In 1912, for example, his work was exhibited in ten different galleries throughout Germany and was included in a touring exhibition organized by the *Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe Hagen* shown in Newark, St. Louis, and Chicago.[113] He also participated as a representative of contemporary German art in the 1912 Cologne Sonderbund exhibition, which included 160

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107 Vergo, 45.

108 Paret, 202.

109 Karl Scheffler "Berliner Sezession," *Kunst und Künstler* (1906-1907) : 339 in Paret, 202.

110 Paret, 202.

111 Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918-19.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 23.

112 Pois, 104.

113 Martin Urban, ed. *Emil Nolde: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings Volume 1 1895-1914.* (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1987), 580-589.

artists from nine different countries.[114] This was an international exhibition of modern art, supported by prominent German and international art representatives, government officials, and university professors.[115] Cézanne and van Gogh were featured most prominently, and artists like Kirchner, Heckel, Schmidt-Rotluff, and Kokoschka were invited to participate.[116]

Thus, by 1912 there was a growing network of support for Expressionist artists in Imperial Germany. Not only did the Sonderbund show their work, but a number of new and radical art journals were established in Berlin.[117] One of these journals, *Der Sturm*, was founded in March 1910 by Herwarth Walden. Walden is credited by Selz with creating an organization around *Der Sturm* that was "the catalyst of the modern movement and the focal point of expressionism -- a term that he made popular."[118] *Der Sturm* gradually developed from a journal into "a publishing firm; a magazine; an art exhibit; a group of artists; a modern art school and much more."[119] Its earliest editions focused on literature and criticism and attracted many of the leading writers of the time such as August Strindberg, Heinrich Mann, and the poet Else Lasker-Schüler, who was also Walden's wife. By May 1910 the Viennese artist Oskar Kokoschka's illustrations, mostly portrait sketches, were added to the publication.[120] Walden discovered the art of other Expressionists including Nolde in 1911, and later that year he included more art criticism in the journal.[121] Two bold black and white drawings by Nolde entitled *Tingeltangel* (Honky-tonk Music Hall) and *Chantant* (Singing) appeared on the March 25, 1911, and

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114 Pois, 104.

115 Selz, *German Expressionist Painters*, 242.

116 Ibid., 237.

117 Carmen Stonge, *"Die Brücke*: Perception and Reception" (M.A. Thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1986), 55.

118 Selz, *German Expressionist*, 250.

119 Herwarth Walden quoted in Edith Hoffmann, "*Der Sturm*: A Document of Expressionism," *Signature* 18, (1954), 52.

120 Herwarth Walden, ed. *Der Sturm: Wochenschrift für Kultur und die Künste* (May 1910 editions).

121 Selz, *Expressionist*, 257.

August 1911 covers of *Der Sturm*.[122] (Figures 5 and 6). Walden's interest in Nolde was short-lived, however. He tended to publish certain artists' work for several issues and then quickly move on to the work of newer avant-garde artists.

Another important journal that featured Nolde's work was *Das Kunstblatt*. Edited by Paul Westheim, it first appeared in mid-January 1917 and provided a place for modern artists and writers to present their work to the public.[123] This journal featured high quality artistic reproductions and, according to Carmen Stonge, was more popular among the general public than *Der Sturm*.[124] Describing the founding of the journal, the editor wrote, "A new artistic generation was in existence . . . spurred on by artistic will aimed at intensification and spiritualization. The works of young masters, real masters, were still being ignored, if not totally rejected."[125] The first edition included works by Nolde, Munch, Barlach, and Kirchner, among others. Though *Das Kunstblatt* was first attacked by art historians and critics as "lacking in proper art school atmosphere," it was respected by avant-garde artists and by the general public.[126] According to Stonge, artists discovered that work featured in this journal tended to be accepted by the public and also would be shown in art galleries that first ignored them.[127]

The next major stage in Nolde's life and work occurred in 1913, when Nolde and his wife were invited to accompany a "medical-demographic"[128] expedition across Eastern Europe and Asia to Southeast Asia. The German Colonial Office had organized this expedition to study the cause of the decline in population in the German protectorates in the South Seas.[129] The group was headed by two anthropologists, Professors Külz and

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122 Walden, *Der Sturm*, 56, (March 25, 1911) : 1.

123 Paul Westheim, "How *Das Kunstblatt* was Born," in *The Era of German Expressionism*, ed. Paul Raabe, trans. J.M. Ritchie (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1974), 202.

124 Carmen Stonge, *"Die Brücke*: Perception and Reception" (M.A. Thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1986), 56.

125 Westheim, 202.

126 Ibid., 204.

127 Stonge, 56.

128 Vergo, 140.

129 Ibid.

Leber, and included geologists, biologists, geographers, and botanists.[130] Nolde was invited to be a pictorial reporter. He made sketches at each stage of the journey and painted a total of fifty-two paintings. These paintings and drawings were all confiscated in 1914 as the expedition crossed the British-controlled Suez Canal, but by 1921 Nolde was able to recover them, and the Colonial Office acquired fifty of his images.[131]

Nolde's involvement with this expedition was unique in that he had no scientific background and little formal art training. His qualifications were simply his interest in primitive art and his lay interest in certain aspects of South Sea carving, and, according to Frank Whitford, "word spread that he was something of an expert."[132] In 1911, while in Berlin, Nolde had started to write a book on the art of the indigenous peoples, based on what he had observed in German ethnological museums. He had planned to entitle it *Kunstäusserungen der Naturvölker* (Artistic Expression of Indigenous Peoples), but the work was never completed.[133] The fragments that still exist indicate that Nolde wrote this from a personal and emotional, rather than a scientific, point of view.

Nolde's trip to the South Pacific seems to have reinforced his ideas regarding primitivism and his ideal of racial purity. He particularly admired the communal life and interrelation of art and daily existence of the indigenous people. In his autobiography he wrote:

> The primitive people live in nature, they are at one with it and part of the universe. At times I have a feeling they alone are still real human beings, while we are something like over-sophisticated marionettes, artificial and arrogant.
>
> *(Die Urmenschen leben in ihrer Natur, sind eins mit ihr und ein Teil vom ganzen All. Ich habe zuweilen das Gefühl, als ob nur sie noch wirkliche Menschen sind, wir aber etwas wie verbildete Gliederpuppen, künstlich und voll Dünkel.)* [134]

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130 Frank Whitford. "Emil Nolde's Trip to the South Seas," *Auction* (January 3, 1969) : 17.

131 Werner Haftmann, *Emil Nolde* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 42.

132 Ibid., 18.

133 Nolde only wrote a few introductory pages. The text appears in Herschel B. Chipp's *Theories of Modern Art*, 150- 151.

134 Emil Nolde, *Welt und Heimat: Die Südsee Reisen* (Cologne: Dumont, 1965), 88. Translation is my own.

In fact, it was Nolde's belief that art came directly from one's racially-conditioned temperament that led him to espouse many of the Nazi theories of art and race during the early years of National Socialism. These ideas are discussed further in Chapter Two.

Unlike so many other Expressionist artists, Nolde's work of the years of World War I does not show any significant change in subject matter or style. One might expect that he would have commented on the horrible events of the war or expressed a hope for regeneration. But in fact, as Peter Vergo comments, Nolde's *oeuvre* remained relatively conservative and homogeneous throughout his lifetime:

> The things he chose to depict would, one feels, scarcely have been any different had he lived half a century earlier. The momentous events of his lifetime called forth barely the faintest echo: two world wars, revolution and street violence, the end of the German empire and the great inflation and depression of the 1920s . . . to judge by his art alone, these things might never have happened. His work is for the most part devoid of any comment on social or political issues.[135]

Vergo notes that Nolde's main thematic interests and his style developed during the Wilhelmine era and changed little throughout his career.[136]

It was not until the Weimar years (1918 to 1933) that his work and the work of other Expressionist artists gained widespread acceptance. Modern artists who had to struggle during the Wilhemine period, in part because of the Kaiser's hostility to modernism, were celebrated during the Weimar era for political reasons. Joan Weinstein's book *The End of Expressionism* (1990) explains that dramatic shift in the status of Expressionist artists in Berlin, Dresden, and Munich. She remarks that the pre-war history of Expressionism had few direct links with radical politics, only a generalized, often unfocused contempt for Wilhelmine culture and politics.[137] However, Weinstein identifies the events of the November Revolution of 1918 as a brief moment when avant-garde artists thought they could bring an end to the old order of the Imperial state and its institutions and have a positive effect on the art-buying public.[138] The history of art during the November

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135 Vergo, 11.

136 Ibid.

137 Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918-19* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 18.

138 Ibid., 3.

Revolution, according to Weinstein, is important for understanding the artistic and institutional framework in the Weimar Republic. In 1918 many Expressionist artists participated in the November Revolution, making demands for the remaking of the German art world. They demanded a revolution in which the arts would play a leading role, and many artists wrote manifestos for artistic freedom, announced the end of a capitalist art market, and also advocated a more open reception to modernism.

During the Weimar Republic, the general reception of Nolde's work changed significantly. For example, Selz tells us that, after World War I, even Nolde's religious work gained more acceptance.[139] Art reviewer Karl With wrote positively about a series of religious paintings, among them *The Life of Christ* (Figure 19) and *Mary of Egypt* which were displayed at St. Catherine's Church in Lübeck in the winter of 1921 to 1922. He writes that "only within the environment of a large medieval church with its dimmed light, could his [Nolde's] brilliant colours achieve their true vibrant and glowing effect."[140] In 1919, art historian Carl Georg Heise published a study of Nolde's religious images, describing Nolde's work as a "vessel of the divine,. . . an intimate, exquisite embellishment of the deepest primitive emotions of mankind."[141] Though no church ever commissioned work from Nolde, the same can be said of most Expressionist artists, with the exception of Ernst Barlach. As Selz points out, "with rare exceptions, religious authorities in our time have tended to prefer sweet, or at least 'non-controversial,' devotional images to powerful and authentic statements about life and its ultimate values, and this was doubtless why no use was found for Nolde's myth-making representation of violence and tragedy."[142]

By the late 1920s Nolde was at the height of his career. His works had been acquired by almost every major German museum.[143] A special "Nolde Room" was set up at the Berlin National Gallery. In 1931 the Museum of Modern Art in New York featured

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139 Selz, *Nolde*, 26.

140 Karl With, "Künstlerbrief Lübeck," *Feuer* III, 2-3 (November /December 1921) : 15-18.

141 Bradley, 70.

142 Selz, *Emil Nolde*, 27.

143 Vergo, 38.

Nolde's work in an exhibition entitled "German Painting and Sculpture." 1927 was a particularly significant year for Nolde. To celebrate Nolde's sixtieth birthday, in August 1927, Dresden gallery owner Rudolf Probst organized a major retrospective exhibition of his work (450 pieces in total, 250 of which were paintings), which then travelled to Hamburg, Wiesbaden, Kiel, and Essen.

Nolde's sixtieth birthday in August 1927 was an important milestone on his road to fame. A *Festschrift* which duly celebrated Nolde's status as one of Germany's leading Expressionists was published that year. A brief examination of its contents can serve as an appropriate conclusion to this chapter. Among the contributors were Professor Kurt Breysig (Berlin University), Ernst Gosebruch (Director of the Folkwang Museum) , Paul Klee (artist and professor at the Bauhaus in Dessau), Max Sauerlandt (Director of the Hamburg Arts and Crafts Musuem), Gustav Schiefler (Director of the County Court in Hamburg), Rudolf Probst (gallery owner and art critic), and Paul Westheim (editor of *Das Kunstblatt*). Probst's introduction celebrates Nolde's "genius," his "primeval uniqueness" *(ureigenstes Wesen).*[144] A number of other contributors extolled Nolde as a cultural hero because of his "Germanness." Kurt Breysig, for example, wrote about Nolde's "flaming, blazing and spurting choice of colours" and declared that Nolde was a "gift to the German people" *(. . . flammenden, lohenden, lodernden Farbenwahl. . .* " *"Das Volk, dem ein solcher Herr und Meister seiner Kunst geschenkt ist . . .")*[145] Max Sauerlandt elevated Nolde's stature in art to that of William Shakespeare in literature and suggested an essential "Germanic spirit" common to both: "As Shakespeare does not belong to England alone, so Nolde does not belong to Germany alone. Both belong to the whole world of Germanic spirits which nurtured them." *(Wie Shakespeare nicht England allein, so gehört Nolde nicht Deutschland allein. Beide gehören der ganzen Welt der germanischen Geister, der sie entwuchsen.")* [146]

In retrospect, Nolde's rise to fame, his sucess, and notoriety were the result of

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[144] *Festschrift für Emil Nolde, Anlässlich seines 60. Geburtstages* (Dresden: Neue Kunst Fides, 1927), 11. Translations into English are my own.

[145] Ibid., 18.

[146] Ibid., 28.

what he himself characterized as forty "years of struggle." By the late 1920s critical responses to his art ranged from admiration and veneration by a number of enthusiastic followers to coolness or rejection by individuals and institutions opposed to modernism. A thorough examination of the critical reactions to Nolde's work will be dealt with in Chapters Three and Four, after an examination of the attack on his reputation by the National Socialists in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Nolde's Encounter with Nazism: The Destruction of his Reputation (1930s to 1945)

By the time Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, Nolde was near the pinnacle of his career. The first volume of his autobiography, *Das eigene Leben*, was published in 1931; and the second volume, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, followed in 1934. His most recent exhibitions received critical acclaim in Germany as well as internationally. As one of Germany's most successful Expressionist artists, hailed by critics as able to capture the spirit of his time and the "Germanness" of his homeland, one might expect a relatively positive encounter between Emil Nolde and National Socialism. This chapter will focus on the complexity of this issue and will show that, while Nolde held some strong *völkisch* and nationalistic views, there was no place for him or his art in the Nazi cultural sphere.

In fact, Nolde's early reception in Nazi Germany was somewhat favourable. According to Peter Vergo, in 1933 "art and culture" were already deemed politically important, but there were no concrete criteria for what was acceptable or unacceptable in the new German art beyond the vague idea to rid German art of "Jewishness" and "Cultural Bolshevism."[1] At the same time, there were active campaigns for both the *völkisch* and the pro-modernist causes. In his book *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (1996), Jonathan Petropoulos identifies two dominant and diametrically opposed positions toward art in the early years of National Socialism: that of self-proclaimed party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg,[2] and that of Paul Joseph Goebbels, head of the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda *(Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda).*[3] In 1933 Rosenberg suggested that the word "Expressionism" ought to be

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[1] Peter Vergo, "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality," in *Emil Nolde*, eds. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 51.

[2] Rosenberg had several roles in the National Socialist government: he was head of the Combat League for German Culture *(Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*); editor of the*Völkischer Beobachter*, the official Party newspaper; a *Reichstag* delegate; and a *Reichsleiter* (one of 17 named to the Party's highest rank in the summer of 1933). Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 33.

[3] Ibid., 23.

avoided.[4] He called for the creation of a new people's art (*Volkskunst*) based on traditional *völkisch* ideals. It would be, in Rosenberg's words, a " 'healthy' art, robust and unreflective, and divorced from morbid introspection."[5] Rosenberg seems to have meant by "healthy" an essentially realistic form of art, free of the distortions of Expressionism. Goebbels, on the other hand, was initially more open to Expressionism as a manifestation of the German people's spirit.[6] Albert Speer recounted his commission to decorate Goebbels' personal apartment in 1933 with Nolde watercolours "on loan" from the Berlin National Gallery.[7]

According to Petropoulos, by June 1933 Goebbels and Rosenberg clashed over the establishment of a true people's art.[8] Goebbels, who wanted to include modern art in the Nazi revolution, gained the support of the National Socialist German Students' Association *(NSD Studentenbund).*[9] The members of this association were students as well as art historians, journalists, and artists who were opposed to Rosenberg and the *völkisch* movement.[10] They wrote articles in periodicals and newspapers such as the liberal-leaning *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and demonstrated in highly publicized rallies for a more liberal *Kunstpolitik.*[11] In June 1933, in the Auditorium Maximum of the Berlin University, the *NSD Studentenbund* announced its motto *"Bekenntnis der Jugend zur deutschen Kunst"* (Youth Creed for German Art); here Nolde and Ernst Barlach were celebrated as "primeval Germans" *("urwüchsig deutsch"),* and the new National Socialist

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[4] Paul Vogt, *Geschichte der deutschen Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972), 333.

[5] Rosenberg in Robert Pois, *Emil Nolde* (Boulder, Colorado: University of America Press, 1982), 192.

[6] Petropoulos, 23.

[7] Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs by Albert Speer,* trans. Richard and Clara Winston, (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1970), 27.

[8] Petropoulos, 33.

[9] Martin Urban "Die 'Ungemalten Bilder' von Emil Nolde," in *Emil Nolde,* ed. Tilman Osterwold (Stuttgart: Würtembergischer Kunstverein, 1988), 115.

[10] Petropoulos, 23.

[11] Ibid.

artists were ridiculed as "petty bourgeois."[12] The deputy leader of the Berlin division of the *NSD Studentenbund*, painter Otto Andreas Schreiber, attacked the defamation of Nolde and Barlach by Rosenberg's *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* as a "crime"[13] and protested against the rejection of Nolde's application for membership in the *Kampfbund.*[14] Schreiber asserted that the "demonic mystique" of Emil Nolde represented a true German art, and that Expressionism should be part of the Nazi art program.[15] Rosenberg immediately retaliated in the July 7, 1933 issue of *Der Völkische Beobachter*, asserting that the students were "still under the influence of Cultural Bolshevist teachers" and denouncing Nolde's portraits as "negroid, impious, raw, and lacking any genuine inner power of form."[16]

The debate between Rosenberg and Goebbels was still not resolved when Hitler gave his annual Nuremburg Party congress cultural speech in 1934. Hitler spoke out against modern art but also criticized the *völkisch* point of view, calling it "Teutonic nonsense."[17] Thus, according to Jonathan Petropoulos, there was no firm policy against modernism until late 1935.[18] At that time Hitler delivered a speech to the 1935 Nuremburg Party Congress harshly attacking modern art. As a result, Goebbels had to readjust his stance.[19]

Goebbels and the *NS Studentenbund* were not the only ones who initially supported Nolde's work. Positive words for Nolde came from Professor Alois Schardt, a well-known defender of the Expressionists and director of the National Gallery in Berlin

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12 Urban, 115.

13 Vergo, 54.

14 Hildegard Brenner, ***Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*** (Hamburg: Reinbek, 1963) in Vergo and Lunn, 69.

15 Robert Pois, "German Expressionism in the Plastic Arts and Nazism: A Confrontation of Idealists," *German Life and Letters* XXI, no. 3 (April 1968) : 211.

16 Urban, 115.

17 Petropoulos, 23. Quoting from Hitler's cultural speech of September 1934 as reprinted in *Der Völkische Beobachter* (September 6, 1934).

