

Article

A Genealogy of XIXth Century French Criticism—Typology, Physiology and Genealogy in Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Nietzsche

Arnaud Sorosina 

Centre d'Histoire des Philosophies Modernes (HiPhiMo), Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne University,
75231 Paris, France; Arnaud.sorosina@yahoo.fr

Abstract: The genealogical paradigm was renewed in French literary criticism in the XIXth Century. The problem it encounters is the following: on the one hand, to reduce the specificity of literary and artistic genius within natural or historical laws; on the other hand, being too fascinated by the uniqueness of genius, so that any historical explanation of the latter could be attempted. Literary genealogy in France is aimed at escaping the antithesis between reductionist naturalism and ahistorical romanticism. First approached through both a biographical and naturalistic method by Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve during the first half of the century, it turns into a more physiological and Darwinian perspective through Hippolyte Taine's historiography. Seen from Nietzsche's European point of view, this way of proceeding lacks self-examination, because every good genealogy must become aware of the values it conveys.

Keywords: literary criticism; genius; evolutionism; typology; positivism



Citation: Sorosina, Arnaud. 2021. A Genealogy of XIXth Century French Criticism—Typology, Physiology and Genealogy in Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Nietzsche. *Genealogy* 5: 73. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030073>

Received: 14 May 2021

Accepted: 30 July 2021

Published: 10 August 2021

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2021 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

1.1. *Genealogical Discourses in the XIXth Century: A Quick Cultural Genealogy in the XIXth Century*

At the time of the “death of God”, the XIXth century not only was that of evolutionism, historical science and philosophies of history, it was also the century of the reorganization of the genealogical discourse: new practices and methods appeared that were foreign to the nobiliary perspective of the French “Ancien Régime”. Indeed, whereas the old genealogical paradigm was the blood-related aristocratic one, that found its way of legitimation in the familial pedigree, a new type of genealogy emerged after the French Revolution. Contrary to the antique *archeo*-logical mythology, where the axiological mythification of the origin was to be found in all the traditional conceptions of time, the naturalization of cultural and natural history transforms completely the notion of time, particularly throughout the perspective of evolution. Furthermore, the disappearance of the “Ancien Régime” in France and the emergence of the democratic political paradigm are seen by many historians and philosophers, since Alexis de Tocqueville, as essential factors of the horizontalization of social relations. In a global perspective, the process of secularization in XIXth century Europe gives the feeling, for many intellectuals and scholars, that the old transcendences are falling, whether they were specifically religious or simply axiological (see for example [Gauchet \(1985\)](#)).

One could think that the *tabula rasa* spirit, proper to the French Revolution, would have uprooted the regard towards tradition, and that post-revolutionary democracy would have led to a voluntarist and a historical conception of politics, leading to the disappearance of filiation mindset, and with it, the idea of the respectability of what is ancestral (As Sainte-Beuve puts it about Vauvenargues, blood-related genealogy is to be considered “as an institution that was devoted to the merit and the virtue of the ancestors, imposing its

legacy to its descendants” (Causeries du lundi, t. 3, p. 125, all translations from the French are ours)).

Actually, far from disappearing, the genealogical way of thinking is experiencing an upsurge. Even if it is in a way that is very different from the old blood-related genealogy, it cannot be doubted that it benefits some of its functions (it is true that the nobiliary ideology survives itself as a fantasy. Indeed, as Sainte-Beuve observes: “One of this century’s diseases, dating from a long time ago, is, in all, to ennoble as much as we can, and to pretend to be what we are not”. (Sainte-Beuve 1876, p. 114)).

Paradoxically then, the new genealogical paradigm that emerges in the beginning of the XIXth century inherits in some ways the phantasmatic and ideological powers of the old aristocratic one (one has to remark, otherwise, that the French bourgeoisie, in the XIXth century, is still fascinated by the nobiliary genealogy: the genealogical narratives multiply at that time. On this topic, see Rodet (2010)). The purpose of the following lines is to show how this can be done throughout some fields of research and ways of representation that could seem completely separated, from a contemporary point of view: natural sciences and literary criticism (the relations between sciences and literature in the XIXth century have been enlightened by a precious recent anthology: N. Wanlin (2019), *Littérature et sciences au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2019. See also the studies assembled by Klinkert and Séginger (2019)).

What I shall demonstrate is that scientific notions such as physiology and typology will operate as genealogical arguments, pretending to legitimize their results by scientific facts instead of traditional authority, but in reality conveying, still, philosophical presuppositions. I hope this will give food for thought to the reader who is interested in understanding the genealogy of a misunderstanding: the alleged conflict between sciences and literature that, before its development from P.C. Snow to S.J. Gould, is rooted in the XIXth century debates on aesthetics, but not as a conflict, rather as a partnership. The ambition, also, from a more academic perspective, is to offer a different piece to the studies about the link between evolution and genealogy in the XIXth century: traditionally, they focus on the relations between natural sciences and social sciences (see Guillo 2003), and this paper could add a different perspective to those offered by Glick and Shaffer (2014), regarding the links between natural history, esthetics and Darwin’s legacy.

First of all, it seems important to remind one that there was not really, in the XIXth century, an impervious border between the sciences, literature or the arts. Their relationships are complicated by philosophical conceptions; this is the case both in the natural and cultural sciences, insofar as, if the former is based on the latter, the biological sciences are also shaped by the very cultural representations they contributed to establish (throughout, for example, the idea of progress). In the biological sciences, Lamarck’s transformism and Häckel and Darwin’s evolutionism enroll human historical time into the long-term temporality of the evolution of species. In the cultural sciences, such as comparative anthropology and prehistoric anthropology, scholars such as John Lubbock or Edward Tylor establish the link between evolution and history, exhuming the ways by which the past survives into the present, throughout residues and atavistic “survivals”, in Tylor’s vocabulary.

Especially in philosophy and the moral sciences, genealogical kinships are established from concepts to values for the purpose of explaining their origins and modalities of transmission, precisely inspired by the evolutionist point of view, the best example being here Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). In a more problematic and mistrustful way, one can think also about Friedrich Nietzsche (the link between Nietzsche’s genealogical method and nineteenth century evolutionism is now well-informed. See for instance Orsucci (1992), Stiegler (2001), Moore (2002), Richardson (2008) and Johnson (2013)), whose case is to be discussed below.

Less known and less observed in this analysis of the modalities through which genealogy redeployed itself in the XIXth century is the way it surrounded the esthetical discourse,

the theory of the arts, and especially literary criticism, reconsidered from Auguste Comte's positivism and a Darwinian point of view, in the second half of the century.

It is rather surprising that evolutionist and physiological considerations are at work in the literary discourse. How and why does literary criticism use genealogical instruments, searching them through the scientific vocabulary? This is what I would like to understand and, to do so, it seems relevant to point out two major figures of literary criticism and historiography of literature from two different generations, before and after Darwin.

Sainte-Beuve (1804–1869) belongs to the first generation; his way of approaching art and literature consists of “physiological” considerations he uses to establish some family resemblance. As a literary critic, he is still well-known for having been criticized by Marcel Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1954, posthumous), who reproaches him for his evaluation of a literary work from biographical considerations. However, in the XIXth century, he is considered as one of the four or five great spirits of the XIXth century, as says his follower Hippolyte Taine.

Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) belongs to the second generation, and it is quite interesting to see how his way of considering the physiology of literature is transformed by the evolutionist frame, after Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Taine is known as a major historian and philosopher of the XIXth century in France, where he taught art history and esthetics, and as a member of the Académie Française in 1878. His positivist historiography is famously summarized by the three notions that determine, for him, human history: race, moment and environment (“milieu”, he says in French).

In the following lines, I would like to show how the genealogical discourse constitutes itself in an original, but plural way, in literary criticism of the two authors mentioned above, in order to understand the philosophical stakes of such an appropriation, using Nietzsche's reception of French literary criticism. Nietzsche's genealogy, we will see, is closely related to a philosophical physiology of esthetics, connected to its French context of elaboration (to our knowledge, studies on the XIXth century have not crossed these three authors. See, however, the interesting research of [Campioni \(2001\)](#). Since [Montinari \(1985\)](#), the main interest of scholars is the relation between Nietzsche and the author Paul Bourget, around the notion of *decadence*).

1.2. Genealogy and ‘Portraits’

It is remarkable that XIXth century historiography is for the main part a practice of history focused on “representative men”, to speak with Emerson's terms. Someone such as Nietzsche inherits from this, and he reads and knows historians whose approach is congruent with this way of thinking of history as a ‘series of monographies’. Of course, one could think of Emerson's “*Representative men*”, but also of Carlyle's “*Heroes*” and, in Burckhardt's methodology, of the importance of representative individualities (See particularly ([Burckhardt \[1860\] 2019](#))). Since Giorgio Vasari, indeed, art history is intimately tied to the biographical method, but nowhere else than in the history of literature can we find such a systematical approach, as to start with Sainte-Beuve.

