

Jarred in June the garnet cherries turn
to intimations of a murrey dusk
when vesper light extinguishes its lamps
and seals the flame. We take our rest in rounds.
North is true but only by a star
that melts like snow upon a cirrus mane.
A roan curvets and leaps the paddock fence
to graze and eye an appaloosa sky,
the palimpsest of autumn burned to grey.
Gone the swallows' woven art of air.
Gnomonic shadows tend from every tree
and mark without summation or despair
the dying day that strengthens to depart.
Go the stillness says, and go by way
the storms will come from rales of dragon bones
that break in margins of the ancient maps,
the wilds of glacial Boreas, the isles
of frozen mist and spray, our spirit goes.
But how to live the stillness will not say.
It lingers on the lips that lose their words,
and draws a single breath to speak your name.

Claude Barbre's biography can be found on page 335. □

Edvard Munch, the Spanish Flu, and COVID-19

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Abstract: Edvard Munch (1863-1944), who suffered a variety of illnesses throughout his life, offers admirers of his paintings an example of an artist who incorporated a pandemic into his art. By analyzing his paintings related to the 1918 Pandemic, we can see the artist's ability to turn his past into a more positive view of life.

Keywords: 1918 Pandemic, caduceus, COVID-19, Edvard Munch, The Frieze of Life, Metabolism, psychobiography, physiology, Self-Portrait with the Spanish Flu

Many recent books have favorably compared the strident global response to the COVID-19 pandemic with the more sluggish, uneven regional reaction to the Spanish Flu of 1918. Back then the headlines were too busy with the battlefield dramas attend-

ing the Great War, so the standard narrative advised paying attention to anything as mundane as a fever, even one that killed over 100,000,000. Far from repeating this well-worn storyline, the present piece draws the curtain on the grand stage of world conflict in an attempt to illustrate one's efforts to turn his painful experience of the 1918 Pandemic into a positive, meaningful self and world concept. The individual in question is painter Edvard Munch (1863-1944), who not only survived the Spanish Flu, but even painted two self-portraits whose titles address it by name: *Self-portrait with the Spanish Flu* (1919) and *Self-Portrait after the Spanish Flu* (1919).

Edvard Munch was born December 12, 1863, in Kristiania (now Oslo), Norway. He grew up in an unstable household. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was five, and his father was a hidebound Lutheran who ruled the household with an iron fist (Ingles, 2012, p. 5). Edvard came to believe that his father's intense Lutheran piety was passed down to him in the form of anxiety and paranoia, two companions that would stalk Munch for his entire life. To make matters worse, Edvard's older sister, Sophie, with whom he was especially close, died of the same illness as their mother, and his younger sister Laura was diagnosed with schizophrenia before she reached adulthood (Prideaux, 2007, pp. 30, 283-284).

Early on, Munch exhibited an exceptional talent as a draughtsman and a painter. As he reached young adulthood, he gained enough of a reputation to be accepted into the ranks of the Kristiania Bohemians, whose number included Hans Jaeger. Jaeger, a self-styled nihilist and advocate of free love, tried to convince Munch that he could never live authentically until he freed himself of all family ties. At one time, Jaeger even enjoined Munch to murder his father Christian Munch (Prideaux, 2007, p. 98). During this time, Edvard entered into an affair with a married woman. However, instead of freeing him from his family's influence, this momentous step merely left Munch wracked with guilt. Moreover, he soon realized that there is no such thing as free love, for his mistress held the reins in their relationship. This situation left Munch feeling tempest-tossed between his father's threats of hell and Jaeger's promise of guilt-free love, finding no solace in either extreme.

From the 1880s on, Munch worked on his magnum opus, a collection of paintings about love and death he called *The Frieze of Life*. Several of the paintings depicted Munch and his former lover, Tulla Larsen. Tulla's game was to draw Munch into her life by

feigning tuberculosis. When Munch was alerted of Larsen's "illness," his childhood traumas centering on illness resurfaced. He would rush to Tulla's side, only to have her affect shift suddenly to icy indifference. Now the picture of health, Tulla would taunt Munch by running into another man's arms.

