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Translated extracts

A Storm in the Eye

One day in early May 1930, Edvard Munch's right eye exploded. According to Munch, it was his best, his artist's eye, and the injury was a result of a nervous breakdown that had overburdened the blood vessels and drowned the eye. That is how he described it, that his eye was drowned in blood.

Terrified at the thought of losing his sight, he does the only thing he can: He paints the pool of blood that spreads through the eye's vitreous humor, registers how it affects his surroundings and changes over time. If he moves his head, it is as though a big bird with dark brown feathers is flapping in front of him. If he walks across the room, it distorts and changes everything he sees: "Snakes were wrapped around chair and table legs – fat snakes with wonderful colours writhed and wrapped themselves around the chaise longue."

The blood bird flies up and down the walls setting the room alight. At other times, the clot resembles an ominous skull, like a stamp of death on the eyeball, when it doesn't just lie there floating like a black sun in the middle of his vision. In one of Munch's pictures from that summer, he has painted himself with the features of the androgynous figure in *Scream*, but with the spot

floating in the foreground. He presumably stood in front of the bed and studied himself in a mirror, which has become the surface of the finished painting. In the mirror's reflection, the spot that Munch sees in front of his own eye, becomes a phenomenon that lies between him and us. Thus we see from the outside what he sees from the inside, we see vision – his vision.

We see, but what do we actually see? A bird, a skull, a black sun? Or perhaps, the perpetual storm in the artist's eye.

The eye doctor confirmed that yes, a blood vessel had ruptured, most probably as a result of strain. But Munch did not need to worry, the blood would subside if he just followed the doctor's advice: on 10 May, he wrote a medical certificate where he states that the patient must have "absolute bodily and mental peace for a sustained period".

What need did Munch have for a doctor's certificate? When the injury happened, he was a famous and wealthy artist in his sixties. He was still working, but preferred to carry out his work from his home at Ekely, where he lived in relative seclusion after many years travelling in Europe. Munch was a free and independent man, and it is hard to imagine that anyone would ask for a doctor's certificate.

However, he asked for the certificate to be renewed several times, indeed, he even had it translated into German. Presumably he needed it most to support his request that the world leave him in peace. The fact that the certificate was issued by a person with the same authority as his own father may not be of much relevance. But it is worth noting that the military doctor, Christian Munch, was the head of a family that constantly worried about illness, and while Christian had prescriptions for many things, he had not had one for complete bodily and mental peace.

Edvard Munch never found peace, not even when the blood withdrew from his retina. The storm in his eye was not a result of the lesion, it had been with him since childhood and would never abate as long as he lived. In his letters, he wrote time and again that he needed to get away and find a place that could give him absolute and complete rest. He never found that place, for the simple reason that he carried unrest with him wherever he went. He lived his life in restless pursuit, moving from country to country, between towns, from room to room, up and down the stairs in his own home. When he spoke, he raced ahead, driven by the sudden leaps and twists of his mind, like the etching needle dance over the copper plate, the brush over the canvas. In Munch's art, there is no peace. In the eye of the artist, the storm never rests.

[...]

Paris, 1889

One day in early October, the Munch family sat gathered around the dining table at Schous plass. Departure was imminent. Their belongings would soon be moved to Hauketo. Christian had had to acquiesce, but he had other things to worry about that day. Edvard was about to leave them and travel to the city of lights, frivolity and temptation. Christian masked his worries with a litany of instructions. Edvard must be careful down there, the climate was damp, he must at all costs not develop arthritis. And he must remember to use the camphor drops, which his father had personally ensured were packed.

Edvard got up from the table, the others followed, and there in the kitchen, he took his Aunt Karen and siblings by the hand, awkward and formal. His father was waiting out in the hall and was the last person to bid him farewell.

A short while later, he stood on the quay with the other Norwegian artists who were going to spend the winter in Paris. During his previous stay, he had only managed to see art.

Now he was going to spend at least eight months there to develop himself as an artist at Léon Bonnat's painting school. Up the gangway, and he was free.

But it transpired that the steamship Alpha was delayed. Edvard could not think of anything better to do than to wander home again. When he opened the door to the flat, slightly embarrassed by this complication to his departure, his father was sitting at his desk, engrossed in work. He turned his head to the side. The forecast was for bad weather, would Edvard not rather stay at home? No, most certainly not. He didn't want to spend a day longer in this place. Ah well, his father mumbled as he turned back to his work. Half an hour later, it was time to go back to the quay. The other passengers greeted him with bottles in their hands and some were already drunk. No sooner was Munch onboard than someone shouted: "There's your father."

And sure enough: Christian Munch was standing among the cargo on the wharf. How many minutes had it taken for him to decide to follow? Edvard ran down the gangway again. His father was wearing his best clothes, so he had made time to change before he came.

'It's a fine ship – indeed – you haven't set sail yet – come home.'

He got no answer from his son. Everything there was to say had already been said. Once more, Edvard walked up the gangway. And so Christian was left to stand alone and watch as the Alpha glided out over the fjord, puffing thick clouds of smoke into the cool October air, on her way to the continent with a cargo of slightly inebriated artists, of which at least one must have stood by the sternpost, his face turned towards land as the arms of the fjord and islands slowly obscured the city and the military doctor on the quayside.

Munch was not the only one to travel to Paris that autumn. The city had become a popular destination for Norwegians, no doubt inspired by the continental flavour that returning artists brought with them to Kristiania. Others now also wanted to escape the pond and get a taste of the freedom of Parisian life. So a flock of them travelled down together and all stayed in the same hotel, Hôtel Champagne on Rue La Condamine. Some were there to see the Exposition Universelle, others to live the bohemian life or to continue their education as artists. This they also did en masse: Léon Bonnat's painting school was full of Norwegians that winter, and the women were taught in the neighbouring building.

When they were not standing behind their easels, the Norwegian artists gathered in the homes of the great poets, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Jonas Lie, who were living there more permanently – most often at the latter's, as Bjørnson was easily angered by anyone who disagreed with him. Or they met in Café de la Régence, a regular haunt, and other Parisian cafes. The mood was generally buoyant, particularly after Kalle Løchen's unexpected appearance. After a spectacular debut as Hamlet at Den Nationale Scene,

Kalle's acting career had faltered. He was still married to Anna Brun, and already had one child with her and another on the way when he left them and the theatre, and went to Paris to paint again.

Munch had little to fear from his old rival. He had come to Paris as a rising star: shortly before he left, the Norwegian masters of the day had hailed him as the leading light of the next generation. He should have felt secure. And apparently he did. In his letters home, he talks positively about the hotel breakfast, his days at Bonnat's studio, and afternoons spent at the expo. But in reality, he was despondent and depressed. He had no enthusiasm for work and very little money left after paying the deposit to Bonnat.

At the end of October, beginning of November, he found a cheap flat some way out of the centre, in Rue de Chartres 27 in the suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, together with his artist friend, Valentin Kielland. He would come to regret this when autumn turned to winter, and the flat proved to be cold and damp. Soon he could add influenza to his worries. In desperation, he wrote a begging letter to Olaf Schou, the son of an industrialist, who had dedicated his life and wealth to art, as a collector and patron. Munch received 400 kroner from Schou and a small contribution from his Aunt Karen, and so was saved until the rest of his stipend was paid out in the new year.

But still he struggled. He was determined to work, but didn't get much out of the classes at Bonnat's. According to a fellow student, it was the teacher who disliked Munch's palette, but the truth was that he had lost all interest in the school. Drawn-out mornings in the studio, holding out an arm, measuring the model with a pencil – how many heads to the body, how broad across the chest. "I am bored and tired – blunted."

And at the end of the working day, when all the Norwegians gathered at Café de la Régence, happy and thirsty, Munch was not there. He had not come to Paris to carouse, and certainly not to be an audience for the Løchen circus. As it happened, the one place he would escape his rival was at the painting school: soon after arriving in Paris, Kalle had seen Jean

Mounet-Sully's Hamlet at Comédie-Française and was once again passionate about theatre. He fully embraced his old role as the tragic Danish prince. Whenever, wherever, on the street and in bars, Kalle could die Hamlet's death. He scared the life out of waiters and drivers, and once was remanded in custody. And so he carried on until late spring, when he went back home to his pregnant wife, with a painting under his arm that he had stolen from Munch.

In his discontent, Munch was no doubt unfair on Bonnat, and equally, the Norwegians most certainly had better things to do than simply party away their days in Paris. But Munch was not interested, he was looking for something else. Once again, he explored the city's museums and galleries. The art selection of Exposition Universelle was housed in Palais des Beaux-Arts, and was split into an international collection and a French collection. Here Munch saw Monet, Manet, Pissarro, Cezanne and James Whistler. If he found his way to Panthéon and the amphitheatre at the Sorbonne, he could see the great murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, and if he was really on his toes, he might also have caught Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* before Salon des independents closed not long after he'd arrived in town. Fortunately, there was more time to enjoy the so-called Volpini exhibition where Paul Gauguin and his circle, "Groupe impressionniste et synthétiste", presented their latest paintings.