Literary typology and all the methodology of the history of literature have remained dependent on this ‘monographic’ and so to say ‘prosopographic’ model, until the end of the XIXth century. Literary history is contemplated as a series of ‘Portraits’ (Sainte-Beuve is particularly related to this genre), and without any surprise, one can consider the number of books with such a title. It will be with Gustave Lanson, in 1894, that the history of French literature will be periodized more systematically in “movements” (see [Lanson \(1910\)](#), [Claudon \(1998\)](#) and [Aubrit and Gendrel \(2019\)](#)).

However, the transition from monography in literary criticism to proper history should not be overestimated. Indeed, Nietzsche, for example, has already overcome the strictly individual perspective, and this is also true about Sainte-Beuve and Taine. In spite of the monographic presentation, one can remark that the genealogical way of thinking allows Sainte-Beuve, and more obviously Taine, to establish patterns of filiations, in a way that is specific and independent.

Meditating on the originality of genius, Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Nietzsche will encounter the same problem, inherited from romanticism: how can genius be possible, if it is original, and how can it be original, if it is possible—which means, determinable?

The romantic, that is, Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian, perspective chooses genius and gives up its explanation. The scientific, physiological historiography chooses the explanation, but gives up, as it seems, the genius, summoning the causal categories of type (or race), environment and moment, in Hippolyte Taine's vocabulary (see also [Lanson \(1904, pp. 630–31\)\)](#)).

Then, the genealogical problem of literary genius is the following: *how can we account for the individuality of artistic genius without reducing it to its socio-historic context or its heredity, and, reciprocally, how can we explain the origin of genius if we take its uniqueness seriously?*

Genealogy—in ways that we will examine, but in the general meaning of the historiographical method that establishes a link between the sociocultural productions and the biological and biographical context of their elaboration—seems to be the answer to this dilemma, insofar as it does not represent a kind of explanation that is strictly causal, but seems partly hermeneutical and analogical; the “traceability”, so to say, of the genius, gives its heraldry, but does not eliminate its idiosyncrasy. It is, in any case, the proper perspective of Nietzsche's genealogy. However, what about those of Sainte-Beuve and Hippolyte Taine? This is what I would like to examine first, comparing them to Nietzsche's way of proceeding and submitting them to his judgment, before approaching Nietzsche's proper physiology of literature.

2. Physiology of Literature: Sainte-Beuve and Taine

2.1. Analogism or Genealogy? The Case of Sainte-Beuve

Genealogy, in the context of literary criticism in the first half of the XIXth century, is the first of all in a taxonomy, in the tradition of natural history and science in XVIIIth Century France, with Cuvier and Buffon, whose taxonomies are, for Sainte-Beuve, a model. The analogy between the natural science of life and literary science of life remains, certainly, an analogy and not an assimilation, because the latter intends to have a simple family resemblance (interestingly enough, this Wittgensteinian vocabulary is already used by Nietzsche in *Beyond good and evil*, §20: “the strange family resemblance [*Familien-Ähnlichkeit*] of all Indian, Greek and German philosophies is quite easily explained. Where there is a linguistic kinship [*Sprach-Verwandschaft*], it is absolutely inevitable that, thanks to the common philosophy of grammar (. . .) everything is already prepared for a similar development and sequence of the philosophical systems” (I translate from the German ([Nietzsche 1980](#))) with the former—that is, a matricula and kinship link. Indeed, Sainte-Beuve is well aware that living individuals, and even more so artists, are not subject to a strict logic of a species development or to a sort of law of nature. Besides, it is precisely insofar as they are in some way unpredictable and as their works are not deductible from causal laws, that we have to pretend, afterwards, that their genesis and their relationships to each other depend on a historical plan. That is why, as Wolf Lepenies puts it:

“Sainte-Beuve remained persuaded that the true talent, the great artist, would never let himself confined in the coarse mesh net of theories and methods regarding criticism. Of each author, there was in any case just one and only occurrence. (. . .) Sainte-Beuve wanted to be sincere and scientific in his role as a critic, but he wanted at the same time his criticism to encounter the perspective of temporal life. Criticism was, for him, the science of literary life. And this “life science” was part of the tradition of natural history” ([Lepenies \(2002, pp. 253–54\)](#), our translation. One can see, here and in the next quote, how Sainte-Beuve is ambiguously torn between romanticism and positivism).

Besides:

“Sainte-Beuve as a naturalist is looking for systematization; he is definitely a supporter of the typological classification. But he stays very close to the real data; he admits the exception that bursts the system, rather than arranging the reality

by his convenience (. . .) convinced, in the middle of the century of Darwin, that literary criticism remains in Linné's and Cuvier's era" (Ibid., p. 255. See also pp. 245–46 and, about the analogy between natural history and literary history, p. 251).

Then, if the problem raised at the beginning—that is to say explaining the genius without abolishing his uniqueness—is not explicitly raised in all its historiographical and philosophical dimensions by Sainte-Beuve or any French literary critiques in the XIXth century (to our knowledge), this problem manifests itself however through the tension between the classificatory aspect of literary taxonomies and the conviction that genius, anyway, cannot be reduced to them (the reference to the natural sciences is therefore, from this point of view, neither a blind allegiance nor an empty rhetoric, insofar as Sainte-Beuve, first seduced by the romantic vision which assimilates the cosmos to a system of elective affinities and tensions, was an assiduous reader of Buffon (see Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve, op. cit.*, p. 239 sq.)). That is the reason why, thinking about the method by which Sainte-Beuve shed lights on an author through the historical and especially familial context, Wolf Lepenies seems entitled to write about the literary criticism of the first half of the XIXth century:

"Like in botanics or zoology, in the matter of literary criticism, the "natural method" was a topic, it allowed to understand better the writer, the great man took as an individual, insofar as it allowed to describe the different "places" in which he was situated within a family, a region, a time, a generation, a genre, a constellation of affinities and repulsions that were modified throughout history. One had to establish such a topic at any cost, but at the same time it brought out the fact that the great man was an atypical creature, out of any place; the genius could certainly be part of different circles, but he could not be defined in its deep nature by the belonging to any group" (Lepenies (2002, p. 252), We agree with Lepenies when he adds that it is no coincidence if, in Taine's method, the originality of individuals tends to disappear). (. . .).

It is, then, with some circumspection, that one should read the texts where Sainte-Beuve risks himself in giving a theoretical form to his own method, because this theory makes him appear more rigid than he actually is. This is particularly the case when, in the conclusion of his book about *Port-Royal*, he writes that the most honorable use of spirit is to "see things and men as they are, and to express them as we see them, to describe around us, as servants of science, the varieties of the species" (*Port-Royal*, VI, p. 245) (. . .).

The genealogical method, here, consists of establishing some sorts of moral heraldry analogous to the zoological families, as Sainte-Beuve claims at the beginning of the same book:

"The true and *natural* families are not so many; when one has observed a little by this side and operated on sufficient quantities, he recognizes how the diverse natures of spirits and organizations, are related to some types, to some main leaders (. . .). It is absolutely like in botanics about plants or in zoology about animal species. There is the moral natural history, the method (barely sketched) of natural families of spirits. An individual, well observed, is quickly related to the species that one only sees from far away, and it lightens him" (Sainte-Beuve 1908, p. 55, quoted by Lepenies, *op. cit.*, p. 235).

This is where genealogy meets heraldry: while they are 'individuation' forces of some aspects of their time and of a certain family of spirits, and give a sample of them, the great writers appear to be at the same time, for Sainte-Beuve, individuation *forces* that give to this family a unique patina. Hence, while being a part of the family (if family has an interest, in Sainte-Beuve, it is only as an analogical and heuristic way of speaking. Real families, indeed, appear to him as "*the enemy of literature*" (*Cahiers*, p. 138)), their genius lies in the trouble they introduce in the familiar resemblance they have with it.

This is partly the reason why Sainte-Beuve does not only stand for the characterization of literary individuals by their affiliation, throughout doctrines or physiological genealogies. He also endeavors to light up their portrait from *within*. While heraldry stumbles on the problem of uniqueness that makes an individual irreducible to his family, the esthetic analogism enables us to explain this uniqueness, taking into account the idiosyncrasy of the artistic individuality. In other words, even if we have to look after the filiation and the genealogical links of the individuals, the recognition of his uniqueness needs, here, to quit the external comparative field, in order to establish internal comparisons, scrutinizing the life and works of the individual. First heraldry, genealogy must become, then, a heuristic analogy.

