

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume One: Number Two

Fall 1970

ASSESSING DREISER

As teachers of literature, we spend most of our time discussing the meaning of literary texts. Perhaps because of the New Criticism our critical vocabulary has been limited to questions about theme, structure, symbol, and image. Seldom do we evaluate the work--either by itself or in terms of another work. Dreiser is one of the few modern novelists who are the exceptions to this practice. His work seems to call for attack or defense, and the arguments over his place in American letters still goes on.

Dreiser himself is perhaps responsible for this turn of events. Because he believed that his novels depicted "life," he was more concerned with what he said than how he said it--more concerned with content than form (although the form is not as sloppy as many have maintained). Because he emphasized his own views of life, his novels have been judged by those views--and this is the crux of the problem. The neo-humanists attacked him because his image of man was too bestial. Lionel Trilling attacked him because he was not Jamesian enough, because his characters were too coarse and sentimental, a narrative fault that Leslie Fiedler also condemned in Dreiser.

Too often these critics have brought to the fiction an image of man that conflicted with Dreiser's. And if Dreiser's critics sometimes seemed excessive, Dreiser's defenders have overstated his achievements or attempted to convert readers who simply cannot respond sympathetically to Dreiser's novels.

I believe that Dreiser's reputation rests with three novels: *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy*. Jennie Gerhardt does not come up to *Sister Carrie*, or *The Titan* to *The Financier*. The "Genius," *The Bulwark*, and *The Stoic* are simply third-rate. To limit Dreiser to three novels is not to detract from his achievement. How many other major American writers can claim three successful novels? James surely, Melville and Faulkner perhaps, but certainly not Cooper, Hawthorne, Howells, Twain, Crane, Norris, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, or Mailer.

A more important question is why are *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy* distinguished works. Perhaps we can suggest an answer by asking why *A Modern Instance*, *The Iron Heel*, *The Big Money*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Native Son*, or *Knock on Any Door* are not distinguished novels. To say that Dreiser's novels are more complex than these works only begs the question of what we mean by "complexity." Complexity can certainly be defined in literary terms, and questions dealing with character, plot, narrative sequence can help us distinguish between the virtues of a *Sister Carrie* and the excesses of a *Jennie Gerhardt*. But perhaps critics like Samuel Johnson and Shelley are right when they tell us that the ultimate complexity of a work must be tested by time. A novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* cannot be read in 1970 with the same response one gave it in 1939. Like yesterday's newspaper, it is a product of a moment now lost in time. Dreiser's best novels are not so limited.

Dreiser had an innate sense of what was large and important in American life. (I don't think it irrelevant that the *An American Tragedy* story has its parallels in over two dozen folk songs.) Dreiser was after the essences, not the accidents, of American life, and he saw in an almost mythical way a pattern of experience that has as much meaning for us today as it did when he wrote it. Better than any other American novelist, he told us what it was like to break with the family, to journey to the city, to struggle for and against the system. The struggle was not an easy one: a greedy self competed with an altruistic self; ideal motives conflicted with material desires; family responsibility cancelled itself out under city lights; religious training dimmed in a secular world. The will was continually torn between irreconcilable and (in the end) unbalanced desires. A modern Prometheus used and misused the new technological and financial powers which changed our very landscape and created the imbalances, the sense of displacement, the eternal restlessness and discontent that make life in America so electric, so hectic.

Dreiser brought to the surface of his own fiction the themes that obsessed Henry Adams, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Lafcadio Hearn, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and even F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ezra Pound. Perhaps this is what Norman Mailer had in mind when he said that Dreiser came "closer to understanding the social machine than any other American writer." At any rate, I believe that the source of Dreiser's proverbial "power" stems in the main from what he had to say, not how he said it.

What I am saying is heresy to the New Critics, for I maintain that Dreiser's novels cannot be judged solely on matters of form and structure. I believe that every work uses a pattern of experience that is extrinsic to the work itself, and that every literary judgment is in part a response to that pattern of experience. The difference between *Sister Carrie* and *Bartley Hubbard*, between *Frank Cowperwood* and *Cash McCall*, between *Clyde Griffiths* and *Bigger Thomas* stems as much from a fidelity to a sense of experience as it does to literary technique.

Dreiser did not write the final chapter in the social novel, but he moved us in a remarkable way beyond Victorian and popular stereotypes. He was much truer than (say) Horatio Alger to a definable pattern of American experience.

We must stop repeating the error of a Lionel Trilling who insists that we cannot define "reality" in American fiction and then goes on to find Dreiser deficient because his novels do not have a Jamesian "reality." Instead we should try to see in what way Dreiser's and James's views differ, in what ways they represent different (but not mutually exclusive) literary traditions, in what ways these views are or are not narratively coherent, in what ways each writer was artistically faithful to his sense of experience, and in what ways this experience is or is not important to you and me. The response to the last question will be the most varied--a fact which, as teachers and readers of literature, we have hitherto been afraid to face.

The question of literary success is perhaps the most difficult of critical questions, and more often than not it generates more heat than light. I am suggesting, however, that if the debate is to go on it might go on in a more profitable context. Ironically, Dreiser himself has said most of this as well as anyone:

On thinking over the books I have written I can only say . . . [that I have had a] vision of life--life with its romance and cruelty, its pity and terror, its joys and anxiety, its peace and conflict. You may not like my vision . . . but it is the only one I can give you.

--Richard Lehan
Department of English
University of California
Los Angeles



Airmail Interview: ELLEN MOERS



Ellen Moers was born in New York City in 1928. Her degrees include a B.A. from Vassar (1948), an M.A. from Radcliffe (1949), and the Ph.D. from Columbia University (1954). In 1949 she married author and music critic Martin Mayer; they have two sons.

Miss Moer's first book was *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm* (Viking, 1960). In 1962-63 she received a Guggenheim fellowship for a critical study of Theodore Dreiser, which eventually culminated in *Two Dreisers* (Viking, 1969), a book that *DN* reviewer Philip Gerber termed "an interior biography worthy of standing companion to W. A. Swanberg's *Dreiser*." Said Joseph Epstein in *Book World*: "Miss Moers rescues Dreiser from the jungle of myth, confusion, and obtuse opinion. Through her patient research, appreciation and respect for her subject, she has revived and once again made accessible an important American writer."

The editors corresponded with Miss Moers at her summer home on Shelter Island, N.Y. Her most recent work, she advised us, includes an essay on Harriet Beecher Stowe ("Mrs. Stowe's Vengeance," *New York Review of Books*, 3 Sept. 1970), and a taped talk on Dreiser for McGraw-Hill's Sound Seminar series. She is also working on a book about key women writers in England, France and America during the 19th century. "And when I get a chance," she adds, "I also work on my golf game."

You describe yourself as being long unacquainted with Dreiser's work. Would you explain the circumstances by which you "discovered" him?

I can be precise about time and place: *Sister Carrie* was the first Dreiser I read, and that was in May 1958, in New York Hospital.

That academic year I had been finishing up my first book, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (a study of the idea of dandyism in English and French 19th-century literature), and also teaching a seminar in comparative modern literature in Columbia's Graduate English department, under the general supervision of William York Tyndall. Professor Tyndall's syllabus for Master's candidates in this area of specialization was as broad and sophisticated as it was uninfluenced by mere fashion. It included Dreiser's work, and thus provided the first occasion in my (still ongoing) career as a student for making me feel ashamedly uneducated because I had not read any Dreiser--though the core of my doctoral studies had been the history of the novel in a variety of literatures. Therefore I took *Sister Carrie* along with me to the hospital, where a project to write a book about Dreiser was born, as well as a baby.

An extraordinary number of Dreiser books are, like your own, written by women. Is there something in the Dreiser personality/career that appeals particularly to the feminine mind?

I don't follow you. I don't know what you mean by "the feminine mind"—as in the case of a Kathleen Tillotson, a Rosemond Tuve, a Marjorie Nicolson, a C. V. Wedgwood, perhaps? It was not Dreiser's personality/career that "appealed" to me, but his major fiction; and the latter is the subject of *Two Dreisers*, not the former. And how do you arrive at that "extraordinary number" of Dreiser books by women? Robert Elias, Alfred Kazin, Maxwell Geismar, Malcolm Cowley, William Swanberg, F. O. Matthiessen—these are the major Dreiser critics and scholars on whose work I had the privilege to rely. The *only* female contributors to the Dreiser canon that I can think of offhand are those who knew him personally, as his wife, secretary, editor or admirer—and these women left valuable personal memoirs, as well as the first biography.

