

DCCD 2020**Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****SECULARIZATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND GERMAN
EXPRESSIONIST POETRY**

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Abstract

The article proves that German expressionist poetry was influenced by the secularization of consciousness in the West-European culture. It was reflected not only in the expressionist philosophy but also in the form of poems that often disclosed the methods of contrafactum and grotesque employed. Secularization itself has become a long-term process that originated already at the Age of Renaissance and has continued into our time. Reformation and Protestantism have played crucial role in the history of secularization. A new generation of writers and philosophers came from the families of Protestant pastors. Subsequently, they were destined to change the attitude towards God and man as it was determined by Christian dogmas. Expressionists' poetry captured one of the important stages in the development of new European spiritual values. They proclaimed the call for a new man who had to arrange a new happy life on earth. This dream has remained an illusion. The reality witnessed the peaceful spiritual revolution turned into bloodshed. The new man in his turn was often exposed to loneliness and urgently needed help and support from above. But God remained mostly silent in the expressionist poems. Silence was interpreted as God's cruelty or fear. The final disaster was looming and people were screaming together with the expressionist poets.

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1. Introduction

1882 saw the work "The Gay Science" by F. Nietzsche which declared that God was dead and people were his murderers (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 181). F. Nietzsche did not plan to kill God himself, but he found him dead in the soul of his contemporaries. The awful aftermath of that fact is likely to be seen in the XX century which claimed thousands of lives and souls.

F. Nietzsche's conclusion emanated from a long process of secularization of West-European culture. It was already obvious at the end of the XIXth century that serious changes had already been made to the spiritual life of Europeans and that they were only going to progress in the future.

The concept of secularization did not immediately get a spiritual or a cultural-historical connotation. The term itself was derived from the Latin words "saeculum" meaning "age", "epoch," or "world" and "saecularis" which means "worldly" or "pagan". Initially in late antiquity it had only a legitimate meaning and stood for "worldly" as opposed to "ecclesiastical". The term acquired its up-to-date definition in relation to culture, and to West-European culture in particular in the XIXth century meaning a new secular world-view (As a sign, secularization can appear as the withdrawal of Church concepts, norms and values from their religious understanding). For example, Christian love should be transformed into secular humanism. H. Cox in the book "The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective", writes that it was the Bible itself that provided the impulse for the further development of secularization (Cox, 2013, p. 25). God and nature are separated there, the sun and moon appear as God's creations, man is also separated from nature and becomes its master: he gives names to animals, tames them, and learns to use nature for his own purposes. It can be concluded that one of the most important signs of secularization is the advance in the status of a person. In relation to West-European culture, secularization can also be interpreted as the destruction of traditional Christianity (Bogdanova, 2001, p. 16). The article will feature it being viewed from that angle as well.

2. Problem Statement

The main problem to be tackled here is the problem of influence of secularization on modern literature.

3. Research Questions

The article will find the following research questions answered:

How did the process of secularization develop?

How did it change the expressionist philosophy?

How did it influence the form of the expressionist poetry?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study can be stated as an attempt to show the influence of secularization on the German expressionistic poetry of 1910-1925.

5. Research Methods

Intertextuality, classification and categorization will be used to analyze the issues.

5.1. The History of Secularization

5.1.1. Humanism and Reformation: the unity and contradictions

Renaissance culture demonstrated a growing interest in everything new and original. The center of culture moved from the city with its commercial relations, transformations in the sphere of industry and manufacture and various innovations. The culture itself, and especially the humanistic movement, was already a part of a secular culture. But at first there was only the concept that could be called "hidden secularization" (Burke, 1972, p. 34). For instance, an artist painted a saint, preserving all traditional attributes but also paying attention to the surrounding details: landscape, city views and scenes, interior, etc. The balance was often shifted in the direction of details, in that case, the figure of a saint seemed smaller and even fell into the background. But it should be remembered that those "secular images" were created for liturgical needs and did not lose their religious significance for contemporaries. If we expand the concept of "hidden secularization", we must admit that the main feature of this phenomenon will be the sanctification of worldly things and the worldliness of sacred things.

