THE TEMPTATION OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AND GERMAN LITERARY MODERNISM-ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

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Abstract: German literary modernism has its origins in the 17th century. Arthur Schnitzler is one of the leading representatives of this literary movement in Austria through the psychological implications, the fine analyzes of conscience and the exposition of the morals that the wealthy classes cultivated. Arthur Schnitzler is one of those voices in literature who wanted to bring about a change. And Austria, at the beginning of the 20th century, like the whole of Europe, was going through deep social transformations. The goal of the new literary movement was to get out of the rigid, idealistic forms of man, promoting a more realistic vision of human consciousness, freed from the constraints of social conventions and taboos. As science was beginning to become a new dogma, it is not surprising that a representative of medicine brings a new, scientific and analytical breath to the literary landscape of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Keywords: modernism, psychoanalysis, subconscious, frivolity, morality

The two cultural poles of Europe at the beginning of the 20th century were Paris and Vienna. In France, neurologists Jean-Martin Charcot and Hippolyte Bernheim were working on experiments related to hypnotism and Freud visited them to explore this niche. For his part, Schnitzler is more and more attracted to psychoanalysis, and in literary terms he is the one who laid the foundations of a literary circle, Jung-Wien, which focused on exposing the strengths of a society that Europe saw in agony. Following Freud in his scientific adventure, Schnitzler succeeded in taking an important step in Austrian literature, shifting public interest to psychoanalysis and the discovery of the mechanisms of the subconscious.

One of the most important representatives of Austrian drama was a doctor-Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931). Born in Vienna, Schnitzler made contact with the medical world from childhood, as his father was a renowned laryngologist, and his mother was the daughter of another doctor. After medical studies in Vienna, Schnitzler obtained his doctorate in 1885. After a few years in which he devoted himself to medicine, Schnitzler chose to continue his literary career.

The first literary work signed by the Viennese doctor is Anatol (1893), which exposes the frivolity of bourgeois society. The Austrian essayist and playwright, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, wrote a poem in the Introduction of this play. The main character is described from the beginning of the play as a superficial person who is only in search of pleasures "an idle young bachelor, lives in a charming flat in Vienna, That he has taste, besides means to indulge it, may be seen by his rooms, the furniture he buys, the pictures he hangs on the walls. And if such things indicate character, one would judge, first by the material comfort of the place and then by the impatience for new ideas which his sense of what is beautiful to live with seems to show, that though a hedonist, he is skeptical of even that easy faith."[1]

Anatol lives the imagined drama of being deceived. On the recommendation of his friend Max, the main character tries to hypnotize his girlfriend to find out the truth. But his own weakness, lack of character and blasé cause him to give up on finding out the truth. Anatol's friend Cora is a young woman from the suburbs, who lacks the questionable morality of the bourgeoisie. The glittering world of the bourgeoisie is actually one of

[1] Arthur Schnitzler, *Anatol*, New York, Mitchell Kennerley, 1911, p. 3

falsehood, intrigue and lack of real values. Although, at the declarative level, Anatol is looking for true love, he himself is not able to give pure feelings. Schnitzler had extensive medical knowledge. This fact helped him to build this penciled character from lights and shadows but to deepen his psychological analysis of this blasé bourgeois. Infidelity, lack of emotional commitment, male selfishness, pride, inability to take charge are discussed. The play must be read in a larger context. Sigmund Freud's theories had begun to appear in Austrian society and the novelty of approaching the human psyche from totally new perspectives attracted the attention of many writers. This aspect does not diminish the indisputable literary quality of doctor Schnitzle, but on the contrary, we can appreciate even better this neophile of literature who tried to connect these two great passions - medicine and literature. After only two years, the doctor returns with another piece - *Flirtation* - in which exactly the same themes are discussed - social inequality, false values and hypocrisy. In 1896 Schnitzler became increasingly active literary publishing *Fair Game* and *Light-'O-Love*.

Two years later, in 1895, Schnitzler published the short story Dying which tells the sad story of a dying young man, Felix, who meets Marie. She promises him that she will stay by his side until the end. Over the course of a whole year, the relationship between the two evolves and Felix is no longer satisfied with just having Marie by his side, but wants her to follow him in death. A complex psychological study, Schnitzler's short story reveals all the darkness of the human soul with the whole cohort of negative feelings that destroy the soul - selfishness, control obsession, the desire to possess another soul, emotional blackmail. Constructed in the form of a first-person narrative, the short story describes the tumult of consciousness from the perspective of the victim-Marie. Controlled by fear and anger, Felix loses contact with what brought him to Marie's side. Dying is a philosophical reflection on death, but also on life, what it has to offer.

