

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Spring 1982

DREISER'S DEBT TO HIS CONTEMPORARIES

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In late 1926, intrigued by the determinism of *An American Tragedy*, Russian critic Sergei Dinamov wrote Dreiser to ask if Stephen Crane or Frank Norris had inspired his fiction in any way. In his response, Dreiser began by challenging the entire question of literary influence.

To say that any writer is influenced or inspired by another is, I believe, hardly a conscious process. Certainly there are temperaments which think and see in compatible terms--with the same understanding and sympathy for life, and when two or more such temperaments set their thoughts on paper, people immediately suspect or imagine that one is influenced by the other. But in many cases it has happened that they were not even familiar with each other's work.¹

Certainly Dreiser was familiar with Stephen Crane's work and seemingly echoed it on occasion;² yet he ignored Dinamov's reference to Crane altogether and dismissed Norris by denying any knowledge of him or his work prior to the submission of *Sister Carrie* to Doubleday-Page and Company. "He was most enthusiastic about it [*Sister Carrie*]," Dreiser concluded, explaining his debt to Norris, "and during all the trouble that ensued from that connection, he stood steadfastly by me, so that I should say, in the strictest sense, he sponsored my

first work, rather than inspired it."³

This tendency to equivocate or bridle at questions concerning his possible debts to other writers was typical of Dreiser. Though he readily admitted his childhood enthusiasm for such writers as Dickens, Scott, Hawthorne, Irving and Poe and his later interest in Hardy, Tolstoy and Balzac,⁴ Dreiser habitually muddied the waters in regard to the works of American contemporaries and immediate predecessors, and even when he acknowledged having read such works, his dating tended to be so vague or inaccurate as to discourage speculations about possible literary influence.⁵ This tendency may have resulted in part from the numerous charges of plagiarism, often well substantiated ones,⁶ that Dreiser endured throughout his career. But more important, perhaps, was Dreiser's belief that great literature grew out of the author's own involvement with life, not his vicarious adventures in literature. As a twenty-two-year-old reporter for the *St. Louis Republic*, Dreiser wrote almost boastfully to a female friend that he was not an avid reader. "I prefer writing to reading," he asserted, "and would rather see for myself than hear or read all the knowledge of the world."⁷ Many years later, in his autobiography *Dawn* (1931), Dreiser reaffirmed this belief that in his case books had been, at best, secondary sources. "And as I grew, I began to note that personal observation and deduction were far more valuable to me than any book. And so I continue to think to this day, although I am by no means dismissing books as aids to my own observations"⁸ Because of this tendency to minimize his debt to other authors, critics have tended to see Dreiser as a complete literary pioneer struggling alone unaware of literary traditions and movements, in F. O. Matthiessen's words, "a primary example of the frequent American need to begin all over again from scratch."⁹

The aim of this essay is not to challenge that view of Dreiser as a pioneer or necessarily assess his literary indebtedness to other authors. Rather, its aim is to call attention to a journal that charts Dreiser's dependence on the writings of others during a very traumatic period in his life and occasionally records his immediate reaction to those works. As the daily entries of this journal indicate, Dreiser was neither ignorant of nor indifferent to the works of his contemporaries. On the contrary, he sought out the current literature to occupy him during a time of pain and frustration and to prepare him for the literary career he hoped someday to resume.

This journal, recently published in Dreiser's *American Diaries: 1902-1926*, dates from October 22, 1902, to February

17, 1903, when it breaks off in mid-sentence.¹⁰ During these months, Dreiser was living in Philadelphia, where he had placed himself under the care of Dr. Louis Adolphus Duhring, a noted dermatologist, in an effort to recover from a neurasthenic condition that had set in shortly after the publication of *Sister Carrie*. To support his wife and himself during this period of convalescence, Dreiser had hoped to complete *Jennie Gerhardt* and write some articles and short fiction for magazines. Almost every project, however, resulted in a new failure, dramatizing the severity of his condition and driving him deeper and deeper into the poverty and enervating gloom reflected in the February 3, 1903, entry: "I am alone. I am homesick. All the courage I have seems to have gone out of me and I sit in my chair brooding. True I have a novel [*Sister Carrie*] to cheer me, and I love to read, but I know it's only passing the time that ought to be given to something else." The days recorded in the Philadelphia journal were among the darkest of Dreiser's career.

