

THE LEADER OF TIME AND THE SHACKLED BOURGEOIS LADY: A PSYCHOANALYTIC AND ICONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TWO PAINTINGS BY CARL ALEXANDER SIMON

O LÍDER DE SEU TEMPO E
A BURGUESA AGRILHOADA:
UMA ANÁLISE PSICANALÍTICA E
ICONOLÓGICA DE DUAS PINTURAS
DE CARL ALEXANDER SIMON

EL LÍDER DE SU TIEMPO Y LA
BURGUESA ENCADENADA: UN
ANÁLISIS PSICOANALÍTICO E
ICONOLÓGICO DE DOS PINTURAS
DE CARL ALEXANDER SIMON

MIGUEL GAETE

ABSTRACT

Original Article*

Miguel Gaete**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3255-349X>

** The University of York,
United Kingdom

* This paper is part of a broader research about Carl Alexander Simon's colonisation project in Chile, which is currently supported by Gerda Henkel Stiftung through its programme of grants and scholarships. The analysis of the two paintings addressed in this essay was carried out in Weimar thanks to a fellowship from Klassik Stiftung Weimar, who provided first-hand access to the artworks and archives of its collection.

DOI: 10.11606/issn.2178-0447.
ars2022. 202452

This paper involves the psychoanalytic and iconological analysis of two paintings by the Romantic artist Carl Alexander Simon held at the Schlossmuseum in Weimar: *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* and *Die Braut des Künstlers*. Simon produced these paintings in 1830, almost 20 years before travelling to South America, where he continued his artistic career and carried out an ambitious colonisation scheme. This is the first study to scrutinise these paintings. This essay's primary purpose is to unveil overlooked aspects of Simon's works, determining the extent to which intricate personality traits began to emerge in these works. The central argument is that various features of these paintings are early instantiations of a messiah complex which will be determinant to understanding his colonising endeavour in Chile.

KEYWORDS German Romanticism; Psychoanalysis; Iconology; Latin America; Colonisation

RESUMO

Este artigo compreende a análise psicanalítica e iconológica de duas pinturas do artista romântico Carl Alexander Simon localizadas no Schlossmuseum, em Weimar: *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* e *Die Braut des Künstlers*. Simon realizou essas pinturas em 1830, quase 20 anos antes de viajar para a América do Sul, onde prosseguiu com sua carreira artística e empreendeu um ambicioso plano de colonização. Este é o primeiro estudo a esmiuçar tais pinturas. O principal objetivo da pesquisa é revelar aspectos ignorados dos trabalhos de Simon, determinando em que medida traços complexos de personalidade passam a emergir nas obras. O argumento central é o de que vários aspectos dessas pinturas configuram representações precoces de um complexo messiânico determinante para a compreensão de sua empreitada colonizadora no Chile.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Romantismo alemão; Psicanálise;
Iconologia; América Latina; Colonização

RESUMEN

Este artículo trata del análisis psicoanalítico e iconológico de dos pinturas del artista romántico Carl Alexander Simon ubicadas en el Schlossmuseum, en Weimar: *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* y *Die Braut des Künstlers*. Simon realizó estas pinturas en 1830, casi 20 años antes de viajar a Sudamérica, donde continuó su carrera artística y llevó a cabo un ambicioso plan de colonización. Este es el primer estudio que analiza tales pinturas. El propósito principal de la investigación es desvelar aspectos ignorados de la obra de Simon, determinando hasta qué punto los intrincados rasgos de personalidad comenzaron a emerger en estas obras. El argumento central es que varios aspectos de estas pinturas configuran representaciones tempranas de un complejo mesiánico que es determinante para entender su quehacer colonizador en Chile.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Romanticismo alemán; Psicoanálisis;
Iconología; América Latina; Colonización





INTRODUCTION

The German Romantic artist Carl Alexander Simon (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1805-Strait of Magellan, Chile, 1852) embodies the utmost expression of a Romantic artist in continuous conflict with the world and himself. During his life, Simon endeavoured to understand every aspect of reality, scrutinising it from perspectives as diverse as poetry, medicine, politics, philosophy, economy, and art criticism, becoming a revolutionary artist in the fullest extension of the word, even enduring political persecution and exile because of his ideas amidst the turbulent political environment in mid-nineteenth-century Germany (MUSPER, 1929, p. 23–31).

Between 1821 and 1824, Simon completed his artistic formation at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and Munich. In the latter city, he became acquainted with the principles of German Romanticism and the Nazarenes (aka Brotherhood of St. Luke or *Lukasbund*), being instructed in painting and drawing by acknowledged masters such as Peter Cornelius (KRAUSS, 2004, p. 90).

Simon's heterogenous oeuvre is currently scattered all over Germany and Chile. His German works comprise arabesque drawings for Christoph Martin Wieland's *Oberon*, several designs and paintings for the Wartburg Castle commissioned by Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna in 1838 (*The Singers War* still hangs on the castle's walls), and a few portraits and self-portraits (WARTBURG JAHRBUCH 2003, 2004). In the southern regions of Chile, where the artist immigrated in 1850, Simon made hundreds of drawings and oil sketches of Indigenous people and nature. Moreover, his legacy includes a novel and poems, many of which have gone missing long ago, political pamphlets that for some scholars resemble "too much" the anarchist ideas of Proudhon, Fourier and Cabet, and an obscure treatise of colonisation published in Stuttgart in 1848 (PEREIRA SALAS, 1967, p. 11).¹

Although, in general, the entirety of Simon's writing and visual productions greatly evinces his inner struggles and complex worldview, these features become particularly detectible in two of his early works currently held by the Schlossmuseum in Weimar, the city in which he settled between 1835 and 1840. The two paintings are *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* (*Self-portrait with Tyrolean Hat*) and the portrait of Charlotte Kindermann titled *Die Braut des Künstlers*

(The Artist's Bride), both completed in 1830.² This essay delves for the first time into these unfathomed artworks, advancing an interpretation in the light of psychoanalysis and iconology. Such a methodological approach is justified by the fact that, to date, the totality of the scarce literature dealing with Simon's work does it almost exclusively relying on a biographical method, disregarding a series of codes and deeper features lying beneath seemingly unambiguous, naïve, and easy-to-read paintings and drawings. This essay does not entirely discard this biographical information but uses it to elaborate a more complete picture of the man and his oeuvre. It is also pertinent to mention that different events of his life will be conjured up in this essay in a non-linear way, prioritising their suitability for understanding these two paintings.³

This essay pursues making Simon's legacy more accessible while opening the range of interpretations of his oeuvre. Arguably, the lack of different approaches to studying Simon's drawings, paintings, and writing is the main reason why, compared to the host of Romantic artists coming out between 1750 and 1850 in Germany, he has remained considerably ignored and underrated. Such a phenomenon is patent not only in Germany, his *Vaterland*, but also in Chile, the adopted land where Simon developed part of

his career. Thus, this essay's main aim is twofold. Firstly, to study Simon's work from a fresh perspective shedding new light on his motivations and the rugosities of his oeuvre and secondly, to install him on the map of German Romantic art in South America.