One could compare this aspect of Sainte-Beuve's method to Nietzsche's, especially regarding the *ad hominem* dimension of some arguments that consist of guessing the esthetic values (or, more generally, the type of will to power, ascending or declining, in Nietzsche's terms) behind the works. However, also, behind the statements and behavioral traits of the individual life, using some 'biographemes' (I use the word in the meaning that Barthes gives it, as a "biographical unit" in someone's life. See Barthes (1975)) to extricate, beyond them, a meta-individual meaning, in a metonymical ('meta-onuma' means to go beyond the name. This was Nietzsche's method from the beginning, not only in his etymological thoughts, but even when he speaks about, for instance, Socrates, whose name not only refers to Socrates as an individual, but to a metonymical, that is a cultural phenomenon. For more details on this point, see how it is especially at work in Nietzsche's relation to the Greek sophists in Sorosina (2014)) manner.

Let us take an example in Nietzsche's work. In a juicy aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil* (§186 *in fine*), Nietzsche explains that everything is said of Schopenhauer's incoherent pessimism when one has learnt that . . . he played the flute (however, even more: he played flute after dinner!) One could smile at this *ad hominem* attack, but despite the falsely casual tone of this apparent *ad hominem* fallacy, such a genealogical traceability of the type of will to power operating behind some conducts is not arbitrary. It often leads Nietzsche to submit some very thoughtful interpretations of what can appear as biographical details. That is the case, to take another example, if we refer to Nietzsche's interpretation of Socrates's last words ("we owe Asklepios a rooster", in §340 of *The Gay Science*), words that reveal to who knows the art of well-reading (in other words: for the philologist proceeding to the genealogical examination of life-samples) a pessimist conception of our finitude, which is the spearhead of all the history of pessimism until Schopenhauer ('s flute). Relating this to the Hellenic context and to Socrates's life, and especially to the context of *Phaedo*, that last sentence can be transposed into an apothem: "life is a disease".

This detour was necessary to understand that Sainte-Beuve's genealogical method is not the same as Nietzsche's. While Nietzsche plays with a pattern of meanings to extract some salient biographies and give them a philological and psychological explanation, and at last highlight their axiological provenance, Sainte-Beuve does not often reveal the vital center from which the esthetical forms appear (we must note that it sometimes happens, such as when, in *Port-Royal*, he presents the opposition between saint François de Sales and M. de Saint-Cyran as a "singular case of a more general and continuous parallelism" (*Port-Royal*, I, p. 216) in the Christian history, where soft people oppose strong individuals (one can think here about the Nietzschean typology in the first treatise of *The Genealogy of Morals*)), but uses analogy to bring out family relations.

This can be conducted by composing from what the positivist thinkers called at that time "small facts" (an expression that will impress Nietzsche negatively), a "mosaic of the time". Sainte-Beuve does such a thing when he uses the individual as a prism through which the picture of a life-form is to be found. For example, Gui Patin, a well-known doctor of the XVIIth century, appears to be a sample of "an inconsistent bourgeoisie and of an indolent epoch" (both formulas with quote marks are Lepenies's, from whom we took this example. See Lepenies (2002, pp. 226–33) and Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, t. VIII, «Gui Patin»); or the writer Saint-Simon, throughout his *Memoirs*, is a compendium of all the

natural history of the “Ancien Régime”, with his classes and species, throughout, of course, a singular perspective. As Sainte-Beuve puts it:

“The landscape, reflecting itself in this lake whose edges are supercilious and whose waves are slightly bitter, in this human, mobile and always more or less prestigious lake, dyes certainly itself with the colour of its waters. An other form of talent, I said it, an other magical mirror would have reproduced different effects. Nevertheless, this one [of Saint-Simon] is true, he is sincere, and it is at the highest degree in the moral and picturesque acception” (Sainte-Beuve 1856, XV, p. 459).

This can also be done using several types of biographies. This is how a style of an esthetic production (artistic biography) appears to be contiguous to other relevant phenomena (moral or compartmental biographies), and Sainte-Beuve maintains that the last are the origin of the first. This is not only the case in the literature, for this heuristic analogy allows us to understand the pianistic style of Franz Liszt, if we look at the way he interacts with other people. The analogy comes, here, when the pianistic terminology operates as a trope to describe this intersubjective dimension of his life. Hence, while the relation to other people was supposed to explain the pianistic style, one can realize that, reciprocally, the pianistic style characterizes his relationship to the others, because they are “together and at the same time on the most extreme, distant keys, in an almost impossible swiftness”, even if “he succeeds less to harmonize the characters than the instrument. One can see the tour de force and the wince: those are the flaws of his play” (*Cahiers*, p. 6–7. Similarly, about Saint-Marc Girardin: “he has in the voice wrong notes I find back even in his spirit” (*Ibid.*, p. 49)).

Throughout this idea of a *kinship* between the ways of being and the ways of doing, the knot of Sainte-Beuve’s genealogical discourse is falling in a sort of existential grammar, establishing filiation relations between the artistical practice and the moral agency. This leads sometimes to the observation that, unexpectedly, a series of correspondences between the life of an author and his writings exists, when one considers for example that “the real biography of Vauvenargues, the history of his soul is altogether in his writings” (*Causeries du lundi*, t. 3, p. 133. See also, about Diderot, some considerations about the relation between weather and personality (*Ibid.*, «Diderot», p. 296). It is well-known, as we said above, that Proust will vehemently reject this aspect of his approach).

This genealogical connection is not only based on those two plans, insofar as it is also used to distinguish several plans within the same practice, as Sainte-Beuve points out with severity about the French writer Jules Janin, who would succeed him at the Académie Française: “Janin has got some drive.—Yes, but it is because the train from behind (the idea) detaches itself very often and does not follow” (*Cahiers*, p. 8. Sainte-Beuve makes an untranslatable pun in French between «entraîn» (drive) and «train» (train): “Janin a de l’entraîn.—Oui, mais parce que le train de derrière (l’idée) se détache bien souvent et ne suit pas”). Playing with words, Sainte-Beuve suggests, here, that the motion of the literary style is risky when it takes up too much space, taking the semantical content to the back seat. Thenceforth, the esthetic work on the signifier cannot be granted to the detriment of the signified.

Eventually, it should be noted that the look, the style or the attitude of an individual does not always, nor perfectly, pass through all aspects of their existence. Sainte-Beuve considers as a weakness, as the sign of a simple and soapy nature, the tendency to let a character trait rule the whole of it, because it becomes too pervasive. That is why, after evoking the case of Janin, he evokes the “critics who have only one manner”, and “does not know at all how to modify it depending on the subject: the frisky one by temper and by genre will be frisky everywhere and always; the pedantic, disputatious one won’t spare you his dialectic, whatever the situation” (*Ibid.*, pp. 8–9). In a spiteful epigram, Sainte-Beuve gives immediately Janin for example of the first, the frisky one, and Gustave Planche of the second, the pedantic (space lacks to develop this aspect, but Gustave Planche (1808–1857) was a French critic who developed a form of genealogy: his purpose was to find back the

“primitive ideas” of the works. Sainte-Beuve opposes the search of the “secret ideal” that determines the style (*Cahiers*, pp. 23–25). For further explanations, see A. Glinoyer (2006) and R. Molho (1963):

“Janin climbs on Dante and frolics at the highest;

Planche does algebra with Manon Lescaut” (Sainte-Beuve, *Cahiers*, p. 9: “*Janin grimpe sur Dante et gambade au plus haut; Planche fait de l’algèbre avec Manon Lescaut*”).

Here, we can acknowledge that the art of portrait, in Sainte-Beuve, is neither a caricature nor a marmoreal engraving: it protrudes some personal aspects from details, but does not pretend to exhaust the personality. If his approach of genealogy is tendentially nomothetic, it is in the frame of a methodological horizon, because the reality of literary criticism is the following: it is always throughout an idiographic approach that we can have access to the formulation of laws that are, in the end, hermeneutical formulas.

2.2. Between Positivist Typology and Nietzschean Genealogy: The Case of Hippolyte Taine

Certainly, this ideographical aspect appeared, later, as a weakness for the physiological critics, such as Hippolyte Taine. Then, what was in Sainte-Beuve only an analogical vocabulary (to give an epistemological consistency to the genealogical discourse, insisting on the fruitfulness of such transpositions (we still agree here with Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve, op. cit.*, p. 243) was about to become, in its follower Taine, and generally in the second half of XIXth century criticism, a more rigid terminology.