18 Petropoulos, 48.

19 Ibid.

until late 1933. He spoke out for Expressionism's potential role within National Socialism. In his view, Expressionism should be viewed in terms of the past.[20] Schardt was an admirer of Nolde, whose paintings he saw as recalling the prophetic ecstasy of early medieval work.[21] Schardt gave Nolde's works a large room to themselves, and even his replacement Eberhard Hanfstaengl continued to strengthen the holdings of the *Neue Abteilung*, the modern art section of the National Gallery, with works from private collections, including works by Nolde.[22]

Max Sauerlandt, Director of the Hamburg Arts and Crafts Museum and Nolde's friend and longtime supporter, also spoke publicly about the potential role of Nolde's art in Nazi Germany.[23] In 1933, Sauerlandt made a series of speeches at the University of Hamburg entitled *Die Kunst der letzten 30 Jahre* (Art of the Last Thirty Years), and these addresses were published in 1935.[24] Most of the information Sauerlandt presented was taken from his 1921 biography of Nolde, but for his lectures he put more emphasis on the uniquely German aspects of Expressionism.[25] Nolde's art, according to Sauerlandt, was "conditioned by blood and soil" and stemmed from "the deepest sources of German fantasy-representation."[26]

Support for Nolde's work, according to Peter Vergo, also came from art dealers, in particular Rudolf Probst in Mannheim and Ferdinand Moeller in Berlin, who still promoted Nolde's work under National Socialist rule.[27] Moeller showed Nolde's work in an

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[20] Pois, "German Expressionism," 211.

[21] Dagmar Grimm, "Emil Nolde" in *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 1991), 315.

[22] Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Argon, 1987), 61.

[23] Pois, *Emil Nolde*, 193.

[24] Ibid. Sauerlandt's lectures were also collected and reprinted by the Nolde Foundation of Seebüll in 1961. Max Sauerlandt, *Emil Nolde* (Flensburg: Dumont, 1961).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid. Pois quoting Sauerlandt. According to the edition edited by the Nolde Foundation, Sauerlandt was removed by the National Socialists from his position as Director of the Museum for Art and Craft *(Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe)* only a few months after giving these talks. He died the following year, 1934. (Joachim von Lepel, "Vorwort," in *Emil Nolde*, n.p.)

[27] Moeller also continued to sell modernist works after 1937, for "convertible foreign currencies." (Petropoulos, 82).

exhibition of thirty modern painters in June 1933 and exhibited sixty of his watercolours and lithographs in April 1934.[28] Moeller indirectly had Goebbels's support in that the Propaganda Minister endorsed pro-modernist groups until the autumn of 1935.[29] An exhibition society called *Der Norden* (The North), which organized several shows at the Ferdinand Moeller Gallery, and the staff of the art journal *Kunst der Nation*, an advocate of Expressionism, were two such groups.[30] In addition, in the summer of 1936, Moeller mounted a second exhibition of thirty modern German artists to coincide with the Berlin Olympics of that year.[31] Thus, there was still room for certain Expressionists and certain types of modernist subject matter at this time. Klaus Lankheit points out that in an attempt to reinterpret Franz Marc's work in a National Socialist context, Marc's *Tower of Blue Horses* (1913) was displayed in a "place of honour" in the Berlin National Gallery in 1936.[32] This was at the time of the Olympic Games when the Nazis were trying to promote a more liberal image to the world and commemorated Marc's death in the trenches of World War I in 1916.[33]

Although things looked better for Nolde than for other modernists in terms of artistic reception in the mid-1930s, a number of issues need to be examined in connection with the fall of his reputation in the years between 1933 and 1945. These include the question of Nolde's membership in the National Socialist party; his encounter with National Socialist cultural policies; and a comparison of his work with the prescribed Nazi art program which led to the *Malverbot* of 1941.

Much discussion has occurred about Nolde's involvement in the National Socialist party and, in general, about his "racism" and "anti-Semitism." Until Peter Vergo's 1995 article "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality," it had been generally agreed among scholars that Nolde became a member of the Danish National Socialist Party at some point in the 1920s.

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[28] Vergo, 52.

[29] Petropoulos, 24.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Vergo, 52.

[32] Klaus Lankheit, *Franz Marc: Die Turm der Blauen Pferde* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961), 26.

[33] Ibid.

Dagmar Grimm, for example, wrote in *Degenerate Art: the Fate of the Avant-garde in Nazi Germany* (1991) that "in 1920 [Nolde] became a charter member of the North Schleswig branch of the Danish National Socialist party."[34] The biographical summary in the catalogue *Zwischen Widerstand und Anpassung, Kunst in Deutschland 1933 -1945* (1978) even emphasizes that Nolde joined the Nazi party "at the same time as Hitler,"[35] which means 1920. The catalogue of the Nolde graphics show in Boston and Los Angeles in 1995 claims that "in 1920 . . . Nolde accepted Danish citizenship and became a member of the Danish National Socialist Party."[36]

Vergo presents a generally convincing and carefully researched account of Nolde's initial membership in the NSAN *(National-Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordschleswig)* in 1934, which he calls a "factional party in the Nazi style."[37] The NSAN was absorbed by the NSDAP-N *(National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei Nordschleswig)* in 1935.[38] Vergo also confirms by way of records relating to party membership in Denmark from the Danish National Archives that Nolde "did not in fact join the Danish National Socialist Party."[39] A summary of Vergo's findings is necessary in order to portray Nolde's involvement accurately.

According to Vergo, a plebiscite, provided for in 1920 by the Treaty of Versailles, resulted in the ceding of North Schleswig to Denmark. Nolde, who was living in Utenwarf, became a Danish citizen at that time.[40] Vergo points out that in the 1920s "there was no Danish Nazi party for him to join" since the Danish National Socialist Party was

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[34] Dagmar Grimm, "Emil Nolde" in *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 1991), 315. Grimm's assertion has subsequently been quoted in Simon Morely, "Supping with the Devil" *Art Review* 47 (December/January 1996), 7.

[35] *Zwischen Widerstand und Anpassung, Kunst in Deutschland 1933 -1945* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1978), 214.

[36] Susan V. Cloeren, "Chronology" in *Nolde: The Painter's Prints*, eds. Clifford Ackley and others (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), 299.

[37] Vergo, 50.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 62.

[40] Ibid., 49.

not founded until November 1930.[41] In the 1920s, former German citizens in Danish North Schleswig organized themselves into voters' associations and German nationalist special interest groups which focused on restoring the old border between Germany and Denmark.[42] Though these groups maintained links with official organizations in Germany, Vergo asserts they were "by no means National Socialist in affiliation."[43] Therefore it would have been impossible for Nolde to join a Danish National Socialist organization in the 1920s.

"What does seem certain," Vergo says, ". . . is that [Nolde] joined the *National-Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordschleswig* (NSAN) in September 1934."[44] In 1927, Nolde moved south from Denmark to Germany, where he began the construction of the house in Seebüll that is now the Nolde Foundation.[45] In 1928, the Nazi Party still had only 3,000 members in German Schleswig-Holstein, but Vergo points out the tremendous growth of Nazi influence in the next four years to "a staggering 42,000 members by 1931, the highest proportion per head of population in the entire country."[46] The NSAN,which Nolde joined in 1934, was a Nazi-inspired splinter group, one of many German-oriented farmers' and voters' associations which originated in 1933 in Denmark. These groups were in many cases hostile to one another, and when it became apparent that these associations could not resolve their differences, they were subsumed within the North Schleswig German Nazi Party *(National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei Nordschleswig* or NSDAP-N) in the summer of 1935.[47] Vergo suggests that Nolde's membership in the Nazi Party may have been "largely involuntary, inasmuch as the local association in which he had been involved was simply swallowed up by . . . a more easily

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Vergo, 50.

[45] Ibid., 49. The reason for this move southward is that Nolde was angry over Danish policies regarding the local environment, specifically the draining of marshland and regulation of irrigation systems which destroyed local ecological systems around Utenwarf.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 50.

supervised and less bitterly divided umbrella organization which remained, none the less, formally independent of the German Nazi party (NSDAP)."[48] Vergo does not elaborate on why or in what way this group was independent of the NSDAP. It is difficult to accept that the North Schleswig German Nazi party would be separate and free of central control in 1935.

Like other scholars, Vergo acknowledges that it is difficult to give specific reasons for Nolde's involvement with the Nazi splinter groups in the first place.[49] The degree to which it was his identification with the Nazi "blood and soil" rhetoric or the general social pressure exerted by close-knit rural communities where Nazi activists sometimes gained the support of entire villages is difficult to determine.[50] Vergo suggests that to some extent Nolde's actions may have been pragmatic: "From the beginning of 1933 onwards the question of how they were likely to fare under the new regime preoccupied a number of modern artists whose position and indeed prospects were initially far from certain."[51] Nolde himself emphasized his political naïveté in his autobiography. Robert Pois refers to him as "enjoy[ing] depicting himself as being in an apolitical stupor for much of his life."[52] Nevertheless, it is likely that he would have been at least somewhat aware of the criticism of Nazi officials in the mid-1930s. Given the intensity of the clash between Goebbels and Rosenberg in June 1933, and Rosenberg's condemnation of Nolde's portraits in the July 7, 1933 issue of *Völkischer Beobachter* discussed above, and given Nolde's previous interest in and his notations of critics' responses in his autobiography, it is indeed likely that for the sake of artistic survival he was acting in his own best interest in becoming

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Vergo, 51.

[52] Pois, *Emil Nolde,* 187. Pois also quotes the following excerpt from Nolde's personal correspondence to illustrate his political confusion: "I didn' t even know how I should vote, for the Nationals [i.e. the National Socialists] for the Communists, each party has my approval and disapproval at the same time. . . Where it is beautiful, I really like *das Deutschtum.* And Communism? Pure Communism is very beautiful." Letter from Emil Nolde to Hans Fehr, May 22, 1928, in Pois, 187. This letter was written in 1928. It was also to Nolde's advantage after the war to portray himself as politically naïve, and therefore the dupe of the National Socialists, as will be shown later in this chapter.

involved with the NSAN in 1934. Thus, his membership in the NSAN suggests opportunism rather than conviction. It is safe to say that had he been a true believer he would have been active in the party. However, being the strong individualist he was, Nolde withdrew from Berlin to the isolation of Seebüll, probably hoping to pursue his own goals rather than subjugate his own ideas and his art to the National Socialist program.

In the mid-1930s, Nolde and other modernist artists witnessed the rapid change of official artistic tastes and emerging policies in Germany. According to Petropoulos, as early as the summer of 1933, the first year of the Third Reich, a series of *"Schandausstellungen"* (special exhibitions of "shameful art") was held in cities such as Dresden, Karlsruhe, and Mannheim, which were supposed to illustrate the degeneration of art and the general "cultural Bolshevism" of the time.[53] These exhibitions, although smaller in scale than later official exhibitions and privately organized, formed the roots of the official 1937 Degenerate Art Exhibition. These various independent exhibitions made sensationalist attacks on modern art and pioneered the techniques that would appear in the 1937 campaign. One of the strategies included posting the inflationary purchase prices of 1923 next to the works of art in order to incite the public's anger over how their tax dollars had been spent, as at the 1933 Karlsruhe exhibition which included works by *die Brücke*, *der Blaue Reiter*, as well as paintings by German Impressionists Max Slevogt and Lovis Corinth. Another strategy was to forbid those under eighteen years of age to view the show in order to suggest that this art should be viewed as obscene.[54] These exhibitions were given titles such as *Kunst, die nicht aus unserer Seele kam* (Art Which Has Not Come From Our Soul) which was held in Chemnitz and *Kulturbolschevismus* (Cultural Bolshevism) held in Mannheim.[55]

The terms "cultural Bolshevism" and "degenerate" were central to the ideologies of Nazi art and cultural policies. "Cultural Bolshevism" *(Kulturbolschevismus)* is explained by Christine Fischer-Defoy as a "vaguely defined and therefore all-embracing . . . slogan

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[53] Petropoulos, 32-33.

[54] Ibid., 32.

[55] Ibid.

. . . used as a cultural equivalent to the term 'Marxism' in the field of politics to denote everything that could be identified with the *Systemzeit* or the Weimar Republic . . . [*Kulturbolschevismus*] could cover the whole range of social democratic, socialist and communist tendencies."[56] The word "degenerate" *(entartet)* designated supposedly "inferior racial, sexual and moral types."[57] The German word *entartet* is derived from *"ent"* which means "away" and *"Art "* which means "species." According to Stephanie Barron, *entartet* is "a biological term, defining a plant or animal that was so changed that it no longer belongs to its species. By extension, it refers to art that is unclassifiable, or so far beyond the confines of what is accepted that it is in essence, 'non-art.' "[58] This "non-art" was considered dangerous and a threat to the party for the messages it contained. Thus, abstraction and primitivism, which distorted both colour and form, were alleged to reveal an underlying moral and spiritual sickness. In turn, this was thought to pose a threat to the strong Aryan Germany envisioned by Hitler. One publication that illustrated these ideas was Paul Schultze-Naumberg's *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and Race) (1928). In this book, Schultze-Naumberg identified cultural decline with racial decline and attempted to "prove" his argument by comparing examples of modern art with photographs of human deformities and diseases. The works of Nolde, Barlach, Heckel and Kirchner were used as illustrations of the "illness" threatening Germany.[59]

In 1934, Hitler condemned both Expressionism and *völkisch* art, but at the same time, he had not developed a firm concept of a unique National Socialist art style. By 1937, the general stylistic preferences for Nazi art was clearly Neo-Classicism and naturalistic realism.[60] These styles were easily adaptable to propagandistic purposes and

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[56] Christine Fischer-Defoy "Artists and Art Institutions in Germany 1933-1945" in *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* eds. Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will (Winchester, UK: Winchester Press, 1990), 92.

[57] Stephanie Barron, "1937: Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany," in *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 11.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Henry Grosshans, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers,1983), 9.

[60] Brandon Taylor "Post-Modernism in the Third Reich,"in *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* , 136.

easily understood by the average German. Not only was modern art considered elitist, but it represented internationalism and foreign influences. Hitler encouraged Germans to view anything foreign as a threat to Germany. For example, the supposed reason for the economic collapse of the 1930s was a conspiracy between the Communists (or Bolsheviks) and the Jews.[61] Abstract art was associated with internationalism and progressive political views, something in direct conflict with the narrow nationalism promoted by the Nazis. A number of journals advertised the new art aesthetic, among them *Völkische Kunst* (Völkisch Art) and the newspaper *Der Völkische Beobachter* (The People's Observer). These publications promoted hatred against so-called "Jewish" and "Bolshevist" art and specifically singled out many modernist artists, including Nolde. His art was to become a major target for the Nazi party in its mission to purge Germany of its "decadence" and "degeneration."

Goebbels had one of the most influential roles in this mission. His Ministry was given total power over art production to the point that artists were issued *Materialkarten*, cards that permitted them to purchase art materials. According to Paul Vogt, at the end of 1936, art criticism *(Kunstkritik)* was forbidden and replaced by art announcements *(Kunstbericht)* in journals now headed by Nazi officials.[62] By 1937 Goebbels undertook his *entartete Kunst Aktion*. On June 30th of that year he put the President of the *Reichskammer für bildende Künste*, the painter Adolf Ziegler, in charge of removing modern art from German museums. Approximately 5,000 paintings and 12,000 graphic artworks were confiscated from 101 museums and galleries over a four month period.[63] Nolde had the dubious distinction of having 1,052 works confiscated, the largest number of any modern artist.[64] Other modernists whose works were similarly singled out included Erich Heckel (759 works), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (639 works), and Max

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61 Barron, 11.

62 Vogt, 334.

63 Petropoulos, 56. Records show that 5,328 of the total 17,000 artworks were collected before the premiere of the Degenerate Art Exhibition in July 1937.

64 Robert A. French, "Modernism and Volkish Attitudes in the Art of Emil Nolde" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1988), 91.

Beckmann (508 works).[65] In addition, non-Germans, such as Alexander Archipenko, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, James Ensor, Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian, Edvard Munch, and Pablo Picasso were also identified as undesirable.[66] After the war, Franz Roh listed in his book *Entartete Kunst* (1948) some of the criteria used to determine which works would be confiscated:

1. Works by Jews
2. Jewish themes, even if they were created by Aryan artists.
3. Pacifist subjects or images of war; for example those by Dix which did not glorify war.
4. Works that suggested socialist and Marxist themes.
5. Ugly figures (like those of Barlach and Mueller) that stem from a less worthy race.
6. Everything Expressionist, including that of the nordic Nolde.
7. Abstract art, like the kind encouraged by Kandinsky and Moholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus.[67]

The modern artwork that German museums had been actively acquiring in the 1920s was now collected for a large "Degenerate Art Exhibition." Masterminded by Goebbels, this exhibition would include 730 selected works and was intended to mock and denigrate the leading modernists of the time.[68] The rest of the paintings and sculpture were stored in a vault at the Ministry of Propaganda. In 1938 privately owned galleries such as Buchholz, Ferdinand Moeller, and Fritz Gurlitt were permitted to sell confiscated works for international currency; at the same time, all references to provenance were destroyed.[69] The following year, 5,000 confiscated pieces were termed "unusable stock" and burned at the Berlin Fire Department on March 20, 1939.[70] On June 30, 1939, 125 others were auctioned off at the Hotel National in Lucerne, Switzerland, to international buyers.[71] Another smaller auction of forty-one pieces was held at the Galerie Fischer in Lucerne in

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65 Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 122.

66 Ibid.

67 Franz Roh, *Entartete Kunst*, (1948), quoted in Vogt, 335.

68 Martin Urban, "Die 'Ungemalten Bilder' von Emil Nolde," in *Emil Nolde* ed. Tilman Osterwold (Stuttgart: Würtembergische Kunstverein, 1988), 116.

69 Vogt, 337.

70 Urban, 116.

71 Ibid.

August 1939.[72]

Significantly, although "Jewishness" was a major criterion in the Nazi purge of modern art, of the 112 artists represented at the Degenerate Art Exhibition, only six were Jewish.[73] The exhibition featured confiscated works of art hung in a chaotic fashion with graffiti-like slogans written on the walls. As with the earlier *Schandaustellungen,* many of the original acquisition prices of the works (acquired with inflated 1920s Marks) were noted, and young people were barred from the show. Peter Adam remarks that at one point, the organizers considered placing museum directors and artists beside their works so the public could "spit at them."[74] Thirty-one of Nolde's works were included in this show;[75] his altarpiece *The Life of Christ* (1911-12) was the main focus of the upper floor installation. According to Barron, the altarpiece was presented as an example of the violation of German religious attitudes[76] and appeared under the heading: "Insolent Mockery of the Divine under Centrist Rule" *(Unter der Herrschaft des Zentrums frecher Verhöhnung des Gott-Erlebens).*[77] Other works by Nolde such as his *Man and Woman* of 1912 appeared under the heading "The Jewish Longing for the Wilderness Reveals Itself -- In Germany the Negro Becomes the Racial Ideal of a Degenerate Art" *(Jüdische Wüstensucht macht sich Luft -- Der Neger wird in Deutschland zum Rassenideal einer entarteten Kunst),* and his images of cows entitled *Young Oxen* (1909) and *Milkcows* (1913) were displayed under the heading "Even the Museum 'Big Wigs' Called This 'Art of the German People'" *(Aber auch Museumsbonzen nannten das 'Kunst des deutschen Volkes').* Over two million visitors came to this art exhibit, over three and a half times the number that attended the official "Great German Art Exhibition" that was staged as an alternative to the "Degenerate Art Exhibition."[78] Peter Guenther, who visited the

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72 Petropoulos, 82.

