

NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY

DREISER AS A STEADY CRITIC OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE

(Dissertation Abstract)

Supervisor:

Prof. Albena Bakratheva, PhD

Candidate:

Mihrije Maloku-Morina

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Mencken wrote “No other American of his generation left so wide and fine mark upon the national letters as Dreiser did. American writing, before and after his time, differed almost as much as biology before and after Darwin. All of us who write are better on writing, because he lived, worked, and hoped...”. Despite Dreiser’s popularity, reputation and fame in the US and around the world, until late only one of his works has been translated into Albanian, *An American Tragedy*. Therefore, on the one hand, the topic of this dissertation “Dreiser as a Steady Critic of Social Injustice” is an unexplored and authentic topic in our studies, while on the other hand, it is a striking, serious, significant and a welcomed topic, for the fact that it is a study that manages to fill a gap for the first time in our philological studies, on the life of this great author of American and world literature; moreover, while nearly all of his novels were translated into the Albanian language some time ago. At the same time, it is believed and hoped that this thesis will be a new contribution to the advancement of the literary and cultural links between Albania and America.

It should be noted that the study of the history of American literature is a strange phenomenon. Especially when considering any critical period during American history, when social conflicts extended to worrying and entangled situations, warnings in the form of books appeared and they were more than welcomed in the given era. The need for such works usually included the essence of social discontent and the aim to change the tough and critical situation. More or less, this was the case with the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by H. B. Stowe, *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair and *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser. As a matter of course, these works became not only special events in the literary life, but also important social and political drifts of American society. “*Dreiser more than any other man, marching alone, usually unappreciated, often hated, has cleared the trail from Victorian and Howells timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness and passion of life. Without his pioneering, I doubt if any of us could, unless we liked to be sent to jail, seek to express life and beauty and terror.*”

These are the words of the writer Sinclair Lewis upon receiving the first Nobel Prize awarded to an American writer. Lewis also mentioned the generation of American writers, praising Dreiser, who, after Mark Twain and Whitman, had overcome the old models and provided American literature with a new climate and situation. By highly praising the work of Dreiser, he let the American literary community know that the Nobel Prize was appropriate for Dreiser and not for him. The affirmation of Dreiser as one of the most prominent American novelists before the Second World War occurred in the period when his work came out of anonymity and reached its peak. After the author's death his work experienced a period of waning popularity. However, after a generation Dreiser's work again began to be appreciated by American and world literary criticism. Dreiser is a notoriously visionary writer of American literature. The portrayal of the US's modernisation predicted the problems that would arise in the XX and XXI centuries. His writings, not only his novels, but his drama, autobiography, commentary and social observations, are detailed, clear and visionary commentaries on the modern consumer society, the relations between social classes and forms of power.

It is a matter of fact that Dreiser made an effort throughout his life to understand and explain the world he lived in. He had a deep curiosity and was fascinated and identified with the legend of contemporary Prometheus, who harnessed his great energy and sought the way to bring this power into the service of society and not to its harm. Dreiser not only changed the landscapes of his works, but he also changed the motives of contemporary man, by creating balances that predetermined and outlined the fate of Cowperwood and Hurstwood. This lack of social and human equilibrium greatly disturbed Dreiser, who began to feel that the ideals of Christianity, love, goodness, equality, humility, mercy and penance, had little, if nothing, to do with his time and society.

Like his contemporaries, Henry Adams and Frank Norris, Dreiser too was fascinated by political and technological power. He was capable of admiring, and at the same time despising, Charles Yerkes, together with the other great authors that belonged to the **American Gilded Age**. He believed that Yerkes' success was a form of implementing power, but he was not sure whether the new technology would be useful to the poor as well. In other words, he was unable to bring together the feelings of selfishness and altruism.

In this way, Dreiser shaped the sense of inner conflict in his prose, even during the last days of his life when his views were fading; he felt that his fate had abandoned him and that the events and experiences of Hurstwood and Clyde Griffiths represented the events and

fate that belonged to all people. The last image of the universe given by Dreiser was that the universe was envious, ruthless and greedy, which spent its life sacrificing others. Dreiser believed in such ideas, though contradicting himself, because he defended the political, ideological, social and political causes and concepts that aimed at a better future.

No wonder that for Dreiser, life in this new world consisted of the unstoppable run after filling the fiery desires and seeking material of satisfaction and happiness. In his first novel, *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser violated the tradition of the appearance of the sinful woman and introduced the woman who, the way she was, succeeded not only as a woman but also as a creature who struggled for a better life, without even considering conventional tradition. So, Dreiser did not portray only women who aspired for success, but he also created a series of portraits of ambitious protagonists like: George Hurstwood in the novel *Sister Carrie*, Lester Caine in *Jennie Gerhardt*, Eugene Witla in *Genius*, Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy*, whereas in his novel *Dawn* he penned his own autobiography. Through the artistic prose and other works, Dreiser places the focus of his interest on gender or sex not only in moral terms and customs but also in a new aspect, as a biological and psychological mystery and as a social desire.

Dreiser is an ever-popular writer of American literature. His portrayals of the modern United States foreshadowed some of the problems of the XX century, with surprising clarity and reached nearly to the beginning of the new century. His writings, not only the prose, but his autobiography, drama, observations and essays as well, make us think deeply about the consumer society, the differences between misery and prosperity, gender, the working class and the power of bureaucracy and democracy. Modern readers can communicate very easily with Dreiser's work, as he portrayed the United States undergoing a process of transformation and the big crisis in the consumer and modern society. The outline and vivid portrayal of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, a heroine who expressed her wishes openly and managed to achieve her goals, is still enticing to the reader. Likewise, the desire of Clyde Griffiths to live better and become a member of his wealthy cousin's family, in the novel *An American Tragedy*, still marks the divide and difference between the wealthy and the poor. It is likely that these events and characters are very similar to those of our time.

In preparing this thesis a number of authors, mainly Americans, but also English and others have been selected, investigated, searched and traced. Among the main authors consulted and used and who have written essays, observations, studies, monographs and critiques about Dreiser, are: T. R. Lingeman, L. J. Loving, L. Casuto, H. Lawrence, L. James,

J. Salzman, D. Pizer, D. Dudley, L. Zani Ze, P. Fisher, R. Lehan, P. Gerber, W. Robert Pen, etc.

Extreme Realism and American Naturalism

Naturalist emphasis on how social and economic forces determine human behaviour was very well developed by the novelist Theodore Dreiser. Dreiser's novels, especially *An American Tragedy* (1925) placed an important emphasis on the exploration of individual fate during a period of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the US; writings of the naturalist period were closely linked to social changes in America during a period of dramatic capitalist growth and development of big business.

Considering Dreiser as a pioneer of Naturalism and an "Unmatched Naturalist", most of the critics however refused to accept the sincerity and the value of his work. By the end of 1944, Chauncey Tinker called Dreiser one of the most prominent leaders of the American naturalist school. However, a critical analysis of his novels will testify that although Dreiser had many features in common with naturalism, his novels also contain features that are incompatible and even inconsistent with naturalism.

Although Dreiser's novels are more or less consistent with this definition, most of them do not fit into the theory of determinism. Naturalists believed that life and human activity are controlled and determined by some external force or physical, social and environmental factors. They do not believe in the influence of free will. Particularly on this point, he does not agree with naturalists.

The Autobiographical Element in Dreiser's Novel

Generally speaking, Dreiser's experiences, viewpoints and ideas are best expressed in his novels. In addition, poverty had a decisive impact on the formation of his thoughts. Dreiser's poverty during his youth made him covet wealth and prosperity. He had realised since his youth that religion and poverty were inseparable. His father was a good example.

All four of his first novels, *Sister Carrie*, *Jenny Gerhardt*, *Financier* and *Titan* are meditations of his assertion that material success would only lead one to disappointment and sorrow.

Love, is the most favourite theme of his novels. Dreiser loved human creatures as an integral part of nature. His autobiographical works tell us about how much he had loved his mother, brothers, sisters, and others. In his essay, the *Confession of Religion* he states: "*I believe in the great power of love. I do not understand it. I believe it is the best fragrance flower in this world of thorns.*" The truth is that he began his career with selfish characters like Carrie and Hurstwood, who only loved themselves. After discovering, identifying and clarifying selfish love, he began to create free and altruistic love, which he began with Jennie and arrived at Solon Barnes and Berenice. He closed his career preaching universal love and brotherhood among people. Also, the mercy and understanding of Dreiser for the poor and the weak turned him into a true humanist. Understanding and support for striking workers, depicting homes for the poor, the generous and altruistic service of the former soldier who believes his services to the poor are services to God, are examples of his early humanist stance. He forced Jane to adopt two orphans. He urged Cowperwood to donate money to build the hospital for the poor and made Berenice serve the orphans.