Hippolyte Taine, indeed, as a central figure of French historiography in the XIXth century after 1860, elaborates a methodology in which genealogy is more exactly a *typology*. He considers the history of a phenomenon as the evolution of a natural kind: just as evolution determines the transformations of a type depending on the pressures of the natural environment, the cultural forms, for Taine, especially in the artistic area (see on this point his (Taine 1865)) and, in our concern, the literary field, evolve according to three factors: the environment (or *milieu*), the race (this racial terminology is very common in the XIXth century, and Sainte-Beuve makes a program of searching this physiological matrix in the genealogy of literary types (see *Cahiers*, p. 70). Taine was going to realize this program) (or *type*), and the moment.

We can convince ourselves of this by opening of his *History of English Literature*, where Taine acknowledges the transformations made in German and French historiographies “throughout the study of literatures”, because these studies allow, “from the literary monuments, [to] find the ways of feeling and thinking of the great men” (Taine 1866, p. iii. Nietzsche had in his library the German translation of the 19th edition). It is in this perspective that literary criticism starts to consider the importance of literary studies for historiography, and this typological method was about to be discussed by almost every work of literary history, even beyond the borders of France (Nietzsche, we will see, has acknowledged the importance of evolutionism and literary criticism, learning French and reading many books on the subject). The typical example, here, is Nietzsche’s discovery and discussion of this historical method. As a method, but not as a system, Taine’s perspective seems to him relevant and interesting (cf. *Essais de critique et d’histoire*, [1858 and 1882], Paris, Hachette, Taine (1908, p. xiii): “I don’t pretend to have a system: I try at most to have a method”.), as an historical psychology (Taine writes about the historian he enhances: “while his eyes read a text, his soul and his spirit follow the continuous development and the changing series of emotions and conceptions from which this text comes out; he makes *the psychology of it*”. (*Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, p. xi, Taine underlines.)) Nietzsche must have been seduced by the idea that “history, basically, is a *problem of psychology*” (Ibid., p. xlv) Taine underlines, a psychology that would give back the living experience of history, an experience that the erudite examination of archives had until then abandoned (Ibid., pp. iv–v). This psychology of *types* is, for Nietzsche, one of the most respectable findings of Taine:

“Taine, who had the skill of invention that led him to discover what is typical, *his method*, meaning essentially: history can be conceived only by concepts, but concepts must be created by the historical man; and the history where only 4–5 factors are at work is the easiest to conceive” (*Posthumous Fragments* (from now on *PF*), April–June 1885, 34 [22] in Nietzsche (1980). Nietzsche underlines. Translations from German are ours).

Then, Taine’s genealogy does not only consist, at least in theory, in describing an objective history, but in bringing together historical forces, so that the study of the past would transform our present. In his *Essais de critique et d’histoire* (*Essays on Criticism and History*), Taine claims that the knowledge of the past and of our dependence to it should not discourage us, but on the contrary, is able to increase our power. If he is right to think that the discovery of the causes of natural events in the natural sciences allows us to predict and modify them, then “an analogous discovery in the moral sciences must provide men with the means to predict and modify to a certain degree the events of history. Because we become all the more the masters of our destiny as we untangle more exactly the reciprocal ties of things” (*Essais de critique et d’histoire*, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii).

Overriding this positivist profession of faith, stating that “the philosophy of human history repeats like a loyal image the philosophy of natural history” (*Ibid.*, p. xxiv), Nietzsche can agree with the Baconian diagnosis of Taine: “increased knowledge increases power (*Ibid.*)”. If the historical knowledge increases the power of making history (a wish that is also Nietzsche’s in his writing on history in 1874), it is because the one who practices genealogy in this perspective inherits some aspects of the past to make it their own, as Nietzsche will put it in §337 of *The Gay Science* and in some important posthumous fragments of 1881, requiring us to make, here again, a small Nietzschean detour:

“When I speak about Plato, Pascal, Spinoza and Goethe, I know that their blood circulates in my veins—I am *proud*, when I tell the truth about them—the family if good enough not having to lie or conceal [anything about it]; and thus I behave regarding everything that has been, *I am proud of everything that is human* and proud, precisely, with an unconditional truthfulness” (*PF*, Fall 1881, 12 [52]).

We need, then, historical science to give the “historical sense” a new bloom, to revitalize it through the ingestion of all the forces of the past. If we do so, we will be able to use our science to create our genealogy, and we will get rid of the absurd pretention of science’s disinterestedness:

“Science gives us our genealogical tree of nobility, our heraldry. It gives us ancestors. (. . .) *Historical sense* is what is new, here something *really important* is growing! First harmful, like everything new! It has to acclimatize at length, before *sanitizing itself* and growing a new blossoming! We hear about all our ancestors *owned*—the heroes—we have to give up a lot, but every loss is accompanied by *higher acquisitions*” (*PF*, Fall 1881, 12 [76]).

Taine’s method was about to lead to this heraldry. However, he chose, eventually, a more systematical and descriptive approach. Yet, in the *Essais de critique et d’histoire*, he acknowledges that some promising attempts were made of this psychological history, foreshadowing a type of history that was not only a history, but at the same time a genealogical configuration of the present forces through the rising of past forces. It is the case, he assures, in Lessing, Walter Scott, Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry and Michelet (*Essais de critique et d’histoire*, *op. cit.*, p. ix). Moreover, he maintains that audacious elaborations of this method can be found in literary men and literary critics who, without being always and only professional historians, are for historical psychology masters and, for the new historiography of which Taine claims to be the initiator, models. Particularly, Goethe, Sainte-Beuve, Carlyle and mostly Stendhal (*Ibid.*, p. xii and, for Stendhal, pp. xlv–xlvi) are quoted. Here, the inspiration of Stendhal is a common elective affinity for Nietzsche and Taine (about Nietzsche’s enthusiasm for Stendhal, see for example in Nietzsche the letters to Köselitz from 30 March 1881 and to Resa von Schirnhofer from 11 March 1885 in Nietzsche (2003) and also: *GS*, §95; *PF*, Spring 1884, 25 [29]; *PF*, June–July

1885, 38, [5]; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §254 and 256; *Genealogy of Morals*, III, §6; *Twilight of Idols, Incursions of an Untimely Man*, §45; *Ecce Homo, Why I am so Cunning*, §3 and *Why I Write such Great Books, The Case of Wagner*, §3). Taine compares Stendhal to a palimpsest decipherer, able to find back, “under the scrawls of a text, the precise feeling, the movement of ideas, the state of mind in which it was written” (*Essais de critique et d’histoire, op. cit.*, p. xlvi). It is in this way that literary history was always essential. The transformation of history (*Historie*) by history (*Geschichte*), and the reciprocal, was always the finality of historiography, if one is right to think that a novel, a correspondence or some confessions, when they come from a great man, “are more instructive than a mound of historians and histories” (*Ibid.*).

Despite, then, the positivism that he stands for to state the laws of history on the basis of facts (about the equivocal position of Taine’s positivism, one can read for instance what Paul Bourget writes in his *Réflexions sur l’art de l’histoire* in *Études et portraits, Bourget (1888)*, t. I, vol. 1, pp. 296–97 and *passim*); despite, furthermore, the analogy he strives to establish between the method of natural sciences and that of moral sciences, considering the former as the model for the latter, Taine does not forget the specificity of his object: life (this is probably why Nietzsche does not assimilate him with the “factalism” of Auguste Comte (*Genealogy of Morals*, III, §24 and *PF, Spring 1884*, 25 [112])). See also *PF, April–June 1885*, 34 [229]). If there are such things as facts, those facts come from living experiences, ways of thinking and colors of the soul requiring, to be apprehended, the help of the poetic imagination and the art of hypotyposis, as Taine finds them in Xenophon’s writings (cf. «Xénophon. *L’Anabase*» in *Essais de critique et d’histoire, op. cit.*, p. 157).

Hence, one has to sift through historical documentation prioritizing some of them and evaluating their importance. However, the necessity of this axiological perspective seems to be in contradiction with objectivity. The conflictual relations between the romantic sensibility to life and the scientific claim, that was in Sainte-Beuve, resurface here in another avatar. Indeed, Taine sometimes evaluates things and men; but he will not admit it because he claims to be a positive thinker (Nietzsche saw it and denounces the futility of objectivity in literary positivism and historiography, quoting Taine’s name (*PF, Summer–Fall 1884*, 26 [348])), and that is precisely what Nietzsche observes and criticizes. On the contrary, Nietzsche assumes that all we can do is evaluate. His literary appetite regarding correspondences, testimonies and literary portraits can be understood in this typological perspective: the purpose is to squeeze as closely as possible the experience lived by the great geniuses who sum up entire eras, insofar as, if those eras “provide some documents” historically important, it is because the literary works “are monuments” (*Histoire de la littérature anglaise, op. cit.*, p. xlvi)» submitted, then, to monumental history.