■ ADAM ON TOUR

Simon completed *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut*, one of his two known self-portraits, in 1830 (figure 1). This painting shows him at the age of 25. According to Simon's principal biographer Theodor Musper, the artist was travelling through Italy at that age. His *Grand Tour* would have taken place between 1827 and 1831.⁴ He visited Rome, Naples, and Sicily during that period, returning to Berlin after a short stay in Switzerland. Therefore, it seems highly likely that Simon executed this painting on his way back to his homeland through the Alps.

Figure 1.
Carl Alexander Simon,
Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut, 1830.
Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 41 cm.
Collection: Schlossmuseum Weimar, Germany.



The iconographic programme of the painting centres on Simon as a Romantic traveller. He depicts himself wearing the typical attire decorated in the Brixental style of the Tyrolean Lower Inn Valley (*Tiroler Unterinntal*), consisting of a dark blue feathered hat, white shirt, and brown leather jacket with some embroidered decorations. In the background, the white caps of the Alps, part of the valley, and lower slopes are discernible. The thick vegetation and local plant life, including edelweiss and globeflowers, surround Simon's figure while part of the footpath becomes visible on the left. In his right hand, the artist clasps a wooden walking cane while the arm holds what seems to be a travel journal. His general aspect is that of a man in harmony with nature, clean, and pure. The beholder does not notice any sign of fatigue visible on his face or clothing. On the contrary, he looks fresh and tidy, which is inconsistent with the image of a peregrine who has spent a long time hiking across Italy and the Alps. Based on this first hint, I advocate an interpretation of this painting as an idealised self-portrait that shows Simon's intricate relationship to the external world and some key features of his psychological frame of mind. Although in *sensu stricto* all self-portraits can be regarded as a personal statement at their core, I shall demonstrate

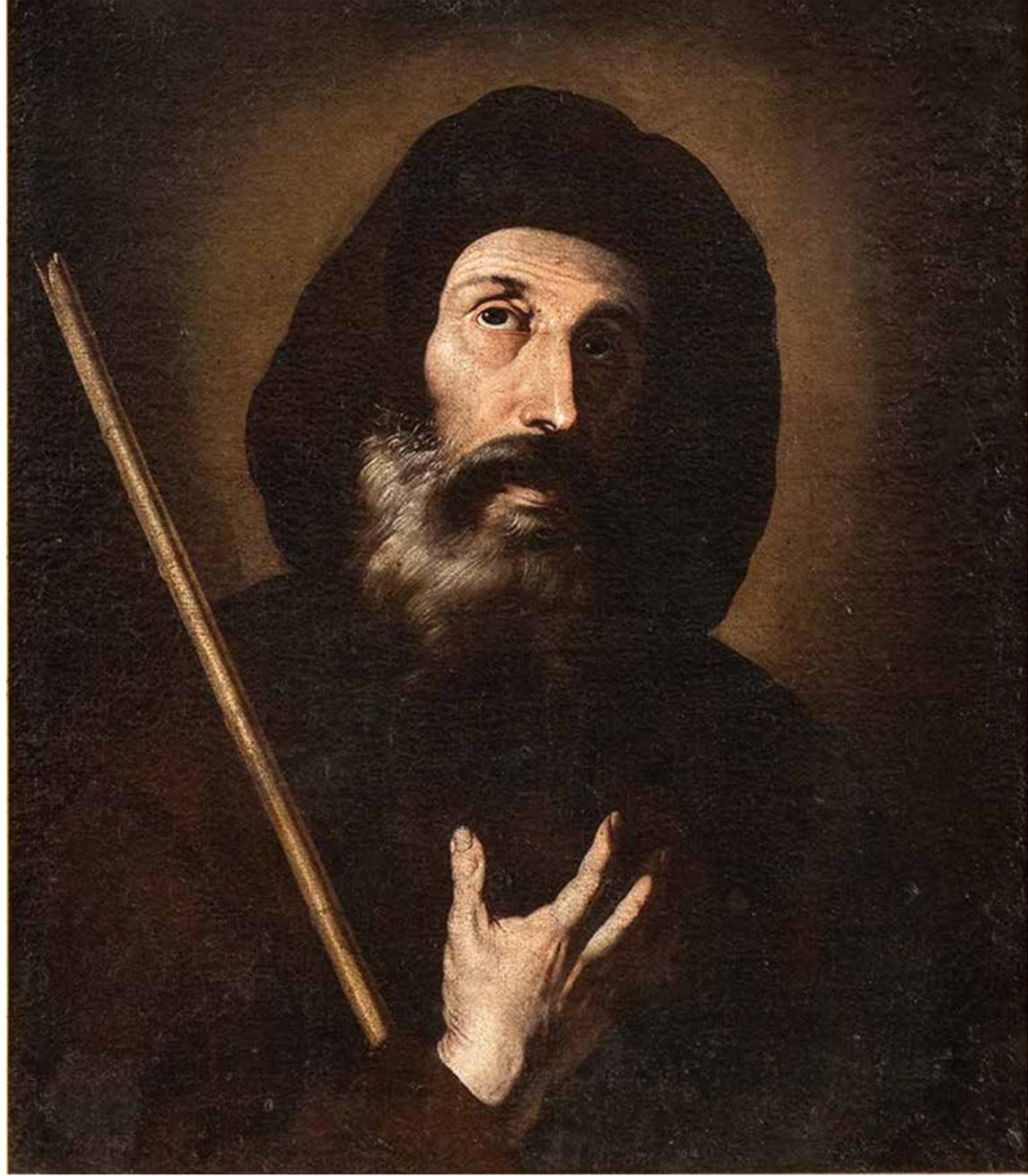
that Simon, drawing upon a series of recognisable symbols, employed this painting as a declaration of principles that brings together the political, moral, and psychological spheres. But an even more provocative thesis is that this self-portrait would expose the germination of Simon's acute messianic impulse.⁵

Let us focus first on Simon's gestures, face, and attachments. His head slightly inclined, crystalline eyes, dreamy, compassionate, and pietistic gaze, in conjunction with a semi-hieratical posture, bestow on Simon an aura of sanctity. His semi-open mouth and tightly clutched notebook are two forceful indicators of someone who has a message to deliver and has been called to a mission. Furthermore, Simon's immaculate white blouse creates a visual link with the whiteness of the snowed Alpine peaks and the clear blue sky, enhancing the image of purity and the "Christian sweetness" that imbues his figure (PEREIRA SALAS, 1967, p. 11).

A closer look at this painting reveals more components that attest to this interpretation. For instance, the staff and the hand lying on the chest, near the heart, are tokens widely employed in the Christian economy (figure 2). Aside from its essential functionalism for foot travel – when the walking stick fulfils the function of a "third leg", serving as an extension of the arm useful

for pushing away shrubbery and tree branches, providing stability when crossing water or walking on snow and ice – this defining icon of the pilgrim has long been construed as a representation of the Holy Trinity, a symbol of the Good Shepherd, and an emblem of authority (SNODGRASS, 2015, p. 105). By the same token, it is very well-known that, in arts, hand gestures were means to communicate non-verbal messages about the holy trinity. As Frances Teague argues, “people perform meaning with their hands, as well as with their words” (2003, p. 218). Placing the hand over the chest denotes honesty and closeness while also suggesting inwardness, a connection between the exterior and the inner self.

