

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume Twelve, Number Two

Fall 1981

GRATITUDE AND GRIEVANCES: DREISER'S INSCRIPTIONS TO MENCKEN

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Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore

The punishment of virtue is more virtue. To
the only Henry L., Chief of the Vice-
Crusaders.

--Dreiser's undated inscription in *Sister
Carrie* (Doubleday, 1900)¹

When Theodore Dreiser and Henry Louis Mencken met for the first time in the spring of 1908, the novelist was editing the *Delineator*, and the Baltimorean was ghostwriting articles on child care for a pediatrician at Johns Hopkins. The ensuing friendship was long, tumultuous and, to say the very least, mutually beneficial. For more than thirty years, these robust individuals--men who were highly opinionated and stubborn, writers whose reach sometimes exceeded their grasp--laughed and played and drank together and sometimes fought bitterly. This was the most significant literary relationship, as well as one of the more important friendships, in each man's career. It was also one of the more intriguing and influential alli-

The author wishes to thank Dr. Neda M. Westlake, Curator of the Rare Book Collection at the University of Pennsylvania, for permission to quote from Dreiser's unpublished writing. For permission to quote Mencken's inscriptions and letters, the author thanks the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore.

ances in American literary history.²

Both writers corresponded diligently. Mencken habitually answered his mail on the same day that he received it, and Carl Bode has estimated that Mencken wrote 100,000 letters during his career.³ A knowledge of the Dreiser-Mencken correspondence, which began in 1907 and ran to about eight hundred letters, is essential for an understanding of the relationship. But some of the other items that passed back and forth in the mail can, at times, prove equally informative.

Both authors, for example, exchanged books and pamphlets. The majority of Dreiser's inscriptions have not been quoted, and these, like the letters, serve as a barometer for the relationship. Dreiser exhibited not only good feeling for the Baltimorean but also exasperation and animosity to a degree that was not always present in either the correspondence or the writing intended for publication.

Dreiser's inscriptions began on Thanksgiving Day, 1909, in a copy of the Dodge, 1907 *Sister Carrie*: "To H. L. Mencken. In honor of breweries, witches, materialism, Mark Twain and all the winds of doctrine. Let's fill up the glass." Such good feeling was in keeping with the then-present mood of camaraderie and professional respect, for Dreiser had already offered Mencken a position on the *Delineator*, which was refused, and Mencken was doing his best to help Dreiser with the *Bohemian* magazine. Mencken, in turn, sent two books to New York: his own *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* as well as *A Wayside Lute* by Lizette Woodworth Reese⁴ (a relatively obscure Baltimore poetess whose cadences Mencken admired). This year also marked Mencken's first published remarks about Dreiser's writing--fittingly enough in the *Smart Set*, for Dreiser had been influential in getting Mencken his position as book reviewer for the magazine.⁵

The next year, 1910, saw Dreiser steal a kiss that profoundly affected not only his own career but also his relationship with Mencken. Still unhappily married to Jug, Dreiser, for whom the call of the flesh was always strong, became infatuated with Thelma Cudlipp, the daughter of an assistant editor at the Butterick Company. His junior by twenty-two years, Thelma was Dreiser's "Honey Pot" and "Divine Fire." Honey Pot's mother saw things differently and told Dreiser's superior that, unless the editor were fired, she would leak the scandal to the press.⁶

After his dismissal, Dreiser had more time for *Jennie Gerhardt*. Mencken repeatedly urged Dreiser to complete the novel and then praised the manuscript when it arrived in

Baltimore. (Astonishingly, Mencken went so far as to say that this was the best American novel ever written.⁷) Moreover, Mencken favorably reviewed *Jennie Gerhardt* in the *Smart Set*, the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, and the *Los Angeles Times* and also wrote a small pamphlet which Harper used for advertising. On October 19, 1911, Dreiser warmly inscribed the novel: "My Dear Mencken: What shall I say in this first copy that I have secured? Oh, yes. May your good opinion of it never change. And may you live long and prosper." Mencken proceeded to use his "Free Lance" column in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* to run three blurbs praising the novel and also spoke highly of Dreiser the man and writer in correspondence with third parties.

During the period from January, 1912, to November, 1916, a prolific Dreiser published six books, all of which were inscribed to Mencken and reviewed by him. Mencken matured as a critic and came to view his friend more objectively. For the first time, Dreiser felt the sting of Mencken's pen. Likewise, Dreiser became more detached in some of his inscriptions. It was unfortunate that a bad novel and a worse play changed the relationship irrevocably.

In late August, 1912, Dreiser wrote that he had nearly finished with the galleys of *The Financier*. Having read the proofs, Mencken recognized that, while the novel was definitely flawed, Dreiser needed encouragement. Despite his reservations, Mencken played up the novel in three "Free Lance" columns. On October 24th, Dreiser sent to Baltimore his graciously inscribed first copy of the novel: "To H. L. Mencken, from Dreiser, in grateful friendship." Mencken was equally effusive in a copy of *The Artist. A Drama Without Words* (a spoof originally published in the *Bohemian*): "To Theodore Dreiser, in admiration and affection." Mencken proceeded to review *The Financier* favorably and, in his correspondence, went so far as to claim that unfavorable reviews had been written by those who had not read the novel.⁸

Later in 1912, Mencken offered to edit *A Traveler at Forty*. After reading the page proofs, he found the travelogue burdened by useless detail, yet he still waxed enthusiastic. The book was published on November 25th, three days before Dreiser sent Mencken the first copy: "To my beloved Henry L., in honor of beer, art and in spite of Italy." (Mencken had objected especially to Chapter XXXII, "Mrs. Q. and the Borgia Family," for he thought that the information contained there was common knowledge.) Mencken returned the favor by sending Dreiser the revised edition of *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* and inscribing it affectionately.

