

PhR 2019 Philological Readings

SPECIFICITY OF RUSSIAN NATURALISM. NATURALISTIC TENDENCIES IN A.P. CHEKHOV WORKS

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Abstract

In the article naturalism is defined as a separate method which had arisen in the end of 19th century, emerged and was realized in the works of second- and third- rate authors and mass literature. In the Russian literature of the final third of the 19th century there were reflected principals of Zola's naturalistic concept, but another historical conditions and characteristics of Russian mentality such as prevalence of spiritual and ideal over physical and material all these determined national identity of Russian naturalism. It is legitimate to take into consideration the influence of naturalism on the works of the greatest writers including A. P. Chekhov. That is why there is such terminology as «naturalistic tendencies» and «naturalistic colours», which are necessary to establish this phenomenon in Chekhov's works as a realist writer. Scientific novelty of the study can be seen in the fact that it is the first time in the literature when the influence of naturalism on the A. P. Chekhov works is proved and naturalistic tendencies in A. P. Chekhov novels of 1880s («The Mire», «The Witch») are considered. Story theme, which was relevant for that time, had required naturalistic view used by Chekhov to create an image of a «beast in man», to intensify an impression from created realistic human character and reality. This study is conducted while using traditional methodological apparatus, which includes descriptive and comparative methods.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Chekhov, the beast in man, naturalistic tendencies, Russian naturalism, Zola.



1. Introduction

The issue of Russian naturalism remains to be relevant despite the lack of studies where it is considered as a phenomenon which needs profound theoretical, historical and literary evidence (Markovich, 1993; Skibina, 2003; Dolzhenkov, 2003; Baybatyrova, 2013; Kharseyeva, 2015; Yusyaev, 2013, 2014). The main discussions revolved around the definition of the term "naturalism" and whether there were sufficient grounds to consider naturalism as an independent creative method that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, or as one of the modifications of realism (Chuprinin, 1979; Muratov, 1983; Jesuitova, 1984; Kataev, 2000; Skibina, 2003; Scheblykin, 2002). Skibina (2003) notes that "not a single literary movement, not a single creative method has so many synonyms for the same way of learning the reality as naturalism: here "naturalism", and "documentary realism", and "copyism", and "naturalistic trends", and "high" and "low" naturalism, and "neonaturalism"" (p. 190).

An important step in the study of naturalism at a completely new level was the year 2000, when Kataev's (2000) article "Realism and Naturalism" was published in the work "Russian Literature at the Turn of the Century (1890– early 1920)". For the first time, a scientist considered Russian naturalism not as an integral part of a broader realistic trend, but as an independent artistic definition (Kataev, 2000). The problem of naturalism as a phenomenon in the world literature, but not in Russian literature, is considered in world literary criticism by such writers as Parellada (2017), Oancea (2018), Rexer (2018), Hayward (2018). We believe that the problem of the specificity of Russian naturalism, its genesis, the influence of naturalism on the literary process, as well as the problem of belonging to it of certain writers, in particular, A.P. Chekhov, is very relevant, which confirms the eternal interest of literary critics in this problem.

1.1. Specificity of Russian naturalism

In the 1860s – 1870s of the 19th century, Zola and the Goncourt brothers developed the theory of naturalism. The preface of the Goncourt brothers to the novel "GerminiLasserte" (October 1864) is the first literary manifesto of naturalism, in which his main ideas are briefly expressed: the primacy of life facts over the writer's imagination, the requirement of a work to democratize his themes and problems, to bring together methods of physiology and experimental psychology with working methods of a writer, a novelist, poetry of physiology.

In Zola's (1967) theory «naturalism» is the main direction in the art of 19th century and the method of this direction. According to Zola (1967), art objective is replacement of romantic fantasy for precise and detailed analysis the purpose of which is "to study a human, get to the bottom of his nature and not being like idealistic writers who are in a hurry with final conclusions and making up human types" (p. 326).

Public, philosophical, economic, scientific and literary preconditions were the reason of turning Russian literature to naturalism in the late 19th century. Russian naturalism should be considered as the part of the wide philosophical period – positivism, and like its result as well. With the impact of positivism, they link the following features of naturalistic poetics: the waiver of moralizing, impartial representation and analysis of facts, view on a human as a biological being found the ultimate expression

in Zola's concept «the human-beast» (Dolzhenkov, 2003). A positivist feature is biologization: greater or less consolidation of psychological to physiological, social to biological.

As a direct predecessor of naturalism in Russia, we consider «the natural school» of the 1840s, although it is very different in “its genesis and phenomenology from the naturalism of the turn of the centuries” (Kataev, 2000, p. 194). That is, many Russian principles of naturalistic theory have been known since the 1840s: reflection in the work of «the whole truth» of life, objectivism, dependence of the individual on the social environment. But the natural school sociologizes, naturalism biologizes.

