

Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg

Fakultät für Geistes-, Sozial- und Erziehungswissenschaften

Institut für Fremdsprachliche Philologien

Immigrant Life, the Environment, and Social Problems:

Sinclair's The Jungle and Schlosser's Fast Food Nation

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- Exzellente formale Gestaltung - sowohl in der gesamten Präsentation als auch in der Beachtung von Formatierungsprinzipien (Quellenangaben, Titeltabelle, Fußnoten)
- sehr gut gegliedert, sehr gut durchdachte Bearbeitungen die einzelnen Aufgaben mit jeweils interessanten und inhaltlich relevanten Beobachtungen, Analysen und Interpretationen
- sehr gute Recherche und sehr gute Verdichtung des relevanten Materials
- sprachlich souveräne Darstellung der Inhalte

[Name]

Bachelor Kulturwissenschaften

(Anglistische Kulturwissenschaft und

[Zweifach])

[X] Fachsemester

Assignments



Note: 10 H. Kersten

Notenskala		
1	sehr gut	eine in jeglicher Hinsicht hervorragende Leistung
2	gut	eine Leistung, die erheblich über den durchschnittlichen Leistungen liegt
3	befriedigend	eine Leistung, die den durchschnittlichen Anforderungen entspricht
4	ausreichend	eine Leistung, die trotz ihrer Mängel noch den Anforderungen genügt

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1. Assignment for session 6 on the 19th of November

The Jungle: Critical Voices

Please read the essay which you have been assigned (list provided in the link in this section of the Moodle classroom). Make a list of the most relevant issues addressed in the text. Try to establish a connection between the results of your group discussion in last week's session with the ideas set forth in the critical essay.

*Applicable
which address them*

In the following I will give a short summary of "The Two Lives of Jurgis Rudkus" by Matthew J. Morris, listing some of the most relevant issues of the essay, thereby mainly concentrating on the link between The Jungle and the life of its author. In addition to this I will, if possible, connect the findings of Morris with our own ones from last week's discussion.

good intro

In "The Two Lives of Jurgis Rudkus" Matthew J. Morris starts with a discussion on the terms of realism, naturalism as well as romance and tries to assign The Jungle to one of those categories, weighing out how the novel could be labelled throughout the whole essay.

He then comments on the author's detachment from the working class and hence Jurgis, as he himself belonged to the middle-class. The writer's position in the novel is thus one of an observer or guide, who leads the reader through an area, which he isn't familiar with either, but for whose inhabitants he feels sympathy and hence the need to introduce them to the audience.

At the same time, however, Morris assumes and also gives evidence that the novel can be linked to Upton Sinclair's own life and struggles. He furthermore connects the rather poor quality of the last chapters to the author's private and financial hardship during the time he was writing them as well as to the distress he must have felt while uncovering the secrets of Packingtown, which – in my opinion – is a very interesting and consistent thought.

Another appealing idea is the interpretation of "prison" as an allegory for ideological error, illusion and ignorance throughout the novel; but not only that, Morris also sees a connection between censorship and imprisonment as the symbols for ideological and physical blockage and restriction. This then can be seen as another factor through which Sinclair, who (among other restraints) encountered difficulties in publishing The Jungle, and Jurgis are indirectly linked. Morris further discovers an even deeper interrelationship between the author and the main character – as Sinclair sees himself as a struggling writer and thus also worker, while Jurgis can be seen as developing into a narrating talent through the cause of the second part of

the novel; for example when he makes up a “hard-luck story” in order to “earn” more money through begging.

Morris ends his essay by returning to Sinclair’s as well as the critics’ struggle to assign the novel to a literary style or to at least reveal an underlying theory of the relationship between the different styles in The Jungle.

In our discussion last week we mainly focused on the idea that the second part of the novel, which starts with the 22nd chapter, marks a rebirth or second life for Jurgis who, from then on, doesn’t seem to worry about anything anymore. This is also what Morris argues in his essay, he furthermore claims that there is a shift in mode and mood from the 22nd chapter onwards, which further supports our findings. In addition to this, Jurgis is finally released from his social and traditional constraints and has set himself free from the horrors of the past – or, in Morris’ words, “loses all personal specificity”¹. Additionally, there also is a shift of focus from the family and their hardship to Jurgis alone and later on to his conversion.