Other than Dreiser's modernity, which you mention in your Preface, did your research into his career and work afford you any shocks or surprises?

Yes. I had had no idea that he was so much a New Yorker and that it would be necessary to explain the development of New York as literary capital of this country in order to explain Dreiser's literary beginnings. Nor did I have any idea that his scientific obsessions were so serious and so long-lasting; that he was only half-Catholic and that the other Protestant half mattered; that the Tolstoy influence was so important for TD and all his generation in America; that the Dreiser papers at the University of Pennsylvania were so vast a collection, so rich in evidence of planning and revising major work for so many years. And much else. Had I not found so many surprises, my book would have been much shorter, closer to the 150 or so critical pages that I originally had in mind.

Many reviewers seem puzzled by the form and method of your Two Dreisers. That is, they find it difficult to determine whether your book is literary history, biography, literary criticism, or cultural history. Now that you are some distance in time from your book, could you attempt to define its intent and method?

As you see, I intended to do a brief critical study, unashamedly appreciative, of the best of Dreiser's creative work, which I, like most of the people I knew, had somehow missed. (My editor at Viking, for example, an extremely cultivated man of long publishing experience had never read a line of Dreiser. C. P. Snow, in a review of the English edition of my book, suggests that ignorance of Dreiser among English intellectuals is even more absolute now than I felt it was in this country about fifteen years ago.) My only firm resolve, as to form, was to avoid defenses, apologetics, especially the polemical sidetaking which obscured Dreiser's critical reputation as a novelist. Come hell or high water, I was not going to succumb to the either/or temptation

(either Dreiser or Henry James, either the genteel or the other tradition, either Trotsky or Stalin--polemical choices produced by the political atmosphere of a period which followed, as I soon found, the effective end of Dreiser's creative work as a novelist). I was not going to spend my time apologizing for Dreiser's faults, for my starting-point was a sense of his greatness--and these faults, in any case, to a student of the Victorian novel and of European realism and naturalism like myself, did not seem uniquely Dreiserian or uniquely American.

My method of work, therefore, was to follow where Dreiser led--and lead me he did, into Elmer Gates's laboratory, the membership files of the Salmagundi Club, Tolstoy's census-taking expeditions in Moscow, the magazine revolution of the 1890's, the chronology of George Ade's publications, the history of Mennonite migrations, a comparison of Freud translations, and countless other explorations of biography, cultural history, literary history and so on. Scholarly matters made the shape of my book expand far beyond the original scheme, and *Two Dreisers* soon turned into a combination of critical study with the biography of two novels. The trick was to make all this relevant material into a clearly organized shape, while preserving the excitement of discovery. I don't know if I succeeded; I do know that, quite apart from writing revisions, the book was entirely recast, organizationally, three times; but form essentially followed (Dreiser) content.

Reviewer Charles Thomas Samuels (in The New Republic, 19 July 1969) contends that the key scenes in both Sister Carrie (Hurstwood's robbing the safe) and An American Tragedy (the murder of Roberta) lack integrity. Do you have any response to this criticism?

These two scenes presented the greatest possible challenge to Dreiser's programmatic naturalism and to his writing skills. The scenes work because Dreiser was thinking very hard of what, intellectually, he wanted to avoid doing and stating; and because he put a great deal of care into their preparation and exercised considerable restraint and finesse (I like to use that word in the Dreiser context) in their writing. If that is "fakery" rather than "integrity," so much the better for the novels in question.

You call Carrie Dreiser's "finest heroine" (p. 81). Would you agree with Dreiser's 1925 comment to Claude G. Bowers that Jennie Gerhardt was unconvincing because he had idealized her too much? Or do you see other flaws in the characterization?

Yes; and yes again. Here Dreiser seems to have been following literary convention rather than personal conviction based on experience; that is, in *Jennie Gerhardt* he set out to do yet another glorification of the Fallen Woman as Noble Heroine. In *Sister Carrie*, however, he had let Carrie enter on her sex life without affection, self-sacrifice, or any sort of deep social or spiritual upheaval; she remains a self-centered, normal American girl, rather cold, without charming--quite a literary achievement. To carry it off, Dreiser had to eliminate entirely two very sensitive (for him) areas: religion and parenthood. Two revealing falsifications in the later novel are

Airmail Interview: ELLEN MOERS



Ellen Moers was born in New York City in 1928. Her degrees include a B.A. from Vassar (1948), an M.A. from Radcliffe (1949), and the Ph.D. from Columbia University (1954). In 1949 she married author and music critic Martin Mayer; they have two sons.

Miss Moers's first book was *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm* (Viking, 1960). In 1962-63 she received a Guggenheim fellowship for a critical

study of Theodore Dreiser, which eventually culminated in *Two Dreisers* (Viking, 1969), a book that *DN* reviewer Philip Gerber termed "an interior biography worthy of standing companion to W. A. Swanberg's *Dreiser*." Said Joseph Epstein in *Book World*: "Miss Moers rescues Dreiser from the jungle of myth, confusion, and obtuse opinion. Through her patient research, appreciation and respect for her subject, she has revived and once again made accessible an important American writer."

The editors corresponded with Miss Moers at her summer home on Shelter Island, N.Y. Her most recent work, she advised us, includes an essay on Harriet Beecher Stowe ("Mrs. Stowe's Vengeance," *New York Review of Books*, 3 Sept. 1970), and a taped talk on Dreiser for McGraw-Hill's Sound Seminar series. She is also working on a book about key women writers in England, France and America during the 19th century. "And when I get a chance," she adds, "I also work on my golf game."

You describe yourself as being long unacquainted with Dreiser's work. Would you explain the circumstances by which you "discovered" him?

I can be precise about time and place: *Sister Carrie* was the first Dreiser I read, and that was in May 1958, in New York Hospital.

That academic year I had been finishing up my first book, *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm* (a study of the idea of dandyism in English and French 19th-century literature), and also teaching a seminar in comparative modern literature in Columbia's Graduate English department, under the general supervision of William York Tyndall. Professor Tyndall's syllabus for Master's candidates in this area of specialization was as broad and sophisticated as it was uninfluenced by mere fashion. It included Dreiser's work, and thus provided the first occasion in my (still ongoing) career as a student for making me feel ashamedly uneducated because I had not read any Dreiser--though the core of my doctoral studies had been the history of the novel in a variety of literatures. Therefore I took *Sister Carrie* along with me to the hospital, where a project to write a book about Dreiser was born, as well as a baby.

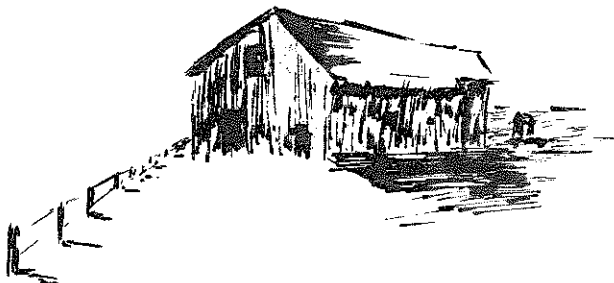
Dreiser did not write the final chapter in the social novel, but he moved us in a remarkable way beyond Victorian and popular stereotypes. He was much truer than (say) Horatio Alger to a definable pattern of American experience.

We must stop repeating the error of a Lionel Trilling who insists that we cannot define "reality" in American fiction and then goes on to find Dreiser deficient because his novels do not have a Jamesian "reality." Instead we should try to see in what way Dreiser's and James's views differ, in what ways they represent different (but not mutually exclusive) literary traditions, in what ways these views are or are not narratively coherent, in what ways each writer was artistically faithful to his sense of experience, and in what ways this experience is or is not important to you and me. The response to the last question will be the most varied--a fact which, as teachers and readers of literature, we have hitherto been afraid to face.

The question of literary success is perhaps the most difficult of critical questions, and more often than not it generates more heat than light. I am suggesting, however, that if the debate is to go on it might go on in a more profitable context. Ironically, Dreiser himself has said most of this as well as anyone:

On thinking over the books I have written I can only say . . . [that I have had a] vision of life--life with its romance and cruelty, its pity and terror, its joys and anxiety, its peace and conflict. You may not like my vision . . . but it is the only one I can give you.

