

Extreme Realism and American Naturalism



Literature

Keywords: realism, naturalism, heritage, environment, determinism, reality, illusion, dream, failure.

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Abstract

Naturalism as a literary movement used details of realism to make it known that social conditions, heritage and environment are unavoidable force in the formation of human character. It is also a literary movement that struggles to repeat the everyday and reliable reality contrary to the Romantic literary movement and Surrealism, where subjects are treated fairly symbolic, idealistic and supernatural. Realist writers try to interpret accurate representation of the world, and their works contain authentic details and descriptions of their characters and the environment. As the Realistic authors, naturalistic ones same tried to portray the world accurately, but they tried to describe the dark side of life. While this period was associated with realism, in part emphasizes the description of surface reality, naturalism is more than a literary technique, involving the philosophy of determinism. Naturalism is anti-romantic in emphasizing disability to deceive mankind against their will, fate, and also in the discredit decoration in imagination of reality. For naturalists, it is the duty of the writer to present to readers reality without illusions, to provide a scientific view, impartial by it than to festoon or juggle or simply to satisfy the reader.

Naturalism as a literary movement used details of realism to make it known that social conditions, heritage and environment are unavoidable force in the formation of human character. It is also a literary movement that struggles to repeat the everyday and reliable reality contrary to the Romantic literary movement and Surrealism, where subjects are treated fairly symbolic, idealistic and supernatural. Indeed, Naturalism stems from Realism, the prominent literary movement among the nineteenth century in France and elsewhere.

Naturalist writers were under the influence of Charles Darwin's theory. They believed that hereditary and environmental factors determine the human character. While realism only try to describe people as they are. Naturalism tries to determine - scientifically - the leading powers (example: environment or heritage, which influences the behavior and actions in people's lives). Naturalism works have often banal themes. Naturalism literary works reflect the hard life and harsh, including poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, and prostitution and degenerated life. (Pizer, 1976, pp. 10, 39)

In addition, another characteristic of Naturalism is the impartiality and detachment from the story. Naturalist writer tries to create a certain tone, which he considered as objective. At the same time, this author tries to appear as neutral, creating the nameless characters. This requires the author to focus on what happens in the course of events and the character of the subject and not primarily on the character. Another characteristic of Naturalism is determinism. Determinism is largely against to the notion of free will.

For determinism is not primary idea according to which the characters have direct impact on the course of events of life, but it is necessary to focus on the nature or fate of the characters. In most cases naturalist writer struggles to convince the reader to believe that the fate of the character has been predetermined, usually by environmental factors, therefore locked in must comply with destiny. Another characteristic of these authors is the sudden curves at the end of the work. Naturalism novels usually give the impression that nature is indifferent to efforts, flounder and human struggle for survival.

Of course it is important to clarify the relationship between the American Naturalism and Naturalism that flourished in France in the late nineteenth century. French naturalism whose main representative was Emil Zola, is considered as a programmatic naturalism with a theory of the novel well defined that consciously eschewed the notion of free will and was devoted to documentary and scientific exposure of human behavior, as defined by nerves and blood.

Most writers American naturalists, especially Norris and London were under influence of Zola. They tried to explain human behavior and acts through the science of nature and they were skeptical of organized religion and belief in free will. However, in American literature they did not develop a special naturalistic literature, so their opinions and critical theory does not rely on any particular philosophy.

In many forms Naturalism was established on the basis laid by previous writers of Realism and was called by some - Extreme Realism. It also was created under the influence of French literary writer Emil Zola, who once had been under the influence of Balzac and Flaubert. Zola believed in a world which couldn't be selected, but was determined or conditioned first of inheritance and environment. Scientific determinism became Zola's main tool for understanding nature and human character.