Considering Munch's later development, it is reasonable to assume that he both saw and learned from Gauguin, but otherwise it is hard to say what seeing these other artists' work might have meant to him. He had ample opportunity to see art once he started travelling abroad, not just in museums and galleries, but also private homes. And if he didn't see, he heard the rumours and read the reviews, or he was influenced by that intangible phenomenon, "zeitgeist", where many wanted to free themselves from tradition and sought the same ways out. In his earliest works, it is easy to identify the influence of the masters Krohg, Thaulow and Heyerdahl. In his later work, it is often most meaningful to talk about how Munch's paintings either conform or don't conform with the trends of his time, without it being possible to demonstrate direct inspiration from others. That autumn, however, it is clear that the strongest impulses came from within.

The Military Doctor's Death

One day at the beginning of December, Munch ran into a friend who told him about a notice he had seen in *Morgenbladet*. About a death in Kristiania. Munch froze; there was something about the other man's tone. He took the letter from his pocket that he had received from Valentin Kielland the same day, but not yet had a chance to open. The letter

was from Aunt Karen, and she confirmed what Edvard had just understood. His father was dead. He had died on Thursday the week before. His aunt had written to him immediately, but sent the letter to Kielland so he could deliver the news gently. But Kielland had either forgotten or put off this onerous duty, and Edvard received the letter the day before his father's funeral.

His father had been in good form prior to his death. On the Monday, he had played with the cat on the drawing room floor and eaten three portions of grits and pork. Then, the same evening, had been paralysed by a heart attack and left seemingly unconscious, but when Inger had bent over him and promised they would trust in God, he had squeezed her hand with a weak smile. Inger said in a letter that he had softened latterly: "You should know that Papa was fully prepared – and there is no death that is easier for a true Christian."

In the period that followed, letters were exchanged between Kristiania and Paris. "Andreas, the girls and I take refuge in God's Word, a source of comfort and strength to your father as well, as you yourself know," writes Karen.

In his reply, Edvard offers equal comfort: "No matter how painful it was for me to hear the news of Papa's death, I realise that it must have been far more so for you. It is hard for me to imagine the drawing room and furniture without him."

The tone is sympathetic, yet controlled, almost formal. That, however, is not the case in the texts he now starts to write for himself, about grief and the loss of his father. Here there is no trace of solace, no reconciliation:

Those at home my aunt my brother and my sisters believe that death is nothing more than sleep – that my father sees and hears ~~– hears and sees our grief~~.

I can do nothing other than let my grief overflow
Run out into ~~the half light~~ the day
That dawns and the day that fades.

He writes his way through grief. He does not hide behind a pseudonym; these notes of mourning are not told by *Brandt*, but by a son who is weeping for his father, far from those he should be with at this time.

I sit alone – with millions
Of memories ... millions of daggers
That tear my heart – and the wounds
Remain open.

In these texts, everything is woven together, childhood memories from the sickbed, his fear of consumption and death, the shame of a dirty secret called Milly, his friendship with

Jæger, which was dirty because it was not secret. The betrayal of his family, of his father. He had been irascible or cold, his father was "soft" and wanted to be reconciled. One day, his father had come down from Helgelandsmoen with a bottle of cheap champagne, which he wanted to drink with his son. As a gesture, despite what had passed between them. Edvard had said, indifferently, that he didn't think he liked the wine. He could have said yes, he could have embraced his father there and then. Now it was too late, now there was only regret.

For seven or eight years, he had lived with an increasing tension between two spheres with his father and Jæger as the extreme points of gravity: the sphere of home and faith on the one hand, and the Bohemians and a free artistic life on the other. After the death of his father, it would seem that he either consciously or subconsciously, looked for ways in which to overcome the tension, but without actually renouncing either sphere. With his father, it was a matter of upholding the love by putting the blame on something other than themselves: "What I wanted, he could not understand. What he revered most, I could not understand. We were separated by God." In the same way, he made a qualified break from the Bohemians. He realised now that his friendship with Jæger was his father's greatest sorrow. "I felt something akin to hatred for Jæger. It was my conviction that he was right – but all the same." In his tirades against the Bohemians' debauched lives, he became something of a preacher himself, especially when it came to the girls in Vika – "those disgusting creatures down there." But in reality, he didn't renounce the Bohemian life. And even though he spurned Christianity, it remained deeply rooted in him and would come to light in the metaphysical symbolism he developed in his paintings from the 1890s. Munch would continue to move between these two spheres of home and art for the rest of his life, between the worlds of the military doctor and the Bohemians, without being able to free himself from either.

Identifying God as the source of anxiety in his life is wrong, no matter what. Rather, he was a young man who had felt the presence of death throughout his childhood. His fear of death originated in hellfire and brimstone, and was fuelled by the hypersensitivity of illness and a father who let his own anxiety spill over into his son; the blood on the shirt, his father's trembling hand on his brow. The painful rejection of God, the shame of a debauched life, the agonizing pleasure of desire. All this in a man who was convinced that his nerves were more delicate and his skin was thinner than those of other people.

Is that not enough?

Nor can I live like
The others – drink like the others not
Eat what I want - love ~~paid~~

For payment – I cannot – they are too
Disgusting – I cannot walk everything spins
I must lie here on the sofa, sick and
Tired – without hope of life – without desire to
Live – dying without death –

If you did not exist – but kill ~~you~~ me
I dare not – death makes me shudder

And life makes me shudder

~~Love~~

†

Night in Saint-Cloud

Over Christmas 1889, Munch lay in his hotel room, broken by grief and another bout of illness that brought death one step closer. Paris had newly been struck by a deadly flu which had appeared in the East and swept around the globe within months. If Munch did not have "the Russian flu", he must certainly have feared it. To be on the safe side, he moved to the suburb of Saint-Cloud, well out of the city centre. Here he took a room in Hôtel Belvédère, on the second floor, with a view to the Seine.

He was alone out there to begin with, but then one day an acquaintance moved into the neighbourhood. Munch had met the Danish writer, Emanuel Goldstein, in Paris, and was familiar with his views on life and art. Goldstein was an eccentric poet from Copenhagen, who identified with Baudelaire and decadence and was vehemently opposed to naturalism. A writer, he believed, should free himself from any school in order to write based on emotional experience, on what he called "the Soul's Design". Such a tabula rasa of course appealed to Munch. As did the Dane's view on love as a battle between the sexes, where the man was inferior: Goldstein would continue to develop the themes in his debut book, the poetry collection *Vexelspil* (1886), which was about his first unhappy love, the curse of desire and the dangerous nature of women, for the rest of his life: "You are the Vampire, who sucks / my Blood."

Unsurprisingly, Munch was influenced by his friend and around this time started to write about his own story with Milly Thaulow. The result was a mass of notes, part memoir, part literary, chronological or fractured into scenes, all permeated by a fear of love and desire, a fear that we now understand was fanned by feelings of grief and guilt after his father's death. It is difficult to say whether he really had not got over Milly, or if she just lived on in him as a fixed eros motif. Later that spring, he heard the latest news about her from the illustrator, Olaf Krohn. Milly had divorced the medical corps captain, Thaulow, some time ago and made a living as a singing teacher. Krohn told Munch that she had since been rejected by the family, and travelled to Vienna to become a singer. Munch assured Krohn that he was done with her, but confessed in his diary that he could imagine Milly as a fallen temptress in a smoky club with that wanton smile he knew so well, offering herself to the men of Vienna for money.

In reality, in January 1890, Milly was in hospital in Berlin, with a child on the way. A year later she married the actor Ludvig Bergh, who was possibly the father, but assumed responsibility for the child, regardless. In the years that followed, Milly performed with her husband, singing and playing the piano. In 1906, she translated the Belgian playwright

Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas and Mélisande* into Norwegian. After her divorce from Bergh, she went on to build a career as a fashion and food writer, which led to a cook book with the rather unvampire-ish title of "Fun Food" (1921).

Vampire women are probably best cultivated in memories, and possibly philosophy and art. And it was in the world of thought and art that Munch mainly moved in those winter months in Saint-Cloud, with only Goldstein for company. And soon Goldstein disappeared as well. Munch was alone again and he lay in his bed, still ill, or pondered and paced around the room, while the pandemic raged outside. His daily walks became fewer and shorter, and eventually he stayed indoors, his frozen feet on the hearth as he stared into the flames. Or he spent hours on his morning ablutions, then dressed up and performed in front of the mirror, with his top hat at jaunty angle.

