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DREISER IN NEW YORK: A DIARY SOURCE

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Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, contemporaries and fellow midwesterners, both contributed significantly to the re-direction of American literature in the earlier part of the 20th century. They were friends who shared a mutual respect for each other's work and who to some extent saw themselves as fighting a common battle, especially in the introduction of frank, honest subject matter into serious literature and in the struggle against rampant literary censorship. Their correspondence, preserved at the Newberry Library and at the University of Pennsylvania, is extensive. Dreiser was the elder of the two by five years and was the more viciously attacked. The younger Anderson became one of Dreiser's staunchest defenders, identified his own cause and direction with that of Dreiser, and persisted in believing that Dreiser had been the "pathfinder" for Anderson's own work and the work of others. Anderson wrote fairly extensively about Dreiser, dedicated *Horses and Men* (1923) to the older man, expressed his "profound gratitude," and claimed that reading *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt* "started me on a new track"¹ that led to *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Despite this closeness of acquaintance and purpose, however, personal contact between the two men was quite limited. Dreiser was already a hero to the Chicago Renaissance writers when Anderson "left business for literature" and began to be associated with the Chicago group in early 1913. Anderson may have met Dreiser during one of the latter's visits to Chicago in

the 1913-1914 period; but Anderson himself states in his *Memoirs*² that he first met Dreiser in 1922 when they lived for a brief time near one another on St. Luke's Place in New York, some years after Dreiser had used his influence with the publisher John Lane to have Anderson's first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, published in 1916. After 1922-23, Anderson did not live in New York again until the winter of 1933-34; and, despite the fact that both men were in New York for at least part of each year between 1933 and 1938, contacts seem to have been only occasional after an initial flurry of meetings in late 1933 and early 1934. Anderson's final meetings with Dreiser came on November 18, 1938, when they dined together just before Dreiser's move from New York to Los Angeles, and on December 1, 1939, when they again dined together in Los Angeles during Anderson's tour of the west coast.

The period from September, 1933, to June, 1934, thus represents a rare period of reasonably close personal association between the two men. Anderson, who had since 1926 been living in Marion, Virginia, married Eleanor Copenhaver in July, 1933; and they moved in September to New York, where Eleanor worked as an official of the Industrial Section of the National YWCA. Dreiser's primary motive for cultivating Anderson at this time seems to have been an effort to recruit the latter for the editorial board of *The American Spectator*.³ Dreiser apparently thought of Anderson as someone who would bolster his own position in the frequent disagreements with fellow editors George Jean Nathan and Ernest Boyd.⁴

Eleanor, an attractive, bright, and quick-witted woman, found it very exciting to meet Dreiser and liked him immediately.⁵ In a sporadically-kept diary which she started after marrying Anderson, she has provided some interesting accounts and impressions of Dreiser in 1933-34. Although brief, these accounts represent a unique source for students of both Dreiser and Anderson and should thus be preserved and made available to scholars. Pertinent sections are here reproduced:

September 23, 1933 (New York)

Friday night went to dinner at Luchow's⁶ with Dreiser and Helen--⁷much talk. On the way down Dreiser used the word *mysticism* about 10 times--leading me to think he had gone mystic and thus explaining his going N.R.A. Later I told him I'd heard it. He laughed and said it was the *Times* headlines--that if I'd read it all I'd see he believes only in communism.⁸

Talked about Mencken--how he had no mysticism--how they were never friends--how he was very grateful to him nevertheless.⁹ Told Sherwood he was the most significant American

figure--that they regarded him as most American, etc. Teddy is really an evangelist raving about how you can get anything over (referring to his Jews to Kansas article in *Spectator*).¹⁰ He's now all hipped on a big exposure of Catholicism. Lots of elementary talk on Russia.

Helen looks sad. Rumor is that she has lost Dreiser. Dreiser wants Sherwood to go on the board of the *Spectator*. I don't know.

November 16, 1933 (New York)

Sherwood had a fuss with Dreiser Tuesday over "Harry Breaks Through," a story he sent the *Spectator*.¹¹ Dreiser said it wasn't poignant enough, whereupon Sherwood said "Who is Dreiser to tell me what a short story is, etc." Sherwood said he would resign as editor on it.¹² Dreiser said he would be glad for him to and put the story in the *Spectator* saying so. I couldn't tell how much was cocktails and how much serious. I hope a lot the former. Sherwood says Nathan and Boyd won't go against Dreiser. I hope it's that and not that they too think the story no good.