At the outset, the journal was kept at the doctor's suggestion to chart sleeplessness, bodily irregularities, and responses to medication. However, as it progressed, Dreiser became increasingly introspective and preoccupied by his inability to write effectively. With depressing regularity, he analyzed the lack of progress on his "story," *Jennie Gerhardt*, and reported his attempts to discipline and revitalize his creativity. On November 10, for example, after a morning of futility, Dreiser lamented that he was "haunted" by a "disturbing sense of error." "My chief complaint at this time," he continued, "concerns a certain nervousness of temper, over-enthusiasm tending to mental wildness coupled with a permanent and sometimes noticeably disturbing form of brain ache. It seems to move about in the head like flashes of sheet lightning round a summer sky." Twelve days later his condition had seemingly worsened. "Either I am very much mistaken and am confusing physical opposition to labor with illness," he wrote, "or I am in a much depressed mental state. Going to work I do not get very far before I question the order and merit of what I am doing and find myself utterly confused as to what is best and interesting." By mid-November, he had seemingly abandoned his daily efforts to push forward with *Jennie Gerhardt* and had turned his attention to shorter pieces which required less discipline and tenacity. Even the thought of his novel, Dreiser recorded on November 25, seemed to weaken his "reasoning capacity" and plunge him into a state of confusion. The shorter pieces, however, were not the solution, for they too proved a monumental and often futile struggle. Until mid-January he tried to work almost daily at some form of literature, constantly lamenting his weariness, confusion and lack of inspiration; then he surrendered to the seemingly

inevitable and virtually ceased to write altogether.

While Dreiser continued to devote his efforts primarily to *Jennie Gerhardt*, reading was at best a casual recreation, usually restricted to Sundays, which were habitually his days of leisure. However, as his confidence waned, the writings of others became more and more the refuge to which he retreated. On November 20, after struggling four days on a four-hundred-word essay for Seymour Eaton of *Booklovers Magazine*, Dreiser made his first recorded visit to the Philadelphia public library and came away with *The Scenery of England and the Causes to Which It Is Due* (1902) by Sir John Lubbock, an author he had consulted almost three years earlier when researching "The Shining Slave Makers."¹¹ The next day, he spent the morning and part of the afternoon reading Lubbock but found himself "becoming nervous and apprehensive and so stopped to rest." His interest in natural science persisted, however, for he returned to *The Scenery of England* at intervals over the next few days and on November 28 paid another visit to the library, this time coming away with Lubbock's *Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870). This he read virtually all day on December 5 but experienced "no recrudescence of the literary spirit." The pain in his head, he complained at the time, had "continued so long and so regularly that I do not mind it much." But when he reported these symptoms to Dr. Duhring the following day, Dreiser was restricted to "light reading" and not a great deal of that.

During the next month, Dreiser made occasional references to reading but identified no specific titles. Then on January 4, he noted that he was reading James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* (1888) but categorized the experience as a dull day. Three days later, Dreiser returned to the library, where he browsed in *Abraham Lincoln* (1882) by John G. Nicolay. In his darker moods, Dreiser obviously identified with Lincoln, whose life he described on February 13 as "the story of that man of sorrows having much in it that reminds me of my own."

On January 17, Dreiser shifted his interest to contemporary fiction, drawing Harold Frederic's *March Hares* (1896) from the library and finishing it that same day. Thus began what he later acknowledged to be a concerted effort to educate himself about "current novels." Frederic's work must have made a favorable impression, for on January 19 Dreiser returned to the library and checked out *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) along with Henry Blake Fuller's *With the Procession* (1895). That afternoon he began *The Damnation of Theron Ware* but made no comment. Somewhat surprisingly, he was equally silent about his reaction to *With the Procession*. Ten years later, Dreiser would include it among the twelve American works of fiction he

admired,¹² and thirty years later, he would call it the first "purely American realistic novel."¹³ With his typical carelessness regarding dates, Dreiser wrote in 1932, "It is true that *With the Procession* by Henry Blake Fuller is the first piece of American realism I encountered. It must have been published in 1885 or 1886, because, if my recollection serves me well, it was in 1886 that I first saw notices of it and somewhat later I found a copy in the Chicago Library. . . . I hold the novel *With the Procession* in high esteem. It is one of the first and, even at this date, one of the best of examples of American realism."¹⁴ Since Dreiser was already in New York City by 1895, the year *With the Procession* was actually published, his reading on January 23, 1903, may well have been his first acquaintance with the novel. If so, despite his retrospective enthusiasm, he made no critical evaluation.

On January 26, Dreiser experienced the additional sorrow of putting his wife on a train bound for her home in Missouri, thereby accepting the economic necessity of struggling on alone. After her departure, he assuaged his loneliness and sense of loss by drawing William Dean Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and John Hay's *The Bread-winners* (1883) from the library. Later in his career, Dreiser would reject Howells "as too socially indifferent and worse, uninformed," a writer who "from a realistic standpoint" could be "unceremoniously dismissed."¹⁵ In 1902, however, at this low ebb physically and emotionally, Dreiser expressed a "spiritual affection" for Howells, whose work he felt demonstrated "the richest, most appealing flowering-out of sympathy, tenderness, uncertainty . . ."¹⁶ Eight months earlier, at the onset of his neurasthenic condition, Dreiser had written Howells to acknowledge the benefit he had received from Howells' poetry:

These poems, if you would be pleased to know, have been a source of never-failing delight to me and I have often turned to them, the very uncertainty of hope in them seeming to answer some need of fellowship when I can no longer feign to believe that life has either a purpose or a plan.¹⁷

In a similarly hopeless mood after his wife's departure, Dreiser began *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which he read during the following two days.