"You see, I have had a rather lonely winter," he complains in a letter to Aase Nørregaard. "I cannot count the number of evenings I have spent here alone, sitting by the window, vexed that you were not here so we could admire the moonlit scene outside, together." When he did eventually dare to venture to the other side of the Seine, for a matinee, it didn't go well. As soon as the orchestra began to play, the music felt deafeningly loud to him. He suddenly became extremely aware of the smell of fresh paint and damp cellars, and the garish, green light from the stained-glass window hurt his eyes. As he pushed his way through the audience, he was trembling, the sweat was pouring, and once outside he collapsed and had to be examined by a doctor.

"He is terribly thin," was the doctor's conclusion. He thought that Munch must be overworked.

It took a lot for Munch to put down his brush. And now he was being forced to rest; the only thing he could bear to use was the pen. The literary impulse that he experienced during those winter months arose from several sources, the most important being the death of his father. The Saint-Cloud Notes are an odd collection of texts, apparently honest and stripped bare, yet written with an experimental literary awareness. Some passages resemble diary entrances, while in other places he delves back to his earliest memories, recalling episodes from Nedre Slottsgate and everything that he can remember about his mother. Other texts are written in the style of auto-fiction – such as the story about Brandt and Mrs Heiberg. He moves seamlessly between the past and present in his free, associative method. The notes read very much like rough drafts and the many deletions indicate that he is searching to find not only the best words, but also the right words.

As a whole, the Saint-Cloud Notes are characterised by Munch's attempt to reconstruct his own memories, but also to explore his excessive hypersensitivity, not least when ill. It is possible that he wrote some of the texts while fevered in order to study the enhancing and distorting effects of a febrile condition on the senses: "Once I have turned on

the lamp, I suddenly see – my enormous shadow across half the wall, reaching right up to the ceiling – And in the mirror over the fire place I see myself – my own ghostly face."

His attention then turns from the hotel room to memories of childhood sickness, when he lay in bed watching his father, aunt and siblings move around the flat like "dark and sinister" figures with an overlay of "screeching, glaring" colours.

The Saint-Cloud Notes have always fascinated art historians, and many are those who have compared it with *The Sick Child, Spring* and *Death in the Sickroom*, with the thought that Munch was a man who was haunted by the past – by his mother's death, his sister's death, by the fury of his father and the fear of devil in hell. He later described himself in this period as "that nervous chap who plagued himself over and again with these sickly memories". But it is equally true that he *sought out* these memories and explored the sensory experience in conscious pursuit of an artistic programme:

> No more interiors with men reading and women knitting shall be painted.
> They must be living people who breathe, feel, suffer and love.
> I will paint a series of such pictures
> People shall understand the sacred within them and bare their heads before them as though they were in church.

These words were written towards the end of the 1920s, but are either identical to or build on texts that Munch wrote in winter 1889-1890. The words have later been understood as a "manifesto", but it is more correct to see them as part of Munch's working process in Saint-Cloud to achieve artistic clarity. In another note he declares, on behalf of himself and his generation, that he "wants something other than merely a photograph of nature". The aim must be, he writes, to create "an art that portrays the human condition" and that is rendered with the artist's own life blood.

The essence is the same: he wanted to abandon naturalism and photographic realism, and work towards an art which, with a subjective and metaphysical eye, would focus on what is *human in people and what is sacred in humanity.*

Emanuel Goldstein was an obvious source of inspiration for this line of thought, as was the Danish art historian Julius Lange, who had recently published a book portraying a new kind of artist who seeks out the "half clear, half shadowy" images that arise from his own memory, rather than observing the world as the Impressionists did. This corresponds well with Munch's insistence that the artist should portray the world as seen with the mind's eye: "If the clouds resemble a bloody cover for a disturbed mind, then one should paint a bloody cover – not 'ordinary clouds.'"

This kind of mood painting would by necessity build on memory, not on direct observation, and thus entailed a break from photographic realism. This gave Munch the opportunity to have a dig at one of his old enemies: Gustav Wentzel had taken realism to the extreme with his detailed painting, but was nonetheless unable to surpass the photograph. Surely it would be more honest to paint a chair, not as one sees it, but as one *saw* it in a given light and given mood. Surely it would be more honest to paint a chair, not as one sees it, but as one *saw* it in a given light and given mood. In that sense, a chair and the death of a sister were the same.

At first glance, Goldstein's contribution to this manifesto may be somewhat obscure. The Dane's fixation with emotional experience and the battle of the sexes was part of his own natural philosophy on the synthesis of spirit and material, and positive male and negative female energy, where the individual's life struggles could be traced back to humanity's mythical beginnings. One artistic consequence of this unquestionably loose philosophy was the belief in "energies" that could manifest for the artist through the various senses – not just sight. So Munch and Goldstein spent many a winter night in Saint-Cloud talking passionately about electricity, light and sound waves, the phonograph, the telegraph and a future wireless telegraph. Both wanted to break with realism by finding an artistic language that would capture their subjective perception of the world in the same way that a phonograph reproduced voices that had long since been silenced.

Judging from the Saint-Cloud Notes, these conversations were rather theoretical, if not simply grandiose. Precisely *how* these new thoughts would be given artistic form is more diffuse. What was an art that "portrays the human"? How to paint the sacred? And what does a memory actually look like? Goldstein had an inexhaustible repertoire of metaphors, but for Munch it was in no way obvious how these nocturnal ruminations from Saint-Cloud would be translated into colours and shapes on a canvas. He would explore solutions in the months that followed. In the meantime, he continued to work in a borderland. For what was this meeting of mind and world, other than a borderland that

corresponded with dusk in the woodlands by Åsgårdstrand, with the sickrooms in Grünerløkka and the night moods in Saint-Cloud, where all that separated the room from the landscape outside was the thin curtains that breathed with the breeze? Skin was the most intimate barrier between the self and the world, and in illness, even this barrier was erased by the heightened senses.

In only one of the paintings he did in Saint-Cloud does all of this manifest. *Night in Saint- Cloud* is full of sorrow, and a biographical interpretation would undoubtedly link this to his father's death. A melancholy man sitting looking out of the window at night. The only sources of light are the moon, the glow of his cigarette and a street lamp. In one of his notes, Munch associates

the moon with memory – "up there, it is pale and small – it is like memory". The moon itself is no more than a hazy light that fills the room with shadowy memories, transforming it into a room of the soul. Where the bright daylight in *Morning* touches and shapes the girl on the bed, the light in *Night in Saint-Cloud* embraces the dark and erases any differentiation between man and room until there is nothing but atmosphere, a restless atmosphere, restless strokes; even the curtain to the left appears to be in motion, though the window is shut. Only the man is still. And a cross on the floor, the only message the moon seems to offer.

Duty and Vocation

Towards the end of April 1980, Munch left Saint-Cloud and went back to Paris to see Salon des indépendents. From there, he travelled home, via Antwerp.

He stepped ashore in Kristiania on 10 May and was reunited with his family, who were in deep crisis following his father's death. Christian had left no savings, and as he and Karen had not been married, there was no widow's pension. Karen had not inherited anything from Andreas Bjølstad, presumably because her stepmother retained possession of the undivided estate, so the family were left with nothing. The fact that none of the grown children living at home had a regular income, did not make things any easier. Andreas was still a student and in addition, had had a child with a maid. Karen had given the girl's father money to have the child adopted, which solved the problem for Andreas, but at a high price for the family. Laura had become gradually worse since puberty, and was odd, irrational and in periods apathetic, and did not function socially. Trying to find her a job would be pointless. So everything rested on Karen and Inger. The father's death was particularly untimely for Inger, who was only twenty-two and should have been settling down with her own family. Instead, she stayed at home and contributed to the household income by giving piano lessons and working as a seamstress. Karen was fifty and had suffered a serious bout of flu that winter. As soon as she was on her feet again, she rented out two rooms and started to sell her bark and moss pictures in Husfliden, a Norwegian craft shop, and at Bennett Travel Agency. She also applied for several grants for daughters of civil servants, but never received enough to make a difference. They quickly gave up all hope that someone from the wealthy Munch family might help them; not even P.A. Munch's daughters, who had so much sympathy for their Uncle Christian, found their way to the east end of the city.

Karen did not hide her bitterness, and nor did Edvard: "So like this disgusting family not to offer their help." As the oldest son, he was very aware of his duty to his aunt and siblings. Karen had suggested in a letter that he teach drawing and painting when he returned. In reply, he had simply repeated her suggestion in the form of a question: "If it might be possible for me to teach painting there?'