Therefore, it is impossible to link directly Russian naturalism of the 40s with Zola's naturalism. The natural school writers master all the secrets of the world, including the reality of the whole metaphysical, supersensitive. “Realism has access to the whole sphere of being,” says Markovich (1993, p. 132). Saltykov-Shchedrin (1972) accurately expressed the important difference between naturalism and realism: “We include the whole person in this area, with all the variety of its definitions and reality; the French are mainly interested in the torso of a man and, of all the variety of his definitions, with the greatest diligence stop at his physical capacity and his love exploits” (p. 80). Russian realist writers realized that if you blindly follow the doctrine of Zola, then, in the end, this will lead to disaster, the collapse of real art.

1.2. Chekhov and naturalism

At the end of the 19th century, naturalism was a pan-European phenomenon. In many European literatures, the aesthetic quest of French naturalists evoked a great response, since in France naturalism took shape earlier than in other world literatures. And here this literary movement put forward such major writers as E. Zola, Guy de Maupassant, the Goncourt brothers.

Biologism, sociologism and other principles of the naturalistic theory of Zola are reflected not only in the works of Russian naturalist writers PD. Boborykina, I. Potapenko, I. Yasinsky, M. Albov, N. Leikin, Vas. and VI. Nemirovich-Danchenko and others, but also in the works of L. Tolstoy, F. Dostoevsky, N. Leskov, A. Chekhov and the subsequent plead of realists of the early 20th century.

In studies, devoted to Chekhov, special attention is not paid to the influence of naturalism on the works of A.P. Chekhov as early as in 1926 by Grossman (1926). In his work, he calls Chekhov a positivist and materialist by the artistic method because he is “a natural scientist, a physician, a biologist, an anatomist”, anxiously anatomizing a person and coming to the truth: “man is an animal”. Nowadays the value of this work for raising the question of naturalistic trends in Chekhov's narrative works is small.

Of the later works, the article written by V.I. Kuleshov named “Chekhov's realism in relation to naturalism and symbolism in Russian literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” deserves attention. The scientist correctly believes that Chekhov's realism should be compared not only with the realistic tradition, but also with unrealistic trends in literature (Kuleshov, 1973). But in terms of relations with naturalism, the scientist considers only the book of essays by Chekhov, “Sakhalin Island”, but this is not enough. Foreign researchers of the Chekhov's oeuvres (Franchi, 2016; Fisher, 2017; Wyman, 2017; Agratin, 2018) study various aspects of his work, many publications are devoted to the humanistic meaning and the religious and moral aspects of the Chekhov's oeuvres (Senelick, 1997; Sherbinin, 1997;

Flath, 1999; Kirjanov, 2000; Swift, 2004 and others), but naturalistic tendencies in Chekhov's work are not paid attention to.

2. Problem Statement

The principles of naturalism reflected in Russian literature of the last third of the XIX century. But another historical conditions and features of Russian mentality (the primacy of the spiritual, the ideal over the carnal and material) identified national originality of naturalism on Russian basis. Actually, only "mass literature" – pornographic (V. Burenin ("Novel in Kislovodsk"), N. Morskoy-Lebedev ("Sodom", 1880), V. Bibikov ("Pure love", 1887), Vas. Nemirovich-Danchenko ("Stolen happiness", 1881), M. Artsybashev and others) began following the principles of naturalistic Zola's theory. In Russian literature naturalism appeared as a method, in line with which writers of the second and third row and mass literature created. But most of the Russian writers, not alien to naturalism, still did not become impartial copyists, chroniclers of reality, outright pornographers. When portraying the relationship between a man and a woman, portraying the life of fallen women, Russian writers avoided outright relish of obscenities, constantly sympathizing with the woman as a person (P. Boborykin "Evening Sacrifice" (1868), A. Amfiteatrov "Victoria Pavlovna. Name day" (1900), "Maria Luseva" (1904)).

It is quite natural to take into consideration the influence of naturalism on the work of great writers, including A.P. Chekhov. That is why we needed to introduce the terms "naturalistic tendencies" and "naturalistic colours", which are necessary to identify this phenomenon in Chekhov's works and to define him as a realist writer.

The term "naturalistic tendencies" should be understood as a set of certain features such as protocolism, factography (photographism), naturalistic details in the descriptions, scenes and portraits of the characters, which are inherent in the naturalist writers' works. "Naturalistic paints" are a colour, sound and smell, used by Chekhov in the depiction of naturalistic details in the descriptions and scenes.