Figure 2.
Gregorio Preti, *Saint Francis of Paola*,
circa 1630. Oil on canvas,
66.5 x 58.5 cm. Private collection.



This initial construal is consistent with a series of events experienced by Simon at the time of painting his self-portrait and with others that would come later in his life in which, very often, the fragile fence between the inner and the external worlds succumbed, resulting in a sharp dissociation with reality. Musper identifies Simon's studies of German idealistic philosophy in Berlin as the key episode that moulded his character and worldview: "the deeper he immersed himself in the realm of ideas, the more impossible it became for him to find his way in reality" (MUSPER, 1929, p. 24). It was after his encounter with the burgeoning metropolis and its viciousness (*Lasterhaftigkeit*) and after undergoing the despotism of the dominant aristocracy, which he loathed intensely because of its "spurious wisdom" (*Afterweisheit*), that he decided to depart for Italy. In this fashion, his self-portrait was made in a time of profound disillusionment and discontent, which would only increase as time passed. Simon spent the following years in "the greatest solitude" (*größten Einsamkeit*) in Tyrol and Italy until 1832, when we found him back in Berlin and in marriage with Charlotte Kindermann (MUSPER, 1929, p. 24).⁶

Simon's inclination to withdraw from the world, already manifested in his first journey, is a crucial point to grasp his self-portrait fully. It certainly brings to mind the initiation journeys of mystic figures, pilgrims, and prophets such as Zarathustra, Buddha, or the Nazarene. By way of illustration, in Chile, Simon lived a semi-withdrawn existence while drawing plants and trees and writing poetry frantically. In many of his drawings, he appears as a lonely hiker, standing behind or sitting near trees, imperceptible at first glance, utterly camouflaged and unified with nature (figure 3). Simon's account includes long walks of several days through the untamed and unmapped jungle of Valdivia and Lake Llanquihue in southern Chile. In 1852, some notes from his diary show him living in a hut next to the Pacific Ocean in an inaccessible spot and away from any human contact, famished and only surrounded by "a poetic nature", "away from the world of the living" (VAN MEURS, 2016, p. 43). Thus, for all intents and purposes, more than a *Grand Tour*, Simon's voyage in Italy and Tyrol constituted the ultimate rite of passage, triggering aspects of his personality that will significantly reverberate in his work and behaviour.

Figure 3.
Carl Alexander Simon, *Coihue (a Tree)*, 1850.
Pencil on paper, 31 x 22 cm,
Collection: Museo Nacional
de Bellas Artes, Santiago.



There was a crucial chapter of Simon’s life that transpired upon his return to Berlin after the journey in question that substantiates the last point. Reportedly, on one occasion, Simon engaged in a conflict with the novelist Willibald Alexis (the pen name of Alexander Häring). He accused Simon of being an atheist because of a painting titled *The Creation*. Alexis “destroyed my artistic existence by proving that I subscribe to dangerous theories”, Simon relates (MUSPER, 1929, p. 24).⁷

Although the painting at issue is inaccessible today and is probably missing (Musper imprecisely mentions that it is in Leipzig, but no record of it has been found), it is still possible to surmise why Willibald Alexis called Simon an atheist. The self-portrait we are dealing with in this essay, plus other pieces of evidence such as writings and drawings produced in Chile years later, give us substantial indications to believe that, in *The Creation*, Simon incorporated symbols that perhaps mirrored too enthusiastically a growing personal and heretic view of that biblical episode. The severity of Willibald Alexis's reaction suggests that Simon might have included a representation of himself as Adam in this painting, which would correspond to the incipient messianic turn already visible in his 1830 self-portrait.

The fact is that Simon developed a distinct interest in the Adamic myth throughout the different stages of his life. His self-perception as “the first man” together with the notions of the Garden of Eden and the *Creation* would appear recurrently in Simon's work both in Germany and Chile. In the latter, Simon engaged in a colonisation process that overtly linked Paradise to a new *Vaterland* (HEBERLEIN, 2008). Based on the idea of a non-finished image of humankind, Simon explicitly

called South American and Chilean landscapes a “*Paradies*”, where “the image of mankind will be harmoniously completed” (SIMON; BROMME, 1850, p. 10).⁸ He employed different strategies to reinforce such a connection. One of them was the inclusion in many drawings of giant trees, a forceful symbol of the Garden of Eden (figure 4) (GAETE, 2022). For instance, in this sketch, Simon denominates the rudimentary *Hütte* (cabin) built beside the giant tree as “my primitive palace”. In addition, the expressions “first aspect” and “first foundations” appear all over his written account and drawings. By doing this, Simon was investing himself with the title of “the first man”, a pioneer, Adam, in this world that he was erecting from the ground up.

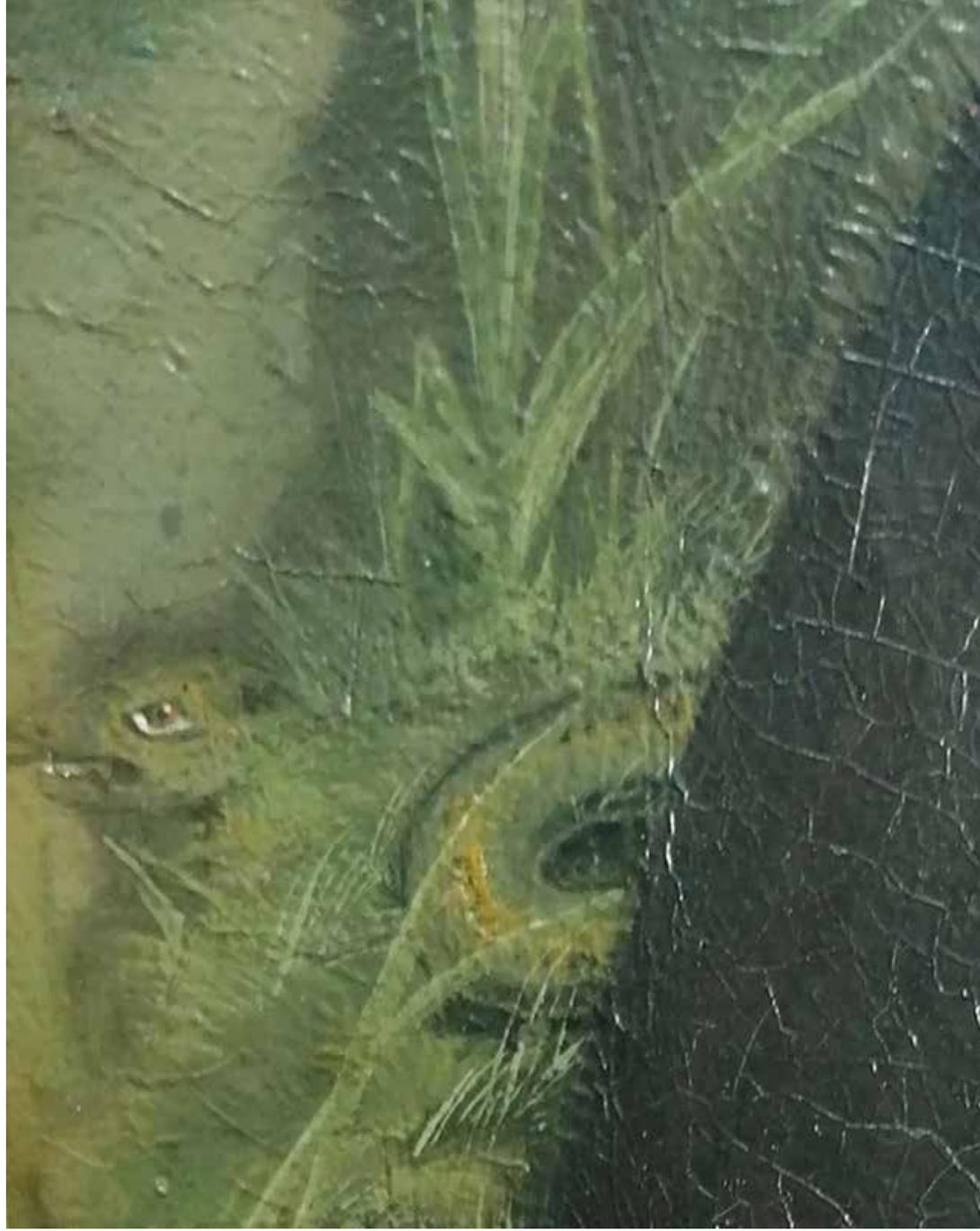
Figure 4.
Carl Alexander Simon, *Primeros cimientos del Puerto Trinidad del Trumao*
(First foundations of Puerto Trinidad del Trumao founded by me on 19 Octob 1850
and appearance of my primitive
Palace), 1850. Drawing on paper.
Collectio: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Chile.