Dreiser realised that the futility of material goals led him to believe in a superior power, although he was not able to understand whether that power was well intentioned or malicious. After a series of meditations and conflicts of ideas he began to believe in the charity of creative power. This belief led him to have a clearer view on the fact that material success did not only lead to demoralisation but also to ruin. In the novel *Genius*, Eugen Witla understands his mistake of being satisfied by pleasures, wealth, and sex after the death of his wife during childbirth. Only after these events he understood the meaning of life. He rejected the idea that God was wicked and believed in the nobility of a supreme being, thus finding peace in life. Dreiser's belief in a supreme, sympathetic and benevolent being is also confirmed in the novel *An American Tragedy*. The creation of highly religious images such as Elvira Griffiths and Macmillan, the emphasis on repentance, salvation or redemption, and the use of Bible quotes, is the result of his later faith. In this novel Dreiser proves that only the search for wealth and pleasure is the cause of tragedy and points out that in this case, repentance and salvation are needed. The last chapters of the novel are about the efforts being made to encourage Clyde to admit that there is a benevolent God. Clyde's suspicions and his later belief in God make his case the same as Dreiser's. That is why the years that followed the publication of the novel *An American Tragedy* have been the most important years of Dreiser's life. He began to see and find order and meaning throughout his creativity and ultimately managed to understand the limitations of science, and then began to become

tolerant regarding religious organisation. He saw the presence of God everywhere and in all things. He even expressed his readiness to prove God's existence. The deep belief that Dreiser had in God and the protection and support of universal love are also reflected in his novels *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic*.

Interest in Facts in Dreiser's Novels

Apparently, Dreiser knew that the fate of man was defined by race or nation, moment or time and environment. Therefore, he wanted to verify these elements through facts, too.

For Dreiser, the truth was definitely related to the fact, so, the free reader had to see the world of facts through his eyes. His ability to feel, to show understanding and to understand reality was as comprehensive and as extensive as the daily newspaper and Dreiser shaped and elaborated this reality as a reader and reporter. His sensitivity as a novelist was closer to that of any other American writer before him who had read documentary evidence in newspapers (as he did about *Carrie*, *Hurstwood* and *Clyde Griffiths*). Although Dreiser was an autodidact and had come from a poor neighbourhood, he was able to experience the anxiety of a Broadway star, to experience the success of a financier and at the same time had the chance to dress in luxurious clothes and to dwell in modern houses. He was at the same time able to experience poverty, failure, jealousy, and exclusion from the American dream of success, whilst also understanding the great dissolution too when he observed the poor amid prosperity. But, Dreiser went further than newspaper readers and reporters and constantly investigated and sought to find out the significance of the accumulated chaos of facts around him, trying to figure out where those facts led him, and what was their purpose. Thus, the scandalous news from Broadway, the advertising of luxurious and expensive items, beggars' lines in front of the shops, the events caused by the strike, unemployment statistics, famine and death. All of these contributed to a new theme in Dreiser's work, a whole block of facts that will be resurrected in *Sister Carrie*.

The triumphs of businessmen and magnates, the details of financial machinations, the described events of the high society, all contained the intense and actual drama that will be recreated by Dreiser in his *Financier*. At the same time, now and again he would find and gather facts about young boys who killed their girlfriends to pursue a career and enrich themselves in society, to live better and to live happily. Instances like these gave him the idea and the basis for the novel *An American Tragedy*.

Dreiser and/in the First Decade of the XX Century

Meanwhile, Dreiser created a profound experience of American life, so he began to think more and more about social problems. He had read Balzac's *Human Comedy*, Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, and A. Hexel's work *Science and Christianity*. However, over time Spencer's influence started to fade. Scenes of poverty and misery, the suppression of the industrial and agricultural plutocracy, forced him to doubt the principles of biological determinism, according to which race is inherited by the most skilled creatures, while the war is always won by the strongest. The answer based on biological determinism seemed to suffice him but did not transmit optimism to the new author. Now Dreiser would seek answers elsewhere and he found these answers in the study of nature and human society.

***Sister Carrie*: Traits of Dreiser's Self-Identification**

In Dreiser's first novel, readers will encounter nearly all of the main topics the author focused his attention on throughout his career. In a powerful and condensed, yet spontaneous, narrative prose he shattered the myth of "great American possibilities and opportunities", demonstrating that while chasing after success in life, man loses values that are much more precious than material goods; he loses intelligence, wisdom, debases spiritual values, decency and benevolence. He is overwhelmed by deep uncertainties. He comes to the realisation that financial success does not guarantee happiness.

Dreiser's style in the novel *Sister Carrie* is characterized by a logical integrity of the structure, with the use of subtle contrasts, beautiful descriptive details, with a varied pace and rhythm and with digressions. Dreiser's symbols demonstrate his compelling convictions about society and the employment of his talent to explain the true essence of social circumstances. Consequently, *Sister Carrie* as a novel represents a powerful document that demonstrates the true nature of the American way of life with light and shade effects and it was precisely this that caused and incited the shameful campaign of persecution and denigration against Dreiser by establishment critics. Moreover, it must be stated that this novel was banned from circulation, therefore all of the printed copies were locked up in the basements of publishing houses. Henceforth, Dreiser suffered a nervous breakdown but remained faithful to his convictions and his experience even when he went hungry and was forced to sell his furniture to survive. He never stopped fighting for the truth and, in time, would be triumphant. The

novel *Sister Carrie* was first published in London in 1904 and was only published in the USA in 1907.

More than in any other earlier novel, Dreiser admitted that he was exposing himself. He had begun to think about the meaning of family, the city, moral principles and was thus realizing that these issues would preoccupy his thoughts throughout his life. The story of Carrie and Hurstwood is a personal as well as public one – it is personal for Dreiser because he was recounting the love story between Emma (his sister) and Hopkins – it is public or representative because it was also a story of deep longing and desire, of weakness and strength, of determined effort, of ambition and success and failure.

Those who read the novel after having read twentieth-century prose will probably view it as trite, artificial, boring, melodramatic and unconvincing. But those who read it after having read nineteenth-century prose may notice that Dreiser was using his immediate surroundings, where he developed the events of the novel, imploring us not to look upon this Victorian femme fatale with malice. Dreiser was adhering to the conventions of the traditional novel of Horatio Alger. However, instead of choosing as his protagonist an honest, virtuous young man, who achieves success in life by remaining true to life's principles, he takes a young, ambitious girl and permits her to do relatively well, by adhering to questionable values. Dreiser used the norms or principles of Horatio Alger's story while morally corrupting his characters.

In addition, in *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser expresses his faith in the blind and insignificant man, who continues the constant struggle to live his life in the face of death.

***Jennie Gerhardt*: Dreiser's Personal Involvement Continuing**

Clearly, in his second novel, *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser continued his struggle, but in a slightly different direction, probing and examining the American reality from another perspective. *Jennie Gerhardt* is a study of the morals and values of the two classes that represent the two Americas – the America of the working class and America of the plutocracy. In both instances, family life is examined, Gerhardt's life is studied with all its arduous physical labour, endurance, honesty and moral fortitude, which the author explores with understanding, sympathy and respect. The character of Jennie's mother is an example, with her pure nobility of spirit and willingness to selflessly sacrifice herself for her vulnerable

family. On the other hand, there is the Kane family, who adheres to a totally different moral code. Archibald Kane, the head of the family, though avoiding open dishonesty (Dreiser never uses extreme characterisations), abides by society's laws – he is cruel, a swindler, indifferent and somewhat dishonest. His love for his son is exceeded by his love of money, thus he sacrifices his son's happiness by forcing him to leave his girlfriend after threatening to deprive him of his inheritance. The Kane family members have lukewarm relations and appear to distrust one another, whereas in the Gerhardt family honest work is respected and there is mutual love.

In his portrayal of the two worlds, Dreiser highlights the cruel and destructive power of money. For the wealthiest bourgeoisie, money not only imposes a dictatorship but also dictates their principles and their way of life.

In Jennie Gerhardt Dreiser reaffirmed with great certainty what he had previously asserted in a somewhat different fashion in *Sister Carrie*, “A society with ruling classes is inhuman, because it robs ordinary men and women, not only materially, but it deprives them of a fuller life, of their destiny, of joy and of their happiness”. To stay alive, according to the author, one must yield to the laws of the damned devil, be mean-spirited, be capable of putting into practice the rule of “*Homo homini lupus est*” and place the dollar above everything else in life.

Dreiser had succeeded, to a certain degree, in depicting Jennie's magnanimity and generosity, without making her appear implausible. In a way, Jennie's personality rose above sentimentalism and that of sentimental heroines. Dreiser's Jennie certainly surpasses Carrie with her philosophical views, wherein, happiness is not only attainable but dwells in the human soul. As for Lester, in his weakness, he more or less reiterates Dreiser's position on his role in the world, by attempting to explain to the woman he was leaving the fact that: *"All of us are more or fewer pawns. We're moved about like chessmen by circumstances over which we have no control"*.