Events in March, 1914, further strengthened the relationship. In his reviews of *The Financier*, Mencken had played up *The Titan*, the forthcoming second volume of Cowperwood's *Trilogy of Desire*. Despite advertising the novel and printing eighty-five hundred sets of sheets, Harper reneged on the contract.⁹ Mencken advised Dreiser to sign with Doran and offered to write the publisher on his behalf. As Mencken saw things, this was yet another example of the moral mania plaguing American letters.

Mencken informed Dreiser that *The Titan* was "the best thing [he had] ever done with the possible exception of 'Jennie Gerhardt.'"¹⁰ While Mencken had once again allowed his enthusiasm to conquer his critical judgment, the good feeling underlying the comment is undeniable. On May 13th, 1914, nine days before *The Titan* was published, Dreiser sent Mencken an inscribed copy: "To Henry L. Mencken, from Theodore Dreiser--to add to his collection of Dreiseriana." Mencken's reviews were far less temperate than Dreiser's inscription.

In *Town Topics*, for example, Mencken proclaimed that Cowperwood is "a memorable figure in a memorable book. People will be reading 'The Titan' thirty years from now. It is the sort of thing that refuses to be forgotten."¹¹ The novel was, of course, forgotten quickly enough, but Mencken's enthusiasm brought a magnanimous response. Dreiser offered the Baltimorean the pen copy of any manuscript that he chose, and Mencken opted for *Sister Carrie*. (This manuscript, now housed at the New York Public Library, later became a point of contention between the men.)

Mencken was less pleased with Dreiser's next novel, patently autobiographical and entitled *The "Genius."* In August, 1914, Mencken and Nathan had agreed to co-edit the *Smart Set*, and Mencken wanted to run several chapters from *The "Genius,"* which he had not yet seen; Dreiser refused. In early December of that year, Mencken read the manuscript and suggested revision. This was Dreiser's favorite novel--and perhaps his worst. Blind to the book's flaws, he rejected Mencken's advice.

On September 27th, 1915, five days before *The "Genius"* was published, Dreiser sent Mencken a copy with a tepid inscription: "To Henry L. Mencken from Theodore Dreiser. Without change but with best wishes just the same." Mencken's *Smart Set* review, scathingly entitled "A Literary Behemoth," was far more lively and made Dreiser into a buffoon. *The "Genius,"* for example, is not merely too long; rather, "Here is a novel so huge that a whole shift of critics are needed to

read it. . . . I read only the first and last paragraphs of each chapter. The rest I farmed out to my pastor and beer man." The novel does not merely lack form; rather, it is "as shapeless as a Philadelphia pie woman. It billows and rolls and bulges out. . . ."12 Dreiser, who never possessed a good sense of humor, was not amused. And his mood did not brighten when this, his financially most successful novel, was suppressed by John S. Sumner, successor to Anthony Comstock as the chief guardian of American morals.

Mencken played a major role in the events which followed-- events which have been admirably explained by Dreiser scholars and which do not need to be recounted here. Suffice it to say that, by the time this episode was over, Mencken was disenchanted with his friend. Such disenchantment was evident, among other places, in yet another inscription.

When Mencken and Nathan began the *American Mercury* in January, 1924, they instituted a column entitled "Americana." Consisting of preposterous remarks gleaned primarily from newspapers and magazines published all across the land, the column was designed to show the imbecility of the American mind. In 1925, Mencken published, under the same title, a volume offering the choicer remarks. He sent the novelist an inscribed copy: "Theodore Dreiser. Here we have the effect of reading 'The Genius' upon the American mind. In brief, go to hell!"

Mencken was equally unkind to *The Hand of the Potter*, a play which, in the context of the Dreiser-Mencken relationship, is best discussed in light of *The "Genius,"* its aftermath, and Mencken's efforts to be helpful. In late November, 1916, several months after the uproar over the novel had begun, Dreiser corresponded about the four-act "tragedy" on which he was working. On December 13th, he mailed to Baltimore *The Hand of the Potter*, whose title alludes to Edward Fitzgerald's translation (1859) of the "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam." To describe God's creation of mankind, Fitzgerald uses the metaphor of "a Potter thumping his wet Clay" (line 146). The Potter's hand shook badly in shaping Isadore Berchansky, Dreiser's protagonist, who is "so strangely compounded mentally and physically that he is bizarre."¹³

When the play opens, Isadore has just been released from prison, where he had spent two years for molesting a young girl. As the drama staggers toward its conclusion, he tries to seduce his sister, fondles his niece, and then rapes and murders an eleven-year-old girl. As a work of art, the play is disastrous. But what infuriated Mencken was the fact that Dreiser wanted to publish the play while *The "Genius"* case, so

important for the freedom of American letters, still had not been settled. The correspondence between the men grew vituperative.

