

# Naturalism in Context

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Nothing tastes staler than the revolutions of the day before yesterday; the bitter flavor of great expectations disappointed clings to them; they make us feel superior for having seen through their ridiculous pretensions and sorry for our fathers and grandfathers for having been taken in by them. That Naturalism in the novel and in the theatre still leaves such an aftertaste on our own palates is, in a way, a tribute to the intensity of emotion it aroused in its day and the length of time during which it acquired and held a dominant position. After all: it was in the 1870's that Zola shocked the world with his new concept of Naturalism; Ibsen's *Ghosts* was first published in 1881; Strindberg's *Father* in 1887, *Miss Julie* in 1888; Hauptmann's *Before Sunrise* had its first performance in 1889; Chekhov's *Seagull* in 1896. Yet the Expressionism of the 1920's, Brecht's epic theatre of the Thirties and Forties, the Theatre of the Absurd of the Fifties and Sixties were still essentially both continuations of and reactions *against* Naturalism (or at least against its latter-day exponents, who still dominate the more conservative sector of our theatre: Broadway, the London West End, and the Paris Boulevard, not to speak of Moscow). A movement which started out as a furious attack on the conventions of what was then regarded as the well-made play, as an iconoclastic, revolutionary onslaught against the establishment, has now turned into the embodiment of "squareness," conservatism, and the contemporary concept of the well-made play. In the West End of London early Shaw and Ibsen have become safe after-dinner entertainment for the suburban business community—the equivalents of Scribe, Sardou and Dumas *fils* in their own day—the very authors whom they had wanted to replace because they were safe and establishment-minded.

Such, however, is the dialectical law of historical development: each hour has its own necessity, its own imperative; and what is essential is precisely the insight and the courage needed to obey it. Once the hour is passed, the new molds have been created, lesser spirits will inevitably continue to use them; and that is how the revolutionary contents and forms of yesteryear turn into the clichés of today.

What matters, therefore, for any objective assessment of a movement like Naturalism, is to see it in its historical context; to understand the moral and artistic impulse behind it; and to pursue its manifestations into our own time: we shall then

find that the impulse behind the Naturalist movement is still very much alive, very relevant for our own time and well worth our study and understanding.

The mid-19th century was one of dismal stagnation in the European theatre. The achievements of the classical and romantic movement in Germany and of the romantic revolution in France had congealed into an empty routine; the theatre was discredited as a serious art form. Looking back on those days Strindberg reported that

if one wanted to submit a play to the Royal Dramatic Theatre in the Sixties and Seventies the following conditions had to be met to get it performed: the play had to have five acts, each act had to run to about 24 sheets of writing paper, thus the whole play to 5 times 24 = 120 foolscap pages. Changes of scene within the acts were not liked and were considered a weakness. Each act had to have a beginning, a middle and an end. The curtain lines had to give rise to applause through oratorical figures; if the play was in unrhymed verse, the last two lines had to rhyme. In the play there had to be "turns" for the actors which were called "scenes"; the monologue was permissible and often constituted a highlight; a longish emotional outburst or invective, a revelation were almost compulsory; there also had to be narrative passages—a dream, an anecdote, an event... This dramaturgy had a certain justification and even a certain beauty; it stemmed in the last resort from Victor Hugo and had been a reaction against the obsolete abstractions of Racine and Corneille in the Thirties. But this art form degenerated like all others, when it had had its day, and the five-act form was used for all kinds of subjects, even for insignificant minor history or anecdote...

Strindberg here confirms the diagnosis which Zola made in his preface to *Thérèse Raquin* (dated July 25, 1873):

Drama is dying of its extravagances, its lies and its platitudes. If comedy still keeps on its feet in the collapse of our stage, that is because it contains more of real life, because it is often true. I defy the last of the romantics to put on the stage a heroic drama; the old iron of the middle ages, the secret doors, the poisoned wines and all the rest would only make one shrug one's shoulders. Melodrama, this bourgeois offspring of romantic drama, is even more dead in the affection of the people; its false sentiment, its complications of stolen children and recovered documents, its impudent grandiloquence have brought it, at long last, into such disrepute that one holds one's ribs at any attempt to resuscitate it. The great works of the 1830's will remain as milestones of a struggle, as literary red-letter days, as superb efforts that brought down the classical trappings. But now that all this is overturned, the cloaks and the daggers have become unnecessary. The time has come to create works of truth. To replace the classical tradition by a romantic tradition would amount to a failure to make use of the freedom which our elders conquered for us. There must be no more schools, no more formulas, no more literary panjandrums of any kind; there is just life itself, an immense field where everybody can explore and create at his heart's content.

