

**PSYCHOCLIMATOLOGY
– AN UNKNOWN CHAPTER OF BIOCLIMATOLOGY**

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Abstract. The paper shows the relationship between climatic phenomena and psychological events. Psychoclimatology includes pathological aspects, as well as therapeutic aspects. Climate may trigger the development of artistic works, prose, poetry, painting or music. Artists are especially sensitive to rain and wind.

Some eighty years ago, in his *Traité de climatologie biologique et médicale (1)*, **H. Van der Elst**, a physician, defined climato-psychology as a chapter of medicine aimed at the therapeutical use of various aspects of the climate. It was a new chapter, beside those already existing in psychotherapy, bordering on nature, society, arts, etc. (aesthetic therapy, art therapy, melotherapy, family therapy, group therapy, ergotherapy – therapy through work, and ethnotherapy).

A geographer would focus rather on psychoclimatology, because his aim is not to treat but mainly to look into the relationships between the climatic elements and the body's state of health or illness from a bioclimatological perspective and define the influence of some climatic aspects, of weather in particular, on the human psyche.

The climate may exert a *direct* action, involving physiological manifestations, and an *indirect* action, with psychic manifestations. It should be remembered that the weather may have either a pathological or therapeutical action in humans, depending on the intensity of the meteorological phenomena, the limits of their manifestation, people's individual particularities (age, adjustment capacity, human type and the limits of individual morbidity).

In general, bioclimatology studies the body's psychological response to temperatures (the cold-or-heat stress), the quantity of insolation, humidity (high or low, cold or warm), sudden pressure variations, high wind speed reducing the comfort gradient, etc.

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The indirect action of the psyche is more subtle and more difficult to observe, which would largely justify why this type of relation attracts so little interest. Perhaps our individual capacity fails to respond to the action of the natural environment, or one's own sensitivity and response ability to various manifestations of the weather is to blame. **Emerson** used to write that *the difference between one landscape and the other is insignificant, but there are huge differences between beholders (1)*. In **Amiel's**(2) view, *the landscape is a state of mind*. On the other hand, the landscape itself may change constantly, irrespective of our state of mind. **Mihail Sadoveanu (3)**, contends that *One is mistaken to believe that a landscape, viewed in the same conditions, is one and the same; that sunrises, middays and sunsets repeat themselves; that moments flow monotonously. He who looks carefully always sees and hears something else; each fraction of life is permanently changing its perspective both in relation to itself and in relation to us*.

A study made over 25 years ago (3) into the relationships between aspects of the climate and arts was an opportunity to discover a whole artistic world in the yearly succession of seasons and in the manifestation of the climate: insolation, nebulosity, rain, snow, wind and storms, without knowing at that time that such a study may fit into what some researchers called climato-psychology. Here are some of their considerations.

As a rule, artists and critics have an intuition for the depth of this relationship and, based on it, they justify, analyze and explain their works. For example, **Hippolyte Taine** in his *Philosophy of Art*(3) highlights the influence of climate on the spiritual make-up of settlers and its reflection in art, illustrating this assertion by comparing the art of Holland and of Greece, and in *The History of English Literature (4)* he advances the idea that the work of art is conditioned by three factors: race, environment and moment, exemplifying the difference between Germanic races, on the one hand, and Hellenic and Latin ones, on the other, in terms of the distinct environments (the climate in particular) they have settled in.

John Ruskin explains sculpture and the building of imposing Gothic structures by some specific climatic features that influence the psychical make-up of people living in the Northern regions(1).

According to **Lucian Blaga (2)**, the works of art represent the reflection of landscape and climate, and he compares the trill of mountain people to the hot Argentinian dance, the sadness of the Russian song, recalling the immensity of the steppe, or the inflexions of the Romanian "Doina". **Octavian Paler (2)** underscores the presence of the Greek and Roman art in connection with the seaside climate, explaining the similitude between classical art and a coastline where the sea is as clear as the sky.

M. Piéry advances the notion of *psychological climate*, illustrating it in painting with the realism of the Flemish School and the idealism of the Florentine School. His explanation is the hot oceanic climate in the former case and the sunny Mediterranean one in the latter.