June 5, 1934 (New York)

On Tuesday, May 29th, Dreiser took us to Luchow's with the French playwright Lenormand and his wife.¹³ A most amazing dinner. The Lenormands so civilized and sophisticated, and Dreiser so gauche and crude. Sherwood saved the day for Dreiser's dinner and for America's name.

I was surprised at the narrow range of Dreiser's literary field. Maybe he was sleepy. But Teddy has a grandeur and virility that makes him for me a great figure towering above George Nathan and others.

July 4, 1934 (Paoli, Pa.)

The *Winesburg* play is over or maybe just begun--Heaven knows.¹⁴ Sherwood and Deeter whom he likes were enthusiastic about the dress rehearsal. Mother and I arrived Saturday morning, June 30th. Dreiser and Helen came.....¹⁵

The performance began very late with the actors getting unnerved waiting. Sherwood and I cooking in the little balcony. The first scenes got off terribly--a mess--not timed right or anything. The whole thing seemed to drag to me, but perhaps it was my nerves. A young critic approached Dreiser, asking how he liked it. Dreiser said, "It's pioneer stuff." Critic: "You mean it's not art?" Dreiser: "I did not say that. I

mean it's pioneering in dramatic art." Critic: "Well, I don't think it will be popular on Broadway." Dreiser: "Well, I don't give a damn. It will influence future Broadway."

We got to Eshericks¹⁶ at 3:30 after having a scene over Dreiser wanting one of the young actresses to go up and "sleep on the grass" with him. Sunday was a long picnic with Dreiser exhibiting his genitals all through a long breakfast. Fortunately Mother didn't notice.¹⁷

July 22, 1934 (Troutdale, Va.)

Many stories of Dreiser. Stewart¹⁸ says he is on his uppers--that his secretary begged *Today* to take terrible mess--little things tacked together with comments like the *New Yorker*. Maybe Dreiser is finding it hard to get publishers, but I am sure he's not hard up.¹⁹ Wish Sherwood would invite Dreiser and Helen, but he says we are fed up on company.²⁰ Sherwood says Teddy is a bad writer but a great novelist.

July 31, 1934 (Troutdale, Va.)

It's interesting to watch the effect of Wharton [Esherick] on Sherwood. He's highly congenial and grand for relaxing Sherwood but I fear that subtly his lack of interest in anything social is letting Sherwood sag--and not read and discuss as he should. I'd rather have him around old Dreiser any day even if it is "bad art." I feel so sure that I must keep Sherwood in touch with young labor people, etc.

November 11, 1934 (Cincinnati, Ohio)

Dreiser certainly left Sherwood in the lurch getting off the *Spectator* as he did.²¹

December 6, 1934 (Willmar, Minn.)

Sherwood and I had a long talk about his special problem--whether he should expect or want...recognition here and now. We mentioned Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis. Sherwood says he believes he is more significant than either, but it won't be known for 50 years. In spite of this feeling once in a long time, he is torn by doubt and a sense of failure most of the time.²²

¹*Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs, A Critical Edition*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 451.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 451-52.

³A monthly of intellectual commentary in newspaper format, begun in November, 1932, with an editorial board consisting of George Jean Nathan, Ernest Boyd, Théodore Dreiser, James Branch Cabell, and Eugene O'Neill. Cabell and O'Neill were not living in New York and were thus relatively inactive participants.

⁴W.A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), p. 410.

⁵In a 1975 interview, Mrs. Anderson singled out Dreiser as the literary figure she admired most, among the many whom she had met in the 1930's. See *Sherwood Anderson: Centennial Studies*, ed. H.H. Campbell and C.E. Modlin (Troy, New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1976), p. 75.

⁶A restaurant at 110 East 14th Street, a favorite of Dreiser, Mencken, Nathan, Anderson, Paul Rosenfeld, and other literati.

⁷Helen Richardson, with whom Dreiser had lived off and on since the early 1920's and whom he would marry in 1944.

⁸The *New York Times* headline (August 28, 1933, page 19) announced, "Dreiser Says NRA is Training Public: Promises on 62nd Birthday to Spend 40 Hours a Week Defending It." The NRA, or National Recovery Act, was a comprehensive program at the heart of President Roosevelt's campaign for economic recovery and reform. Mrs. Anderson was surprised that an extreme leftist like Dreiser was apparently supporting the President's programs.

⁹Actually, Dreiser and Mencken were closely associated from their first meeting in 1908 until 1926, when they broke over Mencken's highly unfavorable review of *An American Tragedy*. After 1926, they would not meet again until December, 1935 (Swanberg, pp. 425-26).

