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## SUMMER IN ÅSGÅRDSTRAND – EDVARD MUNCH’S SYMBOLISTIC LANDSCAPES\*\*

**ABSTRACT:** Åsgårdstrand is a small coastal town located not far from Oslo on the western shore of Oslo Fjord. Painter Edvard Munch chose this town as the place to spend most of his summer months during almost three decades of his life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The significant artistic body of work inspired by this place includes a considerable number of landscapes. Among them, it is possible to distinguish several main motifs that will mark Munch’s work. These include the specific shore of Åsgårdstrand, the surrounding forests, the blue color of the sky during summer twilight, the night sky filled with stars and moonlight. In some of his landscapes, Munch populates them with solitary human figures, making the nature surrounding them the scenery of the protagonist’s inner drama. Such an interpretation of Munch’s nature paintings brings him closer to the European tradition of Symbolist art, which views the landscape as a representation of the human soul. The work will show to what extent Munch’s summer landscapes in Åsgårdstrand are close to Symbolist art, analyzing several motifs: nature as a place of escape from the big city, national elements, and the erotic potential of the landscape.

**KEYWORDS:** Edvard Munch, Landscapes, Symbolism, Åsgårdstrand.

“This is where I painted for more than 30 years, painted my best pictures...” (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 8) This quote from the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch refers to the small coastal town Åsgårdstrand, situated on the western shore of Oslo Fjord. In 1885, at the age of 22, Munch first vacationed in this part of the country with his family, in the town of Borre located a few kilometers north of Åsgårdstrand. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 8) These two places are connected by a walking path through the forest, which will become an important motif in his later paintings. Four years later, Munch returns to Åsgårdstrand. He spends that and the following summers in this town as a guest in rented houses until 1898 when he buys his own house with a garden near the sea. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 9)

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Munch's cottage in Åsgårdstrand is the only house where the painter lived that, after his death, remained almost untouched and has been preserved in its original state to this day. Since 1947, it has had museum status. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 8) The landscape of Åsgårdstrand, a place that became well-known mainly thanks to Munch's paintings, has been and remains a great inspiration for the artist, even in the years when he no longer returned and spent summers in other cities.

### Escape from the city

In the early 1880s, when the Munch family first vacationed in the surroundings of Åsgårdstrand, this place had not yet gained the resort reputation it has today. During that time, the town was a modest fishing village, and the Munch family visited it to rest and escape from the hot, dirty city full of people, such as Christiania (today's Oslo). (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 12) The escape from the big city and all the discomforts that life in it brings were common themes among artists in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The industrial revolutions of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about many changes in lifestyle and work, as well as demographic changes that significantly increased the population of large European cities in just a few decades. (ДИГА 2007: 17-33) Throughout the century, European capitals of industry and culture acquired a dual reputation – while offering plenty of opportunities and excitement on one hand, they also brought new dangers and unpleasantness to their residents – poor hygiene, overcrowding, alienation, and a high rate of prostitution. (FACOS 2009: 80) The lack of light, greenery, and fresh air led many people to various psycho-physical problems, making life in the city often filled with fear of diseases, infections, different epidemics, and death. (FACOS 2009: 69) Norwegian painter Theodor Kittelsen created a series of drawings titled *The Black Death* in 1894, almost eighty years after the last epidemic of the plague in Europe. (FACOS 2009: 71) In this case, the Black Death is just a symbol carrying the meaning of all other physical and mental illnesses for which rest and fresh air were often prescribed as a treatment method. Due to its specific climate, which offered both sea and mountain air, Norway, along with Switzerland, was one of the countries with the most sanatoriums and sanitariums opened during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (FACOS 2009: 72)

The conflict between man and modern urban life is one of the significant and universal themes explored by Symbolist artists, recognizable in the works of those who lived and created in various European environments. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 8) In response to urbanization in literature and Symbolist painting, a duality between the countryside and the city emerged. Rural idyll was juxtaposed with the ailment of the city, symbolizing health and mental peace caused by a simple life in harmony with nature. (HOFSTÄTTER 2000: 25) The countryside thus became a substitute for the Lost Paradise, Arcadia, or the Garden of Eden – the imaginary space of nature reduced to the image of the local landscape as an ideal opposed to the chaotic city life. (ERNSTING 2013: 42; МИШИЧ 2021: 47) Such landscapes, rooted in the idea of returning to a long-lost time of freedom, bliss, and

happiness, were particularly common in German art at the end of the century, greatly influencing artists in Scandinavian countries. (FACOS 1998: 40-41; БОРОЗАН 2018: 34)