On January 29, apparently in need of some assurance, he took the completed chapters of *Jennie Gerhardt* to Joseph Horner Coates, the editor of *Era* magazine, who had promised to give the manuscript a critical reading. Then Dreiser returned "Silas" to the library and checked out Robert Grant's

Unleavened Bread (1900). The next two days he spent reading *The Bread-Winners*. Literature, he now confessed in his journal, had become an escape from reality. In the February 3 entry, Dreiser upbraided himself for his Hurstwood-like tendency to retreat to the security of his rocking chair, "a feeling of cowardly content holding me, as if here at least I was safe. Then I read, rocking and dreaming, the interesting life the novel pictured being a sort of a salve to my distress." Ashamed of his lethargy, he vowed thereafter to face life with "unfaltering faith."

As a demonstration of this faith in his future recovery, Dreiser began the February 4 entry with the assertion that since he could no longer write, he would spend the time improving his knowledge of current novels in anticipation of his own return to fiction writing. Then he turned his attention to *Unleavened Bread*, which inspired in him a renewed enthusiasm and confidence. ". . . I felt for a time as if much of my own ability and power had returned." After going out for a beer to lower the pitch of excitement created by *Unleavened Bread*, he returned to his room determined to resume his career. This impetus carried over into the next day, when Dreiser used Coates' "share" to increase the number of books he could draw from the library. That afternoon, he read Brand Whitlock's *The 13th District* (1902) "eagerly" to its conclusion. *The 13th District* would also later be included among the twelve American books Dreiser admired.¹⁸

This burst of activity was short-lived, however. The following day, February 6, he suffered a nervous collapse while attempting to write, leaving him so shaken that he could not even whet his razor. His momentary decision was to give up the struggle and follow his wife to Missouri. "All the horror of being alone and without work, without money and sick swept over me and I thought I should die," he wrote in his journal. "I was so homesick I could have cried . . . I must get something or do something for a change or I will utterly go mad." That night he slept with the light on.

Yet, despite this setback, he awoke the next morning feeling somewhat improved and continued his reading program, this time taking up Hamlin Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), which he reported reading with some interest. On February 8, he returned to his interest in Lincoln, spending the entire day reading the first volume of Ida Tarbell's *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1900) and finding himself "quite interested in it."

Two days later, Dreiser was further encouraged by a discussion with Coates, who had finished the *Jennie Gerhardt*

manuscript, finding it "in parts . . . very good." As Dreiser reported Coates' reaction on February 10:

It was mixed, he thought, and overwrought in parts, but when I told him the whole story, as I had originally conceived [sic] it, he was as moved as everyone else has been and told me it was fine. I could see by his interruptions though that he was even more wrought up than his words would indicate and when we parted for the night, it was with the assurance that he would give the mss some new thought and see if he could not suggest a way of improving it. "We will hear more of you yet," he exclaimed.

Dreiser's enthusiasm was somewhat dampened, however, by the stark awareness that he was down to his last ten cents. *Era* still owed him forty dollars for past contributions, but Coates informed him that the check would be delayed by clerical details. So Dreiser, who was now planning to return to New York, could do nothing but rock and read and wait.

That day and the next he read in Tarbell's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*; then on February 12, he began reading Fuller's *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893), which impressed him as "an interesting but rather unfinished book." His thoughts, however, were primarily on writing, the literary potential of his present struggle for survival beginning to dawn on him. Having been forced to walk the ten-mile round trip from his room to the *Era* office in order to save a nickel carfare, Dreiser was increasingly impressed by the tragic dimensions of his experience. "I came out [of his boarding house]," Dreiser recorded on February 13, "thinking how I would write all this. What a peculiar story my life would make if all were told" The next day, however, despite this momentary inspiration, he was still incapable of writing. "I have need of money, heaven knows," he wrote in his journal, "and yet I feel as if I cannot write. Lucidity of expression and consecutiveness of ideas is what is bothering me. I cannot write continuously. I lose the thread and forget."

Returning to *The Cliff-Dwellers* on February 15 while waiting for his money from Coates, Dreiser was still unimpressed. "No striking mental thoughts or feelings occurred to me," he recorded upon finishing the novel. That same day he finished Tarbell's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, which had a more profound effect. "Lincoln's life moved me deeply as any such tragedy as that always moves me," he noted. "Lincoln and Christ--somehow these two are naturally associated in my mind. They were both so kind, so tender, so true. Oh that we could all be great, noble and altogether lovely. It is not possible

that any but a few should be so, however" That night Dreiser slept fitfully, admittedly shaken by the tragedy of Lincoln's existence.