Once again, Mencken also showed his displeasure in an inscription. After the play was published in 1919, Dreiser sent a copy, apologetically inscribed, to Baltimore: "H.L.M.-- In some dark corner of your shelf--perhaps--you will make room for this very reprehensible member of the Dreiser family." The following year, Dreiser received a copy of *Heliogabalus, A Buffoonery in Three Acts*, co-authored by Mencken and Nathan. "Dear Dreiser," reads Mencken's inscription, "'The Hand of the Potter' set me to itching for the glory of the boards. This is the lamentable result."¹⁴ This inscription conveys more than humor, for Dreiser's "tragedy in four acts" had generated Mencken's "buffoonery in three." Five years later, Mencken would wonder about the "tragic" aspect of Dreiser's most significant novel.

Dreiser had other tales to tell, however, before he completed the story of Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy*. In the meantime, the Dreiser-Mencken relationship bumped along by stops and starts. Mencken continued to receive Dreiser's books and pamphlets; some were laudable, others far less so. It became increasingly clear that there were fundamental differences between the men--differences that were hinted at, among other places, in the inscriptions.

Unlike Dreiser, Mencken rarely changed his mind. His tastes in literature were never eclectic, and, from the beginning of his career, Mencken most admired and wrote most intelligently about mimetic fiction--precisely the sort of writing at which Dreiser was most proficient. There was a strong strain of mysticism in Dreiser, though, and he believed, perhaps correctly, that Mencken was far too much the rationalist. Such mysticism was patent in several plays contained in *Plays of the Natural and the Supernatural*. In his gracious inscription, though, Dreiser did not allude to this difference: "For Henry L. Mencken from Theodore Dreiser. With all good wishes." While Mencken tried to explain away the mysticism in four plays, his impressionistic *Smart Set* review was, in the end, a staunch defense of Dreiser against the moralists.

A Hoosier Holiday, a second travelogue more admirable than *A Traveler at Forty*, appeared in November, 1916, and Dreiser's inscription, dated October 27th, showed an affectionate irony between old friends and graciously acknowledged Mencken's editorial services: "To Henry L--from Dreiser. Thou scoundrel!-- This night shalt thou be compelled to once

more glance it through." Mencken more than reciprocated. "The Creed of a Novelist," a five-page review full of approbation, appeared in the *Smart Set* more than two months before *A Hoosier Holiday* was published.

In November, 1916, Mencken sailed to Germany as a war correspondent for the Baltimore *Sunpapers*. Both Dreiser, a first-generation American of German descent, and Mencken, whose paternal grandfather left Germany in 1848, suffered badly at the hands of jingoistic critics during World War I. (Mencken's battles, on Dreiser's behalf and his own, against critics such as Stuart Pratt Sherman need not be recounted again here.) When Mencken returned to Baltimore in March, 1917, he was welcomed by a pamphlet containing "Life, Art and America," one of Dreiser's most significant essays. "To my first (critical) love Henry L.--on his return from the fatherland," reads the affectionate inscription, whose final term obliquely disparages an American whom Mencken and Dreiser were convinced was a villain of the worst sort: Woodrow Wilson.

Such solidarity was interrupted, however, by the publication of Mencken's first, and last, volume of literary criticism, *A Book of Prefaces*, which contained among its four pieces an essay entitled "Theodore Dreiser." Dreiser had already responded favorably to the three lengthy columns which appeared in the Baltimore *Evening Sun* during the summer of 1916; all three contained material reprinted in *A Book of Prefaces*.¹⁵ In May, 1917, Mencken informed Dreiser that the essay was being revised. That same month, Mencken sent "Theodore Dreiser," or at least part of it, to the novelist, who returned the manuscript in July.¹⁶ Apparently, Dreiser became angry before *A Book of Prefaces* was released in the fall.

We cannot be certain about what, if anything, was said in conversation. But the copy which Dreiser received bore a frigid inscription: "To Theodore Dreiser." One would expect something more effusive, for this essay of more than eighty pages offered what was at the time the most comprehensive treatment of Dreiser's life and art.¹⁷ The Dreiser-Mencken correspondence, which had broken off in July, 1917, did not resume until May of the following year. In his letters to third parties, Mencken's comments about Dreiser grew more caustic. And in late August, 1918--more than a year after this tiff had begun--Dreiser's inscription in *Free and Other Stories* bore a marked coolness: "For Henry L. Mencken from Theodore Dreiser." Mencken, in turn, wrote a review that could have been far more enthusiastic.

Throughout the remainder of 1918 and early months of 1919, Mencken urged Dreiser to complete *The Bulwark*, which had

already languished for several years. Dreiser pushed ahead with another project, though, and Mencken exulted over *Twelve Men*, the character sketches published in April, 1919. "For Henry L. Mencken--" reads Dreiser's inscription, "acknowledging many courtesies and services." Mencken responded unequivocally, as was his wont, that the portraits of Paul Dresser and Muldoon ("Culhane, The Solid Man") were the best writing that Dreiser had ever done. Two days later, Mencken called for a companion volume to be entitled *Twelve Women*.¹⁸ Moreover, he applauded *Twelve Men* in both the *New York Sun* and the *Smart Set*. Never again, though, would Mencken respond this favorably to a new piece of writing by Dreiser.

In fact, Mencken's remarks about *Hey Rub-A-Dub Dub*, in which he hooted at the Hoosier's clumsy attempts to write metaphysics, comprised the Baltimorean's most unsympathetic review of a book by Dreiser. Far more than in his burlesque of *The "Genius,"* Mencken enjoyed himself thoroughly at the novelist's expense. Dreiser came to wonder if Mencken were not a Philistine anaesthetic to art lying outside his narrow circle. Mencken, in turn, thought that Dreiser was dissipating his talents--by writing about what he could not understand and by having such a messy personal life. Dreiser, on his part, found Mencken to be managerial. Needless to say, the men were sometimes at cross-purposes.