Edvard Munch experienced the negative aspects of city life and the mentioned dangers from an early age. Munch's mother died of tuberculosis in 1868 when he was five years old. In 1877, his sister Sophie died from the same disease at the age of 16. (OROZCO 2021: 611) These deeply traumatic childhood experiences left a mark on the mental health of the painter and influenced his artistic work. Throughout his upbringing and adult life, Munch himself often suffered from weakened nerves, fears, nightmares, and anxiety, exploring their origins and consequences through his artworks. (GULENG 2009: 272-273)

Munch's artistic output is often interpreted within the framework of European Symbolism, and his landscapes can be viewed in this manner. The Norwegian painter was greatly influenced by French Symbolism and the works of artists he encountered in Paris during his numerous visits to the city. (KURCZYNSKI 2006: 126) Thanks to Munch's diaries, it is known that the art of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes made a special impression on the young painter. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 60) Pierre Puvis de Chavannes is a painter of the first or proto-generation of French Symbolist painters (alongside Gustave Moreau), becoming a role model for many Symbolists who created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (COOKE 2014: 30) Chavannes' work had a particular influence due to the public function of his pieces – some of his paintings are located in the amphitheater of the Sorbonne University in Paris, while others depict the history of Paris and are placed in the Panthéon, a building that gained the status of a public monument during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (JUMEAU-LAFOND 2006: 15)

The work of French painter Paul Gauguin and Belgian painter Félicien Rops, who was closely connected to Parisian artistic circles, also influenced Munch's art. (MOFFETT 1972: 17; WHITMORE 2009: 212) Another important artistic center where Munch spent a considerable amount of time and belonged to bohemian circles was Berlin. (MOFFETT 1972: 8; WEST 2007: 13) In this city, Munch acquainted himself with the work of Swiss Symbolist Arnold Böcklin, and he likely came into contact with the art of German Symbolists such as Franz von Stuck, Hans von Marées, or Ludwig von Hofmann. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 60; BOROZAN 2018: 34)

"Nature is the vast kingdom, which nourishes art. Nature is not only that which is visible to the eye. It is also the inner images of the mind. The images upon the reverse of the eye," Munch noted in his diary in 1907-1908. (WEST 2007: 5) The way Munch talks about nature clearly indicates the extent to which his reflections on the landscape were aligned with the art of Symbolism. In Symbolist painting, the landscape was often a pretext for depicting something beyond the boundaries of the visible world, belonging to the realm of the mind, heart, and spirit. (ERNSTING 2013: 34) Therefore, it is often said that in Symbolism, the landscape is a mirror of the human soul, hidden thoughts, emotions, pains, and longings. (МИШИТЬ 2021: 47) By observing Munch's landscapes and depictions of solitary figures or couples in nature, it is evident that the Norwegian artist contemplated nature in a manner akin to his European counterparts.

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Urbanistic changes that swept across Europe did not spare the Oslo Fjord coastline. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Åsgårdstrand began to evolve and transform due to the emergence of modern tourism. During this period, the entire Oslo Fjord coastline underwent urbanization, and places along it started to adapt to new social customs – the culture of leisure, summer vacations, swimming, sunbathing, and entertainment. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 26) Along the coastline, many seaside resorts opened, and the use of seawater and mud for therapeutic purposes gave rise to another form of tourism – spa tourism. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 27-28) As such, Åsgårdstrand fit well into the idea of European intellectuals about modern Arcadia – a village but also a resort, a space with a mild climate, lush nature, simple living, and numerous pleasures.

One of Munch's first landscapes was created near this town. It is the painting *Velerland near Tønsberg* from 1887, depicting a meadow full of wildflowers, species that bloom in mid-summer when nature is in full bloom, and most Norwegians are on vacation. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 40) In the background, the outlines of the forest, one of the important element of Munch's landscapes, can be seen, and the sky hints at the moon, another significant symbol in his future paintings. The idyllic peace of this scene and the blue twilight, typical of Norwegian summers, show that nature and the countryside interested and inspired the young Munch. The depiction of the blooming meadow is one of the first paintings with which the artist began his long career of painting summer landscapes in Åsgårdstrand and its surroundings.