In conclusion it has to be mentioned that while Morris mainly focuses on Sinclair’s writing style, especially his use of allegory, as well as the link between The Jungle and the author’s life, our group concentrated on the plot of the assigned paragraph in the book. This is why I could only work out one connection between the essay and our discussion.

Reference:

Morris, Matthew J. “The Two Lives of Jurgis Rudkus.” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910 29.2 (Winter 1997): 50-67. Rpt. in Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 160 (2005): 50-67. Literature Resource Center. 06.03.10

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CH1420063994&v=2.1&u=uni_magde&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>. ✓

¹ Matthew J. Morris, “The Two Lives of Jurgis Rudkus,” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910 29.2 (Winter 1997).

2. Assignment for session 9 on the 10th of December

Upton Sinclair and "Muckraking"

Please write a short statement (200-300 words) in which you comment on the debate that followed after Roosevelt's April 1906 speech on "The Man with the Muck-Rake"². Connect the speech with the comments that appeared in the press immediately afterwards. What light does this context shed on Sinclair's The Jungle?

In the following I will shortly comment on Roosevelt's 1906 speech about the muckrakers by mentioning some of its most important aspects, which were also referred to in the press. I will then go on to connect it to the immediate responses in and by the papers, further also taking Sinclair's The Jungle into consideration.

good intro

In his speech Roosevelt constantly distinguished between the truthful muckraking, which he viewed as helpful and necessary, and the insincere or exaggerated muckraking, which – for him – was harmful and a betrayal of society. Furthermore he reminded his listeners that too much censure and raking in the mud would lead to disinterest as well as indifference by the public and miss its aim. Thereby he was, however, contrasting himself having said before that every crime had to be exposed. In addition to this he advised the muckrakers that their writing should lead to a betterment of society, but he himself only mentioned one proposal for improvement, namely a new tax, during his whole speech.

These were also, among others, the main points which were dealt with in the New York Times article about his speech, which was highly critical of it and didn't seem to take it seriously². However, a few days later they published another article, in which they claimed: "If it is understood, the President's muck-rake speech will do good, but it was misunderstood, when it was first delivered"³, thus somehow undermining their first article. About a month later, though, they printed a letter to the editor which was eminently in favour of muckraking⁴ - it can thus be concluded that this newspaper was a follower of the muckraking movement.

Other newspapers and individuals, however, misinterpreted the President's speech by only picking out the negative arguments and thus condemning all muckrakers, which can especially be seen in the article about Dr. Radcliffe's point of view in The Washington Herald. He

² Cf. "Mr. Roosevelt's Speech," The New York Times 15. April 1906.

³ "Didn't mean me – Steffens," The New York Times 17 April 1906: 1.

⁴ Cf. "To the Editor of the New York Times," The New York Times 12. May 1906.

good research and documentation!

described the muckrakers as only downward looking and merely believing their own, self-made truth, whereby they were damaging society⁵. The New York Sun even decided not to publish any muckraking stories, but to instead fill its pages with highly positive, patriotic amounts of the real America⁶.

It thus has to be concluded that The Jungle was “born” into a binary environment, one part seeing the necessity of “digging in the mud”, the other considering this style of writing as a “menace to community”⁷.

mid conclusion!

References:

“Didn’t mean me – Steffens.” The New York Times 17. April 1906: 1.

“Mr. Roosevelt’s Speech.” The New York Times 15. April 1906.

“Rakes Muck-rakers.” The Washington Herald 12. November 1906: 10:2.

Roosevelt, Theodore. “The Man with the Muck-rake.” Speechpedia. 1906. 09.12.2009 <<http://www.speechpedia.org/TheodoreRoosevelt/1906/04/14/The-Man-with-the-Muckrake/>>.

““The Man with the Muck Rake” finds no room in The Outing Magazine.” New York Sun 16. April 1906: 7:4.

✓

“To the Editor of the New York Times.” The New York Times 12. May 1906.

⁵ Cf. “Rakes Muck-rakers,” The Washington Herald 12. November 1906: 10:2.

⁶ Cf. ““The Man with the Muck Rake” finds no room in The Outing Magazine,” New York Sun 16. April 1906: 7:4.