THE SNAKE IN THE GARDEN

Given this predisposition, it should not seem rare to us that Simon has included a human-eyed serpent hidden in the foliage behind him (figure 5). On second thought, this symbol endows the Alpine landscape with an undeniable Edenic undertone that goes unnoticed at first glance. At the time of the execution of this painting, the pursuance of purity was something present in Simon's vocabulary already. We must not forget that he left Berlin because of its "viciousness" and "depravity". The symbolism of the serpent as the embodiment of sin and death, at least in Germany, was widely accepted beyond the Christian dogma. An unequivocal illustration of this point is Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1885). Although written almost fifty years after Simon rendered this painting, the similarities with a particular passage from that text in which Zarathustra enters a "region of death" resounds forcefully: "For it was a valley that all animals avoided, even the predators; except for a species of hideous, thick, green snakes that would come here to die when they grew old. And for this reason, the shepherds called this valley: Snake Death" (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 213).

Figure 5.
Carl Alexander Simon,
Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut (detail),
1830. Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 41 cm.
Collection: Schlossmuseum Weimar, Germany.



Contrary to what one could believe, the serpent in psychoanalysis is far from being a mere sexual symbol that appears in dreams or neurotic phantasy. Depending on the context, it might represent deceit, immortality and regeneration (FORTUNE, 1926). But also, the serpent is the quintessential incarnation of evil. These connotations seem to suit what Simon was trying to express through his painting. Like in Nietzsche's story, Simon also thought of an evil green snake to convey the idea of a menace latent in the external world. Such a feeling would remain throughout his entire life, though with variations. In Chile, for instance, Simon assumed the environment's menaces as part of a grander call for the sake of art but also as something that he had to overcome to accomplish an even loftier mission as a redeemer of the German people. The artist makes this view explicit in the many letters addressed to his brother-in-law. In one of these missives, Simon warns him about the country's perilous yet mesmerising nature: "I will be exposed to many dangers in Chile. My stay will be several months in the most secluded jungle, where my studies call me" (SCHMALZ, p. 91).

Pushing the argument further, and considering that this painting was made in Germany, the serpent rises as a symbol

of the institutions and pervasive aristocracy despised and confronted by the artist passionately. The serpent's dominance over space and powerful presence reinforces this appreciation. While all the animals evade the valley of death, the serpent is the only creature that dwells there, Nietzsche says. In Simon's painting, we also see no other animal depicted. Likewise, Simon evokes the image of the shepherd in the valley, who in this case is himself, first, to set the contrast between good and evil subtly, and second, to articulate the idea of an old world that is left behind and transmuted into a new reality. Simon left Germany because, in his mind, the country, and Europe in general, was "growing old and decrepit, languishing on its sickbed of slavery" (SIMON; BROMME, 1850, p. 33), a description that recalls the image of the green snakes going to the valley to die when they become old, according to Nietzsche's narration. All of this corroborates that the serpent represents Simon's old world, Germany, Europe, whilst the lonely walker, the shepherd, embodies the man in the quest for the land where to live a "life full of awareness", a world where the "impulse towards freedom and self-determination" will prevail, as he portrays Chile (SIMON; BROMME, 1850, p. 33).⁹ In this manner, travelling and death converge in the same principles of transformation and passage to a new reality in his self-portrait.

PROMETHEUS IN CHAINS AND THE PROPHETIC EYE

That this painting showcases something incubating in Simon's work will become more apparent in the subsequent years. Another passage of his biography reveals that in 1845 Simon was planning an oil painting with a size of 30 x 26 feet. Although this project seemingly never came to fruition, it is still illuminating. Its subject matter was an allegory of "the liberation of the human spirit" represented by Prometheus (MUSPER, 1929, p. 29). Interestingly, in the second known self-portrait of Simon (1839), he depicted himself as a shackled artist (figure 6). The reference to the myth of Prometheus is conspicuous. Again, the artist perceives himself as someone chosen to free the world but suffers in such an enterprise. In a concrete sense, this drawing is another instantiation of Simon's Adamic and messianic inclinations. Scholars, in effect, have long noticed the analogies between Prometheus and Adam (followed by the similarities between Pandora and Eve) as symbols of the human condition (KREITZER, 1994). Simon's nakedness and bodily expression imply a strong link with the notion of the first man's innocence, whose soul is in agony and condemned to eternal torment.

Figure 6.
Carl Alexander Simon,
Selfportrait, 1839. Pencil on paper.
Collection: © Staatsgalerie Stuttgart .



In Simon, the Promethean quest for the freedom of the human race from Zeus took a political shape after the Stuttgart “bread riot” (*Stuttgarter Brotkrawall*) of 1847 and the posterior revolution of 1848-1849, in which he participated actively, defying and revealing against the local authorities, just like Adam and Prometheus did against their respective gods. In Stuttgart, Simon became embroiled in political disputes and sought contact with such revolutionaries and democrats as Friedrich Römer, Paul Pfitzer, and Franz Tafel (MUSPER, 1974, p. 8). Amidst the tremendous political and social turmoil, Simon espoused socialist ideas. After confronting the military force, Simon was condemned to exile. While hiding in different places to avoid the expulsion, Simon’s convictions became more vigorous, casting harsh comments against the monarchy (MUSPER, 1929, p. 29). In the winter of 1848, he had to flee to France with a few comrades after voicing that monarchy was “as rotten as a bad apple” (MUSPER, 1929, p. 29). Living in exile seems to have just reinvigorated Simon’s pietistic impulses. In France, Simon experienced hunger and cold and begged for food for the first time. Like the Messiah, “only with the poorest of the poor he finds compassion and mercy”, his biographer states (MUSPER, 1929, p. 30).