This kind of scientific writing he called *Le roman experimental*, in which the author in his article acted as a scholar or scientist. According to naturalists the writer's analyzes and observations replace their creative imagination. Life provided a variety of topics and subjects for writer's goals. A significant period of American Naturalism started in 1890 and includes two decades of the twentieth century. However, in the USA had occurred events and dramatic changes since the 1870s, so many young writers felt that America needed a more powerful literature in order to understand the changes that occurred. Writers as Frank Norris, Steven Crane, Jack London and Theodor Dreiser, who were born in the 70's of the nineteenth century had acquired many new values . As a result they created a literature that the world revolved with indifference to human. (Parrington, 1930, p. 9, 11)

On the other hand, the place where people once believed that they would enable their implementation progress and work, poverty grew and was transformed into a nightmare. Therefore, these changes more or less were manifested in the literary movements, because then individual couldn't decide his fate in a world where it was forced to fight for survival. As people began to be deceived and believed that there is a choice to be in this world of illusion, threads facing reality became a subject of naturalist writers. The term "formal world" seemed already outdated compared with the base determinism factors behind great social layer outlining requirements for meeting the basic needs of physical existence, sexual instincts in a poor society. Unlike the romantics, who believed that life has good sides, for naturalist writers the life was hostile because vast and ruthless powers were stepping outside human control.

Therefore, in naturalistic prose characters are encouraged and motivated by sexual desire, excessive greed and domination of psychology of unorganized crowd. Usually the characters are either stereotypes or even perfect. Naturalism is not interested much in details, but it contains a symbolism of global acute problems. Naturalist authors were aware that the company was divided into wealthy and destitute people or better to say the wolves and the victims. They write for a desolate world, perverted, crazy, brutal, vulgar and short, where women and men are not far from the world animal. In such society naturalists have very clear that freedom and free will are illusions and deceit by the fact that nature, society and fate are indifferent to people. In such a society the words "courage, patience, virtue" have no meaning, because everything and everyone is determined by the blind fate and environmental determinism. (Reynolds, 1955, p. 14, 29)

Although the origin of this trend was the European, Naturalism was a very important movement in American Literature, from 90 years of the nineteenth century and up to the 20 years of the twentieth century. While Naturalism is closely connected with realism and sometimes seemed as extreme Realism, Naturalism is essentially anti-romantic because highlights the limited ability of men to impose their will over their own destiny, and thus devalued vision of a beautify reality.

Naturalist writer is the writer's duty to present to readers reality with no illusions and dreams, to provide a separated scientific point of view and not to beautify, to mislead, to misinform or to satisfy the reader. The author in the literary stream has a function to present diagnosis of society to elaborate sicknesses and diseases of society through the development of social sciences in the nineteenth century. American naturalism generally is divided into two streams. One stream deals with social and political dynamics of American urban life, while the other deals with biological aspects of thought, the philosophy of determinism. In the first one is obvious Marx influence, while in the second the influence of Darwin. This diagnostic element of Naturalism stems directly from naturalist Emil Zola, the most important figure of Naturalism in literature development. Some American writers, particularly Steven Crane all supported this view of responsibility of the author and of his right to life issues discussed. So also did Steven Crane vanity in his novel, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*, in 1893. This novel of this author, was the classic novel of Naturalism where is proved that environment has an unusually large role in life and in most cases serves as a condition to exist. This novel also shows the process of dissension and disintegration of the family of Maggie, deals with her prostitution, and suicide as an inevitable process of limited choices and of poverty in the slums of New York.

The ideas of determinism and biological powers in general are not as visible and developed as in other literatures, although these ideas and views were presented in the novels of Mark Twain, in general and in particular to his novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Despite the romantic tradition, under whose influence was as the writer Kate Chopin, she was also interested, as a writer, in the ideas of Naturalism. This is particularly noticeable in her novel *Awakening*, in which she displays through the character of Dr. Mandel the Natural view, in which romantic love is a demagogic illusion toward the status of women, because determines for women the biological role of motherhood. However, the heroine of her novel Edna Pontellier, believes in romantic view of love and its suicide is in complete contradiction with the Maggie of Crane, who as an individual tries to survive in the environment and certain circumstances. Another writer who is under the influence of Naturalism is Jack London, who explored the similarities between humans and animals and how hidden instincts of animal survival structures explode in extreme situations. This is the theme of the novel of the *Sea Dog* and *Cruelty Call*.

Although the most prosperous period of Naturalism was the period of the 1890s until 1925. Aspects of Naturalism have survived and are still present in the works of several contemporary writers. Ernest Hemingway in his first works, often uses naturalistic concept of the individual, which contrasts with the individual and he needs to ensure proper experience and learns not to have illusions and self-deception in life. Other writers with naturalistic elements are Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis.