Dreiser's characters live out their lives, whereas their end is actually their beginning. The results are inseparable from the characters and the circumstances they find themselves in. Given their dispositions and the circumstances they experience, they are chosen by fate to behave and act in a certain way, ever faithful to their principled natures, the qualities of their characters and the norms of behaviour that reign over such individuals in any particular society. This holds true regardless of whether they are lucky and succeed or whether they fail.

Dreiser denied his characters their free will and made them victims of their temperament, their circumstances and of the times. The most bitter irony in the series of events is that Jennie, who is the noblest and honest character in the novel, suffers the most. She is a victim of the poverty she was born into, in general, and of the violation of moral conventions, in particular. They are the source of her misfortune. Just as in *Sister Carrie*, there is no relationship or link between the character and the retribution. Jennie was who she was and she did what she had to do. However, she deserved more. She is a victim of her upbringing and her culture and the ruthless conditions of the times.

In addition, the descriptive details of the novel contain an important social context, while the course of events of the plot is projected against the passing of life and of time.

Dreiser's Solitude

If the effects brought on by advanced capitalism were reflected in Dreiser's two novels: *Private American Life*, *Trilogy of Desire* (*The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914) and *The Stoic*, posthumous publication (1947)) they dealt with the social aspect of circumstances in which the American people fell under the clutch of monopolies. Henceforth, Dreiser creates an epic portrait, or "the epic of big business", delving into the "kitchen of business" in order to chronicle the influence of capital in action. Robert H. Elias, Robert Penn Warren, Ellen Moers and Donald Pizer view this quality of Dreiser's approach in the *Trilogy of Desire* as a sort of isolation. No other American author, with the exception of Whitman, had ever fallen into such a state of solitude. Mr Parrington believed that Dreiser's life had become a process of avoiding groups and illusions and turning from common traditions or norms. Hence, the masses or crowds could not forgive him, since they live within tradition's constraints, unable to think past tribal canons or forgo their admiration of common idols and the preservation of tribal taboos.

The title of this book is quite significant. It highlights 'a desire' to embezzle a large fortune and to secure its end result, the attainment of power.

It should be noted that *The Financier* and *The Titan* offered some critics occasion to accuse the author of too much naturalism. In fact, Dreiser spurred such accusations by highlighting the biological element in human beings, drawing analogies between the behaviour of animals and people, converging and accentuating certain details, writing about

business transactions with all of their complicated and odious consequences, i.e. by framing a backdrop that is in line with the rules or norms of the naturalist tradition. At the beginning of *The Financier*, young Frank Cowperwood first learns of the bitter struggle for survival while observing a lobster devour a squid in a clear glass tank. The moral of the story is clear, “eat or be eaten”. The novel ends in a parable about the black grouper fish, which survives due to its ability to change colour, deceiving predator and prey alike. This comparison, is linked to society and human beings.

Naturally, it should be noted here that his research was focused in three areas: Yerkes’ career, including the elusive details of his personal life, American economic history from the early 1860s to Yerkes’s death, and the social and political histories of Philadelphia, Chicago and London during Yerkes’ time in those cities. Even before beginning to write *The Financier*, Dreiser had planned for his study of the American magnate to assume epic proportions. He would not only recount the extraordinary history of the *boss of the industry* but would try to feature the entire course of the social, economic and moral life of America.

The Financier or the Rise and the Fall of a Businessman

In *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser could write directly from his experiences, either his own individual experiences or those of the members of his family. In the *Trilogy of Desire*, he found himself in the midst of a broader community and had to undertake a great deal of research to pen the novels of the trilogy. Nevertheless, even though the *Trilogy of Desire* was the result of that research, to Dreiser the history of Yerkes Cowperwood was a matter as personal to him as the history of his own sisters. Firstly, Dreiser and Yerkes were both ambitious men, driven by a craving for success. Yerkes was a hero to Horatio Alger, another man who had risen from modest circumstances to wealth and power. Dreiser had been born with the same passion and dedication and was able to interview renowned individuals, publishing them in Marden’s *Success* magazine. Secondly, Yerkes was a materialistic man, who appeared to have an appreciation for beauty and the fine arts, two impulses that were contradictory in him although not as potent as Dreiser's internal conflicts. Thirdly, like Dreiser, Yerkes was a man with a vigorous sexual appetite, who, unsatisfied with a single woman, led a high life beyond the constraints of middle-class propriety, and who remained forever young (at least Dreiser claims) as he was able to seduce beautiful women. Fourthly, Yerkes enjoyed excellence in life and was predisposed to identifying

beautiful women with the beauty of art, since the ultimate sense of beauty in him sprung from his craving, desire and passion for sex. Fifthly, Yerkes was urbane – he was brought up in a big city and made his fortune in the city. *The Financier* is the history of Philadelphia, *The Titan* tells the story of Chicago and *The Stoic* is about London. Fascinated by and with a certain reverence for his robust energy and ambition, Dreiser noticed that Yerkes was manipulating the modern forms of authority. Sixthly, Yerkes lived in a corrupt world in which money brought power and power brought money as a reward. Dreiser had gone beyond the world of the hotels and Broadway scenes of *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt* and was now in the midst of a broader community, one who bought voters, shattered and emptied city coffers, bribed aldermen, controlled and misused newspapers and magazines, manipulated city leaders and corrupts society. These were deep-seated interests, which shaped and guided nineteenth-century society.

Better than any other American novelist, Dreiser revealed in these novels the dynamic of American political and social life, not only the struggle between one tycoon and another but the struggle between one tycoon and the public, a battle that was raging in Dreiser's own heart.

The Autobiography of a Genius

In his other novel, *The Genius*, Dreiser focuses on the problem of art and its fate in American society. Now Dreiser depicts a genial artist, who ruins himself and his talent by not succumbing to society's money-based power. Eugene Witla's story was reminiscent of Dreiser's own life, even though Dreiser never succumbed to that power. *The Genius* became a manifesto of realist art. After its publication, Dreiser was accused of having anti-American sentiments, therefore a year later the book was banned and at the same time, its republication and sale were prohibited. Some may consider it a notable victory. The book was banned due to its realism. This, may have been a strong blow to the author, on the other hand, it may be said to have been an honour and realism's contribution.

Although there are clear elements of realism and naturalism in Dreiser's works, what gives his art a higher tone is that, as a writer, he is under the constant pressure of a particular artistic instinct, which sometimes has pathetic tendencies in life, as well as a particular drama and poetic force. Nevertheless, no other contemporary American author has shown a greater understanding of the true social relations, the psyche of the various strata of society, the

complexity of social circumstances with their chameleon-like elements. His depiction of an unemployed man vainly looking for a job and a meal, which Dreiser described in the second book of the novel, is both terrifying and painful, especially when he counts his last few dollars while shaking in fear at the prospect of having nothing to eat tomorrow. No other American author has been able to write anything similar.

There is no doubt that Frank Algernon Cowperwood and Eugene Witla have many things in common with one another and even with Dreiser himself. They are all energetic men, who have a zest for success. However, each one will destroy their families to achieve success in life. All of these characters feel a need to live in a big city. They are all given to sex and are unsatisfied with having one woman only, just as they are unsatisfied with their status in society. Like Cowperwood, Eugene Witla covets power and he is the head of the streetcar board of directors. He fears Daniel Summerfield, who like most of Horatio Alger's characters in Dreiser's prose has achieved a great deal of success supported by the farming families of Georgia. He has ascended to the top of the advertising company by using other to expand his power and establish order.

Both endings of *The Genius* had to be melodramatic. The reason is evident, Dreiser created two worlds in the novel, the world of art (temperament) and the world of society (convention and tradition), and then eliminated any sort of misunderstanding between them, depicting the world of art as entirely privileged, a continuation of a natural impulse, and depicting the world of convention as something unnatural or wicked, as a source of trouble and frustration. Dreiser prompted his characters to engage in extreme acts, creating a world of heroes, villains and hoodlums, the oppressed and oppressors, enlightened minds duelling with hypocrites. Such extremes undermine ambiguity and doubt. Eugene is too good for the world he inhabits, he is Dreiser's innocent darling in a vile and corrupt world.