No more schools, no more formulas, no more literary panjandrums of any kind! Here lies the impetus behind the Naturalist movement which is still active and immensely relevant. No wonder Zola's impassioned manifesto reads so well and seems fresh and topical today. The romantic movement had overthrown the dominance of the rigid formula of French classical drama, but it had imposed its own narrow conception of subject matter, technique and objective on all serious theatre. Comedy, stemming from Molière and his realism of observation and language,

had remained much freer from the blight of the schoolmen. Now the Naturalists called for a fresh start in *complete* freedom; art, as philosophy, was making the transition from a *closed* to a totally open system. The Naturalists were the first to formulate such a new, open view of aesthetics.

It had taken half a century for Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy to be taken up by the creative artists—Comte's *Système de philosophie positive* had appeared in 1824. It reached Zola via the works of a physiologist, Claude Bernard, notably his *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865), and a literary and social historian, Hippolyte Taine, whose epoch-making *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* had appeared in 1864. What Zola took from Claude Bernard is the basic concept of the *scientific method* of observation and experiment. Zola's essay *Le Roman Expérimental* (1890), the basic formulation of the Naturalists' creed, is little more than an anthology of quotations from Claude Bernard's book on experimental medicine. "All experimental reasoning must be founded on doubt, for the experimenter must have no preconceived ideas when confronting nature; he must always preserve his freedom of mind." Bernard had stressed that the scientific, experimental method implied a *determinist* view of nature; experimentation uncovers the chain of cause and effect behind seemingly arbitrary phenomena. But it was from Taine that Zola took his own specific determinism. In his history of English literature Taine sought to explain each writer through three main factors that determined his nature and his style: race, milieu, moment. This concept allowed the Naturalists to re-introduce the classical source of tragedy—preordained, inescapable *fate*—into drama in a new and highly respectable "scientific" guise. Man's fate was preordained through a combination of heredity, environment and history. It was this idea of heredity that stalked through *Ghosts*, *Before Sunrise* and *Miss Julie*.

Taine's determinism was oversimplified and scientifically untenable. (Modern genetics soon showed that the real workings of heredity were far more complex than Taine, or even Darwin, had imagined; that neither Oswald's syphilis nor the alcoholism which Hauptmann's Helene, in *Before Sunrise*, seemed destined to inherit would in fact have been transmitted from father to son, from father to daughter). But—and this must be stressed again and again in the face of a present-day tendency to scoff at the Naturalists precisely for being scientifically out-of-date—these mistakes in scientific detail are not of the essence of their attitude. Their fundamental and essential belief has not become obsolete:

Naturalism, in literature . . . is the return to nature and to man, direct observation, correct anatomy, the acceptance and the depiction of that which *is*. The task is the same for the scientist as for the writer. Both have to abandon abstractions for realities, ready-made formulas for rigorous analysis. Hence no more abstract characters in our works, no more history of everyone, the web and woof of daily life. It is a matter of a totally new start, of getting to know man from the very well-springs of his being, before reaching conclusions in the manner of the idealists who *invent* their types. Writers from now on are constrained to build from the foundation upward by presenting the largest possible number of human documents, put forward in their logical order . . .