This art of history, of which Taine provides the lineaments, does not have to exhaust its subject with much evidence: “this reconstruction is always incomplete; but we must resign ourselves to it; a mutilated knowledge is better than a non-existent or false one” (*Ibid.*, p. ix). Such a knowledge is interested in living experiences and belong only to the one who, like Stendhal, knows how to grasp the general in the particular (cf. Stendhal (Henri Beyle) in *Essais de critique et d’histoire, op. cit.*, p. 41: “he does care for individuals, but only to paint the species; that is why Beyle’s book is a psychology in act”), and the state of the soul in the reported fact. Therefore, such a historical psychology requires from the historian a certain *pathos*, a sympathy. Taine distinguishes, as it seems, two modalities of it.

First, there is the “sympathetic imagination” of which Michelet is the best example. In his historiographical method, he “sympathizes with the life of centuries as with the life of individuals; he sees the passions of an entire era as clearly as those of a man” (*Essais de critique et d’histoire, op. cit.*, p. 85) and he “shakes and vibrates like a lyre to the sound of all passions and all pains” (*Ibid.*, p. 86)». However, this is not the pinnacle of the art of history, suggests Taine, insofar as Michelet tends to project his “pantheistic instincts (*Ibid.*)” into his account of events, creeping into souls too foreign to his to interpret them throughout his own *Stimmung*. This is exactly what Nietzsche reproaches Michelet (*PF June–July 1885*, 37

[13]) too. However, on the contrary, it is without any incrimination against Michelet that Taine writes: «I would not dare to say that he makes history; history makes itself in him (. . .); he himself resembles this universal being (. . .) who takes all forms, *and who remains himself while becoming all things*” (*Essais de critique et d’histoire, op. cit.*, p 87. We underline).

More contrasted, and even perhaps opposed, is Taine’s portrait of the Stendhalian historical sense (this opposition between Michelet and Stendhal is taken back and reinforced by Nietzsche in *PF, June–July 1885*, 38 [5]), whose artistic account of the past is intropathic (about intropathy in Nietzsche and Stendhal, see Reschke (2014) and Böning (2001), who study the link between fiction and facticity in autobiographical texts of Goethe, Stendhal and Nietzsche)—to use a term that avoids the accents of commiseration still present in Michelet’s sympathetic method, and whose concern is to provide a psychological reflection of the *Stimmung*, as Stendhal does not hesitate to display it repeatedly in his travelogues (see for example Stendhal, who writes in *Rome, Naples, Florence* that “The German, instead of relating everything to himself, relates himself entirely to others. Reading an Assyrian story, he is Assyrian”. (Stendhal [1817] 1927, p. 143). Stendhal adds in a note, p. 144: “I don’t pretend to say what things *are*, I only narrate the sensation they produced on me”. For further considerations, see Domino (1999)). This is what Nietzsche does not hide, reminding us how the apprehension of the past is made from a point of view: “the past is different for *each one of us*: insofar as each one draws a common thread through it, a simplification” (*PF, Spring 1884*, 25 [396]). Certainly, Stendhal “feels the emotion he provokes”, but by virtue of an artistic and noble intropathy that does not condescend to “take part in the miseries and human motions”. Nevertheless, it is a higher sense of communication that “stirs up passions of others without being disturbed”.

It is, then, a paradoxical *pathos*, because the historian, as an artist, is led to a sort of Lucretian *ataraxia* (we hint at *De rerum natura*, book II, v. 1–61: “*suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem (. . .)*”). See for comparison Lemaître (1886, vol. 2, pp. 12, 45)) to the overhang of the battle and, while feeling *pathos*, “remains calm, standing in full light, on a height, while below him the battle of fierce desires stirs up” (Lemaître 1886, pp. 48–49). Here, we find the true historical greatness, embodied by this historian who lives it and at the same time narrates it. Undoubtedly, such an individual realizes what Taine refused to Michelet, and what Nietzsche always demanded of the accomplished historian: it is not history which is made in him, but he who, like Stendhal, makes history.

At this point, we should not incur a misunderstanding: this posture of overhung position protects historiographical sympathy against the reproach of partiality and serves as a guarantee for the objectivism of Taine, who reconciles as much as he can his attraction for facts and his love of the life of the soul, considering that the facts are their custodians (this ambiguity has been underlined by Taine’s scholars. See for example Cassirer (1995, pp. 316, 318)). However, the authentic genealogist must not deny the affective perspective from which the historical judgment comes, which is inevitably also a value judgment.

On one hand, as Nietzsche saw it, Taine ignores himself as an individual perspective (see also on this point Crépon (2003, p. 139)) on the facts he presents and stands for a typology that does not really accede to the statutory dignity of genealogy.

On the other hand, from a Sainte-Beuve point of view (see the *Nouveaux lundis, Sainte-Beuve* (1868), t. VIII, 30 May, 6 July et 13 June 1864 (about the *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* de Taine). Taine, writes Lepenies, forgets that he deals with works that enclose as a last resort, regarding their values or their esthetic flaws, a particular secret, a “*je-ne-sais-quoi*” that we will never entirely understand». (2002, p. 253)), his method is too reductive, unjustly abolishing the singularity of genius, subsuming its productions under too rigid determinations.

In the end, it is this perspectivism that serves as a safeguard and a criterion to repress the supporters of objectivity who would like to understand everything and judge everything historically (“Even the French, like Taine, are looking for, or believe they look for [something] without having [determined], first, value standards. The kneeling before the

‘facts’ has become a sort of worship”. (*PF, May–July 1885*, 35 [44])). If objectivity can still keep a meaning, it is only by considering it as a pairing, when the historian and his object can have a sort of parity between peers. This is the case when the historian who judges and what is judged by him are of the same order of value, in which case sympathy is not excluded, but needed, for Nietzsche.

Therefore, one would have to be physiologically related to a historical figure to claim to portray their psychology. The nexus of the divergence between Taine and Nietzsche is precisely here: it concerns the effects of the historian and, in particular, his physiological ethos, to the extent that in reality the method and the historiographical concepts flow from them. However, this ethical dimension is the blind spot of Taine’s method, as we said, because Taine avoids clarifying his position on this point, and refuses to recognize that everything is based on values.

Leaving the field of his proper genealogical method, and turning to what Taine understands by typology, we should note that his positivism, in the track of Montesquieu (cf. *Histoire de la littérature anglaise, op. cit.*, p. xliv), seeks to identify the “rules of human vegetation” (Ibid.), observing it from its native soil, while historians of the past tended to invoke the past, in the perspective of political historiography, only to make it a model or counter-model for the present. Political historiography, for Taine, remains blind to the fact that “governments, like plants, are indigenous. Transplanted, they perish or they languish” (Montalembert et Troplong in *Essais de critique et d’histoire, op. cit.*, p. 265)». Whoever likes history better than politics must take these irreducible differences into account. Nietzsche, whose interest in the conditions under which “the man plant” (the Stendhalian formula is at the time famous) has grown so far is real, would not disavow Taine on this point. However, he refuses the concept of “milieu” (environment) used by Taine.

Indeed, if Taine is right to reject political historiography, in a Nietzschean perspective, he jumps into conclusions when he suggests that the essential factor is the environment in which geniuses appear, because he reduces them to the expression of a naturalized form of the “people’s spirit” (the *Volksgeist* of XVIIIth German philosophy of history). As a result, he simplifies his own task, denying the specificity of the historical events that he claimed to recognize (“Against the theory of the influence of *milieu* and external causes: the internal force is boundlessly superior (. . .). Exactly identical *milieux* can be interpreted and used in radically opposed manners: there are no such things as facts.—A genius is *not* explained by this kind of conditions of appearance.” (*PF, Fall 1885–Fall 1886*, 2 [175], the word *milieu(x)* is in French in the German text)). If Taine’s genealogy can be careful to individuals, it is, alas, to absorb their idiosyncrasy in the rigidity of his three variables, reducing at the same time history to an extension of natural causality.

