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DOUBLE QUOTES AND DOUBLE MEANINGS IN *JENNIE GERHARDT*

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Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* is structured around a series of deathbed scenes. There is the death of Jennie's mother, then of Old Gerhardt, then of little Vesta, and finally of Lester Kane. In each scene Jennie is deprived of a person dear to her, though in some of the scenes there are declarations and confessions by the dying person which help Jennie bear her loss. The most important of these scenes is the final one--Lester's death in a hotel room in Chicago. Letty Gerald, Lester's wife, is away in Europe. Lester therefore asks that Jennie, whom he has not seen in several years, come to him. She arrives and they exchange small talk; then the scene builds in intensity. Lester apologizes to Jennie for the way matters have turned out: "I haven't been satisfied with the way we parted," he tells her. "It wasn't the right thing, after all. I haven't been any happier. I'm sorry. I wish now, for my own peace of mind, that I hadn't done it."[1] A few lines later one comes upon the emotional high point of the novel--Lester's final and long-delayed declaration of love for Jennie. The passage is reproduced below exactly as it appeared in the Harpers 1911 first-edition

text:

> "Well, I've told you now, and I feel better. You're a good woman, Jennie, and you're kind to come to me this way." I loved you. I love you now. I want to tell you that. It seems strange, but you're the only woman I ever did love truly. We should never have parted.
>
> Jennie caught her breath. It was the one thing she had waited for all these years--this testimony. It was the one thing that could make everything right--this confession of spiritual if not material union. Now she could live happily. Now die so. "Oh, Lester," she exclaimed with a sob, and pressed his hand. He returned the pressure. There was a little silence. Then he spoke again.
>
> "How are the two orphans?" he asked. (422-23)

The careful reader will have noted that there is something wrong. In the Harpers text; the double quotation marks follow the word *way*. All that comes after--Lester's moving confession of love and regret--is outside the quotation marks. Strictly speaking, he does not utter these words.

Certainly one does not wish to make more of a single punctuation mark than it is reasonable to make. Probably this is only a tiny soiled fish swimming about in this particular textual ocean. But the error, if error it is, comes at a crucial point in the narrative. Does Lester really tell Jennie that he loves her, or is his speech something she imagines, something uttered by a voice within her own mind, a voice which tells her what she wants to hear at this particular moment?

One hopes that this is not the case, that Dreiser has not undercut an emotionally important moment near the end of this book by the kind of irony that only a proofreader might notice. But hoping is not enough: one must investigate the composition of *Jennie Gerhardt* in an effort to reconstruct the history of this particular passage, for only by doing so can one be satisfied, at least in part, about the proper punctuation of the passage.

Dreiser began composing *Jennie Gerhardt* on 6 January 1901 and made a strong start over the next few months, producing over forty chapters before deciding that he had made an error in his conception of Jennie's character. He put aside all he had written after Chaptev XV and rewrote from that point on to a new Chapter XXX. He had a typescript prepared of these thirty chapters, revised that typescript with his wife's help, and had a clean typescript made, probably to show to

publishers. These two partial typescripts, and the holograph drafts that preceded them, survive today in the Dreiser Collection at the Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania.

The next portion of the story is familiar. In 1902 Dreiser began to suffer from neurasthenia. He signed a contract for *Jennie Gerhardt* with the J. F. Taylor Company, a New York publishing house, and Taylor provided advances to Dreiser in 1902-03 totalling some $750, but Dreiser was unable to push his manuscript ahead--indeed, was unable to do sustained literary work of any kind. Dreiser eventually recovered from his nervous troubles and re-entered the world of journalism early in 1904. He rose to the position of editor-in-chief of Butterick Publications, but his duties there prevented him from returning to his novel.

Dreiser may have worked on *Jennie Gerhardt* briefly in 1908, but it was not until 1910, after he had lost his job at Butterick, that he resumed serious labor on the novel. He finished it during the last three months of 1910, had this version completely retyped, in ribbon and carbon copies, and showed it to several friends whose literary judgment he trusted. Partly because of their suggestions, and partly because of his own second thoughts, he rewrote the ending of the novel at this point. The first complete version of *Jennie Gerhardt* had a conclusion different from the one found in the first edition. Lester defied his wealthy family, ignored his material interests, and married Jennie. In the new conclusion, however, Lester knuckles under to his family, severs his relationship with Jennie, and eventually marries Letty Gerald.