The next day, in preparation to leave Philadelphia, Dreiser returned *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* to the library; also, he returned Thomas Love Peacock's *Maid Marian* (1822), which Mrs. Dreiser had borrowed from a friend in the city. His confidence in immediate payment by Coates must not have been great, however, for he drew *The Life of Grant* (presumably the *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* [1886]) from the library. His reading or response to the latter book is not recorded, for that same day he received his check from *Era* and began to make plans for an immediate return to New York. The journal, in fact, breaks off in mid-sentence on February 17, but not without a note of triumph. "Much adversity has taught me not to despair," Dreiser concluded the February 16 entry. "I can still live. Though one has neither houses nor lands, nor affection nor companionship, he can still live. It isn't pleasant [sic] I'll admit but it can be done. How I am trying to tell you."

Many dark days still lay ahead before Dreiser would again publish a novel, well over eight years, in fact, but he had at least survived the sternest of tests in Philadelphia. And for this he owed a measure of gratitude to the contemporary writers whose works offered him both relief and inspiration during his darkest hours.

¹Robert H. Elias (ed.), *The Letters of Theodore Dreiser* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), II, 449-50.

²For a discussion of Dreiser's indebtedness to Stephen Crane, see Ellen Moers, *Two Dreisers* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), pp. 60-68.

³Elias (ed.), II, 450.

⁴Elias (ed.), I, 211-216. See also Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Young Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), pp. 38-39, 63-64.

⁵See Charles L. P. Silet, "Theodore Dreiser's Introduction to *McTeague*," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 8 (Spring 1977), 15-17; also see Dreiser's "The Great American Novel," *The American Spectator Yearbook*, ed. George Jean Nathan (New York: Stokes, 1934), p. 17.

⁶W. A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 314, 343-46.

⁷Richard W. Dowell, "'You Will Not Like Me, Im Sure': Dreiser to Miss Emma Rector, November 28, 1893, to April 4, 1894," *American Literary Realism*, 3 (Summer 1970), 267.

⁸Theodore Dreiser, *Dawn* (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), p. 589.

⁹F. O. Matthiessen, *Theodore Dreiser* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1951), p. 59. For an extended study of Dreiser's dependence on observations and instincts rather than literary influences, see Hakutani's *Young Dreiser*.

¹⁰See Thomas P. Riggio, James L. W. West III, and Neda Westlake (eds.), "Philadelphia, 1902-03," *American Diaries: 1902-1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 53-113.

¹¹Elias (ed.), I, 46.

¹²Elias (ed.), I, 121.

¹³"The Great American Novel," p. 17.

¹⁴Elias (ed.), II, 612.

¹⁵"The Great American Novel," p. 17.

¹⁶Moers, pp. 175-76.

¹⁷Moers, p. 175.

¹⁸Elias (ed.), I, 121.

TRAGIC AMERICA: DREISER'S AMERICAN COMMUNISM AND A GENERAL MOTORS EXECUTIVE

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One of Dreiser's least-examined works this year celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. *Tragic America* was published on December 30, 1931, so that for all practical purposes its distribution did not take place until early in 1932. Among all of Dreiser's works this one has seemed even to sympathetic critics one of the longest. To W. A. Swanberg, for example, *Tragic America* was "tossed ... together from scraps of material supplied by female assistants," replete with "sweeping generalities and gross inaccuracies." It is "the work of a bitter and uninformed man," whose "recipe for reform" is "unclear."¹

While it is quite true that Dreiser's examples are derivative and that not every one will stand scrutiny, there is a radical logic which organizes them and argues for a final truth even when the specific examples fail. That radical logic is explicitly that of the Communist Party. Early in 1932, just after the book's publication, Dreiser attempted to join the party, but was rejected by Earl Browder, who simply may have believed that Dreiser would not submit to party discipline.² But during the composition of *Tragic America*, he was drawing as close to organized dogma as he ever came. Throughout, the generalities are pointed rather than sweeping, the tone angry rather than bitter. The "recipe for reform," state capitalism conditioned by a kind of democratic socialism, is clear enough, particularly when set against its source, and was not supplied by a female assistant. For all its faults the book lacks neither passion nor power, and presents an assessment by a very American communist of the faults besetting the republic in the years following the Great Depression. I propose here a word about Dreiser's method and perspective, and then an examination of an important influence on a key section of the book.

No lover of discursive reasoning, Dreiser was content in *Tragic America* to list wrong after wrong, sure that these, in their sum total, would speak for themselves--particularly if given the right emphasis. Suspicious of the crash which

"carried so many to ruin,"³ Dreiser turned to what he took to be the forces still directing the nation, banks, railroads, the federal government, the Supreme Court, and finally that "scrap of paper" (154), the Constitution. Somewhat more soberly he then examined the social results these agencies brought about--corrupt labor unions, "capitalistic overproduction," the growth of "police power" and the consequent "abuse of the individual," the linking of church and charity to wealth, the growth of crime, the illusion of the ballot, and finally the destruction of American values. If the order seems somewhat rambling, it should be remembered that the book is composed largely of examples and is designed to proceed from observation, not argument. Even when the wrongs cited are inaccurate, the sometimes shrill, always passionate text demands justice for the poor, the exploited. The structure does not follow the simple narrative recounting of his autobiographies and travel books and rejects the passive nihilism of *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub*.

