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NATURALISM IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE AND
GERMAN LITERATURE

Abstract

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NATURALISM IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE AND GERMAN LITERATURE

Abstract

This thesis, *Naturalism in Romanian literature and in German literature*, deals with the naturalist current. Throughout the research we will try to combine important and interconnected branches that belong to this topic: the historical and cultural context in which naturalism develops, the manifestation of the current in Romanian and German literature, similarities, particularities or differences between the two and trends or the naturalistic influences identified both in the case of Romanian writers and in that of German writers.

In Chapter I, *The Historical and Cultural Context*, we will present the circumstances in which naturalism develops, the starting points in French, Romanian and German literature, and the main theories that influence the development of the current. Naturalism first appeared in France and was taken over by European naturalist schools. The name of the current derives from nature and suggests the importance of the biological in the structure of the human personality. Naturalists point out a double determination: of the environment and of the biological. Thus, man is no longer a free being, but becomes a product of the environment and heredity. Under the influence of enthusiasm for science, naturalist writers discover the common man and the people below. Naturalists address the ugly in life, the unpleasant, the pathological, as reparative. The ugly receives a stimulating load for artistic inspiration, the beautiful is discovered in the ugly. Émile Zola is the promoter and theorist of the movement. The author legitimizes naturalism both through his novels and his theoretical work, the experimental novel, which describes the inherent mechanisms of the character, highlights intellectual and sensory manifestations, under the influence of heredity and environment, exposes social conditions and experiences that lead to perpetual transformation of the character.

Naturalism as an accentuated, excessive, strident way of realism, replaces it and is situated, chronologically after it. He emphasizes the importance of objective, hereditary and social factors, rises against the morality of free will, demands precision in investigations, has an attitude opposable to pathetic and speculative exaggerations in previous art, shows respect for the document that leads to hypotheses to be verified. The naturalist current has a more radical doctrine than realism, it tends towards the cruel, brutal reproduction of reality, its favorite themes being disease, heredity, biological, pathological cases. Like realism, naturalism

is socially conditioned by the development of industry and the emergence of the proletariat, which revolts against misery and injustice. The cultural framework is enriched with new elements, theories and orientations such as determinism, evolutionism, Marxism and positivism. As for the criticism of the new current, in France Brunetière's denigrating action is counterbalanced by the united powers of Zola, Maupassant, the Goncourt brothers and Taine. In Romania, the literary landscape highlights the hostile positions of Maiorescian junimism, supported by special tools and arguments by Nicolae Iorga and Mihai Dragomirescu. Naturalism counts on the neutrality of Tudor Vianu, Paul Zarifopol, G. Călinescu, E. Lovinescu. In German literature, Bertolt Brecht criticizes naturalist theater for illustrating social conditions in an unfavorable light, and Hermann Bahr considers that there are major differences between naturalism and naturalist theater or stage naturalism.

Chapter II, *Romanian Naturalist Writers*, includes a description of the works of Romanian naturalist writers: Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea and Ion Luca Caragiale. In Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea's short stories in which the protestant character of the current crystallizes, the investigations aimed at revealing the social and literary ideal are accumulated. The social ideal is represented by the recovery of the marginalized categories, the literary one places the ugly on the same side with the beautiful. Șerban Cioculescu describes naturalism in the History of modern Romanian literature as pessimistic. Delavrancea establishes a correlation from nature to society and not from society to nature. Delavrancea's social pessimism starts from the vision of society, in which the disadvantaged people are crushed. He values the simple man, of nature, with his language, with his naive imagination. Naturalists are the short stories *Trubadurul*, *Liniște*, *Iancu Moroi*, *Sultănica*, *Zobie*, *Paraziții* or *Milogul*.

The naturalistic vision resizes the realistic one in the work of Ion Luca Caragiale. Ion Luca Caragiale surprised in his work the human degradation, vice, moral collapse under the impulse of the primary instincts, of the shoots of the unconscious.

The works of German naturalist writers Arno Holz, Johannes Schlaf and Gerhart Hauptmann are presented and interpreted in Chapter III, *German Naturalist Writers*. German naturalism describes and insists on the workers movement. The current enters the scene in both Berlin and Munich through the alliance of several writers and intellectuals who openly confront traditional realism and draw attention to the new current through the work of the circle "Durch Berlin" and the magazine "Die Gesellschaft". In Germany, the current produces an audience of its own due to the large number of plays and playwrights.

German naturalism found its own form in drama and not in the novel. The current shows the reality, not in the form of beautiful works of art, but through a rendering of life as it is. The

choice of its subjects is determined by a social pessimism, which concerns the lower layers of existence.