--Richard Lehan
Department of English
University of California
Los Angeles



A more important question is why are *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy* distinguished works. Perhaps we can suggest an answer by asking why *A Modern Instance*, *The Iron Heel*, *The Big Money*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Native Son*, or *Knock on Any Door* are not distinguished novels. To say that Dreiser's novels are more complex than these works only begs the question of what we mean by "complexity." Complexity can certainly be defined in literary terms, and questions dealing with character, plot, narrative sequence can help us distinguish between the virtues of a *Sister Carrie* and the excesses of a *Jennie Gerhardt*. But perhaps critics like Samuel Johnson and Shelley are right when they tell us that the ultimate complexity of a work must be tested by time. A novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* cannot be read in 1970 with the same response one gave it in 1939. Like yesterday's newspaper, it is a product of a moment now lost in time. Dreiser's best novels are not so limited.

Dreiser had an innate sense of what was large and important in American life. (I don't think it irrelevant that the *An American Tragedy* story has its parallels in over two dozen folk songs.) Dreiser was after the essences, not the accidents, of American life, and he saw in an almost mythical way a pattern of experience that has as much meaning for us today as it did when he wrote it. Better than any other American novelist, he told us what it was like to break with the family, to journey to the city, to struggle for and against the system. The struggle was not an easy one: a greedy self competed with an altruistic self; ideal motives conflicted with material desires; family responsibility cancelled itself out under city lights; religious training dimmed in a secular world. The will was continually torn between irreconcilable and (in the end) unbalanced desires. A modern Prometheus used and misused the new technological and financial powers which changed our very landscape and created the imbalances, the sense of displacement, the eternal restlessness and discontent that make life in America so electric, so hectic.

Dreiser brought to the surface of his own fiction the themes that obsessed Henry Adams, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Lafcadio Hearn, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and even F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ezra Pound. Perhaps this is what Norman Mailer had in mind when he said that Dreiser came "closer to understanding the social machine than any other American writer." At any rate, I believe that the source of Dreiser's proverbial "power" stems in the main from what he had to say, not how he said it.

What I am saying is heresy to the New Critics, for I maintain that Dreiser's novels cannot be judged solely on matters of form and structure. I believe that every work uses a pattern of experience that is extrinsic to the work itself, and that every literary judgment is in part a response to that pattern of experience. The difference between *Sister Carrie* and Bartley Hubbard, between Frank Cowperwood and Cash McCall, between Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas stems as much from a fidelity to a sense of experience as it does to literary technique.

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume One: Number Two

Fall 1970

ASSESSING DREISER

As teachers of literature, we spend most of our time discussing the meaning of literary texts. Perhaps because of the New Criticism our critical vocabulary has been limited to questions about theme, structure, symbol, and image. Seldom do we evaluate the work--either by itself or in terms of another work. Dreiser is one of the few modern novelists who are the exceptions to this practice. His work seems to call for attack or defense, and the arguments over his place in American letters still goes on.

Dreiser himself is perhaps responsible for this turn of events. Because he believed that his novels depicted "life," he was more concerned with what he said than how he said it--more concerned with content than form (although the form is not as sloppy as many have maintained). Because he emphasized his own views of life, his novels have been judged by those views--and this is the crux of the problem. The neo-humanists attacked him because his image of man was too bestial. Lionel Trilling attacked him because he was not Jamesian enough, because his characters were too coarse and sentimental, a narrative fault that Leslie Fiedler also condemned in Dreiser.

Too often these critics have brought to the fiction an image of man that conflicted with Dreiser's. And if Dreiser's critics sometimes seemed excessive, Dreiser's defenders have overstated his achievements or attempted to convert readers who simply cannot respond sympathetically to Dreiser's novels.

I believe that Dreiser's reputation rests with three novels: *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy*. Jennie Gerhardt does not come up to *Sister Carrie*, or *The Titan* to *The Financier*. *The "Genius," The Bulwark*, and *The Stoic* are simply third-rate. To limit Dreiser to three novels is not to detract from his achievement. How many other major American writers can claim three successful novels? James surely, Melville and Faulkner perhaps, but certainly not Cooper, Hawthorne, Howells, Twain, Crane, Norris, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, or Mailer.

Jennie's Lutheran background and her implausible style as a mother. H. L. Mencken's championing of *JG* as Dreiser's best novel is for me the first proof of Mencken's insensitivity as a critic.

To what extent do you agree with Mencken that the first book of *An American Tragedy* is a compendium of all of Dreiser's faults and is worthless?

And this is the second.

Despite his exposure to the world of the theatre through his brother Paul and his various assignments as drama critic, Dreiser's handling of the inarticulate Carrie's rise to stardom seems quite naive and superficial. Do you feel such to be an unfair or inaccurate criticism?

No; I agree, and so, evidently, did Dreiser. Among the largest cuts he made from the *Sister Carrie* manuscript were backstage theater scenes in Chicago and New York, material even more lifeless than the professional theater scenes which survive in the published novel. I think, however--and write at length in my book--that the scene of Carrie's amateur debut in Chicago is brilliant, largely because it was an imaginative creation, dependent almost not at all on TD's entree to the real theater via Paul. As he wrote in *Dawn*, Dreiser early outgrew but long remained ashamed of his boyhood love of the stage. His love/hate, shame/pride relationship with Paul, that is, with the side of himself that most closely resembled Paul, kept Dreiser from handling this area of his experience with lucidity, without intellectual snobbery; he could "do" Paul only indirectly, as he did Hurstwood--a saloon, not theater-manager; on the outskirts, not the inside, of Paul's "metropolitan success" world.

Would you elaborate somewhat on your parenthetical statement (p. 42) that Dreiser and Crane made mistakes in attempting autobiographical fiction?

The Third Violet is the closest thing to a self-portrait that Crane did, and his worst novel; the same might be said of *The "Genius."* Both books seem to me to belong to the general *fin de siècle* glorification of the pictorial artist, and as such have a pleasant, dated genre interest--like that of the much less pleasant Kipling work, *The Light That Failed*, or Du Maurier's *Tribby*. Sexual falsifications are, incidentally, an embarrassing issue in these writer-as-Bohemian-artist novels.

Despite the facts that Dreiser in his youth was an avowed reader of *Alger* and *Samuel Smiles* and was writing *Gospel of Wealth* essays for *Success* and other magazines up to the time of *Sister Carrie*, you do little with that influence. Do you feel that the Algerine influence has been exaggerated and that Dreiser, as he has flatly stated, was merely using that formula to sell essays?

This question seems to me to rest on several faulty assumptions. Dreiser never wrote Gospel of Wealth essays in the sense I think you mean, whatever he may later have said. His few pieces about rich industrialists normally emphasized the moral and spiritual high points of their careers--Pullman's model homes for workers, for example, or Armour's share in the founding of the Illinois Institute of Technology. This revelation of Dreiser's youthful gullibility (and insensitivity to the actual condition of the industrial working class) is undoubtedly more objectionable than the putative lusty worship of wealth and power as a formula for true success, of which Dreiser has often been accused, but which he never exhibited; neither did Smiles or Alger. Samuel Smiles was really a prophet of self-education, providing a kind of freshman composition manual for the lower-middle class; Dreiser did somewhat the same sort of thing in *Ev'ry Month*, where he pressed the study of science, philosophy and history on his unwary readers. Horatio Alger is a much underestimated writer. At his best he reveled in the verve, daring and unrespectability of city street boys, with whom his own life was sadly interwoven. I find a lot of Dickens in Alger, but not much Alger in Dreiser, whose vision of the independent street-boy on the make was a Clyde Griffiths--not a Ragged Dick (or Artful Dodger).

Have you any suggestions on how to continue the search for those issues of Ev'ry Month still missing?

Yes--but I think this interview has already run too long. If you want to give me space in another issue, I would push myself to attend to unfinished Dreiser business of my own, especially depositing my own copies of rare *Ev'ry Months* in the library of the University of Pennsylvania or Columbia, as far as the rules permit me to do so. I should summarize the search to date, its blind and open alleys, and include the suggestions I have made over the years to Dr. Neda Westlake, as well as her discoveries of lost issues since I wrote an account of the state of the extant *Ev'ry Month* issues on page 324 of my book.

Access to Dreiser's letters to Sallie White is currently denied by Miss White's heirs. Is there anything in that correspondence to explain or justify such restrictions? Do these letters contribute new insights into Dreiser as a young man?

No, to the first question; yes, to the second. Years ago, when I examined these letters at Indiana University's Lilly Library, I was allowed to type lengthy quotations from them, which I would be delighted to summarize for your readers. By 1968, when I was preparing *Two Dreisers* for the press, restrictions had so tightened that I was denied access even to the names of the White heirs, to whom I wished to write directly for permission to quote this material. Perhaps you might yourselves write the staff of Lilly to inquire about the propriety or wisdom of the appearance of a summary of my notes in your pages. They certainly would not want to hear from me again.

