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A ‘PALIMPSESTUOUS’ READING OF LISA STRØMME’S *THE STRAWBERRY GIRL*

Abstract: This reading of Lisa Strømme’s debut novel *The Strawberry Girl* (2016) is informed by Gérard Genette’s approach to literature as “hypertextual,” by which the literary theorist means that any text evokes “some other literary work” (*Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* 9). To weave the story of how Munch painted the first version of his iconic *Skrik* (*The Scream*) at Åsgårdstrand, Strømme read Munch’s journals, newspaper archives, an old memoir by a local woman, Inger Alver Gløersen, whose stepfather was a friend of Munch’s, she explored Munch events and exhibitions, Munch’s paintings, and she had talks with local people. Aside from these non-literary sources, the writer referenced Goethe’s *Faust*, the legend of Peer Gynt, the *Poetic Edda*, Dostoevsky, and she prefaced each chapter of the novel with a quote from Goethe’s *Theory of Colours*. This kind of multi-layered writing lends itself to what Genette calls, using Philippe Lejeune’s coinage, “a palimpsestuous reading” (399) done by readers whose barthesque “jouissance” leads them into the temptation of loving “(at least) two [texts] together” (399), and, in this case, a lot more than two, and not just texts, but also the enthralling art of painting, in a synesthetic experience.

Keywords: Åsgårdstrand; chronotope; palimpsest; synaesthesia; “the aesthetics of pleasure”.

Lisa Strømme’s *The Strawberry Girl* was published by Chatto & Windus in the UK in April 2016. A year later, in April 2017, the novel was published under the title *The Girl Between* by Sourcebooks Landmark in the US. This debut novel enjoyed a big success and it has been translated in more than ten languages, including Romanian.⁸

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⁸ *Fata cu fragi*, translated by Irina Bojin, was published by Humanitas Press in the “Raftul Denisei” collection in 2017. The author of this article met Lisa Strømme at FILIT in 2017, when she was Lisa’s interpreter.

Being fascinated by history and by the intriguing figure of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, the British-born artist living in Norway sets the novel in Åsgårdstrand in 1893, the year when Munch painted the first version of *The Scream*. The American edition of Strømme's novel appends, apart from the usual Acknowledgements and a brief introduction to the author, an "Author's Note," "A Conversation with the Author," "A List of Artworks" and a "Reading Group Guide." Strømme confesses in the "Author's Note" that she took the creative liberty of altering the dates of Munch's paintings "to suit the story." (169) Drawing on a real place on the map, Åsgårdstrand, with its magic appeal to the Norwegian painters, and on a landmark year in Munch's career, she re-imagines and re-inscribes both time and place in a story of dramatic force. In "A conversation with the Author" Strømme recounts the genesis of the book starting with the presence of the image of the painter and his work somewhere "in the background of my life for many years" until "*The Scream* sold at auction for a record-breaking figure." (173) Another important strain of the story originates in the author's admiration for the work of the Norwegian realist painter Hans Heyerdahl, Munch's contemporary. It is Heyerdahl's 1887 painting *Strawberry Girl* that Strømme used as an underlying visual reference to shed light on the protagonist's candid nature, and as the title of her tantalising novel.

In the next sections I argue that Åsgårdstrand in 1893 is "a literary artistic chronotope" (84) in Bakhtin's sense of the term described in *Dialogic Imagination*. I further connect this chronotope with the fact that, by referencing media, literary and art sources, the novel is "hypertextual" and invites the reader "to engage in a relational reading," which Gérard Genette calls "palimpsestuous" in his book *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (399). The configuration of this approach to which the novel lends itself leads me to what Virginia Woolf calls "the art of reading" in her seminal essay "How Should One Read a Book?" upon which Harold Bloom expanded and developed his own concept of "the aesthetics of pleasure" in *How to Read and Why* (22-3). Since *The Strawberry Girl* is a *Künstlerroman* and an art novel,⁹ I look into how Strømme crafted it by

⁹ As a *Künstlerroman* and an art novel, *The Strawberry Girl* continues a line illustrated by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Irving Stone's

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translating the technique of superimposition in graphics, cartography, painting and photography into the linguistic medium of the book. *The Scream*, the core that radiates its awe to the whole novel, deserves an approach in terms of ekphrasis and synaesthesia. The concluding remarks will draw all these aspects together into an image of the palimpsest whereby, as the author herself wishes, the reader should discover “the gallery of emotions that is Munch’s art.” (178)