It is obvious that the pathogenic or therapeutic action of climatic factors on the psyche cannot be assigned to them alone, although some aspects of very intense or persistent climatic stress may trigger some specific symptoms in people with a depressive, maniacal structure, in asthenic, anxious, depressive, euphoric, obsessive or other types of neuroses.

Individual reactions to various climatic aspects may hamper balanced activity, or may develop some artistic manifestations, termed by specialists *Aesthetoclimatology*. If some climatic aspects may influence an individual's state of mind, strengthening one's mental health, moods, behaviours and prevent psychic disorders, then we have a case of *Aesthetotherapy*.

The artist has the capacity to express that which most people are likely to experience in the midst of nature in connection with the ordinary or unusual manifestations of the local climate. Here are a few examples of how one's surrounding thermal environment may influence a sensitive person (3). **Andre Gide** writes: *I am at the mercy of my liver, heart and nerves, and no doubt equally of temperature, of all the changes in Jupiter's moods and scowls; My brain works only from 15° up; a consul at Civita Vecchia, Stendhal notes: for Frenchmen, it is unbearably hot here, we are overwhelmed.*

One of the most interesting cases, from a psycho-climatic viewpoint is of **Ovid**, the Latin poet exiled on the Black Sea coast, and who lived there in A.D. 8-17. In his *Letters from Exile*, he left us poems of exquisite beauty in which he bemoans his tragic fate in that harsh winter climate he perceived as follows: *When winter comes a terrible frost lays out a stone-like bridge; the Boreal barks ferociously; as far as eye can see the whole Pontus Euxinus is frozen, ships are stuck in ice floes, live fish struggle in the glassy ice, snow in the fields never melts, fresh snow falls and the old one stays on; in-between two winters snow is still there* (3). Now then, however severe one of the winters he spent there must have been, such images are obviously the expression of a tragic obsession without any connection to reality, because 2000 years ago, the Black Sea coastal climate was relatively similar to present day one. Psychiatrist **Pierre Janet** (1899-3) described a symptom named *the narrowing down of the field of conscience*, expressed by the focus of conscience upon an idea, recollections, actions, etc., which the subject sticks to. Conscience is unable to grasp all of the present experience, except for the traumatized one.

Many people are sensitive to atmospheric pressure variations, even through the accelerated rhythm of our daily life, usually prevents us from looking into our

states of mind. **Marcel Proust** wrote: *As if it were not enough that I was so much alike to my father, instead of being satisfied, like he was, with consulting the barometer, I turned into a living barometer myself.*

Th. Gautier makes an interesting remark: *When winter is drawing near, nervous people would experience that vague uneasiness felt by delicate organism when snow is hanging in the air.* And **Stendhal**, who was a physician, wrote: *an extremely sensitive being, who fell prey to the slightest variations of temperature or of electricity in the air...*

Artists are particularly sensitive to nebulosity, to various types of clouds in a blue or overcast sky, Cirrus or Cumulus clouds hovering over in fine or stormy weather.

Baudelaire confesses: *I love the clouds... clouds that pass ... far away, wonderful clouds.* **Petru Creția**: *Tender sky, mild clouds ... Fresh clouds fill the sky with ever moving and changing shadows and lights.* **Geo Bogza** presents an altogether different picture: *.... running like a pack of bears growling subduedly, menacingly. It is a moment of hesitation before the great life-and-death fight.*

Wonderful images are suggested by **Hermann Hesse**: *They are play and pleasure for the eye, the blessing and joy of God, the ire and power of death. They are gentle, soft and peaceful like the soul of newborn babes, beautiful, rich and generous like good angels; they are dark, settled and ugly like messengers of death; they are chasing one another like criminals, hunt whistling overhead like angry knights; they hang sadly and dreamingly in the white skies like hermits of melancholy.*