The observations are from the perspective of an American communist. In the first sentence of *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (1928), Dreiser had identified himself as "an incorrigible individualist--therefore opposed to Communism," but in a letter dated 14 March 1931 he wrote "quite flatly ... my solution for the difficulties of the world, and particularly those in America, is Communism."⁴ But *Dreiser Looks at Russia* is echoed frequently in *Tragic America*, and there is no real contradiction here. For Dreiser, Communism could not exist without the recognition of the individual. "I firmly believe," he wrote in the above-mentioned letter, "that since the cunning, greed, and vanity, etc. of the individual is the amazing and creative thing that it is today and, also, since there is so much of it, the only thing to do is to limit it in some drastic form, for you will never kill it" (*Letters*, II, 515). The identification and ultimately the containment, by organized direction, of the individual became one of the tenets of Dreiser's Communism, and also of *Tragic America*. Dreiser's view supported government not of, but for, the individual, and if it carried little weight in its day, when the power of the state was seen by the left as the determinant of the future, it perhaps has more interest today. But only about 40 of *Tragic America*'s 426 pages treat of remedy, and some of the ideas at first sight seem odd: in manufacture and sale Dreiser commends such methods as "the present trust method, since that has been proven efficient by capitalists.... Each industry should be organized as to section, with a centralized authority over all mills or mines or factories or farming areas growing particular crops." Farming in particular followed what Dreiser took to be the Russian method, but was to be carried on "in the manner of a corporation or a collective" (419). The source for these injunctions, however, is to be found in a book published

by the President of General Motors Overseas, James D. Mooney (1884-1957).

It was probably shortly before April, 1929--the date is suggested by some signed volumes which have recently come to light--that Dreiser met Mooney, under circumstances which are unknown. Dreiser came to know Mooney chiefly as a financier (in later years Mooney also acted as a confidential diplomat), and as the author of an original and compelling book, *Onward Industry!*, which was published in 1931.⁵ That the relationship was as warm as Dreiser's ever were is suggested not only by the fact that Dreiser read an advance copy of *Onward Industry!*, but also by his appointment of Mooney to a committee charged with examining Paramount Pictures' adaptation of *An American Tragedy*. About the same time Helen Dreiser recalls visits from "the James D. Mooneys."⁶ Late in 1932 Dreiser arranged for Mooney to contribute to the *Spectator*, and in an extraordinary letter to Mooney he declared, "The fact is that you and I, intellectually and economically, are not a sixteenth of an inch apart" (*Letters*, II, 618). In July 1935, Dreiser inscribed a copy of *Moods* for Mooney.

But the most important aspect of the relationship was the use Dreiser made of *Onward Industry!* in *Tragic America*. The most direct citation comes in Chapter 22, "Suggestions Towards a New Statecraft," which deals with the remedies to the social ills Dreiser has spent over 400 pages describing. It is not without irony that it was to a book written by an executive of General Motors that Dreiser turned in seeking to redress the evident inequalities before him, and it was no doubt because he understood the incongruity of his choice that he did not identify the work even when he praised it. But praise it he did, in what must have seemed to him a relatively innocuous context, the fall of the Roman empire. Turning directly to *Onward Industry!*, Dreiser wrote:

What happened to Rome was this: though the average university research worker is sure that the Huns and the Goths or the weak-minded emperors caused the downfall of Rome, an intensive scholarly study has disclosed that many of the colonies, once fruitful, finally failed and disappeared, not because of Goths or Huns or any other invading tribe or body but because of starvation due to grain taxes and money extorted from them by Rome. And America ... may, and I feel reasonably sure will (unless a great intellectual light very presently illuminates it) meet with a like decay. (410)

Although Mooney's analysis is more complex than Dreiser's, there is no doubt that Dreiser's source was *Onward Industry!*, in

which Mooney had concluded:

To the Roman ruler they [industries] simply offered another field for taxation....At no time in Roman history, however, was industry strong enough to share the burden of taxation with agriculture, and agriculture could not carry the burden alone...This process could have only one end. *Taxed out of existence* makes a fitting epitaph for the Roman world. (138-39)

The "intensive scholarly study" was Mooney's, which had treated the invasions of Huns, Goths, and others as having "the character of peaceful settlements The causes of Rome's fall were wholly internal" (134-35). In spite of the remoteness of the allusion, this was in some ways an extraordinary point for Dreiser to concede, hardly a Marxian interpretation of the end of the Roman empire. But the sympathy with the individual against the state he must have found attractive, and by emphasizing that Rome had exploited the provinces, which Dreiser seems to have understood to have been conquered countries, he could legitimately sympathize, if abstractly, with the plight of the vanquished and represent the self-destructive forces of imperialism as responsible for Rome's decline.