Åsgårdstrand in 1893: a “chronotope”

In 1889 Munch started to spend his summers in Åsgårdstrand, and although in Strømme’s novel he owns a house there in 1893, in real life the painter bought it in 1898. The house, which is now a museum open to the public, keeps intact the traces of Munch’s habitation. Munch bought the house attracted by the place and especially by its golden light. The two female protagonists, Johanne (the Strawberry Girl) and Tullik (soon to become Munch’s lover and muse), have a conversation about the merits of the place, which recommends it to visual artists. Tullik wonders: “Who could fail to be inspired by it?” and Johanne points out the peculiarity of the light. She explains to Tullik what the old farmers say about “the landscape [that] bends the light,” which is “why we’re always bathed in gold” (41).

Indeed, the novel chronicles a time, in the late 19th century, when Norwegian painters gathered at Åsgårdstrand to capture the light and the seascape in a moment when in Norwegian painting there was an increasing attraction to *pleinairism*. The Norwegian painters’ interest in the special light that shapes the place can be seen in analogy with the French Impressionists who had chosen the coast and towns of Normandy for their *pleinairism* some decades earlier.

To give the reader a sense of Munch’s eccentric character expressed in the colours and shapes of his art, Strømme makes it blend with the miraculous

Lust for Life (1934) and *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1961), Joyce Cary’s *The Horse’s Mouth* (1944), John Fowles’s *The Collector* (1963), Patrick White’s *The Vivisector* (1970), Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988), Tracy Chevalier’s *Girl with a Pearl* (1999), Sarah Dunant’s *The Birth of Venus* (2003), Susan Vreeland’s *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (2007), B. A. Shapiro’s *The Art Forger* (2013), Donna Tartt’s *The Goldfinch* (2013), Robin Oliveira’s *I Always Loved You* (2014), Heather Mariah Webb’s *Rodin’s Lover* (2015), Olivia Laing’s *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (2016).

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landscape. Munch leaves his paintings to get the life of the surroundings in his garden in Åsgårdstrand. When she first sees the “outdoor gallery” of canvases “scattered throughout the garden” and “resting up against rocks and hedges, placed at random,” Tullik exclaims: “Oh, how magical!” (44). When Tullik becomes Munch’s lover he blends her in with the landscape, to an increased effect of magic. The most memorably enchanting portrait of Tullik is perhaps *Mermaid*, which shows her:

on the day she swam out naked and lay before him at the beach. He had painted her as a mermaid, her lower legs curling up softly into a tail. His signature column of moonlight lit her pale skin, and her luxurious auburn hair hung down over one shoulder and rested in waves over the other. It was Tullik, in all her ethereal and elegant beauty, a tantalizing vision, a mythical creature born of a summer night. (88)

Mermaid was actually painted in 1896 but Strømme concentrates all of Munch’s creative energy in this story of stormy passion. The impossible love between Munch and Tullik Ihlen has to unfold at Åsgårdstrand of all places and in the very year when Munch painted the first version of his most iconic piece. To suit the exceptionally beautiful landscape of Åsgårdstrand and Munch’s “one singular love” (136) for painting, Tullik has to perform not just the role of a lover, which she does with every fibre of her being, but also that of an inspiring muse for a painter who turns her into a mythological creature. Tullik is captured and immortalised in Munch’s scroll as the painter sees her in the episode when Johanne and Tullik go swimming, and Tullik is described “as though she belonged to the sea, like Rán, the sea goddess we used to read about at school.” (47) Therefore, it is not only Munch whom Tullik mesmerises with her ethereal and seductive beauty combined but also Johanne. The Strawberry Girl sees Tullik now as “ethereal, a being not wholly of this world, moulding and shaping everything solid and earthly to fit her fantasy” (38) when they walk through the woods and Tullik hears “trolls and the huldrefolk” (38) and now as befuddlingly flirtatious when, after planting a kiss on her lips, Johanne continues to be under Tullik’s spell. To Munch and to Johanne, Tullik is an inspiring muse, an

emanation of their imagination and a source of colour, shape and seduction in perfect harmony with the landscape:

And then there was Tullik in my head and her arms around me and her hair like fire and her voice as seductive as roses. Red and ruby, reeling and flowing and breathing with life. The exhilaration of scarlet, the indulgence of deep burgundy. The freedom that color brought. (128)

In Bakhtin's terms, Åsgårdstrand in 1893 is "a literary artistic chronotope," defined in *The Dialogic Imagination* as a sum of "spatial and temporal indicators [that] are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (84). Bakhtin adds that "[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history." (84) To visualise it, Bakhtin calls the chronotope in the novel an "intersection of axes and fusion of indicators." (84) Åsgårdstrand in 1893 in Lisa Strømme's novel is an exact illustration of Bakhtin's concept, being precisely that fusion of artistically significant time and symbolically charged space.