Dreiser's narrative assumptions, the depiction of the privileged artist, who senses the force of life and seeks beauty and contentment, lead him to a world of fantasy, a world in which imagination produces all motivations. Isolated by nature because of his temperament, claims Dreiser, Eugene reverts to his meditations. He is a man of ideals, who has no obligations towards society. Dreiser encounters some difficulty with his ideas, even though his novels contain many explanatory passages. Therefore, as a novelist, he needs to create a sense of place and provide a social setting for his characters. Dreiser was never able to bridge the gap between himself and society. His characters hold ideals that cannot be enforced in society. Consequently, his characters act beyond society's laws and have an obligation only

to their aesthetic ideals as well as a passionate desire for contentment. Therefore, while Dreiser's big city is real (e.g. the description of Fifth Avenue, and especially Broadway), it is also unreal to a certain extent, since it promises opportunities that are beyond realisation in Eugene's fantasy world.

Dreiser had a tendency to sublimate his experience and knowledge about the business world in his autobiographical novel *The Genius* published in 1915. The distinguished protagonist of this novel, Eugene Witla, has a talent for literature, even though he succeeds as a painter and illustrator. This novel allows Dreiser to explore and examine his aesthetics as well as his ethics and gives him the opportunity to explore the conflict between art and business and the artist and the gallery. Finally, he was able to gain distinction in the little time he worked as an editor of a publishing house. The novel also gave him an opportunity to dramatize a time in American cultural history, when the demands of realism were under threat and when the nature of American art was being redefined vis-à-vis European models. In other words, *The Genius* is a novel about a painter and the fate of realist art, but indirectly it is also a parallel moment in American literature.

Given the autobiographical nature of *The Genius* and the fact that it was written in the middle of the author's career, the conclusion may appear somewhat ambiguous. From his position of power and prestige, Witla suddenly breaks down as a result of his extramarital affairs, while Dreiser punishes Witla with confusion, loss of love and a mental breakdown. Nevertheless, even from a downfallen position, Dreiser allows him to ascend the stairs of success and return to his art. Painting once again he concludes that his work is sought-after and admired, but interestingly, from the current perspective, Eugene is now formed as an artist. Witla appears overcome with enthusiasm to return to his early themes – labourers, washerwomen, drunkards, etc. The paradox of a decaying drunkard placed against the vivid persistence of life gripped his fancy. This painting somehow suggested himself hanging on, fighting on, accusing nature, and it gave him great courage to do it. This picture eventually sold for eighteen thousand dollars, a record price.

Thus, Eugene has become a prominent public artist, who enjoys both respect and high rewards. But what had happened to his powerful realism, to the feverish desire to paint life as “*he had seen it*”? Are we to suppose that Eugene has turned into a type of Maxfield Parrish, a painter of public murals and idyllic scenes? Or maybe Dreiser is being ironic, proving the price Eugene has to pay for his success? It is not entirely clear here what Dreiser is thinking, although Witla appears to have achieved a certain inner spiritual peace.

Dreiser's Psychologism

American literature is thought to have become enriched in the beginning of the twentieth century with the publication of Dreiser's masterpiece *An American Tragedy* (1925)¹. In 1920, Dreiser published *Hey-Rub-A-Dub-Dub*, which is a collection of essays, observations and comments on sociological matters. In the essays, Dreiser highlighted the continuous struggle between nature and man who suffers and must challenge his fate and overcome the obstacles to achieving human happiness.

Dreiser writes about several honourable people, who serve society, do not believe it is unsustainable and attack and challenge it. The hero of another story is a village doctor, who aids and cures the poor free of charge. An undertaker who saves several labourers from certain death by sacrificing his own life because he was once a labourer, too.

There is speculation that after World War I and the October Revolution, Dreiser completely lost faith in the precepts of capitalism. The inhumane nature of American reality must have disappointed him greatly, which is evident from the collections of short stories published under the title *Free and Other Stories* (1918), *Twelve Men* (1919). He criticised harshly racial discrimination, the corrupt morals of the press, the barbarity and brutality of businessmen and politicians leading America by corruption and blackmail. Dreiser's reactions are novellas that recount the entire lives of the characters. They are characterised by a deep psychological analysis and masterfully drawn characters. In all of his short stories, the reader discovers the author's profound interest in the fate of ordinary people in America.

A Tragedy or the Tragedy of a Victim

There is no doubt that Dreiser uses all his novels to dramatise his views and life lessons. But the novel that has achieved this with more skill and mastery is *An American Tragedy*. Not only does it lack the shortcomings of Dreiser's previous novels, but the chain of events itself harmoniously highlights his many views. In the novel, the reader once again encounters details from Dreiser's childhood. The world of the poor collides with that of the rich. Looking at a parlour from closed windows, he once again feels alienated and this will be the mark or stain on Dreiser's novels. This is the temptation and deception of a young man by the world of wealth and affluence. Wherever he turns, the winds of change are blowing

¹ <https://www.enotes.com/topics/american-tragedy>

capriciously, deceptively and destructively. Sex remains an irresistible force that rules the individual by luring him with illusions that lead him not only to sin but to disaster as well. Indeed, *An American Tragedy* contains nothing new as pertains to Dreiser's concept of life; yet, it connects all the main threads of his philosophy into one perfect entity.

The reception of Dreiser's novel was invaluable to the change in perceptions about the novel between 1900 and 1925. Dreiser broadened these changes with his influence during a quarter-century. All the assertions in the novel were made previously, but Dreiser was ignored, attacked, oppressed and prohibited from making them. It was important for him to know how this novel would be received. He had certainly hoped that it would be well-received, even though his previous experience had made him sceptical. In the end, the novel was an attack on the structure of American society; therefore readers would find themselves depicted as participants in this tragic situation of epic proportions.

Meanwhile, after much waiting, doubts and hope, the novel confirmed the author's hopes. Critics unanimously praised the novel. The eminent English writer H. G. Wells said: "*It is one of the greatest novels of the century*". Joseph V. Crutch considers the novel as "*the great novel of our generation*". Stuart P. Sherman who had previously shown disdain towards Dreiser's work changed his mind and praised the novel highly, saying that the novel has "*a sound morality*". However, although its publication was initially prohibited in Boston, the number of opponents was small.

It should be noted that the novel *An American Tragedy* is the study of a boy who is trapped and ultimately destroyed by the clash of two conflicting powers. Clyde is trapped between his early poverty and the world, which seduces and amuses him -at first the lively world of the Green-Davidson hotel, and later the restrained reality or the calm atmosphere of the Union Club League in Chicago, and the world of exquisite tastes and prosperity of Lycurgus' well-to-do. They created a unique setting for him with all the perfumes, lights, music, flowers and beauty. As Clyde goes from one scene to another, his world is continuously expanding, becoming more perfect and more luxurious. He is enticed by the scenes of this world, his taste is refined and he likes what he sees. However, across the river from the beautiful houses of his uncle's Lycurgus and the Finchley family were the slums, which though small, he had never seen outside of Chicago and Kansas City. Dreiser once again was creating a world dominated by the opposing forces of Herbert Spencer's philosophy.

In other words, Clyde had been trapped for a long time between the world of his poor father and his rich uncle, between the sense of duty towards his family (and towards Roberta, whose case was ironically similar to that of his sister) and his desire for a better life away from his family. He was similarly torn between religious practice and the seductive world of materialistic values. He was also torn between the city experience and the mentality of the town that judged him, between the various personalities of the defence lawyers' and opposing political parties that would benefit from his case.

While Clyde's will is paralysed and denied by the opposing powers, the relationship between the characters with their objections is dynamic and not static. Dreiser tells us that these relationships create their own special power and that the hero or character with the most dynamic personality can face and overpower the other person physically. One of the reasons Dreiser uses technical terminology with a particular jargon is to highlight that the power of a character, whom he pits against another, comes from the total power that is greater than both of them. In *Lycurgus*, when Clyde preys upon Rita Dickerman, he thought there was something overwhelming and severe in her stature, a kind of beam or electron that lured him.

In Dreiser's world, there is a gap between what we see and the true meaning of what we observe. Between appearance and reality, between the world of chance and casualty and the essential world of inevitability.

An American Tragedy is a major work of literature and highly successful prose. In no other novel has Dreiser so skilfully employed the ideas, methods, themes and techniques of the art of literature. In no other novel has he so effectively depicted the innocent dreamer who had fallen into the trap of ruthless powers, as a victim of a lack of balance in himself, in society and in nature.

Stylistically, the novel has an admirable structure. The first part recounts the development of Clyde's personality, the second part depicts the crime, whereas the third includes the conclusion. Many critics such as Richard Lingerian, Stuart Sherman, Harlan Hatcher, Robert Shafer, James D. Hart, Robert Spiller, George Snell, Frederick J. Hoffman etc. agree that the novel's stylistic merits and values are unique. H. Wayne Morgan has observed an internal rhythm that heightens the novel's emotional tension. Thus, he sees death row as an embodiment of Dreiser's resentment, which implies a revolt against an unjust social order. Indeed, the novel exposes and condemns the inhumane nature of the social system in the 1920s, and expresses the belief of American writers of a need for broad generalisations,

and as is noted at the time, this was a distinctive feature of American literature of that age. He suggests that the desire for crucial generalisations was evident in the works of such authors as Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and Francis Scott Fitzgerald, with each one of these renowned authors having written their own “American tragedy”, and in a way told the story of the tragic fate of Americans in that period. Thus, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* became a standard and the pinnacle of critical realism in twentieth-century American literature.

