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'The Trans-National Reception of Literature: The Reception of French Naturalism in Germany'

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The Trans-National Reception of Literature: The Reception of French nationalism in Germany

Abstract

Reception theory, despite its influence, has been criticised for its lack of attention to the social contexts of reception. It has also mainly been applied within one national context. This essay examines the reception of French naturalist novels, in particular those of Emile Zola, within Germany's literary culture of the late 19th century. This examination reveals important tensions between critics' positions, and the demands of an emergent public for French novels, which led to changes in the evaluation of these works.

Key words:

reception theory, naturalism, Zola, German literary culture

Reader reception theory, inaugurated at the end of the 1960s by the Romance languages scholar Hans Robert Jauss and the English scholar Wolfgang Iser, constituted, at least for a decade, the dominant paradigm for literary research in Germany.^[1] Now this approach, which aimed to go beyond a substantialist conception of the work of art, still remained largely dependent on the hermeneutic tradition and conceived of reception as a solitary dialogue between a reader, a critic, and an author or work. Reception theory, whose primary aim was to evaluate the aesthetic distance between the horizon of expectation and the end product, was thus criticized for neglecting the social conditions surrounding the reception process. It will not be possible to give a complete account of this process by isolating one or the other of its agents, but only by considering it as part of a whole, of a system, and which I, using the same term as Pierre Bourdieu, will call a field.^[2]

Research on the reception of literature has been mainly done within a homogeneous national area.^[3] Reception in a different speech area, however, does not obey to the same laws. Pierre Bourdieu named very precisely the specific conditions for the reception of literary and scientific texts in foreign languages. He noticed that the texts often circulate without their context of origin. Recipients, who are in a different field of production, re-interpret foreign texts in accordance with the structure of the field of reception. So the sense and the function of a foreign work is in at least equal proportion determined by the field of origin as by the field of reception. The function of a work in its domestic field is often unknown. Furthermore, the transfer process from one field to another is made up of a series of social operations: a process of selection, a process of labelling and the reading process itself, as foreign readers are often determined by the categories of perception and appreciation of their own domestic field. "In actual fact",

Bourdieu explained, “all sorts of transformations and deformations linked to the strategic use of texts and authors are constantly going on, independently of any intention to manipulate information. The differences are so great between historical traditions, in the intellectual field per se as well as in the ensemble of the social field, that the application to a foreign cultural product of the categories of perception and appreciation acquired from experience in the domestic field can actually create fictitious oppositions between similar things and false parallels between things that are fundamentally different.”^[4]

Therefore, it is important to detect the determining factors for transfer (or non-transfer) of texts and ideas from a national field of origin to a foreign field. This could also serve to uncover the reasons for structurally based misunderstandings, which characterize many trans-national relations, and to pave the way for rational dialogue.

The reception of French naturalism in Germany

Nationalism was not a global social movement like romanticism, but a literary group that functioned like a structure accumulating symbolic capital within a field that had become relatively autonomous. The specific nature of this group, whose cohesion was provided by the figure of Zola presenting himself as a “man of science” rather than as a “prophet,” is aptly described by Christophe Charle.^[5] Yves Chevrel has, in turn, analyzed the role of the group in the development of the naturalist movement both in France and Germany.^[6] The position of naturalism has as its particular characteristic the fact that it serves as an intermediary between the dominant and the dominated poles, a position which has provoked violent reactions on the part of traditional critics who feel that “legitimate literature is being threatened by a literature which is aimed at a wide audience, without abandoning its literary pretensions or its social implications.”^[7]

As for the chronological delimitation of the movement within the field, Jacques Dubois has given a good definition of its various stages, from the appearance of the first naturalist manifesto - which the 1868 preface to *Thérèse Raquin* represents - up until the survey conducted by Huret in 1891, which appeared to confirm the death of the movement.^[8] As for Yves Chevrel, he considers 1893 to be the final date, the year in which the last work in the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle came out and also the year in which *Die Weber (The Weavers)* was performed in Paris.^[9]

When discussing the reception of naturalism, one must take into account not only the time discrepancy and that between the country of origin of the work and those in which it is read, but also, and in particular, the specific structure of the host literary field. Within the host field one should make a distinction between several important mediating agencies, each playing a specific role that is also influenced by their relative position in the field. First of all, there are the translators and the translations; then there is the immediate reaction by the critics of the time who often react on the basis of a given aesthetic code; this is followed by the creative reception of writers inspired by the foreign literary model; and finally, we have the critical debate that arises from the theoretical production, which always seems to accompany the founding of a literary group.

Translations and translators

If naturalism is perceived first and foremost through Zola's works, we must recognize that his works were translated relatively late in Germany. *Thérèse Raquin* was published in 1867, but one had to wait until 1880 to see the first German translation of a work by Zola, *L'Assommoir*, which had come out in France three years earlier. Daudet's *Jack* had been translated before this, in 1876, which did not happen by chance, since the less radical and more conciliatory works of the author of *Le Petit Chose* found more favor with German critics, at least initially. Now an author does not become known only through translations in a culturally similar zone. Zola was already present through the original version of his works. As evidence of this, Yves Chevrel quotes a remark by Fritz Mauthner, who in 1892 estimated at 100,000 the number of volumes by Zola circulating in French in Germany.^[10] One may suppose, however, that it was only a small, cultivated circle who had read Zola in French, and this would certainly have been the case before 1880. The appearance of the first German translation coincided with the high point of naturalism in France, with the publication of *Le Roman expérimental*, considered to be the "systematization and rationalization of the doctrine," and that of *Les Soirées de Médan*, seen as the "affirmation of the coherence of the group."^[11]