The central work in *The Frieze of Life*, the striking *Metabolism* (1898-1899), links the two main themes of the series—the pain of love and the terror of illness and death—in an image of Edvard as Adam and Tulla as Eve in the Edenic woods around Kristiania. In *Metabolism*, Munch is expressing his belief that, though individuals may be disappointed in love, and despite them dying and going into the ground, people nevertheless survive since their soul-substance will live on as the essence of innumerable other living beings. Munch came to this dual resolution of his religious doubts and his romantic longings through his reading of popular scientific writers such as Ernst Haeckel, and by integrating his insights about life and the hereafter into his aesthetic (Kuuva, 2016, p. 125).

There was hardly a year in Munch's life when he was not seriously ill at least some of the time, mostly with fevers and lung ailments, but also with mental diseases such as paranoia and hallucinations, the latter often alcohol-induced. However, in 1919, Munch came down with the Spanish Flu. He recorded his impressions of the experience in his *Self-Portrait with the Spanish Flu*. Munch pictures himself sitting in a chair wrapped in a long evening gown and with a blanket on his lap. His face is somewhat hazy and under-defined, perhaps symbolizing the convalescing painter's own raddled, blurry thought process. On the bed is a green blanket, the folds and creases of which call to mind microorganisms such as bacteria, germs, and viruses. Or perhaps these lines and squiggles represent the invisible filaments of soul-substance that have worked to keep Munch alive by killing the deadly virus. In either case, the mysterious wad of bedding expresses Munch's master-theme, which we also detected in *Metabolism*: Life cannot separate itself from death and illness; pain and suffering *are* life itself since all bodily processes involve using up some sort of organic fuel to keep the organism running. This primary insight of Munch's first crystallized when he suffered from seasonal flu in 1889, during which he received a vision of the unity of all existing things in the very processes that change organic "soul" substances into inorganic substances, and vice versa (Prideaux, 2007, pp. 119-121).

Standing between Munch and his viral bedding is a blue

bedpost that resembles a thermometer. Mercury, one of the most common substances used in thermometers, is often represented in alchemical sources by blue (Bucklow, 2001). It is also a traditional symbol of earthly and spiritual processes since Mercury was not only the god of medicine and healing but also the god of process, change, and movement (Long, 2006, p. 111). In *Metabolism*, the same shade of blue used on *Self-Portrait's* bedpost reappears as a kind of sap leaking out of the tree of life (or, should we say, the tree of life and death), and Eve reaches down to touch it. Adam, however, has his eyes closed, and his arms are wound around his body. This is not unlike the snakes that form a double helix around the central wand of the caduceus, the latter being a symbol for Mercury (Friedlander, 1992).

In 1908, Munch sought alcoholism treatment and began to live a more sedate life in his country home in Ekberg, near Oslo. He remained aloof from the bohemians, journalists, and would-be romantic partners who in the past had oppressed or manipulated him, leading to his many illnesses and breakdowns. The Spanish Flu was only one short episode in a long line of illnesses for Munch, but it gives us an example of an artist who incorporated a pandemic into his art and, once we relate his paintings about the 1918 Pandemic to his central works, we see just how this greatest of Norwegian artists used his paintings to frame his past into a more positive, or at least consoling, view of life.

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Neither Practically Dead nor Exactly Alive: The Confusing State of Virtual Death

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Abstract: The meaning of cyber death might be confusing. Some social media users try to make sense of it through metaphors derived from comparable real-world events.

Keywords: alive, artificial-intelligence, cyberspace, dead, grieving, interaction, metaphor, robots

Many years ago, a friend of mine invited me to a small group in a popular messaging app. This small circle shared and discussed pieces of literary value, either their own writings or passages they came across in their studies. One morning, a group member named Ali, the resident of a far-off city in southeastern Iran, wrote something about the strangeness of death, explaining the ebbs and flows of its violence as it approaches us. His piece ignited a short exchange between me and him on the immediacy of death, the surprise visit it pays to some of us, and if it's a good thing to know its estimated time of arrival.

Later that day, my friend, who had noticed the interaction, privately told me that Ali had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and his days were numbered. She also told me that we wouldn't speak directly of the fact in the group. Ali and I managed to keep the appearances of normal conversation in the group and our private exchanges, though it was anything but normal to me. Less than two months later, Ali passed away. Group members pooled their resources together to send a bouquet with a note of condolence to his funeral. That was it, or so I thought. The experience of losing an online friend was a disturbingly unprecedented one for me, the first of many to come. In every later instance, I've been reminded of Ali, and how difficult a time I had in making sense of his death.

That kind of experience, getting to know and becoming