¹⁰See "Editorial Conference (With Wine)," *The American Spectator*, Vol. I, No. 11 (September, 1933), p. 1. The *Spectator* editors are represented in conference about the "Jewish question." At the conclusion of this irreverent "conference," one participant suggests "that America present the American Jews with the State of Kansas. Thereby, in the first place, we might rid ourselves of Kansas; in the second place, of the Jews; and in the third place, we might happily establish in the heart of America a source not only of aesthetic development but of financial support."

11. "Harry Breaks Through" was not published in *The American Spectator*, but in *The New Caravan*, ed. Alfred Kreymborg, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1936), pp. 84-89.

12. Anderson's name was first included as a member of the editorial board in the December, 1933, issue, to which he also contributed a short story called "The Nationalist." Dreiser earlier had obtained three brief contributions from Anderson, published in the May, June, and September, 1933, issues.

13. Henri René Lenormand (1882-1951), French playwright (*The Coward*; *The Dream Doctor*).

14. The dramatic version of Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* had its world premiere at Jasper Deeter's Hedgerow Theatre near Philadelphia on June 30, 1934.

15. Dreiser had first visited Hedgerow in 1924 (Swanberg, p. 289); and the dramatic version of his own *An American Tragedy* would premiere there on April 20, 1935.

16. Wharton Esherick, artist in wood and a friend of both Anderson and Dreiser, lived with his wife Letty at Paoli, Pa., not far from the Hedgerow Theatre. Dreiser had first stayed with the Eshericks in 1924; and he recorded in his diary the details of another three-day visit that he and Helen made to Paoli December 9-12, 1925 (see Theodore Dreiser, *American Diaries, 1902-1926*, ed. Thomas P. Riggio, James L.W. West III, and Neda M. Westlake (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 417-19.

17. This diary entry, since it is an on-the-spot account, would seem to refute the accuracy of not only Anderson's highly embroidered account of the incident in his *Memoirs* (pp. 457-58) but also the account in Swanberg (p. 419), which reports that Eleanor's mother, Laura Lu Copenhaver, murmured "Disgusting" and fled.

18. William C. Stewart, then managing editor of *Today Magazine*, a journal created to be "sympathetic" to the Roosevelt administration and edited by Raymond Moley, one of Roosevelt's advisors. Anderson spent much of the year 1934 traveling about gathering information on social and economic conditions in the United States for articles commissioned by Moley and Stewart.

19. Writing for *Today* was fairly lucrative; and Dreiser probably got the idea of submitting to *Today* because of Anderson's success with the magazine.

²⁰ During the years 1933-40, Sherwood and Eleanor spent the summers at Anderson's Ripshin Farm, about twenty miles south of Marion, Virginia. Although they entertained frequent guests throughout the period--including Thomas Wolfe, Maxwell Perkins, Paul Rosenfeld, and Henry Wallace--Dreiser never visited Ripshin.

²¹ After talking Anderson into joining the editorial board of *The American Spectator* in late 1933, Dreiser himself resigned in a huff in early 1934. His name does not appear as an editor after the February, 1934, issue. Dreiser's thirteen and one-third shares of stock in American Spectator, Inc. were sold to Anderson on March 26, 1934.

²² Diary material quoted by permission of Mrs. Sherwood Anderson.

COWPERWOOD TREADS THE BOARDS

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When Theodore Dreiser published his revised *Financier* in 1927, the book sold rather frugally, went virtually unreviewed, and certainly did very little to stimulate the groundswell for Dreiser as Nobel laureate which the novelist and his friends had hoped it might encourage. But the event did stir the fires of ambition in a longtime Dreiser fan, Rella Abell Armstrong, who wrote Dreiser from Annapolis late in 1928 to request a personal interview concerning the scenario she had prepared from his novel.

Buried in the Cowperwood story as told in those massive novels *The Financier* and *The Titan*, a great stage play seemed to struggle for release, and Mrs. Armstrong, like a sculptress facing a block of Carrara, would be its emancipator. If only Dreiser would consent to examine her script, she was certain that he would see how powerfully a stage production of his story would affect the playgoing public. "The theme is such a great theme, such a living and vital theme," she argued; could there be any question but that New York, once offered Cowperwood's saga on the stage, would go "mad about it"? In those propitious days of the seemingly-eternal bull market, then entering upon its most spectacular (and final, alas!) upswing, Mrs. Armstrong joined with Calvin Coolidge in thinking of big business as a topic guaranteed to capture the intense personal interest of "the whole prosperous American public."¹ In her mind's eye, the would-be playwright could already visualize hordes of eager Manhattanites queuing up at the box office on Broadway, dollars in hand.