Only in the next letter did he agree that teaching could be an alternative. It is unlikely that this was heartfelt. Should he, the rising star of Norwegian art, settle at Hauketo and make his talent part of the family business together with Karen and Inger, and their dried flower pictures and piano teaching? In September, he was awarded the state stipend for a second time, and started to plan another trip to Paris after the Autumn Exhibition had closed. Other than the moody *Night in Saint-Cloud*, most of his paintings that year were experiments in impressionism: a series from the banks of the Seine, some bright and colourful sketches from Åsgårdstrand. In some paintings, such as *Spring Day on Karl Johan Street*, he had tried out the latest trend in Paris: pointillism, where the picture is developed

as a mosaic of coloured dots. In others, such as *At the Wine Merchant's* and *In the Bar*, he was clearly influenced by Jean-François Raffaëlli's "painted drawings" of common people. It was as though he wanted to find his own way by trying his hand at all the styles and schools in order to see if he could make his own mark on them. He had only just started, he could not allow himself to be held back by his aunt and siblings.

In the course of the autumn, Karen mustered her courage and good sense. She found a new house at Nordstrand, with two extra rooms that could be rented out. The house was by the railway station, which fitted well with Karen's plan to expand the souvenir business with home-made "boys' suits". This, combined with the income from Inger's piano lessons and handkerchief embroidery would hopefully be enough to keep them all alive. Andreas incurred costs, as he had now moved to town for the final year of his medical degree, whereas Laura had been packed off to take a teaching position in Toten. The very idea reeks of desperation; Laura could barely cope with daily life with her closest family around her, and now she was supposed to take responsibility for a school class. The experiment ended with her staying with the local priest, not doing anything, until one day she fled and *walked* to Värmland in Sweden in search of the charismatic healer and preacher, Fredrik August Boltzius. She found the strength, through her faith, to write home and ask for her aunt's forgiveness for all the problems she had caused them; Laura knew only too well how much of a burden she was, and promised her aunt that she would travel to China as a missionary. When she was eventually forced to return home, she didn't dare go to Nordstrand. Karen was told by an acquaintance that Laura had been seen in various chapels and railway stations in town. It took a week before Karen managed to get her niece home.

Such was the situation in which Edvard made his choice. He may have told himself that everything would work out at home, but in reality, it was unthinkable that he would prioritise his family responsibilities over his calling to art. This meant that the harder life got for his aunt and siblings, the more reason there was to stay away. All he could do was love them from a distance and hope that one day, his art would be a blessing for them all.

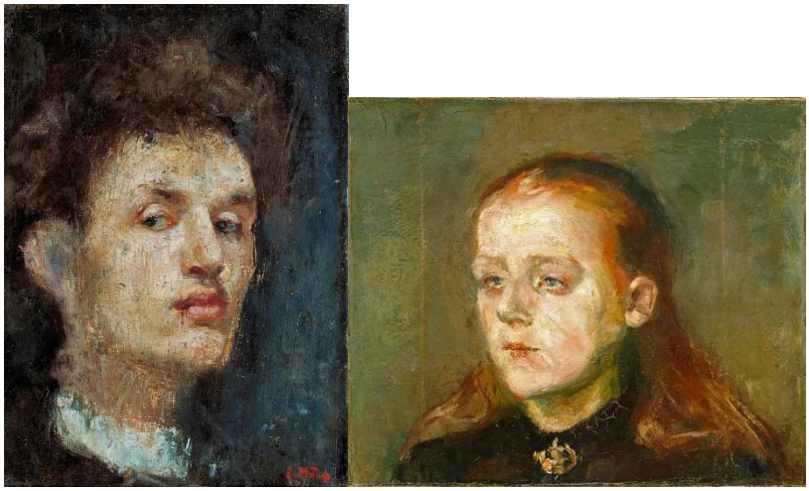
And thus, Andreas Aubert's review of the Autumn Exhibition can be read as a parting gift which neatly manages to hail Munch as a future artist and at the same time links him to his family legacy, illness, his father's nerves and everything he was trying to escape: "He is in kinship with those of delicate and sensitive nerves, of whom we hear more and more in connection with new art," Aubert writes, giving the examples of the British James Whistler, the Danish Vilhelm Hammershøi, the German-speaking artists Gabriel von Max, Arnold Böcklin and Max Klinger, and possibly the French Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. They were all decadent and sensitive, "children of a fragile, over-civilised era". Munch belonged in such company, or to use Aubert's modish expression: Munch was a *neurasthenic*. And it was not meant as a compliment.

Nerves and Lungs

Neurasthenia was one of the day's fashionable diagnoses, used to describe the mental problems it was believed were exacerbated by city life. The theory was that for highly sensitive people, such as artists, modern life could lead to exhaustion, melancholy and digestive issues, in particular if one was the sort who overindulged in company, alcohol, tobacco and sex. The cure was often healthy food and rest at a sanatorium far from the hustle and bustle of the city. The origins of neurasthenia are unclear, a cultural illness where the line between physical and mental issues was blurred, a variant of what later has become known as chronic fatigue. Aubert was the first person in Norway to transpose neurasthenia from a medical to an aesthetic context. In 1887, he had already highlighted the nervous sensitivity of Munch's paintings, only then, three years later, to give him this aesthetical diagnosis.

Munch, however, did not talk of himself as a neurasthenic, but was no stranger to the association of art, body and illness. Unlike Aubert, he tended to see his nervous sensitivity as a quality. And he associated his artistic nature not only with nerves, but also with tuberculosis, which he knew so well from home. As with neurasthenia, the cause of tuberculosis was somewhat obscure. It appeared to strike randomly; whether it was hereditary or due to some other inner disposition or not, victims of tuberculosis lived with a hint of heaven in their eyes, and carried their pale, translucent skin like a shroud. The drawn-out final stages could pass without much pain, which only added to the notion that death by tuberculosis was tragic and beautiful (the reality was of course far more complex; there was often pain, and the moment of death was not always beautiful). The combination of anaemia, wasting away and the fact that it was associated with the airways (breathing, coughing) and fluid (blood in the handkerchief, "humidity" in the lungs), contributed to the idea that the body was dissolving to set to the soul free.

Thus, death by tuberculosis was seen to be a kind of purification where the transient body gradually gave way to the soul, often accompanied by an intensified appreciation of life in the patient. Or a deep resignation, as though one were already on one's way somewhere else. In the history of art, Munch's pale, hollow-eyed women have been compared with the Pre-Raphaelites' heavy-lidded, wistful girls – those who don't love life enough to survive. The portrait of Betzy Nilsen below, which Munch painted in 1887, fits this description well, as does *The Sick Child*, where the grieving mother's



solid, black body stands in sharp contrast to the ethereal girl's face on the white pillow. Tuberculosis as a metaphor reflects a *two-fold experience:* on the one hand, the obliteration of the dividing line between a person's inside and the outside world (humidity in the lungs and the dirty, damp city air, bound by breath and a transparent skin), and the dividing line between life on earth and in heaven, on the other. When Edvard's mother realised that she was going to die, she wrote a final letter to her family, as well as a few words for Edvard alone:

> Long for that which is here above and no longer for what is here on earth. Wait and pray. Believe in Our Lord Jesus, my dear and cherished Edvard, then you will be blessed, and we will meet again in heaven, never again to be parted.

It may just be an oversight, but she actually writes "here above" as though she were writing the letter from beyond the grave, and not Pilestredet 30. And did not Sofie also have a glimpse of heaven in her eyes before she died? She was the tuberculated *child*, associated with innocence, wisdom and a peace that seemed supernatural in those final minutes before death. There is a darker quality to Edvard's portrayal, which is full of angst and separation: Sofie, he writes, *saw* death in the room and towards the end felt "almost lighter than before the pain had ceased ... how strange she felt – the room was different – as seen through a veil – as if her limbs were leaden – how tired."

According to family myth, Sofie was seen as the family's first artist, so tragically taken before she could bloom. "Two geniuses, we could not have coped with that," Inger later said. In this way, the brother and sister are linked: the one who lived to create is indebted to the one who was lost. Edvard's identification with his sister has been woven into the interpretation of *The Sick Child* over the years. It is possible to catch a glimpse of this in his description of Sofie's death: that his sister felt both light and leaden can be read to mean

that she was on her way through the dividing veil between life and the other side, a veil that also distorted her perception of the room where she lay. The similarity with Edvard's exploration of memories and hypersensitivity in the Saint-Cloud Manifesto is striking.

It is not known if Edvard carried the bacteria himself, but it seems that both he and the others believed that tuberculosis was hereditary in their family - that, in a way, they all lived in the shadow of the disease. Not even the identification of the tubercle bacillus in 1882 could dissuade them from the belief that they came from a sick family; after all, the myth gave death meaning and offered a sheen of inevitability to the fate of the child with blood on his shirt.