Zola, *Le Naturalisme au théâtre*

This spirit of free enquiry, totally unprejudiced, unburdened by preconceived ideas, liberated immense energies. That it consciously aimed beyond the immediate techniques and subject matters of the moment is clearly shown, for example, by the manifesto with which Otto Brahm, the great critic and director of German Naturalist drama, opened the Berlin *Freie Buehne* (Free Stage) on January 29, 1890:

Once upon a time there was an art which avoided the present and sought poetry only in the darkness of the past, striving in a bashful flight from reality to reach those ideal distant shores where in eternal youth there blooms what has never happened anywhere. The art of our time embraces, with its tentacles, everything that lives: nature and society; that is why the closest and subtlest relations bind modern art and modern life together; and anyone who wants to grasp modern art must endeavor to penetrate modern life as well in its thousand merging contours, in its intertwined and antagonistic instincts. The motto of this new art, written down in golden characters by our leading spirits, is one word: truth; and truth, truth on every path of life, is what we are striving for. Not the objective truth, which escapes the struggling individual, but individual truth, freely arrived at from the deepest convictions, freely uttered: the truth of the independent spirit who has nothing to explain away or hide; and who therefore knows only one adversary, his arch-enemy and mortal foe: the lie in all its forms.

No other programme is to be recorded in these pages. We swear by no formula and would not dare to chain into the rigid compulsion of rules that which is in eternal flux—life and art. Our striving is for that which is in the act of becoming and our eyes are directed toward the things which are about to arise far more attentively than those elements of an eternal yesterday which have the presumption to tie down in conventions and rules, once and for all time, mankind's infinite potential. We bow in reverence before all the greatness that past epochs have preserved for us, but it is not from them that we draw our lodestone and norms of life; for it is not he who ties himself to the views of a dead world, but only he who freely feels the demand of the present hour, who will penetrate the spiritual powers activating our age as a truly modern man... No barrier of theory, no sanctified model of the past must inhibit the infinity of development which constitutes the essence of our species... Friends of naturalism, we want to stride along with it for a fair stretch of the way, but we shall not be astonished if in the course of this journey, at a point we cannot as yet foresee, the road might suddenly turn, opening up surprising new vistas in art or life. For the infinite development of human culture is bound to no formula, not even the newest; and in this confidence, in this faith in infinite potentiality, we have erected a free stage for modern life.

These are noble words; they show the genuine freedom of the spirit, transcending all narrow dogmatism of literary movements or coteries, which inspired the best minds among the champions of Naturalism. Seldom in the history of literature has the call for *absolute truth* been voiced with such uncompromising conviction, such relentless courage. Chekhov wrote in 1887,

Artistic literature is called so just because it depicts life as it really is. Its aim is truth—unconditional and honest... I agree with you that the "cream" is a fine thing, but a *littérateur* is not a confectioner, not a dealer in cosmetics, not an entertainer; he is a man bound, under compulsion, by the realization of his duty, and by his conscience; having put his hand to the plow he must not plead weakness; and no matter how painful it is to him, he is constrained to overcome his aversion, and soil his imagination with the sordidness of life. He is just like an ordinary reporter. What would you say if a newspaper reporter, because of his fastidiousness or from a wish to give pleasure to his readers, were to describe only

honest mayors, high-minded ladies and virtuous railroad contractors? To a chemist nothing on earth is unclean. A writer must be as objective as a chemist; he must abandon the subjective line; he must know that dung-heaps play a very respectable part in a landscape and that evil passions are as inherent in life as good ones . . . (Letter to M. V. Kiselev, January 14, 1887).

The decisive and truly revolutionary element in this attitude—this I believe must be stressed above all—was exactly this passionate proclamation of the *primacy of content over form*, the conviction that any subject matter could be treated, and that each subject matter would call for the form most adequate and suitable to express it. Artistic form thus came to be seen as the *organic expression* of its content.

We are through with intrigue, with artificial plot, through with the play as a kind of chess game; the ability to perceive and to express, which is the secret of each true artist, is his natural style, his inner form, his inner turn of phrase. In these the great rhythm and the great dynamism of life are reduced to an individual rhythm, an individual dynamism. There may be a tradition in this, but it has become flesh and blood! A tradition which, like those of eating and drinking, is carried by ever new hunger and thirst. Traditional, external dogmas cannot have a bearing on this process. Such useless and pointless external dogmas are: the dogma of plot, the dogma of the unities of space and time, the dogma of exposition in twenty to thirty lines at the opening of the first act, and others. (Gerhart Hauptmann, ca. 1910.)

