

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume Ten, Number Two

Fall 1979

THE DREISERS IN SULLIVAN: A BIOGRAPHICAL REVISION

Thomas P. Riggio

University of Connecticut

Dreiser's record of the Sullivan, Indiana, years--both those he spent there (1879-82) and those he transmitted from family lore--focuses on events that influenced his life and shaped his literary imagination: the business success and eventual misfortunes of his father, John Paul Dreiser. In *A Hoosier Holiday* (1916) and *Dawn* (1931), Dreiser acknowledged life-long scars resulting from his father's lack of resilience after a fire and other mishaps at a Sullivan wool mill. Subsequently, critics and biographers have read Dreiser's fiction in this context--most more or less agreeing with Robert Penn Warren that "a secret drama of Dreiser's [work] is the rejection of a father who, after failure, lived."² And yet doubts about Dreiser's veracity, planted first by Augustus Robert Markle, the Vigo County, Indiana, historian, have led biographers from Elias to Swanberg to be cautious about his account. The implication that, Boudnerby-like, Dreiser had stretched the facts to aggrandize his rise from poverty finds sanction even in Dreiser family documents.³

Markle challenged four points in Dreiser's story: (1) that his father owned a wool mill in Sullivan ("Sullivan, where he built a woolen mill and went into business for himself. For a few years he prospered." *Dawn*, 5); (2) that the mill burned ("Then one spring...it was destroyed by fire." *Dawn*, 5); (3) that his partners, members of the Jewett family, swindled Paul Dreiser ("Thus, by bare-faced robbery and while he was ill--or so I was led to believe--my father lost the remainder of his local wealth." *Dawn*, 5); (4) that the senior Dreiser was prosperous enough before these reversals to donate land to two Catholic churches, both called St. Joseph's ("If you were to look at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church there [presumably

Sullivan], you would behold land given by him to that organization, and you would find a stained glass window bearing his name as donor." *Dawn*, 166; "Just before his failure, or the fire that ruined him, he gave the ground on which the church and school of St. Joseph in Terre Haute now stand." *A Hoosier Holiday*, 392).⁴ Markle insisted that Dreiser's "father could not have owned a thriving mill in Sullivan" since "there is no record of ownership of property there at any time by any one of the name of Dreiser or Dresser"⁵--thus throwing into question any Jewett partnership and/or fraud. To complicate matters further, Markle told Professor Robert Elias that Sullivan townspeople assured him the mill "did not burn but was wrecked by a storm."⁶ Finally, Markle pointed out that deed records reveal Paul Dreiser never owned land later connected with St. Joseph's in Terre Haute, that no glass window bearing his name exists there or in Sullivan, and that Dreiser's confusion (or mendacity) was such that he placed St. Joseph's in Sullivan, where no church of that name ever stood.

Recently, evidence has surfaced to put Dreiser's version of these incidents in new perspective. Professor Richard Dowell took some of the sting out of Markle's charges by demonstrating that between 1867 and 1870 Paul Dreiser bought three lots in Sullivan, he was running a mill under his name by 1870, and he most likely contributed money towards the purchase of land for Sullivan's first Catholic church, built in 1867-68.⁷ Though Dowell concedes there is no indication of Paul Dreiser's investment in a mill before 1870 and that "Dreiser was clearly confused"⁸ about a St. Joseph's in Sullivan, he does substantiate Dreiser's claim that his father was in a position financially to assist Sullivan's church. Dowell concludes with good advice to future biographers: "all too often, Dreiser's accounts are more in keeping with the facts than are Markle's attempts to set the record straight."⁹ As I shall show, this warning should be taken seriously.

The notion that Dreiser advanced major personal untruths gained authority from reliance on inexact sources and less than thorough scholarship. Both Markle and *The History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* (1884) helped establish the now uncontested view that the Dreisers first moved to Sullivan in 1867.¹⁰ With good reason, all attempts to find particulars to fit Dreiser's story into an 1867-71 framework have been inconclusive. The 1867 date found acceptance because Paul Dreiser's first Sullivan property transaction took place in July, 1867; and deed records show the Jewetts, listed as the first mill owners in the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties*,¹¹ did not buy mill lots until March, 1866. Moreover, Dreiser himself unwittingly encouraged the idea that his father's Sullivan history began in the late 1860s. Writing second-hand from family memories, he used vague