Some exegetes have observed a recurring fear in the writings of the Austrian doctor—the game. It's not about fun, it's about puns, competition and conflict situations "Elements of play inhere in almost all the interactions of his personae, in the form of games. Lovegames, wordgames, social games all imply the view that life itself is a game."[2]

The idea of play induces the sense of randomness and chance. In fact, the author, aware of the ideas of psychiatry of his time, brings up the issue of free will. It is clear that Schnitzler regards this as a false perception. People, as Schnitzler's works show, are predetermined. This does not, by way of consequence, lead to the denial of the individual's ability to shape one's own destiny. More precisely, this chimera must be continued because it is the only one that provides a purpose to man. This opposition between free will and man as a predetermined being seems to haunt the author, tipping the balance in favor of determinism. The characters seem to live the illusion that they can set their own path in life. When reality contradicts them, self-destruction occurs.

In 1897, Schnitzler seems to break out of his literary patterns and comes up with the play *Reigen*. At the turn of the century, the author seems eager to shock the audience with this play that discusses the sexual morals of ten characters and how intimate relationships transcend social class. Although Schnitzler originally wrote this play for a close circle of friends, in 1920 it was performed in the theater and, even after this long period, it aroused negative comments. Originally banned, the song is translated into English under the title *Hands Around*. The introduction of this play supports the modernity of the approach that the author has chosen to discuss freely, without taboos, the relationships between men and women because these short stories go beyond "the merely literary they are psychological studies of the interplay of sex, and keen analyses of the sophisticated modern soul, done with

[2] Susan C. Anderson, *Shattered Illusions. Gambling in Arthur Schnitzler's Prose Works*, in *Modern Austrian Literature*, Volume 5, No.3/ 4, 1992, p. 241

freedom and finesse. There are no grim questions of right and wrong in these subtle revelations of the merely human. In fact, one might call them studies in the etiquette of the liaison and all its nuances."[3]

In 1894, Schnitzler had published a play - *Der Wittwer* - which had as its theme the retrospection of a widower. And this material was the basis of the piece published in 1899 - *Die Gefährtin*. Robert, the widower, tries to overcome the tragedy of losing his wife Eveline by lying that she was unfaithful to him. Even more painful when you learn that this is not true. Pain begins where self-victimization stops.

The next drama, *Paracelsus* (1899), is a drastic change of theme. This time, Schnitzler places his action in the 16th century. At the border between the real and the fantastic, Paracelsus brings back the idea of hypnosis. The fascination with this subject comes after the death of the father when Schnitzler had auditory hallucinations. The fact that Sigmund Freud was his close acquaintance introduced him to the practice of hypnosis. Schnitzler even wrote a thesis on the hypnotic treatment of neuroses. He learned the technique of hypnosis with Theodor Meynert and practiced it in his own clinic. Freud would envy him for his extraordinary analytical ability. The defiance of society's cultural conventions and the death-love polarity on which much of Schnitzler's writing focuses make him a literary equal to Freud.

In The Green Cockatoo (1899), Schnitzler takes up the theme of hypnotism but, this time, it is no longer just a technique for probing consciousnesses, but represents the very irrationality of existence "fascinating dramatic trinity where the Weltschmerz of nineteenth-century Romanticism masquerades in Renaissance costumes while equipped at the same time with all the machinery of twentieth century psychology."[4] The action takes place in a sordid tavern in Paris in 1789 and the characters are actors who act out scenes of a crime for the enjoyment of the wealthy.

None but the Brave is perhaps Schnitzler's best-known short story. Written in just six days, the story was published in the *Neue Freie Presse* on December 25, 1900, and following the scandal the author was stripped of his reserve officer title by a military court. Written in the first person, in the form of the inner monologue of Lieutenant Gustl who was going to have a duel with a doctor who had accused the soldiers of cowardice. The short story lets the reader have direct access to the feelings of the protagonist. The combination of fear, impatience, boredom. The themes proposed by Schnitzler were some taboo at the time of writing the short story - the perspective on death, the lack of meaning of the duel, the false honor of the military, the appearances that people are so concerned with, the lack of emotional depth, the vices that hide under the cloak of honor, the inferiority which the character feels but disguises under the aspect of aggression but also society's ability to program individuals.