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume One: Number Two

Fall 1970

ASSESSING DREISER

As teachers of literature, we spend most of our time discussing the meaning of literary texts. Perhaps because of the New Criticism our critical vocabulary has been limited to questions about theme, structure, symbol, and image. Seldom do we evaluate the work--either by itself or in terms of another work. Dreiser is one of the few modern novelists who are the exceptions to this practice. His work seems to call for attack or defense, and the arguments over his place in American letters still goes on.

Dreiser himself is perhaps responsible for this turn of events. Because he believed that his novels depicted "life," he was more concerned with what he said than how he said it--more concerned with content than form (although the form is not as sloppy as many have maintained). Because he emphasized his own views of life, his novels have been judged by those views--and this is the crux of the problem. The neo-humanists attacked him because his image of man was too bestial. Lionel Trilling attacked him because he was not Jamesian enough, because his characters were too coarse and sentimental, a narrative fault that Leslie Fiedler also condemned in Dreiser.

Too often these critics have brought to the fiction an image of man that conflicted with Dreiser's. And if Dreiser's critics sometimes seemed excessive, Dreiser's defenders have overstated his achievements or attempted to convert readers who simply cannot respond sympathetically to Dreiser's novels.

I believe that Dreiser's reputation rests with three novels: *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy*. Jennie Gerhardt does not come up to *Sister Carrie*, or *The Titan* to *The Financier*. The "Genius," *The Bulwark*, and *The Stoic* are simply third-rate. To limit Dreiser to three novels is not to detract from his achievement. How many other major American writers can claim three successful novels? James surely, Melville and Faulkner perhaps, but certainly not Cooper, Hawthorne, Howells, Twain, Crane, Norris, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, or Mailer.

A more important question is why are *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy* distinguished works. Perhaps we can suggest an answer by asking why *A Modern Instance*, *The Iron Heel*, *The Big Money*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Native Son*, or *Knock on Any Door* are not distinguished novels. To say that Dreiser's novels are more complex than these works only begs the question of what we mean by "complexity." Complexity can certainly be defined in literary terms, and questions dealing with character, plot, narrative sequence can help us distinguish between the virtues of a *Sister Carrie* and the excesses of a *Jennie Gerhardt*. But perhaps critics like Samuel Johnson and Shelley are right when they tell us that the ultimate complexity of a work must be tested by time. A novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* cannot be read in 1970 with the same response one gave it in 1939. Like yesterday's newspaper, it is a product of a moment now lost in time. Dreiser's best novels are not so limited.

Dreiser had an innate sense of what was large and important in American life. (I don't think it irrelevant that the *An American Tragedy* story has its parallels in over two dozen folk songs.) Dreiser was after the essences, not the accidents, of American life, and he saw in an almost mythical way a pattern of experience that has as much meaning for us today as it did when he wrote it. Better than any other American novelist, he told us what it was like to break with the family, to journey to the city, to struggle for and against the system. The struggle was not an easy one: a greedy self competed with an altruistic self; ideal motives conflicted with material desires; family responsibility cancelled itself out under city lights; religious training dimmed in a secular world. The will was continually torn between irreconcilable and (in the end) unbalanced desires. A modern Prometheus used and misused the new technological and financial powers which changed our very landscape and created the imbalances, the sense of displacement, the eternal restlessness and discontent that make life in America so electric, so hectic.

Dreiser brought to the surface of his own fiction the themes that obsessed Henry Adams, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Lafcadio Hearn, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and even F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ezra Pound. Perhaps this is what Norman Mailer had in mind when he said that Dreiser came "closer to understanding the social machine than any other American writer." At any rate, I believe that the source of Dreiser's proverbial "power" stems in the main from what he had to say, not how he said it.

What I am saying is heresy to the New Critics, for I maintain that Dreiser's novels cannot be judged solely on matters of form and structure. I believe that every work uses a pattern of experience that is extrinsic to the work itself, and that every literary judgment is in part a response to that pattern of experience. The difference between *Sister Carrie* and Bartley Hubbard, between Frank Cowerwood and Cash McCall, between Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas stems as much from a fidelity to a sense of experience as it does to literary technique.

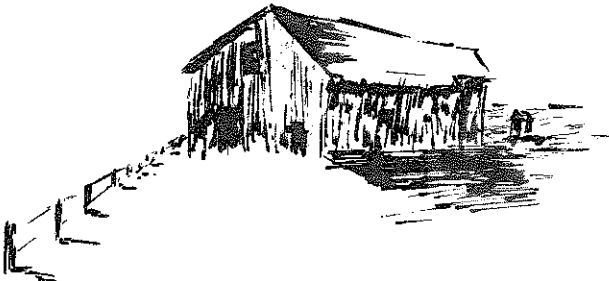
Dreiser did not write the final chapter in the social novel, but he moved us in a remarkable way beyond Victorian and popular stereotypes. He was much truer than (say) Horatio Alger to a definable pattern of American experience.

We must stop repeating the error of a Lionel Trilling who insists that we cannot define "reality" in American fiction and then goes on to find Dreiser deficient because his novels do not have a Jamesian "reality." Instead we should try to see in what way Dreiser's and James's views differ, in what ways they represent different (but not mutually exclusive) literary traditions, in what ways these views are or are not narratively coherent, in what ways each writer was artistically faithful to his sense of experience, and in what ways this experience is or is not important to you and me. The response to the last question will be the most varied--a fact which, as teachers and readers of literature, we have hitherto been afraid to face.

The question of literary success is perhaps the most difficult of critical questions, and more often than not it generates more heat than light. I am suggesting, however, that if the debate is to go on it might go on in a more profitable context. Ironically, Dreiser himself has said most of this as well as anyone:

On thinking over the books I have written I can only say . . . [that I have had a] vision of life--life with its romance and cruelty, its pity and terror, its joys and anxiety, its peace and conflict. You may not like my vision . . . but it is the only one I can give you.

--Richard Lehan
Department of English
University of California
Los Angeles



Airmail Interview: ELLEN MOERS



Ellen Moers was born in New York City in 1928. Her degrees include a B.A. from Vassar (1948), an M.A. from Radcliffe (1949), and the Ph.D. from Columbia University (1954). In 1949 she married author and music critic Martin Mayer; they have two sons.

Miss Moer's first book was *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm* (Viking, 1960). In 1962-63 she received a Guggenheim fellowship for a critical study of Theodore Dreiser, which eventually culminated in *Two Dreisers* (Viking, 1969), a book that *DN* reviewer Philip Gerber termed "an interior biography worthy of standing companion to W. A. Swanberg's *Dreiser*." Said Joseph Epstein in *Book World*: "Miss Moers rescues Dreiser from the jungle of myth, confusion, and obtuse opinion. Through her patient research, appreciation and respect for her subject, she has revived and once again made accessible an important American writer."

The editors corresponded with Miss Moers at her summer home on Shelter Island, N.Y. Her most recent work, she advised us, includes an essay on Harriet Beecher Stowe ("Mrs. Stowe's Vengeance," *New York Review of Books*, 3 Sept. 1970), and a taped talk on Dreiser for McGraw-Hill's Sound Seminar series. She is also working on a book about key women writers in England, France and America during the 19th century. "And when I get a chance," she adds, "I also work on my golf game."

You describe yourself as being long unacquainted with Dreiser's work. Would you explain the circumstances by which you "discovered" him?

I can be precise about time and place: *Sister Carrie* was the first Dreiser I read, and that was in May 1958, in New York Hospital.

That academic year I had been finishing up my first book, *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm* (a study of the idea of dandyism in English and French 19th-century literature), and also teaching a seminar in comparative modern literature in Columbia's Graduate English department, under the general supervision of William York Tyndall. Professor Tyndall's syllabus for Master's candidates in this area of specialization was as broad and sophisticated as it was uninfluenced by mere fashion. It included Dreiser's work, and thus provided the first occasion in my (still ongoing) career as a student for making me feel ashamedly uneducated because I had not read any Dreiser--though the core of my doctoral studies had been the history of the novel in a variety of literatures. Therefore I took *Sister Carrie* along with me to the hospital, where a project to write a book about Dreiser was born, as well as a baby.

An extraordinary number of Dreiser books are, like your own, written by women. Is there something in the Dreiser personality/career that appeals particularly to the feminine mind?