Yet in their demand for truth, the primacy of subject matter over form, the Naturalists were never—as is nowadays often thoughtlessly assumed—naïve enough to believe in the possibility of a truly objective representation of nature. In the above quotation Hauptmann insists on the artist's *individual* ability to perceive and to express as the starting point. And Zola himself coined the famous slogan: "*Il est certain qu'une oeuvre ne sera jamais qu'un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament*" (A work of art cannot but be a corner of nature seen through a temperament).

This recognition of the subjective nature of all perception marks the really decisive breach with any theory of art which believed in the possibility of embodying absolutes, *eternal verities*, in great enduring works. As such, the Naturalists were the first conscious *existentialists* in the realm of aesthetics. (The link from Kierkegaard to his fellow Scandinavian Ibsen is only too clear, although Ibsen was at pains to stress that he had "read little and understood less" of Kierkegaard. Mere awareness of the debate around Kierkegaard must have been enough to acquaint him with the essence of his ideas. While denying that Kierkegaard had been the model for Brand, Ibsen added: "But, of course, the depiction of a man whose sole aim in life is to realize his ideals will always bear a certain resemblance to Kierkegaard's life.") There is no contradiction between the ruthless pursuit of truth, observed, scientifically tested, *experimental* truth on the one hand; and the continual awareness of a subjective point of view on the part of the observer on the other. Indeed, the notion that the observer's subjectivity will always have to be reckoned with is the hallmark of a truly scientific attitude. Zola used the term "*document humain*" to show that any truthful description of human experience, however subjective, also has an objective value as a contribution to man's knowledge of himself. Hence Strindberg's violent denunciation of the tyranny of women over men

could be seen as equally valid as Shaw's passionate advocacy of the rights of women. Each one of these dramatists was ruthlessly truthful, precisely *because* he gave the fullest possible expression to nature seen through *his* temperament.

From this acceptance of the individual's point of view there followed also the rejection of any ethical absolutes, the denial of the notion that it was art's purpose to propagate the accepted moral code. "The idealists," says Zola, "pretend that it is necessary to lie in order to be moral, the naturalists assert that one cannot be moral outside the truth. . . ." Truthfulness, accuracy of observation and the courage to confront the results of this observation thus became the only moral absolutes for the artist.

And this is the impulse which still inspires the literature of today—as indeed it does all the other arts. It is the impulse that has led to abstract painting as much as to the Theatre of the Absurd. Once it is realized that the view of Naturalism as a mere attempt to create photographic reproductions of external reality is a very superficial one; and that, indeed, the essence of the Naturalists' endeavor was an existential, value-free, scientific and experimental exploration of reality in its widest possible sense (including the subjective reality of the artist's temperament through which he perceives external reality); and that this approach logically led to the rejection of all ready-made formal conventions and implied the acceptance of organic form dictated by the nature of the subject matter—all else follows.

Admittedly, the earliest Naturalists did not all have the ability or the desire to follow the theoretical implications of their views to their logical conclusions. Zola's own *Thérèse Raquin* had more in common with a well-made play à la Dumas  *fils* than with later naturalist drama (while its basic melodramatic image, the paralyzed observer unable to communicate his knowledge of a crime to his visitors, comes directly from that arch-romantic novel by Dumas *père*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*); and Ibsen's great social dramas used the stage technique of Sardou, while Shaw openly proclaimed his determination to employ the convention of popular drama to put over modern ideas in a play like *You Never Can Tell*. But who, on the other hand, would doubt that Ibsen's later symbolic myths were the direct and logical development of his determination to explore his own inner, as well as objective external, reality, and that Strindberg's dream plays did not continue the impulse behind his naturalistic explorations of society and its hypocrisies.