The Whimsical Bulwark in the Stream of Time

Thus, *The Bulwark* is the tale of destructive defeat or failure to understand the great truths of life and ultimately recognise those truths triumphantly. In this tragic ambivalence of a singular experience, two brief remarks are made about Solon's life after his death. Solon's career more or less is likened to the life of a saint. The children, however, take two distinct paths; some continue to believe that children preserve their parents' faith while others follow a different path. Several secondary characters become nearly allegoric figures.

It appears that when Dreiser decided to write *The Bulwark*, his aim was to show a religious man's powerlessness in a troubled and changing world.

Time and change are the main themes of *The Bulwark*. In all of Dreiser's novels the reader is forced to imagine the world of the past, sometimes clearly, and sometimes vaguely. This is also true of his autobiographies and travel writings, in which the old aristocracy and value system are torn down and obliterated, especially in the novels where these changes have prompted a new mobilisation and a struggle for wealth and success in a tumultuous, chaotic and mad world. All his characters have a common feature, they are anxious and restless.

The characters of this novel have similarities to the characters of Dreiser's other novels. For example, Barnes becomes another Clyde Griffiths. Both are religious characters, have a sensual nature, like the city's glitter, are in need of more money and are entirely bored with traditional values and want to cast off their shackles. In fact, Dreiser creates some kind of relationship between the disturbed and rebellious Stuart and his older brother, who is arrogant, conservative and selfish; thus, the two brothers can be compared to Clyde and his cousin Gilbert. However, while in *An American Tragedy* Dreiser put the youth in the foreground, in *The Bulwark* he focuses on the elderly. Dreiser always described the father

from the son's perspective. However, now he depicts the son from the father's perspective. Dreiser's views in all of his novels, with all this divergence, correspond with the notion of a rapid and violent change in America, the increased desire to live in a world of abundance, new cars and the new morality. While Solon is a defender of the past, Clyde wants to bring down the wall of the past and charge on towards the future. It is interesting that Dreiser sees them both trapped by a destructive force because each is the antithesis of his own outlook on life.

Consequently, the old conflict between love and beauty and between love and money, which is often found in Dreiser's writings, is an integral part of *The Bulwark*.

The Bulwark is an allegorical novel, in which on an allegorical level the life of a saint is depicted in order to address the theme of individual freedom. *The Financier* and *The Titan* express Dreiser's enduring view of the reality of American life. However, the loss of Solon's innocence in Philadelphia cannot be considered an allegory, as F. S. Fitzgerald had used in the character of Jay Gatsby, because for Dreiser the chastely shores of faith cannot be found in America, but they can still be found in the garden of life that exists for all people. The second allegorical meaning of this novel has to do with Dreiser's spiritual history. Although Dreiser has never been a defender of any faith, his inner spiritual life resembles that of Solon. Like Solon, he grew up in a spiritually limited and tradition-bound sect, but in time discovered that his emotional and spiritual life was related to motherly love. Both Solon and Dreiser spent their youth in a tumultuous and troubled world. The former lived in a prosperous middle-class society, while the latter lived in a world of greed and permanent struggle. Both returned to a faith in later life that surpassed the shallowness of the material world and religious sectarianism and recognised or appreciated the universal truths of eternal faith. Another distinct similarity between the spiritual histories of Dreiser and Solon is the confirmation of Solon's experience and Dreiser's belief that the flare of spiritual activity remains more often undiminished in the love of a woman. However, these similarities cannot be broader, because Dreiser identified himself with a deeper and richer spiritual life. Solon is a man who has gone from a narrow individual and tragic experience to a deep sense of the wonder and beauty of life, while Dreiser has a similar experience, which is ever changing.

Solon is more disillusioned with life, while his soul finds comfort in his unhappy experience and difficult times.

The Bulwark persistently exposes the world of power and defiance, while some other motives here are similar to those in *Sister Carrie*.

Literary criticism of Dreiser's work

In American literature, Theodore Dreiser is famous for his work's truth and dependability. He always presented life as he saw it, raw and ungrammatical, unpolished and tragic. Most of his works are modelled on true things in his life including the experiences of his own, his sisters and brothers. In other words his family, the city, his work as an independent journalist and writer, reading and responding to politics and scientific, were some of the influences that best took place in Dreiser's imagination. Dreiser tried throughout his life to clarify the world in which he lived, fascinated by political and technological power.

Dreiser's style is not that easy to be assessed. But, despite of it he managed to get the attention and appraisal of the critics of the twentieth century. He presented the original face of the society, tore the soft veil of capitalist society, although his work is described as full-length work like epic. He opened a new prospect for the American novel and created a path for the novelists of later generation, through all the difficulties.

Themes from Dreiser's memoirs can be spotted in many of his works: for example, the father's character, who was born outside America and could not understand the American habits and lifestyle of his children, consequently he loses their authority and trust - the revolt and indignation of the second generation against the religious and moral values of the Old World - the role of the public school in the process of Americanization - and of the isolated mother who tries to mediate and maintain the balance between the traditional values and emotional needs of her children. Dreiser, meanwhile, went even further while using these motifs in portraying or describing other American families, such as those of the evangelical preachers in the novel *The American Tragedy* (1925) and the Quaker in the *Bulwark* (1946).

Autobiographical material drawn with the sharp details, distinguishes Dreiser from all other writers of the time, from the description of lively scenes, depressive situations, and the hopeful atmosphere. The realistic style the recognition of the laws of capitalism, ultimately determine the literary attitude, whose direction takes on a prominent character in Dreiser's work.

As a writer had tremendous influence on American literature during the early years of twentieth century, and for some time he was considered to be the greatest representative of this literature, or as the only American writer to whom to speak with the same respect, as was the case for European masters. Dreiser is distinguished for his vigorous attack and for being so active, of observer in American social problems. He wrote about life as it is, the facts as they exist, the game as it is played.

After 1911, H. L. Mencken became one of the most prominent publicists on the American scene, and through his insights and writings in the *Smart Set*, he promoted Dreiser as one of the most prominent American realists. Despite this support, Dreiser had been threatened by censorship for more than two decades. There were also cases where Dreiser's manuscripts were rejected by various publishers. It is interesting that Dreiser continued to face other challenges during World War I. Thus, his German name made the critics criticise him for, as they called it: his barbaric naturalism and his style of authentic and unconventional writing as a representative of the new spirit and kind in American Literature, derived of the "*ethnic element – of the mixed population*".

However, it is important to point out that he was always proud and honoured to be a *radical American*, which for him meant the defence of freedom and the right to speak for individuals who are loyal to and supporters of the socialist system, anarchists, and other radical groups, which constantly raised their voice against and criticised the values of American capitalism.

Dreiser tried to summarise all his views, opinions and research on social problems in his work *Tragic America*, which is a collection of arguments against organizations for which Dreiser believed that were to be blamed for inequality and social injustice in American society. Through numerous data and arguments, he attacked joint stock companies or corporations, educational and religious institutions, rich and wealthy companies in the United States.

In addition to politics, during the 30s of the last century, Dreiser was also preoccupied with philosophical and scientific studies for which he collected information and material from various sources. He read a lot and provided knowledge from physics, biology, chemistry and philosophy. Dreiser hired scholars to do scientific and pseudo-scientific research and collect data that would support his mechanical view of existence, and eventually began writing essays based on these researches. Some of the essays he wrote are: *Myth of Individual*

Thinking, Force called Illusion, and Emotions. Dreiser died before finishing his book, part of which was later published in the work entitled *Notes on Life* (1977).

Readers of the last century during the 40s knew Dreiser not only from his public statements, but above all from his works and creativity. His political views, albeit not so popular at that time, were not unusual and atypical to intellectuals before the bombing of Pearl Harbour. In 1941, in his writing *We Must Save America*, he stood up against the idea that America should be involved in the European war. In this writing he argues against the idea that America should support the British imperialists, and asserted that, apart from the wealthy Americans, there is no possibility for anyone else to gain anything or get rich from this war. During these years, Dreiser was very fond of the Russian political and social system that he became the apogee of this regime. He became part of radical political groups and began to support many goals and objectives of the Communist Party. Before Hitler invaded Russia, Dreiser had expressed his fear that if Americans declared war on Germany they would also fight against the Russians. His public statements expressed the ideals of the *Committee for Friendship with the Soviet Union* and the *American Mobilization for Peace*.

