

The Influence of Disease and Human Sufferance on Edvard Munch's Art

Essay

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Motto: Without anxiety and illness I should have been like a ship without a rudder.

(Edvard Munch)

Ever since a child, the famous national Norwegian painter Edvard Munch had been surrounded by dying people, especially members of his family, illnesses and harsh diseases that couldn't be treated by that time, thing which had a huge impact on both his first works of art, as well as on his later work and creations. The human sufferance, the despair, the inner turbulences, the disappointment and various types of anxiety all appear illustrated symbolically in most of his paintings, thing which has all engaged one artistic current and pattern: the Expressionism. Therefore, he was among the first expressionists and under him, this manifesto came up to life.

His mother died of tuberculosis when Edvard was only five years old, and so did his favorite older sister, Sophie, whom he had a very special connection with, in the absence of his mother. The situation became even worse when his father became emotionally unstable because of the same loss. Moreover, two of his other three siblings also died of pneumonia, respectively cancer, and, Laura, one younger sister suffered of schizophrenia. Suffering not only from all these tragic events, but also from great

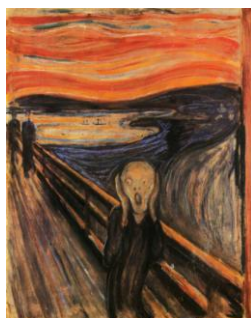


The Sick Child, 1885-1886

poverty, Munch withdrew himself in the universe of art and began creating, reflecting all his inner painful and depressive moods, searching for a way of escape and expression.

Before starting to study Art properly, he painted both himself and his family, mostly in sad poses, mentioning that in his self portraits, he is never smiling. At 22, he left school as to create a famous portrait of his dying older sister entitled *The sick child*.

The themes evoked by E. Munch's paintings were continuously being loss of affection and love, grief, despair, fear, attachment, separation and death. In the 1890's, the artist impressed by his unique style-expressionism, creating numerous paintings reflecting his thoughts, feelings and memories from his turbulent and sad childhood past. He entitled this group of paintings *The Frieze of life*, consisting of:



The Scream, 1893

The scream, showing a fetus-like figure screaming with despair and fear on a bridge, with strong colours in the background, revealing the sunset and some other two figures standing laterally, somewhere in the back, possibly representing the loss of his parents,



Death in the Sickroom – *Death in a Sick Room*. 1893

representing the death of his sister Sophie,

Ashes – with the significance of love transformed into ashes, grief, sorrow and disappear,

Love and Pain – similar to the significance of *Ashes*, *Metabolism* (1898) – showing the image of Adam and Eve,



Anxiety, 1894

Anxiety – revealing the feeling of deep anxiety and fear, in the socio-political context of those times,

Despair – showing loneliness, sadness, dissatisfaction and regret,

Self-Portrait With Skeleton Arm – revealing his image of death, again.

“My art is really a voluntary confession and an attempt to explain to myself my relationship with life – it is, therefore, actually a sort of egoism, but I am constantly hoping that through this I can help others achieve clarity,”

Munch confesses in the diary he left to us, where he is also telling the story of his

life (*The Private Journals of Edvard Munch*). Apparently, there are many clues that lead to the fact that through art Munch managed to resist and got saved from his psychological interior drama, leaving to posterity a wonderful artistic legacy.