73 Barron, 9.

74 Adam, 124.

75 Urban, 116; Stephanie Barron gives the number as 27 (p. 319).

76 Barron, 315.

77 Ibid., 51.

78 Ibid., 17.

exhibition at the age of 17, recalls in his essay "Three Days in Munich, July 1937" that a large number of visitors came to "say good bye" to a time of freedom of artistic expression.[79] Nolde himself visited the exhibition with his friend and supporter Friedrich Doehlemann, director of the *Bayerische Gemeindebank* (Bavarian Community Bank) which had financed the House of German Art, Munich's new museum for officially approved modern German art.[80] Nolde was, according to Barron, so confused and upset by the exhibition that he cancelled his seventieth birthday party plans in Seebüll.[81]

Both Peter Adam and Stephanie Barron give the impression that virtually all modernist works were cleared from every German museum and gallery.[82] Peter Vergo, however, points out that some modern art exhibits were not closed down.[83] In Nolde's case, subject matter played a role in what was confiscated. A number of his landscape and flower paintings remained on display in galleries and museums; for example his *Burchard's Garden* (1907) remained in the *Landesmuseum* in Münster because it was deemed to be a "Westphalian scene."[84] The *Hamburg Kunsthalle* displayed nine paintings by Nolde including his *Deposition* in the spring of 1935; this and several other works were confiscated, while landscape and flower paintings remained on display.[85]

A brief comparison of Nolde's work to National Socialist art yields some significant reasons why there was no room for most of Nolde's artwork in the new art program. Nazi iconography focused on a narrow range of themes, including nature, country life, nudes, the German worker, idealized female portraits, and portraits of

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79 Peter Guenther "Three Days in Munich, July 1937" in Barron, 33.

80 Barron, 319.

81 Ibid.

82 Adam writes "In July 1937 Hitler and Goebbels decided to clear museums of all remaining modern works . . ." (Adam, 121). Barron asserts "The National Socialists rejected and censured virtually everythings that had existed on the German modern art scene prior to 1933. Whether abstract or representational, the innocuously beautiful landscapes and portraits by August Macke, the expressionistically coloured paintings by . . . Ernst Ludwig Kirchner [and] Emil Nolde . . . all were equally condemned." (Barron, 9).

83 Vergo, 52.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

National Socialist party officials.[86] Although many of Nolde's artistic themes paralleled National Socialist guidelines, Robert French suggests that it was the combination of two seemingly opposite impulses, the modern and the *völkisch*, which was responsible for the initial confusion and subsequent hostility which greeted his art under National Socialism.[87] On one hand, the subject matter of Nolde's art was often quite traditional, as in his landscape paintings and his religious images. On the other hand, the overall effect of his art was definitely modern, in his use of colour, distorted or abstract form, and experimental techniques as a means of emotional expression rather than tools to accurately portray visual phenomena. Examples of some of the main areas where Nolde's art differed significantly from that of National Socialism include his approach to landscape paintings, animal paintings, images of peasant life, and images that contradicted the Nazi ideal of a pure Aryan race.

Both Nolde and National Socialist artists dealt extensively with images of the German landscape, peasant life, and animals. Both approaches embodied the Romantic ideal of man and nature as one: the German people *(das Volk)* as part of the land they live in *(Heimat)*. The new landscape tradition of the Nazi era followed that of 19th century Romanticists Caspar David Friedrich and Phillip Otto Runge. But where Friedrich and Runge conveyed a feeling of longing in an imaginary landscape, the new Nazi tradition was meant to portray the actual German "fatherland" with its specific and unique regions, and to convey the concept of *Lebensraum*, the living space of expanding Germany.[88] Nazi-approved work like Werner Peiner's *German Soil* (Figure 9) show the interest in monumental landscape which also inspired works such as Nolde's *Nordermühle* (Northern mill) (1932). In *Nordermühle* (Figure 10), Nolde paints a typical windmill surrounded by the flat North Schleswig landscape. But his use of bright, jarring colour, his interest in the basic geometic forms of the mill and his rough expressive style reveal why even this type of landscape image was too modern for the National Socialists.

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[86] Adam, 129.

[87] French, 2.

[88] Adam, 130.

Another example of the difference between Nolde's and National Socialist views on art may be seen in the depiction of animals and nature. Like Nolde, the Nazis saw nature as an antidote to the city, but, as Peter Adam points out, in Nazi ideology nature was also a place where the strong dominated the weak.[89] Paintings of animals, in particular the lion, the eagle and the bull, typically showed them on a monumental scale in a heroic stance. Nazi artists Julius Paul Junghanns and Werner Peiner even depicted horses and cows as symbols of strength and heroism. Adam describes these images as "the animals equivalent to the naked hero,"[90] a phrase that applies to Junghanns's *Ploughing* (1939) (Figure 11). In this image the three horses dwarf the man who controls them and suggest that they are enabling and contributing to the hardworking lives of the German *Volk*. Werner Peiner's image *German Soil* (c. 1935)[91] emphasizes the team of man and horses working together to plough a field. A large expanse of trees in the background suggests ample room to move and grow. In contrast, Nolde's painting *Young Horses* shows the artist's strong feelings for the power and dynamism he observed in the North German landscape (Figure 12). Here the horses appear joyously free as they jump in a vast rolling field of wild grass. The powerful yellow and green clouds seem to be foreshadowing a dramatic storm. Whereas Nolde's image expresses his strong individualistic response to the landscape and to nature, the examples by artists approved by the National Socialists clearly communicate the ideals of the state (in this case the ideals of the strong, hardworking peasant; a sense of his purpose; the concept of *Lebensraum*; etc.).

In terms of racial ideals, Nolde's interests both paralleled and differed from that of the National Socialists. Like Nolde, National Socialist art glorified the *völkisch* ideal of peasants as the image of the "true German."[92] National Socialist artists celebrated the ideal of "blood and soil" and the simple country life as opposed to the supposedly degenerate life of the city. Again, these are some of the themes of deepest importance to Emil Nolde. He wrote extensively about the evils of urban life and the rejuvenating

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89 Ibid., 132.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 131 Adam does not give a date for this image.

92 Ibid., 132.

qualities of the North German countryside. But, while Nolde glorified peasant life and believed in German racial purity, his ideas were not as radical as those of Nazi ideology. On one hand, he was drawn to the *völkisch* belief that races were not intended to mix. But on the other hand, as Bradley states, "Nolde . . . saw each race as equal and indispensable to the continuation and growth of world culture."[93] Nolde wrote in *Jahre der Kämpfe*:

> Seen in a broad context, no race may be worse or better than another -- before God they are all the same -- but they are different, very different, in their stages of development, in their life, in customs, stature, smell and colour, and it is certainly not the purpose of nature that they should mix with one another.[94]

Nolde encountered a number of different cultural groups in his travels. He painted Russians, South Sea natives, and Chinese people with exaggerated features to emphasize the distinctive aspects of different racial types (Figure 13). These images and Nolde's interest in the art of "primitive" peoples were also directly opposed to National Socialist art, which glorified the heroic strength of the German man as exemplified by Arno Breker's sculpture *Readiness* (1939) (Figure 14). From the point of view of the Nazis, non-German culture groups were inferior races. Nolde chose to include the exaggerated features that he described as typically "Jewish" or "primitive" in many of his religious and peasant images. Images such as *People in the Village Inn* (1912) and *The Blacksmith* (1912) show his interest in strong, simplified, mask-like features (Figures 15 and 16). The exaggerated hooked nose and pointed black beard of the man in the village inn and the profile of the man in *The Blacksmith* suggests those of the "strong Jewish types" to whom Nolde was drawn.

For National Socialists, another symbol of German strength was the image of the family. Two images that illustrate the difference in interpretation of this subject are Adolf Wissel's *Farm Family from Kahlenberg* (1938) and Nolde's woodcut entitled *Family* (1917) (Figures 17 and 18). Wissel shows three generations of an Aryan family in an idealized, serene light . The mother is represented as a Madonna figure with her young

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[93] William S. Bradley, *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in His Own Land* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 75.

[94] Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 2nd ed., (Flensburg: Christian Wolff Verlag, 1949), 126.

daughter on her lap. The grandmother is knitting industriously, and father watches over the family against a backdrop of a farm landscape. Nolde's woodcut has none of the serenity of Wissel's family image. There is a sense of uneasiness among his three wide-eyed subjects: mother, father and child. The three figures are not Aryan, but South Sea natives. The choice of the woodcut medium serves to emphasize some of the associations Nolde has with his subjects: their "primitiveness," and the strong emotion attached to Nolde's ideal of tribal people as pure and uncorrupted by civilization, which comes through in his style and technique. The outlines of the figures are gouged out of the woodblock. The three figures are arranged close to the picture plane, and with their wide eyes and tense poses they appear ready to flee from the viewer. Thus, despite some parallel ideas of family and racial purity, Nolde's image is very different from Wissel's idealized, serene naturalism.

In summary, though some of Nolde's subject matter was similar to that of National Socialist artists, his style and intent was quite different from that of the portrayal of Nazi ideals described above. National Socialist art dealt with strictly realistic depictions of specific subjects and themes and attempted to evoke a controlled emotional response. Nazi art was not meant to be intellectually challenging or to evoke various interpretations. On the other hand, much of Nolde's figural work embodied an almost ecstatic or frenzied degree of emotional expression, and his images are open to many interpretations. Nolde's style is personal and based on the expression of deeply felt emotions. And his forms, like those of other artists labelled "degenerate," are characterized by distortion, exaggeration, and original use of colour. Much of his work is inspired by the stylistic elements of "primitive art." The combination of *völkisch* and modern, which appeared in Nolde's work and which the Nazis saw as mutually exclusive, seems to have offended the Nazis even more than if he had followed a strictly modern course.[95] According to Robert French, "For Hitler, the combination of these two aroused the same horror as the mixing of racial blood -- an apt comparison in light of the way he viewed art as an index of the racial

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[95] French, 94.

integrity of a culture."[96] Thus, Nolde could not avoid the connotations which his modern technique held for the Nazis, no matter how often he professed his admiration of *völkisch* ideology.

Numerous other German Expressionists experienced harassment from Nazi officials and the *Gestapo*, but Nolde seems to have been particularly singled out.[97] As early as May 1933, Nolde and a number of other artists who had been nominated for membership in 1931 in the Prussian Academy of Art by former culture minister Adolf Grimme were asked to resign and submit their names for "reconsideration." According to Vergo, several artists did resign; Schmidt-Rottluff and Otto Dix did so permanently, but most members including Nolde refused to take action.[98] Like these others, Nolde could not understand why he was being asked to leave an association to which he had been elected; nor, as Urban states, could he understand the Nazi defamation of his art as *volksfremd* (alien to the people).[99] Vergo notes that Nolde's "curt" letter of 1933 protesting the request for resignation does not refer at all to party membership or other political affiliations.[100] An examination of subsequent letters written to the Academy and to the Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda clearly shows that Nolde's need to emphasize his affiliation with the National Socialist Party only became important when his reputation and his career were threatened by expulsion from the Academy and confiscation of his paintings.

He was threatened with expulsion from the Prussian Academy of Art again in 1937. A new campaign was launched in conjunction with the Degenerate Art Exhibition to strip modernist artists of any remaining titles or positions and to fill the places vacated by modernists with artists appointed by Goebbels. Again, Nolde refused to resign

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96 Ibid.

97 While Nolde was treated harshly by the National Socialists, it must be noted that the Jewish modernist artists Otto Freundlich, died in a concentration camp.

98 Vergo, 51.

99 Urban, 116.

100 Vergo, 51.

voluntarily,[101] and in an attempt to win the favour of the Academy officials he made sure to articulate what he claimed to be his political leanings. In a letter written to the Academy in 1937 he stressed not only his self-image as a German artist, but also the essential similarity between his beliefs and those of National Socialism:

> Even though a member, I distanced myself from all events and did not submit my artistic work for exhibition. This was on account of the retiring existence to which I had been condemned ever since losing my battles against the tainted art trade, against the swamping of German art by foreign influences and against the power of the Liebermanns and the Cassirers of those days. At that time, around 1910, I was almost alone among German artists in taking up the struggle, with considerable courage and idealism, against an enemy a thousand times stronger than myself. I was conquered, expelled from the Berlin Secession, despised and for decades persecuted by the Press with all the means at its disposal, to the brink of annihilation. It does not, perhaps become me to mention all this . . . I do so, only because my exalted ideals were and are in essence the same as those which National Socialism has fought to attain . . . My whole attitude is one of love for Germany, for the German people and its ideals. Heil Hitler![102]

He also mentioned the 1920 transfer of power over North Schleswig to Denmark in connection with his own membership in the North Schleswig National Socialist Party: "Through the Treaty of Versailles I became a German expatriate in Denmark and lived away from the decisive breakthrough [of the Party]. When the German National Socialist Party in North Schleswig was founded, I became a member"(*"Durch den Versailler Vertrag bin ich an Dänemark abgetretener Auslandsdeutscher, und ich lebte abseits der entscheidenden deutschen Durchbruchskämpfe. Als die deutsche Nationalsozialistische Partei in Nordschleswig gegründet wurde, bin ich deren Mitglied geworden."*)[103] The vagueness of his wording implies that he became a member of the party in the same year that North Schleswig was ceded to Denmark, 1920. According to Peter Vergo's research discussed above, the two events were separated by fifteen years. Whether the vague wording was intentional or not, it later caused confusion among a number of scholars over

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101 Ibid., 55.

102 Letter dated 12.7.1937. Translation in Vergo, 55.

103 Vergo, 64.

the actual date at which Nolde joined the party.

In the summer of 1938, Nolde wrote a final desperate letter to Goebbels in an attempt to rehabilitate himself after the Nazis confiscated his *Life of Christ* altarpiece:

July 2, 1938

Most honoured Herr Minister,

When North Schleswig Holstein was ceded to Denmark I became a Danish citizen and as part of the German minority there joined the NSDAPN [Nazi party]. I respectfully request, according to law, that my pictures be returned to me. They are the following:

A nine-part work: *The Life of Christ* (9 pictures)
Large Sunflowers
Blonde Girl
Wet Day . . .

I also request, most honoured Herr Minister, that the defamation raised against me cease. This I find especially cruel, particularly since even before the National Socialist movement I, virtually alone among German artists, fought publicly against the foreign domination of German art, against the corruption of art dealers and against the intrigues of the Liebermann Cassirer era. It was a battle against vastly superior forces which for decades hurt me financially and professionally.

When National Socialism also labelled me and my art 'degenerate' and 'decadent,' I felt this to be a profound misunderstanding because it is just not so. My art is German, strong, austere and sincere.

After the cession of North Schleswig, it would have been easy for me to become a world-famous artist for political reasons, if I had not placed my loyalty to Germany ahead of all other things, and if I had not taken every opportunity at home and abroad to fight for party and country; yes, in spite of my defamation, or because of it so much the more, I could testify to the world-historical significance of National Socialism.

Certainly I may hope that my request may be granted.

Heil Hitler,
Emil Nolde[104]

In this letter Nolde is clearly trying to ingratiate himself with Goebbels. As in his letter of

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104 Emil Nolde, letter to Joseph Goebbels in *Voices of German Expressionism* ed. Victor H. Miesel (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 209.

1937, Nolde portrays himself as a martyr for a German national art, fighting against a corrupt Jewish conspiracy ("... even before the National Socialist movement I, virtually alone among German artists, fought publicly against the foreign domination of German art, against the corruption of art dealers, against the intrigues of the Liebermann Cassirer era"). Again his wording is vague, and he does not provide much in the way of an explanation for statements like "I could testify to the world-historical significance of National Socialism" and "it would have been easy for me to become a world famous artist for political reasons." This opens his letter to many interpretations. In this letter too, the vague wording in the first sentence implies that he became a member of the National Socialist party "when North Schleswig-Holstein was ceded to Denmark," that is, in 1920. As with the previous letter, such general statements have lent themselves to speculation on the issue of Nolde's party membership and his ideological convictions, and it is unclear whether this was intentional on Nolde's part.

Certainly it is difficult to excuse Nolde's persistent attempts to reconcile his art with the Nazi cultural program. The clearly anti-Semitic and racist statements that appear in the 1934 edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* were written at a desperate point in his artistic career, with opportunistic motives in mind. Nolde recognized that modernism was threatened by National Socialist polices, and in his own longing for the regeneration of German art he recognized a similarity between his own ideas and Nazi rhetoric. At the same time, Nolde was quite politically naïve and failed to recognize the vast difference between his artistic motivations and the political motivations of the Nazis. As William Bradley points out, *völkisch* ideology was complex and still in the process of developing and changing in the 1920s.[105] Nolde's art was a development out of *völkisch* ideology. These ideas gave his own attitudes and emotions he had felt since childhood a structure and a focus. The fact that Nolde identified with *völkisch* thought and that he recognized elements of it in Nazi ideology does not necessarily mean that Nolde was an ardent believer in Nazism.

Instead of working in his favour, his repeated appeals to the authorities actually made him more conspicuous and more of a target for the Nazis. The pictures referred to in

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105 Bradley, 116.

the letter were returned to him in 1939; however, when Nolde did not return the shipping crates he was accused of "sabotage concerning the use of wood."[106] The harassment escalated, culminating in the *Malverbot* (painting prohibition) and *Ausstellungsverbot* (exhibition ban) of 1941. Martin Urban claims that the *Malverbot* was connected with Nolde's tax declaration of 1937.[107] It was noted by the President of the *Reichskammer für bildende Künste*, Adolf Ziegler, who was also an artist, that Nolde reported a higher income from his art than Ziegler himself. Ziegler subsequently demanded that Nolde turn over his entire artistic production of 1940.[108] He then informed Nolde that because of his "unreliability," Nolde would be excluded from the *Reichskammer für bildende Künste* and "effective immediately, any professional or paraprofessional activities in the area of the arts would be forbidden."[109] For an artist dependent on painting as his livelihood, who considered himself an artist for and of the German people, this was a devastating blow. In a system that had its tentacles reaching throughout Germany, the punitive measure of the *Malverbot* would be strictly enforced and could have severe consequences if disobeyed. While many German modernist artists were defamed by the National Socialists, Nolde was one of the few artists issued a *Malverbot* and an *Austellungsverbot* . According to Paul Vogt, Karl Schmidt Rotluff also received the same bans.[110]

Nolde's response to the *Malverbot* issued to him on August 23, 1941, was apparent compliance, but he continued to paint in secret. He produced about 1,300 "Unpainted Pictures" *(Ungemalte Bilder)* between 1941 and 1945.[111] They were small, usually about 6 x 8 inches and therefore easily hidden, and done in watercolour, an odorless medium which in contrast to oilpaints would not be detected by surprise visitors. His subjects ranged from human figures to flowers and landscapes, all done in his characteristic spontaneous style where colour was the main focus of his expression. After the war and

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106 Urban, 117.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Vogt, 355.
111 Urban, 117.

the demise of the Nazi regime these images became a symbol for Nolde's "martyrdom" for his art and the singularity of his artistic vision. They have been shown in numerous exhibitions both in Germany and internationally. However, during the period 1941 to 1945, Nolde stopped producing work for the public, retreated to Seebüll, and disappeared from the official art scene. For the public of the 1940s Emil Nolde ceased to exist.