It has to be noted that naturalist novel in the US often focuses on American areas with non-English backgrounds in big cities of America where the number of immigrants was huge. Among them was a variety of layers of the population, ranging from the poor to the middle class or bourgeoisie. American naturalist writers are not the first, who focused their attention on industrialized areas of American city, but they were the first to believe that Realism facilitates of literature developed in the 70's and 80's of XIX century in America had been insufficient to present a real naturalist movement in literature.

Abraham Cohen, for example, tried to offer his works to the Jewish community of New York, whose member he was. Theodore Dreiser novel presents a considerable number of characters with German and Irish descent. Frank Norris and Steven Crane from Anglophone families also addressed the ethnic mix of characters of ethnically mixed environments. Realism versions of Ellen Glasgow were written against the south mythology, while "problem novels" of David Philips are separate novels that address the topic of prostitution. His novel *Susan Lennox, her fall and rise* can be considered as a naturalistic novel due to subject and topic. In the end, writers and naturalists had been skeptical and had hostile attitude towards the concept of bourgeois

individualism, which reviewed the realism novels about middle class life. Most American naturalist's writers expressed a concern with animalistic motives and irrational human behavior that sometimes appear along with violence and sexual dramas. (Howard, 1985, p. 54)

Naturalist emphasis on how social and economic forces determine human behavior was very well developed by the novelist Theodore Dreiser. Dreiser's novels, especially "An American Tragedy" (1925) was extremely important in the exploration of individual fate during rapid industrialization and urbanization in the US; writings of naturalist period were closely linked to social changes in America during a period of capitalist dramatic growth and development of big business.

Considering Dreiser as a pioneer of Naturalism and an "Unmatched Naturalist" most of the critics however refused to accept the sincerity and the value of his work. By the end of 1944, Chauncey Tinker called Dreiser as one of the famous leaders of the American naturalist school. However, a critical analysis of his novels will testify that although Dreiser had many features in common with naturalism, his novels contain features that are incompatible with naturalism and even that are inconsistent with naturalism. Professor Lars Ahnebring is convinced that Naturalism is a method of artistic creation through which the author portrays the life of philosophical theory of determinism. Unlike the realistic author, naturalist believes that man is an animal without free will. Naturalism interprets man as a creature created by the power of inheritance and environment. Naturalism, though most often noted for its deterministic philosophy and ideas on man and his fate in the universe, had many more characteristics that critics and literary theorists have defined. Among these traits are a focus on the lower classes of society, characters are thwarted of their free will by external forces beyond their control including an indifferent nature, the settings are frequently urban, the world is random, details are not as important as in realism, and life is often cutthroat and cut short.

Although Dreiser novels more or less are consistent with this definition, most of them do not fit with the theory of determinism. Naturalists believed that life and human activity are controlled and determined by some external force or external or physical, social and environmental factors. They do not believe in the influence of free will. Particularly in connection with this he does not agree with naturalists.

Thus, the existence of free will, we can find easily in the first novel of Dreiser *Sister Carrie*. Dreiser also thinks that man is not entirely an animal. Describing the mood of Carrie, Dreiser notes: "Our civilization is in the middle stage. Not completely beast, because it does not comply fully instinct, rarely is humane, because not yet fully comply with understanding." Man is essentially a creature that for example differs from tiger, which is not responsible and is alienated from the power of nature and there is no thought or reason, but is protected by nature. On the other hand, man is moved by the laws of the Jungle and has free will.

However, the man often hesitates and is in a dilemma, because it is not yet in harmony with nature, by his instincts and at the same time has not wisdom that takes into account his free will. He is like a leaf in the wind, which moves and flows from every breath of passion, sometimes acting with his will and sometime according to instincts, from one side and on the other side making a mistake, but also by improving the error immediately. Man is a creature with an uncertain variability. Man has the consolation that he is aware that the development or evolution continues as the action and that the ideal is a light that doesn't fail, but the man so often loses the balance between good and evil. If this jungle of good will and instincts created a harmony and if given understanding to these powers replaced them, man wouldn't change.

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