

Sofija Kymantaitė's Contact with Symbolist and other Early Modernist Aesthetics in Cracow

Summary

The purpose of this article is to research what kind of aesthetic phenomena Sofija Kymantaitė (later Čiurlionienė) had encountered during the art history lectures at Adrian Baraniecki's Higher Courses for Women and her visits to the art exhibitions in Cracow (1904–1907). Kymantaitė took the art history course each semester of her studies. At A. Baraniecki's Higher Courses for Women, Sofija became acquainted with art history from the fifteenth century through modern art. The course was taught by Konstanty Marian Górski, a rather well-known figure in Cracow artistic circles, who returned to Cracow from Paris.

Right before Kymantaitė's entering A. Baraniecki's Higher Courses for Women, the administration changed the lecturer for Renaissance to Modern Art History, Michał Żmigrodzki, because of his negative evaluation of contemporaneous art, namely, works by symbolists: Arnold Böcklin, Max Klinger, and Franz von Stuck, as well as the Modern art style with its great interest in Japonism. Górski wrote a critical review of Żmigrodzki's Art History textbook, emphasizing the textbook author's old-fashioned aesthetic point of view to the art of Symbolism. The polemicist wrote his review at the break of the twentieth century. Górski's rising attention to symbolic expression is demonstrated

in his attempt to write a monograph on the painter Jacek Malczewski's (1854–1929) *oeuvre* in 1903, right after his retrospective exhibition tour through Lvov–Cracow–Warsaw. Kymantaitė's literary interpretation of the series of paintings entitled “The Poisoned Well” (1905–1907) by Malczewski, which she hypothetically wrote in 1910–1912, is a trace of her impressions on Polish symbolism during the period of studies in Cracow.

In the essay book “Lietuvoje” by Čiurlionienė-Kymantaitė and Čiurlionis (1910), she named Arnold Böcklin among the artists, the reproductions of whose works would refine the beauty of home interior of the Lithuanian intelligentsia. Was this name suggested by Čiurlionis, who highly evaluated Böcklin's paintings, as we know it from his autumn letters of 1906? This research let us come to a conclusion that when Kymantaitė returned to Vilnius and met there her “most competent teacher” of art, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, she was already developed in the history of art and was a little acquainted with new art phenomena such as Symbolism. Böcklin's pictures made a great impression on other members from modern Lithuanian intelligentsia, especially on those who studied in the beginning of twentieth century in Switzerland.

Key words: aesthetic thought in Lithuania, Sofija Kymantaitė, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, Arnold Böcklin, Jacek Malczewski, Symbolist aesthetics, A. Baraniecki's Higher Courses for Women in Cracow.