In 1881 *Nana* was brought out by two publishers in Germany. The book had been published the previous year in France. Translations now followed the original editions almost immediately. In two years, 1881 and 1882, eleven volumes were translated for the first time, and from the time *Germinal* was published (1885) readers in other countries were able to discover the works of Zola and Daudet at almost the same time as the French reading public.^[12] In 1880 two translations of Zola were published; in 1882 there were seven; and in 1883, three. But these figures proved modest compared with the circulation of Zola's works in France since the publication of *L'Assommoir*: in a single year (1880), ten editions of *L'Assommoir* came out and twelve of *Nana*. Similar circulation figures in Germany were only attained by Geibel's poetry of 1840, of which the hundredth edition came out in 1884. Between 1892 and 1899 the publishing house Grim of Budapest published the first complete version of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. The complete edition of *Les Rougon-Macquart* compiled by the Munich editor Wolff (1923-25) was hailed by Fritz Rosenfeld as a literary event of great significance. Since 1880, Zola has become extremely popular in Germany. On the inventory of German translations of French texts between 1700 and 1948, Zola retains third place with 311 citations, immediately following Alexandre Dumas (359 citations) and Balzac (320 citations).^[13]

Translation is already an interpretation of the original work. The way Zola's works were received in Germany was heavily influenced by the type of translation. In a letter addressed to the writer in 1887, the German translator Ziegler explained in the following way the reactions provoked by translations that emphasized what could appear rough and coarse without transfiguring it by means of stylistic quality: "All of these immense numbers of readers had found up to now only translations that vied with one another in highlighting the more vivid scenes, and in rendering them in unsuitable language. This

crude prose struck a dissonant note in our idiom, one that allows certain liberties of expression only at the price of falling back into the obscene.... The worst thing is that these translations... have neglected to transcribe with subtlety the passages of your books that epitomize your superiority and your grandeur.”^[14] The growing coarseness went hand in hand with the opposite reaction: censorship of certain passages that was motivated by the prevailing false modesty (the translations of *Nana* and of *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* having been seized by the police in Berlin). The translation of *Germinal* had thus banished from the German text such scenes as the mutilation of Maigrat and the famous gesture of La Mouquette.^[15]

Nevertheless Zola did, in fact, inspire a massive response in the German public. The most important reception was without doubt that of Zola's readers. Yves Chevrel has justifiably emphasized the fact that French naturalism, and Zola in particular, created a community of readers first of all in Germany. What is striking is the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the massive welcome afforded by a public avidly seeking a more open and more modern literature and, on the other hand, the reticence of critics and writers tied to traditional literary standards and to the notion of a literature capable of transforming reality.

Reception by literary critics

Reception by the general public can often only be evaluated by using quantitative data (circulation figures, number of editions). It is only rarely that we have at our disposal authentic documents of the period (diaries, letters) that enable us to analyse the criteria that motivated readers to read. As for the reactions of literary critics, they are easier to grasp even though it is still necessary to have recourse to time-consuming research in order to constitute a representative corpus.^[16] Critical reception of naturalism in Germany has long been the subject of analysis. In 1924 Félix Bertaux published his study “The influence of Zola in Germany.”^[17]

Winthrop H. Root has already suggested a first division in the periods of critical reception of Zola's works in his *German Criticism of Zola, 1875-1893* (published in 1936),^[18] which has become a standard reference for scholars since that time. Henry H. Remak takes as the starting point for his study (1954) the reception of realist authors ("The German reception of French Realism")^[19] and he attributes greater importance to the impact of the type of periodicals in which critical judgments appear. Finally we are indebted to Rita Schober for having produced two studies (published in 1968 and 1977 respectively) that examine the reception of Zola's works beyond the naturalist period up to the present, notably by looking at social-democrat and Marxist reactions.^[20] The most thoroughly researched study, based on almost exhaustive documentation and taking into account not only the reaction of critics but the whole literary system, is Yves Chevrel's major thesis, defended in 1979, on *Le Roman et la nouvelle naturalistes français en Allemagne (1870-1893)* (*The French Naturalist Novel and Novella in Germany (1870-1893)*),^[21] in addition to his numerous studies on particular aspects. Chevrel had wanted a study specifically devoted to Zola's reception in Austria to be undertaken, and Karl Zieger took on this task in his work, published in 1986, *Die Aufnahme der Werke von Emile Zola durch die österreichische Literaturkritik der Jahrhundertwende* (*The Reception of Emile Zola's Works as seen through Literary Criticism at the Turn of the Century*).^[22] Vera Ingun Moe finally situated Zola's influence on German naturalism in relation to that of Ibsen and Dostoyevsky in her book *Deutscher Naturalismus und ausländische Literatur. Zur Rezeption der Werke von Zola, Ibsen und Dostojewski durch die deutsche naturalistische Bewegung* (*German Naturalism and Foreign Literature: On the Reception of the Works of Zola, Ibsen, and Dostoyevsky as witnessed by the German Naturalist Movement*).^[23] It would be impossible to consider each of these analyses in turn. However it would be appropriate to outline some of their major findings.