Taine’s typology, thus, leads to a historiographical relativism from which only a Hegelian rereading of history can save us *a posteriori*, by introducing a retrospective criterion for evaluating the progress of civilization. Taine’s allegiance to Darwin is further corroborated here, since if genius is determined by the social environment, it is because this environment is, in the end, the historical scene of the natural environment. In this Darwinian perspective, the organic *activity*, and the historicity of genius, are unthinkable (this was already the charge of Flaubert against Taine and Sainte-Beuve: “in La Harpe’s time, we were grammar scholars, in Sainte-Beuve’s and Taine’s, we are historians (. . .). Where do you know a criticism that would worry about the work *itself*, in an intense way? We analyze in detail the milieu where it has been produced and the causes that made it appear. But the *unconscious* poetics from which it results? its composition, its style? the authors’ point of view? *never*.” (Letter to George Sand, 2 February 1869, quoted in Thumerel (1998, p. 49))), because their existence are already made impossible within the frame of the explanation. Indeed, the “scenography of the environment” (to use Stephen Jay Gould’s expression (See Gould (2006, pp. 223–34) plays for the history of men the role of environment in the evolution of species (Marc Crépon also noted that the critique of “Darwin’s and Spencer’s determinisms”, in Nietzsche, “is too insistant to make him consider that anything of its transposition in the *Essais de critique et d’histoire* or in the *Histoire*

de la littérature anglaise could have appeared important to him. Race, environment, moment can be invoked as points of view, but they cannot be produced as factors determining an historical necessity" (Crépon 2003, p. 139)). It is therefore not surprising that Nietzsche comes to assimilate such a perspective to a decadent physiology, since it brings Taine into the ranks of the history of the masses, unwilling to take into account individuals. He follows, as we can see, the "logic of the lineament, coarse, carried to the extreme" (PF, Fall 1887, 10 [37])», a logic which, to sum up, gives the primacy to historiographical concepts over the living experience, even though it claimed to account for it. However, it failed.

3. Literature and "Fin de Siècle" Literary Criticism: Nietzsche's Physiology of Art

Because he was concerned with restoring the effectiveness of life, which he considered abolished by Taine's typology and scattered in detail by the portraits of Sainte-Beuve, Nietzsche examined on a new basis the question of genius, studying how French literary criticism, impacted by the evolutionary physiology, taking up the question (Sorosina forthcoming). This question is closely related to the development of what Nietzsche will call, from 1886, the "physiology of art" (See especially PF, 1886–1887 7 [7], 1888, 16 [71–73 and 86], 17 [9] and *The Case of Wagner*, §7), which constitutes a crucial and yet neglected (we remind one that studies on Nietzsche's physiology of art insist on its musicological background, and on its relation to Bourget's characterization of *décadence* (see for instance Müller-Lauter (1998), but does not often consider its link to literary criticism in general (two notable exceptions are Campioni (2001) and, above all, Piazzesi (2003))) stage in the formation of his own genealogical method (1887–1888).

Indeed, the genealogy of the Nietzschean genealogy is traditionally divided between German evolutionism (Wilhelm Roux, William Rolph, Karl Nägeli in particular) and what Nietzsche calls the "English genealogists" of morality (mostly Spencer and Paul Rée who, although German, belong to this branch of the tree; we understand that this country-related genealogy is not of blood, but of philosophical spirit). This elaboration, matured between 1877 and 1885, resulted in an about-face, one which will lead Nietzsche to abandon definitively the English "Natural History of Moral" which he still made in part his in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)—insofar as he still relied on materials from the early 1880s (this has been shown by Jensen (2013))—to finally display the singularity of his genealogical method in the *Genealogy of Morals* (1887).

We think that the blind spot in this genealogy of the Nietzschean genealogy is the role of the 'French spirit', which plays a crucial part in his physiology of art, the latter constituting a central aspect of the genealogical method, as it first finds its application to artistic idiosyncrasies, notably at the beginning of the third dissertation of the *Genealogy of Morals*, before finding its most famous expression in *The Case of Wagner*.

3.1. 'Physiology of Art': A Teratology

What Nietzsche certainly inherits from French literary esthetics is the medical and physiological pattern that constitutes its foundation, especially when this conception implies a reasoning in terms of pathology (See Cheminaud (2018)). On the scale of history, Sainte-Beuve notices for example in his conference entitled *La tradition en littérature* that correspondences between the healthiness of the climate and the health of art can be established. They allow, in a Goethean spirit ("I call classic the healthy, and sick the romantic") to explain the sickly or glowing nature of certain esthetic movements considering the atmosphere from which they flourished (*Causeries du lundi*, Sainte-Beuve (n.d.) t. 8, pp. 381–82).

This medical way of thinking, which spanned the entire Nineteenth Century in its second half, had been prefigured after Goethe with the physiological discourse in literary criticism, but it took an evolutionary grind after Sainte-Beuve, in the 1870s, at the time of Darwin's reception. This is especially the case in naturalistic esthetics, and it has escaped neither its scorners, nor its apologists. Thus, when the critic Louis Desprez (who Nietzsche read) characterizes Flaubert's style, he compares it to that of a surgeon (Desprez 1884, p. 42)

and likens Madame Bovary to a treatise on medicine where physiology meets psychology (Ibid., p. 22). This is not, for Nietzsche, a simple trope: this metaphor is so haunting in criticism that it becomes a physiological symptom.

As if to prove the Goethean diagnosis, confirmed by Sainte-Beuve, evoked above, decadence (the word and the thing) seems to invade esthetics both on the side of creation and on that of criticism. Now, what Nietzsche intends to get his hands on in an original way is the properly esthetic characterization of this concept. Esthetic decadence is a physiological monstrosity where living creation allows its form to be dictated by the lifeless discourse of theory. There is thus decadence when the anatomy of the work precedes its parturition, so that the work of art can only be stillborn. It is then only a Frankenstein-like production, insofar as it is the patchwork of an *a priori* vivisection that mechanizes it and removes the living flesh from it before its creation.

This is a typical feature of modernity that particularly catches the attention of Nietzsche, a feature that he had already noticed in *The Birth of Tragedy* about the opera: as a monstrous *hysteron-proteron*, the theory of art, religiously kneeling before the scientific material intended to underpin it, comes to precede creation (this is all the more interesting, in that literary critics are well aware of it. The Goncourts, for example, note that “The speculum of the Criticism has replaced the chisel of the Muse” (Goncourt 1877, p. 50, dog-eared by Nietzsche in his copy)). This process reaches its paroxysm with naturalism and its false remedy: decadent symbolism. Then, it is no coincidence if decadence is characterized, by those very people who indulge in it, as an esthetic affected by “the greenesses [les verdeurs] of decomposition”, according to Théophile Gautier’s formula.

Nothing can testify better of this mechanization of art and of life (of the life of art, but also of art as an expression of vitality) than the scientific theories of the time. It is well known that they overdetermine the epistemological framework which both literary naturalism and a whole section of French literary criticism adopt when both claim to be based on Darwin and Herbert Spencer. It is therefore hardly surprising that Nietzsche takes the latter to part in *The Genealogy of Morals* (II, §12), precisely to denounce his conception of evolution, where life has deserted to give way to an evolutionary mechanism where in the beginning was, not action, but reaction. What seems particularly interesting to us, when we draw this kind of parallel between the Nietzschean critique of English evolutionist historiography and decadent literary physiology, is to observe that they are, from a Nietzschean point of view, closely related. The diallel that consists of mechanizing life in order to be able to account for it has repercussions in the world of literature, through the writers who adopt hereditary theses. Therefore, they cannot produce a literature that would be, according to Proust’s famous definition, real life, but only a literature which is only the mummified representation of it.

On the contrary, the most fruitful literature would be, to follow Nietzsche, a literature that would resolve the tragic tension Georg Simmel would formulate later in *The Tragedy of Culture*: a literature that would provide a vital surplus and would offer more life (see again Jules Lemaître: “What is beautiful in life, for M. Weiss, is not to undergo or copy reality, but to dominate, knead it, whether in works of art, whether through material action; it is to impose to it, as much as we can, the form of our dream”. (*Les Contemporains, op. cit.*, t. I, p. 269, Nietzsche underlines in his copy)) (*Mehr Leben*), and at the same time, would be more-than-life (one example amongst others is the portrait of Mérimée by Paul Albert: “art (. . .) must be more beautiful than it [reality], because it makes up in beauty what it lacks in reality” (Albert 1885, p. 305, Nietzsche underlines the end in his copy)) (*Mehr-als-Leben*), if it is true that the vocation of art is “to imitate life, to complete it afterwards, and finally to idealize it”, as the critic Ferdinand Brunetière writes against scientific criticism (Brunetière 1888a, p. 226).

Far from being a simple *mimesis* that would fossilize life, literature is intended (when it is truly esthetic) to intensify it. Therefore, it is precisely a reversal of the relationship between life and literature that occurs at the end of the XIXth century, when the theory of art sees itself as what should precede actual art. This is why the diallel identified above also

reverberates amongst art theorists. They apply, *mutatis mutandis*, the Darwinian reading grid to the evolution of literary genres and to creation itself, as is the case with Hippolyte Taine, but also with Louis Desprez and Ferdinand Brunetière—all three authors Nietzsche read.