terms--"For a few years," "Still later," "Shortly after"--to establish the chronology of Paul Dreiser's business ventures in Sullivan. As a result, *Dawn* gives the impression that the elder Dreiser's career there occurred within a few years before the return to Terre Haute and Theodore's birth in 1871. And conflicting information, if it is considered at all, tends to be quietly buried in a footnote as an anomaly. For instance, Dreiser's older sister, Mary Frances Brennan, states in a letter to Markle that another sister, Theresa Mary, was born in Sullivan on August 3, 1864 (in another letter, she listed three other siblings born at Sullivan: "Cecelia (Sylvia)" in 1866, "Aloyisius (Al)" in 1867, and "Clare" in 1868).¹² In addition, the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* contradicts basic assumptions in placing the mill's beginnings two years before the 1866 deed listing: "This mill was built in 1864, by Jewett Bros.; they ran it for two years, and then left it on the hands of Chauncey Rose, of Terre Haute, who furnished the money for its erection."¹³ Significantly, no mention is made of a mill fire in 1869--the year generally given in Dreiser biography. Nor is Paul Dreiser cited, though from advertisements in the *Sullivan Democrat* we know the mill did business under his name from June, 1870, to September 21, 1870. Two formerly unknown sources--Sullivan newspaper entries of the early 1860s and the Clyde S. Crawford file in the Indiana State Library at Indianapolis--help resolve much of this inconsistent testimony.

The *Sullivan Democrat* for 1863-64 demonstrates how misleading the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* is as a resource for Dreiser biography. Newspaper advertisements for these years point out major omissions in the local history. First, the Jewett mill was not the first one in Sullivan; Paul Dreiser's friend and employer, G. F. Ellis, operated a wool mill there from May to December, 1863. Working at the time as foreman for Ellis, Paul Dreiser may have made the twenty-five mile train trip between Terre Haute and Sullivan to what the Ellis ad called a "Branch of The Terre Haute Woolen Factory." This is speculative, but clearly Paul Dreiser arrived in Sullivan with the Jewetts in the spring of 1864. Sullivan County Deed Records and the next advertisement for the mill specify that by March, 1864, the Jewetts had purchased the mill land and the business.¹⁴ They announced themselves in this way:

The Subscribers having purchased the above
Woolen Factory

located in Sullivan, lately owned by Mr. Ellis, are now prepared to do the Carding and Spinning for the Wool Growers of Sullivan and the adjacent counties. The machinery having been put in the best order, and having employed a man as Foreman who has had many years experience both in

Europe and this country, we hope, by strict attention to business and fair dealing, to give entire satisfaction to all who call.

Signed "D.M. & E.D. Jewett," the notice appears from May 12, 1864, to June 20, 1864. In 1864, then, the Jewetts owned a Sullivan mill managed by a foreign foreman who, as shall be seen, is Dreiser's father; and this mill, not the one opened after 1866, burned within two months. (Incidentally, this outline makes plausible many hitherto unexplained biographical fragments: Mary Frances' report of the Sullivan Dreiser births beginning in 1864 and her memories of Sullivan, the "small hamlet" in which she [b. 1861] lived "up to the age of nine"¹⁵; the fact that in 1863 Paul Dreiser sold the Terre Haute property he acquired in 1859, and did not own land there again until his return from Sullivan in 1871¹⁶; and the fact that 1864 was the first year since 1858 that he did not appear in the Terre Haute city directory as an employee of Ellis.)

The contents of the Crawford file in Indianapolis give detail to the 1863-64 newspaper listings. The Dreisers held a special interest for Clyde S. Crawford, dating back to the time when his mother was their neighbor and she worked in the Sullivan mill with Dreiser's brother Paul. As late as 1940 Crawford wrote Theodore asking him to visit Sullivan; Dreiser replied with regrets in a letter of May 16, 1940.¹⁷ Crawford kept local newspaper clippings about the Dreisers, wrote biographical notes, made photographs of the mill and the church they attended, and even retained an interview with one of the younger Paul Dreiser's teachers, Ophelia Moore, who taught at a Sullivan school called "Old Seminary."

Of special interest is an undated newspaper article from the *Sullivan Union* which deals with the Dreisers in Sullivan. The name Maude McConnell, written in the margin by Crawford, probably refers to the author of the piece. It says "The family are remembered by many of the present day citizens," and in part it reads:

Some time in the sixties Mr. Dreiser bought an interest in a woolen mill and moved his family to Sullivan, occupying a house, now 510, on north Broad Street, at that time one of the best residential sections in town. This property Mr. Dreiser later sold to Jefferson Abel.

In 1863 the mill in which Mr. Dreiser had an interest burned and he returned to Terre Haute. A new mill was erected and Mr. Dreiser was employed in the mill as a dyer. This time residing in a house built by Moer Jewett on the location of the old mill, now 330 Gray street, opposite

the present mill. The mill changed owners and Mr. Dreiser returned to Terre Haute in 1871.

Local testimony thus confirms Paul Dreiser's association with two different mills and at least two periods of residence, which go back to the early 1860s. The mill that burned and in which Paul Dreiser "had an interest" is the Jewetts' first mill, though the paper mistakenly gives 1863, not spring, 1864, as the date of the fire. The unusual prominence given the European foreman in the Jewett ad strongly argues for Paul Dreiser's financial stake in the 1864 mill; and the subsequent need to rebuild on a new site after an uncompleted season in 1864 suggests that this is the mill that burned. These facts also explain why the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties*, though remiss in not citing a previous mill, mentions no fire as part of the history of the mill extant in 1884. Instead it begins its account with the Jewetts' second mill, the one financed by Chauncey Rose.

