

Exploration of German Critical Realism Literature in the 19th Century

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German national character is the ideological embodiment of the productive forces and production relations of the German national society. It has specific manifestations at a specific historical stage, and at the same time, it has been continuously inherited and developed throughout the process of German history. Investigating the history of the German nation, there has always been a contradiction between rationality and blind obedience, weakness and brutality in its national character. This contradiction is also reflected in the realist literature of the 19th century. Taking the literary works produced in the historical background of Germany in the 19th century as an example, the article expounds the realism of German literary works in the 19th century.

Keywords: German critical realism, 19th century literary works, Theodor Storm, Theodor Fontane, Heinrich Heine

Background of Realism Literature in the 19th Century

Critical realism literature refers to “A literary trend of thought that began to dominate in European literature in 1830s”. The so-called “literary trend of thought” refers to a certain ideological tendency and trend formed in literature with economic change and social development in a certain historical period. Every historical period often has a dominant literary trend of thought. For example, in the history of modern European and American literature, since the Renaissance, its bourgeois literature has produced five major literary trends of thought in different periods. This is: the humanistic literature centered on “humanism” opposing theocracy in the Renaissance (14th-16th century); Classical literature produced in the 17th century, which aims at obeying the royal power and paying attention to the rational principle of standardization; Enlightenment literature that appeared in the 18th century with the historical task of publicizing and enlightening the people; From the end of 18th century to the beginning of 19th century, romantic literature came into being, which was characterized by opposing the rational principle of classicism and emphasizing the expression of writers’ subjective feelings. By the 1930s, critical realism literature, which is characterized by exposing and criticizing the real society, came into being.

The German bourgeois revolution failed in 1848. The German Revolution of 1848-1849 was a typical bourgeois revolution that was unfinished and abandoned halfway. The democratic demands put forward during the revolution have not been realized, and the basic task of unifying Germany has not been completed. In the 1850s and 1960s, German capitalism developed greatly, but the great bourgeoisie increasingly colluded with feudal nobles and relied more on feudal aristocracy to achieve German reunification. They pinned the hope of

unity on the Prussian dynasty. In 1871, Junker, Otto von Bismarck reunified Germany and established the German Empire; at the same time, the German workers' movement flourished. Otto von Bismarck brutally suppressed the workers' movement.

German literature in this period developed in this contradictory and complex situation. Schopenhauer's pessimism and mystic philosophy had a great influence on the development of German realist literature. However, the literature of that period avoided the major problems of reality and was keen on describing the trivialities and quiet pastoral life in front of us, which is the so-called "poetic realism". From 1830 to 1848, German literature was in the early stage of critical realism, and revolutionary democratic literature emerged. Since the 1830s, on the one hand, there have been revolutionary democratic writers Heine and Büchner in the history of German literature. On the other hand, there have been so-called "1848 poets" shouting for bourgeois revolution, and at the same time, there are the earliest representative works of critical realist writers. Important critical realist writers in Germany during this period include, for example, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Storm, Theodor Fontane, and so on (Wu, 2008).

The Main Representative Works in the Context of This Era

Outstanding critical realist writers attach great importance to truly and profoundly reproducing typical characters in typical environments in their works, expanding the scope of truly describing real life, and reaching the peak of literary and artistic development in the capitalist era.

Heinrich Heine is an important critic of German literature in the 19th century. He is a key figure in the history of German literature. Heine was not only a poet of poetry, but also of a wide range of genres. His prose and travelogues are also very famous. His particular style of poetry has attracted readers from all over the world, and his works have been translated into many languages. His poems are considered classics. His poetry not only inherited romanticism, but also exhibited certain traits of symbolism. His works reveal social malpractice with irony and humor, and have strong realistic criticism. Heine's poems and essays often reveal feudalism, religious hypocrisy and social oppression in satirical ways. For example, his criticism of Prussian autocracy runs through many works. His masterpiece *Germany, A winter's fairy tale* exposes social contradictions through fables and shows the tendency of critical realism. With the background of his journey back to Germany as an exile, the poet exposes the decay of Prussian military rule, religious imprisonment and feudal system through the narrative intertwined with dreams and reality. He describes Cologne Cathedral as a "spiritual bastille" and criticizes autocratic oppression with images, such as black hawk and red beard emperor. The poem consists of 27 chapters, and the author's journey through Aachen, Cologne, Hagen, Minden and other cities when he returned to Germany from France to visit relatives in 1843 is the main narrative line. Through dreams, fantasies and fairy tales, the works depict the backward appearance of Germany in social politics, economy, and culture under Prussian rule (Reiss, 1959).

Another Work of Heinrich Heine is *Beihai Collection*. *Problem* and *Storm* in *Beihai Collection* explore the interweaving of natural images and humanistic feelings in Heine's poems by using text close reading. It reveals the dual functions of natural images in poetry: on the one hand, it is the emotional projection of romanticism, and on the other hand, it is the metaphor of pre-symbolism. Humanistic feelings also interact with natural images through emotions. Heine shows romantic emotional expression and the use of pre-symbolic metaphors in his work. Natural images come from nature and are the emotion of the author through the description of natural elements in literary works. Natural images are an indispensable part of literary works and a common means of

