

Myth of 1910. Reading Edvard Munch's *Alpha and Omega*

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ABSTRACT

Is Edvard Munch's *Alpha and Omega* (1908–10) a fable of the past? Traditionally considered a work pointing backwards, to the 1890s, this article provides examples of how the text-image portfolio also can be read as a myth of the contemporary, deeply embedded in the 20th century. The close reading also shows how Munch explores central artistic ideas in writing that are not found elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, suggesting the potential of a more independent approach to his texts.

Keywords

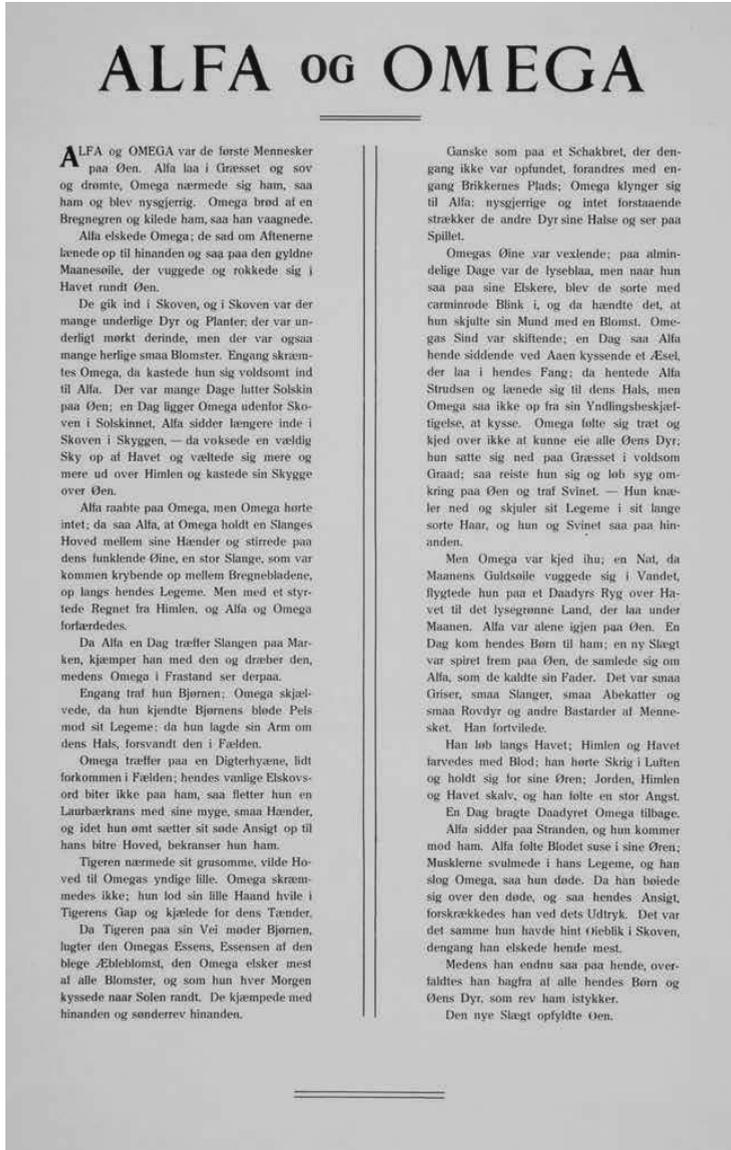
Edvard Munch, *Alpha and Omega*, *Alfa og Omega*, Adam and Eve, Myth, Darwin

In the vast maze of texts left behind upon the death of Edvard Munch, the story *Alpha and Omega*¹ (1910) stands out as the only work of literary fiction he ever published. The text accompanies a suite of lithographic works of the same title and is written in an omnipotent biblical voice, emphasizing the ambitious mythic scope of the story – it is nothing less than a rewriting of Genesis, a founding myth according to Munch.

Introducing the two main characters Alpha and Omega as “the first people on the island” (ill.1), Munch draws up an Eden-like situation: the island they inhabit is rich with animals, trees, and flowers; the days are “days of pure sunshine” and at night, the couple lean against one another, watching the moon.