From discovering to conquering the general public

The first mention of one of Zola's works (*La Curée*) was made in an anonymous account that appeared on 24 July 1873 in the *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung* (*Literary Entertainment Bulletin*). But the first in-depth study on Zola came out only on 23 October 1875 in the *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes* (*Magazine for German and Foreign Literature*), a periodical that, by definition, was open to foreign literature. Public opinion only became aware of the existence of the master of naturalism eight years after the publication of *Thérèse Raquin*, whereas this novel was better known in Russia and Italy. Most scholars thus take 1875 as their starting point for the critical reception of Zola's works in Germany. Root proposes a first period from 1875 to 1880, Remak another from 1875 to 1885. Rita Schober breaks down her first period (1875 up until Zola's death in 1902) into three phases. The pre-naturalist phase (1875-83), the naturalist phase (1883-90) and the post-naturalist phase (1890-1902/4).^[24] The most refined conception of the

division into periods is to be found in Yves Chevrel's work. He suggests first of all a first period of "discovery" for the years 1873-78, when one can discern only a very slow penetration that almost exclusively concerned the specialized critics who, moreover, preferred Daudet to Zola.^[25] The second period is seen as encompassing the period from 1879 to 1882. The numerous translations attest to the fact that the general public had been affected and that French naturalism had begun to shake traditional aesthetic convictions that had sprung from the ideal of poetic realism. Root recounts how negative the judgements of the first period were, notably in periodicals such as *Die Gegenwart* (The Present) and *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung*.

There was only one exception - the *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes* - directed by Edward Engel, a personal friend of Zola's, who in 1879 had invited Zola to collaborate on his *Magazin*, "the most cosmopolitan of all the literary journals and which is read all over the world," in order to affirm the universality of the new conception of literature ("the right to *realism* in the novel, especially in our present-day society, which is indeed the same almost everywhere, whether it be in Berlin or Paris").^[26] In 1879 Engel had devoted an article to *Nana*, which had begun to appear in serial form. In it he highlighted the salutary function of Zola's crude realism in the light of the material excesses of modern urban life and the role of the writer, which consisted in holding a mirror up to the people of his time so that they would recognize themselves in all their horror. In 1877 in the journal *Unsere Zeit*, a very positive article had appeared on Zola by F.K. Petersen in a study devoted to new French novelists. In it he refuted the criticism of amoralism leveled at them: the portrayal of the baser passions, he argued, had a cathartic effect since it brought home in a realistic way what was morally reprehensible while at the same times explaining the causes of the perversions.

Such positive criticism was somewhat rare. Most critics were opposed to Zola on moral and ideological grounds. In H. Breiting's view, expressed in the review *Nord und Süd* (*North and South*) in 1877, a pathological process was being used to further the cause of pessimistic socialism. In the same year, in the review *Die Gegenwart*, Paul D'Abrest condemned *Nana* as a form of "literary onanism." In the publication of the Association of German Writers, Gustav Wast called Zola the leader of a school that had declared war on idealism and put into the limelight prostitutes, madmen, and drunkards - in short, he was a "literary social democrat." The reaction of moral and political conservatives tended then, already, to associate naturalism with moral defilement, hence with nihilism and thus with socialism. Ludwig Pfau does not place himself on this level of moral condemnation in his much more elaborate essay on Zola in 1880 in the review *Nord und Süd*.^[27] If at times the author, who was himself an opposition poet condemned to exile abroad, criticized Zola, he based his criticism on the aesthetic and philosophical conceptions of the writer. In his view, Zola's claim to scientific authenticity was not to be taken seriously since the novelist invents the facts. The critic takes the author of *Nana* to task for his inability to control detail, his mania for the complete inventory, and his failure to distinguish between what is essential and what is fortuitous. According to Pfau these faults are the result of a double error: the aesthetic error of confusing what is real and what is true and the philosophical error of confusing matter and strength. Inspired as he is by his positivistic conception of reality, Zola takes appearances for reality - hence his inability to grasp the laws that constitute reality.

While remaining critical, it must at least be said to Pfau's credit that he was able to familiarize the German public with the epistemological basis of Zola's literary production.

The opposition group of German naturalists formed around the brothers Heinrich and Julius Hart, who presented, in the form of the 1882 review *Kritische Waffengänge (Critical Confrontations)*, a springboard for the recent movement and continually gave vent to their opinions through critical comment and their literary works. What they advocated was a new kind of literature describing the modern world, but based on a code of ethics and criticizing the dominant society on those grounds. Opposed to dilettantism and formalism, to any salon literature, they were not insensitive to the Utopian dimension they discovered in works such as those of Sacher-Masoch. In the second issue of their review, the Hart brothers devoted an eleven-page essay entitled “For and Against Zola” to the master of French naturalism.^[28] They shared Zola’s great concern for truth. They also opposed critics for whom the subject (be it moral or immoral) was a decisive criterion. What the writer portrays was of little importance in their opinion; what was important was that he should handle the subject as a poet would.^[29] The decisive point was the poetic transformation of the subject.

It was on this point that the Hart brothers criticized Zola, blaming him for the accumulation of details and lack of inventiveness — faults they attributed to a theory that was as original as it was false. One should never confuse literature with science: the writer does not observe nature, but rather creates a second nature, using the former as raw material. The domestication of poetry by the scientific conception of literature was rejected for the same reasons as was the false idealism of Zola’s opponents. Science seeks the universal by abstracting from the particular, whereas literature grasps the universal through the particular. Faithful as they were to an idealist aesthetic, the Hart brothers demanded not only truth, but truth transfigured by poetry, which, using everyday reality as its starting point, would transform nature into something ideal. The leader of this movement would more probably have been Gottfried Keller than Zola.