As early as 1887 Georg Brandes had pointed out that Zola himself constantly invested the nature he was describing and exploring with symbolic, mythical significance, that in fact his naturalism took far more from Zola's own poetic temperament, his way of looking at the world, than from the mere transcription of external phenomena. Art, unlike experimental science, deals with a reality which includes the *emotional* reaction of the observer; even the most prosaic object, when seen in a human context, becomes a symbol: Hedda Gabler's pistols, Solness' church tower, Hedwig Ekdal's wild duck transform themselves into images of inner, psychological realities, become the embodiments of dreams and dark desires. It is often said that Naturalism soon lost its impact because its main practitioners turned to symbolism and new-romanticism. This is true only insofar as the dramatists concerned—Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann—followed their initial impulse to its logical consequences. In Hauptmann's *Hannele*, the sick child's dream vision leads us

straight from the ultra-naturalist environment of a workhouse into the poetic world of neo-romantic visions of the Savior surrounded by angels. Likewise Strindberg, in *The Ghost Sonata* or *To Damascus*, merely translated the psychological situation of the chief character of a play like *The Father* into a direct, concrete image of his nightmares and obsessions. Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1892) and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (1903) are both clearly derived from Naturalism in their ruthless determination to delve into the depths of human nature, yet at the same time they also bear the mark of aestheticism and neo-romanticism. Max Reinhardt, the greatest of the neo-romantic directors had first excelled as the interpreter of the Naturalists, and can be regarded as one of the founders of the truly naturalist style of acting by his creation of the *Kammerspiele*, a chamber theatre specially designed for intimate dialogue and subtle psychological effects (1907). Quite analogously, Stanislavski also subsequently developed his style towards neo-romanticism and invited Gordon Craig to direct a highly stylized neo-romantic *Hamlet* (1912). "The theory of environment ends where the subconscious starts," Stanislavski declared—in other words, the naturalism of external reality merges into the dreamlike reality of man's inner life.

This, of course, is not to say that symbolism, neo-romanticism, or the expressionism which Strindberg's dream plays had inspired, are styles *identical* with Naturalism in its accepted sense. It is merely to draw attention to the fact that once the basic position of the Naturalists had been reached a *new phase* of art history had begun, a phase in which the same basic impulse carried all before it, so that—as Otto Brahm had predicted—new vistas quite naturally opened up at bends in the road, and the wayfarers travelling on it naturally entered a succession of new landscapes: Ibsen, who had consciously chosen the path of realism with *Pillars of Society* ("I believe I may say with certainty that we shall both be satisfied with this play of mine. It is modern in all respects and completely in tune with the times. . . ." (Letter to Frederik Hegel, Ibsen's publisher, July 29, 1877—six years after Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*) almost imperceptibly turned into a symbolist; Hauptmann into a neo-romantic; and Strindberg gradually evolved from a ruthless Naturalist (*Miss Julie* was subtitled 'A Naturalistic Tragedy') into the first Expressionist; and at the end of *The Cherry Orchard* even Chekhov, the most rigorous Naturalist, could not resist introducing that famous, mysterious symbolic sound like the breaking of a string.

This line of evolution was dictated not only by the logic behind the basic philosophical concept that had inspired the Naturalist movement, but also by the parallel logic of the development of the *organic form* which, of necessity, had to adapt itself to its subject matter. Zola, Becque, Ibsen still followed in varying degrees the formal pattern of the well-made, social melodrama of the Parisian Boulevard. Yet with the gradual implementation of the underlying theory, with its rejection of intrigue and artificial shape, dramatists came closer to fulfilling Jean Jullien's slogan that drama should become a *tranche de vie*—a slice of life. It was Hauptmann who perfected this new technique in plays like *The Weavers* and *Florian Geyer*. Each act of these massive dramas became a series of loosely connected snapshots, with characters emerging from the crowd and then sinking back into it, half-finished episodes out of which the total mosaic gradually coalesced. These plays could dispense with the old division of the cast into heroes and supporting actors. *The*

*Weavers* has no hero; its principal character is the mass of Silesian weavers, just as the subject of the play is not the fate of one man, but that of a whole social class. This is the multi-focal technique of playwriting which was also used with such immense effect by Gorky in *The Lower Depths* (triumphantly produced by both Stanislavski and Reinhardt) and by Chekhov. (Elmer Rice's *Street Scene*, Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* and O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* fall within the same category. O'Neill is, of course, also a notable example of the closeness of naturalistic and the expressionistic impulse; his development closely parallels that of Strindberg).