Nolde's encounter with National Socialism began with promise for the then-famous Expressionist. Some of his views on "blood and soil," "art and race," and of the desirability of a new German art seemed, at first, to be in keeping with National Socialist goals and values. As the new art aesthetic developed, however, Nolde's art, like the art of all modernists, was perceived as degenerate, and after the Degenerate Art Exhibition of 1937, he was issued painting and exhibition prohibitions. His distorted forms, intense colours, and his strong individualism were in conflict with the rigidly set National Socialist style and subject matter where the purpose of art was to serve the state.

Chapter Three

The Nolde Myth

> Nolde, the primeval soul, the earth-bound, is easier to imagine as a man of flesh and blood than other [artists]. And when one sees him, [one] is hardly disappointed: a genuine *Nolde*, as he is, must be, and will remain.
>
> In their distance of escape from earth, abstractionists sometimes forget that Nolde exists. Not so I, not even on my furthest flights, from which I always find my way back to earth in order to recuperate in newly won gravity.
>
> Nolde is more than just earth-bound,[1] he is also the demon of this region. Even residing elsewhere, one is always aware of him as a cousin there in the depths, a kindred spirit . . .
>
> With Nolde, a human hand is at work; a hand not without heaviness and a writing not without flaws. The mysterious full blooded hand of the lower depths.[2]

When Paul Klee wrote these words of respect and veneration in a *Festschrift* for Emil Nolde's sixtieth birthday in 1927, he seems to have understood much of the spirit that Nolde himself was striving to personify: that of a "primeval soul" who was emotionally and spiritually bound to his homeland and inspired by art's calling. Nolde wrote some years later in *Das eigene Leben* ,"My interest in what is foreign, primeval and primitive was especially strong; I had to get to know the unknown; even the nocturnal, depraved inhabitants of the great city stimulated me like something exotic, and the Jewish types in my later religious pictures may have come into being in part from my following this drive."[3] Another passage from the same volume reads, "Everything which is primeval and elemental captures my imagination. The vast raging ocean is still in its elemental state; the

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[1] This sentence has also been translated as "He is more than just primordial, he is also the demon of this region." in August K. Wiedmann, *The German Quest for Primal Origins in Art, Culture and Politics 1900-1933* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 201.

[2] Translation taken from William S. Bradley, *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in His Own Land* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 29. Original text from *Festschrift für Emil Nolde anlässlich seines 60. Geburtstages* (Dresden: Neue Kunst Fides, 1927), 26.

[3] Emil Nolde, *Das eigene Leben*, 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff Verlag, 1949), 197.

wind and the sun . . . the starry sky are more or less what they were 50,000 years ago."[4] And in *Jahre der Kämpfe* Nolde repeated this idea: "I draw and paint to grasp something of the primal essence . . . Everything primeval captivates my imagination."[5]

During his lifetime, Nolde created his own personal myth, which he articulated in great detail in his four-volume autobiography and in his letters, a number of which were first published in 1927 by Max Sauerlandt.[6] Several other sources have contributed to and perpetuated the Nolde myth. These include the critical acclaim of friends and admirers who knew the artist personally and fostered his self-constructed image. More recently, Siegfried Lenz's 1968 novel *Die Deutschstunde* (The German Lesson) and the film based on it (released by *Internationes*, 1971) have carried on the mythic view of Nolde. Both the novel and the film are clearly based on his encounter with National Socialism and characterize the artist-protagonist as a free spirit who was a victim of a totalitarian regime. This chapter will attempt to define Nolde's self-concept and discuss selected sources as contributors to the Nolde myth.

The mystique that surrounds Emil Nolde's reputation as a major figure in the German Expressionist movement is not unique. It is a prime example of the way art historians have dealt with the artist in Western culture as a privileged, elevated, and isolated individual. Two studies in particular, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurtz's *Legend Myth and Magic*, first published in 1934, and Catherine M. Soussloff's *The Absolute Artist : The Historiography of a Concept* , published in 1997, point out that the basic assumptions about artists and biography have changed little since the Renaissance.[7] Kris and Kurtz observe the tendency of biographers to idealize and mythologize their subjects, and they question the use of stereotyped anecdotes and legends that are frequently told in order to shed light on the artists as individuals. At the same time, they observe that these tendencies

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[4] Ibid., 200.

[5] Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe* 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff Verlag, 1949), 177.

[6] Max Sauerlandt, ed. *Emil Nolde: Briefe aus den Jahren 1894 - 1926* 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Furchte Verlag, 1967).

[7] See Ernst Kris and Otto Kurtz, *Legend Myth and Magic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); and Catherine M. Soussloff *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

are difficult to separate from the biographical genre.[8] With regard to the myth of the artist, Kris and Kurtz wrote:

> It is true that this myth did not evolve into a set form of its own under the probing glare of modern Western culture, but it is woven into the fabric of biography. The heroization of the artist has become the aim of his [sic] biographers. Historiography, having once accepted the legacy of myth, is never fully able to break its spell.[9]

Soussloff also notes that there is a pattern of stereotypical anecdotes in artists' biographies which cater to the myth of the artist.[10] She points out that to a large degree these anecdotes can be related to heroic "types" rather than to historic individuals.[11] In particular, she investigates the notion of the artist as genius and emphasizes that the way any individual artist views himself or herself must rely in some ways on the concept that the culture holds of the category "artists."[12] This concept of the artist as genius was popularized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the context of Romanticism. This view was popular again in the 1890s and provided the basis of the modernist idea in the cult of Nietzsche, which tended to posit the artist as superman, anti-bourgeois, and outside social convention.

These observations by Kris, Kurtz, and Soussloff need to be kept in mind when considering Nolde's self-image, as presented by some of Nolde's critics and biographers and by Nolde himself in his autobiography and published letters. Peter Vergo, for example, sees Nolde's self-image as corresponding "almost exactly with the stereotypical myth of the heroic modern artist -- at odds with the world, condemned to isolation, living solely for his art, responding only to the dictates of 'inner necessity.'"[13] Vergo observes that Nolde's writings with all their self-dramatizing and mythologizing have exerted a

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8 Kris and Kurtz, 52.

9 Ibid.

10 Soussloff, 115.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 21.

13 Peter Vergo, "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality" in *Emil Nolde* eds. Peter Vero and Felicity Lunn (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 41.

"virtual stranglehold on subsequent interpretations of his work."[14] This is partly due to the relatively small body of critical writings on Nolde's early work and the comparatively larger group of writings by Nolde's earliest biographers[15] such as Hans Fehr, Gustav Schiefler, and Max Sauerlandt.[16] These men knew the artist personally, and their writings tend to reflect Nolde's own view of himself. Vergo observes that "their writings resound time and again with Nolde's own unmistakable accent, his choice of phraseology, his fondness for exaggeration and pathos."[17]

Nolde began to write his autobiography in the 1930s.[18] His first two volumes, *Das eigene Leben: Die Zeit der Jugend, 1867-1902* (My Own Life: The Time of Youth) and *Jahre der Kämpfe, 1902-1914* , (Years of Struggle) were published in 1931 and 1934 respectively. *Welt und Heimat: Die Südseereise, 1913-1918* (World and Homeland: The South Sea Journey) was completed by 1936, but in that year the National Socialists had banned the sale of the first two volumes. Publication of this and the final volume, *Reisen, Ächtung, Befreiung,1919-1946*, (Travels, Condemnation, Liberation) did not occur until after Nolde's death.[19] The various volumes have undergone some changes. Most notably, *Jahre der Kämpfe* had many of the overtly anti-Semitic remarks expurgated in its post-war editions.[20] In 1976 Martin Urban edited the four volumes into a single abridged edition entitled *Mein Leben.*

It is unclear why Nolde decided to write his autobiography when he did. William S. Bradley speculates that Nolde may have felt the climate of Germany in the early 1930s

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14 Ibid., 39.

15 Ibid.

16 Nolde referred to Osthaus, Fehr and Schiefler as "the first true friends of his art." Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe* (Flensburg: Christian Wolff, 1949), 145. Hans Fehr described Schiefler and Sauerlandt as "Nolde's closest friends." Hans Fehr, *Emil Nolde:Ein Buch der Freundschaft* (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1960), 116.

17 Vergo, 40.

18 William S. Bradley, *Emil Nolde: A Prophet in His Own Land* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1986), 29.

19 Martin Urban's postscript in *Mein Leben* (first published in 1976), the abridged version of Nolde's autobiography, gives the publication history of the various volumes. Emil Nolde, *Mein Leben* ed. Martin Urban (Cologne: Dumont, 1993), 421-2.

20 Robert Pois, *Emil Nolde* (Washington: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), 96.

would be receptive to an appreciation of his work and his desire to create a "new German art," or he may have simply wanted to reflect back on his artistic career of over 40 years.[21] Whatever Nolde's motivation, it is important to note his rather calculated efforts to present a definite image of himself, one that is not always consistent with actual facts.

Stephen Bronner sums up Nolde's image as presented in his writings as "a solitary genius, an uneducated peasant, who somehow knows what the educated cannot know, who sees what the prophet sees, who feels what others cannot feel. A man obsessed with his urge to create, unconcerned about the public and the social whirl, the servant of an inner demon that guides his art . . ."[22] Bronner's statement can serve, here, as a starting point for a definition of Nolde's self-concept. Nolde's self-image is clearly based on what Vergo calls the image of the stereotypical modern artist.[23] To define exactly what this is, one must look back to the image of the Romantic artist, a notion that was popular at the turn of the century in Germany with both *völkisch* thinkers and Expressionists alike. As Carol M. Zemel notes, the legacy of Romanticism supplied an image of the artist, who, like Goethe's young Werther or the typical 19th-century bohemian, was rejected by society and suffered for his art.[24] Also central to this image is the idea of "genius," which Liah Greenfeld believes "denoted original and thus ultimate, creativity, which turned its possessor into a God on a smaller scale and put him above ordinary mortals; it legitimated extreme sensibility, making feeling both the source and the sign of creative powers."[25]

Though it is difficult to sum up what the Romantic artist represents in a few simplified words, August Wiedmann's book *Romantic Roots in Modern Art, Romanticism and Expressionism: A Study in Comparative Aesthetics* (1979) suggests some parallel themes in Romanticism and Expressionism which may assist in uncovering

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21 Bradley, 30.

22 Stephen Eric Bronner, "Emil Nolde and the Politics of Rage," in *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage* eds. Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Universe Books, 1983), 293.

23 Vergo, 41.

24 Carol M. Zemel, *The Formation of a Legend: Van Gogh Criticism, 1890-1920.* (Ann Arbor:UMI Research Press, 1980), 5.

25 Liah Greenfeld, "The Final Solution of Infinite Longing: Germany" in *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 334.

Nolde's self-concept. Wiedmann identifies a "cult of feeling," and the "praise of individualism and the imagination"[26] as central themes in both movements. In Wiedmann's words, "A pantheistic and cosmic feeling pervaded and motivated the whole Romantic generation."[27] In Expressionism too, "a restless desire for union and communion with the inward existence of the world consumed artist and poet. . . His overriding aim was to restore the essential unity between man and nature, to recapture an experience of the world that went far beyond the visual toward a cosmic feeling with deep religious overtones."[28] These descriptions clearly characterize Nolde.

Another aspect of Nolde's self-image, his identification with "the primeval," is addressed by Wiedmann in *The German Quest for Primal Origins in Art, Culture and Politics 1900-1933* (1995).[29] Wiedmann focuses on the dominant search for primalism (or "roots") that occurred in Expressionism, that is, "man's tendency to penetrate to the presumed primal layers of existence."[30] Wiedmann argues that these primalizing inclinations stemmed from man's sense of loss of meaning and direction in a complex modern world without a unifying faith and culture.[31] Ernst Schürer also notes Nolde's connection and interest in "primal sources," and notes that Nolde repeatedly used the prefix *'ur'* in his writings.[32] According to Schürer, "This prefix refers to primal sources and indicates Nolde's desire to find a source for his art, but his statements are by no means original."[33] Schürer points out that Nolde "uses a vocabulary borrowed from the German Romantics that was also employed and perverted by National Socialist propagandists in

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[26] August K. Wiedmann, *Romantic Roots in Modern Art. Romanticism and Expressionism: A Study in Comparative Aesthetics* (Surrey: Gresham Books, 1979), 3.

[27] Ibid., 3.

[28] Ibid., 21.

[29] August K. Wiedmann, *The German Quest for Primal Origins in Art, Culture and Politics 1900-1933*. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995).

[30] Ibid. 4.

[31] Ibid., 5.

[32] Ernst Schürer. "Emil Nolde and His Times: 'Degenerate Art' and the Totalitarian State," in *Emil Nolde: Works from American Collections* ed. Randy Ploog (Pennsylvania: Penn State, 1988), 5.

[33] Ibid.

their fight for the minds of the German people."[34] As mentioned in Chapter One, a similar link exists between Romanticism and the late 19th/early 20th century *völkisch* ideology in a shared longing for a simple, pastoral way of life and for a spiritual connection with nature. In William Bradley's words: "As it developed from certain trends in German Romanticism, Volkish *[sic]* thinking . . . [admired] a preindustrial German state with a culture based on an agrarian economy and a reverent, panthesistic attitude towards nature."[35] Thus, Nolde's self-concept, related to the image of the Romantic artist, was tied up in some of the predominant ideas of the time expressed in *völkisch* ideology, in Romanticism and in Expressionism in Germany.[36]

Nolde's autobiography was written in the 1930s, and therefore most of the events he was recalling had happened decades earlier. His first volume, *Das eigene Leben: Die Zeit der Jugend, 1867 - 1902* , includes childhood memories which at times seem related more to his mature sense of Romantic spirituality and isolation. He writes of a change that happened in his "fifteenth year of life" when he became a silent and brooding young man who desired to "retreat" from the world of his peers and his family: "Often I sat up in the hay-loft, thinking and dreaming. I concerned myself with religious problems; from time to time to the point of ecstasy."[37] Robert Pois notes in his psychoanalytically-oriented study of Emil Nolde that, rather than developing human relationships, the young Nolde chose to identify himself with the object of his ecstatic religious visions, Jesus Christ.[38] The adult Nolde wrote a rapturous description about one of these episodes:

> In the high corn field, seen by no one, I lay down, back pressed flat against the earth, my eyes closed, arms rigidly stretched out. And then I thought, thus lay thy saviour Jesus Christ, when men and women released him from the cross. And I turned over, dreaming in the undefinable belief that the great, round wonderful earth was my

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Bradley, 5.

[36] For more detail on the relationship between Expressionist art and the German intellectual milieu see Donald E. Gordon, "Intellectual Milieu," *Expressionism, Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 1-24.

[37] Nolde, *Das eigene Leben*, 53.

[38] Robert Pois, *Emil Nolde* (Boulder: University of America Press, 1982).

beloved.[39]

Like so many parts of his autobiography, which was written decades after the events took place, this passage seems to presage Nolde's mature artistic and spiritual experiences and his tendency to self-dramatization. In fact, many of Nolde's recollections suggest that he wanted to present a unified picture of himself and his naive, "Romantic" temperament. At times, he even preferred to portray himself as somewhat of an uneducated "country bumpkin," referring to himself in a letter to a friend as "a peasant, a lowly, common farmer. Horses, cattle, pigs and oxen are my companions, and only by stealth do a few pictures sometimes blossom forth."[40]

In reality, however, Nolde's self-portrayal is hardly accurate, considering some of his interests and the details of his life. As Peter Vergo notes, "One can scarcely imagine the *Industrie- und Gewerbemuseum* in St. Gallen, whose staff Nolde joined in 1892, selecting him for the post of drawing teacher in preference to thirty-three other applicants, had he been . . . 'semi-educated.'"[41] Nolde also travelled widely in his lifetime: to France, Italy, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Russia, Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. He visited anthropological museums and closely studied the art of "primitive" peoples. As mentioned in Chapter One, Nolde even had plans to write a book on primitive art, though he wrote only an introduction.

Nolde also consistently downplayed his actual knowledge of philosophy and literature. As already stated, Nolde referred to the novel *Ekkehard* as the only book he had ever read all the way through in his life. However, he certainly was well-versed in biblical scripture and religious motifs which appear in many of his images. He was also interested in the myths and fairytales of northern Germany and Scandinavia, and some of the figures from these stories also became subjects of his fantasy paintings. Nolde's interest in these mythical subjects recalls Richard Wagner's revival of Nordic mythology in his late nineteenth century operas. Nolde's figures, however, are comical gnomes, giants, and

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[39] Nolde, *Das eigene Leben*, 53. Translation in Pois, 25.

[40] Max Sauerlandt, ed. *Emil Nolde. Briefe aus den Jahren 1894-1926* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag 1967), 131.

[41] Vergo, 41.

witches, rather than Wagner's powerful Valkyries and Norse gods. His interest in theatre is apparent from his drawings of actors from stage productions directed by Max Reinhardt in the winter of 1910-1911. Reinhardt was one of the best known directors of modern German drama before World War I, and is particularly known for his productions of Ibsen and Strindberg.[42] Nolde reportedly asked Reinhardt for front row seats so he could draw the actors in productions of Goethe's *Faust* and Hebbel's *Judith*.[43]

Later, Nolde referred to *Faust*, the Isenheim altarpiece, and Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as some of the most outstanding monuments of German culture,[44] a comment that would hardly come from a "lowly, common farmer." Certainly, Nolde's knowledge of Nietzsche, who was one of the most widely known and influential philosophers of his time, was greater than he let on. Although he portrayed himself as generally ignorant of philosophy and as a non-participant in the philosophical discussions of *die Brücke*, Peter Vergo points out that "many of the statements and observations [his autobiography] contains are unthinkable without an actual knowledge of Nietzsche's ideas."[45] For example, Nolde's emphasis on the need and the search for a new German art evokes Nietzsche's call for a re-evaluation of old values. And in *Jahre der Kämpfe*, he proclaimed boldly that *"die Schönheit ist tot"* [46] (Beauty is dead) referring to Nietzsche's famous quote and to his own personal search for a new aesthetic. Finally, Nolde tried to maintain that he was inarticulate and able to communicate only through painting. Even the title page of Hans Fehr's biography states: "Herein speaks the silent painter." Nolde himself wrote, "I cannot write about my art, and I shouldn't have to either. My most true and inner being finds its expression only in painting."[47] This statement comes from the artist who wrote four volumes on his life and art, hundreds of letters which were later published, and substantial "marginal notes" with observations about his *Unpainted Pictures*.

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[42] John Willett, *Expressionism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 54.

[43] Hans Fehr, *Emil Nolde: Ein Buch der Freundschaft* (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1960), 61.

[44] Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff, 1949), 196.

[45] Vergo, 42.

[46] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 200.

[47] Sauerlandt, 66.