The acknowledgments and praise of the literary circles, which he awaited all his life, came very late. In 1944, he travelled to New York for the last time to receive the *Merit Award* from the American Academy of Arts and Literature. On this occasion, fragments by *Sister Carrie*, *The Twelve Men* and *An American Tragedy* were read. These works were appreciated as the best and the most popular. There were also some other signs of gratitude. He gave permission for his work *Sister Carrie* to be filmed.

Theodor Dreiser is one of the giants of American and world literature. It must be said that during the early years of his career, his method, particularly of his literary style, was met with severe criticism. It was said of him that he lacked a sure style, he exhibited a confused style of expression, he lacked taste and, moreover, that he was not much of a writer. Of course, not without defects in the style, nor in the worldview - of those created under the influence of Spencer, through those of Darwinism and Positivism, to the Marxist at the end of life, but - nevertheless - giant.

In the later years of the beginning of his fame, nearly everything in his work was disorderly, therefore he was branded as “the *worst of the world’s great writers*”. Today that viewpoint has changed significantly, therefore this section of the thesis will focus on information and facts that have contributed to this shift. Nevertheless, that is not to say that

Dreiser was belatedly discovered as a graceful and subtle stylist. The entire world is aware of his shortcomings. However, it has now become clear that he should be judged not by his writing method, but rather by the issues treated in his writings. He had something important and valid to say about life, particularly life in America and he expressed and outlined it in his novels and stories which exhibit an original, grand and astonishing intensity. In his best works, he remains one of the most magnificent American narrators.

Dreiser's activity, especially novels and stories, is permeated by a special note of humanism. They vanish from the power of protest against the ugliness of life and the explicating reports of the oppressive and antihuman capitalist system. He does not say much, not directly, about how the future will be, and we are faced with a very pessimistic conclusion, as is the one who ends up with. "*An American Tragedy*" so happened and so will continue to resemble in the future, but - yet - believes in a power that will bring changes, will bring the light to this terrible moral hell in which they lived.

Herbert Spencer and Honore de Balzac were very influential in Dreiser's understanding of life. At the beginning of his work, when he was young, he was reading in the library and was fascinated by the philosophical creations of Herbert Spencer and the works of Balzac.

Undoubtedly, Dreiser's style is crude, but without a doubt, he does his best to show us an irreproachable story. Joseph Wood, who considered the work "*An American Tragedy*," "*The Best Book of the Generation*," noted that its 840 pages were endlessly interesting and endlessly horrible, proceeding with unbeatable energy.

Dreiser's sentence structure is often discouraged and the content is often excessive. Many things considered informal in Dreiser's works has become part of what is called standard. Dreiser's works succeeded because of their image and emotions, not because of their abstract ideas. His style makes it possible to present a world of elegance and a perfect style. He identifies his language with the consciousness of his characters.

Critical Reception

Criticism for Dreiser takes two extreme measures. While some argue that his writing was full of overlays, inversions, unsafe vocabulary, and overcharged syntax, others considered that his writing was unusual by providing satisfactory details and recording

documented facts. The same thing was presented in the evaluation of the topics in Dreiser's works. Because Dreiser wrote with his conviction of development, materialistic determinism, and his preoccupation over sex, his characters were often motivated by his own harassment and social class oppression that surrounded them rather than the sense of morality. Hence, his works often faced strong criticism from conservative critics who talked about the puritan moralist. However, Dreiser's significance in the history of American literature is generally accepted because of his courage, his sincerity, his decisiveness that he has made with conventional pretence and avoidance.

It has now become clear that he should be judged not by his writing method, but rather by the issues treated in his writings. He had something important and valid to say about life, particularly life in America and he expressed and outlined it in his novels and stories which exhibit an original, grand and astonishing intensity. In his best works, he remains one of the most magnificent American narrators.

Broadening Controversy (1910-1920)

In fact, Mencken considered Dreiser to be one of the most brilliant representatives in the tradition of realism, whose work should not be censured, but rather read and properly appreciated. Prior to Mencken, the critic Randolph Burn, writing for *Dial* magazine in 1916, had said that Dreiser surpasses all other writers in his portrayal of the life of the American middle class since he has dealt with the topic without a guilty or sullied conscience. He had succeeded in glorifying the topic of sex, which has always been targeted by censors, and in the novel *Sister Carrie*, he had succeeded in creating “a” non-mediocre, yet spontaneous and significant novel. The issues that Dreiser had emphasised had been precisely those that characterised the “*New America*”, which was seeking to become more prominent, powerful and articulate and to become the spokesman of the world that was coming into being, which Dreiser had mocked, particularly the American belief in the frequently-mentioned optimism and redemption.

Recognition (1920-1930)

Meanwhile, those that had sensed the radical nature of Dreiser's prose and considered it disturbing even though they may have been unaware of it, but who understood the menacing value of the economic message contained within the themes of his novels, had an easier time attacking Dreiser over a minor fault in his literary style. The main goal appears to have been eliminating the danger Dreiser posed, whereas for the hostile critics, it would be easier to attack some artistic value of Dreiser's fiction. There was even debate about Dreiser's ability or inability to write coherent and beautiful prose. In fact, this was a camouflage and reaction against Dreiser's writing which had attacked the foundations of inhumane capitalistic economic theory, which at the time was considered sacrosanct and untouchable.

Whereas, with the publication of the novel *An American Tragedy* in 1925, his works once again became the subject of debate. Surprisingly, it was precisely Sherman who had formerly attacked his initial works that now took the occasion to praise Dreiser's new novel. Additionally, there was word, backed even by Dreiser himself, that he could be nominated for a Nobel Prize.

The same year his novel *An American Tragedy* was published, Burton Rascoe, a journalist, wrote the first book on Dreiser. His book "*Theodore Dreiser*" was a brochure written for the association "Modern American Authors Series". Rascoe's brochure dealt with critical as well as biographical issues. He found in Dreiser's novels a faithful depiction of the national spirit during the first stage of the industrial changes. "*Until Dreiser came along*", noted Rascoe, "*no one was able to understand the epic quality of this aspect of the drama of American life or the genius, who turned that drama into a novel*". At the same time, this critic was of the opinion that Dreiser's latest book had special power, vitality, energy and vision. Rascoe's brochure was of particular importance since it was written before the publication of the novel *An American Tragedy* and at the same time defended and encouraged Dreiser. Naturally, Rascoe and the novelist become life-long friends.

Great Writer (1940-1950)

During the 1940s, Dreiser was accepted as a prominent novelist. From a critical point of view, it is interesting to note Dreiser's defence by Alfred Kazin in his study *On Native Grounds*, 1942. Discussing Dreiser's career in the context of time, but also relying on

retrospect, this young critic attempted to investigate the so-called “folklore myth”, which he had averted since he was a genius. Instead, Kazin listed Dreiser in the ranks of popular and renowned writers, comparing him to Homer and Whitman.

Dreiser’s Growing Reputation (1950-1980)

Reappraisals of 50s

Two women who loved and helped Dreiser professionally, gave a significant contribution to the studies on Dreiser in the 50s: The first was his widow, Hellen Richardson Dreiser. In the memoir, *My Life with Dreiser* (1951), Hellen recounts her years spent with Dreiser between 1919-1945. She revealed several new things about Dreiser’s “promiscuity”. She had dedicated this book to the unknown women in Theodore Dreiser’s life, who were devoted to Dreiser’s attractiveness, intelligence and artistic talent. In her book, she observes “*Theodore Dreiser appeared to move too far out of my orbit. In my age of limited experience, to meet a man of Dreiser’s calibre was a wonderful occasion. I had finally found a man, who knew the meaning of truth and beauty*”. Despite the casual squabbles, Helen stayed with Dreiser to the end of his life.

Additionally, Louise Campbell from Philadelphia was Dreiser’s lover and volunteer editor while he was writing *The Financier* and *The Titan*. She did not end her relationship with him, at least as his editor, until Dreiser’s death. In 1959, she published a brochure entitled *Letters to Louise*, in which she recounts the professional aspect of their relationship, collecting all of the letters Dreiser had written her, preserving them and allowing Dreiser’s students to become acquainted with Dreiser’s creative thinking.

Flourishing (1960)

In 1969, the number of studies on Dreiser grew with a new study, *Two Dreisers* by Ellen Moers. Having been greatly impressed with Dreiser’s works, Moers continued to dive into a genuine analysis of works and biographical and historical facts of Dreiser’s life, focusing particularly on Dreiser’s two masterpieces *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*. With her critical interpretation, she certainly put Dreiser in the ranks of the world’s most eminent writers and artists such as Yeats, Joyce, Shaw, Proust, Stravinsky and even Picasso.

Thus, R. Elias, reading Moers study, stated: “*Biography and criticism consolidated one-another and paved a new road for Dreiser’s fame*”.