Zola’s triumph

The period from 1883 to 1888 is considered by Yves Chevrel to have been Zola’s period of triumph. The author of *L’Assommoir* had become the most widely read and criticized foreign writer in Germany. Once again one can note a time lag in relation to the situation in France, where the height of the period of naturalist success occurred between 1877 (*L’Assommoir*) and 1880 (*Le Roman expérimental*). During the 1880s a rival school had become established in France, the school of the psychological novel, which had already begun to make a name for itself in 1883 with the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* by Bourget. With *A rebours* (1884) Huysmans, having at first been an adept at naturalism, published an idealist novel, and the second naturalist generation overtly opposed its leader through the Manifeste des cinq (Manifesto of the Five) against *La Terre*.^[30]

Now, even during the period of Zola's triumph in Germany, opinion was far from undivided. Evidence of this is to be seen in the article published in 1884 by Gerhard von Amyntor in the *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes*^[31] that warned the German public about the danger of *Zolaismus* (Zolaism). This neologism had been invented in order to differentiate between a naturalism that was accepted and the exaggerated naturalism in Zola's style that people continued to reject; in this way Zola was singled out from other foreign writers associated with the naturalist movement such as Dostoyevsky, Ibsen, and Daudet. Other German critics such as Karl Bleibtreu understood by the term *Zolaismus* Zola's aesthetic, which was fortunately transcended by the novelist's literary creation.^[32] Von Amyntor did not, however, share this opinion. In his view, the theory of the experimental novel only served to give a scientific appearance to "productions de feu et de boue" ("explosions of fire and mud"). Thus it would be necessary to raise barriers so that the products of Parisian fashion, the "mixed pickles de Zola" (Zola's mishmash) could not enter Germany and corrupt good taste, namely German literary food shaped by conciliatory tendencies. It was impossible to treat reality in the light of an idea, and the ideas chosen by Zola were obviously not worthy of literary exploitation.

Michael Georg Conrad was one of the intermediaries who was most favorable toward Zola in Germany. He had regularly visited the writer during his stay in Paris from 1878 to 1882^[33] and as early as 1880 called him the "grand master of naturalism." Inspired by the French example, in 1885 he founded the review *Die Gesellschaft* (*Society*), which called itself a "realist weekly" and which was to play in Munich a role similar to that played by the Hart brothers' group in Berlin. Having made Nietzsche's acquaintance in 1876, Conrad argued for a resolutely realist vision of the world, basing his argument on an ethical concept of truth, as well as for an enlightened national culture that was to be the work of a spiritual aristocracy personified by figures such as Bismarck, Wagner, and Nietzsche.^[34] In his book *Parisiana*, published in 1880, he had associated Zola with the same spiritual family when comparing the writer to Bismarck, whose brusque methods and herculean strength he shared. His father having served under the Austrians, Zola apparently resembled Bismarck, Hutten, and Luther much more than any representative of an overrefined French society. Where Zola's enemies had denounced in him a taste for the obscene, which was seen as specifically French, Conrad found in him a strength and virility fit to serve as a model for a new movement in German literature.^[35] What is striking is the national trend of German naturalism. Karl Bleibtreu had implied a similar type of recuperation of Zola by speaking in 1885 purely and simply of the novelist's German origins, which were revealed, for example, by his sympathy for animals - a specifically German trait!

In the new review directed by Conrad, *Die Gesellschaft*, Zola appeared from its very first year as a model. In 1885 three stories by Zola, an essay, a chapter of *Germinal*, and eight studies on Zola were published in it, including a study by Conrad entitled "Zola and

Daudet.”^[36] According to Conrad, Zola’s work, founded on observation, was in keeping with the scientific spirit of the time. It served the supreme value, truth, which was inconceivable outside the realm of science. This in no way excluded artistic work and a concern for the harmony of the whole and of its parts, and it would be mistaken to charge Zola with being only a photographer of reality.

Conrad’s review, *Die Gesellschaft*, was not the only one that supported the German naturalist group. The latter also expressed itself through a first anthology of lyrical poetry, *Moderne Dichter-Charaktere*, as well as through regular meetings from 1886 onward of the literary association *Durch*. The program of the German naturalists was, however, far from homogeneous. The Hart brothers scarcely shared Conrad’s enthusiasm for Zola. In a study published in 1886 in the review *Die Gegenwart*, Julius Hart launched an attack exposing the harm done by Zolaism in Germany.^[37] According to him, Zola’s aesthetic represented the death of all poetry. A literature of this type could henceforth only be a reflection of reality, and in his eyes the role of the creative subject would be neglected. It was significant, wrote Hart, that works of such German initiators as Max Kretzer (with his Berlin novels), the novellas of Karl Bleibtreu, and the books by Oskar Welten all failed through their lack of composition. Oskar Welten, as favorable toward Zola as Conrad was, had in 1883 published a work entitled *Zola-Abende bei Frau von S.*, in which he had presented the author of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle as a new Lessing. Like Conrad, however, he reinterpreted Zola’s claim to the scientific validity of literature. The concept of naturalism did not imply for him, or for Zola, reference to the methods of natural science, but referred to an art that simply represented nature and that was distinguished by its naturalness. The German naturalists could hardly be said to be following Zola in his conception of literature as a new science. Some, like Conrad and Welten, reinterpreted the concept (taking away its radical character); others simply repudiated it.