One of the major meteorological phenomena in creating a certain state of mind, usually melancholy, sadness, discouragement, is rain. Selecting from among myriads of examples is fairly difficult, but here are a few. **George Bacovia**, a person particularly sensitive to “precipitation” (a term used by weather specialists), says: *Yes, it rains as I’ve never seen it raining, what a world emptied of dreams, how not weep deep down; yes, how not die mad even; Oh, the sheep-bell moan when rain falls; the walls are wet, cold gets me, and thought accustoms me to those in the grave.* Rain with **Baudelaire** arouses somber images: *When rain stretches its thick streams like bars of a huge prison.*

Another element which artists, or ordinary people even, are extremely sensitive to is wind. Analyzing the meteorological aspects found in Sadoveanu’s work, **Nicolae Topor** writes: *Wind, with its heart-rending moaning, as Tudor Vianu puts it, always disquieted him: he could not sleep, it waked him up, irritated him; in today’s modern terminology we would say that Sadoveanu was allergic to wind, a pathological process actually experienced by many people.* Wind is usually disturbing, unnerving, it creates discomfort. **Victor Hugo**: *The Simoon, the killer wind, was roaring;* **Paul Claudel**: *All harmful winds blow in his face / the South*

Wind, like the outburst of hell. Positive reactions in the face of the unbridled forces of nature are quite rare. **Herman Hesse** makes a subtle analysis of the Föhn unfolding on the northern slopes of the Swiss Alps: *...as a child, the Föhn frightened me, I even hated it. But, as I walked into wild manhood I began loving it, the rebellious the ever young, the insolent brawler and the bearer of spring.*

One of the most spectacular phenomena, strongly influencing the psychic of sensitive people, is undoubtedly the storm. **Victor Hugo**: *The storm behaves like a gang of pirates. There is nothing more similar to an attack than a shipwreck, clouds, thunder, rain, winds, breakers, cliffs, all this gang of accomplices is hideous.* **Jules Renard**: *I have this idiot fear of storms.... What I first look when I see a house is the lightning rod.*

Piéry's treatise speaks about a psychotherapeutical practice, the would-be cultural tourism in modern terms: *at Epidaurus, psychotherapy was not only hypnotic, but perhaps rather chromatic, acoustic, olfactile and tactile. And since people used to come in pilgrimage at the temple sited in a picturesque location, treatment also included climatic, aesthetic and religious elements.* Piéry recalls **Jules Michelet**, who wrote: *Italy, my nurse, to you I return to reinforce my heart ... I am born of Virgil and Vico.*

Climatic psychotherapy includes also ethnotherapy. Romanian geographer **Ion Ghinoiu** relates how Simion Mehedinți, on his return from Switzerland to Soveja, his native village in Vrancea, Romania, feeling ill was healed (between March 24, the eve of the Annunciation, and July 8, a day of prayers for the ancestors) with the help of traditional practices: "exorcism, associated with the therapy of words, healing herbs, pentatonic music, fast tempo, low key and muttered words in a dialogue with the evil spirit". That unusual event is highlighted by **Mehedinți** himself, who recalls Antheus, the giant of the Greek mythology, who used to regain his strength by touching the Earth, that is his mother's body: *When wind is putting you down, you quickly grasp the ground with your hands.*

The therapy in the midst of nature may include, beside cultural tourism, also balneary tourism, ethnotourism and ecotourism.

Psycho-climato-therapy could begin by observing and getting to know nature. Lucian **Blaga** suggests: *The ancients themselves knew that philosophy begins with wondering. But, let me be more specific, philosophy begins with wondering in the face of common things and not of uncommon ones.*

Exalting in the face of Nature's beauties Romanian poetess **Magda Isanos** writes: *I wish to be as light as air and fly up into the sky and kiss it for joy that it unfolds above me and above you.*

The best example of the biological balance established between man and whatever the manifestations of weather, could be G. Simenon's portrayal of his famous Commissaire Maigret: *He enjoyed any kind of weather. He enjoyed*

particularly the weather extremes reported in next day's newspapers, diluvial rains, tornadoes, biting frost and torid heat.

Our life is a permanent rush and daily events, engrossing us completely, make nature, weather pass unnoticed. It is only in the few vacation days, snatched from the unrelenting social haste, that we might perhaps remember enjoying them. The conscious participation in the rhythms of Nature could prove a prophylactic therapy with beneficial long-term effects

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