During his life as an expatriate in France, Simon developed more attitudes of a man in the path of a particular form of illumination. His diary includes several passages in which he speaks to the poor, spreading his gospel. One of those conversations took place in a cart that had picked him up on the route. The driver was a servant: “I spoke to him of the misery of human society”, Simon relates. “It has to get better—the man replied, clenching his fist—and this is how it gets better! The poor get rich, the rich get poor”, Simon responds (SIMON, 1938b, p. 3).¹⁰ With similar intensity, Simon reflects on solitude and nature. In Lyon, he writes that because of the “depravity of human society”, he had always longed for the “solitude and peace of nature”, “the misery of a quiet life”, preferring even enduring hunger and begging, so that he does not have “to witness the curse of time” (SIMON, 1938b, p. 8).¹¹

While living as an ascetic in Provence, Simon went into an apparent state of ecstasy and delirium. On 13 January 1849, Simon experienced a semi-religious awakening, whereupon he arose as a prophet. In a state of rapture, he wrote, “I must go across, I must! It is more than a human longing, it is a divine trait—a destiny—I am a leader of the time” (SIMON, 1938b, p. 29).¹² What he cryptically added next, using convoluted language, prefigures

the underlying purpose of his journey to South America while supplying us with a complete picture of his emotional state:

I must lay the foundation for a new people's temple and go down with them. I accomplish, and should what I love also perish with me. – It must happen. My eye has become prophetic. My spirit has seen its future on the shore of the sea, open in front of me lies the distance!

I see peoples of higher cultures in the paradise of this earth, blessing my name! – Whether they curse it, whether I lie forgotten deep in the abyss of history, I must accomplish it nonetheless and then I want to blossom from the deep. I have fulfilled what I wanted! (SIMON, 1938b, p. 29)¹³

Simon's aspiration to build a new world in a distant land for his children and those who despise him will become a "sacred duty" (*heilige Pflichten*) to him (SIMON, 1938b, p. 42).¹⁴ Resolute to bring this task to completion, Simon returned to Stuttgart from exile and founded the Society for National Emigration and Colonization in 1849 (PEREIRA SALAS, 1967, p. 11).¹⁵ This society is no other thing than the formal avenue of a mission revealed in a state of trance. Its ultimate goal was to create a new world and leave behind the "region of death" that represented certain social circles of Germany to him, paving the "way for democracy" and laying "the foundation

for a social order based on social principles on the other side of the ocean” (MUSPER, 1974, p. 10). In hindsight, there is something prophetic in the fact that Simon has depicted himself with the Alps in the background. Twenty years later, the natural wonder framing his idea of Paradise would be the Andes. In seeking a dreamland overseas, Simon projected images of *Vaterland*, including the Alps, onto this new territory. The “new man” “must start where he breathes air similar to that of the fatherland (*Vaterland*) and where he can grow the food of homeland”, states Simon (1850, p. 29).¹⁶

The set of ideas that he incorporated in his treatise *Die Auswanderung der Demokraten und Proletarier und deutsch-nationale Kolonisation des südamerikanischen Freistaates Chile* reaffirms the hypothesis that his 1830 self-portrait heralded a scenario where he would rise as a saviour, giving us, in turn, some clues about the porous membrane that separated his idealism from a messiah complex. The general flavour of this treatise is of a man who considers himself the emancipator of the oppressed, leading those who believed in his project to the promised land: “If you cannot take the tyrants away from the peoples, then take the peoples away from the tyrants”, was Simon’s motto (MUSPER, 1974, p. 10).¹⁷ As though he was a pastor leading a herd – as shown in his self-portrait – and assuming

a god-like authority blended with unmistakable biblical rhetoric, Simon gave order and structure to this new world: “six German immigrant tribes (*Stämme*) each consisting of 1,000 families and 500 unmarried men who are able to bear arms, are first to gain a foothold in southern Chile” (SIMON; BROMME, 1850, p. 52). Then other tribes should spread from here to the rest of South America, Simon determinedly commands.

THE SHACKLED BOURGEOIS LADY

Simon rendered the portrait of Charlotte Kindermann in 1830 (figure 7), two years before they officially married. That he has painted it the same year as his self-portrait gives us a reasonable ground for believing that there is a connection between the two paintings and that they are therefore better understood conjointly, without disregarding, of course, that the portrait of Frau Kindermann possesses its own merits.

Most descriptions of this portrait agree that Simon depicted Charlotte Kindermann beautifully. The artist gives prominence to the young lady’s handsome facial features and

voluptuous figure enveloped with velvety fabrics that leave her shoulders sensually uncovered. Charlotte's lips "denote sensuality, and her eyes attention and intelligence", a commentator claims (PEREIRA SALAS, 1967, p. 8). However, I would like to propose a somewhat different viewpoint, posing the thesis that this painting can be interpreted as a mirror onto which Simon reflects his own fears and anxieties.

For this painting, the artist chose to portray his fiancée in a domestic space. Considering the date and the luxurious furnishings it seems very likely that the backdrop corresponds to the Kindermann's house. Using elements drawn from the Biedermeier style, Simon depicts Charlotte Kindermann slightly inclined forward and seated on the edge of a red couch adorned with green satin cushions. As it was customary, the domestic space is gendered. The glossy and delicately embroidered coach confers the stereotypical feminine ambience on the scene. Furthermore, Simon purposely matches Charlotte Kindermann's clothing with the materiality of the furniture, suggesting a similar decorative nature.

Figure 7.
Carl Alexander Simon,
Die Braut des Künstlers, 1830.
Oil on canvas, 101 x 77 cm.
Collection: Schlossmuseum Weimar, Germany.



Perhaps more striking is that although ostensibly safe and intimate, the interior space in this painting is as potentially menacing as the external setting of Simon's self-portrait. At a second glance, the atmosphere appears sombre, while Charlotte's posture is constrained and uncomfortable. This form of representing his fiancée finds a feasible explanation in psychoanalysis. The identification of the house with the female genitals, or more generally, with the female body, gained noticeable momentum with Freud (2014, p. 146). In this light, Simon might have considered Charlotte Kindermann's sensual and voluptuous body, the danger lurking outside, as though she was the carnal version of the serpent in his self-portrait. That she is wearing jewels on her forehead and wrists, directing in this way the viewers' gaze towards non-sexual parts, attests to this point. In this fashion, although employing different symbols, both paintings would allude to Simon's fears of the exterior world. The artist, however, does not express such anxiety through the opposition interior – exterior of the house, as one might suppose when contrasting the natural setting of his self-portrait to the dull interior of Frau Kindermann's room. Instead, Simon developed it on a deeper level by rejecting his outwardness which ultimately

included everything and everybody outside his physical body. This circumstance justifies, at least partly, both his inclination to self-isolate and his obsession with building a new world from scratch across the ocean since that was a sphere that he could control, as the extremely detailed instructions contained in his treatise of colonisation reveal.