⁷ “Rakes Muck-rakers,” The Washington Herald 12 Nov. 2006: 10:2.

3. Assignment for session 11 on the 14th of January

Fast Food Nation and its reception in the press

Write a short statement (approx. 100 words) in which you describe your findings in general terms (how much did you find? what did you find? what was the range of your results?) and select one longer article (or issue) and write an academic statement (200-300 words) in which you relate the article to the book (for example: reception of the book, effects of book; political dimension, social dimension).

In this assignment I will first give some general statements about my findings during the research about the reception of Fast Food Nation and then go on with having a closer look at one of the articles I found most interesting.

In order to get an overview of the reception of Fast Food Nation in the American press I used a range of resources (for example the LRC or the Google Advanced Archive Search), most of which offered a wide range of results for the search term: "Schlosser: Fast Food Nation". However, the majority of the articles presented only mentioned Schlosser and his book once and did not deal with its reception. The ones that did, though, took the book very seriously and praised its achievement.

What I found very interesting was that most of the articles were from 2001, when the book was first published, and 2006, when the movie came into the cinemas and Schlosser's "teen-age" Fast Food Nation was published.

any comments on this?

The article at which I had a closer look was "A Food Crusader's Alarm Is Supersized" by Kim Severson, which was published in May 2006 in The New York Times. I chose it because it was one of the few articles which was not just simply summarizing the contents of the book, but took a more critical view towards it. What is striking about this article is that it considers Fast Food Nation, but also the movie that is based on the book as well as Chew on this – a new version of Fast Food Nation designed to get adolescents interested in the topic. Furthermore it is not a subjective article as it quotes a variety of opinions towards the book – even one rather negative one - and also lets a McDonald's spokesman have his share in the debate. Even though the article highly praises Schlosser, gives a list of progress that has been made since the publication of the book (for example the adoption of animal welfare policies by fast food companies) and even compares him to Sinclair, it is also critical towards the question if

all this can really be attributed to Schlosser or if he simply published the book at a time when all this progress was already beginning and is thus given too much credit.

The article concludes in Schlosser's own style, letting a teenager report how the book had an impact on her life and thus adding a personal level to the article.

In conclusion it has to be said that even though quite a few people were already aware of the issues Schlosser mentions in Fast Food Nation and progress in this field had already started before the publication of the book, he can still be seen as "waking up" many of those who did not want to see as well as getting them interested in what they actually eat and thus furthering progress in the area of fast food and everything that is linked with it. ✓

Reference:

Severson, Kim. "A Food Crusader's Alarm Is Supersized." The New York Times 10 May 2006. 13 Jan. 2010

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/10/dining/10fast.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1>. ✓

4. Bibliography

- “Didn’t mean me – Steffens.” The New York Times 17 April 1906: 1.
- “Mr. Roosevelt’s Speech.” The New York Times 15 April 1906.
- Morris, Matthew J. “The Two Lives of Jurgis Rudkus.” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910 29.2 (Winter 1997): 50-67. Rpt. in Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 160 (2005): 50-67. Literature Resource Center. 06 March 10
<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CH1420063994&v=2.1&u=uni_magde&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>.
- “Rakes Muck-rakers.” The Washington Herald 12. November 1906: 10:2.
- Roosevelt, Theodore. “The Man with the Muck-rake.” Speechpedia. 1906. 09 Dec. 2009
<<http://www.speechpedia.org/TheodoreRoosevelt/1906/04/14/The-Man-with-the-Muckrake/>>.
- Severson, Kim. “A Food Crusader’s Alarm Is Supersized.” The New York Times 10 May 2006. 13 Jan. 2010
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/10/dining/10fast.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1>.
- ““The Man with the Muck Rake” finds no room in The Outing Magazine.” New York Sun 16 April 1906: 7:4.
- “To the Editor of the New York Times.” The New York Times 12 May 1906.

5. Declaration of Authorship

I, [Name] , confirm that this work submitted for assessment is my own and is expressed in my own words. Any uses made within it of the works of any other author, in any form (e.g. ideas, equations, figures, text, tables, programs), are properly acknowledged at their point of use. A list of the references used is included.

Signed:

Date: 15.03.2010