Yet, despite the striking ambition and intertextual complexity, the text (and the work it belongs to) has had a reputation of being *outdated* in the Munch literature, emphasizing the “recycling of personal motifs and iconography”² and how it builds on a decade-old idea. Munch had been interested in “The First Humans” for a long time

– the topic was first explored by the artist in the 1890s,³ and the theme was repeated in a series of sketches exhibited in 1904.⁴ Regardless of this fact, when the German artist Emil Nolde saw the work, he was “ganz entzückt von den Blättern,”⁵ a view shared by most international critics. Yet, one scholar symptomatically remarks that it is “a little difficult to understand this enthusiasm.”⁶



III.1: Edvard Munch: *Alfa og Omega/Alpha and Omega*, 1910 (previously dated 1908–09). Published text. The Munch Museum (Oslo).

In particular, the hesitation and assumption of outdatedness stems from the emphasis placed on the gender dynamics in the story, a way of reading *Alpha and Omega* that has been faithful to the artistic intention.⁷ It is in many ways a tale of unstable, irrational feelings: Alpha discovers Omega in the forest erotically entangled with a snake, the first of her many encounters with the animals on the island. When Omega decides to leave their secluded life behind, an anxious Alpha is left alone with a group of her half-breeds. The story ends in violence: Eventually Omega returns, and approaches her former lover – Alpha responds with anger, beating her to death. In order to avenge her murder, the group of hybrid children and animals attack Alpha from behind and kill him. The rather absurd narrative has been interpreted as a commentary on the failure of the sexual freedom practiced in Bohemian circles in Kristiania⁸, and as a work that “summed up what had interested Munch and other important artists in the past few decades, rather than pointing to the future.”⁹ This view of the work as outdated has been repeated in later studies: “The perspectives on women and the pessimism regarding the future expressed in the series belong in the symbolism and decadence of the 1890s,” it is noted. “Problems that seemed serious in the 1890s have 15 years later become a satiric fable from the past.”¹⁰

While many of these observations are valid, important details that could question this conclusion have been left out from previous discussions. Readings have been limited in their approach for several reasons: A tradition for keeping interpretation close to Munch’s intentions, a tradition of treating Munch’s texts as mirrors of the images, and, in this particular case, as Gerd Woll has pointed out, a strong focus on the narrative: the work has “usually been discussed and analyzed in terms of the story itself.”¹¹ However, if we are willing to liberate ourselves from these (often) dominating modes of reading, new and interesting details are unveiled. Here, I focus my attention on two scarcely discussed elements in the text: Omega’s boredom, and the final violent rebellion of the half-humans. My aim is to point out a few new ways in which *Alpha and Omega* may be contextualized and opened to new interpretation, and in doing so, questioning the assumption of *Alpha and Omega* as a work out of touch with the contemporary. Rather than being a work pointing to the 1890s, these examples show how *Alpha and Omega* not only investigates critical issues of modernity, but how it is a situated and responsive work that contains powerful representations of time-specific issues of its own decade.

THE TEXT AS AN EXPANSION OF THE PORTFOLIO

First of all, we need to consider that Munch’s text could still be seen as answering to the narrow, time-specific discourse that had evolved around the graphic portfolio. This responsive element of the text has gone unnoted, as there has been substantial confusion regarding the time of writing – the years 1908, 1909 and 1910 are all identified in the literature. One suggestion is that the text was written and published as part of the group of graphic works from 1908 or 1909, also entitled *Alpha and Omega*.¹² The 22 black and white lithographic images (Woll 336–357) follow the major lines of the written story, and there should be no doubt that the images and the text are integral parts of the same work – later on, they were sold together. Munch had the lithographic prints made in Copenha-

gen, during the eight months that he spent at Dr. Jacobson's clinic following his so-called (and infamous) mental breakdown.