From a different point of view, it seems reasonable to suggest that Simon rendered this painting with the unconscious purpose of demarcating the opposite realms that he and Charlotte Kindermann inhabited. As it becomes patent, Simon furnishes his extensive world with flowers, plants, mountains, and a vast and clear horizon flavoured with biblical undertones. In contrast, he gives Charlotte a place in the province of the vulgar bourgeoisie, surrounded by silky furniture and garments. Thus, while he is out there engrossed in nature, and the mission of re-enacting the foundation of *Vaterland* overseas was germinating in his mind, she is forced to remain secluded in the domestic space, immaculate, frozen in time.

The portrait of Charlotte Kindermann represents all the things that Simon deeply despised, commencing with the domestic space. The house's interior represented to Simon a source

of enormous distress, as he would express a few years later. There is a passage from his exile diary which is particularly revealing of this circumstance. There, Simon describes his feelings regarding the inner space, referring to his room as a place worse than prison:

Confined to my room, which I am not allowed to leave because the police are looking for me, I cannot leave it without a cold, indifferent voice, even contemptuous feelings. As if I were not there, as if I did not count. I hardly endure it – I eat the bread of contempt in my own house. In prison, the jailer comes, gives bread and water and speaks some words. I sit here for days. No one approaches, the newspaper flutters through the barely open door, a knock, a head half stretched out is enough to eat, all because I got deeper into the heart of time (MUSPER, 1974, p. 9).¹⁸

A specific element in this portrait of Charlotte Kindermann operates as a *punctum*, using Roland Barthes' very well-known term (BARTHES, 1981). The objects that prick our eyes are Charlotte's bracelets. The symbolic presence of this piece of jewellery specifically relates to the feeling of confinement experienced by Simon throughout his life while also exposing some interesting subconscious aspects. The two bracelets evoke handcuffs and, more explicitly, the shackles of Simon's self-portrait as Prometheus (figure 8). There are at least

two interconnected interpretations of this parallelism. However contentious it may seem, Simon was at the same time unconsciously punishing Charlotte for her social origin while projecting onto her a repressed sadomasochistic tendency.



Figure 8.
Carl Alexander Simon, self-portrait and
Die Braut des Künstlers (details).

Revealingly, chains, handcuffs, shackles, and the replication of prison-like environments—a scenario that entails deprivation and isolation—were all ubiquitous elements in Simon’s oeuvre and life and also form part of the repertoire of bondage practices (WEINBERG; WILLIAMS; MOSER, 1984). Charlotte Kindermann’s privileged socio-economical background plays a double part in this interpretation. As a daughter of the pastor Franz Kindermann, Charlotte was raised in an affluent family under a clear understanding of the value of chastity before marriage.

The erotism exuding from her portrait, noticed by different commentators, pushes that boundary since they were not married at the moment the painting was executed. Another vital ingredient is that Charlotte's father strongly disapproved of the relationship (PEREIRA SALAS, 1967, p. 7). And, as it is widely known, prohibition and desire are intertwined.

In Simon's work, the sexual side is always intimated whilst the abhorrence of the rich is always overtly uttered. In the portrait of Charlotte Kindermann, jewels, bracelets, ring, earrings, and tiara denote Charlotte's bourgeoisie origin. Besides the sexual reading, it may be argued that Simon employed all these items to imprison her in time and space as a response to the contradiction that she represented to his principles. In effect, Charlotte's countenance and stock radically contravened Simon's political discourse about richness and poverty spread in exile when his proto-socialist thought sprouted more vigorously: "...and that is how it [society] gets better! The poor get rich, the rich get poor" (SIMON, 1938, p. 17). During his stay in France, Simon's realisation of social inequalities and his aversion to aristocracy and bourgeoisie became stronger: "We found a man, a worker, a blacksmith, who eloquently described to us the hopeless conditions of his place, the aristocracy, the priests,

the factory owners” (SIMON, 1938b, p. 19).¹⁹ This narration is immediately followed by the manifestation of something suggested in the portrait of Charlotte Kindermann, namely, Simon’s strong interest in the domestic space and its negative connotations. In the same passage, he describes the peasants’ houses with great detail, paying particular attention to furniture in a way that can be related to Charlotte Kindermann’s setting: “The furnishing of the interior of the houses is simple. Immediately upon entering is the large kitchen with an iron cooking stove. There is usually a large house bed in it. In larger taverns, there is a larger dining room next to this kitchen, and two enormous, thatched roofs go over the storehouses down to the ground” (SIMON, 1938b, p. 19).²⁰ This attention to decoration as a token of class and social injustice also appears while travelling by train in France:

On the other side, in the first-class cabin, there is laughter and the clinking of cups. While here the water drips down from the cold walls like the ticking of a clock, there clinking glasses show the course of the night. Beautifully adorned with pictures and mirrors, in the middle a glowing stove, glowing cushions along the walls on which happy dreamers lie, or voluptuous people chase away their sleep with games and songs. The smell of the food, the refreshing warmth, what an abundance of pleasure but only for the rich! That is the destiny of life, here misery, there joy, here need, there abundance,

here pleasure, there hunger, thirst and sleepless nights. And between the two the boiling cauldron of the glowing crater, the glowing furnace of destiny, which must unite both opposites by destroying both. And up on the deck in the middle stands the master of the ship and smiles. He has no tears for those who suffer, no pity, no mercy; he looks at the bright window of the rich reveller and calculates the profit... Where is mercy in history, in the destiny of our time? – Where justice and – the lamp goes out (SIMON, 1938b, p. 21-22).²¹

In this paragraph, Simon seems to rant about Charlotte's privileges implicitly. In the painting, she is the voluptuous "happy dreamer" lying on the "glowing cushions" of a beautifully adorned room. The definite fissure between the couple is also foreshadowed in this text: "the glowing furnace of destiny, which must unite both opposites by destroying both". Carl Alexander Simon and Charlotte Kindermann will have a break-up when the artist/coloniser decided to set off for Chile, leaving her behind, fettered, living in deprivation with six children in Germany. In a letter dated 23 November 1849 in Stuttgart, before Simon's departure, she seals their destiny with a few poignant words:

Whatever I could write to you from here, it would no longer interest you – you only know one thought, you turn your gaze to the west towards the

land of promise and close your eyes to the past. Oh, how I wish that all your hopes and dreams may come true! In my mind, I see the flapping sails, the swaying sea – Oh, may good fortune lead you across! Farewell! Husband, how and where will we meet again? A significant question – who can answer it? Farewell! (SIMON, 1938a, p. 54)²²

CONCLUSION

This essay has put forward a psychoanalytic and iconological analysis of two paintings by the German Romantic artist and coloniser Carl Alexander Simon: *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* and *Die Braut des Künstlers*, both painted in 1830 and currently part of Weimar's cultural heritage.