I don't follow you. I don't know what you mean by "the feminine mind"--as in the case of a Kathleen Tillotson, a Rosemond Tuve, a Marjorie Nicolson, a C. V. Wedgwood, perhaps? It was not Dreiser's personality/career that "appealed" to me, but his major fiction; and the latter is the subject of *Two Dreisers*, not the former. And how do you arrive at that "extraordinary number" of Dreiser books by women? Robert Elias, Alfred Kazin, Maxwell Geismar, Malcolm Cowley, William Swanberg, F. O. Matthiessen--these are the major Dreiser critics and scholars on whose work I had the privilege to rely. The *only* female contributors to the Dreiser canon that I can think of offhand are those who knew him personally, as his wife, secretary, editor or admirer--and these women left valuable personal memoirs, as well as the first biography.

Other than Dreiser's modernity, which you mention in your Preface, did your research into his career and work afford you any shocks or surprises?

Yes. I had had no idea that he was so much a New Yorker and that it would be necessary to explain the development of New York as literary capital of this country in order to explain Dreiser's literary beginnings. Nor did I have any idea that his scientific obsessions were so serious and so long-lasting; that he was only half-Catholic and that the other Protestant half mattered; that the Tolstoy influence was so important for TD and all his generation in America; that the Dreiser papers at the University of Pennsylvania were so vast a collection, so rich in evidence of planning and revising major work for so many years. And much else. Had I not found so many surprises, my book would have been much shorter, closer to the 150 or so critical pages that I originally had in mind.

Many reviewers seem puzzled by the form and method of your Two Dreisers. That is, they find it difficult to determine whether your book is literary history, biography, literary criticism, or cultural history. Now that you are some distance in time from your book, could you attempt to define its intent and method?

As you see, I intended to do a brief critical study, unashamedly appreciative, of the best of Dreiser's creative work, which I, like most of the people I knew, had somehow missed. (My editor at Viking, for example, an extremely cultivated man of long publishing experience had never read a line of Dreiser. C. P. Snow, in a review of the English edition of my book, suggests that ignorance of Dreiser among English intellectuals is even more absolute now than I felt it was in this country about fifteen years ago.) My only firm resolve, as to form, was to avoid defenses, apologetics, especially the polemical sidetaking which obscured Dreiser's critical reputation as a novelist. Come hell or high water, I was not going to succumb to the either/or temptation

(either Dreiser or Henry James, either the genteel or the other tradition, either Trotsky or Stalin--polemical choices produced by the political atmosphere of a period which followed, as I soon found, the effective end of Dreiser's creative work as a novelist). I was not going to spend my time apologizing for Dreiser's faults, for my starting-point was a sense of his greatness--and these faults, in any case, to a student of the Victorian novel and of European realism and naturalism like myself, did not seem uniquely Dreiserian or uniquely American.

My method of work, therefore, was to follow where Dreiser led--and lead me he did, into Elmer Gates's laboratory, the membership files of the Salmagundi Club, Tolstoy's census-taking expeditions in Moscow, the magazine revolution of the 1890's, the chronology of George Ade's publications, the history of Mennonite migrations, a comparison of Freud translations, and countless other explorations of biography, cultural history, literary history and so on. Scholarly matters made the shape of my book expand far beyond the original scheme, and *Two Dreisers* soon turned into a combination of critical study with the biography of two novels. The trick was to make all this relevant material into a clearly organized shape, while preserving the excitement of discovery. I don't know if I succeeded; I do know that, quite apart from writing revisions, the book was entirely recast, organizationally, three times; but form essentially followed (Dreiser) content.

Reviewer Charles Thomas Samuels (in The New Republic, 19 July 1969) contends that the key scenes in both Sister Carrie (Hurstwood's robbing the safe) and An American Tragedy (the murder of Roberta) lack integrity. Do you have any response to this criticism?

These two scenes presented the greatest possible challenge to Dreiser's programmatic naturalism and to his writing skills. The scenes work because Dreiser was thinking very hard of what, intellectually, he wanted to avoid doing and stating; and because he put a great deal of care into their preparation and exercised considerable restraint and finesse (I like to use that word in the Dreiser context) in their writing. If that is "fakery" rather than "integrity," so much the better for the novels in question.

You call Carrie Dreiser's "finest heroine" (p. 81). Would you agree with Dreiser's 1925 comment to Claude G. Bowers that Jennie Gerhardt was unconvincing because he had idealized her too much? Or do you see other flaws in the characterization?

Yes; and yes again. Here Dreiser seems to have been following literary convention rather than personal conviction based on experience; that is, in *Jennie Gerhardt* he set out to do yet another glorification of the Fallen Woman as Noble Heroine. In *Sister Carrie*, however, he had let Carrie enter on her sex life without affection, self-sacrifice, or any sort of deep social or spiritual upheaval; she remains a self-centered, normal American girl, rather cold, withal charming--quite a literary achievement. To carry it off, Dreiser had to eliminate entirely two very sensitive (for him) areas: religion and parenthood. Two revealing falsifications in the later novel are

Jennie's Lutheran background and her implausible style as a mother. H. L. Mencken's championship of *JG* as Dreiser's best novel is for me the first proof of Mencken's insensitivity as a critic.

To what extent do you agree with Mencken that the first book of An American Tragedy is a compendium of all of Dreiser's faults and is worthless?

And this is the second.

Despite his exposure to the world of the theatre through his brother Paul and his various assignments as drama critic, Dreiser's handling of the inarticulate Carrie's rise to stardom seems quite naive and superficial. Do you feel such to be an unfair or inaccurate criticism?

No; I agree, and so, evidently, did Dreiser. Among the largest cuts he made from the *Sister Carrie* manuscript were backstage theater scenes in Chicago and New York, material even more lifeless than the professional theater scenes which survive in the published novel. I think, however--and write at length in my book--that the scene of Carrie's amateur debut in Chicago is brilliant, largely because it was an imaginative creation, dependent almost not at all on TD's entree to the real theater via Paul. As he wrote in *Dawn*, Dreiser early outgrew but long remained ashamed of his boyhood love of the stage. His love/hate, shame/pride relationship with Paul, that is, with the side of himself that most closely resembled Paul, kept Dreiser from handling this area of his experience with lucidity, without intellectual snobbery; he could "do" Paul only indirectly, as he did Hurstwood--a saloon, not theater-manager; on the outskirts, not the inside, of Paul's "metropolitan success" world.

Would you elaborate somewhat on your parenthetical statement (p. 42) that Dreiser and Crane made mistakes in attempting autobiographical fiction?

The Third Violet is the closest thing to a self-portrait that Crane did, and his worst novel; the same might be said of *The "Genius."* Both books seem to me to belong to the general *fin de siècle* glorification of the pictorial artist, and as such have a pleasant, dated genre interest--like that of the much less pleasant Kipling work, *The Light That Failed*, or Du Maurier's *Trilby*. Sexual falsifications are, incidentally, an embarrassing issue in these writer-as-Bohemian-artist novels.

Despite the facts that Dreiser in his youth was an avowed reader of Alger and Samuel Smiles and was writing Gospel of Wealth essays for Success and other magazines up to the time of Sister Carrie, you do little with that influence. Do you feel that the Algerine influence has been exaggerated and that Dreiser, as he has flatly stated, was merely using that formula to sell essays?

This question seems to me to rest on several faulty assumptions. Dreiser never wrote Gospel of Wealth essays in the sense I think you mean, whatever he may later have said. His few pieces about rich industrialists normally emphasized the moral and spiritual high points of their careers--Pullman's model homes for workers, for example, or Armour's share in the founding of the Illinois Institute of Technology. This revelation of Dreiser's youthful gullibility (and insensitivity to the actual condition of the industrial working class) is undoubtedly more objectionable than the putative lusty worship of wealth and power as a formula for true success, of which Dreiser has often been accused, but which he never exhibited; neither did Smiles or Alger. Samuel Smiles was really a prophet of self-education, providing a kind of freshman composition manual for the lower-middle class; Dreiser did somewhat the same sort of thing in *Ev'ry Month*, where he pressed the study of science, philosophy and history on his unwary readers. Horatio Alger is a much underestimated writer. At his best he reveled in the verve, daring and unrespectability of city street boys, with whom his own life was sadly interwoven. I find a lot of Dickens in Alger, but not much Alger in Dreiser, whose vision of the independent street-boy on the make was a Clyde Griffiths--not a Ragged Dick (or Artful Dodger).

Have you any suggestions on how to continue the search for those issues of Ev'ry Month still missing?