And yet in defining the problems besetting 30's America, Mooney and Dreiser could hardly have been further apart. In treating industry, for example, Mooney had argued that hierarchical organization ruled men by leadership, delegation, and function definition, this last stating that sub-definition identifies specific tasks for various designated subordinates (31-44). Applied to industry this meant for Mooney that industrial organization was an extension of human ingenuity and basic drives--man the fire-producer and man the tool-maker were the ancestors of the captains of industry (343). Formed by commerce, banking and capital, modern industry had created what Mooney, from the depths of the 1929 depression, called "The New Industrial Day" (394), an order whose roots were in the eighteenth century. In it, psychological and moral forces worked together to create "a just balance between work and leisure" (450) and "the more constructive type of labor union" (481). The two "cardinal principles" which emerged, Mooney argued, were that "the interests of the employer and worker are mutual," and that all work "constitutes a social service" (482).

Against this progressive optimism, Dreiser argued the case for labor. For him, the corporation exists to exploit, not to fulfill. The Supreme Court Dreiser took as an example of men who had come from industry and exploited those beneath them. There was not so much the suggestion of historical inevitabil-

ity in his analysis as there was of the specific deeds of specific men--the individual again. *Pace*, Marx, and *pace* Mooney too. This is the way of the world.

Chapter 13, "The Abuse of the Individual," is the center of Dreiser's attack. In it, "corporate control" (227) emerges as the villain, standing against individual rights. Earlier Dreiser had argued that even the labor unions, "leaving the general mass of workers helpless, cater to the corporations" (181), but here his sympathy is with the workers themselves. Some of Dreiser's concerns, such as "rate robbery" (245), may now seem dated, but most will not, and many of the assertions--"Judges obtain their seats by bribery or corporation favor" (228)--earned him no friends. The concern for the individual is deep, and makes no apology to collective individualism, though it remains aware of some mutual obligations. *Tragic America* is an American tract of the first order; its logic would bewilder a European communist.

It was only when Dreiser turned from his radical critique of America to an analysis of remedy in chapter 22, "Suggestions Towards a New Statecraft," that he faced the difficulties of actually remaking the society whose wrongs he had detailed. Here he drew on his own experiences in Russia, on *Dreiser Looks at Russia*, and on Mooney's *Onward Industry!*⁸ Mooney's argument found a more than nominal place for individual initiative and social cooperation in a highly organized system, a mixture which presented Dreiser with the synthesis he had been seeking, and one which might actually work. He grasped the solution with both hands, and asserted, with Mooney, that man's natural drives could create a new order based on individual drive and mutual responsibility. Mooney believed hierarchies were natural to man and recurred throughout history. Dreiser was willing to agree.⁹

It is intriguing to speculate that Dreiser may even have had Mooney in mind for a high position in his new order when he wrote that the new government would be well advised to show concern for "the personal welfare of such earnest individualists who under the present capitalistic systems have shown constructive if not always equitable intent" (418). With the change of a sixteenth of an inch, Dreiser believed, Mooney's America could be his, too. Together they would preserve those individual rights so dear to Dreiser, and yet also bring about an organized measure of social justice, which capitalism had denied. What is significant about *Tragic America* is the way it addresses the pressing questions of exploitation and democratic subversion which the depression had exposed, and looks beyond the easy and current solution of state control to the problems which that control would itself create--a denial of

individual liberty which was itself an abrogation of basic freedom. If Dreiser's own solution, which carries with it more than a little repression, seems itself unsatisfactory, that may be because it is not a problem which admits of easy solution, and we should perhaps be more impressed by the seriousness and tenacity of Dreiser's address, and by his concern with the state of things around him, than by the finality of the suggestions he evolved.

In its general argument, but also in some of its particulars, *Tragic America* still has much to recommend it. Against the influence of the group it argues the prerogative of the individual. Against state and corporation it opposes a kind of modified democratic socialism, where state capitalism, though absolute, is conditioned by a regard for the individual. Thus the book is in the end less a litany of past wrongs than a plea for joint action, at once in sympathy with, and suspicious of, the power of the state, and influenced throughout by a uniquely American regard for the individual.

NOTES

¹W. A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 391-2.

²Swanberg, p. 393. The rejection of Dreiser at the height of his fame remains curious. It may have been based upon a reading of *Tragic America*, and perhaps too of *Dreiser Looks at Russia*, but it also is possible the rejection was influenced by factors yet unknown.

³*Tragic America* (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), p. 37. Quotations from this source will hereafter be cited in the text.

⁴*Letters of Theodore Dreiser, A Selection*, ed. Robert H. Elias (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), II, 513. Dreiser's correspondent in the letters cited in this article was James D. Mooney, and the letter of 14 March 1931 has particular relevance for a study of *Tragic America*. Hereafter quotations from this source will be cited in the text as *Letters*.