Curiously, the article says that the Jewetts built a house on the first mill site, "opposite the present mill," in which the Dreisers later lived. This raises obvious questions: if the fire and alleged misdealings of the Jewetts happened in 1864, why did Paul Dreiser continue with the Jewetts, and what gave Theodore the idea that the "accident" at the mill occurred shortly before the final return to Terre Haute? The inscription behind a photograph Crawford took of the later mill deciphers somewhat the mixed reports about the nature of the damage at the mill:

Woolen Mill at Sullivan, Indiana, where Paul Dresser [Theodore's brother] worked when a boy. Photo made by Crawford after a storm blew off top story of Sullivan Woolen Mill. John Paul Dreiser Sr., was the head dyer. It was here my mother first saw Paul [Dresser] when they were tykes.

Markle is vindicated in this instance. The second mill, run by the Jewetts until Paul Dreiser became proprietor in June, 1870, is the building that was struck by a storm--the only mill "damage" people remembered when Markle inquired about a fire. Whether the storm wrecked the structure during the Jewett ownership or after Dreiser assumed control (or perhaps even later) remains obscure. If the family stories are to make sense, all this would have taken place while the Jewetts occupied the mill. (Mary Frances' version suggests that the Jewetts hoodwinked her father during an "illness"¹⁹--a line Dreiser develops in *Dawn* [p. 5], placing the swindle at a time when his father was recovering from a head wound suffered while he tried to reconstruct the mill.) In this vein, the "treachery" may have had some-

thing to do with the Jewetts' finding a way to unload the ruined mill on Paul Dreiser. On the other hand, the storm might have come after Paul Dreiser bought the business, thus forcing him to abandon it after one season and ending his prospects in Sullivan.²⁰ In any case, the news piece in the Crawford file concludes, as did Dreiser, that Paul Dreiser "was a good citizen, but a poor business man and his family suffered at times" --factors that probably contributed to his neglect in local annals.

Clearly, vague records and family legend blurred many distinctions of time and place in Paul Dreiser's history at Sullivan. The early fire, a dimly recalled sickness, the storm that struck the mill, an accident during a period of reconstruction, a falling out with the Jewetts--all were passed down to Dreiser decades later by siblings too young at the time to understand the circumstances, or even perhaps the proper order of events. We can see now that Dreiser conflated his father's various fortunes partly because he relied on such imprecise information. But these tales also served his purpose, allowing him to give greater dramatic emphasis to a decisive point in his autobiography. Dreiser insisted, after all, that his father's moral weakness was such that one bad blow could ruin him for life. To envision Paul Dreiser rebounding from nearly a decade of business ups and downs, and coming into full proprietorship of a mill a year before his return to Terre Haute, did not fit into the image of the defeated religious fanatic Dreiser felt compelled to project. In effect, Dreiser externalized the cause of his early emotional troubles in the person of his father; this is not an uncommon way of handling problems for which there seem to be no discernible basis. The picture we get of Paul Dreiser undoubtedly is exaggerated; yet the underlying elements, however conflated and heightened, are sounder than has been supposed.

Markle's final charge--Dreiser misrepresented his father's contributions to a St. Joseph's church either in Terre Haute or Sullivan--underscores the need for continuing biographical study. Terre Haute church history indicates that Paul Dreiser may indeed have given money towards the construction of St. Joseph's church or school. *St. Joseph's Centennial History* (1938), published in Terre Haute, relates that while 1840 saw the dedication of the original church, the parish school--which was funded by parishoners and included a gift of new land--did not open until December, 1859, or over a year after Paul Dreiser joined the parish. Furthermore, the church itself was practically rebuilt in 1866 under the direction of Rev. John B. Chasse: "Extensive improvements marked the pastorate of Father Chasse. A vestibule, new front, enlarged windows, and tower with steeple were added and rendered the first church

built by Father Buteux an imposing edifice of worship."²¹ Father Chasse also built a new pastor's residence and enlarged the existing school. Paul Dreiser, both devout and moderately successful in these periods, may have provided a small amount for the building of a "new" church or school; and following common practice, his name would have been inscribed on a church window. Markle's statement that "There never was such a stained window nor any chance that the father could have donated anything to that church" should be discounted. The objection that the window cannot be found today--nor could it in Markle's time--fails to observe that the original St. Joseph's was torn down in 1910 and a new church completed by May, 1912; this second church burned to the ground on January 9, 1934, and the present St. Joseph's was finished in the following year. Since there were two different churches between Markle and the St. Joseph's of Paul Dreiser's day, it is not surprising that he could not find a window bearing the Dreiser name.