This multi-focal snapshot technique makes the playwright concentrate on a single static segment of *time*. Hauptmann tended to build his plays in this style from a sequence of such static pictures. But he was also aware that there might be subjects requiring a completely different approach. In a note dated August 9, 1912, he remarked: "The modern dramatist, being a biologist, may sometimes strive for a drama which, like a house, a work of architecture, stands still in one spot without moving from its position. Or he may have cause to comprehend life in a horizontal direction, having already grasped it in the vertical. He might prefer the *epic flow* of life to its *dramatic stasis*. The true biologist will not want to do without either of these two possibilities of form..." Here Hauptmann already clearly anticipates Brecht's idea of an epic theatre, in which the loving depiction of minute detail gives way to the swift flow of action in a horizontal direction through time. That Brecht's concept of the theatre as a sociological laboratory also stems from the original impulse of the Naturalists' experimental concept hardly needs to be stressed. His demand for a theatre that would be able to deal with reality in an age of science very closely resembles Zola's original manifesto. Equally, Brecht's view that drama should be used to stimulate thinking in the audience has much in common with Hauptmann's view—noted down in 1912—that "drama as literature is not so much the ready-made result of thought as the *thinking process* itself. It is the living presentation of the socially-manifested content of consciousness. From this it follows that none of the truths it presents can lay claim to final, absolute, self-contained validity. Each is valid only insofar as it is conditioned by the inner drama." (I.e., the particular conception of a particular poet's consciousness of a particular event.)

Hauptmann saw the dramatist as a biologist; Zola took his basic concepts from the physiologist Claude Bernard. It is surely no coincidence that Georg Buechner (1813-1837), the greatest forerunner of naturalistic drama, who inspired both Hauptmann and Brecht, was a physiologist, that Brecht had started as a medical student and that both Chekhov and Schnitzler were practicing physicians. Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931), another great dramatist (far too little known in the English-speaking world) who wrote both in a strictly naturalistic and in a neo-romantic style, also used drama as a means of exploration—of depth psychology. His series of dialogues, *Reigen* (1896), was the first attempt to put the sexual act on the stage and to illustrate, with bitter irony and sparkling wit, the extent to which the purely physiological side of sex is overshadowed by social ambition, snobbery and the struggle for domination. Sigmund Freud himself regarded Schnitzler as a kind of double of himself, a co-discoverer of the world of the sub-conscious. On the occa-



sion of Schnitzler's sixtieth birthday he wrote to him:

...again and again, in looking into your creations, I have thought to find, behind the make-believe of fiction, the same endeavors, interests and results, that I knew to have been my own. Your determinism as well as your skepticism—what people call pessimism—your being captivated by the truths of the unconscious, of the instinctive nature of man, your disruption of the safe assumptions of love and death, all this has always struck me with an uncanny familiarity... Thus I gained the impression that not by intuition—but, in fact, by subtle self-observation—you came to know all that which I have uncovered through painstaking work on other people. Yes, I believe, fundamentally you are a psychological depth explorer, as honestly unprejudiced as any... (Freud, Letter to Schnitzler, May 14, 1922).

Among the explorations which Schnitzler undertook was one of the earliest examples of a work of literature which consisted entirely of the thoughts and feelings of an individual—*monologue intérieur*. This was Naturalism pressed to its utmost consequence—nature as perceived in and through a single temperament, an attempt to encompass the totality of the existential process of a human being. Schnitzler's novella *Leutnant Gustl* (1901)—the thoughts of a young officer compelled to commit suicide by a ridiculous "affair of honor"—marks, among other things, a point of contact between the novel and the drama. (In his essay *Le naturalisme au théâtre* Zola had deplored the fact that "an increasingly deep gulf" had opened up between the novel and the drama). For the very fact of being couched in the form of a monologue—a soliloquy—turned the short story into a dramatic representation of reality: the reader was made to *witness* a sequence of events *as it happens* rather than being told about it as a past event. Here again the Naturalists' rejection of rigid categories and preordained forms had led to a creative merging of ancient distinctions. The internal monologue was to become one of the main forms of the vast literature of introspection which arose in the 20th century.