Even if this explanation seems plausible, Gerd Woll has made a strong claim that the text was added to the portfolio later on, in 1910.¹³ Munch's correspondence supports her view: "I sent you my poem Alpha and Omega," Munch writes in a letter to his friend Sigurd Høst, dated April 1910, "it had to finally leave the drawer!"¹⁴ From his last remark, it is plausible to conclude that the text was not yet in public circulation in the spring of 1910, something that is supported by his correspondence with Gustav Schiefler. When Munch sends him the text in the spring of 1910, Schiefler seems confused; this is clearly new material to him. "It is a pity," he writes, "that it is mine and not your description that appears in *Kunst und Künstler*"¹⁵ – Schiefler had written a semi-literary interpretation of *Alpha and Omega* in *Kunst und Künstler* earlier that year.¹⁶

Concluding that the text was added to the portfolio in 1910 has several important implications. For one, the timing influenced reception – most of Munch's audience and critics saw the graphic work exhibited without the text. The *Alpha and Omega* portfolio was first exhibited at Blomqvist in Kristiania in March 1909, while Munch himself was still at the clinic.¹⁷ The lithographs then went on to be exhibited in Kristiansand, Copenhagen, and at the *Secession für Zeichende Künste* in Berlin.¹⁸ The text was never a part of any of these exhibitions, and we can assume that the text was largely unknown and marginalized in the *oeuvre* from the beginning, and never reached a wide group of readers (the exception being private collectors, possibly 80 or 90 in total¹⁹). Further, the timing also affects the perception of the work as a whole. As previously noted, the graphic work was created at Dr. Jacobson's clinic. That Munch continued the work at a later stage, while living in the small southern town of Kragerø, and working on his first drafts of the monumental Aula decorations, should be a clear proof that we need to consider this image-text project as more than an "asylum piece" or a product of his mental state.

Viewing the text a later expansion of the *Alpha and Omega* portfolio also opens up for comparison with other written material that appeared between the spring of 1909 and to the exhibited graphic narrative: In one exhibition catalogue, the island is said to be "desolate" (*øde*), in another catalogue it is said to be placed in the "north". In addition, it is noted that Alpha and Omega are living in the ancient past (*urtid*).²⁰ While Gustav Schiefler's text in *Kunst und Künstler* keeps significantly closer to the lithographic prints, even he adds new details. For instance, he claims that the children are Alpha's children ("Alfa and seine Nachkommen") and that Omega "swims back to the island" ("Omega ist schwimmend zurückgekehrt"). It is interesting that Munch seems to correct Schiefler on certain points in his own text: The children are *her* children ("hendes Børn"), not the "Nachkommen" of Alpha, as Schiefler writes, and Omega does not return by swimming, rather, "the fallow deer brought Omega back." His text is also notably unspecific compared to the exhibition texts: the word *urtid* is left out, and the island does not have a specific geographic location.

However, the Munch text also adds new, important complexity when it is brought into the portfolio in 1910. In the Schiefler text, Omega escapes on a deer ("Hirsche"), across a bay ("Bucht"); this seems to be a precise description of the images. In Munch's text, new details appear: she escapes on a fallow deer ("daadyr") "across the ocean", creating a small

gap between the text and the images that could be said to destabilize the work. We are in fact presented with two separate narratives of Alpha and Omega in the portfolio. Even if the text seems to mirror the existing lithographic work on a surface level, the two do not fully correspond, and when we investigate the text-image relationship from this perspective, important new text-specific details and differences appear. From this, it could be argued that Munch's text is not only *responsive* to the texts that came to surround the artwork in 1909 and 1910, but also an *expansion* of the artwork itself.

EXISTENTIAL VOID: OMEGA AND BOREDOM

Even if it has gone unnoticed in previous studies, boredom is perhaps the most prominent text-specific detail that enters the *Alpha and Omega* portfolio in 1910. As a central and critical issue of modernity, Omega's boredom presents itself as a one way of opening *Alpha and Omega* to a broader set of contexts. The term first appears towards the end of the story, where Omega experiences a crisis or breakdown. She cries heavily, after encounters with several animals:

Omega was tired and bored of not being able to possess all the animals of the island. She sat down in the grass crying violently, and then she got up and ran ill around the island and met the pig. She kneels down and hides her body in her long black hair, and she and the pig looked at each other.