But reviewing the Armstrong scenario, Dreiser was not impressed.² The scenario called for a behemoth of a play which causes one to surmise that Rella Armstrong had been influenced not only by Patrick Kearney's success in adapting *An American Tragedy* for the stage, but even more immediately, perhaps, by the unprecedented reception given to Eugene O'Neill's "Strange Interlude." The O'Neill drama had opened on Broadway in January 1928, had garnered the Pulitzer Prize in May, and was still playing to capacity houses when Mrs. Armstrong wrote to Dreiser concerning her ideas for staging *The*

Financier. "Strange Interlude," in which O'Neill tested the acceptability of a play having the characteristics of a novel, was composed in nine acts, all separated from each other by time lapses ranging from three months to eleven years; the entire drama encompassed a quarter of a century.

Something similar to this was proposed in the Armstrong "Financier." Divided into five acts, the play would begin in Frank Cowperwood's Philadelphia home during the early 1900s, moving from the mansion to his business office (two extended scenes there), and on to the Warden's office in the Eastern District Penitentiary. After a lapse of fifteen years, the scene would shift to Chicago and Cowperwood's Michigan Avenue mansion and then, following a four-year interval, the play would close during the 1920s with New York scenes laid in Cowperwood's private office in the penthouse of a Manhattan skyscraper.

Mrs. Armstrong was in trouble from the beginning, for her misguided effort at updating Dreiser's story wholly overlooked the manner in which both *The Financier* and *The Titan* were locked inextricably to their era, the latter half of the nineteenth century, the heyday of Manifest Destiny and Rugged Individualism, era of the Robber Baron and the growth of great public monopolies. Dreiser's two novels had been historical in the very best sense of that word, and in modernizing his story Mrs. Armstrong badly undercut his meticulous attention to *mise en scene*, at one stroke denuding the saga of its chief glories. Rather than being the archetypal tale of the Yerkes-Astor-Vanderbilt-Carnegie breed of post-Civil War Captain of Industry, as Dreiser had so meticulously specified, the updated story was purely of the twentieth century, a total anachronism. In addition, the play's acting time promised to be interminable, at least five or six hours, possibly more, and it was to be divided into two discrete parts, between Acts Three and Four. Here again, the script aped the pattern initiated by "Strange Interlude," whose curtain rose at 5:15 p.m., broke for an hour's intermission (dinner) at the end of Part I, then resumed to play until 11 p.m.

Mrs. Armstrong's scenario was not at all what Dreiser had in mind for *The Financier*. He returned her synopsis, telling her that its proposed treatment of Cowperwood's financial chicanery was "much too congested." All in all, he reported, the financial material as presented in the proposal seemed "so complicated that the play-goer would not get it." To buttress this claim, he told her that three New York Stage managers had read the scenario and concurred in the opinion that it would not do.³

Rella Armstrong, disappointed but undaunted, began work on a revision designed to overcome Dreiser's objections. Before this new script could achieve concrete form, a new companion had entered Dreiser's life, Kathryn Sayre, a degree candidate in Philosophy at Columbia University. Kay Sayre's M. A. thesis was called "The Themes of Dreiser," and she sent him a complimentary copy, following it with a considerably more personal and effusive encomium of fourteen pages entitled "Theodore Dreiser--Great Spirit." By the summer of 1929 she and Dreiser were lovers, and she soon became a willing and capable assistant in his work. When Rella Armstrong submitted her second version of the "Financier" scenario, apparently early in 1930, it seemed only natural, considering Kay's interest in his writing, that Dreiser should hand it to her for a critical going-over.

In her new script, Mrs. Armstrong had drastically overhauled her original effort.⁴ But in the process, unhappily, she had worked further violence upon Dreiser's story. Her original five acts were now reduced to four, the action occurring wholly in the hectic financial atmosphere of the 1920s. Deleted were all of the early scenes, and thus the total Philadelphia experiences of Cowperwood detailed by Dreiser in *The Financier*. Lillian and Frank Cowperwood were now depicted as being Chicago suburbanites. Lillian's modest inheritance had become the cornerstone upon which the financier built his immense wealth. Then, in rapid succession, came his infatuation with Aileen Butler, his divorce from Lillian, his marriage to Aileen, and then his subsequent rejection of her in his campaign to win the beautiful Berenice (here called Carter rather than Fleming). All of these changes were to occur within a half-dozen years. The world of streetcars and subway franchises nearly forgotten, the business action of the Armstrong script was chiefly concerned with Frank Cowperwood's attempt to monopolize Chicago's public utilities, including its electric power and water supply. Into this scheme, his collusion with "George Steuer," Chicago's city treasurer, was intertwined, a plot strand resurrected and adapted from *The Financier*.