Arno Holz (1863-1929) is considered the theorist of naturalism, being known in literary history as the supporter of "consequent naturalism". Holz adopts Zola's theory that the work of art is a piece of nature seen through a temperament. The most consistent direction in Holz's argument is the monistic line, according to which temperament is considered a part of nature. Holz insists on the artist's freedom to choose his starting point. He describes nature as Art tends to become Nature again. It becomes Nature insofar as this is allowed by imitations and their exploitation. By nature, Holz sees the whole spiritual, social, and physical world, including the world of imagination and dreams, insofar as it is experienced by one person. The author tries to apply in his work, a new technique of storytelling in prose, which he theorized going beyond his naturalism Zola. The volume contains short stories that present with extreme precision fragmentary aspects of life. A "second style" ("Sekundenstil") is discovered, which records the smallest movements, noises, nuances. This style manages to present the situations, in order to record the reality with an accuracy of minutes, but not to confer an internal cohesion, which must be based on selection, omission, potentiation and condensation. This volume belongs to consistent naturalism and is distinguished by "the effect of specific linguistic-stylistic transcription, the dialect is reproduced exactly and the text records interruptions and disturbances in speech."

The drama of Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf, *The Selicke Family* (*Die Familie Selicke*, 1890) is specific to consequent naturalism and marks a decisive difference from conventional theatrical language. It is a dramatic study of the petty-bourgeois daily life, which has reached, in a free joining of scenes, a rendering of maximum precision of reality. The piece is characterized by a static and strict arrangement.

Naturalism found its maturity in Hauptmann's dramas. For Hauptmann, it is not the conflicts, the dramatic construction, the resolution of the characters that matter, but the presented ideas and this is obvious in his dramas.

The playwright is influenced by the aesthetics of Émile Zola and the literary circle of Johannes Schlaf and Arno Holz, the German representatives of the naturalist current. He discovers in naturalism the interest and sympathy for many, the connection with the lived event, the careful research of the influences exerted on human nature by the social conditions, of heredity. The possibility to bring in his work known images from childhood, the landscape and the people of Silesia, the inclination towards the positivist philosophy nourished by admiration for Hänckel, whose principles he knows during his studies, his gift to remember with

astonishing accuracy the details, the they approached the aesthetic ideal of Zola, who asked artists to reproduce in their work a "slice of life".

The tragedy is discovered in the lives of ordinary people, in the sphere of personal and social life, in the impossibility of fulfilling man, of barriers, of the inability to adapt to situations contrary to his nature. His adherence to the naturalist current is organic, this representing a first moment of the revolution and transformations known by modern theater.

Hauptmann's naturalism is nothing more than a struggle with the earthly, whether it depicts the social fresco in the Weavers, whether it describes Krampton grotesquely and earthly, or whether it follows with a cruel cruelty the conscience process of the criminal Rose Bernd. The universe described by Hauptmann is a huge fresco of people and characters, extraordinary human appearances, prototypes of great characters and strong passions that unfold from the amorphous mass of humanity. His naturalism is psychological, as is Ibsen's. Naturalism and romanticism, the two poles of his moral and aesthetic dualism, meet in his writings, in which, after the excess of brutality of naturalism, the romantic element intervenes, catalyst of passions and creator of dreams.

In German literature, Thomas Mann's work is representative of naturalistic influences. The naturalism that finds and refuses to explain, reducing the observer to a passive retina, having the horror of metaphysics, is not, as it was believed, at the opposite of aesthetics, greedy for impressions, morbid and analytical. An overcoming of naturalism and aesthetic decadentism could be accomplished by an invasion in their sphere and this is evident in the work of Thomas Mann.

Thomas Mann fixes decadence, taking it as the object of his art and the morbid decomposition becomes his literary theme. Problematizing the possibility of creation in relation to the destruction of the one who lives in it, to the probability that this morbidity constitutes its own intimate substance, Thomas Mann causes in literature, the paradoxical encounter between art and disease. The two always serve the same purpose: take them away from life. The disease becomes the defining sign in culture, for the social and political immaturity of the bourgeoisie. The protagonists experience the desire for decline, reaching the climax through the death and degeneration of an entire generation.

The disease has a double function in the work of Thomas Mann: social and cultural. The first suggests the rejection to live, the desire for redemption, while the cultural function is related to sanction and absence. Individual life takes refuge in biological abnormality and closes in physiology.

In the work of Thomas Mann, the disease becomes normal and appears as an inability to act. There is a denial of existence that comes from heroes like Tonio Kröger, Aschenbach, Leverkühn. They are absent dreamers, in love with the petty and ridiculous moment of life. The stigma of the disease gives them the opportunity for a fascinating mental experience. The coordinates of Thomas Mann's works are: the mixture of north and south, with echoes in the temperament oscillations of the protagonist, a symbol of the unknown space, of the otherness manifested in modernism.