But Omega was still bored; one night, when the golden moon column was rocking in the ocean, she escaped on the back of a fallow deer over the ocean to the light green land under the moon.

What is striking in this section, if we look beyond the rather dramatic plot, is the introduction of the term “bored” (*kjed*). While it appears twice in the text (“Omega was tired and bored”, “But Omega was still bored”), boredom is never explicitly mentioned in the lithographic series – Munch named the scene in question *Omega Weeping* (Woll 352, ill. 2).

The state of boredom is thus specific to the text alone. One could discuss the translation of the word *kjed* – it could also be understood as *træt*, *lei* (“tired”), the general, existential tiredness common in decadent literature. When I translate it to “bored,” it is because Munch deliberately used the word *kjed* instead of *træt*, and while the two words *træt* and *kjed* could refer to a similar condition in 1890 and 1910, “bored” highlights the contextual importance of the word in a much more acute way than “tired”.

What is the position of boredom in Munch's art? To my knowledge, *bored*, *boring* or *boredom* are not terms used in any of the titles of his paintings and graphic work. However, the vocabulary of boredom seems central in Munch's writing. For instance, in a fragment that remains of an unfinished novel, written around 1890, the main character Brandt is having dinner with a group of acquaintances, and he is struggling with the small talk: “[t]he women were sitting, looking at him – How they thought he was boring – he suffered terribly by this thought.”²¹ His worries could be tied to a lack of self-esteem, and his preoccupation with appearance, but they are also a product of the fear of boredom

and the constant need for entertainment and distraction in the group. In this unfinished novel, the motif of the *bored woman* appears several times: “I am so easily bored,” as one of the women complains,²² and this complaint reappears in the draft of a comic play, *From the City of Free Love*, written much later on, in 1904 or 1905.²³ In the play, the rich “Dollar Princess” takes interest in a poor singer, a new arrival to town. The condition of boredom is introduced early on:

The Dollar Princess is sitting with her friends and drinking Champagne with the feet on the table

Dollar P. – Oh God – how boring

The others Oh God how boring²⁴



III. 2: Edvard Munch: *Omega Weeping*, 1908–09. Lithography, 240 x 368 mm. Woll no. 352, MM G 317. The Munch Museum (Oslo). Photo: Ove Kvavik.

“Oh God – so boring” is in fact the first line she utters in the play, and the line is then repeated by her choir of friends. As this demonstrates, Omega’s boredom is not an isolated case – boredom is an explicit condition Munch developed in his writing.

Not only does the boredom in *Alpha and Omega* mark a continuation of Munch’s previous literary projects, but it also connects the text to the literature and philosophy of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Boredom (and the bored woman in particular) is central to

modern literature²⁵ – two key texts include *Madame Bovary* (1856) by Gustave Flaubert and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) by Henrik Ibsen, where boredom leads to infidelity, lies, and ultimately suicide. Both works were well-known to Munch – he did stage scenery for *Hedda Gabler* in 1906–1907, and in his unfinished novel, Brandt actually imagines himself as a character in *Madame Bovary* (or at least, a story very much like it): He had read in French novels “of similar situations,” the “young sweet promiscuous wife,” “bored in the countryside.”²⁶ While boredom and tiredness often have been regarded a topic of decadent literature and *fin de siècle* of the 1890s, one could argue that it is perhaps better understood as one of the deep, consistent topics of modernity. In his study on boredom, philosopher Lars Fr. Svendsen queries: “Is modern life first and foremost an escape from boredom?”²⁷ According to him, boredom results from the emptiness and lack of meaning that forces people to the limits of moral behavior in order to fill a void: it “forces a movement towards transgression.”²⁸



III. 3: Lester Ralph: *Eve and the tigers*, 1906. Illustration from *Eve's Diary* by Mark Twain.

It is particularly interesting to read *Alpha and Omega* in the context of *Eve's Diary*, one of the very last works by American writer Mark Twain, published only a few years prior to *Alpha and Omega*, in 1905–06.²⁹ In *Eve's Diary*, Twain rewrites the story of Adam and Eve in a rather playful way (there is a brontosaurus involved), and much like Munch's Omega, Eve is highly curious, restless, and investigative.