### Norwegian blue mood summer sky

Munch's friend and relative, Ludvig Ravensberg, once said, "This is where Munch discovers and becomes the portrayer of the pale, shadowless Nordic night." (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 8) This pale blue shade of the sky can be seen in Munch's early paintings created in Åsgårdstrand, such as the mentioned painting *Velerland near Tønsberg*, as well as two depictions of his sisters in nature. He painted his sister Laura in the garden in the painting titled *Evening* in 1888, and his sister Inger on the large rocks typical of the coastline of this town in the painting *Inger on the Beach* the following year, 1889. (WHITMORE 2009: 211; FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 46) (Image 1) The specific color of the Norwegian sky is also mentioned in Munch's diaries. (HOLLAND 2005: 25, 182) The painter compares it to the blue color he saw in Paris on the mythological compositions of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 29; KURCZYNSKI 2006: 126)

In addition to Chavannes' influence on Munch's depiction of the sky, the Norwegian tradition of painting so-called "blue mood" pictures also played a significant role. These paintings possessed a unique blue tonality in the landscape, inspired by the specific light that could only be seen in the summer twilight of the far north of Europe. (FACOS 1998: 31; WHITMORE 2009: 212) During the Norwegian summer, the sun never sets completely, and the sky never reaches a completely dark color but always remains in twilight shades,



Fig. 1. Edvard Munch, *Inger on the Beach*, 1889 (Wikimedia Commons)

with tones of blue. Some of the most well-known representatives of these “blue mood” paintings are Eilif Peterssen and Frits Thaulow. (WHITMORE 2009: 212) The Norwegian painter Kitty Kielland, who adopted a similar approach to depicting light and a comparable color palette, created the painting *After Sunset* in the summer of 1885. It depicts the tranquility of a summer evening in a small Norwegian town and bears a striking resemblance to Munch’s landscapes from this period. (FACOS 1998: 31)

### **Starry night over the Åsgårdstrand**

Symbolist painters used landscapes to express through art what lies beyond the boundaries of the visible world. However, such landscapes rarely originated purely from imagination; more often, they were topographically accurate scenes painted based on the landscapes carefully observed and faithfully documented by the painters. (ERNSTING 2013: 34) This approach is also recognizable in the work of Edvard Munch. In his diaries, Munch





Fig. 2. Edvard Munch, *Starry Night*, 1893 (Wikimedia Commons)

described the feeling of owning a house in Åsgårdstrand, with a garden containing trees, rocks, birds, the shoreline, and even “stars overhead”. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 9) It is clear that the view of the starry sky was a scene that occupied the painter’s attention and imagination, and the starry sky and other celestial bodies and phenomena are important motifs in his summer landscapes, especially considering that during the summer, thanks to the milder climate, stars are more frequently and clearly visible.

The painting *Starry Night*, created in 1893, is one such example. (OROZCO 2021: 219) (Image 2) It is a landscape from Åsgårdstrand that was misinterpreted for many years

until a group of scientists from Texas visited this resort in 2008, aiming to discover the mysterious celestial phenomena recorded in Munch's paintings. (OLSON 2014: 86) After determining the vantage point from which the painter observed the sea and the sky in front of him, astronomers discovered that the bright spot, whose light breaks through the branches of a large tree, cannot be the Moon (as previously believed) because moonlight reflects only in a line on the water's surface, which, looking at Munch's other seascapes, the painter knew very well. (OLSON 2014: 88) By comparing the current appearance of the location with old photographs of the coastline, it was concluded that this light source is, in fact, a flagpole with a ball on top, from whose smooth metal surface the light of the stars is reflected. (OLSON 2014: 90) Additionally, the "red star" depicted low on the horizon, previously thought to be Venus, is actually the top of the Larkollen harbor lighthouse located on the eastern side of the fjord. (OLSON 2014: 91) Venus was not visible during the spring and summer of 1893 because it was in the northern hemisphere, west of the place where Munch painted, and nearby hills blocked the view of it. (OLSON 2014: 90) The brightest star in the night sky, it was concluded, was actually the planet Jupiter. Above it, it is possible to see the Pleiades, an asterism (a group of stars not officially recognized as a constellation), and computer simulations have shown that the Pleiades were directly above Jupiter as the planet rose in the evening sky in 1893. (OLSON 2014: 93) The original title of the painting, *Evening Star*, indicates that the artwork depicted the evening sky, not the night sky. This information was crucial for scientists in determining the exact date of the painting's creation – it was concluded that it could not have been created before July 9<sup>th</sup> because Jupiter was then rising after midnight (which would not correspond to the adjective "evening"). The painting, judging by the position of the brightest "star", was created between July 9<sup>th</sup> and September 24<sup>th</sup>, and consulting meteorological reports from the year the painting was made revealed that only two evenings that summer skies were clear enough for such an unobstructed view of the stars – August 16<sup>th</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup>. (OLSON 2014: 94)