In Julius Hart's view, poetry would transcend the scientific character of Zola's aesthetic: "In the veins of the German people a vital force still circulates; it is not a nation of decadence, but of fulfillment. This guarantees that a healthy idealism will destroy the pessimistic and perturbed materialism of the French writer and that a literature dominated exclusively by what is ugly and depressing will be transformed into a genuinely realistic literature of the real, the great and the sublime."^[38] In this conclusion recurrent elements of Zola criticism in Germany are concentrated: the national element, the idealist heritage, and the criticism regarding pessimistic exaggeration. The latter argument was already to be found in Fontane, who had read *La Fortune des Rougon* and *La Conquete des Plassans* as early as 1883 and had confided to his wife: "Life is not like that. . . . There is beauty in it; one needs only to open one's eyes and not to shut oneself off from this obvious truth. Realism will always be full of beauty. For beauty, thanks be to God, belongs as much to life as does what is ugly. Perhaps it has not even been proven that ugliness predominates."^[39] Similarly, the writer Fritz Mauthner, author of several novels on Berlin, criticized Zola in his book *Von Keller zu Zola* (1887) for being only the mud and not the flowers; in Mauthner's opinion this bias endangered the very principle of realism.

Interpretation of Naturalism

The fourth period of the reception of naturalism, still according to the periodization proposed by Chevrel, is that which spans the years from 1889 to 1893 when Zola's and naturalism's contributions were integrated and transcended.^[40] At the end of the 1880s Zola no longer played the role of standard reference point in debates about a new kind of literature, as he did in 1885, but his works continued to be read on a massive scale by the German public. At this time, Zola's naturalism ceased to be received primarily by an avant-garde; he was now received by a much larger audience. For the year 1892 V.I. Moe has counted forty-seven articles representing the highest number of reviews devoted to Zola.^[41] Reactions were printed in new reviews of modern literature such as *Moderne Dichtung (Modern Literature)* and *Freie Bühne (Free Theater)*. The latter, founded in 1890 in Berlin, took over the role of mouthpiece for naturalism previously played by the Munich review *Die Gesellschaft*. Subjectivism - opposed to an objectivism inspired by the model of the natural sciences - had now become an important point in naturalist policy. It was the social sciences, psychology and philosophy of life, which attained the status of reference paradigm. Zola's definition of the work of art as "un coin de la nature vu a travers un temperament" ("a corner of nature seen through a temperament") was recalled, and the contribution of the subject in the conception of art was emphasized. This was certainly the case for Georg Brandes who, in a wonderful study of Zola published in 1888 in the review *Deutsche Rundschau*,^[42] brought out the tendency toward symbolization in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, thus inciting readers to proceed with a reinterpretation of Zola's works. Critics now looked in his novels for proof of the

part played by the subject who arranges the facts in order to create specific effects, who takes up traditional themes, uses symbols, simplifies and reduces psychic traits, and personifies abstract ideas.^[43]

The fourth period was above all that of the creative reception of naturalism. The year 1889 and the ones following saw the publication of naturalist works that acquired a certain notoriety. In 1889 A. Holz and J. Schlaf published the novella *Papa Hamlet* and Gerhard Hauptmann published his play *Vor Sonnenaufgang (Before Dawn)*. Chevrel has reminded us of the extent to which the latter work, in which Zola is explicitly cited alongside Ibsen, was influenced by French naturalism, notably by the idea of heredity.^[44] The play's main character is a militant in the workers' movement who plans to conduct inquiries in the milieu of the mines, but who is shown in all his ambiguity, torn apart by the conflict between social and private interests - a constellation of themes that brings Zola to mind.^[45] In addition, in 1889 the Freie Bühne was set up in Berlin, which was to be the home of naturalist theatre - an event of some significance, since the German movement, unlike the French, excelled in the field of drama.

Creative reception and assimilation of the theory

The fourth period was also one of autonomous theoretical activity within German naturalism, for which we are particularly indebted to Arno Holz, initially an author of poems of social inspiration who, after a trip to Paris in 1887, had discovered Zola's writings and the works of Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers. From the beginning of 1890, he edited *Freie Bühne* and, in the same year at the Freie Bühne theatre staged his play *Die Familie Selicke*, which he had written with Johannes Schlaf. As early as 1890, he attacked Zola's theoretical writings in an article in his review entitled "Zola als Theoretiker" ("Zola as Theoretician")^[46], in order to demonstrate the lack of pertinence of the argumentation of the experimental novel, in which experiments were made in the imagination of the writer and not in reality. This refusal of the theses of the experimental novel is highly significant, according to J. Kolkenbrock-Netz.^[47] For the German critics - we have seen this very clearly - did not accept the radical proposal that art and literature be transformed into a science, thus removing the former from the field of philosophical-aesthetic discourse. German critics such as Holz, Bölzsche, and Alberti proposed only to "scientificize" aesthetics (but not art) by associating the former, as Taine previously done, with the humanities.

The recourse of the scientific paradigm, however, as J. Kolkenbrock-Netz justly states, worked in both cases as a strategy to legitimize art at a time when art was in crisis. If Holz also refused the idea of art as a reproduction or reflection of nature, it was in order to develop his own conception of art as a second nature, which he made public in 1891 in his essay *L'Art. Son essence et ses lois*: "L'art a la tendance de redevenir la nature: il la redevient en proportion de la qualité des instruments de reproduction employés et de