The related question of a St. Joseph's in Sullivan obviously involves something more than a fabrication or simple mistake on Dreiser's part. First, it should be said that only once (*Dawn*, 166) did Dreiser ever mention a St. Joseph's in Sullivan; numerous passages in *Dawn* and *A Hoosier Holiday* all locate St. Joseph's in Terre Haute. In the face of such repeated citations, to accuse Dreiser of deliberately placing the church in Sullivan assumes a carelessness far beyond even that usually attributed to him. Two factors--one textual, the other historical--must be considered in this instance.

Let's begin by quoting the specific sentence from *Dawn*, in context and with its proper punctuation:

In Dayton, Fort Wayne and Terre Haute he [my father] had been either foreman or superintendent in the different mills, and in Sullivan he had operated his own mill. (If you were to look at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church there, you would behold land given by him to that organization, and inside you would find a stained glass window bearing his name as donor.)

Markle was the first to consider that the "there" in the parenthetical sentence referred to Sullivan, the last of a series of places mentioned in the previous line. Given Dreiser's often vague modifiers, this should at least have prompted a question--particularly because he always described the Sullivan church, as did Mary Frances, as an unnamed "small white church" attended monthly by a missionary priest. In *A Hoosier Holiday*, Dreiser writes after visiting the Sullivan church: "The small white church, still at hand, was no longer a Catholic Church but a hall, the Catholics having moved to a

more imposing edifice" (p. 427). Yet despite such circumstantial evidence, the *Dawn* "there" remains and may in fact be construed to mean Sullivan.

Attention to the manuscript and typescripts of *Dawn*, however, demonstrates that Dreiser did not intend such a reading. The passage first appears in a holograph addition to a typescript now in the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana, Bloomington. Dreiser originally wrote the following:

In Dayton, Ft. Wayne and Terre Haute he had been either a foreman or superintendant in the different mills there and in Sullivan he had actually built and operated his own mill. If you were to look at St. Joseph's Holy Roman Catholic Church & School you would see land given by him to that organization as a pious gift and, at this writing, inside you will find a stained glass window bearing his name as donor and for which he paid.

The elements of this section are hastily organized, but this version more clearly shows Dreiser's logic. At this point in the writing, Dreiser had already spoken about St. Joseph's in Terre Haute for many chapters; and he could suppose the reader would know the church's location. Later texts of *Dawn* indicate that Dreiser's typist, Louise Campbell, added "there" (no doubt as an initial misreading, because the "there" after "mills" in holograph comes directly over the space after "School"); and the printer's copy inserted the parenthesis, probably to give more coherence to the sequence. But nowhere do we find a direct reference to St. Joseph's being "there" (Sullivan) in Dreiser's hand.

Beyond such textual considerations, there are historical reasons that explain Dreiser's possible linking of Terre Haute's St. Joseph's with the Sullivan years. The "small white church" corresponds to the church described in the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* under the heading of "The Catholic Church":

Situated near the Evansville & Terre Haute depot is a frame house, which was built in 1867-68 by William Greenlee as contractor, under the supervision of Father McCarty, who was visiting Sullivan as a missionary at that time. The money to build it was raised by donation, a great part of it by those not members of the church...At that time there were only five or six Catholic families here, and they were mostly poor. In 1868, Father Alderning took the place of Father McCarty, and held services once a month until 1872...this has been considered a mission, and has been attended by a priest from Terre Haute of the order of St. Francis. (p. 624)

The Dreisers were one of the "five or six Catholic families" in town at the time, and Paul Dreiser almost certainly aided the church financially. That the senior Dreiser, who traded with local farmers, was in a position to solicit money from "those not members of the church" reinforced the family's surely overblown sense of his part in the church's construction. Obviously remembering stories told by Mary Frances Brennan and other Dreisers, Carmel O'Neill Haley later wrote: "There was no Church when the family moved to Sullivan, and Mr. Dreiser gave the ground and collected enough from the neighboring farmers to build the edifice, contributing his share as well."²² In this connection, the Crawford file again adds to our knowledge. Clyde Crawford took two photographs of the white frame church, and the name on the front angle picture reads "Pilgrim Holiness Church." On the back of the print showing a side angle of the church, Crawford wrote: "This is a picture of the Church where the [Dreiser] parents and family went to worship, which was [sic] Catholic edifice. P.S. Burned since I made photo." The church had glass windows, front and side, and it is possible that as a donor Paul Dreiser may have had his name placed on one of the windows.

Even if Dreiser had mistaken his father's role in Sullivan's church history with his attachment to the Terre Haute church, it would be more understandable than Markle suggests. Pilgrim Holiness Church was a missionary outpost of St. Joseph's, and both Father McCarty and Father Alderning were assistant pastors at St. Joseph's. During their stay in Sullivan, then, the Dreisers retained connections with their old Terre Haute parish, and in fact would still consider themselves part of the mother church. Though unlikely, if Dreiser did indeed confuse the two churches in *Dawn*, the fact that St. Joseph's serviced the Sullivan church could have influenced him.