⁵The book's full title is *Onward Industry! The Principles of Organization and Their Significance to Modern Industry* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1931). The first edition, which lists twenty-one persons who received preliminary copies, including "Theodore Dreiser, author and playwright, New York" (p. x), names as its authors James D. Mooney and Alan C. Reiley, but Reiley's name was dropped in all editions subsequent to

1947, when the work was reprinted under its subtitle alone, and without the Acknowledgment which included Dreiser's name. There is a short biography and appreciation of Mooney, "Famous Firsts of Management IV: Drawing the Rules from History," in *Business Week*, 3 August 1963, pp. 46 and 51. In 1931 Mooney also published *Wages and the Road Ahead*, a book which lacked the scope and imagination of *Onward Industry!*. Quotations from *Onward Industry!* will hereafter be cited in the text.

⁶Mooney's membership on the Paramount Pictures Committee is reported in Swanberg, p. 376; Helen Dreiser's recollection is reported in *My Life With Dreiser* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1951), p. 218.

⁷Dreiser's inscriptions to Mooney will be published in a later issue of the *DN*.

⁸The charge that Communism worked against the individual in practice was one Dreiser made frequently in *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1928); see especially pp. 126-29 and 247 ff. Dreiser clearly endorsed much of what he saw in Russia, but was by no means uncritical, and from the perspective of *Tragic America* it is clear that his criticism of the power the state held over the individual was not random, but was aimed at what he believed to be a central and important weakness of a philosophical and political system he greatly esteemed.

⁹One hierarchy Dreiser declined absolutely to affirm was that of the Roman Catholic church, whose money and influence he feared (247 ff.), though for a better informed exposition of the church in this period see David J. O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform, the New Deal Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968). Even here though Dreiser's real attack is upon "religion in its present sectarian and dogmatic form" (276), and makes ample allowance for his continued interest in the spirit.

REVIEWS

DREISER'S DIARIES

American Diaries 1902-1926, by Thomas Riggio, James L. W. West III, and Neda Westlake. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, xi & 471 pp. \$28.50.

Dreiser in *Newspaper Days* recalled that as a youth in Chicago he was constantly saying to himself, "No common man am I." Certainly any reader of the *American Diaries* will be inclined to agree with this self-assessment, for the Dreiser who emerges from those indiscriminate and often intensely personal entries is anything but a common man. Rather, he seems by turns many highly uncommon men--sometimes admirable, occasionally outrageous, frequently boorish and insensitive, but never dull. During the twenty-four years covered intermittently by the diaries, Dreiser appears in such roles as the disconsolate neurasthenic struggling to save his career and marriage, the inveterate pinchpenny denouncing greed in others while he grudgingly records each minor expenditure, the indefatigable author jumping from manuscript to manuscript as the market and his inspiration dictate, the equally indefatigable lover demanding fidelity from his women while jumping from bed to bed as his desires and need for editorial assistance dictate, the tireless traveler alternately awed by natural beauty and cynical about the ugliness and crassness of man's creations, and incidentally the intellectual frustrated and bewildered by the problems of automobile travel. Certainly the reader of the *American Diaries* will better appreciate the consternation of Swanberg, who after trying for 524 pages threw up his hands over the impossibility of accounting for Dreiser.

Of the seven diaries published in this volume, two, "Home to Indiana, 1919" and "A Trip to the Jersey Shore, 1919," are slight and of marginal interest. The remaining five, however, are substantive enough to have narrative interest and great biographical significance.

"Philadelphia, 1902-03" is the most poignant, as it narrates Dreiser's battle with a neurasthenic condition that had robbed him of his ability to finish *Jennie Gerhardt* and had

reduced him to poverty. Apparently begun at the suggestion of a physician, this journal is at the outset primarily an analysis of symptoms and responses to medication. As he continued, however, Dreiser increasingly used this diary to record his loneliness, poverty, inertia and occasional moments of resolve. (For a fuller description of this diary, see "Dreiser's Debt to His Contemporaries," pp. 1-9.)

"Savannah and the South, 1916" grew out of Dreiser's decision to leave New York during the winter of 1916 so that he could be alone to work on *A Hoosier Holiday* and reflect on his deteriorating relationship with Kirah Markham. The ocean cruise to Savannah obviously stimulated Dreiser, for the opening pages of this journal are filled with poetic and philosophical flights about the sea, clouds, gulls and life moods. He also took a somewhat condescending pleasure in describing the pretensions of his fellow passengers and sketching shipboard vignettes. Upon reaching Savannah, however, his mood changed. He did not like the Southern temperament, as is obvious from the entry penned on January 30, the day after his arrival:

Character of Southerners--peaked, whiny, suspicious, jealous, touchy--an offensive company. All this is due to the perversion of naturalness following upon a promoralistic atmosphere. The result of sex suppression is jealousy, suspicion, envy, false witness, false pretense, a better than thou viewpoint. . . . It is a horrible case of race or national perversion which will end in disaster.

Entries thereafter are characterized by querulous complaints about illness, fatigue and loneliness, particularly for female companionship. His enthusiasm for the diary began to wane as the minutia of daily life occupied Dreiser's mind--the cost of items, the difficulty of finding suitable living accommodations, letters received and answered, the progress on *A Hoosier Holiday*. The Savannah journal then breaks off after February 17, though Dreiser remained there until early April.