Whatever their allegiance, moreover, towards Spencer's false evolutionism, which mechanizes life in order to be able to conceive its evolution as the production of a reaction, the literary critics mentioned above have this peculiarity that they are for the most part aware of the conjuncture in which literary creation is, and of the pathological aspect of the literary field, invaded by critical works to the detriment of novels and poetry. All this reveals a trampling of creation, a crisis of which the Baudelairean «*décadence*» analyzed by Paul Bourget is the main symptom. However, of this decadence, they rejoice to the point of sometimes taking pleasure in it. With more nuance, Nietzsche's judgment, without being strictly disapproving, invites us to examine this phenomenon in all its ambivalence and with resolute circumspection.

The typical example of this literary devitalization can be found in the one who is a main thinker for many critics: Hippolyte Taine, again. As Taine is the product of his "milieu", his concept of "milieu" mirrors the "milieu" from which he came himself, Nietzsche would say, and it is quite revealing that he likes to remind us that amongst Darwin and utilitarianist thinkers, one can smell the populous atmosphere of industrial London: for most thinkers, the "milieu" is certainly essential, but it is because they are not, precisely, geniuses, but samples of the masses! Then, Taine also takes part in the way of thinking that conceives all action as the product of a reaction. The result of this way of thinking is a literary fatalism that destroys life by suppressing the will of the individual.

This point has been seen by Paul Bourget, in his study of Flaubert (see [Bourget 1883](#), p. 166), and it has been guessed by Nietzsche since 1868, before he observed it more carefully from 1884 to 1888: "[naturalists] only ever see the action of the outside world and the already formed ego (quite like Taine?)—they only know those whose will is weak, whose desire takes the place of the will" (*PF Spring 1884*, 25 [182] ("désir" is in French)). It is, to conclude on this point, in this context that evolutionism invades the discourse of criticism and the methodology of literary creation in the form of a trope that does not have the rigor of a real transposition.

3.2. *The Great "Décadents": From Naturalism to Symbolism*

This decadence, of which Nietzsche makes the genealogy in French literature and criticism, will experience a new avatar in the generation that is contemporary to it, that of the 1880s, where the decadents and the symbolists explicitly claim physiological decadence to make it the principle of their esthetics. Then, the problem of decadence will consist less of the antecedence of the theory in relation to creation than in the confusion of the arts, because this is what is concealed behind the slogan of their "correspondence", in the Baudelairean legacy. (Moreover, this slogan reminds Nietzsche of bad memories related to Wagner's total art). Of course, naturalism already found its model and its correspondent in another art, painting; symbolism will give primacy to the signifier, proclaiming the musical autonomy of language and its independence from meaning.

It is in this sense in any case that, in *Le roman naturaliste*, Ferdinand Brunetière sends back to back the formalist esthetics of the decadent Symbolists, on the one hand (*id est*: those who want with Verlaine "music above all else"), and the naturalistic esthetics, which is inspired by painting to render the colors of the world, on the other hand. From this point of view, the critics seem to paraphrase each other: Jules Lemaître, paraphrased by Louis Desprez, recognizes for example that the Goncourts have a style similar to impressionist painters: their pages "look like sketches, full of large spots of juxtaposed colors", like "a first draft prose" (Desprez, *L'Évolution naturaliste*, *op. cit.*, p. 80) without seeking the harmony. Brunetière, for his part, charges the Goncourts with false naturalism, and prefers to speak, about them, of "Japonism in the novel" ([Brunetière 1884](#), p. 346). Louis Desprez adds:

“Mr. Brunetière, in a fierce article, spoke (. . .) of the introduction of Japonism into the novel. The word is not badly found and sufficiently characterizes this art of decadence. (. . .) The art of exception and excessive color has its last word. This poetry has greenish tones like the paintings of Delacroix, [and] lets guess in the shadowy corners all kinds of confused, monstrous things” (Desprez, *L'Évolution naturaliste*, *op. cit.*, p. 115—Nietzsche takes back this term, “japonisme”, in *PF Spring 1884*, 25 [121] quoted above.).

It is clear now: literary impressionism consists of departing from Lessing's precepts and in resorting in literature to procedures and rhetoric that belong to another art than the art of writing. This is something that even a naturalist writer like Louis Desprez repudiates:

“the impressionist type in literature is provided by MM. de Goncourt. They have tried the most radically to transport the processes of painting into the book, odd attempt, but which, to my mind, does not want to be taken any further. The brush has such an advantage for the materialization of things and men that the duel seems unequal to me, to the disadvantage of the pen. The arts do well to mix, but they are wrong to mingle” (Ibid., p. 95. About the relations between literature and painting in the XIXth century, see [Vouilloux \(2011\)](#)).

So, where the decadence famously described by Bourget applies to naturalist literature and to the music of Wagner, the Symbolist decadence, on the other hand, seeks the harmony of sound instead of the harmony of meaning. This is Brunetière's main charge in an article of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* entitled *Symbolistes et décadents*, in the November–December 1888 issue. Only the fanatics of Wagner, he writes ([Brunetière 1888b](#), p. 221), “from the *Parsifal* to the *Walkure*”, are capable of tasting the poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé, this supra-naturalist poetry that would like “to flee, over there to flee”, and that is part of an artistic Platonism: with these poets, literature left the soil of human history and joined the supra-historical forces.

In short, this criticism is similar to that of literary impressionism and of the literary decadence as it was used to characterize Baudelaire. Brunetière, thus, rediscovers the terms Bourget called upon to characterize the decadence, when he considers that the impressionists “trace with the current of the pen”, and, “hypnotized in the contemplation of the words, or even of the letters [. . .] have lost the meaning of the sentence, of the stanza, all the more so that of the sets” (Ibid., p. 224. See ([Guyau 1887](#), p. 345): “Literature of the cranks expresses in general *painful analysis*, rarely *action*” (*op. cit.*, p. 345). All this passage on decadence, p. 345 *sq.*, is very instructive in a Nietzschean perspective: “The times of decadence know more and can less” (Ibid., p. 354)). In a fairly Nietzschean way, Brunetière notes the risk of such a project, on the grounds that the greatest danger of the self-proclaimed decadent is to “dig with their own hands, to deepen the separation between art and life” (Ibid., p. 225. This is also the reason why Jean-Marie Guyau opposes the esthetics of Gautier in *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, *op. cit.*, p. 363).

However, here precisely lies the biggest problem: Brunetière himself does not escape the decadence he nonetheless analyzes and criticizes. Nietzsche's philosophy is entirely driven by the project of overcoming this decadence, which historically and physiologically he feels dependent on. We remember that, in the second *Untimely Consideration* (1874), Nietzsche felt necessary to bend the sting of “historical sense” against itself so that, by this self-poisoning, he ended up immunizing in order to heal itself (about this metaphor, see [Sorosina \(2020\)](#)). Such a project will poison his entire physiology of art. Literary critics, alas, do not know how to dose in a vaccinal way the poison they inoculate themselves: they want to go too quickly and transform literature through criticism—which is why they are still victims of the diallel that consists of putting ‘theôria’ before ‘poiësis’, representation before will. Therefore, they remain irreducibly symptoms *and causes* of decadence, but certainly not their therapists (here, again, Guyau will be very perspicuous about the fact that theorists of decadence are themselves decadent in the way they analyze it with many details, in a decadent way, so to say, considering it both fatal and normal (*L'Art au point*

de vue sociologique, op. cit., pp. 375–76)). It is because they lack the sense of duration, even though they have found it to be lacking in writers. Besides, they lack the true historical sense, which resides in the grasping of a ‘kairos’ that requires a new historical method, genealogy, of which the Nietzschean physiology of literature constitutes an important form of revival.

4. Conclusions: The Self-Reliance of Genealogy

To conclude, I would like to come back to a remark Wolf Lepenies made, which builds on the fact that genealogical writing implies a reflexivity which is not only theoretical, but above all affective. This is especially the case where genealogy is concerned, as it is the case here, considering esthetic forms:

“the notion of *family* also has an emotional appeal. When one classifies individuals—and especially individuals with whom one has lived for a long time as an author—one takes the risk of becoming like a family member towards them. Sainte-Beuve congratulated himself on having kept his distance from Port-Royal. (. . .) Sainte-Beuve invokes the distance more than he embodies it. Because *Port-Royal* is, despite the rigor of its subject, a book full of inner emotions” (Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve, op. cit.*, p. 236).