The Renaissance did not avoid religious problems, but its philosophers and artists demonstrated their re-assessment. Their attitude to religious and ecclesiastical issues was subject to the art of spiritual freedom. Philosophers were looking for a universal religion in which Christianity was not the unique form that determined the world-view. They also admitted to the existence of paganism of the ancients and hellenistic occult wisdom, magic and alchemy, in part even Judaism and Islam (Batkin, 1995, p. 238).

The next important step in the process of secularization was the Reformation. The humanistic culture had a significant influence on the emergence and development of reformation teachings, on criticism of the Catholic Church and scholastic theology, on the desire to restore the original text of the Holy Scripture and on the call for the renewal of the Christian religion.

Less obvious were the points to radical opposites of Humanism and the Reformation. The humanistic doctrine of God, world and man actually contradicted the dogma of original sin and was applied to the natural determinism. The task of the Reformation was not simply to criticize Catholicism, but to reconstruct religious dogmas in such a way that it would be possible to defend Christianity in spite of humanistic freedom of thought. The reformers did not accept for example the idea of synergy: the cooperation of efforts of God and man for the improvement and salvation of humanity (Revunenkov, 1980, pp. 78-82). Later they agreed that the salvation was only possible due to the grace from above. The efforts of a man to comprehend himself were also criticized. They revealed only his poverty and vanity and that he was shallow and naked without God. The doctrine of the sovereign virtues of a person was recognized as a creation of ancient philosophy. Insufficient mind could not guide a person and be the instrument of knowledge. Thus, the humanistic faith in the good nature and free will of man were also criticized, although it was recognized that the sciences and arts make people more humane and educate them.

Despite the ideological oppositions of Humanism and Reformation the XVI century witnessed the process of secularization of culture which was not only increasing gradually its speed but also involved the sphere of religion itself. The work "Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism" by Weber (1990)

emphasized that Protestantism exalted the worldly work of man, his successes and professional duties. The honestly earned wealth did not was not subject to be ashamed of. On the contrary, it was a sign of God's mercy (Weber, 1990, pp. 190-191). According to that, the emphasis was transferred to the worldly life. Faith itself appeared as a fact of personal relationship with God. Protestants did not accept any mediation of the church and insisted on the freedom of will, of conscience and of word, all of that led subsequently to the appearance of alternative interpretations of the Holy Scripture and as the result of it – to the emergence of new religious sects.

5.1.2. Protestantism and Literature

Bultman (1960) approved that the New Testament presented a mythological picture of the world. Even the language of Scripture itself was mythological. According to Bultman (1960), “theologians had to answer the questions, if they could trust the Scripture and whether the truth was separable from mythology. They had to demythologize the New Testament” (p.16). Demythologization aimed to clarify the sermon as a message at each individual person, to distract a man from his own egoism and self-assurance and direct his thoughts to God and to the true self. demythologization was successively applied as a special hermeneutical method - a method of subjective interpretation of the events described in the Bible.

The truth could be revealed to a man through reading the Scriptures. The sacred books encouraged creativity in those who grew up reading them. It should be emphasized that, from the middle of the 16th century many literary talents emerged from among protestant pastors and their sons. It is enough to list only a few names to understand the significance of this phenomenon: Griffius, Bodmer, Gottshed, Lessing, Miller, Lenz, Schlegel, Gothelf, Nietzsche, Benn and others. Statistics claim that from 1525 to 1900 this list totaled up to 765 names (Schöne, 1968, p. 30), more than a quarter of all poets were sons of Protestant pastors. It is also difficult to identify philosophers of the Enlightenment who would not come from among protestant priests or graduate from the theological school. Even a brief listing of the names (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Plessing, Georg Müller) allows us to insist on this statement. Moreover, often one person became a poet and a scientist and a philosopher at one and the same time. Their works revealed the parallel development of two processes: the secularization of the biblical language and the sacralization of the poetic language and poetry, as well as literature on the whole.