Nonetheless, Dreiser asked Mencken to edit *A Book About Myself* and to search for chapters that could be sold to magazines. Mencken suggested several changes in the manuscript. On November 28th, 1922, Dreiser inscribed the book in a quasi-German (which has defied all attempts at translation) and pasted inside the front cover a note acknowledging the revisions. In the *Smart Set* of March, 1923, Mencken gave only cursory attention to the autobiography.

On April 13th, Dreiser sent to Baltimore *Douze Hommes*, the French translation of the character sketches, with a stilted, perhaps ironic, inscription that did not bode well: "For Mencken from Dreiser. Bows. Genuflections. Hand-Kissings." And when the *Color of a Great City* was published on December 6th, 1923, Dreiser wrote only: "For Henry L. Mencken--his first edition." Mencken reviewed these sketches only in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. The fact that Mencken chose not to discuss *The Color of a Great City* in the *American Mercury*, whose first issue appeared the same month as the *Sunpapers'* review, showed his low esteem for Dreiser's current writing.

Later in 1924, Mencken refused to undertake another project which could have helped Dreiser. For his proposed series of monographs on American novelists, Ernest Boyd, the Irish

literary critic, asked Mencken to write the one about Dreiser. Mencken replied that he had already written too much and then proceeded to add that he had nothing new to say.¹⁹ There was, perhaps, some truth to the second claim. But during the earlier years of the relationship, Mencken would never have raised such an objection. Boyd then turned to Burton Rascoe, whose monograph appeared the following year; Mencken disparaged it.²⁰ It is impossible to say whether Dreiser knew about this series of events.

In any event, Mencken received in May, 1924, the same month in which he had refused to undertake the monograph, a pamphlet published by Haldeman-Julius which contained two short stories from *Free*: "The Lost Phoebe" and "Old Rogaum and His Theresa."²¹ "Here you are--" reads the rather perfunctory inscription, "a 1st edition--no less--& with my compliments."

Dreiser's inscription in the next book sent to Baltimore conveyed anything but compliments. The manuscript of *An American Tragedy* is approximately one million words--that is, roughly the same size as the unabridged *Clarissa*, approximately the same length as the *Of Time and the River* manuscript with which Maxwell Perkins had to wrestle. In July, 1925, Dreiser cut the manuscript to 385,000 words and sent it to the printer.²² Mencken was supposed to see the page proofs but, as late as November 28th, he had not received them. In his letter of that day, Mencken promised to review the novel in "a hoflich [courteous] and able manner." It is certain that Mencken performed no editorial services upon the novel, and it is probable that he did not see *An American Tragedy* before it was published on December 17, 1925.

On January 14th of the following year, Dreiser wrote from Florida, where he was vacationing with Helen: "I'm sending you a signed & numbered & personally inscribed copy of *An American Tragedy* whether you want it or not. If you don't want it give it to your worst enemy. My regards. My Pontifical indulgence." Mencken replied amiably that he would be delighted to have the book.²³ Certainly, he was not delighted when he received the novel and saw Dreiser's inscription: "Dear Heinrich: As my oldest living enemy I venture to offer you this little pamphlet. Don't mind if it emits a destructive gas. Us Germans--you know."²⁴

The novel arrived in Baltimore sometime after January 20th, and Mencken wrote on January 28th that his review was finished. Forthright as usual, Mencken said that he had attacked *An American Tragedy* as well as praised it. Mencken explained further, in his letter of February 5th, that the

trial and execution of Clyde were well-handled but that the events up to and including Roberta's death "made me shed some sweat." Significantly, Mencken closed on an amiable note: "I hear that the book is selling well." Thoroughly enraged, Dreiser vilified Mencken three days later: "As to your critical predilections, animosities, inhibitions--et cet. Tosh. Who reads you? Bums and loafers. No-goods. We were friends before ever you were a critic of mine if I recall. And,--if an [sic] humble leman may speak up--may remain so despite various--well--choose your insults."²⁵ Mencken chose not to respond in kind, and the correspondence ceased for more than eight years.

It cannot be my purpose here to account thoroughly for this estrangement. I would like, however, to clear up one signal misconception. Dreiser did not, as some critics have suggested, write this vitriolic letter after he read Mencken's review of *An American Tragedy*, which appeared in the *American Mercury* of March, 1926.²⁶ At the time of this letter, Dreiser knew of the review only what he had been told in Mencken's correspondence of January 28th and February 5th--that is, the discussion in the *Mercury* was a mixture of praise and censure. The estrangement had occurred, then, more than two weeks before the novelist could have seen "Dreiser in 840 Pages."

During the estrangement, which lasted until late 1934, Mencken chose to comment publicly upon only some of Dreiser's new books. Needless to say, none of the books and pamphlets which he received at this time bore an inscription. Mencken decided not to review the three books published in 1927: a revised edition of *The Financier*; a collection of short stories entitled *Chains* (three of which Mencken had run in the *Smart Set* and the *Mercury*); and an edition of an old nemesis, *The Hand of The Potter*, briefly shortened in the final act.²⁷ Mencken did, however, acquire the first two books, and he also obtained *The Songs of Paul Dresser* (New York: Boni and Liveright), for which Dreiser had written the Introduction.

