

DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

52





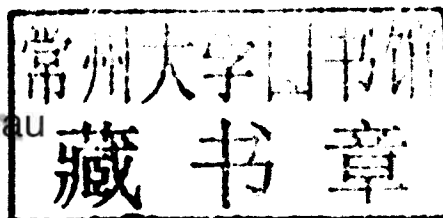
DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 52

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



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Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

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By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately three to five entries are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to a playwright's work, an individual play, or a literary topic pertinent to the study of drama. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics whose work has been translated into English. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the playwright most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Also located here are any name variations under which a playwright wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises plays and theoretical works about drama by the author. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated

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- Essays offering **overviews of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; usually, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All plays and theoretical works about drama by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
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- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Each volume of *DC* contains a **Title Index** that lists in alphabetical order the individual plays and theoretical works about drama discussed in the criticism contained in the volume. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English translations of titles published in other languages and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing. All titles reviewed in *DC* and in the other Literary Criticism Series can be found online in the Gale Literary Index.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style or University of Chicago Press style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Rocha, Mark William. "Black Madness in August Wilson's 'Down the Line' Cycle." *Madness in Drama*. Ed. James Redmond. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 191-201. Rpt. in *Drama Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 31. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 229-35. Print.

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Gerhart Hauptmann

1862-1946

(Born Gerhard Johann Robert Hauptmann) German playwright, novelist, novella and short-story writer, poet, non-fiction writer, and memoirist.

The following entry provides criticism of Hauptmann's life and dramatic works. For additional information about Hauptmann, see *DC*, Volume 34.

INTRODUCTION

Widely regarded as the preeminent German dramatist of his era, Gerhart Hauptmann is best known as the most successful practitioner of German Naturalism, a literary mode concerned with the depiction of the harsh, often brutal realities of lower-class German life. Although it was to some degree inspired by Realism, which emphasized verisimilitude and the accurate reproduction of reality, Naturalism, as practiced by Hauptmann and the French novelist Émile Zola, differed in its tendency to focus on proletarian rather than bourgeois protagonists and in its thoroughgoing bleakness. Naturalists tended to emphasize the darker aspects of everyday life and to present society as a squalid, deterministic system of exploitation and coercion. Although Naturalism spans a wide variety of literary genres, in its German incarnation, it is generally regarded as having flourished most strongly within the theater, with Hauptmann's work representing the culmination of the movement. Following the decline of German Naturalism around the turn of the twentieth century, Hauptmann began to diversify into other literary modes, often incorporating elements of Romanticism and Symbolism into his plays. Although none of this subsequent work achieved the lasting fame of his early Naturalistic plays—which remain the principal foundation of his reputation as a major writer—it was generally well received and helped to solidify his status as one of the elder statesmen of German letters. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1912.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Hauptmann was born Gerhard Johann Robert (at birth his first name was spelled with a final “d”) on 15 November 1862, the fourth child of Robert and Marie Hauptmann, in Ober-Salzbrunn, a small town in the German province of Silesia, an area that following World War II is mainly in Poland. His father ran a spa hotel, and Hauptmann was raised there, often in the care of a Prussian nursemaid who was a severe disciplinarian. He entered secondary

school in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland) in 1874 and wrote his earliest extant poems the following year. His father lost his hotel to creditors in 1877, and Hauptmann worked briefly as an agricultural trainee the following year, before embarking on a study of sculpture. In 1881, he became engaged to Marie Thienemann, whom he married in 1885, and her family funded his artistic ambitions. That support allowed Hauptmann to study briefly at the University of Berlin, where he developed a serious interest in pursuing a literary career.

Once established with his wife in the Berlin suburb of Erkner, Hauptmann was introduced to Naturalism, the key aesthetic underlying his most important works. In 1887, he joined the self-consciously radical literary group *Durch* (meaning “through”) and moved decisively into the dramatic arts with the 1889 premiere of *Vor Sonnenaufgang* (published as *Before Dawn*). Influenced by the notion of “consistent realism” as developed by *Durch* members Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf, the play was produced under the management of Berlin's Freie Bühne, or free-stage society, which, because it depended on the subscriptions of members, avoided both police censorship and the persuasion of profit. The success of Hauptmann's controversial Naturalist classic led to the performance and publication of further plays: *Das Friedensfest* (1890; published as *The Coming of Peace*); *Einsame Menschen* (1891; published as *Lonely Lives*); and, most important, *Die Weber* (1892; published as *The Weavers*). Dramatizing the 1844 uprising of a band of wretched Silesian craftsmen, *The Weavers* came under the close scrutiny of the censor, who objected to the potentially incendiary socialist material it contained. Hauptmann also published his first major prose work at this time, the 1892 novella *Bahnwärter Thiel* (published as *Flagman Thiel*), now considered a centerpiece of German Naturalism.