One last note. Dreiser's baptismal certificate can be found in the rectory of St. Benedict's Catholic Church in Terre Haute. But since school ledgers for either St. Benedict's or St. Joseph's have not turned up, one should not assume with Markle that Dreiser, while claiming to have attended St. Joseph's school, "gives the locality of St. Benedict's Church and School at Ninth and Ohio Streets":

To clear up the matter [Markle continues], it was St. Benedict's he attended in those earliest years. Perhaps his use of St. Joseph's came from listening to his oldest brother, Paul, who would have received his first instruction there.

Dreiser's detailed recollection of St. Joseph's school during his 1915 visit to Terre Haute hardly seems the product of "lis-

tening to his older brother, Paul."²⁴ Again Markle's research needs amendment. While St. Joseph had a well-established church and school in the 1870s, St. Benedict's Church was not dedicated until 1865, and even then, according to a history of St. Benedict's, "The Benedictine Fathers ministered to the new parish from their residence at St. Joseph's."²⁵ St. Benedict's began with a splinter group from St. Joseph's that wanted a German service, particularly as more German Catholics moved to the region after the Civil War. Sometime after the Benedictines left the area; and "on May 2, 1872, Bishop de Palaise issued the decree by which he gave both St. Joseph and St. Benedict parishes into the care of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual (Franciscans)."²⁶ Therefore, although St. Benedict's offered German services and St. Joseph's ministered to a predominantly Irish group, the administrations of the two churches were not distinctly separate. When we consider the close ties between the two parishes and, in particular, the fact that St. Benedict's school at Ninth and Ohio Streets was not dedicated until June 12, 1887--years after Dreiser left Terre Haute--then it seems likely that the "school to which, at say six, I was led by the hand by my sister" is St. Joseph's. Of course, Dreiser could have gone to a smaller, less official school run by St. Benedict's; but until support is found for this proposition, there seems little reason to doubt his word.

In retrospect, Dreiser's memoirs of his family's years in Sullivan and Terre Haute, though subject to minor errors, appear more convincing when submitted to the test of new research. At the least, fresh data goes some way towards settling the seemingly blatant contradictions on record. In the process, by providing knowledge about events that held symbolic weight for Dreiser, such evidence confirms the important links between biography and criticism.

¹I would like to acknowledge aid received in the form of an American Council of Learned Societies grant which allowed me to undertake the research in Indiana upon which this article is based.

²Robert Penn Warren, *Homage to Theodore Dreiser* (New York, 1971), p. 11.

³See Vera Dreiser, *My Uncle Theodore* (New York, 1976), pp. 14-46 and Mary Francis Dreiser Brennan's letters in the Markle papers.

⁴Theodore Dreiser, *A Hoosier Holiday* (New York, 1916) and *Dawn* (New York, 1931). All references are to the first edi-

tions.

⁵All quotations attributed to A. R. Markle, unless otherwise noted, are found in the unpublished Markle Papers, Fairbanks Memorial Library, Terre Haute, Indiana.

⁶In W. A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York, 1965), p. 45, though Swanberg seems to accept Dreiser's word about a fire--as do Richard Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (Carbondale and Evansville, 1969), pp. 3-4; and John McAleer, *Theodore Dreiser* (New York, 1968), p. 6, Robert Elias, *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature* (Ithaca, 1948; 1970), is non-committal, p. 6.

⁷Richard W. Dowell, "Ask Mr. Markle?", *The Dreiser Newsletter* (Spring, 1977), pp. 9-14.

⁸Dowell, p. 10.

⁹Dowell, p. 13.

¹⁰See Swanberg, p. 5; Vera Dreiser, p. 24.

¹¹*History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* (Chicago, 1884), p. 613.

¹²Markle Papers.

¹³*The History of Greene and Sullivan Counties*, p. 613.

¹⁴Microfilmed deed accounts at the Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, show that "G. F. Ellis sold to Jewett & Jewett (outlets) 24, (inlots) 23, Sullivan"; recorded April 10, 1864.

¹⁵Markle papers.

¹⁶Information collected by Gloria M. Collins and found in the Markle papers.

¹⁷The original of this unpublished letter is in the Crawford File, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

¹⁸The article also gives the identity of the Sullivan house Dreiser speaks of occupying when he moved there with his mother in 1879: "709 Duane Street, known then as the George Basler house."

¹⁹Mary Francis Brennan's letter to A. R. Markle, January 13, 1946 (Markle Papers).