Thomas Mann is not a naturalist writer, his work does not show naturalism very clearly, but the naturalistic influences and the author's interest in this literary current are obvious.

Chapter IV, entitled *Similarities. Particularities. Differences*, highlight the common points of the two naturalistic manifestations, but also the nuances specific to the works of German and Romanian literature. The specific themes of the naturalist current, common to both literatures, are the struggle between generations, current and professional life, the city, industrialization, routine, environment, decay, alcoholism, instinctual biological life, pathology, analysis of feelings, concern for suicide, human alienation, the character without free will, determinism, the influence of heredity on the destiny of the characters, poverty, the proletariat, the family.

Family disasters are presented in the work of Gerhart Hauptmann, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Ion Luca Caragiale and Thomas Mann. The purpose of marriages is material and people who come from outside the family always have a defining function that leads to the acceleration of degradation. Urban aesthetics is a similarity identified in the works of naturalist writers analyzed in this paper. Most events take place in nature, in rural areas. The city is standardized, non-specific and sterile, barely seen in passing, by car or from the hustle and bustle of the streets. This is obvious in the novel. Thomas Mann presents Venice as a source of disease. The city is in the work of Delavrancea a territory of ferocity and dehumanization, in the urban universe taking place the unmasking of vice. In Eugen Barbu novel, the action takes place on the outskirts of the city, on the city's household waste.

The collective character is present in the naturalistic works of Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Liviu Rebreanu, Eugen Barbu.

The collective character is present in the naturalistic works of Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Liviu Rebreanu, Eugen Barbu and Fănuș Neagu. The naturalist current sought to be closer to the workers force. The connections between naturalism, workers and socialism result from ideological and sociological similarities. Work is represented collectively. In this collective identity, the representation of the worker is determined by discourse and affects the

patterns that result from the transfer of the concepts of mass psychology. At the end of the nineteenth century, the mass means an ordered, irrational, forced collective being, in which neither the individual nor the social order can be represented. The social concept limits individuals, erases the conscious personality of the will and promotes instinctuality. An educated individual can become en masse an unpredictable, ferocious, enthusiastic, heroic and easily influenced barbarian, seduced into actions that violate his apparent interests. Naturalism transfers to workers patterns of speech affected by fear.

Naturalism turns the environment into an instrument for justifying moments of crisis. The effects of the reality of the environment turn at some point into the effects of their delusional failure. The interior transforms from a protective space into a delirious space. The houses are transformed into sanatoriums in the work of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu or Thomas Mann, in the case of Prince Maxentius, Mrs. Buddenbrook or Hanno. The bedroom becomes a forbidden space, the place where taboos take place. In the case of Liviu Rebreanu, Eugen Barbu and Gerhart Hauptmann, most of the actions take place in the pub.

In the work of Ion Luca Caragiale, madness appears as a conclusive, catastrophic element. It erupts violently, expressing a rupture beyond which lies the disorder of the spirit. This is the case of Lefter Popescu, who spend his life in a game of nerves, illusion and disappointment. The same happens in the case of Gheorghe or Iancu Georgescu. The hallucinations are the reflection of a mind that became ill as a result of the torments endured during the investigation of the crime of which it is not guilty. Madness is manifested by the word, by discontinuous verbal delirium, from which a reference universe cannot be rebuilt. It is the consciousness of human deviance and the experience lived and assumed until the disintegration of the being. This is also the case of Matthias Clausen, who, before committing suicide, wanders barefoot through the storm and hallucinates.

The correspondence between reality and fiction is highlighted in the works of the authors Liviu Rebreanu, Eugen Barbu and Gerhart Hauptmann. The drama presents the acute situation in which workers find themselves as a result of industrialization.

Gerhart Hauptmann's plays often end with the deaths of his heroes: Elena Krause, Hilse, Johannes Vockerat, Arnold Kramer, Henry, Pippa, Mathias Clausen. With few exceptions, death is the end of the songs. Death in Gerhart Hauptmann's plays is both a release and a protest, sometimes even atonement. A protestant meaning is found in the death of Elena Krause or that of Matthias Clausen. Authentic and emotional release is the deaths of Arnold Kramer and Gabriel Schilling.