It is also evident that Nolde carefully considered who his reading audience would be and how he might appear in its eyes. His opportunistic motives are particularly clear when one compares certain parts of the original 1934 edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* with subsequent revised editions published after 1945. In 1934, Nolde was desperately trying to win the favour of the Nazi cultural officials. According to Pois, although Nolde's statements are "made in a random, almost haphazard fashion,"[48] he does express certain attitudes that present a clear image of what Pois calls a "strongly anti-Semitic and a *völkischly* inclined racist."[49] In contrast, the second revised edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* which was published in 1949, had almost all the overtly anti-Semitic statements removed, though some of the more generally racist statements remain. These changes, according to Martin Urban, were made under the direction of Nolde himself.[50] Thus, not only did Nolde's reputation shift with the political circumstances of the late 1930s and 1940s; his self-constructed image shifted as well.

Robert Pois's study compares the 1934 edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* with subsequent editions and presents a number of revealing differences. One of the clearest examples of Nolde's opportunistic motives occurs in the way he wrote about the 1910 "Berlin Secession affair," or what Nolde referred to as a "Nolde-fight" *("Noldestreit").*[51] As described in Chapter One, Nolde presented himself as a strongly nationalistic instigator of a fight for the "younger" and more avant-garde members of the Secession against the older, conservative, predominantly Jewish Secession leaders. Looking back on this event, Nolde obviously wanted to emphasize his nationalist leanings to a contemporary National Socialist audience. For example, he prefaced the 1934 account of this conflict with a reference to the general notion in Germany that the press was controlled by Jewish interests:

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48 Pois, 96.

49 Ibid., 187.

50 Martin Urban, "Nachwort," in Emil Nolde, *Mein Leben,* ed. Martin Urban (Cologne: DuMont, 1993), 422.

51 Nolde wrote in *Jahre der Kämpfe*. "A Nolde quarrel [*Noldestreit*] had erupted, in which the parties battled each other like religious fanatics. I myself stood apart from it all." Translation my own. Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe* 2nd ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff, 1949), 136.

> An all powerful press, which only half heartedly liked the German-born, fought against me. The cause itself, which was important to me, was always avoided. I desired clarity and justice and the recognition of the opposing artistic views, the separation between alien and German, past and future art forms. What mattered to me was a division that was as clean as possible.[52]

This passage was removed from subsequent editions. Another section which remained in post-war editions records the disparaging remarks of two Jewish critics, Paul Cassirer and Alfred Kerr. In other sections of his autobiography, Nolde seems to enjoy recording negative criticism, using it to show the ignorance of his audience and his struggle for acceptance. But in this case, Nolde seems to suggest a pervasively negative spirit on the part of Jewish critics toward his art. He noted various slanderous phrases supposedly uttered by Cassirer such as *"Krasse Heuchelei"* (crass hypocrisy); *"Mantel der Biederkeit"* ([superficial] coat of respectability); *"Reklame für sich"* (self-promoter); and a poem by Jewish critic Alfred Kerr, the last stanza of which reads in William Bradley's translation:

> Nolde hangs, the miserable creature
> Dangling in the December storm. To be
> Hung, so young, how mean an end!
> (But yet, still no talent).
>
> *(Nolde hängt, der Unglückswurm*
> *Baumelt im Dezembersturm .*
> *Jung; gehängt;o schnödes End!*
> *Doch auch jetzt noch kein Talent)* [53]

Also, in the 1949 edition and in Martin Urban's 1993 edition, there are a few anecdotes that allude to Nolde's generally anti-Semitic sentiments towards Cassirer. For example, in the chapter entitled "New Secession 1911-1912," Nolde includes an excerpt of a letter from Kirchner in which he describes how Cassirer, the new Berlin Secession President, purchased some works of art from Heckel, Mueller, Schmidt-Rottluff, and Kirchner at their New Secession exhibition. Kirchner emphasized how Cassirer "complained constantly"[54] about the prices of the paintings and how, after bartering down the prices,

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[52] Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe* 1st ed. (Berlin: 1934), 163 in Pois, 96.

[53] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff, 1949), 171.

[54] Ibid., 212.

Cassirer then exhibited the New Secessionists paintings in his own Berlin Secession exhibition. As a result, Nolde called Cassirer a "dangerous enemy to artists" because of what Nolde saw as his self-centred motives and lack of respect for German artists.[55]

Other passages in the 1934 edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* emphasize more clearly Nolde's concept of the difference between German and Jewish peoples. For example, he wrote that the Jewish critic Herwarth Walden was able to recognize many good artists such as Marc, Kokoschka, Klee, and Kandinsky, but "had little feeling to that particular art rooted in the soul and soil of the homeland."[56] According to Nolde, "Jews have much intelligence and intellectuality, but little soul and little creative gift."[57] He believed that a specific "Jewish intellectual sense" prohibited Walden from having such a feeling for "true German art."[58] Robert Pois asserts that Nolde at one point sounded a bit like Alfred Rosenberg, when he declared that "at one time, England had been an extremely creative nation,"[59] but that, when it was "invaded by Spanish Jews," it became "greedy for power and possessions."[60] In other words, Nolde was suggesting that British imperialism and industrialism was the result of Jewish influence, which thus affected British artists' creativity.[61] In another instance, Nolde credited the Jews with "having the Bible and Christianity as accomplishments,"[62] but said that, because of their settling among Aryan people, "a situation unbearable for both parties has been created."[63] According to Nolde, the Jews should therefore be relocated to "some healthy and fruitful part of the earth" to carry out what he thought to be "the most humanely reconciliative and greatest act for the

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 1st ed. (Berlin: 1934), 101 in Pois, 96.

[57] Ibid., 101 in Pois, 96.

[58] Ibid., 121, in Pois, 96.

[59] Pois, 97.

[60] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe* (1934) , 124 in Pois, 97.

[61] Pois, 97.

[62] Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe* (1934), 124 in Pois, 97.

[63] Ibid.

people and the future."[64]

At the same time, Nolde also expressed admiration for his concept of the Jewish "race." He wrote about his *Life of Christ* altarpiece in the 1934 edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe*, explaining that he "painted [the figures] as strong Jewish types, because those who acknowledged Christ's revolutionary new teachings were certainly not weaklings."[65] Pois emphasizes that the fact that this passage appeared in the 1934 edition shows that Nolde had little real understanding of the systematic racism of the Nazis.[66] Pois notes that the Nazi views of religion were rooted in some of the teachings of people such as Eugen Dühring and Houston Stewart Chamberlain who went as far as denying that Christ was Jewish at all.[67]

Though none of these statements were reproduced in later editions of *Jahre der Kämpfe*, Pois points out that some racist statements remained, such as those relating to "primitive peoples" and "Jewish types."[68] With the more blatant remarks removed, later editions presented Nolde's views in a much more positive light, and revealed that his was a nuanced anti-Semitism. For example, a passage in the 1949 edition of *Jahre der Kämpfe* reads: "The great diversity of races enriches humanity wonderfully. Purity, beauty and performance are based in each individual race, and their value lies in their being different."[69]

A further work that presents Nolde's writings and contributes greatly to his personal myth is a book of collected correspondence edited by Max Sauerlandt entitled *Emil Nolde: Briefe aus den Jahren 1894-1926* . This book, which was originally published in 1927 for Nolde's 60th birthday, includes letters from Nolde to various friends and supporters such as Rosa Schapire and Gustav Schiefler. An updated edition of these letters, with an introduction by Martin Urban, the then-Director of the Nolde Museum, was

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64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 192, in Pois, 102.

66 Pois, 102.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 97.

69 Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, 2nd rev. ed. (1949), 126.

published in 1967 for the 100th anniversary of Nolde's birth. In it, Urban calls Nolde "an almost legendary figure"*("eine fast legendäre Gestalt")*[70] who survived years of persecution. Following closely Nolde's self-portrayal in *Jahre der Kämpfe*, Urban regards these letters as genuine documents of Nolde's struggle *(Kämpfe)* for recognition. It is interesting to note that Urban writes that Nolde's letters "present him as he really was" *("wie er wirklich war, dafür sind seine Briefe die lebendigsten Zeugen.")*[71] and that the letters contain Nolde's genuine and sincere reactions to events. Urban also believes that Sauerlandt was the best candidate to edit such a book, calling him "a passionate advocate for and the best connoisseur of Emil Nolde's art, and a friend" and claiming that "No one had a greater calling to put together this selection of letters."*(" . . . ein leidenschaftlicher Vorkämpfer und der beste Kenner der Kunst Emil Noldes, er zählte zu seinen Freunden. Niemand war berufener, diese Auswahl der Briefe zusammenzustellen.")*[72] According to Peter Vergo, the letters were published "with Nolde's full co-operation and approval."[73]

Like the autobiography these letters also give the reader glimpses into Nolde's personal life and thoughts, and they reveal Nolde's tendency toward self-dramatization. For example, as in his autobiography, Nolde found great pleasure in recording critics' negative reactions to his work, thereby portraying himself as a misunderstood and struggling outsider in the art world. In one of his letters he recorded some of these comments: "No style . . . colourful soup. . . childish experiments. . . insufficient respect for technique, insufficient respect for himself. . ." *("es fehlt der Stil. . . Bunte Suppe. . . Kindliche Versuche. . .ungenügender Respekt vor der Technik, ungenügender Respekt vor sich selbst.. . ")*[74] Similarly, in a letter to a "Dr. K.," he referred to the limited understanding on the part of the general public for his art. He writes of one gentleman who supposedly said, "A good thrashing would not be enough for this character."

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[70] Martin Urban, "Introduction" in *Emil Nolde: Briefe aus den Jahren 1894-1926* ed. Max Sauerlandt (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1967), 5.

[71] Urban, 5.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Vergo, 39.

[74] Sauerlandt, 70-71.

("Prügelstrafe wäre nicht genug für so einen Kerl!") [75] At the same time, Nolde triumphantly noted that two young people "passionately defended"[76] his paintings, stating, "'Some only know how to laugh, but others are deeply moved." *("Manche wissen nur zu lachen, andere wieder sind tief ergriffen.")* [77] Another letter presents Nolde in the role of a mentor giving advice to a younger artist. He wrote, "To be an artist requires a high sense of duty. It is a very difficult path. Whoever found it easy, never was a great artist." *("Künstler sein erfordert ein hohes Pflichtgefühl. Es ist ein sehr schwerer Weg. Wem es leicht wurde, der war wohl nie ein hoher Künstler.")* [78]

Early critics also did their part to further the myth constructed by Nolde in his autobiographical writing and his correspondence. Some of these earliest critics wrote of Nolde's struggle, suffering, isolation, heroism, and even of redemption, making Nolde's image into a kind of Christ-like cultural archetype. Early in Nolde's career, a number of critics identified Nolde as a uniquely "German" artist because of his individualism, his self-imposed isolation, his emotional and intuitive approach to art and his sensitivity to his local native landscape and to nature in general.[79] A number of these critics also closely followed Nolde's writings, which have been shown to be highly subjective, and also rely on personal interactions and impressions of the artist.

A prime example of an early subjective assessment which celebrated Nolde's genius and his work was a series of articles by the Expressionist poet and novelist Theodor Däubler. He wrote two ecstatic reviews of Nolde's work in 1917 for *Das Kunstblatt* and in 1919 for *Das junge Deutschland.* Typically Expressionist in his writing style, Däubler exclaimed, in short poetic phrases about Nolde's South Sea paintings, "Oh this land is imagined orchid-like: what a chorus of colour! And what rhythmic cradling in the tropical

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[75] Ibid., 88.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., 142.

[79] In her article "Böcklin's Reputation: Its Rise and Fall," Elizabeth Tumasonis identifies similar characteristics in Arnold Böcklin's art. These characteristics were identified as "uniquely German" and celebrated by German critics in the 1890s, and catapulted Böcklin to fame. Elizabeth Tumasonis, "Böcklin's Reputation: Its Rise and Fall," *Art Criticism* 6, 2 (1990) : 58.

atmosphere! Our difficult-to-reach paradise of existence." (*"Oh dieses Land ist orchideenhaft gedacht: welcher Gesang der Farben! Dazu was für ein rhythmisches Sich-wiegen in der Tropenschwüle! Unser schwererreichbares Paradies ins Dasein."*)[80] In the 1917 article, Däubler emphasized the magic nature of Nolde's paintings: "Nolde spreads out a colourful magic coat and then leads us, via our childhood, to the most remote realm of our soul." (*"Nolde breitet einen farbigen Zaubermantel aus und führt uns über unsere Kindheit ins allerentlegenste Land unserer Seele."*)[81] Here Däubler echoed what many Expressionist writers valued in their fellow artists: a Romantic spirit capable of tuning in to one's deepest and purest emotions.

In the case of the Expressionist poet Däubler, one might expect greater subjectivity in his reaction to Nolde's work, since poetry is the most subjective form of literary expression. However, other contemporary critics and biographers were similarly subjective. In particular, Gustav Schiefler, Max Sauerlandt, and Hans Fehr, all friends and supporters of Emil Nolde, contributed to and enhanced the Nolde image with their purposely subjective approaches. For example, Schiefler, the Hamburg print connoisseur, wrote in his introduction to *Emil Nolde: Das graphische Werk* (first published in 1910), that a subjective assessment based on "love" and common experience with the artist can often be trusted more than cold, impersonal, intellectual examination (*"Aber neben des Kühle objektiven Wägens behauptet auch die Liebe ihr Recht, und der Mitlebende, Miterlebende darf seinem warmen Emfinden oftmals sicherer vertrauen als einer unpersönlichen verstandesmäßigen Beurteilung."*)[82] As one of the first critics to write an article which appeared in the 1908 edition of *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* , Gustav Schiefler celebrated Nolde as a German cultural hero and an intermediary of a greater power.[83] Schiefler's article describes Nolde's diverse and "overwhelming" talents in the areas of painting, drawing, etching, lithography, and woodcut. In keeping with the image

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80 Theodor Däubler, "Emil Nolde,"*Das Junge Deutschland* 2 (1919) : 305.

81 Däubler, "Emil Nolde," *Das Kunstblatt* 1 (1917) : 115.

82 Gustav Schiefler, "Einführung," in *Emil Nolde: Das graphische Werk* ed. Christel Mosel, new and rev. ed. (Cologne: DuMont, 1995), 12.

83 Ibid., 26.

of the Romantic artist, Schiefler approaches Nolde's art with religious reverence, suggesting that Nolde, who is dependent on his own "demons," is a "genius"[84] who "does not work" but "creates with a pantheistic-divine creative power which works through the artist."[85] *("Wäre es anders, so würde Nolde von seinem Dämonium nicht so abhängig sein, sondern arbeiten können, wie und wann er wollte. Aber er 'arbeitet' nicht, sondern schafft mit jener pantheistisch-göttlichen Schöpferkraft, die in den Menschen wie etwas Fremdes hineinfährt.")* Believing the artist would join the ranks of the great Northern cultural figures of the German Reich,[86] Schiefler glorified Nolde's visionary and ground-breaking potential, and suggested that Nolde might be one of the chosen few to lead German art to the "sunlit pinnacles" reserved for that art *("Vielleicht ist er einer von den Männern, die berufen sind, als hellsehende Bergführer die deutsche künstlerische Kultur auf die ihr vorbehaltenen sonnebeschienenen Gipfel zu leiten.")*[87]

Max Sauerlandt's 1924 article, *"Zu einigen Aquarellen Emil Noldes"* (On some of Nolde's watercolours) published in *Das Kunstblatt* , also characterized Nolde in terms of a Romantic artist ideal. Sauerlandt surmised that Nolde's drawings and watercolours allow glimpses into Nolde's and the creative process in general. He imbued Nolde with a kind of magical aura, seeing the creative process as one in which the artist conjures a new vision from paint and paper:

> These last great images, in which the colourfully dissolved hues are put on with a dripping wet brush, entirely drench the white paper and blend with one another so that colour and paper have become totally one, so there is no longer colour and paper as separate entities, rather a third previously nonexistent thing -- these images have the great characteristic of a creation of a new artistic expression, a new way of seeing/interpreting the world.
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> *("Diese letzten großen Blätter, in denen die bunten gelösten Farben, mit tropfend nassem Pinsel aufgetragen, das weiche, saugende Papier miteinander verfließend völlig durchtränken -- so daß Farbe und Papier ganz eins geworden sind, daß nicht mehr Farbe und*

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 25.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Gustav Schiefler, "Emil Nolde," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 19, 2 (1908) : 32. Translation from German to English is my own.

nicht mehr Papier, sondern ein vorher nicht bestehendes neues Drittes ist -- haben den großen Zug von Schöpfungen eines neuen künstlerischen Ausdrucks, einer neuen Form der Anschauung des Weltbildes.")[88]

Sauerlandt's praise culminates with a quotation from an unidentified poem in celebration of the Romantic genius:

He gathers what is scattered
And his feeling gives life to the inanimate. . .
In this, his own magic realm dwells
This wondrous man and he draws us
To walk with him, to take part with him
He seems to approach us, yet remains afar . . .

(Das weit zerstreute sammelt sein Gemüt
und sein Gefühl belebt das Unbelebte.. .
In diesem eigenen Zauberkreise wandelt
Der wunderbare Mann und zieht uns an,
Mit ihm zu wandeln, Teil an ihm zu nehmen;
Er scheint sich uns zu nahen und bleibt uns fern. . .)[89]

In a similarly subjective vein, Max Sauerlandt, director of the Hamburg Museum for Arts and Crafts, published a number of reviews of Nolde's work. His earliest review, published in 1914 in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, praised Nolde's struggles against great odds and his efforts to "individualize the object," that is to imbue his subject matter with his own personal feelings and experience.[90] Like Schiefler, Sauerlandt and several other critics around this time began to place emphasis on Nolde's racial roots and his "nordic art," and characterized Nolde as one of "the strong people of the north, who know no masters."[91]

Paul Erich Kuppers also emphasized Nolde's nordic background in his 1918 article in *Das Kunstblatt* in which he wrote: "The northern spirit is tied inextricably to a tendency

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[88] Max Sauerlandt, "Zu einigen Aquarellen Emil Noldes," *Das Kunstblatt* 8 (1924) : 228.

[89] Ibid., 229. Translation from German to English is my own.

[90] Sauerlandt, "Emil Nolde," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 25, 1 (1914) : 184.

[91] Ibid., 181.

towards mysticism."[92] Kuppers spoke of the "tragic conflict of the Nordic soul," which expressed itself in the grotesque and in the fantastic, and of that "strong farming race from which Nolde came, a race which eschewed empty language and superficiality."[93] Further, Kuppers believed that Nolde had sought to overthrow the "superficiality of Impressionism," something that had hindered expression of "Nordic mysticism, this new religiosity."[94] Thus, according to Kuppers, through Nolde's strong character, which he expressed in colour, the artist "overcomes worldly capriciousness and provides spritiual essence, the final truth."[95] Though Schiefler, Sauerlandt, and Kuppers all emphasized Nolde's Nordic roots, Kuppers went further at this time, suggesting that Nolde's primitivism was "part of his search for the very roots of life itself. He, like the heroes of old Nordic myths, was seeking to go beyond the bounds of being."[96]

Another major contributor to the Nolde myth was Hans Fehr, who after Nolde's death published *Emil Nolde: Ein Buch der Freundschaft* (1960). This book was intended to celebrate the 46-year friendship between Nolde and his closest friend and was based on a combination of personal anecdotes, over two hundred letters exhanged between the two men, conversations with Nolde's wife, and on Nolde's autobiography and paintings.[97] Prior to writing this book, Fehr also wrote a number of articles while Nolde was still emerging on the art scene. One of the earliest examples, written in 1919 for *Das Kunstblatt*, is entitled "*Aus Leben und Werkstatt Emil Noldes.*" In the article, Fehr offered glimpses into Nolde's life, his creative process and his artistic philosophy from short excerpts of personal letters exchanged between the two friends (1905-1910). As a friend and contemporary of Nolde, Fehr unquestioningly believed in Nolde's "greatness," and his tone was one of celebration and admiration of his friend's work. For example, he

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[92] Paul Erich Kuppers, "Emil Nolde," *Das Kunstblatt* 2, 11 (1918) : 329. Translation in Pois, 123-124.