But also as a young, ambitious artist, there was something tubercular about Munch, but more thanks to the fashion that had resurrected the romantic image of the pale, young artist whose elegance demonstrated sensitivity and creativity. As was the case with the young Edvard Munch who wandered, pale and hollowed-eye, up and down Karl Johan Street, like a Lazarus on his way from the grave to the Grand Hotel, the kind of man Bokken Lasson and Barbara Ring found attractive, but Aase Nørregaard realised was a poor choice for marriage. This is how he appears in his self-portrait from 1886, to the left of Betzy above. It is tempting to see some of the translucency of the sick child's skin in the young man with the sensitive mouth and arrogant gaze. Munch used the same layering technique as he did in *The Sick Child*, and the self-portrait was scraped and scored in the same brutal manner. The result is a self-representation that is at once raw and refined, sensual and ethereal.

Tuberculosis is the disease of Romanticism, as syphilis was the disease of Naturalism. Hans Jæger died with the shame of syphilis hanging over him, whereas Munch, with his lungs and nerves, united the tubercular artist aristocrat of Romanticism with the neurotic artist of modern urban life. The combination fuelled a pathological artist persona, where body and soul were an indivisible unit, and as such made the artist, with his pale skin, a canvas where the world could leave its mark, and his nerves, like an Aeolian harp, could capture the winds of the world around him, if they were not already vibrating with memories from the past.

*

Nerve harp and canvas skin – the artist's body was a membrane that separated the soul and the world. We only have to compare Munch with the Norwegian poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder to see that this artistic persona was not exclusive to him. Obstfelder did not come from the elite classes, but he too came from a family that had fallen from social grace. He lost his mother early, had siblings with poor mental health, and rejected his father and Christian faith in one

fell swoop. During treatment at Rikshospitalet in 1891, the doctor wrote that he "came from a family that suffers from nerves, his father is apparently highly irascible and hotheaded ... a brother who is mad, from what he says due to masturbation, a sister who "has been odd" since she was a child, he says, and that he already as a boy was very "anxious"."

The similarities between these two artists say something about their generation's upbringing in the limitless city, about the rejection of their fathers, faith and morals – while the doctors, in their search for answers to modernity's worrying impact on the mind, served up theories about inheritance and degeneration.

For Munch, the tubercular and neurasthenic artist persona no doubt represented a deep and meaningful connection with his own roots: the tuberculosis came from the Bjølstad side, and the neurasthenia was inherited from the Munch family. The latter allowed him to see himself as a descendent from an ailing, and at the same time, blessed family. Edvard and his siblings had always known that they came from a good family on their father's side, with important men and interesting women, creative and original people. This was reflected in their grandparents' home, the old Bakkehuset, which the Munch children remembered as a dilapidated, old wooden house full of secrets. At home in Grünerløkka, Andreas copied out sections of the archdeacon's diary, while the 17-year-old Edvard painted copies of the portraits of their great grandparents, Peder and Christine Munch, that hung on the wall. He later painted them into his pictures, a clear and symbolic allusion to the family's power over its descendants. He himself was in thrall to that power, all the more so the older he became. In a late, undated note, he writes about this legacy:

> I inherited two of a person's most terrible enemies – the inheritance of tuberculosis and of mental illness – sickness and madness and death were the black angels who stood by my cradle. A mother who died early – gave me the seeds of consumption – an over-nervous father ... pietistic ... religious to the point of madness – from a long lineage – gave me the seeds of madness.

In the many notes he left behind, he lists, almost with pride and well complemented by Inger, all his sick and mad relatives: cousin Nathalie Møller, P.A. Munch's daughter, who was mad – just like her mother. His father's sister, Mathilde, who had married into a rich, but mentally fragile family, and produced two mad sons and a daughter, who was also mad. And not forgetting Munch's paternal grandfather, Edvard Storm Munch, who died of dementia and a degenerative spine condition.

In Munch's immediate family, his father and sister Laura suffered from delicate nerves, and his mother and Sofie from tuberculosis. So, in accordance with the roles of the

various family members, his tubercular mother and older sister were associated with heaven, and his sensitive father and younger sister with a fear of the depths of hell.

Forty years earlier, Søren Kierkegaard had written: “The anxiety with which father filled my soul, his own frightful melancholy, everything that I in that respect cannot even commit to paper. I felt such fear of Christianity, and yet was strongly drawn to it.” For Kierkegaard, the angst was an existential feeling, a perequisite for man’s transition from one stage of life to the next. For Munch, it was something physical caused by nerves, but also laden with transition. While Christian Munch allowed his anxiety to break him down, his son channelled his anxiety into art, thereby elevating himself in life. It is hard to emphasise enough the reconciliation this entailed.

[...]

Berlin

All dramatists know the problem: in the middle of writing, everything stops. The plot gets stuck, the characters have exhausted their individual qualities. But in fiction the plot can always be improved in a play, if necessary, by introducing a new character – or killing off another. In non-fiction, one does not have that luxury; in real life, the plot is never perfect, the unfolding of events can never be changed, and there is always someone who dies before they should. But life does sometimes – well, quite often, in fact – offer a helping hand. Someone wanders onto the stage and gets the plot moving again.

In autumn 1890, Munch had in many ways reached an impasse in his life. He was an artist who provoked; year after year he had shown that he could paint beyond the limits of his generation, while the critics, or many of them at least, did their best to keep up. He

had travelled and completed a kind of artist's education in Paris. And now he had spent his third government stipend and returned home. Dare he hope for a fourth?

And then Adelsteen Normann showed up at Tolstrupgården. He was one of the *Late Düsseldorfers* who lived in Germany, known for his grandiose landscape paintings of northern Norway, and was passing through Kristiania when he decided to visit Munch's exhibition. On his return to Berlin, he sent his young colleague a letter where he wrote that the city's artists' association wanted to arrange an exhibition for him. What lay behind this invitation is a mystery. The Berlin Artists' Association was a bastion of Idealism. Adelsteen Normann was a member of the association's exhibition committee and himself an artist who stood for everything the Norwegian naturalists were against. What on earth did such people want from an ultra-radical artist like Munch?

At the time, Berlin was the capital of the young, modern empire of Germany, founded after Prussia's victory over France in 1870-71. While Paris was transformed into an elegant, yellow sandstone metropol, Berlin expanded at a galloping pace from garrison town to a modern city with endless streets of grey tenements and monumental, solid buildings. Berlin was everything that Paris was not, an upstart of a metropol, uncertain and nervous, but also brash and swaggering with military and industrial potency, all kept in place by an emperor and bourgeoisie that sat like a lid over the sooty workers, rosy-cheeked butchers and plump barmaids. The unification of Germany, however, did not prompt the centralisation of cultural life. The art world in Munich was still more sophisticated than in the capital, and former principalities and city states such as Hamburg, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main and Cologne maintained their own traditions. When Wilhelm II was crowned emperor in 1888, he decided to focus on nation-building through art, to educate the people in order to curb foreign influences, especially from France, the arch enemy. Anton von Werner held the power in Berlin's art scene, as the director of the art academy, leader of the artists' association. He was also a historical painter with a penchant for battle scenes. Like the emperor, he preferred art to be idealistic and patriotic, and viewed impressionism as a curiosity. At the start of the 1890s, opposition to this school of thought was growing, but in 1892, the Germans still associated "modern art" with Max Liebermann and Fritz von Uhde's moderate impressionism. Van Gogh's colour symphonies, Georges Seurat's pointillism and Gauguin's synthetism were relatively unknown to them.

The explanation as to why the artists' association still chose to invite Munch to exhibit, of all people, must lie in the association's failed attempt to arrange a major, international exhibition the year before, which had ended with France withdrawing and the Norwegian naturalists being pushed to one side in favour of the Late Düsseldorfers who lived in Germany. As a result, the German impressionists formed their own group ("The Eleven"), partly in response to the way in which the Norwegian artists had been treated.

So Anton von Werner must have thought it both wise and mollifying to invite a Norwegian the following year. It is worth noting that he had no idea what kind of paintings Munch would exhibit, only Adelsteen Normann knew that. Why he wanted Munch to come, we will never know. One explanation could be that he, as a Late Düsseldorfer, may have preferred his home country's youngest rising star over his rivals in the Naturalist Movement. Another might be that Normann was more open to innovation than his reputation would lead us to believe; after all, he was part of the opposition in the artists' association, and at the time experimented himself with impressionistic techniques. In addition, he had a written recommendation from the Munich artist, Fritz von Uhde, who, to be fair, had only seen four relatively innocent mood paintings by Munch. But that was enough for the exhibition committee and Anton von Werner. After all, how much of a risk could it really be?