As Hauptmann was experiencing great success with his plays, his marriage was damaged irreparably by his association with the actress Margarete Marschalk, begun in 1893, which produced an illegitimate son. Hauptmann divorced Marie and married Margarete in 1904. During this period, he wrote a series of classic plays, some departing from the Naturalist aesthetic, which led to his recognition as the leading German dramatist of his time. During the years prior to World War I, he published the novel *Der Narr in Christo Emanuel Quint* (1910; published as *The Fool in Christ Emanuel Quint*). Two years later, he completed a second novel, *Atlantis*, and became a Nobel laureate.

After the war, Hauptmann was a prominent cultural icon and literary figure, serving as a commentator and a public speaker during Germany's Weimar Republic years. Although he had already made his most important contributions to the literary canon, he continued to produce a huge volume of diverse works, including plays, novels, short stories, poetry, essays, memoirs, translations, and criticism. After Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party took power in 1933, Hauptmann made the controversial decision to remain in Germany. His position under the Nazis was ambiguous, and he retreated from public life, accused of being a Nazi puppet and at the same time viewed as suspect by the Nazis. During World War II, he became increasingly isolated and uncertain in his "internal exile." Hauptmann died on 6 June 1946. The German government maintains Hauptmann museums in Erkner, a suburb of Berlin where he began his career as a dramatist, and in Kloster, where he died.

MAJOR DRAMATIC WORKS

Hauptmann gained near-instant notoriety within German drama with the publication and subsequent theatrical premiere of *Before Dawn*, his first major work. Publicly denounced by various conservative public figures for its perceived obscenity and leftist political orientation, the play tells the sordid story of the moral degeneration of the Krauses, a peasant family who come into unexpected wealth when coal is discovered on their property. The Krauses' hereditary alcoholism, a condition exacerbated by the sudden influx of disposable income, causes them to descend into utter depravity. Meanwhile, Alfred Loth, an idealistic but fanatical social reformer, arrives on their farm and falls in love with Helene, seemingly the only decent member of the family. However, Loth is deeply preoccupied with the importance of passing on only incorrupt genes to future generations, and upon finding out about the family's alcoholic tendencies, he abandons Helene, who commits suicide.

The grim outlook and socialist themes of *Before Dawn* are also central to Hauptmann's most frequently staged play, *The Weavers*. An ensemble piece dramatizing a real-life uprising in 1844 by a group of exploited Silesian textile workers, the play moves freely from character to character, emphasizing the struggles faced by the weavers as a group rather than focusing on the experiences of individual members. The play concludes with the revolt still ongoing and with many of its participants optimistic about its outcome. In reality, however, the rebellion was ultimately crushed, and the audience's knowledge of this fact lends the play an undertone of fatalism highly characteristic of much Naturalist literature.

Not all of Hauptmann's Naturalist plays are bleak or tragic. *Der Biberpelz* (1893; may be translated as *The Beaver Coat*) humorously portrays the adventures of Frau Wolff, a washerwoman who helps maintain her family's financial

solvency by poaching and stealing from the wealthy. The local authorities, meanwhile, are too preoccupied with persecuting socialists—including one character based on Hauptmann himself—to deal with the rash of thievery occurring on their watch. Like *The Weavers*, the play encountered some initial trouble with censors, who ultimately permitted its performance after deciding that it was too boring to remain in theaters for long. In fact, it became one of the most-often produced plays in German theatrical history, though a darker, tragicomic sequel, *Der rote Hahn* (1901; may be translated as *The Red Rooster*) failed to replicate its success.

As his career progressed, Hauptmann began to experiment with other literary styles and approaches—particularly Romanticism—though many of the themes of his early Naturalist work remained evident. A growing interest in fantastic and mythic content may be discerned in plays such as *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* (1893; published as *Hannele*), which takes place partly in an angelic dreamworld existing in the mind of a freezing and poverty-stricken young girl, and *Die versunkene Glocke* (1896; published as *The Sunken Bell*), a fairy tale about a bellfounder whose struggles exemplify the dilemmas inherent in the act of artistic creation. Likewise, Hauptmann's growing interest in pagan mythology is exhibited in one of his last major works, *Die Atriden-Tetralogie* (1949; may be translated as *The House of Atreus Tetralogy*), a four-play cycle inspired by Greek legend and by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's never-realized plan to write a sequel to his play *Iphigenie in Tauris* (1787).