“It tires me just to sit around and watch the tree,” she utters.³⁰ “If there wasn't anything to find out, it would be dull.”³¹ Twain's Eve takes an interest in a range of odd animals – in one of the scenes, Eve “found some tigers and nestled in among them and was most adorably comfortable, and their breath was sweet and pleasant.”³² (Munch, on his account, makes Omega put “her small hand” in the mouth of a tiger, “cuddling its teeth” (ills. 3 and 4).



III. 4: Edvard Munch: *The Tiger*, 1908–09. Lithography, 312 x 380 mm. Woll, no. 346, MM G 311. The Munch Museum (Oslo). Photo: Sidsel de Jong.

The two women both deal with boredom through transgression: While Omega makes her flight from the island, Eve travels on the back of an elephant to the corners of the world. With a sense of dread and desperation, she acknowledges that she is soon to have emptied the world of new things to explore: “I think there are many things to learn yet – I hope so; and by economizing and not hurrying too fast I think they will last weeks and weeks. I hope so.”³³

Reading *Alpha and Omega* through the prism of Omega's boredom sheds light on a topic that has escaped attention in the previous Munch literature. Most notably, we see how the pattern of boredom and repeated transgression relates to a larger set of contemporary discourses and texts. More specifically, it seems to open a dialogue with Twain's recently published *Eve's Diary*. Such a connection in turn shifts the interpretation of the story: Rather than rejecting Omega's behavior as mirroring a bohemian attitude of free

love, one could argue that Omega represents the modern human being, subject to boredom as a modern condition. In the attempt to liberate herself from boredom – which really is existential emptiness – she searches for the entertainment of lovers, drama, and *change* in general. The situation eventually drives her to madness – she cries violently, she becomes ill; when Munch pictures her in *Omega Weeping*, she is in a raw, disintegrated state. Reading her on these terms, her escape could be understood in terms of existential necessity, as rescue or survival, rather than a childish search for new entertainment. It is an act of desperation; her restlessness and sexual promiscuity are only symptoms of the structural, unbearable emptiness in which she is trapped.

A MYTH FOR THE MODERN WORLD?

What happens if we take *Alpha and Omega* seriously as the founding myth it mimics; a genre that aims at explaining the foundations of society? As a third and final contextual suggestion, I propose that we view *Alpha and Omega* in this light. In particular, the concluding paragraph in the text calls for attention: “[...] he was attacked from behind by all her children and the animals of the island, which tore him apart. The new race filled the island.” The scene is pictured in *Alpha’s Death* (Woll 357, ill. 5), where we see the group of half-animals cheering over Alpha’s dead body, “[s]mall pigs, small snakes, small apes and small ungulates, and other Bastards of the human race.” In this violent finale, we witness not only the end of Alpha and Omega, but also the end of humans – the last ‘pure’ human is dead; the world is taken over by human-animal “bastards.”



III. 5: Edvard Munch: *Alpha’s Death*, 1908–09. Lithography, 287 x 502 mm. Woll. no 357, MM G 357. The Munch Museum (Oslo). Photo: not specified.

How should we to understand this? I find a particularly fruitful theoretical approach in the essay “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” (1923), written by the poet and critic T.S. Eliot. In the essay, Eliot argues that we have to understand myths as necessary to represent the modern world. He claims that we, through myths, are capable of understanding and representing our own time – myth gives “a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”³⁴ In technical terms, this is done through what Eliot defines as the mythic method – working within myths, but also creating a subtle connection to the present time. Applying this to *Alpha and Omega*, which seemingly is without any references to the contemporary, it is interesting to see how modernity is actually signified through two small words, “bored,” which only first came into use in the 18th century³⁵, and “the fallow deer,” *Alpha’s Death (Daadyr)*, (ill. 6) an animal that was imported to Norway around 1900.³⁶



III. 6: Edvard Munch: *Omega's Flight*, 1908–09. Lithography, 255 x 500 mm. Woll no. 353, MM G 353. The Munch Museum (Oslo). Photo: not specified.