Apparently Mrs. Armstrong, having just passed through the Wall Street Crash of 1929, was seized by the notion of draining topicality for whatever it might be made to offer, for her play revolves around an imminent panic on the New York Stock Exchange. The Crash occurs, again with a nice feel for the anachronistic, during the early years of the 1920s. Cowperwood, holding immense blocks of stock in a company called Public Utilities purchased on margin, has seen a twenty-point fall in value nick him for \$750,000. The prospect is desperate. He faces "one of the wildest days in the history of the

country" (II, 3):

Frank is very pessimistic over conditions owing to information he has just received over a private wire from New York. He fears a nation wide panic will effect [sic] local stocks, Public Utilities, etc. If this news is true, he warns his father to spend Saturday and Sunday battenning down his hatchets [sic], and to get ready for the storm of selling that will strike Wall Street on the coming Monday, when all stocks will be hammered down, thousands of men made bankrupt and millions lost.
(I, 4-5)

In Rella Armstrong's translation of the Dreiser novels, most of Dreiser's galaxy of characters are omitted, quite understandably of course in a version prepared for the stage. Those characters who remain often undergo strangely unaccountable sea changes. The most prominent is Frank Cowperwood himself. Mrs. Armstrong seems to have in mind here not Charles T. Yerkes, the street-railway monopolist whose life in every detail was Dreiser's model for that role, but instead a more recent tycoon of the Samuel Insull stamp. Cowperwood's heavy interest in the stock of the Public Utilities company is the tip-off here, for Mrs. Armstrong was doing her adaptation at a time when the Insull empire was beginning to shake. Timothy Arneel is renamed Philip, which very interestingly identifies him more closely with his original model, Philip D. Armour, the Chicago meatpacker, but here transformed into a bank president. Cowperwood's congenial catspaw, Henry De Sota Sippens, now becomes Colonel Van Sippens, a journalistic power in Chicago (suggested to Mrs. Armstrong by Col. Robert McCormick of the *Tribune*?), whereas the genuine editor-prototypes from *The Titan* are ignored altogether. Harold and Rita Sohlberg, she the only survivor from Cowperwood's parade of lovers in the novel, become the Schulbergs. Edward Malia Butler, Aileen's father, takes on a formidable new career and personality as boss of Chicago's political machine.

As the scenario proceeds, Mrs. Armstrong's stage directions echo powerful national events of all too recent and morbid memory:

A clerk hands him [Cowperwood] a telegram from New York. The storm has broken there. All loans are being called. Call money has gone [to] 20%. The bottom is out of the market. The rush of selling orders piling up in the brokers' offices will swamp the market the minute the exchange opens. (II, 4) The ticker by Frank's desk begins. He crosses, reads the quotations. All stocks are going down. . . . down, down! Millions are being swept

away. The exchange is in a pandemonium. Frank feverishly hands over the ticker counting the points as the stocks keep dropping--

The stage is darkened for a minute to denote the passage of one hour's time. The lights go up. Frank is still hanging over the ticker. All stocks have dropped to new lows--The New York Stock Exchange is to be closed in an effort to stem the panic-- (II, 5-6)

It is at this juncture that the Cowperwood-Steuer collusion is disclosed and that Edward Malia Butler learns of Cowperwood's seduction of his daughter Aileen. While Wall Street crashes around their ears, seducer faces enraged father in an exchange of dialogue whose slangy 1920s flavor could not have struck Dreiser as anything but wrong, wrong, all wrong:

Aileen rushes in from inner office. Declares her love for Frank and her determination to stick by him. Butler vows vengeance. He will give the story of the theft of the city funds to the press. It will be on the streets within an hour. He commands Aileen to go home with Owen. Aileen refuses, says her place is by her lover. Frank begs her to go. The game is up. He will either have to flee the country or go to jail. He has decided on jail. Turns to Butler, "You think you've got me licked. You haven't got one corner of me licked. I'll show you what it means to put up a real fight. I'll take the rap. What will it cost me?" Butler grimly: "Five years. In the penitentiary!" (II, 7)

Shades of Jimmy Cagney and "the big house"!