The manner of Zola's writing (abundance of naturalistic and intimate details) inspired a lot of Russian writers for such experiments. This kind of Novels and stories was a huge success among ordinary readers. This feature of the new direction was called "Nana-turalism" (from the name of Zola's novel "Nana", 1883).

"Nana-turalism" left in the Russian literature of the turn of the century a few traces in almost forgotten works such as "Romance in Kislovodsk" V. Burenin, "Sodom" (1880) N. Morskoy-Lebedev, "Evening Sacrifice" (1868) P. Boborykin, "Victoria Pavlovna. "Name Day" (1900) and "Marya Luseva" (1904) A. Amfiteatrova, V. Bibikova ("Pure Love", 1887), I. Potapenko and others.

The promiscuous woman, depicted by Chekhov in the stories "Tina" (1886) and "Witch" (1886), who seduces men is very close to the images of writers-naturalists who wrote about their heroines-prostitutes in a naturalistic way about man as "kind of Zoological breed". These stories reflected Chekhov's concept of "beast in man" and influenced Chekhov's writing style. He uses Naturalistic colours in the descriptions and portraits of the characters.

In Chekhov's letters, there are such statements as "all animals, cavemen and Moscow's merchants' supremacy is due to a subconscious instinct" (Chekhov, 1975, p. 208). That means that Chekhov held the

same point of view, widespread at the end of 19th and at the beginning of 20th century, such as “A primal instinct is inherent within human nature.”

Chekhov’s definition known as “the beast in man” can be related to such characters as Susanna (“Tina”), Raisa Nilovna (“Witch”) and Ariadna (“Ariadna”, 1895); but different motives occur in his other works too. We believe that Chekhov’s naturalistic details are used to create this exact portrayal of “the beast in man”.

The main reason (purpose) of “Tina” and “Witches” heroines’ lives is attraction and conquest of the male. The set of “sex, death, blood and food consumption” allows to see the prevalence of animal nature in the behaviour of the heroine in “Tina”. Her portrait, described with the naturalistic details, helps to see “the beast in man”: “Having smiled, with all her teeth (brute grin) she showed her pale gums <...>”. (There is the same reason (purpose) in describing the guests of Susanna) - “The rest of them were listening and grinning with pleasure”; “<...> having bared her teeth more, she rushed with all her might”; “A wicked cat’s expression showed up on all her face, neck and even on her chest”; “<...> startingly, like a cat <...>”; “A wicked cat’s expression on the face of that Jew gradually turned into a kind smile” (Chekhov, 1976a, p. 370). There is also the motive of the food consumption: “The lieutenant, undertaken by the fight, was staring at Susann’s laughing, arrogant face and her chewing mouth <...>”. The combination of sex and death is seen in her portrait: “<...> her pale face which reminded, for some reason, of a luscious jasmine scent that didn’t go with her black thick, curly eyebrows, and her ears and nose were strikingly pale as if they were dead or made of clear wax”; also it is seen in her bedroom: “In one of the room’s corners, where the greenery was thicker and higher, under a pink canopy, as if it was funeral, there was a bed with wrinkled and messy sheets on it. A bunch of crumpled dresses were lying on two armchairs. Their hems and sleeves with wrinkly lace and ruffles were hanging down on the carpet where its ribbons, two roaches, caramel wrappers were shining all over the surface <...>” (Chekhov, 1976a, p. 363).

Description of bedrooms is a necessary part of slice-of-life stories. Chekhov used it too but he gave the other meaning to it. It is worth noting that his descriptions are alike with Zola’s (1993) in the novel “Nana”:

The bedroom and the boudoir were the only apartments which had been properly furnished by a neighbouring upholsterer. A ray of light glided in through a curtain, lightened rosewood furniture, wallpapers and armchairs of figured damask with a pattern of big blue flowers on a grey ground. <...>The embroidered tulle kept the room in twilight. It was the most elegant room in the apartment, it was hung with light-coloured fabric, there were a marble dressing-table framed in mosaic, a lounge and armchairs upholstered in blue satin ... (pp. 30 - 43)

In Chekhov’s naturalistic descriptions naturalistic colours play a big role, including description of unpleasant, annoying, and even making feel disgusting smell. Smells perform various functions in Chekhov’s art world. We can be interested in jasmine smell that we can see almost on each page of the story “Mire”: “Finally, he found himself in a spacious square room, where he was immediately impressed by great amount of flowering plants and sweet, disgustingly heavy smell of jasmine” (Chekhov, 1976a, p.

362). “When laundress gave me the damned jacket that I had been wearing then I felt so mad by the jasmine smell!” (Chekhov, 1976a, p. 376).