That same year, at the same location, some of Munch's paintings were created, and their dates can be determined with even greater precision due to the position of the depicted celestial bodies. One of them is the painting *The Storm*, which depicts a severe storm that hit Åsgårdstrand that summer. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 24) (Image 3) Instead of a turbulent sea, the painting portrays the anxiety of those waiting on the shore, wondering if their loved ones will safely return to the harbor. It is an impression of the anxiety, fear, and unrest of the women waiting for their fisherman husbands, reflecting the subordinate position of humans in relation to the intimidating power of untamed nature. *The Storm* is a painting that brings Munch closer to the landscape painting of Arnold Böcklin, an artist whose works left a strong impression on Munch during his travels to Berlin. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 24) Like his Norwegian counterpart, Böcklin had the habit of observing the open sea for a long time, listening to the sound of the waves, studying the colors of water and rocks, and portraying nature as an unstoppable, wild force that often evokes both admiration and fear in humans. (БОРОЗАН 2018: 31-32) However, while *The Storm* is simultaneously a psychological, symbolist vision of the dangerous side of nature, it is also a document of



Fig. 3. Edvard Munch, *The Storm*, 1893 (Wikimedia Commons)



Fig. 4. Edvard Munch, *Sunrise in Åsgårdstrand*, 1893 (Wikimedia Commons)



the real storm that hit Åsgårdstrand on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1893, at 9 PM. (OLSON 2014: 96) More precisely, the painted scene unfolded at 9:15 PM that evening, as determined by the position of the star visible in the upper right corner of the painting, which astronomers identified as Arcturus, the brightest star in the northern celestial hemisphere. (OLSON 2014: 97)

“The town lay silent and reeking under a burning June sun...” are the words Munch used to describe his arrival in Åsgårdstrand one summer while observing it from a boat approaching the harbor. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 23) These same words could be used to describe the painting *Sunrise in Åsgårdstrand*, also created in 1893. (Image 4) The difference is that the painting depicts the sunrise from early September, not June, and this information is known again thanks to astronomical research. Scientists first identified the house from whose window Munch observed the open sea. Since the point on the horizon where the sun appears changes throughout the year, they found only two moments when the sun could be exactly in the position shown in the painting – during the second week of April (when Munch was in Germany) or during the first five days of September. (OLSON 2014: 98-99) The weather forecast from 1893 was again helpful. Thanks to it, it is known that out of all these days, there was no rain only on September 3<sup>rd</sup> when the sun rose exactly at 5:30 AM. (OLSON 2014: 99) If there are paintings whose moment of creation can be measured precisely down to the minute, they are Munch's *The Storm* and *Sunrise in Åsgårdstrand*.

### **National pride and erotic appeal – Munch's forest, moonlight and sea shore**

Apart from the sky and celestial bodies, Munch devoted significant attention and numerous works to depicting the forest. “Forests of symbols” is a phrase known to all those who, in their work, have come into contact with the art of symbolism. “Man passes there through forests of symbols” is a line from the poem *Correspondences* by the French poet Charles Baudelaire, which is often used to explain the symbolic understanding of the interconnectedness of man and the surrounding world. (ELEZ 2020: 7-8) At the same time, in Scandinavian countries, the forest represented a symbol of national pride, and for Munch, it held intimate and personal symbolism.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Munch's first landscapes were created, Norway was not an independent country but was under Swedish rule. (FACOS 2009: 156) Like in many European countries, Norway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the awakening of national consciousness and a desire for regained independence. Among the intellectual elite advocating for the national movement, a prominent figure was Peter Andreas Munch, the uncle of Edvard Munch, a professor at the University of Christiania, and the author of several popular books on the history of the Norwegian people. (OROZCO 2021: 7) National identity in visual culture, literature, and music emphasized a return to Norwegian legends, folklore, and the characteristic landscape of the country. (FACOS 1998: 27, 29, 30) The winding shores of fjords, dense forests, and even the trees themselves became symbols of national pride for Norwegian artists who created during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 5. Edvard Munch, *Cherry Tree in Blossom*, 1905 (Wikimedia Commons)