²⁰A note in the Crawford file says that Paul Dreiser bought from "David M. Jewett and wife...Lot #33 in Gray, Watson, and Bloom Addition, May 14, 1870. Paul Dreiser and Sarah, conveyed to Peter Hill, Eli Milner, and Anthony Milner, Lot #33...on April 7th, 1871." Crawford indicates this is the lot on which the Dreiser home stood; obviously it was the house in which the mill owners lived since Jewett sold it to Dreiser, who in turn sold it to Hill and Milner, who are listed after the Jewetts as mill owners in the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties*, p. 613.

²¹*St. Joseph's Centennial History* (Terre Haute, 1938), p. 26.

²²Carmel O'Neill Haley, "The Dreisers," *The Commonweal*, July 7, 1933, p. 265.

²³*St. Joseph's Centennial History*, p. 15.

²⁴In *Dawn* Dreiser says St. Joseph's is "in Ninth Street in Terre Haute" (p. 27), but in *A Hoosier Holiday*, p. 410, he clearly examines (and remembers) St. Joseph's School. It is more probable that Dreiser would forget the exact address and remember the school's name and features than vice-versa.

²⁵*Centennial: 1865-1965, St. Benedict's Church* (Terre Haute, 1965), p. 17.

²⁶*Centennial: 1865-1965, St. Benedict's Church*, p. 17.

²⁷*Centennial: 1865-1965, St. Benedict's Church*, p. 17.

DREISER, MENCKEN AND THE AMERICAN MERCURY YEARS

Vincent Fitzpatrick

State University of New York, Stony Brook

H.L. Mencken was, to use W.A. Swanberg's phrase, "by far the most important single literary influence in Dreiser's life."¹ Mencken's magazine articles play a significant part in his discussion of Dreiser's novels and non-fiction, the way the books were received, and Dreiser's role in the history of American literature. In the *Smart Set* of December, 1923, the last issue edited by Mencken and George Jean Nathan, Mencken glances back over his fifteen-year career as book reviewer and notes the positive changes in American literature. Praising Dreiser's perseverance and ultimate success, Mencken states, "The pedagogues tried to scare him to death...but they failed every time. The more he was reviled, sneered at, neglected, the more resolutely he stuck to his formula. That formula is now every serious American novelist's formula...they all follow him in his fundamental purpose-- to make the novel true."²

This final article serves as a fitting tribute to a novelist whom Mencken had discussed more than seventy times in the *Smart Set*. Ironically, Mencken did not learn until after he left the magazine that Dreiser had gotten him the job.³ Thus, Dreiser opened to Mencken the forum that was used to defend the novelist's method and his books.

In January, 1924, Mencken and Nathan founded the *American Mercury*. Disenchanted with the purely literary nature of the earlier magazine, Mencken wanted a new forum in which to discuss American culture and politics. But he remembered, at least for a while, his friend, benefactor, and fellow writer. Earlier, Dreiser had published Mencken's work in the *Delineator* and the *Bohemian*, and Mencken had reciprocated by printing Dreiser in the *Smart Set*. In the *American Mercury*, Mencken ran Dreiser's poetry and prose. Also, Mencken reviewed *An American Tragedy*, *A Gallery of Women*, and *Dawn*. Further, in his book review column called "The Library," in the "Clinical Notes" co-authored with Nathan, and in his "Editorial" essays, Mencken discussed Dreiser several times. The comments were of various lengths; while some were negative, the majority were positive. As the following list shows, Mencken touched upon a number of issues. The lambasting of the New Humanists was especially significant, here and throughout Mencken's literary criticism.

Mencken's hatred stemmed, in part, from their attitude toward Dreiser's work.

"The Library." I (February, 1924). Dreiser is a trenchant figure in "the literary conquest of the East by the Middle West." Also, Mencken derides "Robert Underwood Johnson *de l'Académie Américaine*, B.S., A.M., Ph.D. and all the rest of it" for his "rancorous hostility to every idea hatched since 1885" and his consequent refusal to recognize the value of Dreiser's writing. Further, Mencken praises Dreiser in a review of *Horses and Men*.

"The Library." I (April, 1924). Mencken titles his review of *Arlie Gelston* "The Husk of Dreiser" and then extols *Jennie Gerhardt*.

"Clinical Notes." II (June, 1924). Calling for "a genuinely realistic novel about a happy marriage," Mencken claims that "Dreiser's heroes imitate the colossal adulteries of a guinea pig, a movie actor or a Wall Street broker."⁴

"The Library." II (June, 1924). Reviewing Edgar Lee Master's *Mirage*, Mencken states that Dreiser's characters "stand out as thoroughly alive." Then, Mencken disparages *The Genius*.

"The Library." V (May, 1925). "The influence of Dreiser upon the literature of tomorrow in this land--upon all the youngsters who are now coming to maturity in the universities and turning away from their ordained professors--will be a hundred times as potent as that of any New Englander now alive."

"The Library." VI (November, 1925). Mencken speaks of the "harsh uncouthness" of Dreiser's style.