The Scandal

Edvard Munch stepped down from the train in Berlin in mid-October. He found himself a hotel and settled into Café Bauer on the corner of Friedrichstrasse and the city's main boulevard, Unter den Linden. It was his first time in the German capital, but not in Germany. On his way to Nice the year before, he had seen an exhibition in Kunsthalle in Hamburg that had distressed him as much as the Paris Salon had, full as it was of "revolting German art – languishing women – battle scenes with rearing horses – shiny canon balls – oh, disgust – oh, revolt."

And now the empire's most renowned battle painter had given him a date. It was all very promising. While he waited for his paintings to arrive, he allowed himself to be introduced to Berlin's art scene by Adelsteen Normann. After a few days, he asked Aunt Karen to send his drawings portfolio and newspaper reviews, which Normann wanted to translate into German. Then he went out and bought himself a new winter coat, a frock coat, the finest garment he had ever owned. He *knew* that he would cause a stir in town, and was preparing for it, whether it be scandal or success, preferably both. When the paintings eventually arrived towards the end of October, he set about hanging them in the association's premises in Architektenhaus. There was space for 55 pictures, in all, of which 45 had been exhibited in Tostrupgården. And to ensure the height to fall from grace, he had been advertised in advance as "the brilliant Norwegian painter" and his pictures had been described as "imaginative portrayals in Ibsen style."

So what was bound to happen, happened. When Architektenhaus opened its doors on Saturday 5 November, the storm broke. Over the next few days and weeks, the Berlin art

critics went into a frenzy about the young Norwegian's "naturalistic excesses". The most extreme paintings, such as *Sick Mood at Sunset*, were dismissed as fancies, and even critics who normally defended the German impressionists, were somewhat offended: did Munch think he was the only impressionist in Germany? Of the very few who had anything good to say, Theodor Wolff, co-founder of *Freie Bühne* and later editor of the liberal newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*, was the most important. He confessed that he had gone to Architektenhaus for a good laugh, and instead found, in amongst Munch's terrible and peculiar paintings "delicate moods – in dark rooms filled with moonlight, on lonely paths, in silent Norwegian summer nights". Some of the same ambivalence is to be found in art historian Georg Voss. In his view, Munch was at his best when he was not trying to imitate the French painters, but instead expressed a refreshing and naive perception of nature that Voss associated with Norwegian-ness.

But Wolff and Voss were the exceptions. The overall reception is perhaps best summarised by a caricature in the satirical magazine *ULK*. Here Munch was portrayed as a brat with a dripping palette and bare behind being led to the throne in art heaven by Raphael and Titian. The caricature was a response to one critic who compared Munch with the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's poem, and commented with some irony that he seemed to believe that all he needed to do was throw some paint around and the great masters would bow before him.

"Indeed, the exhibition is now open – and is causing great indignation", Munch confides in Aunt Karen soon after the opening, "you see, there are many old, terrible painters here who are furious about the new direction."

The press was ablaze, and the members of Berlin Artists' Association were livid. The painter Herman Eschke proposed that the exhibition should be closed immediately. He received support from 31 signatories, a sufficient number to call an extraordinary general

meeting. This put Anton von Werner in a tricky situation. He could not ignore the members' dissatisfaction, but it would be unheard of to throw out an invited artist, and a foreign guest at that.

"I am truly preparing to do battle," Edvard writes to his aunt, only a few hours before the extraordinary general meeting was due to begin. He was certain the exhibition would be closed. He was equally certain of what it meant. "But this is in fact the best thing that could happen ... [I] could not get better publicity."

And, true enough, the same evening, the general meeting voted by 120 to 105 to close the exhibition one week earlier than planned. As soon as this became known, eight of the twelve members of the exhibition committee resigned. The graphic artist Karl Köpping stood up and declared that no decent person could be part of such an organisation. He then left the room, followed by around 80 members, went straight to a café by Potsdamer Brücke and set up a new and independent group under the name Freie Verein Berliner Künstler – Berlin Independent Artists' Association.

It was an overwhelming turn of events. If one did not know better, it might appear that an unknown Norwegian had split the art scene in the capital of the country that had produced Goethe and Beethoven. But that was not quite the case; among those who knew the art world, Berlin was seen to lack sophistication, and the scandal caused by Munch was not unique – though it was perhaps more spectacular than other similar confrontations. Munch himself no doubt recognised the serendipity of the whole affair, and that he had blown wind into a smouldering fire. And so did Aunt Karen. "We all understand that this is excellent publicity for you – and that you in a remarkable way have been thrust far into the limelight without having done anything yourself."

Munch was certainly the name of the month in Berlin. When he packed the last of his paintings back in their boxes, he was determined to ride the storm in the newspapers for his own gain. He had in fact already been given an offer. There were a couple of galleries that showed modern German and foreign art in Berlin. Eduard Schulte's gallery on Unter den Linden, was one and had opened its doors for the artists of The Eleven. And now Schulte wanted to tour Munch's paintings to Düsseldorf and Cologne. He offered to pay all expenses in return for two thirds of all entrance fees. Munch accepted, but was nonetheless peeved that he had not managed to get more out of the scandal in Berlin.

"I did make one grave error," he writes to Aunt Karen. "I should of course have exhibited my paintings here in town straight after the closure. I would have earned many thousands of kroner." His aunt had recently sent him money, so he was obviously broke. But thanks to an extensive social life, he had still managed to gain two kilos and was otherwise in great form. He could not remember having had so much fun: "Incredible that something as innocent as painting can cause such a stir."

One might be surprised that Berlin's enfant terrible was such a faithful correspondent with his old aunt in Nordstrand. Munch burnt many bridges in his life, but never the one that led back to the family. His progress and misfortunes had governed their lives for a long time. When *Night in Nice* was acquired by the National Gallery the year before, Karen had got out the sherry, and Laura was sent to the baker's to buy cakes. If things turned against him, Karen was there to comfort and advise. Any trace of his father's judgement had evaporated; even Hans Jæger's portrait was left to hang on the wall until Karen took it down in order not to scare off potential lodgers. After the notorious exhibition, Andreas translated the German reviews that his brother wanted to send to the Norwegian newspapers, and Karen sent Norwegian newspaper clippings to Berlin. *Aftenposten* focused only on what was negative, so the family had cancelled the conservative rag. Karen was not in the slightest bit concerned: "Uproar, as Verdens Gang calls it, seems to be in your favour all the same – it has always led to something good before – when folk have made such a fuss."

Aunt Karen had understood, but Edvard did not seem to think that adversity at home was much fun anymore. The strange thing was, now that he had the attention of Berlin, it did not seem important to cause a stir in Kristiania. "What do the Norwegian newspapers say – do they only publish the terrible reviews?"

The Scandinavian Renaissance

While Munch painted Berlin red, August Strindberg packed his writing things into his green canvas bag in the suburb of Friedrichshagen, where the Spree fed into Müggelsee, around twenty kilometres south of the city. The Swedish author was fast approaching 44 and had more or less fled his homeland following the harrowing divorce from Siri von Essen. The divorce was followed by poverty and drink, but this did not stop his pen. In the past ten months alone he had written one five-act play and six one-act plays, which had all been turned down by Swedish theatres.

The person who had brought Strindberg to Friedrichshagen was his younger colleague, Ola Hansson, the author of the decadent novel *Sensitiva amorosa* (1887), who helped to introduce Edgar Allan Poe, Joris-Karl Huysmans and Friedrich Nietzsche to Sweden. Together with his wife, the writer and translator Laura Marholm, Hansson belonged to a group that was part of the naturalistic theatre movement connected to *Freie Bühne*, which a few years earlier had staged Ibsen's *Ghosts* in Berlin. The literary group in Friedrichshagen attracted locals and visitors such as Wilhelm Bölsche, Bruno Wille, Max Dauthendey, Richard Dehmel, Gerhart Hauptmann and others. The current schools of

thought mixed in this melting pot: naturalism and socialism, decadence and Darwinism and psychology – as well as a small dose of Satanism. The latter was preached by a Polish mystic by the name of Stanisław Przybyszewski. He was a twenty-four-year old medical student who had devoted himself to literature and a metaphysical decadence philosophy that he, whenever there was a piano nearby, expressed by playing wild, diabolical interpretations of Chopin. Przybyszewski was a man who built his reputation through other men and would soon, having made his debut with a collection of studies on Ola Hansson, Chopin and Nietzsche, turn his intense gaze on Munch.