A "Palimpsestuous" Reading of a Palimpsestuous Story

Reimagining and reinscribing a peculiar place, whose magic she lets shine through her ekphrastic prose, and a particular moment in Munch's life and career, which she gives the force of a tragic hubris, Strømme weaves the strains of her story into the multi-layered pattern of the palimpsest. Coupling his concept of hypertextuality with that of the palimpsest, which is a manuscript written on papyrus or parchment used more than once, with earlier layers of writing not completely erased and thus legible, Genette argues that "on the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows showing through." (398-9)

In the "Author's Note" Strømme states that she thoroughly documented the novel by reading everything she could find "about Munch's life in Åsgårdstrand," speaking "to local people," reading "the periodicals of local history associations," and going "to every Munch event and exhibition in the area." (168) Doing this research prior to writing the novel, she discovered "an old memoir" written by "Inger Alver Gløersen, whose stepfather was a friend of Munch's." (168) In Gløersen's book, Strømme found the intriguing story of a

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young girl, Regine, an admiral's daughter, who "had a summer of romance with Edvard Munch" (168). According to the same source, the painter gifted Regine with his works, which she would hide from her disapproving parents. When the house was vacated and cleaned after the summer, the paintings were eventually traced and burned. It is around this story, with its complicated threads of truth based on the evidence of photographs and local census records, on the one hand, and hearsay, on the other, that Strømme wove her own in *The Strawberry Girl*. It is particularly relevant that what attracted the author to this romantic plot was that it reveals two sisters, Milly, with whom it is attested that Munch had a fling, and Regine Ihlen (nicknamed Tullik), whose affair with Munch is just an unlikely hypothesis. Strømme's research and readings led her to the conclusion that "Tullik Ihlen seems to have vanished into history." (168-9)

My argument here, drawing on Strømme's account in the "Author's Note," is that the character of Tullik, one of the three protagonists in the novel, is an earlier layer of writing in the palimpsest, which the author makes visible in her own writing of the novel, together with a whole plethora of re-imagined events around a significant year in Munch's lifework. If Tullik "vanished into history" (168-9) in the last decade of the 19th century, she re-emerged in her full brilliance and vigour as a figment of the author's imagination, which needed just that spark to fabricate her "own tale out of these wisps" (169) more than a century later.

Genette connects the superimposed hypertextuality of the palimpsest with what he calls:

a relational reading, the flavour of which, however perverse, may well be condensed in an adjective recently coined by Philippe Lejeune: a *palimpsestuous* reading. To put it differently, just for the fun of switching perversities, one who really loves texts must wish from time to time to love (at least) two together. (399)

Genette's French intellectual refinement in matters of hypertextuality recommended itself to me as the best theoretical approach to a romance like *The Strawberry Girl*, whose ingredients, layers and underlayers invite a reading which is "relational" and ultimately "palimpsestuous." One is tempted to love

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Strømme's text and a lot more than "two together." I have always wondered, inspired by Virginia Woolf, who asked herself in "How Should One Read a Book?: "How are we to learn the art of reading for ourselves?"(75). Drawing on Woolf's dilemma, Harold Bloom built on the idea that reading is an art and he formulated the principle of "the aesthetics of pleasure" practised by "solitary readers, young, and old, everywhere, even in universities." (*How to Read and Why* 22-3) It is as an art governed by the aesthetics of pleasure that I engage in reading literature, and especially Strømme's novel. Munch's affair with two sisters in the simulated world of the novel is a spark ignited by documents, to which the author responded imaginatively, adding more and more sources. The reader's task is to engage with the novel's multiple strains, to respond to references and allusions to the collection of sources in Strømme's text in an equally imaginative and artful way.

One of the sources is Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, which provides Strømme with mottoes for each of her chapters in the book. The first chapter, "Blank Canvas," is prefaced by "The greatest brightness, short of dazzling, acts near the greatest darkness," (7) which is a suggestion that the novel may read as a visual work, originally a "blank canvas" that gets gradually filled in with bright and dark tones.