(FACOS 1998: 30-31) Besides forests, the motif of trees itself is very important for Norwegian people, given that in Norse mythology, the center of the world is depicted as the sacred tree Yggdrasil. (TREBJEŠANIN 2011: 219-220) At the exhibition of Norwegian artists in Paris in 1889, a critic noticed a strong connection between Norwegian people and nature and trees, comparing Norwegian men to pines and women to birches. (FACOS 1998: 31)

The national aspirations of Norwegian artists, their visual and symbolic language that identifies humans with nature, were well-known to Munch. In numerous notebooks and diaries, he emphasized the importance of nature and the typical Norwegian landscape. In some of his prose poems, he even stated symbolically that humans originated from trees or that people are “trees that have pulled their roots out of the ground.” (WEST 2007: 26-28) As a patriotic motif, trees and landscapes appear in Munch’s paintings, such as *Cherry Tree in Blossom* and *Trees and Torpedo Boat*, created in 1905. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 216-217) The year of the creation of these paintings is particularly important because



Fig. 6. Edvard Munch, *Summer's Night Dream. The Voice*, 1893 (Wikimedia Commons)

Norway gained independence and separated from Sweden. (FACOS 2009: 156) Munch himself named the painting *Cherry Tree in Blossom* as “the 7 June Picture” (The Union Dissolution Day), explaining that it depicts nature in bright and vibrant colors, mirroring the joy of the people for the achieved independence. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 216) (Image 5) In the painting *Trees and Torpedo Boat*, with a similar tonality, the artist depicted a torpedo boat maneuvering along the Åsgårdstrand coast as a celebration. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 217)

Besides expressing their national identity, many Norwegian artists affiliated with Symbolist art aimed to convey their feelings, thoughts, fears, and dreams through the depiction of nature. (FACOS 1998: 117) One of the best examples of such a painting in Edvard Munch's early career is the artwork *Summer Night's Dream. The Voice*, created in 1893. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 26-27) (Image 6) The painting features a young woman in a nocturnal landscape. Behind her, trees, the sea, and a moonlight pillar on the water's surface are visible – motifs that Munch would use many times in the following years. *The Voice* is a painting inspired by events from the artist's private life, specifically his first romantic affair.



The history of the painting takes us back to 1885 when the painter was 22 years old and first came on vacation near Åsgårdstrand with his family. During that summer, young Munch initiated a love affair with an older married woman, Andrea Fredrikke Emilie (Milly) Thaulow, which he extensively documented in his notebooks. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 22-23) Their love story began during one of the many nighttime walks through the forest, along the path connecting Åsgårdstrand and the place Borre. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 30-31) The footpath through the forest has been preserved to this day, allowing confirmation of the extent to which Munch accurately depicted the local landscape. The painting is dominated by the characteristic blue mood tone, and the nocturnal ambiance of the scene, considering the source of Munch's inspiration, becomes a true reflection of the landscape as a mirror of the painter's intimate feelings, filled with erotic associations.

Munch once again succeeded in expressing subtle symbolism through his carefully chosen visual language. The essence of the painting is encapsulated in the first part of the title, *Summer Night's Dream*. Dreams and emotions, hallucinations, and hidden desires are values that Symbolist artists sought and found in the depiction of nature. The second part of the painting's title, *The Voice*, suggests that someone's voice is also a part of the depicted scene. Based on the girl's gestures, it is assumed that she is listening to the voice of her lover, who is probably opposite her, precisely at the viewer's position in the painting. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 90-92) In this way, Munch places the observer in his own position and shows the scene as he saw it – with small boats in the distance, the shimmering reflection of the moon on the water, and a woman surrendering to his voice.