Yes--but I think this interview has already run too long. If you want to give me space in another issue, I would push myself to attend to unfinished Dreiser business of my own, especially depositing my own copies of rare *Ev'ry Months* in the library of the University of Pennsylvania or Columbia, as far as the rules permit me to do so. I should summarize the search to date, its blind and open alleys, and include the suggestions I have made over the years to Dr. Neda Westlake, as well as her discoveries of lost issues since I wrote an account of the state of the extant *Ev'ry Month* issues on page 324 of my book.

Access to Dreiser's letters to Sallie White is currently denied by Miss White's heirs. Is there anything in that correspondence to explain or justify such restrictions? Do these letters contribute new insights into Dreiser as a young man?

No, to the first question; yes, to the second. Years ago, when I examined these letters at Indiana University's Lilly Library, I was allowed to type lengthy quotations from them, which I would be delighted to summarize for your readers. By 1968, when I was preparing *Two Dreisers* for the press, restrictions had so tightened that I was denied access even to the names of the White heirs, to whom I wished to write directly for permission to quote this material. Perhaps you might yourselves write the staff of Lilly to inquire about the propriety or wisdom of the appearance of a summary of my notes in your pages. They certainly would not want to hear from me again.

What projects, perhaps within the scope of the DN, do you feel need to be undertaken by Dreiser scholars?

For DN particularly, an account of Terre Haute as it is today and as it was in Dreiser's day: population, geography, industry, railroad routes in relation to TD's birthplace. And tell us what has been done, or will be done, to memorialize the landmarks of TD's birthplace. When I was there, the representatives of the local historical society were helpful and courteous, but I carried away the impression that Paul Dresser was the one member of the family that Terre Haute really wanted to remember. [This impression is correct.--The Editors.]

Publication of a definitive list--which, from my recent correspondence with Professor Elias, I am sure is still needed--of Dreiser's siblings: their full names, married names, descendants; their birth-dates and death-dates; along with the names TD used for each one in his autobiographies.

More investigation of the Schanab/Snepp side of the family, the maternal family, leading to eventual determination of their place of origin in Europe, their date of immigration and movements in this country, and church affiliations. Indiana genealogists should be able to turn up much more material than the little I was able to find and to summarize in my appendix, "Dreiser and the Plain People."

Investigation by American travelers of the birthplace of Dreiser's father; and more documented information about his movements in America.

The encouragement of the preparation (by students, perhaps) of indexes to *Dawn*, *A Hoosier Holiday*, *Newspaper Days*. Future editions of these volumes should all, of course, be indexed.

Preparatory studies of small, interesting sections of Dreiser manuscripts--starting with that of *Sister Carrie*.

Reports of articles about Dreiser, as well as books; and information about him published in the memoirs of his fast-disappearing contemporaries--Waldo Frank, Anais Nin, *et al*. And readers' reports of their encounter with "new" or little-known Dreiser manuscripts in libraries or elsewhere.

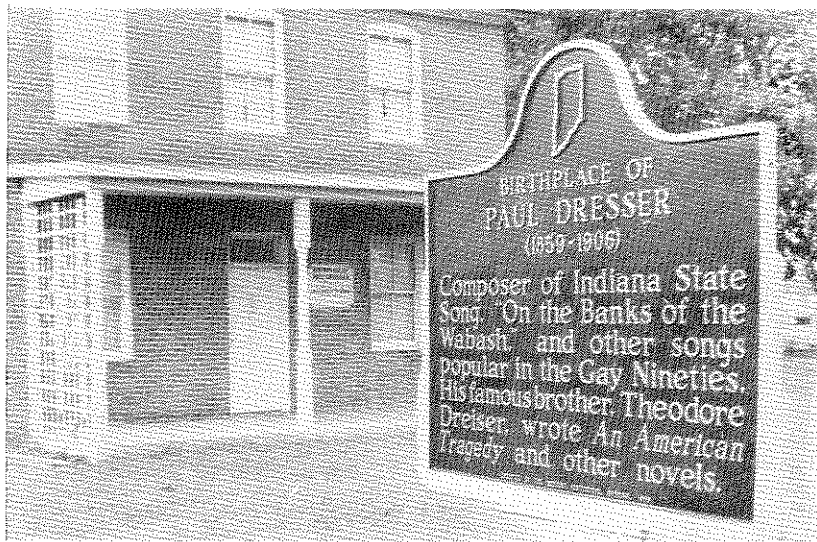
The organization of efforts, especially appropriate for the centennial year, toward memorializing Dreiser's presence in many American cities. Such memorial plaques or other markers would be particularly welcome in the many shabby, out-of-fashion streets of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles where he lived and wrote.

Finally, all Dreiserians are aware of the need for a new and definitive bibliography, in the preparation of which DN might play an important role. My own special concern is with everything written in the apprenticeship years, before *Sister Carrie*--essentially newspaper

and magazine articles. Many of these were printed after the novel, but assigned, researched, written and even accepted well before, as can be documented from editorial correspondence with Dreiser at the University of Pennsylvania. Such information would be included in the bibliography and could be collected in your pages, as much of it is vital--as, for example, the information that "Curious Shifts of the Poor" was written before the finale of *Sister Carrie* into which it was incorporated, and long before its inclusion, under another title, in *The Color of a Great City*. My own dream is the publication of an anthology-cum-bibliography of Dreiser's 1890's writings: the major articles printed in their entirety, the lesser ones summarized and quoted in brief, the whole supplied with data about composition, original publication and revisions for later publication, along with a thorough index to the content of these articles--a content often buried by a title (for example, TD's account of the Tolstoy dinner in his profile of Israel Zangwill).

And please keep us informed of plans for the centennial year.

DREISER BIRTHPLACE



This home, believed to be the birthplace of Paul Dresser, has been restored and moved to Dresser Drive, which runs along the "Banks of the Wabash." Dreiser's birthplace remains a matter of uncertainty. The sign in the foreground typifies Terre Haute's attitude toward the two brothers: Dreiser traditionally receives second billing. (Photo by James Terry)

REVIEW: DREISER & SOVIET UNION

Theodore Dreiser and the Soviet Union, 1927-1945, A first-hand Chronicle by Ruth E. Kennell. International Publishers, 1969. Illus., 320 pp., index, \$7.50.

This is a fascinating, if somewhat disconcerting book. It has the ring of truth, of first-hand experience, and gives an excellent close-up of the enigmatic Dreiser. Yet, it produces a rather disjointed impression of what he was thinking on his visit to the Soviet Union in 1927-28, and the last portion of the book arrives at a somewhat oversimplified conclusion as to his final thoughts and attitudes. On the whole, however, it is a valuable document. Moreover, Mrs. Kennell writes well and evokes the Russian scene with authentic skill.

Dreiser was invited to visit the Soviet Union for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. He accepted, on the condition that he could travel about freely and interview whomever he wished. He was wary about putting himself into the hands of official guides. Then the young editor of his books, Sergey Dinamov, from the English division of the *Gosizdat*, or State Publishing House, called on him--for many of Dreiser's books had already been published in Russia, and he was widely known and loved there. (Dinamov later edited a twelve-volume set of Dreiser's work, of which 200,000 copies were immediately sold.) Coming to Dreiser's hotel, he brought Ruth Kennell, who was working on an introduction to *Chains*. Immediately, Dreiser wanted to engage her as his secretary. She had been in the Soviet Union for five years with her engineer-husband, and she spoke fluent Russian. She was obviously capable, as well as charming, and with her he could feel free to move about. Although his official hosts frowned on the fact that she was not a *Soviet woman*, they were obliged to concede to his wishes, but they insisted that a professional guide should also accompany them when they left Moscow.

The first weeks in Moscow were filled with excited encounters and interviews. Dreiser met Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theater and was somewhat troubled by "his guarded statements regarding restrictions on freedom of expression in the creative arts." "The white line of art is eternal and passing conditions cannot change it," said the great director, but he had faith that all would adjust itself and that there was a great future for acting in Russia.

Dreiser was dismayed by the brash, new-style productions of Meierhold and preferred the theater of Tairov, who was producing Eugene O'Neill. He was stimulated by a talk with the film artist Eisenstein, whom he saw later in Hollywood. Dreiser had a gay evening with Mayakovsky, Poet of the Revolution, a temperament akin to his own.

A great artistic sensation of his stay in Moscow was the *Russian*

Bolshoi Theatre, revived by the new regime. Subsequently, Dreiser attempted to bring the ballet to New York, with the backing of Otto Kahn and Sol Hurok; however, the plan fell through because of a block on the Soviet side. (Hurok is hoping to do this in the spring of 1971--forty years later!)