If the writing of genealogies and the fact of learning about genealogies allows us to become familiar with families, it is because genealogy is not an exercise in neutral description that could attain the typological factuality Taine claimed to reach. Behind Sainte-Beuve’s displayed positivism, there is a being whose sensitivity continues to be touched and modulated by the frequentation of the individuals he portrays and, when this undertaking is as extensive as the work he provided to write *Port-Royal*, it becomes unquestionable that the nature of the affects and the moral types that one summons calls upon us to the point of marking us with their imprint. It is perhaps at this point that we find the greatest strength of the genealogical method, if the genealogist accepts this consequence, and its greatest weakness, if he does not: the genealogist is always more or less troubled and affected by what he makes the genealogy of, according to the affiliation or rejection relationships he establishes.

This is what Nietzsche, for his part, has acknowledged, resolving the dilemma Sainte-Beuve and Taine did not escape: from *The Birth of Tragedy* to his latest works, he has been more and more aware that the writer he was is always engaged in a battle in which he takes part in the very way he reports it. So this is what the genealogist should never forget: his affectivity is perhaps structurally modulated by the colors of the object he is depicting, much more than this object takes on the colors that his affectivity projects on him. So, any genealogical work must appear, sooner or later, for what it is: a genealogy of the genealogist himself (in order to extend these reflections on the affective dimension of historiographical discourse and of the participation of the historian to the history in Nietzsche’s work, one can refer to [Sorosina \(2016\)](#) et [Jensen \(2016\)](#)).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Albert, Paul. 1885. *La Littérature Française du Dix-Neuvième Siècle*. Paris: Hachette, vol. 2.
- Aubrit, Jean-Pierre, and Bernard Gendrel. 2019. *Littérature: Les Mouvements Et Ecoles Littéraires*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Barthes, Roland. 1975. *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Paris: Seuil.
- Böning, Thomas. 2001. *Alterität und Identität in literarischen Texten von Rousseau und Goethe bis Celan und Handke*. Freiburg: Rombach.
- Bourget, Paul. 1883. *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*. Paris: Lemerre.

- Bourget, Paul. 1888. *Etudes et Portraits. Sociologie et Littérature*. t. I. 2 vols. Paris: Lemerre.
- Brunetière, Ferdinand. 1884. *Le Roman Naturaliste*. Paris: Lévy.
- Brunetière, Ferdinand. 1888a. La critique scientifique. *Revue des Deux Mondes* 88: 213–26.
- Brunetière, Ferdinand. 1888b. Symbolistes et décadens. *Revue des Deux Mondes* 90: 213–26.
- Burckhardt, Jakob. 2019. *The Civilisation of the Period of the Renaissance in Italie*. London: Routledge. First published 1860.
- Campioni, Giuliano. 2001. *Les Lectures Françaises de Nietzsche*. Paris: PUF.
- Cassirer, Ernst. 1995. *Le problème de la Connaissance Dans la Science des Temps Modernes*. t. III. Paris: Cerf.
- Cheminaud, Julie. 2018. *Les Evadés de la Médecine. Physiologie de l'art Dans la France de la Seconde Moitié du XIXe Siècle*. Paris: Vrin.
- Claudon, Francis. 1998. L'histoire littéraire: Jadis, naguère, maintenant. *Neohelicon* 25: 205–44. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Crépon, Marc. 2003. *Nietzsche, L'art et la Politique de L'avenir*. Paris: PUF.
- Desprez, Louis. 1884. *L'Évolution Naturaliste*. Paris: Tresse.
- Domino, Brian. 1999. Stendhal's Ecstatic Embrace of History as the Antidote for Decadence. In *Nietzsche's Futures*. Edited by John Lippitt. London: MacMillan, pp. 48–61.
- Gauchet, Marcel. 1985. *Le Désenchantement du Monde*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Glick, Thomas, and Elinor Shaffer. 2014. *The Literary and Cultural Reception of Darwin in Europe*. London: Bloomsbury, vol. III.
- Glinoyer, Anthony. 2006. Portrait de Gustave Planche en porte-étendard de la critique littéraire. *Revue D'histoire Littéraire de la France* 106: 885–99. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Goncourt, Jules et Edmont. 1877. *Idées et sensations*. Paris: Charpentier.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. 2006. *La Structure de la théorie de l'évolution*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Guillo, Dominique. 2003. *Les figures de l'organisation. Sciences de la vie et sciences sociales au XIXe siècle*. Paris: PUF.
- Guyau, Jean-Marie. 1887. *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*. Paris: Alcan.
- Jensen, Anthony. 2013. From Natural History to Genealogy. In *Texturen des Denkens*. Edited by Axel Pichler and Marcus Andreas Born (Hsrg). Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 189–204.
- Jensen, Anthony. 2016. Écrire l'histoire historiquement. In *Les Historicités de Nietzsche*. Directed by Bertrand Binoche and Arnaud Sorosina. Paris: éditions de la Sorbonne.
- Johnson, Dirk Robert. 2013. *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klinkert, Thomas, and Gisèle Séginger. 2019. *Biographes. Mythes et Savoirs Biologiques Dans la Littérature du XIXe Siècle*. Paris: Hermann.
- Lanson, Gustave. 1904. L'histoire littéraire et la sociologie. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 12: 621–42.
- Lanson, Gustave. 1910. La méthode de l'histoire littéraire. *La Revue du mois* 10: 385–413.
- Lemaître, Jules. 1886. *Les Contemporains: Études et Portraits*. 2 vols. Paris: Lecène et Oudin.
- Lepenies, Wolf. 2002. *Sainte-Beuve. Au seuil de la modernité*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Molho, Raphaël. 1963. *La Critique littéraire en France au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Buchet-Chastel.
- Montinari, Mazzino. 1985. Nietzsche e la 'decadence'. In *D'Annunzio e la Cultura Germanica: Atti del VI Convegno Internazionale di Studi D'Annunziani*. Pescara: Centro Nazionale di Studi D'Annunziani, pp. 117–27.
- Moore, Gregory E. 2002. *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Müller-Lauter, Wolfgang. 1998. Décadence artistique et décadence physiologique: Les dernières critiques de Nietzsche contre Wagner. *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 3: 275–92.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1980. *Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*. 15 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2003. *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe*. 8 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Orsucci, Andrea. 1992. *Dalla Biologia Cellulare Alle Scienze Dello Spirito*. Bologna: il mulino.
- Piazzesi, Chiara. 2003. *Nietzsche, Fisiologia Dell'arte e Decadence*. Lecce: Conti.
- Reschke, Renate. 2014. Leidenschaft und Subjektivität: Nietzsche als Leser von Stendhal. In *Ohnmacht des Subjekts—Macht der Persönlichkeit*. Edited by Christian Benne and Enrico Müller (Hsrg). Basel: Schwabe, pp. 367–83.
- Richardson, John. 2008. *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rodet, Chantal. 2010. *Généalogies. Le Récit Bourgeois, XIX-XXe Siècle*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.
- Sainte-Beuve. 1856. Les mémoires de Saint-Simon. In *Causeries du Lundi*. Paris: Garnier frères, vol. XV, p. 459.
- Sainte-Beuve. 1868. *Nouveaux Lundis*. 13 vols. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Sainte-Beuve. 1876. *Les Cahiers de Sainte-Beuve*. Paris: Hachette/BNF.
- Sainte-Beuve. 1908. *Port-Royal*, 7th ed. Paris: Hachette.
- Sainte-Beuve. n.d. *Causeries du Lundi*. 16 vols. Paris: Garnier.
- Sorosina, Arnaud. 2014. Le statut des sophistes chez Nietzsche. *Philonsorbonne* 8: 65–87. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sorosina, Arnaud. 2016. Histoire, pitié et pathos de la distance. In *Les Historicités de Nietzsche*. Directed by Bertrand Binoche and Arnaud Sorosina. Paris: éditions de la Sorbonne.
- Sorosina, Arnaud. 2020. *Le Scorpion de l'histoire. Généalogies de Nietzsche*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.
- Sorosina, Arnaud. forthcoming. *Anatomie de la Critique Littéraire. Éléments Pour la Généalogie de la Physiologie de l'art*.
- Stendhal. 1927. *Rome, Naples, Florence*. Paris: Le Divan. First published 1817.
- Stiegler, Barbara. 2001. *Nietzsche et la Biologie*. Paris: PUF.
- Taine, Hippolyte. 1865. *Philosophie de L'art*. Paris: Baillière.
- Taine, Hippolyte. 1866. *Histoire de la Littérature Anglais*. Paris: Hachette.

-
- Taine, Hippolyte. 1908. *Essais de Critique et D'histoire*. Paris: L. Hachette et cie.
- Thumerel, Fabrice. 1998. *La Critique Littéraire*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Vouilloux, Bernard. 2011. *Le Tournant "Artiste" de la Littérature Française. Ecrire la Peinture au XIXe Siècle*. Paris: Hermann.
- Nicolas Wanlin, director. 2019, *Littérature et Sciences au XIXe Siècle*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.