

NATURALISM
in
GERHART HAUPTMANN'S DRAMAS.

-by-

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NATURALISM and GERHART HAUPTMANN.

PART 1.

"Naturalism was the term Emile Zola seized upon and, transforming it from its traditional scientific sense, made into a war-cry for the new literature and drama.*" This aspect of literary realism reached its climax about 1895 and was the expression in literature of ideas and tendencies then prevalent.

About the middle of the last century Charles Darwin uprooted all methods of investigation by instituting a study of phenomena in their development and this spirit of investigation permeated every phase of life. A series of scientific experiments and their practical application gave rise to industrialism and a rapid transformation of daily life from rural communities to huge industrial centres was directly responsible for the rise of socialism and its consequent problems and discussions.

These problems and discussions constitute the basis for the naturalistic movement in literature and with the quickening of the popular pulse, a nervous tension and sensitivity is introduced.

The first to transfer Darwin's scientific methods to literature was Emile Zola, who observed, gathered and experimented with characters and situations as the scientist with his laboratory specimens.

* Matthew Josephson-Zola and His Times.

Zola was born in Paris, in the year 1840, the son of a civil engineer, and, because of the latter's continual changes and travelling, the boy's childhood was, for the most part, spent at Aix-La-Chapelle. Here were founded the youthful friendships which for many years remained the only abiding source of pleasant memories recalling joyous, carefree hours.

The first note of tragedy in a hitherto blissful existence was struck when Émile was but six years of age. His father died suddenly, leaving very little provision for his family. The widow made repeated sacrifices to give her son the benefits of academic training but he profited little, and steadily the meagre family fortune dwindled away.

While still quite young, Zola found himself shoulder to shoulder with the Bohemian section of Paris, where, slowly but surely, the illusions of beauty and romance to which his youthful mind clung frantically, were forced aside in the face of stark reality. Squalid living, poverty and hunger became constant companions and in the general holocaust of his illusions, he was left destitute of all religion and philosophy. The uncertainty which pervaded his reason at this time never quite left him, although life changed considerably for him afterwards.

Aid came from without. Through the influence of an old friend of his father, Zola was saved from Bohemia and began the journalistic career which, step by step, placed him in greater prominence in the world

of literature. His first production, a novel, "Thérèse Raquin", significantly shadowed Balzac and followed the impersonal method used by Gustav Flaubert and the Goncourt Bros. The former's "Madame Bovary" had appeared in 1857 but after this one manifestation of Naturalism, Flaubert left the field and later expressed regret that his name had ever been associated with this novel from his pen. Zola picked up the ideas, and in "Thérèse Raquin", portrayed characters completely dominated by the pre-determined maladies of their nerves and blood. In answer to those who shrank away from his mutilations of humanity, he said, "I have simply done on two living bodies the work that surgeons do on corpses." Zola, in his writings, even went so far as to chronicle his own life, thoughts and inner struggles. He was wise enough to realize the necessity for keeping to contemporaneous events as subjects for his naturalistic novels, for here alone it was that he could successfully observe, collect and experiment.

Naturally he met with opposition since his ideas were revolutionary. Declaring "aujourd'hui, les naturalistes arrivent et déclarent que le vrai n'a pas besoin de draperies; il doit marcher dans sa nudité," he could not help but meet with the disapproval of generations of deeply rooted conventional morality. Nothing daunted, however, he continued with "Élargissez donc le chemin et laissez passer l'humanité en marche.-- On ne peut pas exclusif, si l'on ressuscite le passé c'est tout le moins qu'on laisse vivre le présent."

No doubt Zola's writings were motivated by a great human sympathy and in consideration of this fact, his name is linked with that of his contemporary, Leo Tolstoi.