Five years later, when the script resumes, Armstrong's Cowperwood has served his eighteen months in the penitentiary, has divorced Lillian, married Aileen, and "continued his adventures with women." Somewhat miraculously he has in something like three years come from total ruin to a "meteoric rise to tremendous power and wealth. . . . He is now worth more than twenty million, has a magnificent home, an art collection second to none in the city. Is a patron of musicians, opera, etc." (III, 1). Not bad for three years of effort; it took the Cowperwood of Dreiser's *Financier* twenty years and a total change of environment to accomplish as much.

It is now the later 1920s and Cowperwood, handily ignoring the history of political reforms that since 1900 have altered the prospects for traction monopolies in Illinois, is attempting to achieve the fifty-year franchises which will ensure his continued domination of Chicago. His opposition in the state government comes from Mark Simpson, who begins the

play as a United States Senator solidly in the Cowperwood camp. After being dumped by the financier's other allies at the time of Frank's imprisonment, Simpson reaches for his revenge by running for governor on a reform ticket (reversing the usual state-to-federal track followed by politicians) and boasting that he will veto the fifty-year franchise bill when and if it reaches his desk.

Simpson's revenge is not to be obtained, however, for his term expires before the franchise bill works its way through the legislature, and Frank later is pitted against, not him, but his successor. Simpson seems to be used merely as a plot gimmick making it possible for Cowperwood to meet the lovely Berenice. In a drastic shuffling of Dreiser's plot, not to mention a marked speeding-up of the time element, Cowperwood solves his supposed problem with Simpson and becomes Berenice's benefactor:

Mrs. Nannie Carter, [sic] is of good family, her husband was killed in a drunken brawl in Louisville over a lover of hers. Owing to subsequent poverty, misfortune, and scandal, she had slipped down the social ladder until she became the keeper of a private house of ill fame, where Simpson met and fell in love with her, subsequently writing letters, basis for a breach of promise suit, which she is now willing to sell. She has a daughter whom she is very anxious to keep in ignorance of her mode of life. McKibbon goes into the next room and returns with Mrs. Carter and Berenice. Frank is much attracted by the unusual charm and beauty of this girl.

McKibbon takes the girl into another room, while the mother tells her own story to Frank. After hearing it, he promises to educate the girl and care for the mother in New York as the price of Senator Simpson's letters, which she gives him. The girl re-enters with McKibbon. She has a scene with Frank, in which he becomes fascinated by her good breeding, brains, simplicity, and charm. Girl and Mother exit. (III, 3-4)

In the briefest role in the play, "Doctor Hooper. . . the president of the State University" is announced, come to solicit funds. Asked what the campus needs, Hooper replies that "the greatest need is scientific equipment in particular, [sic] a telescope. Delighted with the idea, Frank promises Doctor Hooper, [sic] the greatest telescope in the world" (III, 4). Exit Doctor Hooper. It is just such capricious treatment of the original story that destroys it. Incidents from Dreiser's novels are included or omitted seemingly at whim, without due reference to history, time element, or plot-worthiness. The Schulbergs are introduced in order that Frank

may be shown in his philandering with Rita; and Polk Lynde, "Rich Man About Town," is brought into the action as Aileen's lover-confidant:

Aileen and Lynde enter. He again makes love to Aileen. Fans her jealousy by telling her about Rita. Gives her all the details about their affair. Aileen, wild with jealousy and hurt pride, utters violent threats against Rita. They exit. (III, 3)

As the third act draws to its close, Aileen accuses Frank of infidelity, while Frank "arrogantly acknowledges that it is true and asks her what she can do about it." What Aileen can do is take Rita into the room next door where she "attacks and beats her up behind the locked doors" in a scene which is credited with considerably more of an impact than it possibly could have engendered in real life: "this scandal will forever bar him from being accepted socially in Chicago." The act finishes with Aileen happy at having vanquished her hated rival and Frank making plans to leave for New York "where they will begin again, a new life together" (III, 5).

Now the curtain rises on the fourth and final act of the proposed Armstrong play. It is two years later--1929 perhaps--and we are in Cowperwood's private office "in Pent house on roof of skyscraper in lower Manhattan." In this most strange of houses of assignation, Aileen Cowperwood meets her lover Lynde. She looks "hard, dissipated and declasse," clearly the consequence of heavy drinking, which the stage directions indicate in broad lines of action reminiscent of the Prohibition era:

Aileen walks restlessly around the room. Takes decanter from cabinet, pours herself a half a tumbler of whiskey Aileen pours herself a stiff drink and accuses Frank of not caring. (IV, 1)

Her drinking makes somewhat plausible Aileen's "final desperate effort" to hold onto her husband later in this final act, when she "takes a small pistol out of her bag and shoots herself," not fatally, not even seriously, and not deeply enough to require any sort of medical care--but sufficiently to cause Frank to decide upon a divorce at once (IV, 3).