When Strindberg joined the Friedrichshagen circle, *The Father* and *Miss Julie* had already been successful in Germany. Over the next few months, he consolidated his position as a Scandinavian attraction on the Berlin stages. However, his friendship with Hansson quickly soured. So, in the middle of November, Strindberg packed his green canvas bag and moved into a boarding house in Neue Wilhelmstrasse 2 in Berlin. He must have met Munch here relatively soon after, as a month later, the artist had started to paint his portrait. It was more than a whim, as Munch had now worked out his next move in Berlin: while his paintings were on tour, he rented a space in Equitable Palast on the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Leipzigerstrasse. The plan was to organise an exhibition himself. As a means to attract people, he wrote to Brødrene Dobloug in Kristiania and ordered a large Norwegian flag, which he hung outside the grand commercial building. This was his way to exploit the scandal and hopefully earn a little something from the whole affair.

He hung the pictures in the room as shown in the photograph below, the one next to or above the other like in a Paris salon, like an enormous Munch collage showing all its diversity in colour and style. With nothing more than a thin wooden frame, the paintings must have almost blended into each

other, unlike later exhibits of the now revered Munch, where the paintings hang like isolated islands on spacious walls, enclosed and separated by thick gold frames. At Equitable Palast, the pictures had even wandered out into the room; one, in front of the pillar to the left in the photograph, had been leant up against the back of a chair, and beside it on an easel, the newly finished portrait of Strindberg. It could barely have been dry and the smell of linseed oil and turpentine must have lingered in the air. Fill the photograph with colours, and it is easy to imagine how overwhelming the experience must have been for curious Berliners who had, until now, only heard rumours about the self-declared genius from the north. It was more than an exhibition, it must have been like stepping into the artist's troubled mind.

That is certainly how Max Dauthendey experienced it. The first thing he noticed when he came into the room was Munch himself, in the crowd – "a slim young man of medium height. Fair, typically Nordic, narow forehead, narrow head, but the back of his head looked like a coconut." As he moved from painting to painting, he felt a growing sense of frustration. No matter how much he wanted to understand what he saw, he could not. After a while, Dauthendey had to admit that tradition lay so heavy on his eyes that he could not decipher Munch's visual language.

Then he had an idea. He stopped, took off his spectacles – and suddenly the magic of the paintings was clear to him. "The brush-strokes blended into each other, six, seven vibrating tones that the painter, with broad strokes, had made into one; the shadows glimmered with different tones, as in nature, the light shimmered and everything was alive."

With the Norwegian flag fluttering outside the entrance and Strindberg's portrait in a prominent place, Munch told his German audience that he was a Norwegian first, and then a Scandinavian. Strindberg placed most importance on the latter: "Today Munch reopened his exhibition giving yet another boost to the Scandinavian renaissance." The nerve centre of this renaissance was a small wine shop on Unter den Linden, with an entrance from Neue Wilhelmstrasse. It was Strindberg who discovered G. Türkes Weinhandlung und Probierstube, which he immediately renamed Zum schwarzen Ferkel, as the blackened Bessarabic wine bag that hung over the door reminded him of a small pig.

Zum schwarzen Ferkel was a tiny place that grew over time as new voices joined the debates, even some who were never there. In addition to the shop, there was a small room furnished with a horsehair sofa, some chairs and a table, that might accommodate around 20 people, with a bit of goodwill. The only window faced the street, and the walls were lined with shelves of wine and schnapps bottles. The proprietor, Gustav Türke, was generous with credit, and soon the evenings spent here were an alcohol-fuelled source of collective creativity for an expanding circle of Scandinavians and Germans.

Strindberg, the Polish mystic, Przybyszewski, and Munch were the core of the group. There were other regulars from Friedrichshagen, such as the surgeon and author Carl Ludwig Schleich, Munch's advocate in the press Theodor Wolff, and the painters Walter Leistikow and Hermann Schlittgen, who were both from the opposition in the artists' association. An important, if sporadic guest, was the young champion of symbolism in German poetry, Richard Dehmel. And on the Scandinavian side, in addition to Strindberg and Munch, was the Finnish-Swedish decadent Adolf Paul, who quickly earned himself the name "Strindberg's house slave", and who no one seems to have liked. He did, however, have the last word in his memoirs, as the vengeful chronicler of Zum schwarzen Ferkel. There were also travelling Scandinavians. From Norway, Christian and Oda Krohg, the playwright Gunnar Heiberg, the composer Christian Sinding, the art historian Jens Thiis and the young Neo-Romantics, Gabriel Finne and Axel Maurer. Denmark was represented by the poet Holger Drachmann, and Sweden by the painters Richard Bergh and Bruno Liljefors. They tried in vain to lure Jean Sibelius over from Finland, but managed to tempt the Finnish-Swedish writer, Karl August Tavaststjerna.

Munch is there, somewhere in the Ferkel pot. But he is not easy to spot, as he is seldom highlighted in the many tales about the group. One exception is Theodor Wolff's party on 7 January 1893: "Like the other young men, Munch danced with the many beautiful girls from the start until dawn, free of the self-conscious loneliness that never leaves him in his artistic work and dreams," says Wolff.

A moment of joy, perhaps, of the purest kind that happens when one manages to forget oneself. It can't have been easy, as Munch drew attention whenever he showed himself in his buff coat and black top hat that overshadowed his pale, fine-featured face with the forceful chin. He must have started to grow his gingerish moustache before he left Norway. If we are to believe Strindberg, it did not help to hide away in Türke's wine shop, because the infatuated Mrs Türke was waiting there in her best frock, with a "love-red" chain around her neck. Munch knew perfectly well which accessories were suited to a new enfant terrible in Berlin, but not everyone was fooled. The first time Thiis saw him with Strindberg at the Equitable Palast, he easily spotted *the Norwegian*. Thiis felt there was "a certain elegant grandezza" about Strindberg's manner that was different from Munch's more direct nature. Strindberg was the son of a maid, but Swedish, and so moved through the world with confidence. Munch was the son of a civil servant, but Norwegian, and therefore must have felt the prickle of a sackcloth shirt under his new coat.

Dagny's Eyes

For those who frequented Türke's wine shop in the winter of 1892-93, the mood must have been buoyed by that rare, but unmistakable feeling of being of the time, when everything you do and say is picked up on the wind and taken out into the world. But such intoxication has a price as one might imagine with so many Scandinavians and so much alcohol around a small table. The first fallout happened late in the evening of 2 March, as the alcohol fog thickened. During an improvised speech, Drachmann insulted Munch, who then, after a short exchange of opinions, marched out. In the fracas that followed, Strindberg stood by Munch. Drachmann's acolytes, Gunnar Heiberg and the Krohgs, gave him an earful, but Strindberg stood his ground and claimed to remember every word the Dane had said about Munch.

'Repeat them,' Krohg demanded. But Strindberg refused.

'Well, write them down then,' Krohg insisted and asked the proprietor for pen and paper. Strindberg wrote everything down and then threw the wretched writing tools at Christian and Oda. He did not hit either of them, but Oda was furious. 'We will not accept that from you, throwing pen and paper in our faces, no, we will not accept that!'

Christian stroked the weeping Oda on the back and assured her that he would take the matter in hand, but before he could do anything, Gunnar Heiberg stood up. It was well-known that he and Oda had developed an appetite for each other, a fact that Christian treated with his usual equilibrium. Heiberg put his spectacles in his pocket and thrust his substantial paunch into the seated Strindberg's chest and demanded that he apologise to Oda. 'I will oblige whenever you wish, with whichever weapon you prefer,' Strindberg replied, 'but I will not brawl like farmhands in a pub.'

The trio of Kristiania Bohemians then marched out of the door, while Drachmann stood by the window and shook his head. The Bohemian life could be so exhausting, enriching you one minute, then depriving you the next. But the most important reason for dwelling on this unhappy evening is, however, the chronicler, Adolf Paul. He and Munch did not like each other, and Paul was of the opinion that Munch had brought it upon himself. According to Paul, Munch felt intimidated by Krohg and Heiberg, without having the courage to confront them. Instead, he took his frustration out on Paul, instead, and did not stop until threatened with a thumping. A couple of weeks later, Paul notes in his diary:

> Ed. Munch – could have been given space in my diary already six months ago, were it not for the fact that he is such a vacuous being. – Came here – invited by the artists' association – put up an exhibition, was thrown out in style. Made him famous, debated in all the newspapers, discussed – with the result that he thought he was genius.

How good it must have felt to get it all out, all the jealousy and disgust that Paul did *not* include in his later memoires, but can now be found in his diaries in Uppsala University Library. But why should this contemptible portrait be any less credible than a more respectful one? Even though Paul admired his talent, he thought Munch had allowed the media attention and adrenaline from the scandal go to his head. And he would therefore never achieve the heights he should and could as an artist. "Indeed, he is too physically weak to overcome the aforementioned childhood diseases – poor Munch!"