In 1928, Mencken failed to acquire both *Moods: Cadenced and Declaimed* and *Dreiser Looks at Russia*. The following year, Mencken obtained the four-page "Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by Jerome Blum," for which Dreiser had written the Foreword. Mencken also acquired *A Gallery of Women*, the two-volume collection of fifteen sketches which was published in November, 1929, after a gestation of more than ten years. This was the first book by Dreiser which Mencken chose to review after the rift. It will be remembered that, in 1919, Mencken had called for the publication of this volume. Perhaps he therefore felt obliged to respond to it. In any event, "Ladies, Mainly Sad," a perfunctory review of little more than

one page, appeared in the *Mercury* of February, 1930.

Dawn, the first chronological volume of Dreiser's autobiography, was finally published in May, 1931. Years earlier, the author had asked Mencken to protect the manuscript from the Dreiser family and to edit it as well. Perhaps for old-time's sake, Mencken reviewed the book. The untitled review of barely more than two hundred words, Mencken's briefest for any book by Dreiser, appeared in the July issue of the *Mercury*. The polemical *Tragic America* was published in late December, 1931, and Mencken received a copy in February of the following year. "It looks rather depressing," he told Edgar Lee Masters, "but I suppose I shall have to tackle it."²⁸ It is uncertain if Mencken read the book carefully. If he did so, then this self-admitted "Tory" was undoubtedly incensed by Dreiser's politics. In any event, Mencken did not respond in print to *Tragic America*. *Dawn*, in fact, proved to be the final new book by Dreiser which Mencken reviewed.

In late 1934, the relationship resumed because of remarks made by Burton Rascoe. Along with Groff Conklin, Rascoe was putting together *The Smart Set Anthology*, and Mencken, who looked back upon his *Smart Set* pieces as ephemeral writing, refused to give the editors permission to reprint his work. Rascoe was unhappy. In an effort to advertise the anthology, Reynal and Hitchcock, the publisher, circulated in pamphlet form seven hundred and fifty copies of Rascoe's Introduction, "'Smart Set' History."

Rascoe wrote that, according to Dreiser, Mencken split with the novelist because Dreiser had refused to contribute to a fund defending the *Mercury* in a censorship case involving "Hatrack."²⁹ (This story by Herbert Asbury concerned a small-town prostitute and appeared in the April, 1926, issue.) Had he taken the trouble to check his chronology, Rascoe would have recognized that the estrangement had occurred prior to "Hatrack." Moreover, Dreiser's reaction showed that Rascoe had badly misconstrued the novelist's remarks.

Besides writing to Rascoe, Reynal and Hitchcock and Alfred A. Knopf, Dreiser sent a conciliatory letter to Baltimore, and an appreciative Mencken replied in the boisterous vein of the good old days. In early December, 1934, the men got together at the Ansonia Hotel in New York City, the site of Tommy Wilhelm's later struggles in Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*. Under the burden of this first encounter, Mencken and Dreiser struggled as well.³⁰ Rascoe's error was not a panacea, for there were still profound differences between the men.

Nonetheless, Mencken resumed some of his former roles and

offered advice about a variety of matters. When *The Living Thoughts of Thoreau*, for which Dreiser had written the Introduction, appeared in March, 1939, Mencken received a warmly inscribed copy: "For Henry L. Mencken in gratitude for much." In December, Mencken gave Dreiser a copy of *Happy Days*, volume one of the Baltimorean's congenial, and highly successful, autobiographical trilogy.

In August, 1940, Dreiser asked for help on a manuscript tentatively entitled *America, Keep Out*.³¹ Despite the profound ideological conflict between radical and reactionary, Dreiser and Mencken could agree about several issues. One, both hated what they viewed as British imperialism and believed that England was not above using the United States for its own self-interest. Two, Dreiser and Mencken thought that FDR wanted to enter World War II as quickly as possible because his New Deal economics had failed miserably. Three, both men were, at heart, isolationists.

America Is Worth Saving was published in January, 1941. Its long and effusive inscription was the last which Dreiser would write for the Baltimorean: "For Henry L. Mencken from (and with the enduring affection of) Theodore Dreiser. In trade, as you might say, for those ten realistic years of your youth. No concealed attempt at proselytizing because of no hope of so doing." No longer did Dreiser feel compelled to instruct a wayward friend.

Unfortunately, such *concordia discors* could not last, for there was a serious--in fact, final--falling out over Dreiser's decision to accept an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In Mencken's eyes, Dreiser had profaned the cause for which they had fought so long and ardently. Mencken wrote for the last time on July 4, 1944; Dreiser's few letters in 1945 proved to be futile attempts to renew the correspondence. Mencken and Dreiser were two of America's more prolific writers; however, they proved incapable of saying one word: good-bye.

After the novelist's death in December, 1945, Mrs. Dreiser asked Mencken to write an Introduction to the Memorial Edition of *An American Tragedy*, which was published the following year. Although Mencken found the task most distasteful, he could hardly refuse. As far as I have been able to tell, Mrs. Dreiser did not inscribe this edition and mail it to Baltimore. Mencken, on the other hand, did inscribe a copy to Alfred A. Knopf and admitted what he was unable to say in the Introduction: "It took some blubber offen [off of] me to have to be polite to 'An American Tragedy.'"

In February, 1946, Mencken offered to help Mrs. Dreiser with the galleys of *The Bulwark*, a task that he found far more palatable. In March, he went so far as to suggest that, in many respects, this was Dreiser's best novel. Mencken also offered to review *The Bulwark* in the New York *Herald Tribune*, but the task was given to someone else.³² Understandably, Mrs. Dreiser was grateful. On March 21, the day *The Bulwark* was published, she sent an inscribed copy to Baltimore: "For our friend, Henry L. Mencken, with the admiration and esteem of Helen Dreiser."