*Leutnant Gustl* was only one of the earliest examples of internal monologue; the very first came from France: Edouard Dujardin's short novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887), which James Joyce regarded as the model for his own use of internal monologue in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Here, then, is another direct link between the Naturalists and the avant-garde literature of introspection, dream and fantasy which culminated in Surrealism and the Theatre of the Absurd. Again, as in the case of the link between the Naturalists and neo-romantics, the connection is narrow, organic and initially so gradual as to amount to an imperceptible merging. Joyce started as an admirer of Ibsen, he learned Norwegian to read Ibsen in the original, his first works of fiction were meticulously observed slices of life; the step from the careful description of external reality to the plan to encompass not only the exterior but also the interior of the hero's life was logical and inevitable.

In the French novel, and in the wake of Dujardin, and certainly by the same inner logic, Proust's monumental attempt to capture the process of time through his hero's consciousness also led to an *internalization* of the concept of reality: the same scenes, the same people appear differently to an eager young, and a disillusioned middle-aged, Marcel. And this, again, is a process entirely analogous to the subjective vision behind Strindberg's *To Damascus*, *A Dream Play* and *Ghost Sonata*. Antonin Artaud directed Strindberg's *Dream Play* in 1928. Arthur Adamov derived his inspiration for his first absurdist plays from Strindberg as well as from Artaud

himself; and Samuel Beckett's dramatic *oeuvre* forms part of a wider exploration of the inner world of the internal monologue closely related to the ideas and the example of James Joyce. Thus we can observe the initial impulse behind the Naturalist revolution spreading, and still active, in the manifold manifestations of contemporary theatre.

However revolutionary the ideas of the early Naturalists may have been, they saw themselves as part of a tradition. Zola proclaimed that "Naturalism is Diderot, Rousseau, Balzac and twenty others." He even regarded Homer as a naturalist and consciously emulated Homeric passages. Taine, who admired English literature, derived many of the ideas which later inspired Zola from the English realistic social novel of the 18th and early 19th century. In Germany the dramatists of the *Sturm und Drang* period (Lenz, Zacharias Werner, Klinger) as well as the early Goethe and Schiller must clearly be regarded as forerunners of Naturalism; and so must Kleist and Buechner, Grabbe and Hebbel. In Russia, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Ostrovsky exercised a powerful and decisive influence on Chekhov and Stanislavski, Gorky and Leonid Andreyev. In the English-speaking theatre, T. W. Robertson's *Caste* (1867) must be regarded as a forerunner of the realism of Shaw and Granville-Barker.

The coming of the Naturalist revolution was inevitable. It was an expression of the *Zeitgeist*—the rapid industrialization of Europe and North America, the growth of science, the impact of Darwinism and positivism, and the consequent collapse of old certainties and established faiths. What the early pioneers and theoreticians of Naturalism achieved was no more than the systematization and clear, programmatic expression of the spirit of their age. Nevertheless, the effect was overwhelming—a feeling of excitement, of liberation. And it was this excitement which released the most valuable element in the Naturalist revolution: by opening up a vast new field of subject matter, by removing age-old inhibitions and taboos, by destroying time-honored rules and recipes for writing dialogue and structuring plot, Naturalism opened the floodgates for a stream of new poetic possibilities in the theatre. Whatever their ideas, their social purpose, their political commitment may have been, the great Naturalists—Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Hauptmann, Chekhov, Gorky, Schnitzler—must ultimately be judged as great poets, poets of a new kind: for they discovered the magic that lies behind the seemingly commonplace surface of ordinary life, the tragic greatness of simple people, the poetry of silences and reticences, the bitter ironies of unspoken thoughts: Mrs. Alving hearing the ghosts of the past in the next room; the old drunken doctor, Chebutykin, washing his hands in the night of the fire in *Three Sisters*; the "Baron's" barely articulate account of his life in *The Lower Depths*—these are examples of a poetry of the stage, a poetry arising out of, and entirely in tune with, an industrialized, urbanized society and the image of man which it had created. To have bridged the gulf between literature and theatre, which had opened up so disastrously in the middle of the 19th century, to have restored the dignity of the theatre not only as an art but also as an instrument of serious thought and enquiry and to have created a new kind of poetry—these are the true achievements of the early Naturalists. The contemporary theatre, to a very large extent, still draws its impetus and energy from their ideas, their courage, their liberating influence.