5.1.3. From Pietism to Expressionism

The end of the XVII century saw Protestantism growing into an intellectual, philosophical system, far from biblical and practical Christianity. It was moving away from the personal belief in God. As a consequence of that and at the same time as an attempt to overcome that problem after the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) there appeared a new religious movement - pietism (from Latin pietas - piety).

Mysticism and intellectualism were typical of Pietism. Its founder, theologian F.Ya. Spener (the author of "Pia desideria" - "Pious desires" or "Pious dreams") placed personal religious feelings above church dogmas and rites. An important consequence of Pietism was also a new literary trend - sentimentalism, that also laid the emphasis on feelings and moral experiences of a man.

Protestantism and Pietism ensured also the penetration of rationalism into the sphere of religion. With the development of progress the eschatological ideas were replaced by the reliance on the endless

perfection of the human mind. A man became the master of his fate and later of the whole world. In the late XVII and early XVIII centuries the protestant individualism started developing democratic secular ideas of the equality of all people and their rights. Gradually the hope of finding peace after death was transformed into a desire to recreate the lost paradise on earth, also by means of a revolution (Troeltsch, 1961, p. 15). Moreover, man was capable of arranging his world independently on fairer and more perfect grounds.

However, as history shows, not all hopes connected with the revolution were justified and after that belief in man already proved not that categorical. Nevertheless, the XIX century welcomed the flowering of secularization of culture in the 19th century.

The XX century saw the outcomes of secularization growing even more impressive. At the beginning of the century the so-called “fourth way” (Nicoll, 1972, p. 32) - the doctrine of the possible spiritual evolution of man - was brought to Europe. According to that conception man was not complete but it was only he who could complete himself. To achieve a new state of self, a person had to change internally and become a New Man.

The problem of a new person, partially or fully taking on the role of God, also appeared relevant for expressionists (1910-1925). G. Bar claimed that a person had to rise to the divine or fall into the night, because to remain in the same state was equivalent to nothing, to emptiness (Bahr, 2000, p. 189).

The expressionistic philosophy featured the utopian ideas of the new mankind, of worldly paradise and at the same time the premonition of a disaster which inherited eschatological images, but in a special form, that was remote from the religiosity.

5.2. The Main Themes of Expressionist Poetry

5.2.1. The End of the World and God’s Silence

It has already been stated that the Renaissance saw the center of culture moving from village to city. The lifestyle there was modern, original and full of events. At the time of German expressionism, many people saw the situation and atmosphere in cities already from a different angle. Urban life gave expressionists the sense of a close disaster. In the poem “God of the City” (Der Gott der Stadt) by the famous expressionist poet Georg Heym (2018, <https://holodrome.tumblr.com>) cities become the kingdom of the evil and cruel pagan God Baal. The following quotation from the poem illustrates this point;

“At evening glows the ruddy gut of Baal,
The greatest cities kneel to him like choirs.”

Nevertheless, service to Baal is compared to the worship of the Christian God. The following quote from the poem explains;

“A monstrous heap of church bell after church bell
Up to him swells from dark a sea of spires. <...>
The chimney smoke, the clouds of manufacture
Unto him cling, blue scent of incense sweet.”

The church bell’s ring and incense here lose its significance and in fact their Christian symbolism. And this is directly connected with the weakening position of the Christian God

The life in big cities is awful. It is revealed in the words to come;
“A sea of fire hunts
The length of one street. And the hot smoke roars
Consuming it, until the morning comes.”

And the disaster becomes even more devastating when the First World War breaks out. The reactions of people can be described in two ways: suffering or indifference. Many people are screaming. In the poem “End of the World” (Weltende), Jakob van Hoddis writes (2017);

“<...> And all the booming air rocks like a scream <...>”

The other are staying calm despite the catastrophe surrounding them. The abovementioned is illustrated by the following quotation from the same poem;

“<...> And on the coasts – we read – the tide is fat. <...>
Most people now have noses that are dripping.”