Admittedly, Simon was a man who lived in constant tension with the world. His art training took place in various German cities such as Berlin, Stuttgart, and Munich, where he became enmeshed in scientific and political discussions and controversies with other artists and members of society. Simon's tendency to self-isolate can be regarded as a repercussion of his strained personal relationships, configuring a scenario that would soon

activate intricate edges of his personality. The first indications of it appeared in his *grand tour* through Italy and the Alps, which in practice became an initiation journey, and then in Chile, where at some point, he withdrew from all human contact to live an ascetic life amidst nature. Behind his first retreats, we find an incipient saviour complex that led him to devise the creation of a new world, a process in which he would become the “leader of time”. *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* is crucial because it shows the first traces of this forceful impulse.

In his works, Simon usually drew upon religious symbols to convey an image of sanctity and illumination. *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut* is fraught with these icons: the snake, the shepherd, pietistic gestures evoking blessedness, and the Garden of Eden-like landscape. In the end, all these elements would be helpful in his most decisive goal, to wit, institute a German colony in southern Chile, the last stage of his pilgrimage and the place where to restore the old German myths and ancient land. Crucial components in forming his sophisticated self-concept were the influence of utopian socialism, the idealistic philosophy, and the agitated political landscape in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. These factors all together intensified his crusading spirit.

A related aspect of his messianic impulse was his self-perception as Adam and Prometheus, or in a broader sense, as the first man, a pathfinder called for a grander mission, which is utterly consistent with his facet as a colonist. Most of the artworks analysed in the first part of this essay, including *Selbstbildnis mit Tirolerhut*, are strong instantiations of such an idea.

The scrutiny of the portrait of his fiancée Charlotte Kindermann uncovered a more intimate side of Simon. His fears of the exterior world, alongside repressed aspects of his sexuality, appear here under the guise of a voluptuous woman secluded in the domestic space. Simon shackles and punishes her, projecting onto the bodily features of his future wife and the sumptuously adorned decor all his hatred towards the German bourgeoisie society.

When studying the life of Simon, it becomes evident that his personality and acute *pathos* determined to a great extent his tragic fate and the whole of his work. Simon was an ardent Romantic who hardly succeeded in any endeavour during his life: he was rejected by the German art milieu, then persecuted because of his political ideas and expelled from the country. In Chile, his outlandish colonisation project was far from being a success, and as if this were not enough, he perished in a freak accident

while acting as a drafter in an official exploration in Patagonia, alone, away from his family, falling into oblivion both in Germany and Chile. This study has proposed a different elucidation of his work in the hope of bringing him back, gaining, at the same time, new insights into unexplored and obscured angles of German Romantic art in Europe and Latin America.

NOTAS

1. The title of the treatise is *Die Auswanderung der Demokraten und Proletarier und deutsch-nationale Kolonisation des südamerikanischen Freistaates Chile* (*The Migration of Democrats and Proletarians and the German National Colonization of the South American Free State of Chile*). A second edition was published in Bayreuth in 1850. In this latest edition the words “Demokraten” and “Proletarier” were removed.
2. Together with *Der Sängerkrie*, these two paintings are the only three oils on canvas by Simon currently remaining.
3. For a complete biography, see the sources cited at the end of this essay.
4. Jutta Krauss (2004, p. 90), nevertheless, suggests a slightly different dating. She claims that Simon started his four-year journey in 1830. Eugenio Pereira Salas (1967, p. 7), on the other hand, supplies a shorter dating for this journey: 1829 to 1831. Marijke von Meurs (2016, p. 14) provides 1828 as the year Simon started his almost four-year journey.
5. In this paper, I use the terms “messiah complex”, or “messianic complex” based on the definition by the American Psychological Association: “Messiah complex: the desire and compulsion to redeem or save others or the world. The individual may harbour the delusion of being divine. See also Jehovah complex”. (VANDENBOS, 2015, p. 644)
6. Part of his journey in Italy, however, would have taken place in the company of the musician and poet Carl Banck, whom Simon met in Rome (KRAUSS, 2004, p. 90).
7. “Herr Häring, welcher seinen stinkenden Namen damals in das romantische Willibald Alexis übersetzte, begoß mein Kunstwerk mit dem stark gesalzenen Lack, in welchem er zu schwimmen gewohnt war, und vernichtete meine künstlerische Existenz, indem er bewies, daß ich gefährlichen Theorien huldige...Allein Elend und Not folgten den Spuren eines ersten Fehltritts.” All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

8. “ (...) das Bild der Menschheit, wird in den Paradiesen Südamerikas zur harmonischen Vollendung gelangen.”

9. “In Chile ist eine Art nordischer kräftiger spekulativer Geist, ein Leben voll Bewusstsein, Freiheitsdrang und Selbstherrschaft, während Europa hinaltert und ohnmächtig zurücksinkt auf das Siechbett der Sklaverei.”

10. “Am Abend nahm uns ein Karren auf und rüttelte unsere Jammergestalten durch die Nacht. Es war ein Knecht. Ich sprach mit ihm von dem Unglück der menschlichen Gesellschaft. Es muss besser werden — so erwiderte er und ballte die Faust — und so wird’s besser! Die Armen werden reich, die Reichen arm warden.”

11. The full paragraph is: “Ich kann die Pracht Lyons und ihrer Berge nicht flüchtig schildern, das Leben dieser Stadt, ihr Handel, der Luxus, der reiche Markt mit Südfrüchten, Gemüse und Produkten der Natur und der Industrie aller Art bietet freudige und traurige Bilder und gibt zu komischen Betrachtungen Anlass, die immer wieder zurückführen zum letzten Grunde, der Verderbtheit der menschlichen Gesellschaft, aus der ich mich immer wieder hinaussehnte in die Einsamkeit und den Frieden der Natur, in die Not des stillen Lebens, in Hunger selbst und Bettel, um nur nicht Zeuge des Fluches der Zeit zu sein”.

12. “Ich muss hinüber, ich muss! Es ist mehr menschliches Sehnen, es ist ein göttlicher Zug— es ist ein Schicksal — ich bin ein Führer der Zeit.”

13. “Ich muss den Grundstein legen zu einem neuen Volkstempel und mit ihnen untergehen. Ich vollbringe und sollte auch, was ich liebe, mit mir untergehen. — Es muss geschehen. Mein Auge ist prophetisch geworden. Mein Geist hat am Ufer des Meeres seine Zukunft erschaut, offen liegt vor mir die Ferne! Ich sehe Völker höherer Kultur im Paradies dieser Erde, segnend meinen Namen! — Ob sie ihm auch fluchen, ob ich vergessen liege tief im Abgrund der Geschichte, vollbringen muss ich es doch und aus der Tiefe aufblühen will ich dann. Ich habe, was ich wollte, erfüllt!”

14. "Ein neues Exil, aber meine Hand wird doch fruchtbar werden. Ich werde den Grund einer Zukunft für meine Kinder legen. Und auch für die, die mich verachten, will ich arbeiten. Es sind Pflichten, heilige Pflichten, die ich versäumte, höhere zu vollbringen."