habileté dans leur maniement.” (“Art has a tendency to become nature again: it does this in proportion to the quality of the instruments used to reproduce it and with the cleverness involved in their manipulation.”)^[48] The artistic raw material and the transformation technique are at the heart of this reflection. Brauneck has justly emphasized the innovative nature of these proposals, which foregrounded the process of artistic production; no longer were the cognitive and ethical functions in relation to a preexisting reality to be reproduced considered to be of prime importance, as was the case with the theoreticians of the 1880s. The consequence of and the stylistic basis for this theory was *Sekundenstil* (second-by-second style), illustrated by Holz and Schlaf in the novella *Papa Hamlet*, in which, by using the artistic means of language, the subjective element *x* (in keeping with Holz’s formula “art = nature – *x*”) was reduced to a minimum. This was done by privileging direct speech and dramatization of prose so that the style resembled “la transcription d’un enregistrement magnétique” (“the transcript of a tape recording”)^[49] This aesthetic ideal was in (at least partial) contradiction with the interpretation of Zola at this time in Germany, which, as we have seen, emphasized the contribution of temperament while being based on a mimetic conception of literature. The new style was not without influence on Hauptmann, who dedicated his first play, *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, to Bjarne P. Holmsen (Holz’s and Schlaf’s pseudonym) using the words “réaliste conséquent” (“consequent realist”). It is moreover significant that Hauptmann used the term *realist*. There was a certain reticence about using the denomination of naturalism so as not to make the new literature look like a servile copy of the French model. In 1885, Conrad had thus given the subtitle “organe réaliste” (“realist publication”) and not naturalist to his review *Die Gesellschaft*. Yves Chevrel has noted that the writers who are designated today as naturalists were grouped together under two headings: firstly the concept of *Jüngstdeutschland* (the Youngest Germany), underlining the social and national orientation through its echo of the Young Germany revolutionary movement of 1835; and secondly around the term *die Moderne*, in order to bring out the will to break with the past.^[50]

The height of naturalist production was undoubtedly the play *Die Weber* (*The Weavers*) by Gerhart Hauptmann in 1892, which was published in 1893 and staged in 1894. The social subject, but also the method (Hauptmann had conducted investigations into the weavers’ milieu in Silesia) immediately brought Zola to mind. Zola attended the Théâtre Libre’s production of the play in 1893 – it was the first performance of a contemporary German play in Paris. He took up the defense of the play, noting in it the influence of French writers as well as a certain similarity to *Germinal*; however he was scarcely sensitive to the innovative nature of *Die Weber*, regretting as he did – in accordance with traditional criteria – its lack of plot.^[51]

If the first three periods mentioned above can be considered as embodying above all a reaction to French naturalism, the fourth was characterized by a form of creative assimilation, indeed even of autonomous production in the fields of theory and literary

creation – production that did not, however, provoke any response in France, since at the time of the performance naturalism was already nearing its decline.

The surpassing of Naturalism

But in Germany, too, the zenith of naturalism coincided with the idea of its passing. In 1891 Hermann Bahr brought out a study, *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus (The Surpassing of Naturalism)*,^[52] in which he claimed to belong to Bourget's school of psychology as well as Zola's naturalism to form a new synthesis, which he could already see taking shape in the works of Huysmans and Rod. If Bahr's reaction was still relatively serene, that of others was characterized by aggression and malevolence; this was especially true of Julius Langbehn, who in his book *Rembrandt als Erzieher (Rembrandt as Educator)* of 1890 displayed reactionary chauvinism by declaring war on Gallo-Roman influences, democracy, and scientific rationalism. For him Zola was the representative of an Italian and Celtic (!) anti-Germanic cast of mind that had nothing in common with the authentically German creations of Dürer, Goethe, or Mozart. The master of French naturalism embodied, in his view, the brutality of feeling and the arrogance of duty. The fatherland would only be saved if a profoundly German essence succeeded in conquering the deeply rooted superficial French wit!^[53]

A similar perspective was adopted by Max Nordau, a doctor who had been practicing in Paris since 1880 and who was also a press correspondent. If, in 1882, he had boasted of the *Rougon-Macquart* novels as forming a work of great importance, conceived of under the sign of truth, from the beginnings of the 1890s he classified Zola among the degenerates – products of city life. In his work *Entartung*, published in 1892 and translated in 1895 under the title *Degeneracy*, he considered that the stories of love, jealousy, and adultery in Zola and Ibsen were foreign to a vital and healthy organism and were the expression of an exaggerated individualism that one could also find in a writer like Nietzsche.^[54] The presence of demented, maniacal, and criminal characters or prostitutes in Zola's work is not condemned by Nordau on moral, but biopathological grounds, which foreshadowed, just as Langbehn's aggressive chauvinism did, the ill-fated future developments of German history.

It is appropriate also to note the social-democrat press reaction, especially as witnessed by its publication *Die Neue Zeit*, which had followed Zola's production from the 1880s onward; the judgments it contained scarcely differed from those of the bourgeois press. Zola was criticized for his lack of taste and artistic delicacy. However in spite of its faults (a lack of concision, borrowings from science), *Germinal* was considered by Robert Schweichel to be an important work for socialists since the author had been able to portray the workers' cause as no other novelist before him. In an article published in 1891-92 in *Die Neue Zeit*, Paul Lafargue, Marx's son in law, who considered Zola to be an innovator, at the same time criticized his portrayal of the working-class world as the product of an outside observer who could only note appearances. In this way Lafargue defended the point of view of the leaders of the Social-Democrat party who, using Liebknecht as spokesman, had condemned the leftist opposition within the party that was favorable toward naturalism. At the party congress held at Gotha in October 1896, naturalism was discussed for a day and a half; when Zola died in 1902, Franz Mehring reiterated in *Die Neue Zeit* grievances of a formal nature against Zola, while emphasizing his combative nature that linked him to a prime quality of the proletariat: the class struggle.