In proceeding to a consideration of the Russian, we approach the other extremity of European thought. Zola's solution for problems of humanity was based upon the principle of work, that of Tolstoi upon resignation. Their correspondence shows their wide divergence of opinion in this respect. Zola had said, "A man who works is always good"--but Tolstoi replied, "Work makes man evil and cruel, not good as Zola says...We need peace... We must stop working and find again our lost path. This can only be attained by non-action and reflection. For the only reality lies in the ideal...We must love, in order to have happiness on earth, without distinction of family or race. And to do this, we must stop this feverish and vicious activity and change our conception of life." His injunction to humanity was "Love each other." This, however, seemed rather vague to the Frenchmen-- "How can we institute such non-action, such a universal strike as Tolstoi advocates?" he queried. "Humanity advances, groping, as always. Because we are groping now, must we abandon everything, cease advancing? The end and hope of man is truth, to work toward truth is the soul joy." But Tolstoi counters, "I know well that it is impossible to stop all the wheels of society at once and supplant them. What I should like is that we cease to consider as immutable the way in which we live

and penetrate to its immortality. I wish to abandon the arts, science, metaphysics as we know them to-day, because they deceive us. There exist not a single science or art which can procure for the greatest number of people, the greatest sum of happiness possible. Our sciences bring comforts only to the privileged classes... We have no time to reflect upon the means of ending the suffering, physical and moral, of great numbers.

Zola considered Tolstoi's idea that man is good and love latent within him as merely the principles which led through Rousseau to the revolution and the establishment of the two empires. He said "The nature of man has made society what it is...I wish to believe that our progress is toward the good...We cannot go back on our steps.It is a biological law. Life is not a matter of our wills."* In this last sentence, Zola summed up conclusively one of the eminent ideas of the new movement.

These two, then, so greatly different, had yet one object before them. Each hoped to aid humanity to transcend its present status.

Leo Tolstoi was twelve years the senior of Zola, and unlike him, was born an aristocrat. While still a child, he lost both his father and his mother but no sacrifices were necessary for his education and training. He proved, however, an indifferent scholar. As a youth, following the general ideas of his associates, he abandoned religion, considering it merely a foolish

* Matthew Josephson---Zola and His Times

practise for the insensible and uncultured, for those who were incapable of thinking for themselves.

University life at Kazan and social life in Moseow added little incentive to hard mental application so Tolstoi was proceeding along the accepted routine of life, when an incident occurred which set him thinking about the inequality of the social order. After having enjoyed himself one evening at a party, he came out to find his coachman nearly paralyzed with cold. Struck by the realization of the difference between his life and that of his servant, there took initial shape in his mind the questions which caused him so much thought and pain during the greater part of his life and to which he gave forcible expression later in his writings.

Unlike Zola, Tolstoi was well received as a literary man early in life, having already gained the reputation of a brilliant writer on his return from his service in the Crimean War. It was during this period that he developed decided opinions against militarism which grew steadily more pronounced. Also unlike Zola, he was not forced to view the gruesome side of life by being thrust violently into association with it.

Too, the Russian's married life was happy, marred only by the objection of his wife and family to his giving away all his money and property. Thirteen children were born to him, five of whom, however, died in youth. On the other hand, Zola's marriage proved rather unfortunate, his only children being born out of wedlock.

Tolstoi's literary powers were expended somewhat in

the field of the novel but he also contributed to the naturalistic drama and his greatest picture of the Russian peasant is contained in "The Power of Darkness."

As Zola suffered materially at the hands of society and the government for his plain writings, so Tolstoi expected persecution. He was mistaken. The government left him personally quite unmolested but other means were adopted which caused him much agitation. Some of his books were prohibited, others censored beyond recognition and people who had aided him materially were banished from the country. Crosby has summed up Tolstoi admirably in the following, "Peasant nobleman, an aristocrat born into the ruling class of an autocracy, who condemns all government and caste, veteran of two wars who proscribes all bloodshed, keen sportsman turned vegetarian, a land-lord who emancipates, man of wealth who will have nothing to do with money, famous novelist who thinks the time wasted which was engaged in writing most of his novels, a rigid moralist, one of whose books at least (The Kreutzer Sonate) was placed under the ban of the American Post Office." This is the man whose teachings and living were so religiously simple and wholesome.