The true reason for his divorce is Cowperwood's rising passion for Berenice, "who has developed into an exquisite girl." Just prior to Aileen's ploy with the pistol, intended to rouse Cowperwood's sympathies, Berenice had been in the office, where the financier

Tells her she typifies all he most desires in woman, youth, beauty, brains, and breeding. He outlines to her what the impending fifty year franchise will mean to him. The control of Chicago street railways for fifty years, wealth undreamed of and despotic power for the remainder of his life, and, for her, a palace on Park Avenue with himself, as her lover. She listens, startled and fascinated. Asks time to think it over. Exits to terrace. (IV, 2-3)

The terrace must have been a breezy spot, so high above the towers of Wall Street, and it also becomes a busy one. Berenice disports herself there while Cowperwood learns of his henchmen's plot to bribe the new Illinois governor with "a satchel containing three hundred thousand dollars in cash," thus virtually assuring his legislative victory. She re-enters the office long enough to declare her refusal "to be a bought mistress," then exits long enough for Aileen's mock suicide, after which she re-enters the office and Cowperwood "joyously tells her he is a free man now, and asks her to marry him." While Berenice ponders this turn of affairs, Cowperwood's aide Mollenhauer enters "with news of disaster. The Governor of Illinois has proven to be an honest man." Believing that his "edifice of power is demolished," Cowperwood in a highly dramatic gesture, more Jamesian than Dreiserian in its inspiration surely, renounces his love for Berenice and tells her to leave. His wife, his love, his power all gone now, he sees only money left to him. But Berenice now realizes that "he really needs her love," and the final curtain falls as Cowperwood, his arms around Berenice,

leads her to the terrace and pointing to the great ships in the harbor tells her he is going to London in search of new worlds to conquer to continue his everlasting quest for power and beauty. (IV, 4)

Kay Sayre turned thumbs down on Mrs. Armstrong's revised script. Although she believed this second try had produced "the better Mss,"⁵ Kay estimated the running time for the proposed drama to be at least four-and-a-half hours. The cutting of the Philadelphia scenes in particular did not meet with her approval. Kay visualized the action of the financier's story more or less as Dreiser had presented it in his novels: "As I see the story, it falls graphically into three acts, the first and largest because of the greatest amount of detailed characterization, in Philadelphia, the second in Chicago, and the third in N.Y."⁶ "It needs more concise thinking to the point," she advised Dreiser in her informal critique; Mrs. Armstrong should not have initiated writing until the story in her mind was more "clearly thought out in a broad way--and

simplified."⁷

Apparently the Armstrong scenario was read also by Dr. Edmond Pauker, for a typed copy of a critique attributed to him is attached to the copy of the Armstrong script which resides in the University of Pennsylvania's Dreiser Collection. Pauker suggested that the action-filled scenario (which he called "well-written") held enough to energize two plots at least, two separate plays. There was altogether too much business, too much politics in the script. Cowperwood, he thought, "changes women frequently, but without sufficient love interest in any one particular woman." For Pauker the drama's Achilles' heel lay in the fact that Rella Armstrong, apparently not a dramatist either by training or by intuition, had lacked knowledge of what to include and what to eliminate from her script. And finally, with an eye on the all-too-recent Wall Street Crash and the subsequent deep pessimistic mood of a national populace cast down into shock by the Great Depression, Pauker delivered his *coup de grace* to Rella Armstrong's proposal. It was unacceptable, he judged, because it was far "too gloomy and depressive for any producer here in America to present on Broadway."⁸

Nothing ever came of the "Financier" scenario, either as play or motion picture (for which it might have been better suited). Certainly the nation was in no mood to support a re-enactment of *The Crash* on the Broadway stage. And Dreiser had his own immediate worries to contend with: the loss of his coveted Nobel Prize to Sinclair Lewis, the imminent bankruptcy of Horace Liveright, his publisher and financial mainstay, and his frustration in attempting to complete the third and final volume of his *Trilogy*. (The effort to complete *The Stoic* could possibly have been triggered by Mrs. Armstrong's enthusiasm over the earlier novels; if so, it would be the only salutary result of her labors.) For the sake of his purse if for no other reason, Dreiser could have used a commercial stage success in 1930; it would not be lost on him that his *Tragedy* in its Broadway version had grossed \$30,000 weekly. But all of the evidence would indicate that the "Financier" play, even if written and produced, could only have been an embarrassment to him.