Ups and Downs of The 1970s

Dreiser’s new path to fame-, which Elias spoke about, was significantly expanded by several events and works of the 70s. One of the first was the *Dreiser Information Bulletin*, published under the editors Richard W. Dowell and Robert P. Saalbach at Indiana State University. For years, various scholars serving as editors or publishers have contributed to the popularity of Dreiser’s works. Among them the most notable are Jack Saltzman, Ellen Moers, Robert P. Saalbach, Lawrence E. Hussman, Thomas P. Riggio, T. D. Nostwich and James L. West. *The Information Bulletin*, which was turned into *Dreiserian Studies* in 1987 has published in various publications, different approaches and assessments on every scholar that has written about Dreiser. In 1971, Indiana State University’s English Department held a festival on the centennial of Dreiser’s birth. A significant number of scholars attended the event on Dreiser’s life and works, including Philip Gerber, Richard Lehan, Rolf Lunden, John McAleer, Ellen Moers, Robert Saalbach, Charles Shapiro, Neda Westlake, Ruth Kennell and Marguerite Tjader. They all came with stories highlighting their acquaintance with the great writer. It must be noted that in the beginning of the 70s, a considerable number of studies on Dreiser were published, including John Lydenberg’s book *Dreiser: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Then, in 1975, a more complete bibliography was published, edited by Donald Pizer, Richard W. Dowell and Frederick E. Rusch. This bibliography was the most encompassing ever published since it included pamphlets, studies, works published in periodicals, newspapers, individual letters, interviews and speeches.

From the works of criticism dedicated to Dreiser in the 70s, the most noteworthy is *Homage to Theodore Dreiser* (1971) published by Robert Penn Warren. This author was a respected member of the American literary community, who had not previously appreciated Dreiser’s works, although with the publication of the novel *An American Tragedy*, he became a great admirer. In his opinion, Dreiser was such an artist that his method was so straightforward and precise, “*that his craft often reveals Dreiser’s art*”. Referring to scholars and critics, who had contributed to Dreiser’s fame, Warren concludes that Dreiser was a “*great artist, the chief American philosopher of illusion, a writer whose novels take the reader deep into American life*”. Later, W. M. Frohock in 1972 and James Lundquist in 1974,

published two thorough studies both entitled *Theodore Dreiser*. They both expanded on the tradition created by Gerber and McAleer during the 60s. After these studies came a voluminous and ambitious study by Donald Pizer entitled *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser* (1976). This study is a genuine analysis of the novels' value and it is also a description of the circumstances in which the novels were created and their sources.

Moreover, the columnist and editor Jack Salzman published *Modern Fiction Studies* in 1977 which included special essays on Dreiser by Robert Forrey, Lester H. Cohen, Max Westbrook and Frederick E. Rusch. The volume included more essays on the novels *The Financier*, *The Titan*, *The Genius* and *An American Tragedy*.

Dreiser Studies from the 1980s to the Late Twentieth Century

The previous decade had been rich with Dreiser studies. It began with the publication of the novel *Sister Carrie* by University of Pennsylvania Press. Numerous editors such as John C. Berkey, Alice Winters, James L. W. West and Neda Westlake published a revised and perfected text of the novel *Sister Carrie*. The publication is for scholars and students, a special edition, which includes a history of the novel's publication. After this edition, in 1985, James L. W. West published a special study entitled *A Sister Carry Portfolio*, which details the difficulties Dreiser had encountered in writing the novel.

One of the best studies on Dreiser's art is Philip Fisher's study entitled *Hard Facts* in 1985. The book focuses on three American novelists, whose transformative power enabled them to create enduring works that depict major truths in the periods in which they lived. This includes James Fennimore Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Theodor Dreiser, whom Fisher called "ordinary", by which he meant to define their ability to describe everyday situations, that which is fundamental, essential and particular. The hard facts of the title allude to three indelible events in American society, the killing of a man, particularly a Native American man, for whom Cooper invented a wild nature with an archetypal backdrop, the cruelty of slavery. To understand the truth, he went to live with a farmer's family on a plantation. And finally, Dreiser's escape and objectivism as a consequence of the capitalist world of the future pushed him to focus on the new industrial city, in general and the streets in particular. According to Fisher, Dreiser created this backdrop and atmosphere in the novel *Sister Carrie*, later culminating in the novel *An American Tragedy*.

New approaches to Dreiser's life and work were introduced after 1991 in a conference of the American Letters Association, where Leonard Cassuto used the psychological method in interpreting the novel *The Financier*. The German, Irene Gamell introduced and examined feminist issues in Dreiser's novels. The establishment of the "*International Theodore Dreiser Society*", took a further step in a meeting organised by Miriam Gogol and Frederick Rusch, where various scholars decided to continue Dreiser's studies in the initial stage, particularly highlighting the artistic and ethical values of Dreiser's works, the importance of his writing in the emancipation of women and the analysis of Dreiser's works through the psychoanalytic method. In short, numerous scholars and scientists from America and elsewhere, decide to deepen and expand the studies on this genius.

Dreiser's Reception in Our Country

In our country, in Kosovo students of English are familiar with Dreiser's works, but only really with *An American Tragedy*.

The Albanian reader was introduced to Dreiser through some of his stories that were published in the literary press and in the collection *American Stories*. But in 1957, readers were finally introduced to *An American Tragedy*, which is regarded as Dreiser's masterpiece. Although nearly all of Dreiser's works have been translated into Albanian, few have been the subject of critical analyses, with some translations even missing a foreword. Even if anything more had been written, it most likely burned up in the fire that once engulfed the National Library of Albania.

Such was the situation in which Dreiser's receptional biography in Albania began and continued. A study by Gentiana Taraj offers linguistic analysis of the Albanian translations of Dreiser's works in the course of forty years: *An American Tragedy* (1965), *Genius* (1968) and *Trilogy of Desire* (2004).

In Kosovo, only the author Hasan Mekuli was marginally involved with Dreiser's works. Upon reading Mekuli's commentary, it becomes apparent that it was written by someone who had experienced similar circumstances in life to those depicted in Dreiser's novels. Dreiser had himself witnessed on many occasions the hardships of everyday life in typical American cities and this shaped later many of his characters. Dreiser's friends and scholars usually agreed with his depictions of American society, since they did not see

America as a place of great and unlimited opportunities, but rather viewed it as a place that often lacked the material conditions for a normal life.

Thus, Dreiser created some angst amongst bourgeois critics with his novels and other literary works, with his hatred of capitalism and bourgeois relations, with his affirmative political stance towards life and socialism as a path forward. He believed "it is worth saving America" and in this belief became a member of the US Communist Party. Though he was also a member of Communist Party, people from Albania saw and tried to understand him as one of them, taking the force from him to continue on. They saw Dreiser as very open in the fight against injustices, generally in the fight against social problems. Dreiser's novels characterize war and suffering for human existence, where each protagonist is portrayed briefly dependent on environmental forces and ultimately victimized by these forces.

Accomplishments of the Dissertation

Indeed, Theodore Dreiser is the true pioneer of twentieth-century in American literature. For this reason, a large number of books and essays have been written about his life and work in the US as well as throughout the civilized world. His works were referred to as '*the pinnacle of American prose*'. He was called a '*late romantic*', a '*spokesperson of the realistic novel*', '*great writer of the masses*'. At the same time, he was compared to Michelangelo, Dr Samuel Johnson, Balzac, Dickens, Hardy, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, etc.

It should be noted that in Dreiser's novels, money is power and a source of every value. If the character's desire for money is ignored, nothing would happen in the novel, Carrie would not live with Drouet; Hurstwood would not steal the money from the safe; Jennie would not become Kane's lover; Cowperwood would not marry Lillian; Clyde would not drown Roberta. In Dreiser's novels, there are two types of characters, the haves and have nots. The haves, believed the author, created their own values and forged their way of making money. The have nots had neither the power nor the courage to fight or move forward in life, just like Dreiser's father, who had given up the struggle for a better life because of his deep faith in Christian values.

Dreiser, more than any other twentieth-century novelist, has been criticized for his views on reality and has been particularly judged more for the quality of his ideas than his ability to use them in his novels. However fragmented his ideas may appear or sound, there is no such indication of fragmentation in his works. Therefore, he believed himself to be a realist writer since only the views on life he featured in his works seemed real and true to him. Like any proud and dignified writer, Dreiser was surprised by those who disagreed with his views and opinions as well as with his experience. To such critics, he had this to say: *“In thinking back over the books I have written, I can only say this has been my vision of life - life with its romance and cruelty, its pity and horror, its joys and anxiety, its peace and conflict. You may not like my vision, but it is the only one that I have seen and felt, therefore, it is the only one I can give you.”*

In this paper, the prose of Theodor Dreiser is treated with special qualities in American literature. His works published and republished include, among other things, fundamental issues, namely themes, ideas, figures. In this respect, Dreiser is the most emblematic writer who built his fables over the essence and experience of reality. Dreiser masterfully mastered the stories, idea and description. The work of Dreiser is characterized, generally, by depicting the darker side of society, focusing on such issues as adultery, poverty, sex, lies, intrigue, social and economic crises, morals, crime, by the themes of ambition, American dream, despair, greed, tragedy, unemployment, social division etc.