Johanne, the Strawberry Girl, one of the protagonists and also the narrator who filters the story for the readers, is described in visual terms translating, and thus superimposing Heyerdahl's painting onto the words of the text:

I hid inside the Painting, hoping she wouldn't see what I had become. Sometimes it still worked. If I closed my eyes and thought of strawberries, I could feel the threads of the ripped dress tickling my bare shoulder while Herr Heyerdahl's brush swept the palette and daubed the canvas. When I concentrated hard, I could make my face sullen, yet obedient, as it was when he captured it. I could even feel the fine stems of the jasmine laced through my fingers like cobwebs. My other hand, trembling with fatigue, gripping the bowl. That itch on my shoulder that I couldn't scratch; must not move, must not talk, must keep still. (7)

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In ekphrastic prose, the text gives Johanne a voice which is muted in Heyerdahl's painting. This opening is a description of Heyerdahl's *Strawberry Girl* adapted to the linguistic medium, an ekphrasis. If the painting is static, fixed in a pose whose emotional freight can only be inferred by the viewer, the text translates the image into a dynamic pattern of a character whose sensations and feelings can be rendered in words. What the text does is to record the limitations of the visual medium and then to transcend them in writing.

Strømme's text superimposes the visual medium of painting onto the linguistic medium of the novel and translates colours into language. The "Blue" chapter is prefaced by this motto taken from Goethe's *Theory of Colours*: "They are like two rivers which have their source in one and the same mountain, but subsequently pursue their way under totally different conditions" (68). This superimposition is not only of the two media but also of the key characters of Munch and Johanne, one a painter with experience, and the other a young peasant girl learning to paint from him. Johanne connects to Munch in the most concrete way, by paying him visits that she keeps secret from her parents, especially her mother, but also through Goethe's book, which Munch offers Johanne, who carries it wherever she goes. Johanne and Munch seem to fuse (in) their passion for painting ("their source" of vitality), and at the same time they keep their identities and physical entities separate:

Munch was a wanderer. He had the ability to tuck himself away, to blend, chameleon-like, into his surroundings where he could silently observe. He was not approachable, but he had always fascinated me. He painted. He sketched. He did the things I wanted to do. Communicated in shapes and colors, like me. As a child, I would find a spot some distance away and sit with him, although we were always apart. He knew I was there. We sensed each other. (68)

Apart from painting, Strømme's palimpsestic novel has literary underlayers. It is crucial that Tullik avidly reads Goethe's *Faust*, and while reading it she connects to Munch in fancy as passionately as she connects to him physically. In Chapter 7 ("Light") Tullik enthusiastically quotes from *Faust* in a chat with Johanne. The quote is about art rising up "from your heart's space" (51), which is exactly Munch's idea of art. In her tumultuous passion stirred by reading Goethe's *Faust*, Tullik asks Johanne, imploringly and expectantly: "Has

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he read *Faust* too?" she said. "Does he have it?" (51) In passages like this, hypertextuality and the palimpsestic nature of the text are highlighted, and the reader is invited to go beyond the text at hand and explore textual spaces beyond it, which open onto other textual and visual spaces, virtually without limits.

In the same hypertextually palimpsestic manner, Munch's philosophical views on life and art are articulated through Dostoevsky's in the "Light" chapter, where the modernist painter broods over faith in God and God's existence only to conclude that, like Dostoevsky and like Goethe before him (invoked by Tullik earlier in the chapter):

I have been faithful to the goddess of art, and she has been faithful to me. It is the soul you see in these paintings. A true artist uses their art to express the soul's journey, to express that which cannot be answered by the intellect. Do you read Dostoevsky, Miss Ihlen? (58)

The reader immersed in a relational reading of the novel cannot miss the networked references, which engage the hypotexts (in this case Goethe's *Faust* and Dostoevsky's approaches to art and life) in a dialogue across time and space. What this hypertextually superimposed pattern achieves is also a very deep communication among the characters beyond the immediate level, into some sort of literary transcendence, with all its philosophic and aesthetic implications. In Strømme's novel, Munch, Tullik and Johanne communicate through the works and ideas of Goethe and Dostoevsky in a way that is finely tuned to our most essential humanity. To Goethe and Dostoevsky, Strømme adds older layers of Norse legends: Peer Gynt, evoked by Johanne in one of her conversations with Thomas (her lover and future husband), and Rán, the sea goddess in the *Poetic Edda*, embodied by Tullik in the novel.