The disappearance of the characters is exposed in naturalism in various forms and includes all social categories: hanged peasants, dead children, women who die after giving birth. Death at birth is paradoxical. Women give birth to healthy, lively children or the children end up dying immediately after birth. Suicide is often found in naturalistic works. The causes are psychiatric, biological, or medical: heredity and suicidal families. Responsible for such an act are events with the role of precipitating factors, social and environmental factors. Those who commit suicide feel unfit for life, powerless to live. Johannes is a misfit of family life. He commits suicide out of love. The remorseful Henschel carrier is delirious and commits suicide. Likewise, in Delavrancea's short story, the doctor commits suicide after the death of his wife and daughter. Professor Paul Malerian commits suicide in an act of dementia, lawyer Rudolf ends up making the same gesture out of passionate exaltation, and also suicide appears as a release. Iancu Moroi commits suicide to end his humble, depersonalized existence. It is an act of courage against one's own decay. Death by suicide appears both in the short stories of Ion Slavici, Iorgovan commits suicide, and in the works by Ion Luca Caragiale. Suicide has different valences in the work of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu. The death by suicide of the heir Drăganescu validates the fortune of Elena Drăganescu Hallipa, while the death of Ana from Ion by Liviu Rebreanu can lead to the loss of the inheritance. Ion fears that by the death of his wife he could lose everything he had gained by marrying her. Avrum's suicide draws Ana to the death row. Both Avrum's and Dumitru Moarcaș's death announce Ana's suicide. Petrișor's death is received by Ion as a punishment from God.

The typology of female characters is vast: upstart, cultured, emancipated or victim. Normal women are described as virtuous and happy, while those who display a deviant femininity are grotesque, miserable or depraved. The woman is the first victim in the age of declining values: the muse becomes a model, the faithful woman a hysteric, the natural woman an object of disgust. Destiny comes down to a grotesque physiology. As an object of aesthetics, the woman becomes ugly. Naturalistic writings present a series of shortcomings of women: they are swallowed by the banality of everyday life, their destinies are tragic, they are subject to decay and degradation. The duality of female characters is manifested through various mythical and literary figures, in all their complexity and diversity.

Hereditary fatality is exploited in naturalism. The burden of heredity is the favorite view of naturalists. Abnormality and repulsive physiology are outlawed. Delavrancea's characters suffer from physical disability. The short story is dominated, like Zola's novel *Les Rougon-Macquart*, by the idea of heredity. The problem of heredity was analyzed also by Ion Luca Caragiale.

Regarding the differences, the Romanian naturalism is more lyrical, the nervous vibration is focused on a moral spring, less dominated by sensations accelerated by intellectual fever. The current in Romania is a mixture of compassionate lyricism and revolted spirit. He has a sociological conformation, he is more concerned with the individual's relations with the world, with the work process, with the possessing passions, than with the accidents of heredity and fatalism. Romanian naturalists retain from Zolism determinism only the argument according to which the degradation of social relations is classified as physiological degradation and primary instincts precede. German naturalism seeks to mirror reality, not in the form of beautiful works of art, but through a rendering of life, without veils and false modesty. The choice of his subjects is determined by a social pessimism, which concerns the lower layers of existence. Consistent naturalism is specific to German literature. This naturalism is explained by the formula that states that art tends to be nature. Art becomes nature using the exact means of reproduction. Firm photography of reality is the favorite artistic tactic of German authors. The style of the seconds ("Sekundenstil") is characteristic of German naturalism and records the smallest movements, noises, nuances. A radical precision of the analytical-ironic prose, expressively enhanced in its objectivity, is elaborated by Arno Holz with a sharp artistic skill. Another element of differentiation is the human psyche. French naturalists are concerned with cases, the examples studied are taken from treatises on pathological psychology, they are real observation sheets. The circumstances described lead to reading impressions dominated by the visceral and sometimes the caricature. The point of separation between French, German and Romanian naturalism is biological and social determinism.

The last chapter, Chapter V, entitled *Naturalistic influences*, expands the area of manifestation of naturalism and presents the naturalistic tendencies identified in the literature of the two countries. Anticipations of Romanian naturalism appear for the first time in Costache Negruzzi. Elements of naturalism are also in the work of Ioan Slavici. The interwar period is the period of profiling a literary consciousness receptive to the message of biological fatality, dramas of heredity and social guilt. Artists such as Liviu Rebreanu or Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu describe the vice and the regeneration of the characters is delayed because naturalism is under the sign of the fundamental attraction for strange, downgraded existences. In German literature, Thomas Mann's work is representative of naturalistic influences. Immediately after the Second World War, in Romania, in strict dependence on confusion and the cruelty of the bloody years, a naturalistic style of the moment is outlined, impregnated by the social, but passed through the filter of allusion. Marin Preda's literary beginnings capture the sickly dispersions of the physical in the village environment, and Eugen Barbu's *Pit* is a poem of vital

instinct whipped and locked in the cage of promiscuity. Influences of naturalism are also found in the work of Fănuș Neagu.