At the same time, this is an important, challenging, befitting and contemporary topic to be studied, primarily from an American literature perspective, and will therefore shed light on the critical views in Dreiser’s works, the aesthetic values of his works as well as the prevalence, reception and popularity of this renowned American author in Albanian language, literature and culture. Dreiser occupies one of the most prominent places in literature, possibly because we view his works in a dual and distinctive spectrum, reflected, directly and indirectly, by subtle rays of artistic light.

My goal is to present my personal point of view for those times where American literature had changed and began to gain a different reputation. The main characteristic of this time and American life was and still is today the class struggle, which expressed all the aims and researches of society, all the capitalist contradictions in the phase of its expansive development.

Though the work of Theodor Dreiser is studied by many professionals, in this paper as a general context of the study it is important to briefly describe the theoretical developments that influenced Dreiser's writings. The problem, the determined issue is of fundamental importance to American literature, literature in general, but also to all those who read the Dreiser.

This study creates the opportunity for the obtained results to have practical and applicative value. It was carried out on previously uninvolved topics (in our country) in studies of this nature, almost for all Dreiser's works, thus making a significant contribution to the development of knowledge in this field.

Theodore Dreiser novels, and translations into Albanian, form the basis of this doctoral thesis. Thus, the thesis is based on the following texts:

- Original texts written by the author, and
- Texts translated into Albanian

This study of Dreiser's works and critical views is the first such extensive monographic study to be undertaken in Kosovo, which will further shed light on the topic.

This thesis encompasses two (main) objectives :

1. Elaborates on the facts, sources and composition of some of the main works, and
2. Study 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)

The analytical study on the "Dreiser as a Steady Critic on Social Injustice", offers conclusions on:

1. Composition and outline of his composition,
2. Design, review, approach and analysis of critical views in Dreiser's works,
3. Overall acceptance, prevalence, popularity and success of this renowned American author's works in Albanian literature.

The conceptual design of this doctoral dissertation “Dreiser as a Steady Critic on Social Injustice” is comprised of several distinct segments, which are organized in chapters and together offer a monographic study.

1. The first chapter includes a comprehensive overview of American Naturalism and its professed views during this period.
2. The next chapter examines Theodore Dreiser’s life (a major influence on his works) and works.
3. The third chapter includes an analysis of the critical views in Theodore Dreiser’s novels.

Dreiser’s novels focus on the following ideas, problems and issues of the American naturalist movement, through which the critical views in his novels originate, emerge and come to light:

- Biological and hereditary characteristics, including controversial racial-ethnic theories; society’s sickness and erosion; sexuality and its various forms of expression; primitivism and emotional disorders.
- The city and its society’s construction: the city as an organism, the crowds, the psychology of crowds; social conflicts; the urban jungle, social Darwinism, and the possibility or impossibility of reform.
- The concepts of environment and surroundings, including built and natural environment; prisons and misconduct; the destruction of nature and by nature.
- Commodities and the culture of consumerism: sexual desire, shopping malls, advertisements and the role of texts in crafting subjectivity.
- Technology and the culture of automation (mechanization): the body used as a utensil, the power of technology, including industrial capitalism.

4. The last chapter includes a summary on the Literary Criticism of Dreiser’s Work and Dreiser’s Reception in Our Country.

Therefore, the purpose of this part of the thesis is to explore the American author’s prevalence in the worldwide and of course in Albanian language, literature and culture; which

of his works have been translated and published in Albanian and the motives behind the spread of these works, depending on the ideas they convey throughout various periods of our literature and culture, given that there are often multiple translations of his works.

In the end, I have addressed only one aspect of the opus of this literary genius; therefore, this dissertation has not exhausted the possibilities for additional research and study of other aspects of Dreiser's body of work, such as his career as a publicist and journalist, his influence on other American writers, the popularity of his work in foreign literature, the superman as an archetypal character in his novels, his philosophical views, the aesthetic and ethical values of his work, Dreiser in Albanian language and literature, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bloom Harold. **Dreiser's 'An American Tragedy'**. New York: Chelsia House Publisher's, 1988;
- Cassuto Leonard and Ebby C. Virginia. **The Companion to Theodore Dreiser**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004;
- Dreiser Helen. **My Life with Dreiser**. Cleveland: World, 1951;
- **Dreiser– Mencken Letters: The Correspondence of Th. Dreiser and H. L. Mencken**. Ed. Riggio P. Thomas, 2 vols. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986;
- Elias Robert. **Theodore Dreiser: An Apostle of Nature**. Amended Edition. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970;
- Fisher, Philip. **Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel**. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985;
- Fishkin Shelley Fisher. **From Fact to Fiction**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988;
- Gami, N. **Letersi e huaj**. Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, Tiranë. 1969. p. 183.
- Gerber, Philip. **Theodore Dreiser**. New York. Twayne, 1992;
- Gerber, Philip. **Trilogy of Desire. Three Novels** by Theodore Dreiser. New York: World Publishing, 1972;
- Hussman, Lawrence E. Jr. **Dreiser and his Fiction: Twentieth Century Quest**. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983;
- Lehan, Richard. **Theodore Dreiser: 'His World and his Novels'**. London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois University Press – Carbondale, 1969;
- Lingeman, Richard. **Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City**. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1986;
- Loving, Jeroma Berlkey. **The Last Titan**. University of California Press, 2005;
- Lubdusit, James. **Theodore Dreiser**. New York. Ungar, 1974;
- Lucacs, George. **Studies in Realism**. London, 1950;
- Matthiesen, F. O. **Theodore Dreiser**. New York: William Sloane, 1951;
- Mekuli, Hasan. **Letersi Botërore**. Prishtinë. Libri Shkollor. 2002.
- Moers, Ellen. **Two Dreisers. The Man and The Novelist..** London: Thames and Hudson, 1970;
- Parrington, Vernon. **Theodore Dreiser: Chief of American Naturalists..** In the Main Currents in American Thought, vol. 3. New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1930;
- Pizer, Donald. **The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976;
- Putzel, Max. **The Man in the Mirror**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963;
- Swanberg, W. A. **Dreiser**. New York: Scribner's, 1965;
- Theodore Dreiser: The Critical Reception. New York: David Lewis, 1972;
- Tjader, Marguarite. **Theodore Dreiser: A New Dimension**. Norwalk: Conn., Silvermine, 1965;
- Trilling, Lionel. **Reality in America in his Liberal Imagination**. New York: Viking, 1950;
- Taraj, G. A translation analysis of complex sentences from English into Albanian in Theodor Dreiser's novel *The Genius*". Insituti I Alb-Shkenca. Nr.4. Tiranë. 2011. P. 665-671
- Warren Robert Pen. **Homage to Theodore Dreiser**. New York: Random House, 1971;

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	1
Extreme Realism and American Naturalism.....	4
The Autobiographical Element in Dreiser’s Novel.....	5
Interest in Facts in Dreiser’s Novels.....	6
Dreiser and/in the First Decade of the XX Century.....	7
<i>Sister Carrie</i> : Traits of Dreiser’s Self-Identification.....	7
<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i> : Dreiser’s Personal Involvement Continuing.....	9
Dreiser’s Solitude.....	10
<i>The Financier</i> or the Rise and the Fall of a Businessman.....	11
The Autobiography of a Genius.....	12
Dreiser’s Psychologism.....	15
A Tragedy or the Tragedy of the Victim.....	16
The Whimsical Bulwark in the Stream of the Time.....	18
Literary Criticism of Dreiser’s work.....	20
Critical Reception.....	24
Accomplishments of the Dissertation.....	30
Bibliography.....	35

Publications on the Topic of the PhD Dissertation

Mihrije Maloku-Morina: **Extreme Realism and American Naturalism**. International Journal Anglisticum; Literature, Linguistics & Interdisciplinary Studies. Tetova, 2015. p. 228-234

Mihrije Maloku-Morina: **Pikëpamjet kritike të Drajzerit në romanin e tij**. Seminari Ndërkombëtar për Gjuhë dhe Letërsi Shqipe. Prishtinë, 2015. p. 297-305

Mihrije Maloku-Morina: **Forcat shoqërore kundër vullnetit individual**. Seminari Ndërkombëtar për Gjuhë dhe Letërsi Shqipe. Prishtinë, 2016. p. 421-428