[93] Ibid., 330.

[94] Ibid., 332.

[95] Ibid., 339.

[96] Ibid., 340.

[97] Hans Fehr, *Emil Nolde: Ein Buch der Freundschaft* (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1960), 8.

wrote, "With a kind of colouring the artist masters his subjects so that one sees the entire splendour of the Bible rise before oneself."*("Mit einem Farbenklang meistert der Künstler seine Gestalten, daß man die ganze Herrlichkeit der Bibel vor sich aufsteigen sieht...")*[98] Fehr's approach was to write introductory sections such as this and then follow them with Nolde's own interpretation of his work, letting Nolde's writing speak for itself. For example, regarding his painting *Harvest Day*, Nolde wrote of his own "intoxication" and "amazement" at producing this work, *("Es war mir wie ein Rausch, als ich dieses Bild malte, ich überraschte mich selbst und staunte über die Wirkung, über die Bewegung, über die Helligkeit.")*, and that there is so much more behind his religious works than he was actually able to capture *("Wie viel mehr war da zu nehmen, ich aber konnte nur dieses fassen.")*[99]

Fehr also used a similar approach in his book of 1960, using Nolde's autobiography and letters as a major source for retelling Nolde's life story and Fehr's role in it. Fehr was very conscious of his subjective approach; however, and pointed out that the definitive work on Nolde will have to be written by an art historian. He emphasized his friendship with Nolde and his own eager participation in Nolde's "fight" and "eventual victory" in gaining recognition.[100] Fehr characterized himself as the counterpart to Nolde's personality. Fehr was the "stormy youth," "the younger and more learned one,"[101] who discussed literature and art with Nolde, who had been Fehr's drawing teacher in St. Gall and who was characterized as the "still, closed, nordic, silent man."[102] Fehr's perception of his role in Nolde's life was similar to the way the artist described it. Both emphasized that Fehr supported Nolde and his wife financially and otherwise in their early years of marriage, and Fehr quoted Nolde's testimony of gratitude as written in *Jahre der Kämpfe*.[103]

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98 Hans Fehr, "Aus Leben und Werkstatt Emil Noldes," *Kunstblatt* (1919) : 210.

99 Ibid., 210.

100 Fehr, *Ein Buch der Freundschaft*, 8.

101 Ibid., 9-11.

102 Ibid., 9.

103 Ibid., 31.

Perhaps the most important perpetuator of the Nolde myth was Siegfried Lenz. His 1968 novel *Die Deutschstunde* (The German Lesson) popularized Nolde's life story. The novel deals with many questions and issues about the artist in a totalitarian state and with the central question of Germany's post-war literature, that of coming to terms with the past. The novel and the film based on it have become very popular, and the novel is considered one of the most important examples of German post-war literature. By the summer of 1973, 850,000 copies of *Die Deutschstunde* were in print; the book spent seven months on the bestseller lists and was translated into nineteen different languages.[104] The film version is available from *Internationes*, free of charge to all German language institutions such as Goethe Institutes and German departments in universities and colleges. Not surprisingly, both film and novel are regular features in post-war German literature courses. Part of the appeal of this story is its universality. Lenz's protagonist questions and challenges authority, an issue that was of particular concern in the 1960s when this book was written. In addition, the novel's moral, the virtues and potential vices of duty, can apply to any society.

The central part of the story deals with an artist in a remote North German town who experiences defamation and the loss of artistic freedom under totalitarian rule. The narrative will be summarized here in order to show how it relates to the Nolde myth. The story begins in 1954 and through flashbacks recalls events beginning in 1943 up to the fictional present. The narrator, Siggi Jepsen, is confined to a correction institute for "juvenile delinquents" because he has stolen a number of the artist Max Ludwig Nansen's paintings. Part of the boy's "rehabilitation" is to write an essay on "The Pleasures of Duty." Siggi is unable to complete the essay in the allotted time, because the whole story of his past life comes back to his mind. The essay eventually becomes a detailed retelling of his childhood experiences as they relate to the fate of the artist Nansen. This character is clearly based on the real-life Emil Nolde. Siggi's story begins in the fictional North German town of Rugbüll. He is nine years old. His father, village policeman Ole Jepsen, is the agent for Nazi Germany in this remote area. Jepsen receives an assignment from

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104 Trudis Reber, *Siegfried Lenz* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1973), 72.

head office in Berlin to enforce a painting prohibition on the local Expressionist painter Max Ludwig Nansen. Despite a lifelong friendship (Jepsen is indebted to Nansen for saving his life as a child), Jepsen carries out his duty relentlessly. At first he is apologetic, but as Nansen resists Jepsen's attempts to enforce the ban and to confiscate his work, Jepsen becomes more vigilant.

Siegfried Lenz makes the artist character into a symbol of creative freedom. Nansen chooses to follow his sense of "inner duty" and continues to paint despite the *Malverbot*. In contrast, the policeman, who blindly carries out orders, represents the embodiment of externally imposed duty.[105] According to B.O. Murdoch and M. Read, Lenz uses the policeman to demonstrate the perverted sense of duty which allowed a regime like National Socialism to function.[106] Murdoch and Read interpret the story as showing "the mentality of a German generation who forfeited a sense of personal responsibility and subordinated themselves to a state authority they never questioned."[107] This idea is reinforced near the end of the novel, when the war is over and Jepsen returns to his post after three months' internment for "denazification." Jepsen continues to carry out his former "duties" despite new circumstances. He undertakes a personal vendetta against Nansen.

From the beginning, Siggi is drawn to Nansen, rather than to his father the policeman, a strict authoritarian. He admires the artist, who teaches him to question authority. Siggi decides to help hide Nansen's paintings, rather than act as a spy for his father. After the war, Jepsen continues to harass Nansen and burns down an old mill which Siggi used as a secret hiding place for some of Nansen's work. After the fire in the mill, Siggi imagines flames engulfing others of Nansen's paintings and feels he must rescue and hide them. Siggi then begins to steal publicly exhibited paintings by Nansen in order to conceal them. Like his father, Siggi develops a sense of self-imposed duty that continues even after the Nazi regime has collapsed. Siggi is finally arrested and placed in a

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[105] B.O. Murdoch and M. Read, *Siegfried Lenz* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1978), 62.

[106] Ibid., 60.

[107] Ibid.

juvenile detention centre.

There are several other story lines in Lenz's narrative. For example, Lenz gives the reader the impression of a more objective interpretation of Siggi's story from the point of view of the psychologist Mackenroth, who investigates Siggi's case for a doctoral thesis. Mackenroth believes Siggi's kleptomania is a result of his experiences in childhood, when he was deprived of love and support in a time of shifting values. Siggi rejects this assessment. He believes that the punishment he is enduring is being applied to the wrong generation and that he is being punished for the moral crimes carried out by a previous generation.[108]

Lenz's novel is a *Schlüsselroman*, a work of fiction that to a large extent is based on Nolde's life and work. Lenz himself disclosed that, in writing this book he thought first and foremost of Nolde's experiences during the Nazi regime.[109] Wilhelm H. Grothmann has carried out a detailed study of the novel, entitled, *"Siegfried Lenz' 'Deutschstunde.' Eine Würdigung der Kunst Emil Noldes*. Grothmann makes a detailed comparison between the character Max Ludwig Nansen and the artist Emil Nolde and points out that the the fictional surname of the artist "Nansen" combines Nolde's family name Hansen and his assumed name Nolde. But at the same time, the names "Max" and "Ludwig," according to Peter Vergo, show that the fictional artist may be an amalgam of personalities and experiences, composed from Nolde's near-contemporaries Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Max Beckmann.[110] It is also possible that Lenz remembered a phrase recorded in Nolde's (who was then called Emil Hansen) autobiography, *Das eigene Leben*. Nolde recorded a quote that appeared in the local press after he led a group on a successful climb up the Matterhorn: *"Vom Nordpol kam der Nansen, Vom Matterhorn der*

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[108] Ibid., 70-71.

[109] Dietrich Peinert. "Siegfried Lenz' Deutschstunde" in Colin Russ, ed. *Der Schriftsteller Siegfried Lenz* (Hamburg: 1973), 177.

[110] Vergo, 16.

Hansen!"[111] (From the North Pole Came Nansen, From the Matterhorn, Hansen!).[112] Certainly Lenz was thoroughly familiar with Nolde's autobiography.

Wilhelm H. Grothmann's article is a homage to Nolde and demonstrates that Nansen's character is indeed based on Nolde's life. Grothmann is not alone, however. Other critics have mentioned in passing the Nansen/Nolde similarity. For example, Colin Russ writes of "the artist Nansen reminiscent of Nolde" (*"dem an Nolde erinnernden Künstler Nansen"*).[113] In her book *Siegfried Lenz*, Trudis Reber asks, "Is this a *Künstlerroman* (artist's novel) about Emil Nolde whose name is Max Ludwig Nansen?" (*Oder aber ist es ein Künstlerroman um Emil Nolde, das heißt Max Ludwig Nansen?"*).[114] In the book *Lenz, Deutschstunde/Untersuchung zum Roman, Analysen und Reflexionen*, Heidrun Worm-Kaschuge asserts that Nansen, "is identical to the historical figure Emil Nolde (*. . . daß Nansen mit der historischen Figur Emil Noldes identisch ist"*).[115]

Grothmann goes into great detail to prove that the association between Nansen and Nolde is intentional. He points out that, of the thirty-one titles of pictures mentioned in the novel, many indicate a connection to actual works by Nolde.[116] Only one of Nansen's works in the novel is titled the same as Nolde's, his *Doubting Thomas*. But other titles, motifs, subject matter, and descriptions of works of art in the novel are evocative of specific Nolde paintings. Through a detailed comparison of the fictional Nansen's work with that of Nolde, Grothmann gives numerous examples of corresponding ideas, similar titles and descriptions. For example, Grothmann notes the titles *Zitronenfrau* (Lemon Lady) in Lenz's novel and *Im Zitronengarten* (In the Lemon Garden) by Nolde; *Pierrot*

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111 Emil Nolde, *Das eigene Leben*, 2nd ed. (Flensburg: Christian Wolff, 1949), 138.

112 Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) was a famous Norwegian Arctic explorer. Although the headline quoted above suggests Nansen was the first to reach the North Pole, Peary and Hensen are usually credited as the first to do so in 1909.

113 Colin Russ, "Siegfried Lenz," in *Deutscher Dichter der Gegenwart*, Benno von Wiese, ed. (Berlin, 1973), 550.

114 Trudis Reber, *Siegfried Lenz*, Köpfe des xx. Jahrhunderts, 74 (Berlin, 1973), 74.

115 Heidrun Worm-Kashuge, *Lenz, Deutschstunde/Untersuchung zum Roman, Analysen und Reflexionen*, (Hollfeld, 1974), 97.

116 Wilhelm H. Grothmann, "Siegfried Lenz' *Die Deutschstunde*. Eine Würdigung der Kunst Emil Noldes," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*. 15, 1 (February 1979) : 57.

prüft eine Maske (Pierrot Inspects a Mask) in Lenz and *Frauen und Pierrot* (Women and Pierrot) by Nolde; *Fohlen und Gewitter* (Foals and Thunderstorm) in Lenz and *Pferd und Fohlen* (Horse and Foals) by Nolde, to name only a few.[117] More obvious is the similar name given to the works both artists create after being issued the *Malverbot*. Nolde calls his watercolours painted in secret his "*Ungemalte Bilder*" ("Unpainted Pictures") whereas Nansen calls his paintings "*Unsichtbare Bilder*" ("Invisible pictures").[118]

According to Grothmann there are also a number of geographical, art historical, and biographical parallels between Nansen and Nolde. For example in the novel, the maiden name of Nansen's wife, Ditte, is Gosebruch, the same last name of gallery director Ernst Gosebruch who exhibited Nolde's works in 1910 in the Essen Art Museum and also of author Martin Gosebruch, who wrote a study on Nolde in 1957 entitled *Nolde, Watercolours and Drawings*.[119] Most important, Grothmann examines how Lenz presents the character Max Ludwig Nansen. The way in which Lenz characterizes Nansen, Grothmann points out, indicates how Lenz perceived Emil Nolde, namely in an idealized light.[120] Lenz makes Nansen into a victim of National Socialism and makes no reference to Emil Nolde's petitions for acceptance by the Nazis. Instead, Lenz focuses on the Romantic image of Nolde/Nansen. In order to prove this, Grothmann divides the novel into four sections and identifies specific passages to support the Romantic image of the protagonist. The first section illuminates Nansen's rootedness in his homeland; the second part his affinity to the people of his village; the third part his deep spiritual connection to nature, and the fourth section his vision and artistic development, and his particular way of seeing and painting.[121]

The artist Emil Nolde has indeed been idealized, romanticized, and made into a cultural myth by the artist himself, by some of his contemporary critics, and by Siegfried

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117 Grothmann, 57.

118 Ibid.

119 Martin Gosebruch. *Nolde: Aquarellen und Zeichnungen*. (Munich 1957).

120 Grothmann, 67.

121 Ibid., 59.

Lenz in the character of Max Ludwig Nansen in *Die Deutschstunde*. Nolde and his contemporaries envisioned him as an archetypal Romantic artist: a man who was in tune with nature, spiritually connected to his homeland and the peasants who lived there, and highly emotional and individualistic in his approach to his art. Nolde was also characterized as a visionary who would lead the way to a new German art, but not without great struggle and tenacity on his part. The composite of Nolde's image, which is based on both fact and fiction, is so pervasive today that the Director of the Nolde Museum felt it necessary to point out that one should not take the film or the novel by Lenz to be a documentary about Nolde.[122]

[122] Personal correspondence, letter from Manfred Reuther dated September 10, 1997.

Chapter Four

Post-1945: The Revision of the Myth

The end of World War II and the collapse of the National Socialist regime brought an entirely different artistic climate to West Germany. After more than a decade of state control of every facet of society, including the arts, there was now a chance for a fresh start. Nolde, who had been forbidden to paint or exhibit by the National Socialists, was now able to practise his art freely. Though he was already seventy-eight years old in 1945, he continued to work at his house in Seebüll, using some of his 1,300 *Unpainted Pictures* [1] as inspiration for larger oil paintings. His reputation was restored to its former status. He received various honours, including an appointment in 1946 as a professor by the government of Schleswig-Holstein, and in 1950 the Venice Biennale prize for his graphic work.[2]

More important, Nolde now began to put into place an idea that had been mentioned to him in 1919 by the Dresden art dealer Rudolf Probst.[3] In a letter, Probst wrote, "I can think of nothing finer, for the modern, contemporary consciousness, than a museum devoted exclusively to the showing of your work. Then I can imagine people going on a modern pilgrimage. What power would surely emanate from such a place!"[4] Nolde realized this idea with his Testament of April 1946, outlining his vision of the Ada and Emil Nolde Foundation in Seebüll *(Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde)*. The Foundation would be housed in the Nolde home in Seebüll, which would be opened to the public as a museum, "for the people of our own home region, on one hand, and on the other --

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[1] Manfred Reuther, "Nolde and Seebüll," trans. David Britt, in *Emil Nolde*, eds. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 67.

[2] Werner Haftmann, *Emil Nolde* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 44.

[3] Reuther, 72.

[4] Reuther quoting Rudolf Probst, no source given except "a December 1919 letter," 72.

figuratively speaking -- [for] travellers in the spirit from every land."[5] According to Nolde, his Foundation would be a "modest, special place," for "a little happiness and artistic and spiritual refreshment: in gratitude to the home region that gave us a sunny childhood, and in gratitude to Denmark and Germany, the countries that gave us refuge and help in good times and hard times alike."[6] The Noldes wanted to establish "an independent, free foundation" in order to promote "the general love of art" and to serve as "a bridge of understanding between Scandinavia and Germany."[7]

The Nolde Foundation has made and continues to make a great contribution to the artist's reputation. This is in part due to its yearly exhibitions at Seebüll and the national and international exhibits it sponsors. The exhibitions in Germany will be compared with selected exhibitions of Nolde's work elsewhere, in particular one of the most recent, held in 1995-1996, at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. The purpose of this comparison is to show the challenge the Nolde myth provides, and to suggest that, with time and distance, greater objectivity is being applied to Nolde and his work, modifying his image. To support this claim, the post-war writings on Nolde of selected German scholars will be compared with perspectives of scholars from other countries.

The Nolde Museum in Seebüll was opened to the public in 1957, one year after Nolde's death. In accordance with the artist's will, it is indeed a place that celebrates his life and work to this day. It has also become the centre of Nolde research.[8] There is an extensive archive which houses Nolde's manuscripts, notes, numerous documents, and thousands of letters and personal objects.[9] The Foundation makes this information accessible to visiting scholars. Over the years the Foundation has sponsored an extensive body of publications, some of them revised editions of Nolde's autobiography. The Foundation also produces catalogues of Nolde's works, some accompanied by Nolde's

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[5] Reuther, 68. Reuther cites the source as "the preamble to Nolde's Testament, April 1946," no footnote given.

[6] Reuther, 68.

[7] Ibid., 68-69.

[8] Martin Urban, *Die Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde* (Seebüll 1991), n.p.

[9] Ibid.

own writings, excerpts from his letters and his autobiography, and, usually, biographical essays. As of 1991, the Nolde Foundation had supported over one hundred exhibitions of Nolde's work, not only at Seebüll but also at other German museums and abroad.[10] As Roger Bevan notes in a 1995 exhibition review, "The co-operation of the Stiftung [Foundation], which owns 541 of the artist's 1,356 surviving oil paintings, as well as more than 5,500 watercolours and sketches, is really a pre-requisite for any exhibition of Nolde's work."[11] In the attempt to define Nolde's place in modern art of the twentieth century, one of the greatest challenges the Nolde Foundation faces is to address both the myth and the reality concerning the artist.

Whether intentional or not, the Nolde Museum contributes greatly to the perpetuation of the artist's personal myth. Located in a remote area near the town of Neukirchen in northern Germany, the Nolde Museum is indeed a place of pilgrimage. Not only does the Museum house the major body of Nolde's paintings, writings, and personal possessions, but both Ada and Emil Nolde are buried in the garden surrounding the museum.[12] There are on average, 100,000 visitors in the nine months it is open each year.[13] Occasionally school, church, or other travel groups choose Seebüll as their destination: an article of 1978 by Manfred Reuther, current Director of the Museum, reproduces a talk delivered to a such group of students on a fieldtrip from the Protestant Academies of Hofgeismar and Nordelbien.[14]

Even some of the exhibition choices of the Nolde Museum evoke associations with the artist's personal myth. For example, the permanent exhibition includes a room devoted

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Roger Bevan, "Whitechapel Art Gallery, London: Making Waves With Nolde," *Art Newspaper* 6 (December 1995) : 11.