The writer's new status

Literary criticism and the formulation of its reactions in new reviews, the groups that form around a program, and the literary production and theoretical justifications of writers all constitute important elements of the literary field. Now in France, naturalism had upset the very structure of the field, characterized from the beginning of the nineteenth century by the dichotomy between restricted production (that is, aimed at a small elite, mostly other writers) and broad (aimed at a wide public) production.^[55] The Zola movement maintained the literary aims particular to the restricted field, while aiming at the popular success of the broad field.

The public thus became a new, important agent of the field, which implied at the same time a new status for the writer. This was clearly perceived by Zola in 1880 in his famous article "L'Argent et la littérature" ("Money and Literature") in which he opposed the modern writer, affirming his freedom through struggle and owing his success only to an anonymous audience, to the pre-revolutionary model of the writer with a private income writing literature for an elite. While the prevailing critical school regretted the "industrialization" of a literature being produced for the press and the general public, Zola condemned the hoax of the poet of the Ancien Régime being maintained in a state of precarious dependency by the wealthy ruling class, and at the same time Zola favorably portrays the modern writer who, having lost his aura, "a worker like anyone else", had attained greater freedom.^[56] In fact an autonomization of the literary field was occurring, endowing itself with structures specific to itself, through, for example, an institution such

as the Société des Gens de Lettres, over which Zola presided, and through the struggle for royalties that finally led to the Berne Convention (1886). It was, of course, an institutional process of autonomization, and not autonomy as regards literary content, with the writers claiming as professionals (having ceased to be dilettantes) a recognized social status in addition to the right to intervene as such in the affairs of society. This transformation of the French field could also be perceived in Germany, where the public, as Yves Chevrel has noted, also became an important element of the field. It was the public that was the first to become sensitive to the new naturalist literature from France, whereas the critics, heavily influenced by the standards of the past, proved rather reticent. It was the demands of this public that provided the stimulus for an authentically German naturalist production. Writers of the new generation demanded public recognition of their social status, expressing themselves in this way with the aid of the state without the latter claiming to be in charge of what they produced.

Evidence of this is the open letter addressed in 1882 by the Hart brothers to Bismarck^[57], as well as Karl Bleibtreu's protest in the review *Die Gesellschaft* in 1885 against the chancellor's view of writers and scientists as people who were, economically speaking, "unproductive".^[58] Even Fontane, in an article on the "social position of the writer", had requested public recognition for literary professionals, even if he was sceptical about the usefulness of a state office for the arts and literature.^[59] Yet the context of Bismarck's and William II's Germany was not identical to that of France. Not enjoying the legitimacy afforded by wide popular success, the German naturalists were more constrained to make compromises, particularly in their relations with the state. J. Kolkenbrock-Netz^[60] aptly demonstrated that Zola based the modern writer's legitimacy on the capitalist organization of the literary market via the press and bookshops, whereas the German naturalists opposed the writer to the journalist and the reader of literary works to the newspaper reader. Conditions of modern reproduction appeared to Zola to be an arrangement that was favorable to a new literature, even though these same conditions were considered by German writers to be the negation of literature as art. As J. Kolkenbrock-Netz notes, the former had to compensate for their economic failure, whereas Zola was forced to legitimize his success.

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The reception of French naturalism in Germany was far from being simply a passive reaction. Zola's movement provoked responses to literary and theoretical production, forcing the critics to reformulate their long-standing position. Zola contributed perhaps the most – more than Ibsen and Tolstoy – to the creation of a new literature in Germany, even though its blossoming lasted for only a very brief period of time. The impact of a new type of literature considerably modified the structure of the literary field, even though the changes in Germany were less radical. If the French model constituted the starting point and the reference point for the movement, neither the literary products (especially in poetry and drama), nor theoretical thinking (less scientifically based), nor the legitimizing strategies (less market-oriented) were identical.

[1] H. R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1970); W. Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", *New Literary History* 3 (1972): p. 1-46; J. Jurt, "De l'analyse immanente à l'histoire sociale de la littérature. A propos des recherches littéraires en Allemagne depuis 1945", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 78 (June 1989): p. 99-100.

[2] P. Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

[3] This applies also to the first texts I presented on the establishment of a sociology of reception. J. Jurt, "Für eine Rezeptionssoziologie", *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 3 (1979): p. 214-231; id., *La Réception de la littérature par la critique journalistique* (Paris: J.-M. Place, 1980): p. 30-34. The texts referring to this approach were also dedicated to the reception of literature within a homogeneous national area. Ingrid Galster, *Le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre devant ses premiers critiques* (Paris: J.-M. Place /Tübingen: G. Narr, 1986); Eva Ahlstedt, *André Gide et le débat sur l'homosexualité de 'L'immoraliste' (1902) à 'Si le grain ne meurt' (1926)* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1954); Maurice Arpin, *La fortune littéraire de Paul Nizan. Une analyse des deux réceptions critiques de son œuvre* (Bern/Berlin/Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1995).

[4] P. Bourdieu, *Forschen und Handeln. Recherche et Action* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2004; ed. J. Jurt), p. 28. P. Bourdieu, "The social conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas", in Bourdieu, *A Critical Reader*. Ed. R. Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 255.

[5] C. Charle, *La Crise littéraire à l'époque du naturalisme. Roman. Théâtre. Politique* (Paris: P.E.N.S., 1979), pp. 64-90.

[6] Y. Chevrel, "Nature et rôle du groupe dans le développement du mouvement naturaliste en France et en Allemagne," *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires* (1979), pp. 97-107.