An Art Novel about the Modernist Artist, "Faithful to the Goddess of Art"

In the spirit of modernism as professed by the impressionists, post-impressionists, expressionists like himself, etc. across the arts, Munch in real life and in Strømme's novel laid emphasis on the immediacy of perception. In the "Ruby" chapter he answers Tullik's question "What makes you paint like this?" explaining that he tries "to paint life's unsolvable riddles, the things that perplex us," "life as it is lived." (45) In order to do so, he opts for the modernist principle of leaving things unfinished, to give his viewers a sense of sketchiness and

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imperfection that actually transcends mimeticism and makes his modernist art nonfigurative and abstract. In “Cerise,” the chapter immediately following “Light,” Munch explains this time to Johanne, his apprentice: “It’s not finished yet, [...] but I’d rather paint a thousand decent unfinished pictures than a single bad completed one.” (66)¹⁰

Munch’s constant impulse, characteristic of modernism, is akin to Virginia Woolf’s urge in “Modern Fiction” to “Look within” and render the “myriad impressions” (160) received by the mind.¹¹ Likewise, Munch teaches Johanne that:

Our outer world changes according to our inner feelings. That is what I must convey. Just as Dostoevsky penetrates into the realms of the soul with his words, so I must penetrate the same realms in my art. (66)

Munch is the Baudelairean artist of spleen, a “*poète maudit*.” The phrase was coined by Alfred de Vigny in his 1832 novel *Stello*, in which the poet, and by extension the artist, is “*la race toujours maudite par les puissants de la terre.*”¹² (57) A whole cohort of such cursed artists, typified by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud cropped up in the late 19th century, and Strømme’s depiction of Munch’s character places him in their company and in sharp opposition to an establishment that scorns, derides and ostracises them. In the very first chapter of the novel, Munch is introduced as a bizarre figure loathed by

¹⁰ In his approach to a fellow writer, D. H. Lawrence, whom he met several times, on which occasions they would always converse, Aldous Huxley tackles, among other aspects, Lawrence’s “aesthetic principle, that art must be wholly spontaneous, and, like the artist, imperfect, limited and transient” (66), which is very similar to Munch’s in Strømme’s novel. There is a striking resemblance between Lawrence’s belief that “Art [...] should flower from an immediate impulse toward self-expression or communication and should wither with the passing of the impulse,” coupled with the fact that Lawrence felt some sort of discomfort in the presence of any highly finished work of art” (66) in Huxley’s account of Lawrence’s aesthetics of spontaneity and sketchiness and Strømme’s approach to Munch’s aesthetics of “unfinished paintings” lying outdoors to impregnate with the life of the outer world surrounding them.

¹¹ This is an urge that thinkers, art critics and artists started to formulate in the latter half of the 19th century. One finds it in Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (originally published in 1873), renamed *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, especially in the “Conclusion” chapter; in Henry James’s seminal essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884); and in his brother William James’s *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). All these writings advocated the primacy of the reality of the mind and soul, which shaped the *Zeitgeist* of modernism to which Munch belonged.

¹² “the race that will always be cursed by the powerful ones of the earth.”

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the respectable townsfolk. Johanne's mother will always refer to him by the taboo phrase "the Sinful Man," (8) which echoes the culturally resonant "poète maudit." In her mind fed on the conventions of the time, Munch is "her devil" in contrast to Heyerdahl, who is her "god" (8). Johanne, who secretly admires Munch and stealthily sneaks into his garden, comments on the people's attitude of repulsion on the grounds of his uncertain social status ("Neither distinguished nor successful") and of "His strange paintings [that] did nothing to strengthen his reputation" (8). Demonised by the society of his day, called "a madman and a drunk" (8), Munch walks in Strømme's story as he walked in real life:

He had a strong jawline and pale-blue, doleful eyes that sang with sadness. It struck me that the sadness was not a fleeting emotion but something that inhabited him permanently, like an anchor. (11)

The Scream

The Scream is the core of the novel. When Johanne sees Munch working on it for the first time she is struck by the air of sorrow it transmits to the viewer:

The painting he was working on was of a man on a bridge looking out into a swirling, violet fjord. Soft tones of blue and brown and black dominated the lower half of the picture. The man on the bridge in the foreground was wearing a dark coat like Munch's and a fedora like Munch's. Two figures in top hats and black suits walked away into the background. The wavy sky was colorless; it had not been painted yet. The sorrow of the painting made me step back and clutch my chest. I could have taken Munch in my arms right there in his garden, so great was the ache that radiated from him. (52)

This ekphrasis in chapter 7 "Light" is a vivid painting in words of Munch's iconic *Scream* while being painted, which gives it a sense of dynamism and sketchiness. At the same time, it describes a symbiotic relationship between the artist and his crafted object, rendering the emotional intensity of the process itself, which is transmitted to the viewer. Johanne is so transfixed by it that her reaction is somatic. The painting has such a hypnotic appeal that Johanne, who repeats "like Munch's" as if she fell into a trance, feels inescapably immersed in it.

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From the moment when she sees the painting in that early stage of composition, Johanne is haunted by it and the plot dramatically unfurls to its tragic denouement as if driven by *The Scream's* unleashed pathos.

Seven chapters later, in the "Dark" chapter, maybe suggestive of the seven sins, Johanne reports that when she pays Munch a visit to let him know that Tullik is ill at ease she hears a sound coming from the painting: "A whine? A moaning, like Tullik in the night." (112) She is awed to see that the hypnotically "wavy sky" is "now a vibrant bloodred vermilion layered with bright gold." (112) Caught in the loop of the trance, Johanne continues to translate the language of the painting into terrible words that swarm on the page transmitting their powerful suggestions of profound unease to the reader: "Worked into the sky was a stretched elliptical shape, like an eye watching me." (112) The ekphrasis plunges the reader into an experience of synaesthesia redolent of the *fin de siècle* spleen that in its hypertrophy engulfs the whole world:

The fjord was stark ultramarine edged with black curving lines, and the minute, sailless boats in the distance were sailing precariously close to the yellow whirlpool at the center of the fjord. But the most shocking detail was the figure on the bridge. It was no longer a man in a hat, staring over the railings, but had become an abstract figure that had turned around to face us. It was still only an outline, but it curved like the flame of a candle in the wind. And the sound, the whining, seemed to be coming from this figure, this being, on the bridge. (112)

That is precisely what Munch aims to do: to paint a sound, which pushes his skills beyond the limits of his craft in an act of hubris. It dawns on Johanne that the painting is Tullik but the more she thinks of it the less clearly she can see things. She then doubts that the sexless figure in Munch's painting is Tullik, and her next thought is that "Maybe she was me?" (113).

Tullik plunges into despair and she falls into a whining trance evocative of *The Scream*. In Johanne's account, Munch's art is so powerful that it can impact destinies: in one of his works, the painter sketches his sister Laura confined at Gaustad, an asylum, "wrestling with madness, unable to talk, lost in the darkest depths of her own mind" (156). Johanne feels that what traps Laura in that deplorable state is Munch, who also "sketched Tullik into the painting, merged her with his sister, entwined them with strokes of charcoal." (156) The 1893

version of *The Scream* is carefully hidden under the floorboard by Johanne helped by her brother, and thus it is saved from destruction. In Strømme's novel, that is Johanne's *Scream*. Munch goes to Germany in pursuit of his art, his most consuming and enduring passion. The three protagonists are united by a destructive love for one another under the spell of the art of painting and in the name of its transgressive spirit.

Conclusions

The Strawberry Girl is a novel that re-imagines the past, connecting it with a place in a chronotope: Åsgårdstrand, in 1893, an inspiration for the Norwegian artists of the time. It is also a romance based on the author's fabrication of the enthralling persona of Tullik Ihlen who ensnared Munch in a dangerous summer fling and Johanne in an enduring loyalty and attachment.

Strømme wrote the novel at the intersection of fact and fiction, transforming factuality into fiction. The novel draws on archival sources, memoirs, etc., and it is replete with references to Norse legends, literary texts, Heyerdhal's and Munch's paintings, which give it the quality of a palimpsest in Genette's terms. It also invites what Genette called "a relational reading," which is "palimpsestuous." (399)

Another aspect of the novel is a style that reflects on the spirit of modernism (impressionism, postimpressionism, expressionism, etc.), its aesthetics, and the stance of the late 19th century Baudelairean artist. Being an art novel, *The Strawberry Girl* relies on ekphrasis and synesthetic effects, mirroring Munch's own experience of synaesthesia.

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