"The Library." VII (January, 1926). Mencken attacks Brander Matthews and his antipathy to Dreiser. Also, Mencken praises Dreiser in a review of Gertrude Beasley's *My First Thirty Years*.

"The Library." VII (April, 1926). Briefly, Mencken compares Charles Norris's *Pig Iron* to *An American Tragedy*.

"Editorial." VIII (June, 1926). Mencken claims that British critics are unfair to Dreiser because of the anti-American feeling lingering after World War I.

"Editorial." XII (September, 1927). Mencken decries the demise of the American novel: "No first book as solid and

memorable as 'McTeague' or 'Sister Carrie' has come out since the annunciation of Coolidge." (*McTeague* was not Norris's first book; *Moran of the Lady Letty* was published one year before in 1898.)

"The Library." XVIII (December, 1929). Mencken derides Stuart P. Sherman's change of heart about Dreiser. Astonishingly, Mencken implies that *Jennie Gerhardt* and *The Titan* are superior to *An American Tragedy*.

"The Library." XIX (April, 1930). Mencken praises the portrayal of Mrs. Dreiser in *A Hoosier Holiday*. Also, Mencken speaks of Dreiser in a lengthy attack upon the New Humanists.

"Editorial." XX (June, 1930). "Let the Senate investigate the Humanists' charge that Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson and company are in the pay of the Bolsheviki. Or the counter-charge, which I herewith make formally, that Dr. Paul Elmer More is in receipt of bribes from the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Morals."

"The Library." XX (August, 1930). Mencken speaks of Dreiser in another attack upon the New Humanists.

"The Library." XXIV (December, 1931). Mencken extols A. H. Thorndike and Russell Blankenship for "speaking up for Dreiser." Mencken then notes the element of mysticism in Dreiser's work.

Mencken continued as editor until December, 1933, and he wrote intermittently for the magazine after that, but he spoke no more of Dreiser.

While acknowledgment of these comments contributes to our information concerning the Dreiser-Mencken relationship, the *American Mercury* years have further significance. The much-discussed split between the men was prompted by Mencken's caustic review of *An American Tragedy* in March, 1926. In an unpublished letter of January 28, Mencken warned Dreiser about the review. And on February 5, Mencken wrote to Dreiser again: "I am performing upon you without anaesthetics in the March Merkur, but with reservations. I think the trial and execution of Griffiths goes beyond everything you have ever done. But the first volume made me shed some sweat. I hear that the book is selling very well."⁵ Nevertheless, the letter enraged Dreiser, and three days later he shot back: "As to your critical predilections, animosities, inhibitions--et. cet. Tosh. Who reads you? Bums and loafers. No-goods."⁶ The remainder of the letter is equally acerbic. The men did not correspond

again until November 20, 1934. The friendship was over.

¹W.A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (N.Y.: Scribner's, 1965), caption beneath photograph #28, included between pp. 330-331.

²"Fifteen Years," *Smart Set*, 37 (December, 1923), p. 141.

³*Ibid.*, p. 138: "To this day, curiously enough, I don't know who [nominated me for the job]." But in the unpublished Autobiographical Notes--1925 (volume A29 in the Mencken Collection at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore), Mencken states that he has since learned that Dreiser was responsible.

⁴Mencken's authorship is proven by the manuscript in volume A43 in the Mencken Collection.

⁵Guy Fergue, ed., *Letters of H. L. Mencken* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1961), pp. 288-289.

⁶This letter is not included in Robert Elias's collection. It is quoted by Edgar Kemler, *The Irreverent Mr. Mencken* (Boston: Little, 1950), p. 172 and by Carl Bode, *Mencken* (Carbondale: S.I.U. Press, 1969), p. 325.

A DREISER CHECKLIST, 1978

Frederic E. Rusch
Indiana State University

This checklist covers the year's work on Dreiser in 1978 plus a number of publications omitted from previous checklists.

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

An American Tragedy. Illus. by Grant Reynard. Intro. H. L. Mencken. Cleveland: World, 1948. Rpt. Cambridge, MA: Robert Bentley, 1978.

Fine Furniture. New York: Random House, 1930. Rpt. Philadelphia: R. West, 1978.

II. NEW DREISER STUDIES AND NEW STUDIES THAT INCLUDE DREISER

Brennan, Stephen C. "The Composition of *Sister Carrie*: A Reconsideration," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 9 (Fall 1978), 17-23.

_____. "Dreiser and Balzac: A Literary Source for Hurstwood and Carrie," *American Notes & Queries*, 17 (Oct. 1978), 21-24.

Cerf, Bennett. *At Random*. New York: Random House, 1977. Pp. 14, 27, et passim.

Commins, Dorothy. *What Is an Editor? Saxe Commins at Work*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978. Pp. 13, 20-24, et passim.

Donaldson, Scott and Ann Massa. *American Literature: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978. Pp. 74-80, 177-79, 185-88, 223.