¹Rella Abell Armstrong to Theodore Dreiser, 30 October 1928. UP.

²It is unclear whether Dreiser did his own evaluation of this first scenario or plan or whether, as was his habit, he turned it over to one of his various aides for comment.

³Theodore Dreiser to Rella Abell Armstrong, 19 December 1928. UP. There seems to be no evidence indicating that stage managers did in fact read and comment on the script.

⁴Rella Abell Armstrong, "Scenario of *THE FINANCIER*: A Drama of Today." n.d. UP. (Hereinafter cited in the text by act and page numbers).

⁵Undated note from Kathryn Sayre to Theodore Dreiser, UP.

⁶Undated note from Kathryn Sayre to Theodore Dreiser, attached to Armstrong scenario for "Financier." UP.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Typed report labeled "Criticism by Dr. Edmond Pauker of *THE FINANCIER* as dramatized by Rella Abell Armstrong." UP.

DREISER IN THE *DLB*

In recently published volumes of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale Research Company), Dreiser and his work are prominently represented. Volume 9: *American Novelists, 1910-1945* (Part 1) includes a most informative and handsomely illustrated essay (pp. 236-57) by Philip L. Gerber, whose skillful interweaving of biography and plot analyses should prove an excellent introduction to Dreiser's career as a novelist. In Volume 12: *American Realists and Naturalists* (pp. 145-65) Donald Pizer provides an overview of Dreiser's life and work to substantiate his conclusion that Dreiser's "significance as the one major American naturalist who had a full career and who therefore best exemplifies the character of American naturalism is unchallenged." Like Gerber's, Pizer's essay is effectively illustrated by photographs of Dreiser and his manuscripts.

Dreiser is also included in Volume 1 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography Documentary Series*, which supplements the *DLB* by making significant but often inaccessible literary documents available. In the Dreiser section (pp. 165-238), top priority has been given to major reviews which reflect the controversies often generated by Dreiser's books. Then there are numerous pieces of correspondence and interviews which present a more personal side of Dreiser or focus on a crucial event in his career. Then, interspersed liberally throughout the section is a wealth of interesting Dreiser memorabilia: pithy cuttings from his books and letters; reproductions of manuscript pages, book jackets, inscriptions to friends, and advertisements for his works; photographs of Dreiser at various stages of his career, and of people who figured prominently in his life. With the aid of Editorial Advisor Lawrence E. Hussman, the *DLB Documentary Series* has brought together a rich and varied collection of materials that should lead to a greater appreciation of Dreiser as a public and private figure.

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DREISER NEWS & NOTES

Lawrence E. Hussman's *Dreiser and His Fiction: A Twentieth Century Quest* is scheduled for Spring publication by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Hussman's study "argues that the early work was not so uncompromisingly deterministic as the received criticism has insisted and that *The Bulwark* is not the aberration that it has most often been perceived to be but rather a logical development from *Sister Carrie* and a much underrated achievement." . . . Thomas Riggio is editing the Dreiser/Mencken correspondence for the University of Pennsylvania Press. "I'm shaping it around a 'life in letters' format," Riggio describes the project, "with a lot of my own writing centering on the biographical and literary links between the two men in their 40-year exchange. It's very rich material and should make for an interesting package for both the scholar and informed general reader." . . . *The Old Northwest: A Journal of Regional Life and Letters* is planning a special issue on Dreiser, to be published late in 1983. Special Editor Jack E. Wallace writes that he is looking for manuscripts on "Dreiser: Self and the American Scene." These manuscripts should be sent to Wallace, *The Old Northwest*, 302 Bachelor Hall, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056. The deadline for submission is September 15, 1983. . . . Richard Davison is looking for information on portraits of Dreiser by Bror J. O. Nordfeldt, which may have been done in 1917 or 1923. He is also interested in portraits of Dreiser's colleagues in Chicago and any papers relating to these and Dreiser's portraits, especially correspondence of Marguerite Doolittle Nordfeldt, a Jungian psychiatrist and Nordfeldt's first wife. Anyone who can assist Mr. Davison should write him at 885 Massachusetts Ave., Apt. 12A, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. . . . *The Works of Theodore Dreiser* in twenty volumes was published in 1981 by the Rinsen Book Company, Kyoto, Japan. The edition was limited to 200 copies.

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