When exegetes refer to the style of Franz Kafka who used the third-person narrative perspective, *erlebte Rede*, we can associate this technique with Schnitzler. In fact, he used both the monologue and the third-person narration, which he preferred. If *erlebte Rede* is a much more intrusive and intimate technique, third-person narration offers detachment and objectivity. After the publication of the short story *None but the Brave*, Schnitzler publishes *Frau Bertha* (1900). This short story makes it possible to identify how Schnitzler uses "autobiographical material" adaptând "genre to the narrative situation."[5] At the same time,

[3] L. D. Edwards & F. L. Glaser, *Introduction* to *Hands Around. A Cycle of Ten Dialogues*, by Arthur Schnitzler, New York, Privately Printed for Subscribers, MCMXX, p. XII

[4] *Introduction* to *The green cockatoo and other plays* by Arthur Schnitzler, 1913, London, Gay & Hancock, p. VIII

[5] G.J. Weinberger, *Arthur Schnitzler's 'Frau Berta Garlan': Genesis and Genre*, in *Modern Austrian Literature*, vol. 25, no. 3/4, 1992, p. 53 JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24647987. Accessed 1 Aug. 2024.

the short story *Frau Bertha* is the moment when the author seems to be more and more interested in the inner mechanisms of women. Originally published in the literary journal *Neue Deutsche Rundschau* in Berlin in 1901, the short story was later published as a book. Bertha Garlan, a widow living in a small provincial town, meets her great love again - the violinist Emil Lindbach. During her three years of widowhood, Bertha supports herself by giving piano lessons and raising her son alone. Unfortunately, Bertha discovers that she can only have an affair with Emil and no hope of rebuilding a life.

Blind Geronimo and his Brother (1902) is a novel where Schnitzler explores the feeling of guilt. Geronimo is blind from a childhood game and Carlos is guilty. Without a stable home, the two brothers go from town to town, Geronimo plays the guitar and Carlos takes care of the practical things. The two have a relationship of codependence and the author reveals the fine mechanisms by which sentimental guilt can poison the human spirit. *Andreas Thameyer's Last Letter* is a short story published in 1902. The short story focuses on the farewell letter of the protagonist, Thameyer, who tries to explain his suicide. Unwilling to accept that his wife has cheated on him, Thameyer explains the birth of a black son as being caused by a scare his wife had when she saw the monkeys at the zoo. The suicidal person invokes aberrant reasons to justify the birth of this child. From superstitions, philosophical explanations, to magic and imagination, this useless prop of justifications only deepens the drama. Even if, initially, the letter has a justifying role of the suicidal act, it becomes a catharsis, revealing "suppressed or unconscious reasons."[6] The imminence of death has a liberating effect on consciences tormented by questions or turmoil.

In 1904, Arthur Schnitzler publishes a new play entitled *The Lonely Way*. This time the action takes place in Vienna at the beginning of the century. The central character is University Professor Wegrath. We find here the same mastery of the author to paint the sordid bourgeois world of deceptions, betrayal and selfishness. Except that this time the young children of the teacher - Felix and Johanna - are victims along with the adults. The way in which the author introduces us to the characters is, however, interesting. The author only reproduces, lets us understand the inner springs of his characters. The social classes that Schnitzler paints in most of his writings are those of the Viennese bourgeoisie of which he himself was a part. The attention to detail and the unique ability to immerse the reader in the atmosphere make the written page a faithful reproduction of reality. It is precisely because of this convention that Schnitzler's characters seem so real to us, with anxieties, exasperations and limitations like a real person.

As a premonition of the changes that would be brought about by the war, young Felix expresses his inability to adapt to a changing world "I have my doubts whether I could get anywhere as a lawyer or an engineer. And on the whole I feel a good deal better than ever before. Often it seems to me as if I hadn't been born at the right time. I think I should have come into the world while there was still so much of order left in it, that one could venture all sorts of things one couldn't possibly venture nowadays." Schnitzler proves his mastery in building traumatized consciences, in a pendulum between tragic and psychology, as Dostoevsky did. The difference between the Austrian doctor and the Russian writer is, however, an important one. In Schnitzler, pathologies of the mind such as murder or suicide do not occur. But like his Russian predecessor, the Austrian excels at analyzes of conscience with an almost professional subtlety.

Intermezzo (1904) is the story of a marriage between Amadeus Adams (conductor) and Cecilia (opera singer). The husband this time is much too sure of Cecilia and this security causes him to have possessive feelings towards her. He has even created an aphorism "If you

[6] Maja D. Reid, *Andreas Thameyers Letzter Brief and Der Letzte Brief Eines Literaten: Two Neglected Schnitzler Stories*, in *The German Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1972, p. 443 JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/403857. Accessed 1 Aug. 2024.

grasp me, you rasp me; If I know you, I own you." But, his wife wants emancipation and not the suffocating love and even authority of Amadeus. This play is a defense of a woman's right to decide her own destiny, to remain emotionally independent even in a marriage.