In December, 1947, Mrs. Dreiser sent along a copy of *The Stoic*, the final volume of the Cowperwood trilogy: "For Henry L. Mencken--a friend of long standing, and a true source of inspiration to many--[.]" There is no evidence that Mencken read the novel, but he thanked Mrs. Dreiser for the gift and advised her not to be upset by the negative reviews.³³

My Life With Dreiser, Mrs. Dreiser's memoirs, appeared in 1951. Earlier, Mencken had urged her to do the book; furthermore, he read and praised the manuscript.³⁴ While the copy which he received bore a warm inscription, he was in no condition to enjoy it fully, for he had suffered a severe stroke in 1948. He passed away in 1956, the year after Mrs. Dreiser's death.

When examined in their entirety, these inscriptions are, I think, representative of the men who wrote them. More often than not, Dreiser and Mencken were generous, yet they could, at times, be churlish. The inscriptions clearly contrast Dreiser's lack of humor to Mencken's propensity for laughter. The writers, in short, viewed the American scene from radically different perspectives, and the relationship was propelled by both contention and a deep-seated mutual respect.

While none of these inscriptions is especially profound--one should not really expect them to be--they do show the breadth of the relationship and help to suggest its role in American literary history. In this way, the inscriptions complement both the correspondence and the writing which the men did for publication. The private voice which talks here is rather like the public voice which reached so many Americans--a voice that was alternately congenial and caustic, a voice that was usually, in some way or another, controversial.

NOTES

¹The books and pamphlets which Dreiser gave to Mencken are housed at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. The material which Mencken gave to Dreiser is housed at the

University of Pennsylvania. Mencken's letters to Theodore and Helen Dreiser are also at the University, and the New York Public Library holds the letters from Theodore and Helen Dreiser to Mencken. Unless otherwise noted, the letters referred to in this article are housed in these collections.

²The Dreiser-Mencken relationship has already been discussed by a variety of critics too numerous to list in their entirety. The subject is mentioned in varying degrees in most of the books devoted to each writer. W. A. Swanberg's *Dreiser* is dedicated to Mencken and discusses this matter at length; Mr. Swanberg also examines Mencken and Dreiser in *Menckenianna*, 15 (Fall, 1965). I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Swanberg's thorough and valuable study. Donald R. Stoddard examines the early years of the relationship in "Mencken and Dreiser: An Exchange of Roles," *Library Chronicle*, 32 (Spring, 1966). I have discussed aspects of the relationship in both *Menckenianna* and *The Dreiser Newsletter*. For a comprehensive bibliography, I would direct the reader to my dissertation, *Two Beasts in the Parlor: The Dreiser-Mencken Relationship* (S.U.N.Y. at Stony Brook, 1979).

³Carl Bode, "Sincerely H.L.M.," in *The New Mencken Letters*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Dial, 1977), p. 3.

⁴*Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, ed. Robert Elias (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), I, 97, n. 5.

⁵"The Books of the Dog Days," *Smart Set*, 29 (September, 1909), 157; and "'A Doll's House'--With a Fourth Act," *Smart Set*, 29 (December, 1909), 153.

⁶W. A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), p. 131. Dreiser to Thelma Cudlipp, in Elias, *Letters*, I, 105-106.

⁷Mencken to Dreiser, September 15, 1911.

⁸Mencken to Dreiser, January 7, 1913.

⁹Swanberg, *Dreiser*, p. 172.

¹⁰Mencken to Dreiser, March 23, 1914, in *Letters of H. L. Mencken*, ed. Guy Fergue (New York: Knopf, 1961), pp. 43-44.

¹¹"The Literary Show: Dreiser and His Titan," *Town Topics*, 71 (June 18, 1914), 17-18.

¹²"A Literary Behemoth," *Smart Set*, 47 (December, 1915), 150-154.

¹³*The Hand of the Potter* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), p. 27.

¹⁴In February, 1920, Dreiser responded in a similar vein in his inscription in *Hey Rub-A-Dub-Dub*.

¹⁵"Theodore Dreiser," Baltimore *Evening Sun*, July 26, 1916, p. 6; "More Dreiseriana," Baltimore *Evening Sun*, August 1, 1916, p. 6; and "Two Dreiser Novels," Baltimore *Evening Sun*, August 4, 1916, p. 8.

¹⁶See Stoddard, "Mencken and Dreiser: An Exchange of Roles," p. 133. Professor Stoddard says that Dreiser saw the entire essay before it was published.

¹⁷Several critics have praised the essay. See Stoddard, "Mencken and Dreiser: An Exchange of Roles," p. 133; Swanberg, *Dreiser*, p. 223; and Robert Elias, *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 378.

¹⁸Mencken to Dreiser, April 3, 1919 and April 5, 1919.

¹⁹See Bode, *Letters*, p. 182. Mencken to Ernest Boyd, May 30, 1924 (Princeton University). Mencken to Ernest Boyd, June 2, 1924; quoted, in part, by Bode, *Letters*, p. 182.

²⁰Rascoe, *Theodore Dreiser* (New York: McBride, 1925). Mencken to Ernest Boyd, September 1, 1925 (Princeton University).

