

Summary

**LIDIA GŁUCHOWSKA / *Requiem aeternam, Frieze of Life and Hell.*
Przybyszewski, Munch, Vigeland and Pre-Expressionist theory of art**

Celebrated in Berlin for his ambiguous fame of 'a genius Pole' and 'a King of Bohemia', a Polish-German writer Stanisław Przybyszewski was the first to promote consistently the work of Edvard Munch and his native sculptor Gustav Vigeland. His essays *Das Werk des Edvard Munch* (1894) and *Auf den Wegen der Seele/On the Roads of the Soul* (1897/ 1900) indicated the starting point for their artistic successes, becoming at the same time the first theory of Expressionism. Also in the initial sentence of a rhapsody *Totenmesse/Requiem Aeternam* (1893/1904) – 'In the beginning was the lust' – by replacing 'word', Logos with 'lust'/'kind' Przybyszewski indicated despondency in the overall power of language and rationality together with belief in the prime of irrational sources of existence and creation.

The literary and biographical legend pushed him into a cabinet of curiosities, muffling the objective judgment of his achievements. Sometimes the critics treated his interpretations of works by Norwegian authors as an anticipation of their creative development, or even as compensation of some shortages in their works. Some others claimed that he allowed himself an over-interpretation by popularising views which were more relevant to his own ideology – a mythology of sex struggle, theory of a naked soul or satanism – than to the artists' visions. The very artists, however, confirmed rightness of the writer's interpretational intuition.

Przybyszewski played also the role of a strategic impresario of both of the Norwegians, soliciting to sell their works in Berlin and to organise Munch's exhibitions in Warsaw (1903) and Prague (1905). He promoted their achievements as well as fashion for Scandinavia as a correspondent-advisor of 'Moderní Revue' – a journal edited in Prague, and later as an editor-in-chief of 'Życie' journal issued in Cracow. Przybyszewski's essays on Munch and Vigeland's works, translated into many languages, enabled their successes in all Central and Eastern Europe.

Przybyszewski's *Requiem aeternam/ Totenmesse*, just like Munch's *Frieze of Life* or Vigeland's *Hell* are catalysts of tragic, catharsis-like experiences of the epoch. The common feature of all these works is their narrative, Proto Expressionist and Proto Avant-Garde character. Regarding their style and the motifs which they made common, the artists create a synesthetic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which breaks borders between genres, one of the most important aesthetic-ideological manifestoes of the turn of the 19th century.

Przybyszewski's playwriting and literary oeuvre, both in Polish and German, has been praised in the recent years. However, the reconstruction of his achievements in the field of art theory and critics, as well as his role of a mediator in the cultural dialogue from Scandinavia to the Balkans, still deserve thorough international and interdisciplinary research.