Arthur Schnitzler's next play, *Der Ruf des Lebens*, premiered in St. Petersburg in 1906. The play is tender through the sacrifice that 26-year-old Marie Moser makes to care for her immobilized father at bed, Captain Moser. Asked to marry, Marie gives up out of a sense of duty to her father. The drama unfolds when the daughter learns that the father was guilty of the desertion of an entire regiment. The devoted daughter poisons her father and runs away to her lover Max. But the lover ends up killed and the young woman realizes that she killed her father out of pure selfishness. *Countess Mizzi or the Family Reunion* (1907) brings up again the marriages of bourgeois families in which the woman does not have many options and a possible escapade is not allowed even if the husband can have extramarital affairs. Everything revolves around selfishness, arrogance and harmful social customs in which both partners fall victim. In fact, families are not reunited, but separated by a lot of taboos, customs and wrong beliefs that only separate those who have in common the most beautiful creation of society - the family.

Arthur Schnitzler publishes in 1908 his first novel, *The Road into the Open* in which Viennese society is explored. The main character, the composer Georg von Wergenthin-Recco, spends his time socializing in Viennese cafes and becomes involved in a relationship with a young woman from the lower classes of society - Anna Rosner. Even if, at first impression, the love story is central, the real heart of the novel is the description of the Viennese society grinded by anti-Semitism and frivolities.

Living Hours (1911) is a play in one act but it is, to some extent, different from that of the earlier plays. Two friends, Heinrich and Hausdorfer, share the loss of a loved one - their mother and their girlfriend, respectively. The fact that Heinrich had been abandoned by his father as a child had strengthened the bond with his mother. The drama of a child who understands that his father left him for another woman is as current as possible. The play makes us understand how the long series of betrayals we feel in childhood shapes our character later. Parents do not understand, or do not want to, how much influence their actions have on their children and their destiny.

Arthur Schnitzler also tried to write historical plays. And one of these is *Young Medardus* (1910) for which the author received the Raimund Prize. Although the starting point of the play is the commemoration of a century since the battle of Aspern-Essling in 1809, the author managed to paint the life of Vienna a century before the play starting from *Memories from my life* signed by Caroline Pilcher. The play's inspiration is Shakespearean because the hero ends tragically. In 1911, Arthur Schnitzler published the play *The Vast Domain* which has a detective core. Friedrich Hofreiter, tycoon in the electric light bulb industry, welcomes the pianist Korsakov to his villa, who shot himself shortly afterwards. Some suspect a love triangle between the tycoon, his wife, Genia, and the musician. As in other plays by the Austrian doctor, the impossibility of possessing the partner leads to loss of reason and clouding of judgment.

The bourgeois society described by Schnitzler is one dominated by the cult of pleasure, the exercise of force, the intoxication with the power that various people exercise over acquaintances or family. All these forces lead to the alienation of the individual, to the cutting of normal interpersonal ties and with the family, but also to a splitting of the personality, often with tragic consequences both for them and for the circle of close ones. The real theme of reflection that the author proposes to the readers is that of evil that is so easy to commit but which is impossible to repair. The author's medical studies had an enormous impact on the literature signed by him. It is evident that during his time studying medicine Schnitzler became interested in psychology, how the human mind succeeds, or rather often

fails, in relating to failures and dramas, and how it tries to find false exits from crisis situations. All these fine analyses could not have been done without the author having a basic medical culture. The irony that Schnitzler manages to carefully hide in his works is given precisely by the antagonism between the apparent luxury of the described society and the lack of real values. A swagger that can attract at first sight reveals a lack of substance, a vanity fair.

Professor Bernhardi (1912) is the first play in which the main character is a doctor of Jewish origin. Professor Bernhardi, together with Professor Tugendvetter and Professor Cyprian, founded the Elizabethinum Medical Institution. After 15 years, the hospital and clinic are rated as the best in Vienna and the founder is also the president of this institution. The drama occurs when a patient with septicemia following an abortion dies. Doctor Bernhardi, a supporter of science, forbids Father Reder to confess the patient on her deathbed. While the two argue, the patient dies. This is picked up by the media which incites people to antisemitism. The profession finds itself in a strange situation where friends leave him to avoid scandal and to maintain his privileges and he is offered help from right-wing parties who want to speculate on the moment for political interest. Following the trial in which he is accused, doctor Bernhardi is fired from the clinic, has served two months in prison and loses his right to practice medicine.