15. Thirty-five members integrated this society led by Simon, F. Cast, Oscar Wachter, Traugott Bromme, Eber, H. Schulke.

16. "Er muss beginnen, wo er eine ähnliche Luft atmet wie im Vaterlande, wo er die Nahrungsmittel der Heimath baut, wo verwandte Nahrungsstoffe."

17. "Kannst du den Völkern nicht die Tyrannen nehmen, so nimm den Tyrannen die Völker."

18. "In mein Zimmer gebannt, das ich nicht verlassen darf, da die Polizei nach mir fahndet, kann ich es nicht verlassen, ohne kalten, gleichgültigen, ja verachtenden Gefühlen zu begegnen. Als wäre ich nicht da, als gälte ich nichts. Geduldet kaum — esse ich im eigenen Hause das Brot der Verachtung. Im Gefängnis kommt doch der Wärter, reicht Brot und Wasser und redet Worte des rostes. Hier sitze ich tagelang. Niemand naht, die Zeitung flattert durch die kaum geöffnete Tür, ein Pochen, ein halb vorgestreckter Kopf reicht zu essen, und das Alles, weil ich tiefer in das Herz der Zeit..."

19. "Einen einzigen Mann, einen Arbeiter fanden wir, einen Hufschmied, der uns mit beredten Worten die heil- losen Zustände seines Ortes schilderte, der Aristokratie, der Pfaffen, der Fabrikherren."

20. "Die Einrichtung des Innern der Häuser ist einfach. Gleich beim Eintritt ist die grosse Küche mit einem eisernen Kochofen. Darin steht gewöhnlich ein grosses Hausbett. In grösseren Wirtshäusern ist neben dieser Küche ein grösseres Wirtszimmer, 2 ungeheure Strohdächer gehen über die Vorrathshäuser bis auf die Erde."

21. "Auf der anderen Seite ist die Kajüte der I. Klasse, da schallt noch Lachen und Becherklang und während von den kalten Wänden der unsrigen das Wasser niedertröpfelt, wie das Ticken einer Uhr, zeigen klingende Gläser dort den Lauf der Nacht. Schön verziert durch Bilder und Spiegel, in der Mitte ein glühender Ofen, an den Wänden umher schwellende Polster, auf denen glückliche Träumer ruhen oder Schwelger mit Spiel und Gesang den Schlaf verscheuchen.

Der Duft der Speisen, die erquickende Wärme, welch eine Fülle des Genusses — doch nur für die Reichen! Das ist das Lebensschicksal, hier Elend, dort Freude, hier Not, dort Überfluss — hier Genuss, dort Hunger, Durst und schlaflose Nächte. Und zwischen beiden der siedende Kessel des glühenden Kraters, der Glühofen des Schicksals, der beide Gegensätze vereinigen muss, indem er beide vernichtet. — Und oben auf dem Deck in der Mitte steht der Herr des Schiffes und lächelt. Er hat keine Träne für die Leidenden, kein Mitleid, kein Erbarmen; er blickt nach dem leuchtenden Fenster der reichen Schwelger und — berechnet den Gewinn. Wo ist Erbarmen in der Geschichte, im Schicksal unserer Zeit? —Wo Gerechtigkeit und — die Lampe verlischt.“

22. “Was ich Dir von hier auch schreiben könnte, es würde Dich nicht mehr interessieren — Du kennst ja nur einen Gedanken, Du wendest Deinen Blick gen Westen nach dem Lande der Verheissung und schliesst Dein Auge für das Vergangene. O, wie sehr wünsche ich, dass alle Deine Hoffnungen und Träume sich erfüllen möchten! Ich sehe in Gedanken die flatternden Segel das wogende Meer — O möge Euch ein günstiges Geschick hinüberführen! Leb wohl! Mann, wie und wo werden wir uns wiedersehen? Eine inhaltsschwere Frage — wer kann sie beantworten? Leb wohl!”

REFERENCES

BARTHES, Roland. **Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography**. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981.

FORTUNE, Reo Franklin. The Symbolism of the Serpent. **International Journal of Psychoanalysis**, n. 7, 1926, p. 237-243.

FREUD, Sigmund. **A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis**. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014.

GAETE, Miguel A. The Garden of Eden Revisited: The German Romantic Vision of Landscapes of Brazil and Chile. **Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture**, University of California Press, v. 4, n. 4, 2022, p. 9-25.

HEBERLEIN, Regine. **Writing a National Colony: The Hostility of Inscription in the German Settlement of Lake Llanquihue**. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008.

KRAUSS, Jutta. Leben, Tat oder Tod-der Wartburgerneurer Carl Alexander Simon. In **Wartburg Jahrbuch 2003**. Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2004.

KREITZER, Larry Joseph. **Prometheus and Adam: Enduring Symbols of the Human Situation**. Lanham: University Press of America, 1994.

MUSPER, Theodor. Carl Alexander Simon: (Ein vergessener Maler der Spätromantik). **Die Graphischen Künste**, n. 52, 1929.

MUSPER, Theodor. Carl Alexander Simon. In **Dokumente zur Geschichte der deutschen Einwanderung**. Santiago de Chile: Unknown, 1974.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich Wilhelm. **Thus Spoke Zarathustra**. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

PEREIRA SALAS, Eugenio. El pintor alemán Alexander Simon y su trágica utopía chilena. **Academia Chilena de la Historia**, n. 77, 1967.

SCHMALZ, Ingeborg. **Carl Alexander Simon. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Einwanderung** - Heft 1 (unpublished), unknown date.

SIMON, Carl Alexander. **Briefe von und an Carl Alexander Simon**, 1938a.

SIMON, Carl Alexander. **Reiseskizzen durch das stolze Frankreich im Winter 1848-49**. [s.l.] Unpublished manuscript, 1938b.

SIMON, Carl Alexander.; BROMME, Traugott. **Auswanderung und deutsch-nationale Kolonisation von Südamerika mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Freistaates Chile**. Bayreuth: Verlag Buchner'sche Buchhandlung, 1850.

SNODGRASS, Mary Ellen. **World Clothing and Fashion: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Social Influence**. London; New York: Routledge, 2015.

TEAGUE, Frances. "What about Our Hands?": A Presentational Image Cluster. **Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England**, v. 16, 2003, p. 218–227.

VAN MEURS, Marijke. **Carl Alexander Simon en Chiloé**. Ancud: Ediciones Museo Regional de Ancud, 2016.

VANDENBOS, Gary. **APA Dictionary of Psychology** (Second Edition). American Psychological Association ed. Washington: [s.n.].

WARTBURG JAHRBUCH 2003. Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2004.

WEINBERG, Martin; WILLIAMS, Colin; MOSER, Charles. The Social Constituents of Sadomasochism. **Social Problems**, v. 31, n. 4, 1984, p. 379–389.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Miguel Gaete is a PhD in History of Art from the University of York and PhD in Philosophy from the Autonomous University of Madrid. He has received fellowships and grants from Klassik Stiftung Weimar, the Herzog August Bibliothek, the Paul Mellon Centre, and Gerda Henkel Stiftung. Presently, he is a visiting researcher at the University of Newcastle's School of Modern Languages.

Article received on
September 19th, 2022 and accepted
on December 12th, 2022.