The one diary which no longer exists in Dreiser's handwriting but rather as a typescript prepared by his sometime paramour and editorial assistant Estelle Kubitz is "Greenwich Village, 1917-18." As the title suggests, Dreiser in recording his meetings and conversations with many of the writers and artists of the time captured much of the intellectual ferment of that Bohemian environment. The real story of this journal, however, is his womanizing. Virtually every entry describes some subterfuge involved in his Houdini-like effort to maintain concurrent affairs with Estelle "Bert" Kubitz, Louise Campbell, Lillian Rosenthal and various others. The entry of May 27, 1917, is typical:

[Bert's] philandering talk makes me sore. I leave as she talks, half resolving to break with her. . . . All my love affairs these days are so casual. . . . At 4:30 Lill calls up. Wants to come down. Does so, 4:45. Lies in my arms a while in big chair. . . . Tell her I'm going to Louis Wilkinson's for dinner, when as a matter of fact I am going to Bert's. Have promised to be there at 7, but have to come home to get a bag to take to P. R. R. station so I can leave at 10:08 A. M. for Trenton to meet Louise. Expect Bert to stay all night here and won't be able to get out with bag in A. M. . . . Get off [street car] at 9th Street and walk through in hopes of possibly encountering Margaret Mower who lives in this street.

Dreiser's mood during this period was ambivalent. He was obviously pleased that so many women were drawn to him but also feared that excessive sexual activity would prove harmful. "Feel that I must give up so much screwing or I will break down," he wrote on August 8, 1917. In addition, he was becoming increasingly concerned about his inability to maintain a lasting relationship. "I must be calloused," he recorded on June 6, 1917. "The love moods torture me at the moment, yet a little while later I forget them. And I believe it would almost kill me--be absolutely impossible for me to be faithful to one woman. At this date it would be almost the severest strain I have yet endured."

"Helen, Hollywood, and the *Tragedy*, 1919-1924," kept intermittently during Dreiser's first five years with Helen Richardson, traces that relationship from its satyric beginning, through the jealousies and suspicions engendered by Helen's movie success, to their first estrangement in 1924. Another side of Dreiser dramatized by this journal is what Helen in *My Life With Dreiser* termed his "poverty complex." The entries reveal a fear of spending that verged on paranoia as he became increasingly sensitive to his inability to support Helen in the manner she deserved. "She is too beautiful not to have a car & I resent our poverty," he wrote on April 18, 1920. Also, since his own work was going poorly, he felt upstaged and somewhat resentful of the attention Helen received. Overall, though he traveled extensively and enjoyed the company of George Sterling and George Douglas, the California years were unproductive and depressing, as suggested by Dreiser's last entry before returning to New York: "At the moment see no very clear way out of money troubles or that I am making any real artistic headway with work. The relentless push against the individual on and away into dissolution hangs heavy on me" (September 11, 1922).

"Motoring to Florida, 1925-26" reveals Dreiser at his most petulant. In early December 1925, just prior to the publica-

tion of *An American Tragedy*, he and Helen left for Florida, where he hoped to rest and escape the reactions to his novel; however, the pleasures on this seven-week trip were few. In fact, the daily entries read like a litany of miseries: constant bickering with Helen, bad weather, repeated problems with the automobile, lost luggage, and expensive but unsatisfactory living accommodations. "Travel with rain & car trouble & a lost bag is not so much," he lamented on December 30. He was equally depressed by the Florida scene, which struck him as crass and often fraudulent. "Beauty, age, romance made to order & sold at so much a lot. . . . This trip is boresome to me," he wrote upon arriving at Fort Lauderdale. Before the end of January, he and Helen had boarded the *Kroonland* to return to New York. "Wretched days with someone I really don't care to be with" was his capsule comment on this escape to Florida.

The editors of the *American Diaries* are to be commended. Historical editor Thomas Riggio has provided an informative introduction which focuses on the intellectual, psychological and sexual needs reflected in the diaries and demonstrates how these same needs ultimately inspired and/or shaped Dreiser's other literary projects. Also, faced with textual references to literally thousands of people, places and literary works, Riggio has been generally successful in documenting only those references that are meaningful and by-passing those which are obvious, self-evident in context or inconsequential. Textual editor James L. W. West III made the decision that since the diaries were private documents all misspellings and grammatical errors should stand uncorrected, unless they result in confusing passages. The product of this decision is a quite readable text that reflects Dreiser's casual approach to the diaries and many of his literary idiosyncrasies.

Overall, the *American Diaries, 1902-1926* is a valuable contribution to Dreiser scholarship, for the book makes a rich and interesting fund of autobiographical material easily accessible for the first time. As Riggio points out, even in the autobiographies, Dreiser was prone to don a mask; in the diaries, he did not. Thus, they bring us as close to the man as we are likely to get.

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