Jasmine smell, tiresome but alluring, is a Chekhov’s detail playing a certain role. Firstly, the background of the story was a closed space of Susanna’s house and the first impression the story reader together with a character got crossing the border between external and internal world, is an obsessive, unpleasant to disgust, smell, from which the hero “muddies”. But only at first, then he already attracts him. This peculiar evolution of the smell - from “from rotation” to “so I was drawn” - is projected onto the morale of the characters in the story. The smell of jasmine is the smell of obsessive, cloying, but attractive sin that has become available and possible, which has become more the norm of life than retreat from it.

In the story “The Witch”, a woman is associated with evil spirits, with a dead man (the clerk suspects that his wife is a witch). In the description of the main character, Chekhov constantly emphasizes her animal, attractive beauty: “A tin lamp standing on another stool, as if shy and not believing in its strength, poured a thin, flickering light onto its broad shoulders, beautiful, appetizing body reliefs, on a thick braid that touched the ground” (Chekhov, 1976b, p. 376).

There is the description of the bedroom and bed in the story “The Witch”. It is not similar to that of the writers of Nana-Turism, but naturalistic, although the emphasis is not on the intimate parts of the toilet, but on the dirt of the situation: “Almost half the room was occupied by a bed that stretched along the entire wall and consisted of dirty feather beds, grey hard pillows, blankets and various nameless rags. This bed was a shapeless, ugly lump, almost the same as that on Savelia’s head always when the hunt came to oil his hair <...>” (Chekhov, 1976b, p. 385).

Thus, in *The Witch* and *In Tina* there are naturalistic scenes and descriptions similar to those in the novels and stories of naturalist writers.

3. Research Questions

Taking into account the peculiarities of the emergence and functioning of naturalism in Russian literature, which arose in connection with other historical conditions and peculiarities of the Russian mentality (the predominance of the spiritual, ideal over carnal and material), we assume that Russian naturalism arose as a method for writers of the second and third row, influenced the realist writers (writers of the first magnitude). So, the main research question is the following: having determined the specificity of Russian naturalism, its aesthetic essence, to prove the impact of the features of naturalistic writing on the work of the writer of the first magnitude - A. P. Chekhov.

4. Purpose of the Study

So, this study is aimed at determining the specificity of Russian naturalism, as well as identifying the features of naturalistic writing - naturalistic tendencies - in the works of A. P. Chekhov.

5. Research Methods

The study was carried out in line with the use of the traditional methodological apparatus, which includes descriptive and comparative methods.

6. Findings

Thus, the results of a study on the specifics of Russian naturalism and the identification of naturalistic tendencies in the works of A.P. Chekhov lead to the following conclusions. First, the Russian literature of the last third of the XIX century reflected the search for followers of Zola, but other historical conditions and peculiarities of the Russian mentality - the primacy of the spiritual, ideal over the carnal and material - determined the national identity of naturalism on Russian soil. Russian naturalism did not nominate such major representatives as French naturalism, it emerged as a method, in line with which writers of the second and third row worked (P. Boborykin, I. Potapenko and others).

Secondly, despite this, he still influenced the work of writers of the first magnitude. In the stories of A. P. Chekhov's 1880s "Tina", "The Witch" naturalistic trends can be traced. The very theme of the stories demanded the use of naturalistic paints as a technique to help Chekhov to create the image of a "beast in man". With his natural paints, the writer greatly enhanced the impression of the created realistic image of a person and reality. In these stories, A. P. Chekhov can find points of contact with naturalism, but not with "nana-turalizm."

Thirdly, the term "naturalistic tendencies" should be understood as the totality of certain features inherent in the works of naturalist writers — protocolism, factographic (photographic), naturalistic details in the descriptions, scenes and portraits of the characters. Naturalistic paints are the colour, sound and smell used by Chekhov in depicting naturalistic details in descriptions and scenes. Naturalistic scenes and descriptions are in the stories of A. P. Chekhov's "The Witch" and "Tina", at first glance similar to the scenes and descriptions in the novels and stories of naturalist writers. But Chekhov needs naturalistic paints, he uses them as a technique that allows him to portray the "beast in man", to show the world in which he exists.

7. Conclusion

Russian naturalism, without putting forward major representatives, emerged, nevertheless, as a separate literary method, within which the second and third row writers worked. But the writers of the first magnitude, in our study, Anton Chekhov, experienced the effects of the features of naturalistic writing, which affected their works. It is assumed that naturalistic trends can be traced in the stories of A.P. Chekhov's 1880's "Tina", "Witch". Chekhov uses naturalistic colours in the descriptions and portraits of the characters with their general functioning in a realistic work system.

Acknowledgments

The author is sincerely grateful to the doctor of philological sciences, Professor Olga Mikhailovna Skibina for valuable advice and assistance.

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