artistic expression in literary works. Natural images come from nature and are the emotion of the author through the description of natural elements in literary works. Natural images are an indispensable part of literary works and a common means of artistic expression in literary works. In Heine's poetry, there are a variety of images, but the analysis of natural images is crucial. The nature pictures include plant pictures, animal pictures, natural landscapes, etc. Natural images, such as the sea, the moon, etc. appear several times in the poems. Through the representation of natural landscapes and their symbolic images, Heine allows the original natural elements to carry the inner emotional message and the deep symbolic meaning of the author. In Heine's poems, the natural image of the sea appears several times in his poetry collection *Nordsee Poems*. Over time, the symbolism of the sea has also changed. For example, the natural image of the sea contains several levels of symbolism that contain the emotions of different authors. As a romantic poet, Heine's poetry is characterized by obvious romantic traits. A large number of nature pictures appear in this collection of poems, which provide rich research material for the analysis of nature pictures in Heine's poetry in this subsection. Heine conveys to his poem question the nature and meaning of human existence at the core of Romanticism through natural pictorial worlds, such as the sea, the starry sky, and the waves. Heine often uses images in his poems to convey his ideological connotation. Heine often used rhetorical means to make the expression of humanistic feelings more vivid (Schmitz, 2004).

German poetic realist writer Theodor Storm mainly writes novella and is also a lyric poet. Storm's realist tendencies are more reflected in his post-production. He is deeply influenced by romantic writers, so the lyrical nature of romanticism has become one of his creative characteristics.

The White Horse Knight is a late masterpiece of the 19th century German realist writer Theodor Storm. It was published in April 1888, taking the Frisland region of Northern Germany as the location of the story, around the life of Hauke Haien, the captain of the dike, unfolds. The novel adopts a classic box-shaped structure, and three narrators tell the story of the protagonist Hawker: as a teenager, Hawker was quiet and obsessed with mathematics and calculation, hoping that one day he could rebuild the precarious old dike to better protect his village; the young Hawk's mathematics can be appreciated by the dike chief, and the latter He married his daughter Elk to Hawk, and Hawk became the new dam leader. Since then, he has been committed to the renovation of the seawall to protect the village land from the invasion of the tide. However, these construction concepts have been resisted by residents. Hawke's efforts were finally lost by a big storm. The old dam was washed away, and Hawke watched his wife and daughter being swallowed up by the tide. In desperation, he rode a white horse into the surging flood. Since then, it has been said that every stormy night, you can bump into a ghost rider riding a white horse near the dike. It shows the disagreement and conflict between human civilization and primitive natural forces, individuals and groups, and scientific rationality and traditional customs (Wu, 2010).

The first real master of German critical realism was Theodor Fontane. He began his literary career by writing poetry. First, he was famous for writing narrative poems, and then as a journalist, he wrote some travel impressions. Before the *Storm* is Fontane's first long story. He extensively describes the lives of nobles, citizens, and peasants in Brandenburg on the eve of the Liberation War of 1812-1813. The work consists of many episodes, and the relationship between the episodes is relaxed, so he does not have the typical style and structural characteristics of Fontane's future works. *Lost and Chaos* is a one-step novel about the reality of 1880 and a "contemporary novel" of Fontana's life. It tells the love story of a teenager of aristocratic origin and a girl of civilian origin. This pair of men and women eventually succumbed to the prejudice and pressure of society and was forced to put their lives on the social trajectory at that time. The heroine Reiner is the adopted daughter of the washerwoman. Reiner was simple, beautiful, smart, and insightful. When he was rowing, he met the young

baron-lieutenant officer Bhutto von-Rien Ecker. The two fell in love at first sight and quickly fell in love. Bhutto felt that it was natural to be with her, without the same affections in the noble salon. Although Reiner is uneducated, Bhutto believes that her sincere feelings for him are better than anything else. They spent a summer of sincere love with each other. After Bhutto returned to his aristocratic society, Butto's parents asked Bhutto to marry Miss Kate for economic and local considerations. After a painful inner struggle, Bhutto finally succumbed to the norms of reality. Reiner knew that their summer happiness could not last long, and finally followed the society and married a worker who was much older than him. Both men and women believe that the concept of door valves and social pressure is much stronger than the power of love between them. They cannot survive against the society at that time, so they can only sacrifice their happiness. Vontana's criticism of society is hidden in his superficial recognition of this social concept.

The novella *Stina* also writes the same theme. *Stina* is more tragic than *Lost and Chaos*. The heroine of this novel has a very calm attitude towards reality without any illusions. In *Stina*, *Stina* rejects the plan of noble youth to elope to the Americas. These two women are not the image of the rebel, but the image of the bearer. Tolerance is the characteristic of the positive characters in Fontana's works. *Effie Blister* is Fontane's best novel. It deserves its ideological depth and artistic achievements as a world masterpiece (Yu, 2006). Effie's image can be included in the most touching women's gallery in world literature. Fontana was the main critical realist writer in Germany at the end of the 19th century. He pioneered German critical realism in the 20th century. At the turn of the 19-20 world, with the complexity and diversity of social contradictions, various trends of thought have emerged in literature, and there are also the rise and fall, follow-up, and coexistence of various schools in literature. In this way, German literature entered a more complex new period of development at the turn of the 19th-20th century.

Conclusion

As a literary trend of thought, critical realism literature has its own important characteristics in its creative method, that is, with a realistic attitude, it exposes the evil phenomena of feudal system and capitalist society, and describes the inevitable decline of aristocratic class and the rise and decline of bourgeoisie. It has shaped many typical noble and bourgeois figures, showing the social customs and history at that time. As a manifestation of German national character in the cultural field, it is of practical significance to examine the history and inheritance of German literature. Through the macro- and micro-levels, that is, the social and cultural background and the works of specific writers, and the study of the German national character reflected in the realistic literature of the 19th century, it can be found that under the social conditions at that time, German literature played a real role in criticizing and thoroughly criticizing and abandoning the weaknesses in national character.

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