In their poems expressionists are screaming themselves (see the famous expressionist painting “The Scream” – original title – “The Scream of Nature” by Edvard Munch) not only about the disaster but especially about the death of man’s soul. The sense of frustration and despair is reflected even in the titles of poems “Despair” (Wilhelm Klemm, Albert Ehrenstein – Verzweiflung), “Suffering” (A. Ehrenstein – Leid), “Complaint” (G. Trakl – Klage), “Doomsday” (G. Trakl – Untergang; Karl Kraus – Mein Weltuntergang), “Purgatory” (G. Trakl – Vorhölle) (Belyaeva, 2018; Vietta, 1999). The expressionistic eschatological conceptions are associated with the worldly events. The war and the moral decay are interpreted as the end of the world.

The God still remains in oblivion. F. Nietzsche has already declared: God is dead. Else Lasker-Schüler repeats this thought in her poem “The End of the World” (Weltende) (Schüler, 2019, <https://www.babelmatrix.org>);

“There is weeping in the world,
As if the dear god were dead <...>”

Like a conclusion sound the words from the same poem;
“There is a yearning beating in the world,
by which we must die.”

Such melancholy is connected with the sense of loneliness of mankind. “God’s silence” becomes the only answer to man’s appeal. The poem by Georg Trakl “De profundis” (De profundis) is an illustration to it (Trakl, 2017, <http://johnirons.blogspot.com>). There are two dominant interpretations: God is cruel like a cannibal (Gustav Sack “God” (Gott)) or helpless and pitiful, he is sitting and shivering in the darkness (Ernst Stadler “Dialogue” (Zwiegespräch) (Krasovickaya, 2018a, p. 34; Vietta, 1999).

As a result, “the dear God” becomes a symbol of an old obsolescent world. People have to arrange their lives themselves. Only an “internal spiritual renewal” (Krasovickaya, 2018b, p. 17) can save mankind and give it the new worldly life, that can begin not after the death but already now.

5.2.2. Contrafactum and Grotesque in Expressionistic Poetry

Contrafactum should be interpreted as an intentional parody of the original spiritual religious senses in literary texts. It adds to the examples provided in the previous chapter, where the Christian God becomes a cannibal or a helpless sufferer, where the church bells and incense are used in pagan rites or where man determines his destiny himself. The poem “Bread and Wine” (Brot und Wein) by Johannes R. Becher helps us to illustrate this method. The “holy night” in the poem is described like a feast with friend. The participants must drink for the dead according to the law of antiquity (Becher, 2016).

The poem by Jakob van Hoddis “The Visionut” (Der Visionarr) gives us another example (Hoddis, 2018). The title “Visionarr” contains a German word “Narr” meaning “a fool”. Catholic saints were often seen as visionaries. The poem claims this comparison sounds like a mockery.

Here we can also see the tendency to expressionist grotesque that turns into absurd logic (Lange-Soboleva, 2019, p. 29; Vietta, 1999, p. 239). The event described in the poem and the reaction of the main character prove to that absurdity;

“Out of the wall drove a slender woman’s arm. <...>
I kissed the hand, I startled:
It was alive and warm. <...>
I took a kitchen knife and cut a few veins.”

Grotesque becomes the whole expressionist world that has immensely changed since the beginning of the New Age and during the process of secularization. Poets have tried to demonstrate it in their works.

6. Findings

In the course of our study we have substantiated the hypothesis that German expressionist poetry was strongly influenced by the process of secularization of consciousness. It was reflected not only in the philosophy of expressionism but also in the form of the poems, the image and comparison methods. The significance of Christian symbolism and the meaning of God faded. The reason for that change originated from the European culture of the New Age.

7. Conclusion

Faith in God in the German expressionist poetry was replaced by faith in man; in a new man. The silence of God and the surrounding chaos forced man to take the reins of government into his own hands and strive for a new life.

Nevertheless, the expressionists’ belief in the possibility of spiritual renewal of mankind remained only an illusion. In reality, the bloodless revolution of the spirit was embodied in the terrible bloodshed that followed the First World War. The man did not change spiritually, but felt his power and impunity. The

violation of the hierarchy “divine – human” already could not be amended. Secularization of consciousness has continued and is still progressing nowadays. And the poetry of expressionism does not lose its relevance today.

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