[12] Martin Urban, *Emil Nolde: Unpainted Pictures* (Seebüll: Stiftung Ada und Emil Nolde, 1996), 6.

[13] Martin Urban, *Die Stiftung*, n.p. Manfred Reuther reports that numbers have declined slightly but consistently over the past 5 years (personal correspondence September 10, 1997).

[14] Manfred Reuther, "Emil Noldes Religiöse Bilder" *Anstösse: Aus der Arbeit der Evangelischen Akademie Hofgeismar* 4 (1978) : 129.
Reuther also wrote of the Church's later interest in Nolde's work, for example in 1961 the Protestant Church sponsored an exhibition of Nolde's religious works in conjunction with the 10th German Protestant *Kirchentag* in Berlin.

to Nolde's religious images, including the *The Life of Christ* series with the dramatic *Crucifixion* (1912) in the centre[15] (Figure 19). In many ways, the *Crucifixion* image can be seen as an icon or a symbol of Nolde's life experiences and of some of his deepest beliefs. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Nolde wrote that as a youth he identified intensely with Christ. The image of the suffering Christ seems to have stayed with him for the rest of his life, taking on various incarnations. For example, Nolde certainly believed that his purpose as an artist was to prophesy a new German art, and he sporadically took on various causes to defend his artistic vision and mission, such as his highly publicized quarrel with Berlin Secession President Max Liebermann. Moreover, Nolde's encounter with National Socialism and his subsequent persecution are reminiscent of the lifestory of Christ. Similar to Christ, who was ridiculed, betrayed, and crucified, Nolde, the artist who himself identified with Christ and prophesied a new German art, was ridiculed, defamed, and in a manner, "crucified" through the Degenerate Art Exhibition and the *Malverbot*. Thus, the visitor who is even vaguely familiar with Nolde's life story and/or Lenz's novel emerges from the Museum having been confronted with an image which vividly portrays Christ's life of struggle, persecution, and crucifixion and suggests Nolde's martyrdom for his art.

For German critics, who generally approach the Nolde myth with their own cultural baggage, the challenge of responding to this myth and attempting to revise it is particularly problematic. Part of this German cultural baggage includes a pervasive feeling of guilt over the Nazi nightmare and the need for restitution *(Wiedergutmachung)*, which, in the case of the arts, includes attempts to rehabilitate the reputation/image of artists who were wronged under National Socialism. As *Maclean's* magazine journalist Nomi Morris pointed out in a recent article, "War and Memory: Dealing with the Past Causes Unending Debate":

> Delving into the past has become something of a national obsession in Germany. . . And endorsing such efforts [as the first Holocaust museum in Germany or a museum dedicated to the Third Reich over Hitler's bunker] has turned into the German version of political

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[15] Floorplan of the Nolde Museum's permanent exhibition; sent by Manfred Reuther on September 10, 1997.

correctness.[16]

In examining a cross-section of recent critical assessment of Nolde's work by German scholars, one needs to consider this issue in their approach in the context of "coming to terms with the past" *(Vergangenheitsbewältigung).* It is evident that a certain amount of guilt is attached to the past treatment of this artist (as well as other German Expressionists) at the hands of the National Socialists. A great deal of German post-war Nolde criticism has tended to downplay questions concerning Nolde's anti-Semitism in favour of a more celebratory approach to Nolde's life and work, especially Nolde's "resurrection" after the *Malverbot.* Indeed, the prohibition by the Nazis was later to work in Nolde's favour. It singled him out as someone important enough to pose a threat to National Socialism, and thus, after 1945, provided a starting point for his rehabilitation.

An example of the celebratory approach to Nolde after 1945 is Walter Jens's address, delivered on August 7, 1967, at Seebüll, to mark Nolde's 100th birthday.[17] Jens, an historian and author, hailed Nolde as "a visionary genius"[18] whose art posed a serious threat to the National Socialists. Like certain other German scholars, Jens also employs Nolde's own words to celebrate his art. Using words like "struggle"and "liberation" which recall the titles of two volumes of Nolde's autobiography, Jens described Nolde as follows: "a German painter, who, centuries after Dürer wanted to bring in a second Germanic Renaissance, became the Nazi's [*sic*] deadly enemy. . . instead of conforming he engaged in a secret struggle, in anticipation of the day of liberation."[19] Jens also highlights a point that was emphasized by Nolde as one of the defining characteristics of his art, that of contrast and antithesis. Nolde wrote in a letter of 1901 that a truly great artist is someone capable of being "simple and cultivated at the same time, . . . naive and refined, temperamental and rational, . . . full of exuberant life and silent repose."[20] Peter

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16 Nomi Morris, "War and Memory: Dealing with the Past Causes Unending Debate" ***Maclean's*** 110, 41 (October 13, 1997) : 38.

17 Walter Jens "A Hundred Years Old" in *Emil Nolde: Unpainted Pictures* ed. Martin Urban (Seebüll: Stiftung Ada und Emil Nolde, 1996), 14-15.

18 Ibid., 14.

19 Ibid., 14-15.

20 Max Sauerlandt, ed. *Briefe aus den Jahren 1894-1926* (Hamburg 1967), 35.

Vergo points out that this notion of the centrality of antithesis to Nolde's work has been accepted uncritically into the post-1945 art historical literature.[21] Jens used Nolde's own words to emphasize "the interplay of naïvety and refinement" in Nolde's work. And he referred to Nolde in terms reminiscent of Däubler's poetic language (see Chapter 3): "Janus-headed, a conjuror with myths and a psychologist, a painter with a mania for the demonic and for the tenderest gesture."[22]

Jens's interpretation is but one example of how writing about Nolde has been affected by the artist's own statements. Another German historian, Tilman Osterwold, used a similar approach in a catalogue for a 1988 exhibition of Nolde's work at the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart. Osterwold's article *"Bilder und Texte von Emil Nolde"* attempted to elucidate the artist's writings by explaining them with further quotes from Nolde's writing, an approach that is reminiscent of that of Hans Fehr (see Chapter 3). Osterwold interspersed his well-researched biographical article with short, cryptic subheadings consisting of phrases from Nolde's own writing, such as *"Malen ist Malen"* (Painting is Painting); *"Die Schönheit ist tot"* (Beauty is dead); *"Ich bin ein Tier"* (I am an animal); and *"Ich ging meinen Künstlerweg allein"* (I went on my artistic way/road alone), and then explains these quotes with additional direct quotations from Nolde's autobiography and from letters. For example, the quote *"Malen ist Malen"* precedes a section on Nolde's creative process, a process that Osterwold describes further with Nolde's own words: "Painting has its purpose in itself, as event, as process, as movement, and as activity." *("Malerei hat ihrem Sinn in sich selbst, als Vorgang, Prozeß, Bewegung, Aktivität.")* [23]

This exhibition at Stuttgart was sponsored by the Nolde Museum, and most of the articles in the catalogue are written by former director Martin Urban and current director Manfred Reuther. Typical of many of the Nolde Museum's publications, this catalogue

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2121 Peter Vergo, "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality" in *Emil Nolde* eds. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn, (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 40.

22 Jens, 14.

23 Tilman Osterwold, ed. "Bilder und Texte von Emil Nolde,"*Emil Nolde* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Kunstverein, 1988), 8.

does a general "stock taking" of Nolde's art and writings, and describes the function and history of the Nolde Foundation. The emphasis is on commentary based on Nolde's writings, and analysis remains tied closely to the biography of the artist. In the chapter entitled *"Ungemalte Bilder"* ("Unpainted Pictures"), for example, Martin Urban portrays Nolde in the best tradition of myth making, as a martyr and persecuted painter *("Martyrium für die Kunst")*, and uses a typical generalization made by Nolde: "I always fought against the current" *("ich habe immer gegen den Strom gekämpft")* to support this claim.[24]

Indeed, the Nolde Foundation has become a kind of "manager" or "custodian" of the Nolde myth, as Nolde must have intended. An example which underlines this role is one of the Foundation's few English-language publications, *Emil Nolde: Unpainted Pictures* (1987), edited by Martin Urban. Significantly, Urban has chosen one of the most sensational aspects of the artist's career to make accessible to English-speaking audiences. Again, the format of the book includes a biographical introduction by Urban, excerpts from celebratory writings by Walter Jens and Paul Klee, excerpts from Nolde's autobiography and from "Words in the Margin," his notes on the *Unpainted Pictures*, and a large section of colour plates.

In contrast to the above examples, critics from other countries typically lack the cultural and historical point of view of some German scholars. These other critics have different perspectives, different approaches and emphases. A number of these scholars have gradually exposed certain issues and are slowly piecing together a revision of the Nolde image. For non-German critics, some of the most significant issues concerning the revision of the Nolde myth have been Nolde's anti-Semitism and his alleged membership in the National Socialist Party. Immediately after World War II, these issues understandably became a focus in dealing with this controversial artist. Interestingly, it was the German scholar Paul Ortwin Rave who first acknowledged Nolde's National Socialist connection. Rave's book *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (1949), which uncovers the roles of numerous inviduals in the arts and culture scene in Nazi Germany, (incorrectly) refers to Nolde as "one of the original members of the National Socialist Party in North

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[24] Urban, 117.

Schleswig."[25]

The issue of Nolde's anti-Semitism and his involvement with the National Socialist party gradually moved from cursory acknowledgement to centre stage. Two American scholars, Bernard S. Myers and Peter Selz, were among the first to question Nolde's status as a supposed victim of National Socialism and at least to make mention of the anti-Semitic statements in his autobiography. In 1957 Myers and Selz published separate studies on German Expressionism entitled *German Expressionism: A Generation in Revolt* and *German Expressionist Painting* respectively. These were among the first comprehensive studies of Expressionist art in the English language. Both books contain chapters devoted exclusively to Emil Nolde. While they did acknowledge Nolde's anti-Semitism, neither Myers nor Selz dealt with it in any depth. Myers, for example, did not mention anything about Nolde's political opinions, nor did he mention the *Malverbot* in the body of the book. But he did describe Nolde's attacks on Liebermann and Cassirer as "immaturely anti-Semitic"[26] and offered the following explanation in a footnote:

> It would serve no useful purpose to multiply the instances of such statements, nor the racist theory propounded throughout Nolde's book. They would seem to be of a piece, however, with his general background and political position maintained for many years. Paul Ortwin Rave's monograph *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* ,. . . (1949) relates that Nolde was one of the original members of the Nazi party in North Schleswig and made no bones about it. When his art was included among the 'degenerate' in 1937 and much of it confiscated, Nolde wrote bitter letters of protest to *Kulturminister* Rust and to Dr. Goebbels, indicating the true German character of his racial heritage and his work.[27]

In contrast, Selz included a couple of sentences on Nolde's racial opinions, his anti-Semitism with regard to Liebermann and Cassirer, and branded Nolde as a card-carrying National Socialist:

> Nolde, always a strong believer in theories of racial superiority and the need for a national German art revival, was frequently guilty of employing openly anti-Semitic attacks against Liebermann and Paul

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[25] Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich.* (Berlin: 1949; reprint Berlin: Argon, ed. Uwe M. Schneede, 1987), 135.

[26] Bernard S. Myers, *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 136.

[27] Ibid., 316, fn. 98.

> Cassirer, who were leaders of the Berlin Secession, as a means of venting his bitterness toward them; he also decried Cubist and Constructivist paintings as being of Jewish origin because he disliked them. It was by no means accidental that Nolde became one of the charter members of the Nazi party in North Schleswig at its foundation in 1920.[28]

This is the only acknowledgement of these issues in the entire volume, and Selz does not provide any examples of Nolde's "theories of racial superiority" or of his "openly anti-Semitic attacks." Part of the reason for Myers's and Selz's cursory treatments of these issues was that their studies on the subject of German Expressionist art were the first in North America after the war and indeed the first major studies of German Expressionism in English. The authors clearly wanted to rehabilitate German culture and to present it in as positive light as possible to the late 1950s North American public. However, Selz's and Myers's initial findings, reactions and observations on the two most controversial issues concerning Nolde provided important starting points for the discussion and gradual refinement of the "real" Nolde.

Six years later, in 1963, the Museum of Modern Art in New York mounted the first American Nolde retrospective. Selz, who wrote the catalogue, again addressed the anti-Semitism question in the context of the Berlin Secession affair and highlighted Nolde's tendency "to blame the Jews for the lack of his general acceptance during the first ten years of his life as a painter."[29] Again Selz's treatment is fairly cursory, and he offers no specific examples. But Selz does draw some important preliminary parallels between Nolde's beliefs and Nazi ideology. Selz notes Nolde's "pan-German chauvinism"[30] with regard to the Nazi slogans of "blood and soil" and "art and race," and asserts that Nolde genuinely expected to be a part of the German national revolution of 1933.[31] Selz also briefly points out that Nolde's "autobiography and letters are filled with the narrow-minded anti-Semitism, nationalism and racism prevalent among the isolated German peasantry and

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[28] Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 123-4.

[29] Selz, *Emil Nolde* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1963), 28.

[30] Ibid., 70.

[31] Ibid.

later exploited so successfully by the Nazis."[32]

In contrast to Selz, a study by the German critic Werner Haftmann in 1959, which was also translated into English, contains nothing about the anti-Semitic flavour of Nolde's involvement in the Berlin Secession "affair" or his political opinions or supposed membership in the NSDAP. Haftmann's focus is primarily biographical and, with regard to the Degenerate Art Exhibition, he characterizes Nolde as a victim whose name became "synonymous with *Kulturbolschivismus*." [33] In response to issues raised by Selz and Myers, Haftmann rises to Nolde's defense in his subsequent 1965 publication entitled *Emil Nolde: Unpainted Pictures* and defends Nolde against the "absurd notion of his anti-Semitism."[34] Haftmann states that National Socialism was "totally unacceptable" to Nolde and that he was persecuted because of the "inherent voice of freedom" in his work.[35]

Among American scholars, the anti-Semitism question seems to have been a major pre-occupation among Nolde scholars in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. The question of Nolde's involvement in the National Socialist Party, too, dominated discussions about him until recently, with Peter Vergo's publication in 1995 ("Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality").[36] It is possible that this preoccupation reflected the political climate of the time in the United States. The political protests of the 1960s, especially those against the Vietnam War, made it important in the post-1960s era not to seem to be whitewashing anything. The Kennedy assassinations, Watergate, and other events of the 1960s and early 1970s meant the rise of many conspiracy theories and general suspicion of the government and official organizations. The new political climate in the 1970s fostered the need to avoid any perception of conspiracy or cover-up.

Indeed, the focus of Nolde scholarship in the 1960s and early 1970s was the ferreting out of what had previously been "whitewashed." Two publications, *Theories of*

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[32] Ibid., 28.

[33] Werner Haftmann, *Emil Nolde,* trans. Norbert Guterman (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 36.

[34] Haftmann, *Emil Nolde: Unpainted Pictures*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York 1965), 15.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Peter Vergo, "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality," in *Emil Nolde,* eds. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn (London: Whitechapel, 1995),

Modern Art (1968), edited by Herschel Chipp, and *Voices of German Expressionism* (1970), edited by Victor Miesel, are source books of official and personal documents, some of which pertain specifically to Emil Nolde. Chipp, who was a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, noted in the introduction that the purpose of the book was to respond to "a need, voiced by art historians and students, for access to the fundamental theoretical documents of twentieth century art."[37] Included in the chapter on Expressionism are six pages of excerpts from *Jahre der Kämpfe* taken from the 1934 edition. The editor has chosen a section from 1909 where Nolde writes about his religious paintings and of his desire to paint the Last Supper, "the most mysterious, the profoundest, most inward event of all Christian religion."[38] Chipp chose an excerpt from Nolde's writing that exemplifies the preoccupations of a typical Expressionist, his strong emotionalism, introspection, and individualism: "Then again I went into the mystical depth of human divine existence. The painting of the Pentecost was then sketched out. Five of the fishermen apostles were painted in ecstatic supersensory reception of the Holy Ghost."[39] Selz's introduction to this section characterizes this excerpt as "an almost ecstatic episode in his autobiography [which] gives insight into his fervent, tempestuous personality."[40] While the purpose of Chipp's book was to provide documents of twentieth century art, there is still a subjective element in this particular section. Given that this is the only example of Nolde's writing in Chipp's book, its spiritual and introspective tone certainly perpetuates Nolde's self image of the Romantic artist.

A similar kind of source book, entitled *Voices of German Expressionism,* was edited in 1970 by Victor H. Miesel, Professor of Art History at the University of Michigan. Miesel included documents that in retrospect reflect both the myth and reality of Nolde's image, though he provided little commentary on these selections. For example, one of the first entries is from *Jahre der Kämpfe* where Nolde muses on some of his religious

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[37] Herschel B. Chipp, ed. preface to *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*. (Berkeley 1968), vi.

[38] Emil Nolde "From *Jahre der Kämpfe*" in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley 1968) ed. Herschel B. Chipp, trans. Ernest Mundt, 147.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Peter Selz, "Fauvism and Expressionism: The Creative Intuition," in Chipp, 126.

paintings, imagining himself in the place of Christ on the cross: "It must have been painful to be on the cross but it must also have been an inexpressible joy to die in absolute certainty as son of God and son of man in order to save mankind from everlasting torment. I can't imagine a grander or more glorious death."[41] This selection also includes Nolde's reference to the apostles whom he depicted as "strong Jewish types."[42] Certainly the selections reflect Miesel's intent "to permit artists . . . to demonstrate in their own words individual points of view, points of view which not infrequently changed with changing social and political conditions."[43] In contrast to this excerpt, the final chapter "Expressionism and the Third Reich" reveals Nolde's new preoccupations. For the first time, Nolde's plaintive letter to Joseph Goebbels was published in English.[44] This was the letter in which Nolde claims he was a member of the NSDAP ever since North Schleswig was ceded to Denmark, and where he attests to the "Germanness" of his art and the "world-historical significance of National Socialism."[45] Miesel excuses Nolde's words by saying, "let us not forget that Nolde, in spite of his nationalism, remained true to his vision. He never changed his style, and he even risked arrest by continuing to paint after having been forbidden to do so by the authorities."[46]

Two studies done in the 1980s by American scholars show new approaches to Nolde as a product of certain cultural trends. Robert Pois's Ph.D. thesis of 1982 takes a "Freudian informed psychohistorical"[47] approach to understanding Nolde as a representative of certain forces and trends in German cultural history between 1870 and 1933.[48] Pois uses Nolde's writings and his artwork to explore Nolde's personal

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41 Emil Nolde "Work in Nine Parts (January 1911)" in *Voices of German Expressionism* ed. Victor H. Miesel (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 31.

42 Ibid., 33.

43 Victor H. Miesel, introduction to *Voices of German Expressionism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 1.