If *Alpha and Omega* could be read as a way of giving shape to the experience of living in 1910, as Eliot suggests, what world is mirrored in the concluding paragraph of Munch's text? One experience that seems to be reflected is the implication of a world according to Charles Darwin's evolutionary science. Darwin's theories had been experienced as a radical shift for writers like Garborg, Bjørnson and Kielland³⁷, and represented “the overthrow of the old order [...] the assault on traditional beliefs concerning God, the universe and humanity's position in relation to each.”³⁸ In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), Darwin had argued that humans are descendants of apes, and in doing so, he reduced humans to “Godless primates sharing ancestors with other ‘savage’ animals.”³⁹ This seems like a precise description of *Alpha and Omega*,

where Munch provides us with the mythical explanation for this. Darwinism was widely accepted among Norwegian scientists by 1910, and discussions had mainly shifted to its implications on genetics and explanations of social and cultural traits.⁴⁰ Even if it is a coincidence that *Alpha and Omega* was first exhibited in the year of the 50th anniversary of *On the Origin of Species* and 100th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth, an event that was widely celebrated, it still makes Darwinism an acutely relevant context for Munch's myth.

The final paragraph could also be read in terms of the political situation in 1910. When Alpha is torn apart by "all her children and the animals," who then take over the island, the situation could be interpreted as a concentrated mirror of political concerns of the time, reflecting what was the decade of the *masses*. Between 1900 and 1909, the number of eligible voters in Norway was more than tripled,⁴¹ giving the large masses political power for the first time. In 1905, Russia had its first revolution, an event commented upon in Munch's correspondence, and in 1906, Rosa Luxemburg published her influential pamphlet *The Mass Strike*, which agitated for revolt of the masses.

This interpretation is supported by the fact *Alpha and Omega* is written in what could be defined as the most explicit political phase in Munch's art. Munch had been exposed to radical political movements most of his life. Frank Høifødt has suggested that "Munch was sympathetic to the subversive ideology of both Hans Jæger and the Russian nihilists at a very early age,"⁴² and in her study on the worker motif, Gerd Woll devotes a substantial part of her discussion to Munch's possible relationship with socialism; noting his interest in Karl Marx, and the presence of books such as *Die Anarchisten* (1891) and Rosa Luxemburg's letters (1920) in his private library.⁴³

However, the years 1908–1910 mark the introduction of new motifs such as the beggar and the workers (first appearing in 1908 and 1909), as well as other representations of economic inequality.⁴⁴ If we turn to Munch's literary work, political aspects were already present in *From the City of Free Love* (1904–5), in which war, politicians and labor unions are mentioned, and where the main character is taken to court for being "an Anarchist and dangerous to your surroundings."⁴⁵ In an alternative draft, the term socialism appears – here, the main character is prosecuted for "calling Mr. Baboon a socialist."⁴⁶ While the comic aspects are obvious, the presence of such concepts reflects how aware Munch was of the major political discourses at the time.

In sum, *Alpha and Omega* seems to mirror a world without God, laws or authority, where humans are left to themselves and their own shifting, irrational feelings. The work also provides the reader with a strikingly accurate representation of the sentiments of the decade: the raging, violent masses, part animal, taking over the world. While this is not necessarily a normative or political stance, it still raises a series of potentially difficult questions, such as the connection between modernism and fascism, issues of race, and anti-democratic tendencies.

READING MUNCH. A FEW CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having located *Alpha and Omega* in relation to twentieth-century cultural and political shifts, evidence suggests that we need to view the work as more contemporary and socially aware than the previous literature has suggested. Several elements point to *Alpha and Omega* being deeply situational and embedded in the discourses of the first decade of the twentieth century and not only as anachronistic Bohemian tale. On a general level, the text is tied to broader ideas such as boredom, Darwinism, and politics, and on a much more specific level, we could read it in relation to the publication of *Eve's Diary* in 1906, as well as other texts and events.