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Hauptmann was a popular and intensely scrutinized playwright from the beginning of his dramatic career, though much of the attention his work received was by no means positive. Many German critics, audiences, and politicians were disgusted by what they perceived as the gross immorality of his early plays. Others, however, championed him as Germany's most distinguished practitioner of Naturalist literature—a judgment largely validated by the work of later scholars—and despite the divisive nature of his output, his plays generally attracted large audiences. His Nobel Prize brought him sustained critical attention outside of Germany and consolidated his reputation as an eminent modern European dramatist. His move away from strict Naturalism as his career progressed did not always meet with approval, and his work's popularity began to fade in the decades following his death, but his importance within German theatrical history is widely acknowledged.

Much critical writing on Hauptmann is devoted to situating his work within the context of literary history, often in terms of his status as a Naturalist author. In his two-part essay "The Naturalistic Plays of Gerhart Hauptmann," published in 1906 and 1907, Josef Wiehr provided a long and detailed analysis of Hauptmann's Naturalist output, analyzing the

plots, themes, strengths, and weaknesses of his plays before concluding that although Hauptmann represents the apex of the German Naturalist movement, his work does not realize the full potential of German drama. Sigfrid Hoefert (2002) examined the film adaptations of Hauptmann's most famous Naturalist dramas, considering how the medium of film altered the presentation of the works.

Scholars have also considered Hauptmann in relation to other writers. Frederick W. J. Heuser (1920) discussed the personal and literary relationship between Hauptmann and the German playwright Frank Wedekind, and Allen W. Porterfield (1937) posited that the dramatist and poet Karl Immermann was a possible influence on Hauptmann's work. Likewise, K. M. Gunvaldsen (1941) compared the thematic portrayal of the pursuit of artistic freedom in *The Sunken Bell* to that in Henrik Ibsen's 1892 play *The Master Builder*, and Charles H. Moore (1958) disputed the notion that *The Weavers* was directly inspired by Zola's 1885 novel *Germinal*. Herbert W. Reichert (1961) contrasted Frau Wolff, as portrayed in *The Beaver Coat*, with the superficially similar title character of Bertolt Brecht's 1941 play *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Many scholars have discussed the ramifications of Hauptmann's transformative reworking of preexisting textual or mythological material. Walter A. Reichart (1932) scrutinized the changes made to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600) in Hauptmann's 1927 translation and adaptation of that play, and Philip Mellen (1982; see Further Reading) examined the influence of the biblical parable of the sower on *Before Dawn*. Raleigh Whiting (1993) argued that Hauptmann took a "provocative turn from the patriarchal tradition" in *Lonely Lives*, portraying the character Anna Mahr in a way that suggests an "essentially constructive" view of female emancipation. Rudolf Kayser (1953) attributed Hauptmann's epic depiction of the Greek mythological figure of Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, in *The House of Atreus Tetralogy* to his affinity for the culture of preclassical Greek antiquity. Reichart (1948), also considering the Iphigenia plays, drew connections between their themes and Hauptmann's own preoccupations, particularly regarding World War II, at the time he composed them.

Other commentators have focused on how Hauptmann's work has been received, as in Heuser's 1937 survey of the developing body of Hauptmann scholarship. Helen Emerson (1948) evaluated Charles Henry Meltzer's English translations of *Hannele* and *The Sunken Bell* and claimed that they fail to do justice to the original texts. Reichart (1929) provided an overview of Hauptmann's output prior to *Before Dawn*, arguing that this early work provides important insight into the characteristic themes of his later writings.

James Overholtzer

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Die Weber: Schauspiel aus den vierziger Jahren [published as *The Weavers*]. Neues Theater, Berlin. 26 Feb. 1893. Berlin: Fischer, 1892.

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*This work was completed posthumously by Carl Zuckmayer.

†Includes the novella *Bahnwärter Thiel* [published as *Flagman Thiel*].

‡This work was completed posthumously by Frank Thiess.

CRITICISM

Josef Wiehr (essay date 1906)

SOURCE: Wiehr, Josef. "The Naturalistic Plays of Gerhart Hauptmann." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 6.1 (1906): 1-71. Print.