Fecher, Charles A. *Mencken: A Study of His Thought*. New York: Knopf, 1978. Pp. passim.

Graham, Don. "Psychological Veracity in 'The Lost Phoebe': Dreiser's Revisions," *Studies in American Fiction*, 6 (Spring 1978), 100-05.

Grasshoff, Wilhelm. *Der Wandel des Amerikabildes, von Dreiser bis Faulkner*. München: Lentz, 1974.

- Griffin, Joseph P. "Dreiser's Later Short Stories," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 9 (Spring 1978), 5-10.
- Guiguet, Jean. *Sister Carrie and Dreiser*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1978.
- Hakutani, Yoshinobu. "Dreiser and American Magazines of the 1890's," *Library Chronicle*, 43 (Spring 1978), 55-80.
- _____. "The Making of Dreiser's Early Short Stories: The Philosopher and the Artist," *Studies in American Fiction*, 6 (Spring 1978), 47-63.
- _____. "Theodore Dreiser, Japan, and World War II," *Resources for American Literary Study*, 8 (Autumn 1978), 188-92.
- Kehl, Del G. "An American Tragedy and Dreiser's Cousin, Mr. Poe," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 32 (Autumn 1978), 211-21.
- Libman, V. I. *Amerikanskaya Literatura v Russkikh Perevodakh i Kritike: Bibliografiya 1776-1975 [American Literature in Russian Translations and Criticism: Bibliography 1776-1975]*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1977. Pp. 108-17.
- Lundén, Rolf. "Theodore Dreiser and the Nobel Prize," *American Literature*, 50 (May 1978), 216-29.
- Nostwich, T. D. "The Source of Dreiser's 'Nigger Jeff,'" *Resources for American Literary Study*, 8 (Autumn 1978), 174-87.
- Pagetti, Carlo. *Theodore Dreiser*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1978.
- Riggio, Thomas P. "American Gothic: Poe and *An American Tragedy*," *American Literature*, 49 (Jan. 1978), 515-32.
- _____. "Dreiser on Society and Literature: The San Francisco Exposition Interview," *American Literary Realism*, 11 (Autumn 1978), 284-94.
- _____. "Mark Twain and Theodore Dreiser: Two Boys Lost in a Cave," *Mark Twain Journal*, 19 (Summer 1978), 20-25.
- Rosenman, Mona G. "An American Tragedy: Constitutional Violations," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 9 (Spring 1978), 11-19.
- Scharnhorst, Gary. "A Possible Source for *Sister Carrie*:

Horatio Alger's *Helen Ford*," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 9
(Spring 1978), 1-4.

See, Fred G. "The Text as Mirror: 'Sister Carrie' and the
Lost Language of the Heart," *Criticism*, 20 (Spring 1978),
144-66.

Spindler, Michael. "Youth, Class, and Consumerism in Dreiser's
An American Tragedy," *Journal of American Studies*, 12
(April 1978), 63-79.

Stronks, James. "Supplements to the Standard Bibliographies of
Crane, Dreiser, Frederic, Fuller, Garland, London and
Norris," *American Literary Realism*, 11 (Spring 1978), 124-
33.

Tavernier-Courbin, Jacqueline. "Hurstwood Achieved: A Study
of Dreiser's Reluctant Art," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 9 (Fall
1978), 1-16.

Warren, Robert Penn. *Democracy and Poetry*. Cambridge, MA:
Harvard Univ. Press, 1975. Pp. 23-27.

III. REPRINTS OF EARLIER DREISER STUDIES

Rascoe, Burton. *Theodore Dreiser*. New York: Robert M.
McBride, 1925. Rpt. Philadelphia: R. West, 1978.

IV. ABSTRACTS OF DISSERTATIONS AND THESES ON AND INCLUDING DREISER

Chanda, Asoke Kumar. "From the Picaro to the Young Man from
the Provinces: The Theme of Social Climbing in European
and American Fiction," *DAI*, 39 (1978), 207A (Illinois).

Fienberg, Lorne Michael. "Changing Perspectives on the
Businessman in the American Novel, 1865-1914," *DAI*, 38
(1978), 4825A (U. Cal, Berkeley).

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Documentary Impulses in American
Literature: The Vicissitudes of a Creative Problem,"
DAI, 39 (1978), 1565A-1566A (Yale).

Patterson, Eric Haines. "The Most Stately Mansions: An
Analysis of the Social Functions of Domestic Architecture
Among the Affluent in America in the Later Nineteenth
Century and a Discussion of the Manner in Which Edith
Wharton, Henry Blake Fuller, and Theodore Dreiser Inter-
preted the Domestic Architecture of the Affluent as a
Social Artifact in Fiction," *DAI*, 39 (1978), 1680A-1681A

(Yale).

Wanless, James Michael. "Dreiser's Way with Words," *DAI*, 38
(1978), 6732A (Wayne State).