²¹This was E. Haldeman-Julius's *Little Blue Book* No. 659. *Little Blue Book* No. 661 contained "Neurotic America and the Sex Impulse" and "Some Aspects of Our National Character." Dreiser gave this to Mencken as well, with an undated inscription.

²²Swanberg, *Dreiser*, p. 295.

²³Dreiser to Mencken, January 14, 1926. Mencken to Dreiser, January 20, 1926.

²⁴Quoted by Bode, *Mencken* (U.S.A.: Arcturus Books, 1973), p. 185. Professor Bode reads "humans" for "Germans."

²⁵Mencken to Dreiser, January 28, 1926. Mencken to Dreiser, February 5, 1926, in Forgue, *Letters*, p. 289. The passage concluding with "No-goods" is quoted by Edgar Kemler, *The Irreverent Mr. Mencken* (Boston: Little, 1950), p. 172; he does not give his source. "Who reads you? Bums and loafers."

No-goods." is quoted by Bode, *Mencken*, p. 325; Professor Bode lists Mr. Kemler as his source.

²⁶M. K. Singleton, *H. L. Mencken and the American Mercury Adventure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1962), p. 211, n. 50. Bode, *Mencken*, p. 325. The confusion stems, perhaps, from Mr. Kemler's decision not to give the date of Dreiser's letter.

²⁷Donald Pizer, Richard W. Dowell, and Frederick E. Rusch, *Theodore Dreiser: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (Boston: Hall, 1975), p. 47.

²⁸Mencken to Edgar Lee Masters, February 13, 1932, in Forgue, *Letters*, p. 339.

²⁹Rascoe, "'Smart Set' History" (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934), p. 33. This error was corrected before the Introduction was published in *The Smart Set Anthology*.

³⁰Dreiser to Mencken, November 20, 1934. Mencken to Dreiser, November 21, 1934. The meeting at the Ansonia is discussed by Arnold Gingrich, "How to Become the World's Second-Best Authority on Almost Anything," *Esquire*, 55 (April, 1966), 6; and by Swanberg, *Dreiser*, pp. 425-426.

³¹Dreiser to Mencken, August 22, 1940; quoted by Swanberg, *Dreiser*, pp. 469-470.

³²Mencken to Mrs. Dreiser, February 18, 1946, and March 12, 1946.

³³Mencken to Mrs. Dreiser, December 15, 1947.

³⁴Mencken to Mrs. Dreiser, January 18, 1946, in Forgue, *Letters*, pp. 493-494. Mencken to Mrs. Dreiser, June 6, 1946, and October 13, 1947.

A DREISER CHECKLIST, 1980

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This checklist covers the year's work on Dreiser in 1980 plus a number of publications omitted from previous checklists.

I. NEW EDITIONS, TRANSLATIONS AND REPRINTS OF DREISER'S WORKS

The Best Short Stories of Theodore Dreiser. Illus. by Barron Storey. Franklin Center, PA: Franklin Library, 1980.

II. NEW DREISER STUDIES AND NEW STUDIES THAT INCLUDE DREISER

Arms, George. "The Bulwark: A Chronology," *Dreiser News-Letter*, 11 (Fall 1980), 10-14.

Buckingham, Willis J. and Barnett Shepherd. "Unquiet Anchorage: Dreiser's Revisions of 'When the Sails Are Furled,'" *Research Studies* (Washington State University), 48 (June 1980), 105-15.

Butler, Robert James. "Movement in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 11 (Spring 1980), 1-12.

Donaldson, Norman and Betty Donaldson. *How Did They Die?* New York: St. Martins, 1980. Pp. 101-02.

Doody, Terrence. *Confession and Community in the Novel*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980. Pp. 101-132.

Drescher-Schroder, Christa. *Das Bild Chicagos in der Cowper-wood-Trilogie Theodore Dreisers mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von "The Titan"*. Frankfurt: R. G. Fischer, 1980.

Epstein, Joseph. *Ambition: The Secret Passion*. New York: Dutton, 1980. Pp. 78-81, 205, 239-40, et passim.

Fargion, Luisa. "'Sister Carrie' e 'Nana.'" *Acme* (Italy), 31 (1978), 429-42.

Griffin, Joseph P. "'When the Old Century Was New': An Early

- Dreiser Parody," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 17 (Summer 1980), 285-89.
- Hussman, Lawrence E., Jr. "A Measure of Sister Carrie's Growth," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 11 (Spring 1980), 13-23.
- Kwiat, Joseph J. "The Education of Theodore Dreiser in the World of the City: 'Exercises' for the Early Novels," *Americana-Austriaca: Beitrage zur Amerikakunde*, 5 (1980), 91-109.
- Lozovskii, A. I. Essay on the theme of art in Dreiser's *Twelve Men in Amerikanskaya literatura: Problemy romantizma i realizma* [*American Literature: Problems of Romanticism and Realism*]. Krasnodar: Kubanskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 1979. Not seen; cited in *American Literary Scholarship*, 1979, p. 468.
- Matheson, Terence J. "The Two Faces of Sister Carrie: The Characterization of Dreiser's First Heroine," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 11 (Oct. 1980), 71-86.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. "Sister Carrie's Popular Economy," *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (Winter 1980), 373-90.
- Mickelson, Joel C. "Correlations between Art and Literature in Interpreting the American City: Theodore Dreiser and John Sloan," in *Images of the American City in the Arts*. Ed. Joel C. Mickelson. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1978. Pp. 20-25.
- Mills, Nicolaus. "Class and Crowd in American Fiction," *Centennial Review*, 24 (Spring 1980), 192-217.
- Morozova, T. L. "Tipologiya Geroya [A Typology of the Hero]," in *Literatura SSHA XX veka. Opyt Tipologicheskovo isledovaniya (Avtorskaya pozysiya, konflikt, geroi)* [*Literature of the USA of the 20th Century. An attempt at a typological Analysis. (The Position of the Writer, Conflict, Hero)*]. Ed. Yasen N. Zasurski. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1978. Pp. 359-560.
- Muller, Kurt. "Identitat und Rolle in Theodore Dreisers *Sister Carrie*, Teil I: Rollenverhalten, Identitat und soziale Struktur," *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch im Auftrage der Gorres-Gesellschaft*, NS 21 (1980), 253-82.
- Price, Alan. "Lily Bart and Carrie Meeber: Cultural Sisters," *American Literary Realism*, 13 (Autumn 1980),