And so the winter evenings passed in Türke's wine cellar. But the greatest disruption of all had not yet arrived. Around Christmas 1892, 25-year-old Dagny Juel decided to do as her sister had done, and travel abroad to study music. But where Ragnhild had gone to Paris, Dagny went to Berlin. Here she contacted Munch, who introduced her to Zum schwarzen Ferkel in the evening of 9 March. From this point on, it is as though she is spirited away from life into myth – and continues to live as myth through cultural history until her tragic death eight years later. Almost everything that is written about Dagny Juel is coloured by the men who could not get enough of her slim figure and luminous eyes

behind half-closed lids, and her laugh "that drove men mad". Dagny was the men's muse – that was her light role. The other, far darker role was femme fatale, which stemmed from her dangerous and unpredictable independence.

That Strindberg also fell for her, was deeply unfortunate. Only a month earlier he had met Frida Uhl, a 20-year-old woman from Vienna, who worked as a correspondent in Berlin, and they got engaged in his hotel room two days before Dagny arrived. Frida then left the following evening to spend time at the family summerhouse, while Strindberg

embarked on an affair with Dagny that resembles, more than anything, an annexation of Dagny's soul by a writer who never tried to disguise his hate for women. According to Strindberg, she had been Munch's lover before Munch "donated" her to him, but not before she had had an affair with Carl Ludwig Schleich. However, the real drama involving Dagny was played out between Strindberg and his compatriots Bengt Lidforss and Adolf Paul. Lidforss was a 25-year-old botanist, who, like Paul, was an obsequious admirer of Strindberg. He had met Dagny previously, but only fell in love with her when he met her again in Berlin. When it became clear that his feelings were not reciprocated, Lidforss fell into an alcohol-infused depression that almost broke him.

In the scorned botanist's eyes, Dagny was the Scandinavian colony's whore who Strindberg, when he was finished with her, wished to "transfer" to him along with half a dozen condoms (presumably because Lidforss suffered from syphilis). Strindberg himself claimed that he had her to himself for three weeks before Frida returned to Berlin, and they left for Helgoland to get married at the end of April.

When he heard that Dagny had become Stanisław Przybyszewski's lover, he started a correspondence with Lidforss and Paul, from which the descriptions of Dagny above are drawn, and which is possibly one of the vilest smear campaigns against a woman in Scandinavian cultural history. "Our poor Bengt is stuck in a hotel in Berlin, destroyed by that confounded and diabolical woman, Dagny Juel," Strindberg writes to an acquaintance back in Sweden, in May. He concludes that Dagny should return home for her own good and that of the men she threatened to destroy. But this was a miscalculation on Strindberg's part. The recipient took him at his word, and the whole affair ended when two parties were sent from Sweden, one to rescue Lidforss, and one to collect Dagny. When Dagny's sister Gudrun arrived in Berlin, she discovered there was no real cause for concern, however it was felt that the promising young natural scientist had been scandalised by Strindberg raising the alarm. And so Strindberg was the loser in the whole affair. He continued to hate Dagny, but now also feared a reprisal from both her and Przybyszewski.

The Love Series

While all this is happening, Munch's easel stands empty in his hotel room, as the ice crystals on the windows melt a little earlier each morning. It is difficult to work, there is so much else to think about. Neither Schulte's touring exhibition or that at Equitable Palast had brought in as much money as he had hoped. He had caused a scandal, everyone's eyes were on him, but he could not live off that in the long run. For a while, it seemed that all the attention in Berlin might lead to openings in Copenhagen and Stockholm. But the latter ran

into the sand, and when he sent his paintings to the art dealer, Valdemar Kleis, in Copenhagen in the new year, the boat was delayed as the sounds had frozen over. The paintings were therefore only exhibited for a few days. And not a single one was sold; all he had was the 100 kroner that Kleis had given him as an advance.

Had he overestimated interest? Been too rash? Whatever the case, he didn't share his teachers' collective approach: when Erik Werenskiold later asked him to take part in a joint-Norwegian campaign in Germany, he declined. Werenskiold naturally thought the notorious exhibition in Berlin could be a door-opener for Norwegian art. But Munch had no such nationalistic sentiments, he was an agent for himself alone. He toured his paintings again in spring 1893, and applied to the Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung, which was organised by the art academy and artists' association, with the kaiser as patron. He was rejected, as expected, so he sent his paintings to the oppositions' exhibition for those who had been not been accepted, Freie Berliner Kunstausstellung, an equivalent to the French Salon des réfuses.

Rejected by the establishment, embraced by the opposition – so it was for the avantgarde. For Munch, the problem was that not only was the opposition in Germany weak, it was in no way as radical as he was. Freie Berliner Kunstausstellung turned out to be a one-off event, and similarly, the Berlin Free Artists' Association never became a true breakaway organisation, but remained the opposition within Berlin Artists' Association. Munch had the support of the German impressionists, but compared with him, men like Max Liebermann, Franz Skarbina and Fritz von Uhde were not particularly progressive. The scandalous exhibition had made a great impression on the youngest artists, but according to Holger Darchmann, even they were too conscientious and "germanically circumspect" to keep up with their Norwegian role model. And in return, Munch did not have much to say for them. Six months after the exhibition, he declared that German contemporary art was "dross" and the only ones worth mentioning were Arnold Böcklin and Max Klinger. Neither of them were young, and neither of them were part of any movement.

The fact that Munch was so out of step with his German allies is one reason why his notorious exhibition in 1892 did not lead to a breakthrough in Germany. Schulte and the 26-year-old industrialist Walther Rathenau were among the few who did not balk at his radical expression. The latter had visited Freie Berliner Kunstausstellung in July, while Munch was in Munich with his touring exhibition. It was here that he received the message that Rathenau wanted to buy *Karl Johan in the Rain* (1891) for 100 marks. Munch must have been delighted, as the spring exhibition had not given much reward either.

However, his greatest challenge was not get money for the completed canvases, but rather to fill the empty ones. It was not until the summer that Munch found the peace to process those

final, intense months in Berlin. Once again, his paints were taken out. He continued to work when he returned home to Norway and Åsgårdstrand in August. Here the mood often took him at night. As it did one muggy evening when he was sitting on the beach with friends. When a storm broke, some ran back to the hotel, while others went down to the jetty to save the boats that were dancing on the waves. The following day, Munch painted *The Storm*. This painting, and the other night paintings from Åsgårdstrand reveal an intensification of the blue mood from *Night in Saint-Cloud.* While *The Storm* manifests inner anguish in an external form, *Moonlight* vibrates with a spiritual unrest, with the

woman standing pale and expressionless by a white picket fence, as do the dark, swaying trees in *Starry Night*. In *Summer Night's Dream (The Voice)* – above right – he has started to develop the stylised forms that are so characteristic of his 1890s paintings. The pillar of moonlight is there as a gleaming parallel to the grille-like dark tree trunks, broken only by the curving shoreline. The woman is standing stiff and upright, as though she too were a tree. Her mouth is closed, but her eyes are like open portals between nature and the soul where the mood flows freely. She is leaning intimately in towards her lover, who is where we stand. Whatever she wants to say to us, we are obliged to read from her eyes, which lie deep in the shadow of her eye sockets.

Munch's great productivity was not only inspired by Berlin, but also by a clear idea. At the end of May, he had told a Danish friend that he felt the need to find greater "integrity" in his work. He realised that many of his paintings may be incomprehensible in their own right, he explained, so he now wanted to make a series of paintings around the themes of love and death. This was the seed of what, over the years, would become *The Frieze of Life*.

He initially brought together six paintings under the title "Study for a series on Love" (Die Liebe), which tell the story of love from the first infatuation through its many throes to pure angst. The individual paintings were (with their current titles in brackets): *Summer Night's Dream (The Voice), The Kiss, Love and Pain (Vampire), Madonna Face* (a

lost version of *Madonna*), *Jealousy (Melancholy)* and not least, a painting of a swaying figure under a flaming sky, his hands lifted to a mask-like face twisted in a scream. In *The Scream*, the lonely wanderer from the sketches Munch made after his father's death, finally reaches his artistic destination: in a precursor, *Sick Mood at Sunset*, the sky was already there, but the faceless man by the railing was half turned away. In the new painting, Munch had filled a piece of cardboard with tempera and pastels, and now the figure was turned and facing the viewer, thus replacing melancholy contemplation with expressive confrontation.

He had originally wanted to create a series about love and death. But instead he concentrated on a love that was charged with death. The fact that the genesis of *The Scream* lies in Munch's sketched contemplations of his father's journey to the other side says something about how painful love could be for the military doctor's son.