In 1891, Munch painted a couple taking a walk along a path leading to the forest and named the painting *Eroticism of the Summer Evening*. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 59) Six years later, a somewhat different depiction of a man and a woman in the forest titled *To The Forest* was created, which underwent numerous variations in different techniques. (WEST 2007: 6; OROZCO 2021: 268) This time, the couple is depicted from behind, and the forest in front of them is dense and impenetrable. Although the young man and the girl embrace, no path opens before them. In later years, Munch returned to depictions of the forest, especially the one that stretches north of Åsgårdstrand, tied to his personal memories. An interesting version of his famous painting *Vampire*, originally painted the same year as *The Voice* in 1893, is a later variation created between 1916 and 1918. In this latter version, Munch places the well-known portrayal of a red-haired woman embracing and, presumably, sinking her teeth into her lover's neck, into a forested landscape with a shore and a moonlight pillar on the sea's surface. (OROZCO 2021: 396) Once again, the forest and the sea are accomplices in the tragic love story between two people overwhelmed with emotions.

The forest was a significant motif in Munch's symbolism, as evident from numerous entries in his diaries where he mentions his youthful walks through the forest with a beloved but married woman in the form of prose poems. (HOLLAND 2005: 69-73) Several other motifs stand out in these writings – moonlight, large stones on the shore, the surface of the sea – real motifs of the Åsgårdstrand coast. (HOLLAND 2005: 72) Reading Munch's diaries and observing his landscapes of this town reveals another important motif through which





Fig. 7. Edvard Munch, *Summer Night. Mermaid*, 1893 (Wikimedia Commons)

the painter connects ideas of national identity with European Symbolist art. These are sea creatures, specifically mermaids (or sirens), known in European mythology and folklore as women who, through their song and appearance, entice and lead sailors to their death. (СРЕЈОВИЋ, ЦЕРМАНОВИЋ-КУЗМАНОВИЋ 2004: 387) In Symbolist art, mermaids became one of the motifs of *femme fatale*, dangerous beauties, synonymous with temptation and doom. (ERNSTING 2013: 41; COOPER 2009: 193) It should not be forgotten that the most famous mermaid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was born from the pen of a Scandinavian writer, and not by chance. (MYLIUS 2006: 166; MORTENSEN 2008: 437) Mermaids of both genders appear in the folklore tradition of Scandinavian peoples, and in Norwegian mythology, a similar role was played by the goddess Rán, who, according to legend, awaits ships in ambush and drags them down with a net. (KOLMAN-RUKAVINA, MANDIĆ 1961: 38-41) Munch mentions in his diaries that he recognizes the figures of these beings in the large stones on the Åsgårdstrand shore, representing an entire population of sea creatures. (HOLLAND 2005: 23) At the same time, he compares his lover to a mermaid, calling her his sea-wife. (HOLLAND 2005: 74)

One of Munch's early depictions of mermaids is the painting *Summer Night. Mermaid*, created in 1893. (WHITMORE 2009: 220) (Image 7) The painter portrayed the mermaid in a marine landscape that clearly indicates the location as the shore of Åsgårdstrand, with its large stones and the moonlight pillar in the background. (WHITMORE 2009: 220) Three years later, paintings with similar themes emerged: *Mermaid*, where Munch again depicts a girl in a lonely marine landscape at night, and *Meeting on the Beach, Mermaid*, where the lover on land joins the girl emerging from the water. (KURCZYNSKI 2006: 127; OROZCO 2021: 226) The image is visually divided so that along the right side, the mermaid's side, an infinite expanse of the sea is visible, while on the left, the man's side, a stretch of forest extends. In this way, Munch creates a mixture of reality (real landscape) and myth. (WHITMORE 2009: 220) In the spirit of the Symbolists, the part borrowed from mythology in the picture serves to depict his personal, intimate thoughts, associations, and moods related to the real sea-wife who seduced and hurt him, much like the mythological enchantress.