[7] Charle, *La Crise littéraire*, p.84.

- [8] J. Dubois, "Emergence et position du groupe naturaliste dans l'institution littéraire," in *Le Naturalisme*, ed. P. Cogny (Paris: U.G.E.. 1978), p. 77.
- [9] Chevrel, "Der Naturalismus in Deutschland und in Frankreich," in: *Gallo-Romanica* (Nancy, 1986), p.310.
- [10] Y. Chevrel, "De l'histoire de la réception à l'histoire des mentalités: l'exemple du naturalisme en Allemagne au tournant du siècle." *Synthesis* 10 (1983), p. 55.
- [11] Dubois, "Emergence et position du groupe naturaliste", p.77.
- [12] Y. Chevrel, "La naturalisme français en Allemagne: l'année 1892," in *Feindbild und Faszination*, ed. J.-J. Lüsebrink and J. Riesz (Frankfurt /M.: P. Lang, 1984), p.86.
- [13] H. Fromm, *Bibliographie deutscher Übersetzungen aus dem Französischen, 1700-1948* (Baden-Baden: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1953), 6, pp. 309-33.
- [14] Y. Chevrel, "Les relations de Zola avec le monde germanique," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 46 (1973), pp. 237-38.
- [15] Y. Chevrel, "Germinal et la 'révolution littéraire' en Allemagne." *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 50 (1976), p. 151.
- [16] Jurt, "Für eine Rezeptionssoziologie".
- [17] F. Bertaux, "L'influence de Zola en Allemagne", *Revue de littérature comparée* 4 (1924), pp. 73-91.
- [18] W.H.Root, *German Criticism of Zola, 1875-1893* (New-York: Columbia University Press, 1936).
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- [20] R. Schober, "L'Actualité de Zola en R.D.A.," *Europe* 46 (1968): 222-32; id., "Für oder wider Zola. Zum Verhältnis von Rezeption, Kritik und Bewertung," *Weimarer Beiträge* 3 (1977), pp. 5-43.
- [21] Y. Chevrel, *Le Roman et la nouvelle naturalistes français en Allemagne (1870-1893)* (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris, 1979).
- [22] K. Zieger, *Die Aufnahme der Werke von Emile Zola durch die österreichische Literaturkritik der Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt/M.: P. Lang, 1986).
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- [24] Schober, "Für und wider Zola," p. 77.

- [25] Y. Chevrel, "Fontane lecteur de Zola," in Université de Picardie, *Lectures, systèmes de lectures* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), p. 54.
- [26] Chevrel, "Les relations de Zola avec le monde germanique", p. 234.
- [27] M. Brauneck and C. Miller, eds., *Naturalismus. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur, 1880-1900* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), pp. 646-52.
- [28] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, pp. 655-59.
- [29] J. Osborne, "Zola, Ibsen, and the Development of the Naturalist Movement in Germany," *Arcadia* 2 (1967), pp. 196-203.
- [30] C. Charle, *La Crise littéraire*, pp. 91-113, and J. Jurt, "Les mécanismes de constitution de groupes littéraires: l'exemple du symbolisme," *Neophilologus* 70 (1986), pp. 20-33.
- [31] Brauneck and Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, pp. 60-62.
- [32] Moe, *Deutscher Naturalismus*, p. 84.
- [33] Chevrel, "Les relations de Zola avec le monde germanique", pp. 230-32.
- [34] E. Ruprecht, ed., *Literarische Manifeste des Naturalismus, 1880-1882* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1962), pp. 55-58.
- [35] Moe, *Deutscher Naturalismus*, p. 81.
- [36] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, pp. 672-78.
- [37] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, p. 678.
- [38] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, p. 678.
- [39] T. Fontane, *Briefe* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlag, 1981), vol. 2, 1879-1898, p. 103; see also Chevrel, "Fontane lecteur de Zola", pp. 62-64.
- [40] Chevrel, "Fontane lecteur de Zola", p. 54.
- [41] Moe, *Deutscher Naturalismus*, p. 86.
- [42] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, p. 683-700.
- [43] Root, *German Criticism of Zola, 1875-1893*, pp. 81-85.
- [44] Y. Chevrel, "Naturalismus allemand et français: écarts et rencontres," in *Le Naturalisme*, ed. P. Cogny (Paris: U.G.E., 1978), p. 48.

- [45] H. Scherer, *Bürgerlich-oppositionelle Literatur und sozial-demokratische Arbeiterbewegung nach 1890* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974), pp. 96-99.
- [46] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, pp. 66-70.
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- [49] Chevrel, "Naturalismes allemand et français", p. 55.
- [50] Chevrel, "Naturalismes allemand et français", p. 57.
- [51] Chevrel, "Les relations de Zola avec le monde germanique", p. 344; id., "De *Germinal* aux *Tisserands*: histoire, mythe, littérature", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 85 (1985), pp. 446-63.
- [52] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, pp. 180-184.
- [53] Brauneck und Müller, eds., *Naturalismus*, pp. 713-17.
- [54] Root, *German Criticism of Zola, 1875-1893*, pp. 92-93.
- [55] P. Bourdieu, "Le marché des biens symboliques", *L'année sociologique* 23 (1971), pp. 49-125.
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- [58] Ruprecht, ed., *Literarische Manifeste*, p. 27.
- [59] Ruprecht, ed., *Literarische Manifeste*, pp. 1-4.
- [60] Kolkenbrock-Netz, *Fabrikation*, pp. 67-121.

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