44 The first publication of the original letter was in Dieter Schmidt, ed. *In letzter Stunde, 1933-1945* (Dresden 1964), 152. For an excerpt from this letter see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

45 Nolde in Miesel, 209-210.

46 Ibid., 191.

47 Robert Pois, *Emil Nolde* (Boulder: University of America Press, 1982), xviii.

48 Ibid., xvii.

ideology, which Pois claims, "was never consistent,"[49] in an attempt to show how Nolde's constructed persona was a product of its time. For example, Pois carried out a detailed comparison of the 1934 versus the 1949 editions of *Jahre der Kämpfe* and pointed out the opportunistic motives behind Nolde's original anti-Semitic writings which were later removed.

William S. Bradley's Ph.D. thesis of 1988, which was subsequently published in book form, is a study of the strong ties which Nolde's art and writing had with *völkisch* writers of the late 19th and early 20th century in Germany, such as Paul de Lagarde and Julius Langbehn. Bradley's study shows how these beliefs were manifested in Nolde's art and writing, and, in reference to Romanticism and National Socialism, how these beliefs "could inspire the highest and the lowest of human aspirations."[50] Bradley's work did much to explain the origins of some of Nolde's beliefs and to place his ideas in the larger cultural context of German history.

One of the most recent exhibitions which dealt with Nolde and his reputation in a new and different manner is the 1995-1996 exhibition curated by Peter Vergo, professor at the University of Essex, and by Felicity Lunn, curator at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, England. Although Nolde had been included in several group shows in Britain over the last decade, the Whitechapel Art Gallery mounted the first comprehensive one-person exhibition.[51] This exhibition then travelled to Copenhagen's new Museum of Modern Art. One of the most striking things about the accompanying catalogue is the tone and perspective of the non-German contributors. Most of the contributors were British and one was Danish; therefore, they did not approach Nolde and his work with the cultural baggage typical of German scholars. Vergo, for example, takes a sober, unsentimental look at Nolde's artistic achievements and attempts to deconstruct the self-image that Nolde presents in his autobiography. Vergo clarified the fact that Nolde joined "a factional party

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[49] Ibid., x.

[50] William S. Bradley, *Emil Nolde: A Prophet in His Own Land* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1986), 74.

[51] Jill Lloyd, "London and Copenhagen, Emil Nolde," *The Burlington Magazine* 138, 1, 116 (March 1996) : 209.

in the Nazi style in 1934 which was subsumed into the German Nazi Party the following year."[52] He placed Nolde's political involvement in the context of regional pressures, thus giving new insight into the revision of Nolde's image and re-evaluation of his artistic career. In addition, Vergo situated Nolde's artistic contribution in the larger context of modern 20th century art rather than celebrating the quintessential "Germanness" of Nolde's art, as most German critics have done. He calls Nolde a "great outsider" in the history of modern German art and notes that Nolde did not have any pupils and very few followers during his lifetime.[53] By generally comparing him with other moderns and putting him in the context of the development of modern art, Vergo points out that the only really unique aspect of Nolde's painting was in fact his use of colour. Vergo notes that Nolde's manner of painting hardly changed during four decades of his career: his subject matter was representational and he avoided subjects of modern life; he never ventured into abstraction, and there is little obvious trace of any stylistic development except in his move from a Post-Impressionist style to Expressionism early in his career.[54]

Other contributors to this catalogue take part in the new approach to Nolde. Felicity Lunn examined the subject of Nolde's attitude toward women. Nolde's view of women as "Madonnas or Eves" reflects an attitude typical of artists around the turn of the century. A valuable essay by Danish scholar Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen entitled "On the Borderline" treats the image of Nolde from a Danish point of view. Nørregård-Nielsen points out that not all Danes share the German adulation of the artist. He writes: "Few artists have produced an *oeuvre* that provokes such strong approval or disapproval. There is no room for lukewarm feelings where Nolde is concerned, especially not for those of us who regard him as someone from home."[55] (Nolde became a Danish citizen in 1920). According to Nørregård-Nielsen, Nolde's name evokes sensitive issues for Danes. In a 1920 referendum the old Danish duchy of Schleswig was divided into North Schleswig,

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[52] Peter Vergo, "Emil Nolde: Myth and Reality" in *Emil Nolde* ed. Peter Vergo and Felicity Lunn, (London: Whitechapel, 1995), 50.

[53] Ibid., 8.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen, "On the Borderline" in Vergo and Lunn, 79.

ceded to Denmark, and South Schleswig, which became part of Germany. Nørregård-Nielsen notes that a short time later a satirical jingle in the Danish press ran: "The reunion gave us Nolde. The Germans are welcome to keep him."[56] Nørregård-Nielsen approaches Nolde's art with wry objectivity, musing, "Many prominent art historians have visited the museum and found the pictures so detestable that they have rushed through the house as fast as possible in order to get out into the fresh air again, for they have seen them as expressing a primitive, strident degree of self-assertiveness."[57] Interestingly too, Nørregård-Nielsen emphasizes the role of Ada, Emil Nolde's Danish wife, in supporting the artist throughout his life. He even suggests that had Nolde not met her, he would have had much greater difficulty in realizing his artistic goals.

Like the scholars involved in the Whitechapel exhibition, who emphasize Nolde's work and the question of where he stands in the art of the 20th century, there are a number of German scholars who have recently adopted new approaches to Nolde's art. One of the most prominent is Manfred Reuther, current director of the Nolde Museum. His Ph.D. thesis has been published as a book entitled *Das Frühwerk Emil Noldes* (The Early Work of Emil Nolde) (1985). In it, Reuther focuses mainly on Nolde's youth, his rural North German origins, and his early years as a "craftsman" *(Kunstgewerbler)* to explain the life and work of the mature artist. Reuther claims that most of the themes and motifs of Nolde's later paintings originate from his childhood experiences, such as his family, his village, the Bible, nature; and he makes a bold assertion that Nolde's art did not undergo any fundamental changes once he had found his particular mode of expression. Reuther argues that this breakthrough happened in the late 1890s in Nolde's paintings of personified mountains and the portraits with exaggerated and grotesque features which Nolde entitled *Masks*.[58] To support this claim, Reuther looks back to drawings done by Nolde when he was in his teens and early twenties (1872-1883), and examines them as documents of Nolde's past and clues to Nolde's future development. The drawings from Nolde's youth are mainly done in a meticulous academic style. But during his

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[56] Ibid., 74.

[57] Ibid., 79.

[58] Manfred Reuther, *Das Frühwerk Emil Noldes* (Cologne: Dumont, 1985), 17.

apprenticeship years in Flensburg, Nolde saw himself, Reuther suggests, as an "outsider" who was always looking to portray *"Urerlebnisse"* (primeval experiences).[59] This search for the primeval or underlying characteristics of a person or place manifested itself, according to Reuther, in Nolde's early interest in portraits. These portraits often verged on caricature rather than actual likenesses and, even in Nolde's early years, tended toward exaggeration and the grotesque.[60] Reuther argues that Nolde consistently applied this interest to his later work and concludes that there is a thread of continuity from the beginning to the end of his *oeuvre*.

Similarly, Reuther's contribution to the exhibition catalogue edited by Tilman Osterwold (1988) has a similar thesis statement. In his chapter entitled *"Kontinuität und Wandel im Werk Emil Nolde"* (Continuity and Change in the Work of Emil Nolde), Reuther writes, "Very early on the opinion prevailed that Nolde was faithful to himself and that his work did not show real development." *("Schon früh setzt sich die Meinung durch, Nolde sie sich stets treu geblieben und sein Werk weise keine eigentliche Entwicklung auf.")* [61] Reuther supports this assertion with quotes from other art critics writing in the 1920s to the 1950s who made similar claims.

In 1994 the Nolde Foundation under the direction of Manfred Reuther, together with art historian Ingried Brugger, mounted an exhibition at the Kunstforum Bank in Vienna and published a catalogue. Brugger's article *"'Groteske Begegnungen' im Werk von Emil Nolde"* (Grotesque Encounters in the Work of Emil Nolde), is an excellent thematic study focusing on "grotesque interactions" and juxtapositions and their possible meanings in Nolde's work. She observes that Nolde typically sets up ambiguous encounters between people *(as in his painting Begegnung am Strand)*; between people and animals *(Der große Vogel);* and/or between two different worlds, such as the world of a missionary and that of "primitive" peoples *(Der Missionar)*. Brugger begins her article with Wolfgang Kayer's definition of the grotesque: "The grotesque is the alienated world.

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[59] Ibid., 66.

[60] Ibid., 78.

[61] Manfred Reuther "Kontinuität und Wandel im Werk Emil Noldes," in *Emil Nolde* ed. Tilman Osterwold, (Stuttgart: Würtembergischer Kunsterverein, 1988), 226.

It includes that which is familiar and consequently which suddenly apppears to us as foreign and monstrous. It is our world which has suddenly changed,"*("Die Groteske ist die entfremdete Welt. Dazu gehört , daß das, was uns vertraut und heimisch war, sich plötzlich als fremd und unheimlich enthüllt. Es ist unsere Welt, die sich plötzlich verwandelt hat.")*[62] She shows through examples of specific works by Nolde (such as *Der Missionar)* how he portrays the grotesque, not only in subject matter but also through the jarring colouration and the way in which he expresses his message, and how he involves the viewer in the process, forcing a response from him/her.

One of the greatest challenges in attempting a revised assessment of Emil Nolde's contribution to twentieth-century art is how to deal with the myth and the reality that surrounds this artist's persona and his work. Nolde's intriguing self-constructed image as a Romantic artist who was spiritually connected to his North German homeland appeals to deeply embedded German cultural values. His persistence in maintaining his artistic vision even to the point of being forbidden to paint by the National Socialists and his defiance of the *Malverbot* reads like a book. In fact, one of the most widely studied post-war German novels, Siegfried Lenz's *Die Deutschstunde*, attests to the appeal of Nolde's story. Nolde's own version of his life, his four volume autobiography, has dominated past scholarly assessments of his work. Scholars writing about Nolde in the late 1950s to the early 1990s have been particularly preoccupied with the question of Nolde's alleged membership in the National Socialist party and the presence of anti-Semitic statements in his autobiography. More recent scholars have, in contrast, emphasized Nolde's artistic output and attempted to place it in the context of the development of modern art in the twentieth century. At the same time, Nolde's legacy lives on through the Nolde Foundation, which faces its own challenges as a research centre and as a major sponsor of Nolde art exhibitions. As has been shown in this chapter, the Foundation has become a kind of custodian of the Nolde myth. At the same time, recent exhibitions have shown that the Foundation is involved in new approaches to Emil Nolde's life and work. These new approaches have led to important discoveries which are gradually deconstructing the Nolde

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62 Ingried Brugger, "'Groteske Begegnungen' im Werk Emil Noldes," in *Emil Nolde* eds. Brugger and Manfred Reuther (Vienna: Kunstforum Bank, 1994), 13.

myth. When taken together, these individual observations and discoveries create a new [re]-vision of Nolde's image, that of myth and reality.

Conclusion

Emil Nolde's reputation today is a combination of myth and reality. His artistic reputation has undergone great changes both during his lifetime and since his death in 1956. Throughout his life, his reputation was strongly affected by historical events, as traced in chapters one and two, which deal with his rise to fame and his negative encounter with National Socialism. In the Wilhelmine era, with the overall preference of the elite for academic art, Nolde, like other avant garde artists in Germany, had to struggle for any kind of recognition from the public or the official institutions controlled by the Kaiser. Nolde gained a small but dedicated group of patrons of his art, and he briefly joined the *Brücke* group in 1906 and the Berlin Secession from 1908 to 1910. During the Weimar Republic years of 1918 to 1933, Nolde's reputation increased steadily within artistic circles in Germany, and he was able to reach the pinnacle of his career. In this time of relatively fragile democracy, German Expressionist art was hailed as a symbol of all that the new Republic stood for in its hope for a new start: internationalism, individualism, modernism. Nolde's art, which had generally been harshly criticized if not completely ignored by the mainstream press of imperial Germany, was now celebrated both at home and internationally.

With the advent of the National Socialist regime, Nolde's reputation underwent a drastic change. Although Nolde's views on art were *völkisch*ly and nationalistically oriented, and he was initially drawn to the Nazi rhetoric, which to him emphasized a purification and revival of the German spirit, his beliefs and his artistic achievements meant little to the National Socialists. To them, his highly individualistic and intense expression, his distortion of form, and his unique use of colour were an affront to their strictly controlled art aesthetic. They branded Nolde, like many other modernist artists, German or otherwise, "degenerate." There were a few promising signs for Nolde in the early years of National Socialist rule, including the initial admiration of his work by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. But after Hitler's Nuremburg Party Congress speech in 1935, which

contained specific guidelines for the new art aesthetic, there was no hope that Nolde would be part of the Nazi art program. Despite his persistence in trying to explain the "Germanness" of his art to government officials, his reputation was systematically attacked, first with the 1937 "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich and then with a full-scale painting and exhibition prohibition issued to him in 1941. After the fall of National Socialism, Nolde resurfaced as a major figure in German art. He was awarded various honorary appointments, exhibition prizes, and medals. After his death, he even became the subject of Siegfried Lenz's popular novel *Die Deutschstunde*, which idealized him as a persecuted hero.

In addition to these historical events, the writings about Nolde's life and work also contributed to his reputation and to the reception of his art. Chapters three and four have examined the Nolde myth and its revision. Nolde's own writings as well as publications by his contemporaries did much to fabricate a strong and lasting mythical aura around his reputation. A number of his friends and patrons wrote celebratory reviews and articles about his life and work. Nolde himself articulated his personal myth in great detail in his four-volume autobiography written in the 1930s and 40s. In it, he described himself as a "primeval soul," a simple peasant, and a Christ-like prophet of and martyr for his vision of a true German art. Nolde's vision of himself is in the tradition of the late 18th and early 19th century Romantic notion of the artist as a genius. This notion in part provided the basis for the modernist ideal, which, inspired by the words of Nietzsche, developed into a vision of the artist as an anti-bourgeois outsider, part of an intellectual elite, who by sheer will would lead the way to a much-touted rebirth of humanity. Nolde embraced this popular artistic ideal in his search for a new German art.

After Nolde's death in 1956, his personal myth was enhanced and perpetuated in a number of ways, particularly by German scholars and critics. In the 1950s, German writers tended to approach Nolde from their own particular cultural point of view. A pervasive sense of guilt about the Nazi era, a desire for restitution *(Wiedergutmachung)*, and attempts to come to terms with the past, led a number of German scholars to downplay questions about Nolde's anti-Semitism and his National Socialist leanings in favour of a

more celebratory approach to his life and work. The focus tended to be on rehabilitating Nolde's tainted image. Early post-war German scholarship on Nolde typically celebrated him as a survivor of National Socialism. For scholars such as Martin Urban and Werner Haftmann, who both wrote about Nolde's *Unpainted Pictures* in 1971, these images became the primary focus of his *oeuvre* and a symbol of Nolde's defiance of the National Socialist *Malverbot*. Through their focus on the *Malverbot* , these scholars cast Nolde as a victim of the Nazis, and, by way of his *Unpainted Pictures*, characterized him as a quietly rebellious survivor of the Nazi nightmare.

Siegfried Lenz's 1968 novel *Die Deutschstunde* likewise enhanced this point of view. Lenz recast Nolde's "story" in an idealized light, making the protagonist Max Ludwig Nansen into a victim of National Socialism and a symbol for freedom of expression. Although Lenz's protagonist was based on a number of modernist artists' experiences, the parallels to Nolde, such as similar place names, titles of paintings, and personal experiences, are most obvious. Significantly, Lenz made no references to Nolde's petitions to the Nazis or to his anti-Semitic and racist statements. The subsequent film version, released in 1971, spread Lenz's story to an even wider audience, thereby popularizing the idealized image of Nolde.

In contrast to the German approach to Nolde criticism in the 1950s, American scholars emphasized different aspects in the revision of the Nolde myth. Initially, a number of scholars writing in the 1950s tended to whitewash Nolde's image. Bernard S. Myers and Peter Selz, who in 1957 wrote the first comprehensive studies in English on German Expressionism, both glossed over the question of Nolde's anti-Semitism and his National Socialist involvement in an attempt to present a generally favourable impression of German art to American audiences. In contrast, in his 1963 publication for the Museum of Modern Art, Selz made some emphatic generalizations about Nolde as "a strong believer in theories of racial superiority," who was "frequently guilty of employing openly anti-Semitic attacks against Liebermann and Cassirer," and who became "one of the charter members of the Nazi party . . . in 1920." During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the question of Nolde's anti-Semitism and his National Socialist leanings developed into a central concern

among American Nolde scholars. The political climate of the time in the United States, owing especially to the protests of the 1960s, contributed to this preoccupation with ferreting out what had previously been whitewashed. Two important sourcebooks of official and personal documents edited by Herschel Chipp (1968) and Victor Miesel (1970) provided the first English-language examples of Nolde's writings. Chipp's selection of a 1909 excerpt from *Jahre der Kämpfe* focused on the image of Nolde the Romantic artist. Miesel included examples of Nolde's writings, among them excerpts which show examples of his Romantic concept of the artist and his writings on primitive art. Two years later, Miesel also published Nolde's self-justifying letter to Goebbels.

In the 1980s two scholars examined Nolde and his art in wider cultural contexts. William Bradley conducted a detailed study of the links between Nolde's art and *völkisch* ideology. Robert Pois approached Nolde's art and writings from a Freudian psychoanalytical point of view, dealing, among other issues, with Nolde's intense identification with Christ, an aspect central to the Nolde myth. Pois also related Nolde's search for an idealized past to the German Romantic tradition and asserted that Nolde's own search was a microcosm of that of the German nation.

In the 1990s, scholars and critics began to focus increasingly on Nolde's work and on assessing his place in the larger context of twentieth-century modern art. This new approach tended to shift the focus away from the Nolde persona. By divorcing him from the context of his consciously constructed image of the prophet and practitioner of a new German art, scholars have come closer to an assessment of the "reality" of his artistic innovation: his original use of colour, his mastery of etching techniques, his predilection for distortion, exaggeration and the grotesque, and his choice of specific recurring themes. Peter Vergo points out that Nolde's subject matter and style did not change to any great extent during more than forty years of creative activity. Indeed, Manfred Reuther asserted that after Nolde's initial breakthrough with his personified mountain postcards, his artistic expression did not change significantly.

Finally, Vergo elucidated Nolde's actual involvement with the National Socialist Party, pointing out that Nolde could not have been aware of the consequences of

membership in a group that started out as a "factional party in the Nazi style." The fact that Nolde later made use of his party membership smacks of opportunism but is perhaps understandable in his desperate situation. Vergo also acknowledged Nolde's espousal of *völkisch* ideas as quite characteristic of the rural population and regional pressures that Nolde experienced. Vergo suggested that many of the ideas Nolde embraced such as his disenchantment with progress, modern urban life, bourgeois values, and the decline in rural traditions were addressed by thinkers and critics with seemingly conflicting perspectives, including many Expressionists, *völkisch* thinkers, and National Socialists. What remains is that Nolde's reputation today is both myth and reality. This view is supported by the latest efforts of the Nolde Museum in its functions as custodian of Nolde's legacy and as a sponsor of exhibitions and research designed to uncover the real Nolde and his contribution to modern art of the twentieth century.

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