Tolstoi at first derided the drama but finally came to consider it a fitting vehicle for his social ideas. In the presentation of life as it existed, and of the individual crushed by his environment, he took his place among the dramatic naturalists but there is also present in Tolstoi an idealism which he introduces into his writings. "The Power of Darkness" is, however, incredibly sordid,

showing life motivated by the lowest conditions and human beings prompted to perpetrate the vilest of crimes logically and without a shadow of immorality and it is without doubt, one of the most powerful indictments against the passive acceptance by the upper classes of the existing conditions among the more unfortunate.

Tolstoi was deeply revered by his fellow countrymen, the actor, Constantin Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre, recording that many who knew him would speak of him when life seemed overly hard and unbearable, "There, in Yasnaya Polyana, lives Leo Tolstoi and the love of life would come back to us." Zola was never spoken of thus, yet the ones who knew him intimately never found him harsh or unkind.

These two personalities, then, combined and separately, gave great force to the movement swiftly gaining momentum. There must now be added the influence of Scandinavia whose contribution issued from the pen of Henrik Ibsen. Here we find, to a certain degree, concrete specimens and technical examples of the ideas set forth by France and Russia. Tolstoi offered a detailed analysis of the sombre and attempted some sort of a solution but Ibsen, while setting forth, clinically, a much closer diagnosis, says "my vocation is to question, not to answer".

Henrik Johann Ibsen was born in 1828 to a family of the great middle class from which he drew nearly all the characters of his dramas. His birthplace was Skein, Norway. He has been styled "the Norwegian Seer" but it

has been conclusively proved that there flowed in his veins not one drop of Norwegian blood. Moreover he spent the greater part of his life in voluntary exile, living in Italy and Germany. School and academic training held no attraction for him and, at sixteen, he expressed the desire to study art. Financial exigency forbade and he was finally apprenticed for five years, to an apothecary in Grimstad.

Several early attempts at dramatic production failed and from his association with the theatres, at one time as art director and another as assistant dramatist, he gained only technical experience. He married happily but was forced to support his wife and himself on the meagre returns from his art work.

Ibsen's dramatically productive career divides easily into three parts and these divisions correspond closely to the trends of modern literature--Romanticism, Realism and Symbolism.

His first attempts were for the purpose of re-awakening Norway to a consciousness of the wealth of national folk literature in her possession but his efforts were met with no enthusiasm and, by 1864, he was thoroughly disgusted with the reception his works were receiving at the hands of his countrymen.

The continued rebuffs served to loosen the hold of Romanticism upon him, and, in the year 1877, he brought forth the piece which began his realistic career. "The Pillars of Society" was received whole-heartedly in Germany where it immediately served the needs of those

who were searching for technical examples of the new ideas.

Ibsen was interested primarily in ideas and their presentation in dramatic form but the artistic creator was so strong within him that he gave expression to the problems occupying great minds of his time--sociological issues and the woman question. This fundamental theme was the revolt of the individual against conventional discipline--and he put up a logical defence against forced conformity to traditional convention in "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts". In the latter he proceeded to set forth not perhaps a probable, but certainly a possible result from a woman's quiet conformity to social niceties.

Ibsen's dramas are "packed" with profound reasonings and thought, for he confined his problems to the drama and consequently there is contained in them the gist of his polemic treatises. The whole organization of sociological procedure based on collective hypocrisy is attacked in "An Enemy of the People" and in "Ghosts", he introduced a subject at which religious fanaticism and social conventionalism at once threw up their hands in horror.

Ibsen thus led the way in dramatic representation of current ideas and we may sum up the progression of the movement to this point with the following--Zola's documentary novel with his sordid depictions of the life of the lower classes; the further development of his theme in Tolstoi's gruesome picture of the Russian peasant in novel and drama; and, finally the presentation of vices persisting in the middle classes and the struggle of the individual against organized society voiced by Ibsen.

IN GERMANY.

The movement now swings to Germany and we are brought face to face with the question "Where were these dramas first portrayed?" "How did they gain production where a steel chain binds the majority to age-old institutions and conventions?" But the age which produced the revolutionary writers provided ways and means for the presentation of their works.