[In the following essay, Wiehr provides a detailed overview of Hauptmann's career as an author of Naturalist drama, summarizing the plots and explicating the themes of several of his plays—including *Before Dawn*, *The Coming of Peace*, and *The Weavers*—and evaluating his success as a dramatist.]

The recent naturalistic movement in European literature had already reached the high water mark, when it gained a foothold and quickly attained a high degree of perfection in Germany. It did not receive general recognition; but the foremost representative of the new style among the German authors, Gerhart Hauptmann, has, in spite of various digressions and the violent opposition which he met, always returned to naturalism and has above all others developed and perfected this new artistic form, especially in the domain of dramatic art. It was not during the last decades of the nineteenth century, that naturalism first made its appearance in literature, but naturalism is not always the same. In the first place all beginnings of artistic productivity must of necessity be naturalistic, since at that stage there are no aesthetic rules to guide the artist; also among nations which have already attained a high degree of artistic culture, we find not infrequently isolated individuals, who, indeed, possess the ability and the desire to create works of art, but who have either no access at all, or only insufficient access, to the store-houses of the past and whose works therefore are apt to be naturalistic. A striking instance of this sort is Jeremias Gotthelf, well known for his tales of Swiss country life. Lastly, we meet naturalism as a re-action against the rigid uniformity of empty and lifeless conventionality in art. To this latter class belongs the movement, which even at the present day has not yet completely died out. It differs, however, widely from all previous revolts of a similar character, and many deny to the naturalism of Zola and Hauptmann the name of art. Still naturalism is art, just as well as idealism or realism; whatever objections may be made to it. It would lead us too far, here to outline the recent controversy between the naturalists and their opponents; things remain moreover unchanged, at least as far as an agreement between the contending parties is concerned. Hauptmann has not, himself, set forth any new theory of art, nor was he the originator of the naturalistic movement in Germany. He rather followed in the wake of Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf; at the beginning of his career professing himself

indirectly a supporter of their creed. Holz, the theorist of the naturalistic school, maintaining that our present system of aesthetics has been erected upon wrong foundations, and that it therefore is without any value whatsoever, has imposed upon himself the task of supplying the world with at least a basis for a new science of aesthetics, but has surely failed in the attempt. Permeated by the scientific spirit of the age, nothing short of the exactness of natural science will do for him, and accordingly he treats aesthetics as a social science. From the analysis of a single, and most simple case, he announces the following as the fundamental truth of aesthetics: 'Art has the tendency to be nature again. Art becomes nature to a degree determined by the conditions of reproduction and the manner in which they prevail in each specific case.' It is, according to him, the sole purpose of aesthetics to discover and formulate the natural laws or tendencies underlying all artistic activity, so that the artist through the knowledge thus obtained may be enabled to put himself into harmony with these natural tendencies, and so achieve a higher degree of perfection. The contention that art has the tendency to become nature again takes no account of the artist who consciously and intentionally idealises nature in his works; or we must regard, not only the fashion in art at that particular period, education and training of the artist, and the influence of his associates upon him, but above all the idiosyncracies of the artist, as conditions of reproduction. From the arguments of Holz it appears, moreover, that the most perfect likeness of a natural object should rank highest as a work of art. The artist, having once comprehended the intent of nature, should choose those materials, and that method of forming them which will produce the most perfect result. Holz cannot deny to him the privilege of choosing any sort of material, and any manner of treatment whatsoever. But then a wax-figure of the degree of perfection now attainable would rank higher as work of art than a similar marble figure; for the former is beyond dispute nearer to nature than the latter. If we accept the views of Holz, we have no grounds on which to exclude photographs, moving pictures, and the like, from the realm of fine arts, no matter what the manner of their production. Holz tries to refute this argument by pointing out what effect it would have, if we should attach to a marble, or plaster of Paris statue a mustache of natural hair. But this argument is not at all to the point. Our objections to such a procedure result simply from the incongruity existing between the two materials in question, and the consequent disillusion. The fact is that any true work of art must contain something over and above external nature, something which has been born in the imagination of the artist.

The radical views and sweeping statements of Holz have certainly in no inconsiderable degree been the cause of the violent polemics directed against naturalism, and against Hauptmann, who, as mentioned before, subscribed at the beginning of his career indirectly to the views of Arno Holz. In the course of this discussion, many and serious charges have been preferred against naturalism in general, and the dramas of Hauptmann in particular. At the head