Dreiser had dramatic interviews with Radek, Bukharin and Mikoyan. Mrs. Kennell gives swift glimpses of their personalities and reports provocative conversations. One wishes that the book had come out earlier, for much of what they said is not relevant today. However, to a student of Russian development, this was a crucial period when the NEP (New Economic Policy, which permitted the investment of foreign capital to stimulate production) was still being tried--and oppression was beginning to mount. Later, both Radek and Bukharin were liquidated by Stalin.

These interviews reflect the ferment and contradictions in Dreiser's political ideas. In his own book, *Dreiser Looks at Russia*, which came out in 1928, the confusion was still greater. Mrs. Kennell kept a typed diary, at Dreiser's request, so that he might use it for his account, but he disregarded her chronology and most of her careful observations, bringing people and scenes to life in his own way. Perhaps this was fortunate, for now she has given us this diary plus her interpretations, so that we have two books, each supplementing the other to give a total picture. But how does one capture the whole impact of that tour on Dreiser? It remained in his mind for the rest of his life, causing mixed but strong emotions.

Moscow was only the beginning. He visited Leningrad, with its beautiful river *Neva* and the great Church and Fortress of Peter-and-Paul, where Dostoevsky had once been imprisoned for *revolutionary activity*, along with countless others. All these things impressed him greatly, as well as a visit to the Czar's old summer Palace, the Winter Palace, now the Hermitage Art Gallery, Pushkin's House, and other historic spots. Also in Leningrad Dreiser had an interview with the dynamic director of a large rubber factory, typical of the spirited yet argumentative conversations with prominent leaders.

Then Dreiser returned to Moscow and finally headed south. He was given a Soviet woman doctor for an official guide. Mrs. Kennell knew and liked her, but Dreiser resented her "authority," and this led to some comic as well as trying situations. Mrs. Kennell has a good sense of humor, and her blow-by-blow account of their long trip--as far as Baku, the Caspian Sea, and Tiflis in Georgia--is entertaining and colorful. She describes unbelievable scenes at railroad stations and in the oriental-flavored cities, showing great misery and contrasting beauties. The train service was fantastically unreliable, and the back-country in a sad state of undevelopment, very different from today.

Between the lines runs the thread of Mrs. Kennell's devotion to Dreiser through all his difficult moods and the vicissitudes of the tour. She faithfully reports his interviews and remarks, although many of his hasty opinions must have been annoying to one who had lived in the country for five years. But she also appreciated Dreiser's tremendous interest in all he saw, his response to beauty and to the Russian people.

Indeed, only after the long trip was over did Dreiser and Ruth Kennell realize what a rich experience it had been for both of them. The third part of her book illustrates this, as she tries to follow up Dreiser's reactions, both human and political, after he returned.

The remaining sixty-odd pages of the book attempt a brilliant synthesis of Dreiser's political activity for the next seventeen years. Many letters from Dreiser are included, as well as some of Ruth Kennell's to him, press clippings, etc. Although their paths seldom crossed, Dreiser often expressed admiration for her constancy and dedication to the cause of justice. Of course, he had been quick to say that he never could have got through his tour of Russia without her! Their parallel interest in social progress gave them a sense of fellowship; their love of humanity, a common affection. It is this warmth which runs through the book and, in spite of some dated material, gives it life.

--Marguerite Tjader
Vikingsborg
Darien, Connecticut



CHECKLIST: DREISER STUDIES, 1969

Compiled & Edited by Richard W. Dowell

Each Fall the *Newsletter* will contain an annotated checklist of Dreiser scholarship from the previous year's work. The editors welcome contributions from *DN* readers for this checklist--especially from Dreiser enthusiasts who locate items in lesser-known journals, or in books not focused directly on Dreiser. Annotated items should follow the same form as those below. Contributors will be acknowledged after each annotation.

Atkinson, Hugh C. Checklist of Theodore Dreiser. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.

This 43-page booklet in a "basic bibliographic resource," including all Dreiser books, collected shorter pieces, and stand-ard criticism through 1966. Omitted are "writings made obsolete by the passage of time and the progress of knowledge, as well as master's and doctoral theses, works in languages other than English, the entire category of editions . . . whose major recommendation is current availability, and articles of interest only to the specialist already involved in close study of the author."

Auchincloss, Louis. "Introduction." Sister Carrie. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.

Auchincloss asserts that the greatness of Dreiser in general and *Sister Carrie* specifically lies in his amoral enthusiasm for life, in his ability to communicate his characters' longing for and joy in creature comforts. "[Dreiser] liked the jungles," writes Auchincloss, "or at least he liked the spectacle of ferocity, the drama of the struggle for survival." Auchincloss, however, finds the ending of *Sister Carrie* "curious" in that Dreiser "reverses himself" by minimizing the importance of material possession and violating Carrie's character in turning her into a "restless artist."

Campbell, Charles L. "An American Tragedy: or, Death in the Woods." Modern Fiction Studies, 15:251-259 (Summer, 1969).

In *An American Tragedy*, Campbell finds echoes and deliberate allusions to *Walden*; however, instead of using Nature to symbolize spiritual rebirth, as Thoreau does, Dreiser invested such images with temporal values which lured Clyde to his death--the ultimate progress of the American dream. "Both writers," concludes Campbell, "operate imaginatively in the American Eden; while Thoreau sees the Golden Age constantly

being renewed, Dreiser presents what is perhaps the most explicit depiction of the corrupted Garden."

Elias, Robert H. "Theodore Dreiser," Fifteen Modern American Authors, ed. Jackson R. Bryer. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

In this bibliographical essay, Elias surveys and offers critical analyses of Dreiser manuscripts, letters, editions, biographies, and critical studies through 1969. At present, Fifteen Modern American Authors is being updated and will be brought out in paperback by Norton.

Griffin, Ernest G. "Sympathetic Materialism: A Rereading of Theodore Dreiser." Humanities Association Bulletin, 20:59-68 (Winter, 1969).

Focusing primarily on the Cowperwood trilogy, Griffin challenges the criticism that Dreiser's pity and pietism are inconsistent with his materialistic view of life. Rather, Dreiser's fiction "transcended contemporary naturalist theory and produced work which in some ways is remarkably relevant to our time . . . something of the new synthesis of evolution and religion."

Jones, Alan K. "The Family in the Works of Theodore Dreiser." Dissertation Abstracts, 29:2265A.

Jones analyzes the "ideal of the family" in Dreiser's novels (Section I); the destructive forces in the family (Section II); and the external forces that weaken the family unity (Section III).

Katope, Christopher G. "Sister Carrie and Spencer's First Principles." American Literature, 41:64-75 (March, 1969).

Katope illustrates the idea that Carrie's rise and Hurstwood's disintegration are consistent with Spencer's First Principles. Carrie represents the evolutionary movement from simplicity to complexity, aimlessness to stability. Hurstwood's decline parallels Spencer's description of the dissolution after evolution has run its course.

Kennell, Ruth E. Theodore Dreiser and the Soviet Union, 1927-1945: A First-Hand Chronicle. New York: International Publishers.

See Marguerite Tjader review, p. 11.

Lehan, Richard. Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

See Philip L. Gerber, "Two Dreiser Plus One," Dreiser Newsletter, 1:6-10 (Spring, 1970).

Moers, Ellen. Two Dreisers. New York: Viking Press.

See Philip Gerber, "Two Dreisers Plus One," Dreiser Newsletter, 1:6-10 (Spring, 1970).

Mookerjee, R. N. "An Embarrassment of Riches: Dreiser Research: Materials and Problems." Indian Journal of American Studies, 1 (July, 1969).

A brief survey of the collection and opportunities at the University of Pennsylvania. [Robert Elias, Cornell University]

Mulqueen, James E. "Sister Carrie: A Modern Pilgrim's Progress." CEA Critic, 21: 8-20 (March, 1969).

Mulqueen sees in the story an ironic inversion of Bunyan's values. The pilgrimage to the city of wealth, described with occasional military metaphors suggesting the medieval romance, in chapters whose titles are Biblically allusive, gains in significance because of the tension that is created with the accepted Christian point of view--a tension that puts SC as much in the tradition of Hawthorne and Melville as in that of Zola. [Robert Elias, Cornell University]

Mostwicz, Theodore D. "The Structure of Theodore Dreiser's Novels," Dissertation Abstracts, 29:3617A.

Excepting *Sister Carrie* and *The Stoic*, Mostwicz describes Dreiser's structural pattern as "a cause-and-effect sequence of episodes mounting through increasingly significant crises and complications to a final, often overwhelming catastrophe. His action consistently falls into three parts and employs climaxes of increasing impact."

