

Review

by Associate Professor Svetla Kirilova Cherpokova-Zaharieva, PhD, lecturer in the History of Literature and Comparative Literature Studies Department, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,

on the dissertation titled “Dimensions of Loneliness in the Dramaturgy of Jaime Salazar Sampaio” for the awarding of scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of higher education to Asst. Prof. Soni Agop Bohosyan. Field of higher education: 2. Humanities, Professional field: 2.1. Philology, Specialty: “Literature from Europe, Africa, America, Asia, and Australia (Contemporary Portuguese Literature, 20-21st century)”, academic advisor: Prof. Yana Elenkova Andreeva, PhD

For the awarding of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” Assistant Professor Soni Agop Bohosyan presents a dissertation on the topic *Dimensions of Loneliness in the Dramaturgy of Jaime Salazar Sampaio*, accompanied by an abstract with a list of bibliography, contributions, and six publications on the subject.

The submitted set of materials complies with the requirements of all documents governing the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The proposed report on scientometric indicators meets the minimum national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor,” and even exceeds the prescribed number of points. The abstract clearly and accurately summarizes the dissertation and demonstrates its achievements and contributions.

Before sharing my impressions of the material provided by Asst. Prof. Soni Bohosyan, I would like to note that I am very impressed by the quality of the dissertations prepared in the Department of Portuguese and Lusophone Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," especially under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Yana Andreeva. Asst. Prof. Soni Bohosyan's dissertation is no different. As always, the choice of topic is original and contributes significantly to the field. What is especially valuable in this well-established practice is the study of authors and texts that have the potential to be translated and introduced to Bulgarian readers, and in this case – even staged in the theater.

The topic of the dissertation has not been discussed within Bulgarian literary spaces, and as far as I am aware, worldwide the theme of loneliness in the dramaturgy of Jaime Salazar Sampaio in particular has also not been the subject of independent research. In this respect, we

can point out at least two major contributions: the work introduces and comments on an issue unknown to Bulgarian literary scholars, and it chooses as the object of study the theme of loneliness – which, as the dissertation demonstrates, is emblematic of Sampaio’s dramaturgy. To this we may add another important contribution which is less visible if one focuses only on the author and his works: the topicality of the issue of loneliness. The sense of loneliness, characteristic of modern times in which it is otherwise difficult for a person to remain alone due to living in a constantly buzzing, dependency-producing society, can find explanation through the dramaturgy of Jaime Salazar Sampaio, one of the significant Portuguese authors of the 20th century. Through analysis of his plays, one may even search for a recipe for escaping loneliness.

The choice of topic, of course, is important, but the realization of the research is equally impressive. The text carefully introduces the playwright, his works, and their critical reception. This is especially necessary when working with an artist unfamiliar to the Bulgarian public. The dissertation consists of 210 pages that include an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and bibliography with sources in Portuguese, English, Bulgarian, French, and other languages.

The theoretical first chapter, “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of the Theme of Loneliness,” thoroughly justifies the two key concepts – “theme” and “loneliness,” which serve as the main tools of the research. An interdisciplinary direction is set, addressing “philosophical, psychological, and sociological ideas of loneliness” (p. 10). This is not merely stated at the beginning but applied systematically throughout. Chapter Two, “About the Author and His Work,” provides a comprehensive overview of Sampaio’s activity, enticing the reader to learn more about the Portuguese playwright. Particularly valuable, though brief, is section “2.2. Critical Reception of Sampaio’s Dramaturgy,” which summarizes representative commentaries on his work. In fact, the theme of critical reception recurs throughout the dissertation, with conscientious discussion of diverse views of his dramaturgy. A very well-structured classification of the material is presented in Chapters Three and Four – “Discourse and Loneliness in the Dramaturgical Work of Jaime Salazar Sampaio” and “Loneliness in Time and Space in the Dramaturgy of Jaime Salazar Sampaio.” Focus falls on characteristic dramaturgical techniques – the function of dialogues and monologues, the arrangement of time, and the construction of space. Closed spaces, the home-as-fortress, the desert – these are only part of the environments explored by the dissertation, guided by the author’s skillful hand. An interesting perspective is presented in the discussion of public space (see “4.2.2. Public Space”), which, according to the author, “does not predispose toward physical solitude” (p. 173). It turns out that “this same space, viewed dramaturgically, points to a dead end both literally and

figuratively” (ibid.), “intensifying psychological solitude and the sense of abandonment” (p. 180). The study of different manifestations of loneliness is not treated as a dry taxonomy but carries originality even in its classifications (e.g., “4.1.1. Plays with working clocks” and “4.1.2. Broken clocks”).

Whether by design or coincidence, the composition of the dissertation reveals a kind of concentricity: the theme of loneliness in scholarly discourse, in Sampaio’s dramaturgy, in individual works, and in the perceptions of his characters, including in their monologues and dialogues. What binds these layers together – and is among the dissertation’s many contributions – is the discussion of loneliness in its purely human dimension. The conclusions drawn can apply beyond this single author to other research fields as well.

As a teacher of Western European literature, I found particularly interesting the connections with European drama of the absurd – with Beckett, Pinter, Ionesco. Even if some of these connections are only briefly indicated (e.g., Sampaio – Pinter), they hold great potential for future comparative studies (Sampaio – Pinter/Beckett/Ionesco). As the dissertation’s author notes, the connections are not accidental, since Sampaio translated Pinter’s plays into Portuguese. What is in embryonic form here could develop into future research directions, thereby confirming one of the dissertation’s stated contributions – that Sampaio’s dramaturgy is of pan-European significance and not limited to Portuguese literature alone.

The dissertation not only demonstrates thorough knowledge of Sampaio’s works but radiates, from beginning to end, a strong devotion to theater. I would go as far as calling it love of theater, which makes the research engaging, readable, and inspiring. It is very difficult to work with texts unknown to the reader, and even more so when those texts are dramas. Here, the doctoral candidate shows a remarkable ability to make these texts “come alive,” so that a potential reader can grasp not only their literary qualities but also their theatrical dimension. There is also solid knowledge of theater theory and practice.

Very valuable, too, are the translations included. As I have said before, one of the key merits of dissertations of this type is that they point toward texts that deserve translation and publication in Bulgarian – and Jaime Salazar Sampaio certainly does.

I have no critical remarks for the dissertation. I would only recommend, with future publication in mind, a more precise use of “reader” versus “spectator” when referring to Sampaio’s plays. It is clear that the analytical perspective is that of a reader (especially when stage directions are discussed), but in some contexts “spectator” seems more appropriate, since

potential visual impact is also addressed. I would also be interested in learning more about how the theme of loneliness stands within Portuguese literature more broadly, and specifically in dramaturgy beyond Sampaio's works – but I leave this curiosity for a future dissertation by Soni Bohosyan on her academic path.

In conclusion, I express my absolute confidence in the merits of Soni Agop Bohosyan's dissertation and in its potential to be successfully defended. I give my entirely **positive evaluation** and recommend to the esteemed scientific jury that the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional field: 2.1. Philology, "Literature of Europe, Africa, America, Asia, and Australia (Contemporary Portuguese Literature, 20th–21st century)" be awarded to Asst. Prof. Soni Agop Bohosyan.

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Sofia

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