More broadly, this essay also highlights important issues regarding method and mode of reading. Several productive, new perspectives on reading Munch's texts have been introduced during the last decade, for instance by Mai Britt Guleng, who has informed our understanding on how the writing is linked to memory and creativity⁴⁷, and Per Thomas Andersen, who has discussed the fragmentary form.⁴⁸ However, the tendency in both research and curatorial practices to focus on Munch's texts as textual mirrors of the images seems to have passed unquestioned. As this essay shows, the text often works in a different way than the images; for instance, boredom is a concept that is investigated solely in the *Alpha and Omega* text, but not in the images. In conclusion, we could benefit from paying closer attention to how Munch is making use of the material-specific potential of texts, as he does elsewhere in his experiments with different artistic mediums. The texts provide a separate artistic landscape, with its own set of motifs, such as boredom, silence, sound, travelling and time; all topics that are more readily investigated in text than in image. In future studies, it thus seems vital that we read the texts closely and autonomously, looking specifically for new text-specific motifs and intertextual spaces that could enrich our understanding of Munch's writing and his work in general.

NOTES

- 1 Edvard Munch, *Alfa og Omega*, MM UT 32, The Munch Museum. Published text. All translations are my own.
- 2 Gerd Woll, "Alpha and Omega. Munch's Pictorial Fable of the First Two Human Beings." in *Edvard Munch: Alpha & Omega* (Alkersum, Föhr: Museum der Westküste, 2013-2014), 74.
- 3 For a very good account of the history of the idea, see Gerd Woll, "Alpha and Omega. Munch's Pictorial Fable of the First Two Human Beings" in *Edvard Munch: Alpha & Omega*, 77f, and Gerd Woll, *Edvard Munch – Samlede grafiske verk* (Oslo: Orfeus, 2012), 260. Examples of early drawings include MM.T.00319, *Mann og kvinne svømmer (De første mennesker)*, 1895. There are also other drawings and sketches dated 1895 that seem related to *Alpha and Omega*, such as *Kvinnen, tigreren og bjørnen* (MM.T.01394) and *Alfa og strutsen* (MM.T.01372).
- 4 Woll, *Samlede grafiske verk*, 260.
- 5 MM K 3171. The Munch Museum. Letter from Gustav Schiefler. Dated 10.06.1909.
- 6 Woll, "Alpha and Omega. Munch's Pictorial Fable of the First Two Human Beings," 75.
- 7 In two retrospective letters to Jens Thiis, Munch writes that the work is a comment on gender dynamics, "mocking certain enactments between man and woman –". The letters are undated, but are written in the early 1930s, as comments to Thiis' upcoming biography on Munch.