Michael Georg Conrad of Munich spent some time in Paris when the new ideas were gaining headway and, very much impressed by the doctrines and writings of Emile Zola, returned home and began reviews of the great Frenchman and his works in a periodical which began its publication on New Year's Day, 1885, under the name "Die Gesellschaft".

The following year a society was formed in Berlin, comprising socialistic individualists and natural scientists banded together in an endeavour to discuss the new literary ideas and further the new aims. Ibsen, Tolstoi, Dostoievsky and Turgenev were under continual discussion and no doubt hopes were raised for the presentation of their most revolutionary works upon the German stage. It is not until later, however, that there came to the group the young man who was to be known as the greatest of naturalistic writers--With a group of friends, in May, 1887, Gerhart Hauptmann joined the "Verein Durch".

This same year, in France, efforts were being put forth to forward the production of the new dramas. A young man by the name of Andre Antoine, giving up his job at a gas works, founded a private organization for the presentation of plays to an audience of registered members. In this way, the censor was eluded and the realistic projects of the century were freed

from obscurity. The Paris Théâtre Libre was opened on March, 30, 1887, with Leon Hennique's "Jacques Damour". Antoine had worked very hard, coaching actors and actresses who were used to the classical dialogue and stiff restrained movements in the new roles which required as much naturalness as possible.

With the new drama a new school of acting, as well as a new stage technique was inaugurated. This same year, Antoine and his players visited Berlin and were received with great favor by all those in sympathy with the new theatre. Discussion was rife everywhere. The members of the "Verein Durch" were particularly interested and owing to the efforts of many within the circle, plans were considered to follow in Antoine's footsteps. It was not, however, until April 5, 1889, that the "Verein Freie Bühne" was organized upon a plan identical with that of the French Théâtre Libre. Many interesting people were connected with the organization, among others Maximilian Harden, afterwards famous as the editor of "Die Zukunft"; the critics, Theodore Wolff and Paul Schlenther; the Bros. Heinrich and Julius Hart, already noted for their publication, "Critical Duels" in 1885; and the publisher S. Fischer. The dictatorial powers were fortunately invested in the hands of Otto Brahm, later director of the German theatre (1894) and of the Lessing theatre (1904) in Berlin. Brahm, an able producer, in a period of ten years, presented ten plays of Henrik Ibsen and twelve of Gerhart Hauptmann. Thus a new stagecraft was definitely established. The "Verein Freie Bühne"

at the period of its greatest florescence, boasted over a thousand members. In the initial year there were five foreign and three native plays produced, among the former, Ibsen's "Ghosts", with which it opened on September 29, 1889, and Tolstoi's "Power of Darkness". On October 20 of this same year, the first drama of Gerhart Hauptmann was produced, "Vor Sonnenaufgang". Six months later, there appeared the "Familie Selicke" of Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf which, in 1891, was published under the title of "Neue Gleise".

Other organizations of like order rapidly sprang up, for example the "Deutsche Bühne" founded in 1890 by Bleibtreu and others; the Berlin "Freie Volksbühne" founded in July 29 of the same year and which had upwards of twelve thousand members about 1912; the Berlin "Fresko-Bühne" in 1891, and, two years later, an organization was founded in Hamburg which opened with the presentation of Gerhart Hauptmann's "Vor Sonnenaufgang". Student organizations were also added to the list in Berlin, Munich and Vienna.