Pizer, Donald. "Theodore Dreiser's 'Nigger Jeff': The Development of an Aesthetic." American Literature, 41:331-341. (November, 1969).

Focusing on the four extant versions of "Nigger Jeff" (c. 1895, 1899, 1901, and 1918), Pizer reveals Dreiser's development from a groping beginning when he was "viewing much of the tragic complexity of life but understanding little of it" through a period of stylistic and structural control to a maturity in which his ideas became "increasingly self-conscious and polemical."

Saalbach, Robert P. Selected Poems (from Moods) by Theodore Dreiser. New York: Exposition Press.

In his introduction, Saalbach traces Dreiser's groping, often vacillating attempts, through poetry, to reconcile a mechanically determined universe with his "passionate compassion" for mankind. Since Dreiser was unable to make such a reconciliation, Saalbach concludes, his "only hope of escaping pessimism through social re-

form lay in a conviction that the gods were good. This conviction, in Dreiser, is never as strong as in Whitman, but it is there in the groping and seeking, and it has . . . made of Dreiser a poet."

Salzman, Jack. "The Critical Recognition of *Sister Carrie*: 1900-1907." Journal of American Studies, 3:123-133 (July, 1969).

Salzman illustrates not only that the stories about *Sister Carrie*'s initial rejection are largely false but also that the American reviewers were greatly impressed by the novel's favorable reception in England. "The present eminence in the history of American letters not only of Dreiser's first novel but of Dreiser himself," Salzman contends, "is thus due largely--perhaps even primarily--to the edition of *Sister Carrie* published in England in 1901."

. "Dreiser and Ade: A Note on the Text of *Sister Carrie*." American Literature, 40:544-548 (January, 1969).

By comparing passages from *Fables in Slang* and the first edition of *Sister Carrie*, Salzman reveals the extent of Dreiser's borrowing and his later attempts to cover up that borrowing in the 1907 edition.

. "Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945)." American Literary Realism, 2:132-138 (Summer, 1969).

In this bibliographical essay, Salzman briefly surveys the history and present state of Dreiser criticism, bibliography, and manuscript collection. Also included are an annotated listing of "Recent Articles" (1961-1966) and some suggested "Areas Needing Further Attention."

Samuels, Charles Thomas. "The Irrepressible Dreiserian." New Republic, 161:25-31 (July 9, 1969).

In a review of Ellen Moers' *Two Dreisers*, Samuels disputes Dreiser's "tough integrity," asking where such integrity is in the key scenes of *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*. "At the very moment when he closes his trap," Samuels notes, "we find Dreiser simultaneously insisting that his heroes are and aren't mice. So they develop sudden consciences, which are, nevertheless, literally bewitched . . . Dreiser becomes very deterministic when this will evoke pity and allay censure, but he abandons determinism when it threatens to provoke contempt."

Shapiro, Charles. Guide to Theodore Dreiser. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.

In this 44-page booklet, Shapiro surveys the major biographical influences, summarizes plots of the novels, notes their critical

reception, and offers explications illustrating Dreiser's concern for the individual oppressed by twentieth-century America.

Spatz, Jonas. "Dreiser's *Bulwark*: An Archaic Masterpiece." *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, ed. Warren French. Deland, Fla.: Everett/Edwards.

Reading *The Bulwark* as a retelling of the Cowperwood story in an attempt "to find meaning in the blind cycle of man's struggle for existence," Spatz concludes that the novel "manages, despite its primitive style, to achieve an authenticity that transcends current conventions of language, characterization, and narrative . . . [and] to demonstrate what could be done not only with the assumptions of nineteenth-century fiction but also with the simplicities that have formed the basis of tragedy from the beginning."

Taylor, Gordon O. *The Passages of Thought: Psychological Representation in the American Novel 1870-1900.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Basing his study on the work of James, Howells, Crane, Norris, and Dreiser, Taylor traces the development of psychological analysis in the American novel between 1870 and 1900, during which time the earlier focus on "a single level of rational awareness" based on an absolute morality and developed as a "conscious, logical introspection" gave way to an investigation of instinctual and sub- or semi-conscious responses to environment. Taylor uses Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* to represent the final stage of this development.

Thomas, J. D. "Epimetheus Bound: Theodore Dreiser and the Novel of Thought." *Southern Humanities Review*, 3:346-357 (Fall, 1969).

Thomas sees Dreiser's work as a constant search for a beauty or "Immanent Will" to balance the ugliness and injustice of life: "Clear and present to his titanic imagination, always, was every horror that can be conceived as issuing from Pandora's box; yet safely treasured he kept faith that the world is somehow wonderful in its unknown but sure intention, and his discovery beneath life's dark, mocking surfaces of a beauty beyond dreams and imagination."

Wycherley, H. Alan. "Mechanism and Vitalism in Dreiser's Nonfiction." *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 11:1039-1049 (Summer, 1969).

In a chronological survey of Dreiser's nonfiction, Wycherley illustrates the "unending tension between [Dreiser's] intellectual acceptance of the mechanistic argument and his psychic adherence to kindness, pity, hope, and a sense of purpose . . ." The non-fiction, Wycherley notes, reveals this tension more sharply than the novels because it is "less inhibited by the demands of form."

DREISER NEWS & NOTES

THE DREISER CENTENNIAL

Plans for the August 9-20 workshop on Theodore Dreiser, to be offered by Indiana State University, Terre Haute, are firming up. Visiting relatives and scholars are asked to set aside Tuesday and Wednesday, August 17 and 18, for participation in the main celebration, which will be open to the public, both from Terre Haute and other parts of Indiana and visitors from other states and countries.

The Centennial Committee has also decided to seek financial aid to the extent necessary, from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is hoped that substantial stipends, in addition to expenses, will be available for all participants. Again, the Committee urgently requests that you send suggestions for the main celebration, as well as for other possible events to be held during the centennial year, to chairman Robert P. Saalbach, Department of English, Indiana State University, Terre Haute 47809 as soon as possible. We are particularly interested in persons with specialized knowledge concerning some phase of Dreiser's life or work who would be willing to share this knowledge with us at the workshop and by way of public lecture or special panel discussion. Publication of the proceedings is being planned.

The Committee feels that most persons needed for the centennial celebration are readers of this *Newsletter*. Please, therefore, send your ideas to the chairman, whether they fit the exact dates noted above or not.

--Robert P. Saalbach
Indiana State University

* * * * *

A DREISER CHECKLIST IN THE PRESS

Although a full-scale descriptive bibliography of Theodore Dreiser's works is in preparation at the University of Pennsylvania, Professor Hugh C. Atkinson (Ohio State University) has completed *Theodore Dreiser: A Checklist*, to be published in the fall of 1970 by The Kent State University Press. It will appear as No. 16 in The Serif Series: Bibliographies and Checklists, of which I am the general editor.

Mr. Atkinson's compilation, which is now in the proof stage, lists all of the Dreiser books (with various editions and translations), publications for which the novelist wrote introductions, periodical appearances (though not newspapers), editions of his letters, and material

about Dreiser, including biographies, books and dissertations about his writings, a long list of articles on him and his work, and a selection of reviews of Dreiser books.

In view of the little bibliographical work on Dreiser, much of it long out of date and out of print, the Atkinson checklist of Dreiser and Dreiseriana will, I am sure, be welcome to readers of *The Dreiser Newsletter* and others interested in the author of *An American Tragedy*.

--William White
Wayne State University

* * * * *

MOERS TALK

Ellen Moers' tape, "A Century of Dreiser," is not yet available out of stock from the McGraw-Hill Company. Dreiserians seeking information on this centennial talk can get in touch with editor Carol Sullivan, however. Her address: Sound Seminars, 50 East Hollister, Cincinnati, Ohio 45219 (Phone: 421-2020).

* * * * *

DREISER IN RUSSIA

Clarence Gohdes of Duke University has edited *Russian Studies of American Literature* (U. of North Carolina Press, 1969), which contains a list of Russian publications (articles, translations and dissertations) on Dreiser, 1925-63. There are 126 items in all. The list was compiled by Valentina A. Libman and translated by Robert V. Allen.

* * * * *

DISSERTATION

Sheila Jurnak is writing a dissertation under Donald Pizer at Newcomb College, Tulane University, entitled *A Study of Dreiser's Autobiographies: Dawn and Newspaper Days*. Miss Jurnak plans to study the two volumes as works of art, and then relate them thematically and stylistically to Dreiser's novels.

Pen and ink drawings this issue: Thomas Torrens