### Summertime sadness or *Melancholy*

Relying on the tradition of Romantic painters, Symbolist artists would sometimes place solitary human figures in their landscapes. This practice was particularly common in the paintings of Arnold Böcklin, which greatly influenced Munch. (БОРОЗАН 2018: 27-28) On many occasions, the landscape in the works of the Norwegian artist served as the backdrop for conflicts, erotic relationships between men and women, or the culmination of emotions such as jealousy or melancholy. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 69) Munch's painting *Melancholy*, which, in some catalogs of his works, carries the dual title *Melancholy/Jealousy*, received its first version in the summer of 1891. (OROZCO 2021: 296) (Image 8) Much like to his sister Inger, whom he depicted three years earlier in a similar blue twilight on the rocks of Åsgårdstrand, gazing thoughtfully into the distance, Munch painted his friend Jappe Nilssen in the same location in 1891. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 20) That summer, Jappe Nilssen went through a turbulent love affair much like the one the painter had recently experienced – the young writer entered into a romantic relationship with Oda Krogh, an older married woman. (ELDERFIELD, EGGUM 1979: 21) From conversations with Jappe's sister, Munch learned that his friend was “in delirium,” suffering from hysteria, insomnia, weakened nerves, and attempting to alleviate his pain with alcohol. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 69) The thoughts and feelings that the disappointed Jappe had to confront that summer were well known to Munch from his personal experience. Notes about the emotional collapse of this relationship were found in the painter's notebook, and its consequences were soon transferred to the canvas. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 69)

The young man's body movement in the painting clearly evokes the title. *Melancholy* and a certain sense of sadness and disappointment can easily be discerned from his gestures. The two small figures of a man and a woman depicted in the background, on the dock, allude to real-life events that inspired the creation of the painting. However, even the landscape itself is in harmony with the emotions experienced by its protagonist. Munch's

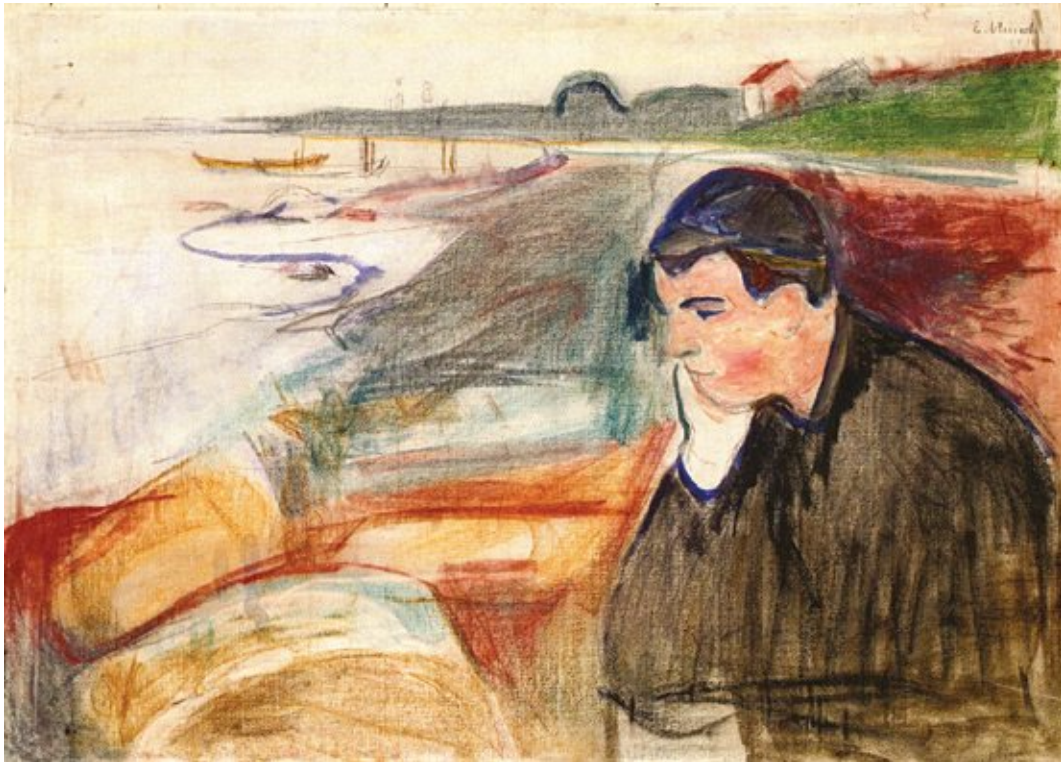


Fig. 8. Edvard Munch, *Melancholy*, 1891 (Wikimedia Commons)

sketchbooks are filled with sketches of this same location, which he reproduced many times in later versions of the painting, and it is noticeable how the sketch of the coastline changed its appearance over time. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 74) While in the early drawings, every detail of the coastline was treated with equal attention, in later versions, the coast is reduced to just one winding line, repeated so many times that its meandering course has become a symbol of both melancholy and the Åsgårdstrand coast. The Norwegian art historian Jens Thiis named this recognizable line “the Åsgårdstrand line”. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 74)