- Rusch, Frederic E. "A Dreiser Checklist, 1979," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 11 (Fall 1980), 15-22.
- Shapiro, Charles. "On Our Own: Trilling vs. Dreiser," in *Seasoned Authors for a New Season: The Search for Standards in Popular Writing*. Ed. Louis Filler. Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1980. Pp. 152-56.
- Tjader, Marguerite. "Dreiser's Investigations of Nature," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 11 (Fall 1980), 1-9.
- Vidan, Ivo. "The Capitulation of Literature? The Scope of the 'Nonfictive Novel,'" in *Yugoslav Perspectives on American Literature: An Anthology*. Ed. James L. Thorson. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980. Pp. 157-80.
- Westbrook, Wayne W. *Wall Street in the American Novel*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1980. Pp. 24-25, 152-58, *et passim*.
- Zvergov, A. M. "'Amerikanskaya Tragediya' i 'Amerikanskaya Mechta' ['American Tragedy' and 'American Dream']," in *Literatura SSHA XX veka. Opyt Tipologicheskova isledovaniya (Avtorskaya pozytsiya, konflikt, geroi) [Literature of the USA of the 20th Century. An Attempt at a Typological Analysis. (The Position of the Writer, Conflict, Hero)]*. Ed. Yasen N. Zasurski. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1978. Pp. 134-208.

III. REPRINTS OF EARLIER DREISER STUDIES

- Asselineau, Roger. "Theodore Dreiser's Transcendentalism," in *English Studies Today, Second Series*. Ed. G. A. Bonnard. Bern: Francke Verlag, 1961. Rpt. in Roger Asselineau, *The Transcendentalist Constant in American Literature*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1980. Pp. 99-114.
- Cowley, Malcolm. "An Evening at Theodore Dreiser's," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 18 (Summer 1979), rpt. in Malcolm Cowley, *The Dream of the Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1930s*. New York: Viking, 1980. Pp. 51-62.

IV. ABSTRACTS OF DISSERTATIONS AND THESES ON AND INCLUDING DREISER

- Howard, June Marie. "Slumming in Determinism: The Generic Structures of American Literary Naturalism," *DAI*, 40 (1980), 4596A (U. Cal., San Diego).

DREISER NEWS & NOTES

On April 1, the University of Pennsylvania Press published Dreiser's *American Diaries, 1902-1926*, edited by Thomas Riggio, James L. W. West III and Neda Westlake. . . . Mr. L. Jegenatha Raja writes to say that the third number of *The Journal of Life, Art and Literature* will be devoted to Dreiser. He says that "this venture will be the first of its kind in India" and invites the submission of articles on Dreiser. Those wishing to contribute articles to this special number should send them to Mr. Raja, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, 600 002, Tamil Nadu, India. . . . The 1982 Bantam Paperbacks lists a new *Sister Carrie*, with an introduction by E. L. Doctorow. . . . Two Signet Classic editions have also been added to the Dreiser novels available: *The "Genius,"* with an afterword by Larzer Ziff, and *The Stoic*, with an introduction by Richard Lingeman. . . . Also, Lingeman, a Hoosier and author of *Small-Town America: A Narrative History, 1620 to the Present*, is doing a Dreiser biography for Putnam's. He sends *The Dreiser Newsletter* the following progress report: "As for my Dreiser biography, I am proceeding apace, albeit at a slow one; when it will be completed only my conscience and my publisher know for sure. Thus far, I have concentrated on reading and rereading Dreiser, as well as everything about him that has been published. In sum, I am still in that misty realm of inchoate facts, ideas and perceptions, that precedes entry into the rough terrain of actual writing. My talismanic word for my approach is 'holistic'--a word I shall not try to defend but which means a blend of psychological, critical and sociological perspectives, with emphasis on the latter. Seen against the backdrop of his times, Dreiser seems righter and righter to me--for all his gropings and crankiness. Still, it is a challenge to say 'something new' and I appreciate the work of predecessors like Moers, Swanberg, Elias and the people listed on your editorial board, among others (whom I would earnestly ask to send me any suggestions or tearsheets of articles they might have). In a very nice letter more than a year ago, Robert Elias suggested that as a magazine editor I attempt to define in my book the current 'news' about Dreiser, for us, now (I am paraphrasing from memory), and I would be happy to do nothing more than write a vivid portrait that interests people in his writings while placing the man and his work where they deserve to be placed in the history of our literature and our intellectual life--that is, at the top. Back to the drawing-board. I welcome correspondence and pep talks." Mr. Lingeman can be reached at *The Nation*, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y., 10011.