- See MM N 2094, Munch Museum. Not dated. Draft of letter to Jens Thiis, and MM N 3118, Munch Museum. Not dated. Letter to Jens Thiis.
- 8 Arne Eggum, "Alfa og Omega. Edvard Munchs satiriske kjærlighetsdikt," in *Alfa og Omega. Utstillingskatalog* (Oslo: Oslo kommunes kunstsamlinger, 1981), 41.
 - 9 Eggum, "Alfa og Omega," 54.
 - 10 Gerd Woll, "Alfa og Omega. Munchs billedfabel om de første to mennesker" in *Edvard Munch og Danmark* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 44.
 - 11 Woll, "Alpha and Omega. Munch's Pictorial Fable of the First Two Human Beings," 64.
 - 12 Both *Norsk kunstnerleksikon* and *emunch.no* suggest 1908–09 as publication year. (Accessed Sept. 2016).
 - 13 Gerd Woll makes this claim several places: In *Samlede grafiske verk*, "Alpha and Omega. Munch's Pictorial Fable" and "Alfa og Omega. Munchs billedfabel."
 - 14 Edvard Munch, MM N 3269, Munchmuseet. Dated 3.4.1910. Letter to Sigurd Høst.
 - 15 Gustav Schiefler, MM K 3181, Munchmuseet. Dated 11.5.1910. Letter from Gustav Schiefler.
 - 16 Gustav Schiefler, MM K 3181, Munchmuseet. Dated 11.5.1910. Letter from Gustav Schiefler.
 - 17 Edvard Munch, "Alpha and Omega," 1908–09. Woll 336–357.
 - 18 Gerd Woll (2009) gives an excellent account of the history of this work with elaborate details of printing, exhibitions and marketing strategies.
 - 19 Woll, *Samlede grafiske verk*, 260.
 - 20 Woll, "Alfa og Omega. Munchs billedfabel," 40.
 - 21 Edvard Munch, MM N 587, The Munch Museum, written note, not dated, 6.
 - 22 Edvard Munch, MM T 2771, The Munch Museum, notebook, dated 1890–1891, 29.
 - 23 Edvard Munch, MM T 2786, The Munch Museum, notebook, not dated.
 - 24 Edvard Munch, MM T 2786, The Munch Museum, notebook, not dated, 5.
 - 25 Boredom as a literary topic has been subject to several studies in the last decade. See for instance *Boredom. The literary history of a state of mind* (1995) by Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Essays on boredom and modernity* (2009), an anthology edited by Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, and *Modernism, feminism and the culture of boredom* (2012) by Allison Peas.
 - 26 Edvard Munch, MM N 504, The Munch Museum, written note, dated 1889–1890.
 - 27 Lars Fr. H. Svendsen, *Kjedsomhetens filosofi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999), 38.
 - 28 Svendsen, *Kjedsomhetens filosofi*, 38.
 - 29 Mark Twain, "Eve's diary," in *Collected tales, sketches, speeches, & essays. 1891–1910* (New York: The library of America, 1992).
 - 30 Twain, *Eve's diary*, 697.
 - 31 Twain, *Eve's diary*, 706.
 - 32 Twain, *Eve's diary*, 696f.
 - 33 Twain, *Eve's diary*, 706.
 - 34 T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," in *The Waste Land (Norton Critical Editions)*, ed. Michael North (New York: Norton, 2001), 130.
 - 35 Svendsen, *Kjedsomhetens filosofi*, 25f. The word boredom was introduced to English in 1760, and German *langweile* a few decades earlier. The Danish *kedsomhet* is first mentioned in the early 1700s.
 - 36 The fallow deer were imported to private parks in southern Norway by wealthy landowners. For instance, seven fallow deer was imported to the island Hankø in 1899. For more on the topic, see: snl.no/dåhjort.
 - 37 Dag O. Hessen and Thore Lie, *Mennesket i et nytt lys: darwinisme og utviklingslære i Norge* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2002).
 - 38 Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 37.
 - 39 Childs, *Modernism*, 47.
 - 40 Hessen and Lie, *Mennesket i et nytt lys*, 245.

- 41 Espen Søybe, “Stemmerettens historie i Norge,” in *Store norske leksikon*, www.snl.no. (Accessed Sept. 28 2016).
- 42 Frank Høifødt, “The Kristiana Bohemia reflected in the art of the young Edvard Munch,” in *Edvard Munch: An Anthology*, ed. Erik Mørstad (Oslo: Unipub 2006), 22.
- 43 Gerd Woll, “Edvard Munchs arbeiderfrise,” magistergradsavhandling i kunsthistorie, Universitetet i Oslo, 1972, 42ff.
- 44 A few examples include *Caricature: The Rich Man* (Woll 374) and *Caricature: The Money-bag and the Poor Painter* (Woll 376) from 1910, and *Workers and Man with Top Hat from 1916* (Woll 527).
- 45 Edvard Munch, MM T 2786, The Munch Museum, notebook, not dated, 22.
- 46 Edvard Munch, MM T 2803, The Munch Museum, notebook, not dated, 7.
- 47 Mai Britt Guleng, “Edvard Munch and the source of creativity,” in *Edvard Munch and Åsgårdstrand*, ed. Jan Åke Pettersson (Oslo: Labyrinth Press, 2010).
- 48 Per Thomas Andersen, “Edvard Munch og det litterære fragmentet,” in *eMunch.no – tekst og bilde*, ed. Mai Britt Guleng (Oslo: Unipub, 2011).