The inherently symbolic nature of the painting *Melancholy* was confirmed by Mrs. Oda's husband, Christian Krogh, also a painter who had the opportunity to see it at the Autumn Exhibition the same year. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 71) In his critique of the exhibition, he wrote that it was “related to Symbolism, the newest movement in French art.” (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 71) In the spirit of Symbolism, Munch presented another side of the seaside resort and summer to his audience. Besides the exciting encounters of lovers on the beach, night walks, moonlight, and the sound of waves, summers are often, especially in youth, filled with negative and dark feelings, jealousy, melancholy, and sadness.

The mystical landscape of a small place like Åsgårdstrand changes its appearance from painting to painting – while for some, it is the scenery of whispered love, for others, it is the painful line of a broken heart that cuts across the shore and sea, stretching indefinitely.

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“These last few days I have been thinking and thinking of the Nordland summer, with its endless day.” (ХАМСУН 2015: 7) This sentence opens the book *Pan* by the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun and can be used as an illustration of Munch’s connection to the scenes of summer and summer landscapes that he carried with him from Åsgårdstrand. Like Hamsun (whose literary work is often linked to Munch’s painting since both lived and created at the same time, inspired by similar ideas and motifs), Munch frequently thought and repeated images of summer in works that were created far from the small coastal town on the Oslo Fjord. (HOLLAND 2005: 4, 6; KURCZYNSKI 2006: 126; FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 60) After 1905, due to health and mental crises, Munch left Norway, and when he returned, he only visited Åsgårdstrand briefly to check if everything was in order with the house, staying in the town very briefly. (FRYDENBERG FLAATTEN 2013: 9, 235) Nevertheless, characteristic motifs from Åsgårdstrand that marked his early landscapes and paintings of deep human dreams and feelings would repeat many times in Munch’s works as echoes of bygone days, symbolic observations of nature, and memories of long warm summers.

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Јована М. Николић  
 ЛЕТО У ОЗГОРШТРАНУ – СИМБОЛИСТИЧКИ ПЕЈЗАЖИ  
 ЕДВАРДА МУНКА

Резиме

Озгорштран је мало приморско место које се налази недалеко од Осла на западној обали Осло фјорда. Сликари Едвард Мунк одабрао је овај градић за место на којем ће провести већину летњих месеци током готово три деценије живота. Од осамдесетих година XIX века до 1905. године уметник је током лета живео у викендици на тадашњем ободу града посматрајући и сликајући његову обалу, шуме, куће, бродове, становнике и посетиоце. Велики уметнички опус настао инспирисан овим местом чини значајан број пејзажа. Међу њима је могуће издвојити неколико главних мотива који ће обележити Мунков рад и појављивати се на његовим сликама до краја живота. У питању су специфична обала Озгорштрана, море оивичено великим камењем на обали, мистичне шуме међу чијим стаблима се сусрећу тајни љубавници, плава боја неба током летњих сумрака на северу Европе, ноћно небо испуњено звездама и месечином.

Захваљујући великој прецизности којом је Мунк документовао природу, по положају насликаних небеских тела на његовим ноћним пејзажима данас је могуће одредити тачно време настанка појединих слика. Мотиви преузети из природе важни су и за осећај националне припадности и родољубива осећања која су норвешки уметници крајем XIX века истицали призорима типичним за пејзаж ове земље – њеним вијугавим линијама фјордова, густим шумама, алузијама на фолклорну традицију и митолошка бића. Иако суптилна, симболика природе као ресурса националног поноса присутна је и у Мунковом сликарству.

Неке од својих пејзажа Мунк насељава усамљеним људским фигурама, појединцима или љубавним паровима, услед чега природа која их окружује постаје сценографија унутрашње драме протагониста. Пејзаж на тај начин добија улогу огледала људске психе, снова и осећања. Таквим тумачењем природе Мунк се приближава европској традицији уметности симболизма која слику природе посматра као слику човечије душе. На његовим призорима Озгорштрана посматрач добија увид у сликарева расположења и емотивна превирања током многих лета која је провео у овом малом граду. Типични призори Озгорштрана и његове околине постају на тај начин и сами симболи Мункових мисли и осећања.

Кључне речи: Едвард Мунк, пејзажи, симболизам, Озгорштран.