Naturalism should not be summarized and understood, in a strictly theoretical aspect, but as the way in which an opera, belonging to the naturalistic moment of the evolution of literature, captures the moral coefficient of human existence, in a form as expressive as possible.

The naturalist writer draws up real medical files of the characters, included in a whole deterministic-biological chain and applies the experimental working method. Naturalism supports the will of accuracy, anti-bourgeois ideas and scientific conceptions, refers to the destiny of the working class, details, transforms the act of reflection into one of recording and rejecting evil. The naturalist current revolutionizes literature by putting the ugly at the center of art, the lives of the disinherited, physical misery, soul alternations. The gain was a deep exploration of human nature, dramas, the role of the environment and heredity in determining the dialectic of temperament. Literature gives up idyllicism, the reader's sensitivity is reshaped.

Romanian naturalism has a sociological conformation, it is more concerned with the individual's relations with the world, with the work process, with the inequity cultivated by the possessing passions, than with the accidents of heredity and morbid fatalism. The absence of whim reserves to Romanian naturalism a status of seriousness, of availability that does not submit, is not absorbed by the pressures of expressiveness. Before being expressive, the truth matters more, the desire to disturb, to give public expression to the eminently social meanings of life. After the First World War, a programmatic interest in closed universes crystallized, in a trivial energy, of life lived brutally and instinctively. The changes brought about by the war arouse the desire to claim aversion to retrograde institutions and mentalities.

Unlike most European national schools, centered in time on a period that varies between 1875-1903 and which have on their side the density and a consumed culmination, Romanian naturalism is an open current. The first anticipations of naturalism in Romanian literature appear with the short story written by Costache Negruzzi in 1840 and continue until at least 1968 when he debuts in the novel Fănuș Neagu.

German naturalism describes and insists on the workers movement. His problems, less dominated by biological fatalism and with more possibilities to reflect the contradictions and causes of the decomposition of capitalist morality, are guided by the laws of public success. In Germany, the movement has the effervescence of French anti-conformism, while being concerned with highlighting the instinctual aspects of life. Zolist descriptivism gives way to the cutting technique theorized by Conrad Alberti in 1890, and the snapshot in 1887 by Wilhelm Börsche. In Germany, human misery and the fatigue caused by exploitation increase the interest

for the working environment, for the substratum of non-idealized facts. The contrast between business law and the environment aristocratic, much more erased than in France, is replaced by the brutal assault of bitterness over the distrust of the liberation bourgeoisie. German naturalism, against a black social background, of awkward struggles and insatiable material appetites, throws the common man into a situation without salvation. However, the bankruptcy balance tends to become a kind of mobilization of consciences. The current is an expression of workers' demands that reveals the suspicion that bourgeois life inspires. From this suspicion springs the dream of redemption as well as the thirst for nature of German writers, who aspire to a well-ordered humanity. Their apparent release is not related to the theoretical impetus as in the case of Flaubert or Maupassant, but to the imaginative shock that comes from finding that the hidden mechanism of facts is probed only when you know how to detach yourself from the immediate circumstances. German writers become acquainted with Darwin's theories and positivist ideas based on the research of Spencer and Auguste Comte, and after 1885 embrace them thanks to Taine and the demonstration that Zola had made until then. Naturalism removes the provincial limitation of German realism and gives a complex picture of industrial expansion. The naturalist writer does not choose, he records. The choice is subjective, inevitably arbitrary. The accumulation of details facilitates the writers' effort not to remain outside the perceived matter. Firm photography is fully perceived, and the real leaves no room for any oscillation.

As in Zola's novels, the lower sensations are cruelly rendered and the physiological details are disgusting and detailed. The lack of interest or total absence of inner life, the influence of the environment and external conditions push the description of the characters in terms of temperament and physiology, primitive and inferior beings driven by sensations, animal impulses, instinct or primary passions. The moral and social perspective narrows in naturalism by exposing the higher psychic life, repudiating sentimentality and explaining it in physiological terms.

Collectivity, the desire for money and goods, family disasters, city issues, the adverse influence of the environment, determinism, decay, degeneration, death, representation of the female character, heredity, disease and music are common features of naturalism highlighted in the works of writers in this paper.

Naturalism is a topic that deserves to be debated because it manages to present us with authentic slices of life, memorable episodes with remarkable characters and events, which come out of the routine and strike. The originality of naturalism lies in the fact that it allows us to see the beauty of literature in less comfortable descriptions.

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