Professor Bernhardi is the first play in which Arthur Schnitzler uses a Jewish doctor character. As an alter ego of the author, the crisis in which Bernhardi finds himself seems to be a wake-up call to the slippages taking place in Viennese society. At the same time, it is the only play that puts the action in a professional context and that is based on a much higher stake than an individual one. Arthur Schnitzler knew best the medical environment full of envy, false academic pretensions and full of the desire to get ahead by any means. But the author does not limit himself to describing this professional framework of false values, but widens it to the entire society dominated by hatred and resentment towards the Jews. Manipulation seems to be at home, a minority uses every opportunity to rise politically, defending their interests at the cost of a medical personality's career. Truth and objective Reality no longer represent anything in front of political interests. The author's medical career helped him enormously in building the most realistic action and setting of this play that leaves the paradigm the reader was used to.

In 1917, Arthur Schnitzler publishes a collection of plays entitled *Comedies of Words and Other Plays* which brings together five literary works - *The Hour of Recognition, The Big Scene, The Festival of Bacchus, Literature, His Helpmate*. The action in The Comedy of Seduction (1924) takes place before the First World War, in 1914, and the characters, as the author used to tell us, are aristocrats and artists. The frivolity of Max and Duchess Aurelie is, in fact, an attempt by the characters to find themselves, it is the drama of souls unable to feel true love seeking refuge in escapades and superficial concerns. Suicidal ideas also return in this play, but they are a metaphor for the entire society that is collapsing. It must be said, however, that Schnitzler faced suicide in his personal life. His daughter committed suicide and the author remained inconsolable for the rest of his life.

Arthur Schnitzler, a neophyte of literature, has the merit of having brought to the public a subtle analysis of the human soul, an examination of human relations. And all this would not have been possible without his medical training, to which the author is indebted. The Viennese doctor arouses his reader to a thorough investigation not only of the abysses of the human being but also of the springs by which society conditions its citizens, limits them and programs them almost imperceptibly “As long as men and women will continue to be intrigued by the elusive enigma of life, by subtle states of the soul, by problems of the subliminal self, so long, we may venture to predict, will the plays of Arthur Schnitzler compel

attention from the truly great audiences of the world which, as Whitman realized, are the indispensable abettors of progress in every art."[7]

The studies and medical practice that Schnitzler accumulated before deciding to become a writer were vital in his evolution as a man of letters. at the basis of the functioning of the entire society are the pillars on which the entire literary construct of the Viennese doctor rests "It is significant and infinitely suggestive along the path of a sound appreciation and appraisal of the man. It is the key, without doubt, to a proper and final under standing of his work in that it helps to throw light on his tenderness and on that peculiar incisive dissection of human yearnings and the daily stock of human foibles standing out on every page of his novels, tales and plays ; in short, those poignant diagnoses of the soul, instinct rather than patent in everything he has set his hand to, which are as inexorable as they are expert. This fact, as I have indicated, provides the touchstone to his writings which, quite possibly, we would otherwise miss."[8] Contemporary with the prose writer Hermann Bahr and librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler breathed new life into Viennese literature and laid the foundations for new literary approaches.

Therese: The Chronicle of a Woman's Life (1928) is the sad story of a poor young woman who gives birth to an illegitimate child-Franz. When, in the end, she meets a Jewish businessman willing to lift her out of poverty, Therese experiences the drama of his death.

The two major themes on which the Austrian author dwelled were the relations between the two sexes and the love-death relationship. Even though he was a neophyte of writing, Schnitzler efficiently used stream-of-consciousness techniques, being one of the first Austrian authors to use this way of observing the emotional evolution of his characters. The friendship with the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmud Freud, helped Schnitzler to absorb in literary form some of the psychoanalyst's most innovative ideas about dreams and the subconscious. the literary landscape of Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century. The characters experience the traumas through flashbacks and the reader can witness them through the monologue that the protagonists carry out. The translation from the medical study of deviations to the literary analysis of these emotional states places Schnitzler at the forefront of the Austrian modernist literary movement "From this early interest in hypnosis and suggestion, Schnitzler naturally became interested in dreams and visions, prophecies, and telepathy-all from literary point of view."[9]

[7] Arthur Schnitzler, translation in English by Pierre Loving, *Introduction to Comedies of Words and Other Plays*, Stewart & Kidd Company, Harvard University, 1917, p, VIII

[8] Idem, pp, IX-X

[9] Theodor W. Alexander, *From the Scientific to the Supernatural in Schnitzler*, in *The South Central Bulletin*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1971, p. 164 JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/3188982. Accessed 1 Aug. 2024.

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