

REVIEW

**Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Yana Rowland PhD
(ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY)**

PhD Candidate: **Mihrije Maloku-Morina**

Title of PhD Thesis: ***DREISER AS A STEADY CRITIC OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE***

Academic Supervisor: Prof. Dr. habil. Albena Bakracheva (New Bulgarian University)

1. Relevance of the researched problem (scholarship and application).

This research consists of an *Introduction*, 4 parts, and a *Conclusion*, followed by a list of works cited and consulted. It deals with an authentic, so far insufficiently investigated, topic, as the candidate evidences in her review of criticism on Dreiser between, chiefly, the 1960s and the 1990s. Ms. Maloku-Morina demonstrates the contributiveness of the problem by delineating a broader context which could involve the work of H. B. Stowe, U. Sinclair, Sh. Anderson, W. Faulkner, and E. Hemingway. It is obvious that there is good commandment of literary facts and critical attitudes regarding the theme of investigation, hemmed by the PhD candidate's desire to outline the interaction between the historical and the fictional in what may be termed a saga about the changing moral system of America from the end of the 19th century through to WWII. An especial focus could be considered *Sister Carrie* whereby Ms. Maloku-Morina attests the autobiographical foundation of Dreiser's literary mastery. The main part of the thesis is followed by an overview, by periods, of literary criticism on Dreiser. There is also an apparently much needed and therefore contributive opinion on the position of Dreiser in the candidate's own country – with regard to the importation of foreign (American) literature across political changes in our time.

2. Validation of the purposes and tasks of research.

The PhD thesis gathers, analyses, selectively (a definite merit!), facts and scholarly opinions regarding the social problematic of Dreiser's novelistic oeuvre. It also maps possible further routes in the development of the current investigation. On p. 32 of the PhD synopsis we read the following statement: "This thesis encompasses two (main) objectives: [it elaborates on the facts, sources and composition of some of the main works, and [...] [it studies] the themes and form of the finalized works. (It is not my intention to provide generic information about each novel, but to rather draw the facts out of an imagined reality)". In this sense, I believe, the candidate has managed to successfully fulfil the tasks she has assumed.

3. Compatibility between the chosen methodology and methods of research and the tasks of the current research.

Given the candidate's desire to utilize facts and a selection of critical opinions which disclose the biographical verve of Dreiser's work, I would venture to claim that a historical approach underlies the whole endeavor yet structuralist elements (to do with tracing narrative components, especially with regard to the type of narrator and the interaction between the characters – e.g. pp. 11, 30, 37, 77, 91, 98, 102, 194, 127, 156, text of thesis) are not entirely alien to this project. Overall, I declare that this PhD research sets tasks correctly and feasibly and adheres to them through the end.

4. Scientific and practical achievements of the doctoral research, including original contribution to the relevant scholarly field(s).

I should like to outline the following merits of this PhD research:

- Enrichment of the scholarly context of studying Theodore Dreiser
- The candidate's pioneering investigation of the fate and routes of studying Dreiser in her native state
- A significant contribution to approaching Dreiser in terms of periodization of specialized critical opinion in his own state

5. Relevant publications on the theme of research.

The candidate has presented three impressive publications on the theme of research – all in scholarly journals and editions and within the period 2015 – 2016.

6. Citations and impact factor.

I am not in possession of any specific information regarding the candidate's current impact factor.

7. Recommendations, remarks, etc.

The bibliographic reference is way too modest for a scholarly project such as this one and given the unflagging interest in Dreiser to the present day. Thus, it mostly relies on research between 1960 and 1990. Should the candidate wish to further her knowledge of a variety of critical schools that have ventured to peruse the writer, I would be glad to suggest two monographs (which I have copies of and would therefore only be glad to forward to her): Clare Virginia Eby, *Dreiser and Veblen, Saboteurs of the Status Quo* (1998), and Miriam Gogol, *Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism* (1995).

I find somewhat worrying a tendency for referring to, rather than citing precisely (which would, naturally, manifest itself, also graphically), literary criticism. The latter could be perceived to somehow stifle the candidate's own voice and take away from the beauty of the contributive element of the research (examples: pp. 19, 22, 24, 27, 34, 46, 66 etc., text of thesis). In this sense, but perhaps in a real-life discussion, I would dare raise certain queries. Such as, for instance, the *certainty* of well-known facts regarding the autobiographical premise of Dreiser's composition of *Sister Carrie* ("In August 1986, eight years after Emma

eloped ... in a flat on *Thirteenth Street*", cc. 33-34, text of thesis). Or, the derivative format of referring to Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (pp. 96-97, text of thesis; Shelley's work is freely available on the web), rather than quoting from the original (which, to my mind, would have been much more productive an experience).

In addition, I was slightly taken aback to discover the candidate's review of critical opinion on Dreiser (by period) placed finally. Had it been placed initially, it would have even further promoted the uniqueness of the current research, but perhaps this is just a matter of preference of one structure over another.

I should also like to encourage Ms. Maloku-Morina to dig deeper into the comparative context she has indeed suggested (pp. 32, 171, text of PhD): Theodore Dreiser and Thomas Hardy. To this I would certainly add the necessity of taking a close look at John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* which treats issues very similar to those Dreiser deals with. Both lines of comparative research create a transcontinental context which could enrich the present project with novel possibilities for approaching the matter of the interaction between historicity and fictionality.

By suggesting all of the above remarks, however, in no way do I decree any absolute requirements. Rather, I offer ways of promoting the candidate's knowledge of Dreiser.

8. Final opinion.

In view of the above said, I am convinced that that candidate has fulfilled the purposes and tasks of the current PhD project successfully. **I therefore suggest to the respectable members of the examination board that Mihrije Maloku-Morina be awarded the title "Doctor of Philosophy."** I believe she fully deserves this and I should therefore wish her every success in her further journeys across some unploughed fields of the great American novel.

02 Feb 2021

Signature 

(Assoc. Prof. Yana Rowland PhD)