Although Gerhart Hauptmann is the greatest name in connection with the naturalistic drama, he was not, however, the first even in Germany. He was preceded by Arno Holz (1863-1929) who represented the movement in its extreme form. In the winter of 1887-8 he, with his collaborator, Johannes Schlaf, wrote a collection of studies entitled "Papa Hamlet" under the pseudonym of Bjerne P. Holmsen. This collection is only significant because of its form and its introduction of every-day speech and phonographic representation of the halting dialogue and conversation, there being nothing in the content to merit notice. A Norse name was chosen because of the wide influence Ibsen and Björnson were exercising on

the public opinion of the time. Holz, it was, who coined the expression, "Art has the tendency to become Nature again" wherein he set forth, somewhat clumsily, the difference between the old doctrine of art as a strife after beauty and truth and the new ideas which seemed only a strife after the ugly and gruesome, truthful or not. Unfortunately, the life of Holz was attended by misfortune and he produced his works under the most adverse conditions. His pupil and friend, Gerhart Hauptmann, reaped the benefits of the teacher's earlier investigation and application and received the applause awarded more perfect examples and productions.

GERHART HAUPTMANN.

Gerhart Hauptmann was born in the Silesian mountains at a health resort called Obersalzbrunn. The date is November 15; the year, 1862. His father was the son of a Silesian weaver who had managed to break away from the loom, and, becoming a waiter, had gradually fitted himself for the management and later ownership of an Obersalzbrunn hotel called "Zur Preussischen Krone". The father of the dramatist inherited this at a prosperous time when it was patronized not only by German but also by Polish nobility, and Robert Hauptmann was a most popular and greatly esteemed "Gastwirt". He was a connoisseur of wines, a good conversationalist and very well-read--consequently many pleasant hours were passed with his wealthy guests in the discussion of subjects of popular interest.

The dramatist's Mother came from a family named Straehler, who were strict adherents to the Moravian faith, two strong-

holds of which were not far removed, at Gnadenfrei and Herrnhut. Of three sons and one daughter born to Robert and Marie Hauptmann, the youngest, a son, was baptized on New Year's day 1863---Gerhart Johann Robert. Like his older brothers and sister, he attended the Obersalzbrunn school where he distinguished himself in nothing but writing compositions and telling stories. This period was followed by four years spent in Breslau at a secondary school where the embryo dramatist met his first real sorrows. He disliked city life and detested school, consequently made little progress. The few lyrical exultations, which he gave forth up to this time, were appreciated only by Carl Hauptmann, who realized his brother's unhappy state but was incapable of directing his energies into any happier channel. Gerhart spent his spare pennies at the theatre here in Breslau but any connection with it, in his mind, was still far away.

Misfortune for his parents about this time brought happiness to the boy. Due to the falling off of trade, Robert was forced to take Gerhart from school. He was the only one financially dependent on the family at this time. His mother's sister Julie had just lost her only son Georg, so Gerhart was sent to cheer the Schubert household. Their home was in the country and here, for two years, the youth was in contact with forces which made his weary soul grow strong again. Music was a part of daily life now. Aunt Julie sang and her sister, Auguste, played her accompaniments. Beethoven was the dearly beloved of the family but Bach and Handel were also favorites. There it was that Gerhart came under the mystical and pietistic influences which show themselves later in his works.

Here he also learned that realism often intervenes even in the first sweet hours of courtship. Walking in the garden one day with his heart's desire, the reverie was suddenly broken by uncomprehending urchins who thrust every day reality before his very eyes in the guise of stones and pebbles proceeding over the garden wall. However, for the most part, his life here was free from little worries and irritation.

In 1880, Gerhart, knowing finally that he could never content himself with becoming a farmer, proceeded on October 6 once more to Breslau, this time to study art---particularly sculpture. But even here, pursuing supposedly the line he most desired, he was deficient in interest and attendance and was only saved from rustication by the kindness of one of his professors, Robert Haertels by name. His brother Carl, however, remained his most trusted and understanding counsellor and critic. The restiveness of his soul was so pronounced during this period that he finally left school 'on account of his health' and the teachers believed him a consumptive.

Gerhart proceeded to Jena where Carl was already studying and there heard lectures in philosophy and natural sciences, the greatest influence at this time being Haeckel, the zoölogist. His art studies he also kept up during the winter. There Hauptmann enjoyed for the first time the nearer comradeship of a circle interested in current events. Darwin was the hero of the group but art and philosophy were widely discussed. This year proved one of profit for the youth and it was perhaps unfortunate that his interest waned during the