In composing this new conclusion, Dreiser inscribed fresh holograph drafts of the final chapters of the book, had these new chapters typed in ribbon and carbon copies, and grafted these new sections onto the earlier typed chapters. The ribbon copy of this composite typescript went to Harper & Brothers; the carbon went to England for consideration by British publishers. This carbon came back to Dreiser, was sent to H. L. Mencken for an opinion, and was again returned to Dreiser. Its travels thereafter are obscure, but it eventually came to rest in the Barrett Collection at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia. It is an important document for our purposes here, since it is now the only complete pre-publication typescript of *Jennie Gerhardt* extant.

The ribbon copy at Harpers was revised and cut by editor Ripley Hitchcock and his assistants. So extensive were their alterations that a fresh typescript had to be prepared for the

lot better satisfied as it is. It's been hard but, dear, everything is hard at times." She paused.

"No," he said. "It wasn't right. The thing wasn't worked out right from the start but that wasn't your fault. I'm sorry. I wanted to tell you that. I'm glad I'm here to do it."

"Don't talk that way, Lester, - please don't," she pleaded. "It's all right. You needn't be sorry. There's nothing to be sorry for. You have always been so good to me. Why, when I think -" she stopped, for it was hard for her to speak. She was choking with affection and sympathy. She pressed his hands. She was recalling the house he took for her family in Cleveland, the manner in which he had let Gerhardt come, the money he had supplied her since.

Lester finally spoke.

"Well, I've told you now and I feel better. You're a good woman, Jennie, and you're kind to come to me this way."

She could see that sickness had taken away some of the natural phlegmatic sternness of his character.

"How are the two orphans?" he added.

"Oh, they're ~~stars~~ lovely," she ~~described~~ replied, entering upon an account of their charms, abilities and idiosyncrasies. He listened comfortably for her voice was soothing to him. Her whole personality was grateful to him. When it came time for her to go he seemed interested to keep her.

Theodore Dreiser Collection (#6220)
Barrett Library
University of Virginia Library

She was choking with affection and

~~sympathy~~: [illegible]

"Well, I've told you now and I feel better. You're a good woman; and your kind to come this way."

She could see that sickness had taken away some of the natural phlegmatic sternness of his character.

"How are the two orphans?" he added.

"Oh, they're fine", she described, entering upon an account of their charms, abilities and idiosyncrasies. He listened comfortably for her voice was soothing to him. Her whole

The Theodore Dreiser Collection
Department of Special Collections
Van Pelt Library
University of Pennsylvania

compositor of the first edition. Hitchcock returned a portion of the revised and cut ribbon copy to Dreiser on 1 June 1911, but no part of this ribbon copy appears to survive today.[2] The fresh typescript prepared by Harpers and used by the compositor has also not survived, and there are no galleys or page proofs extant.

To trace the history of the quotation marks we must therefore rely on limited evidence. Fortunately there is enough to support a working hypothesis. As it turns out, there is a fairly simple explanation for the misplaced quotation marks: Dreiser added Lester's declaration of love, and Jennie's reaction, in a comparatively late stage of revision, and either he (or a typist or compositor) forgot to move the quotation marks to include the new words.

In the holograph draft of the passage, Lester avoids the subject of love. He does apologize to Jennie for mishandling their relationship, but he says nothing more. At the point of the crux in the first edition, the manuscript reads as follows:

> "Well, I've told you now and I feel better. Your a good woman and your kind to come this way."
> She could see that sickness had taken away some of the natural phlegmatic sternness of his character.
> "How are the two orphans?" he added.

This passage does not appear in either of the typescripts at the University of Pennsylvania; they go only through Chapter XXX, and Lester's death occurs in Chapter LXI of the published book. The passage does appear, however, in the Barrett typescript at Virginia. There it is virtually identical to the manuscript text (which was touched up slightly by Dreiser's wife). Lester still apologizes to Jennie, but he makes no declaration of love, and there is no outpouring of gratitude from her.

The expansion of Lester's speech, and the addition of Jennie's reaction to his words, must therefore have been executed by Dreiser either on the original ribbon copy of the typescript, or on the Harpers typescript, or in galleys, or in page proof. Although none of these forms of the text survives, one can reconstruct what probably happened. Dreiser added the new lines in a margin, or perhaps (given the length of the addition) on a separate sheet of paper. He must have written a note, drawn an arrow, or put in a caret to indicate where the new passage should go, but he apparently neglected to delete the quotation marks after *way* and to add new ones after *parted*. The typist and/or compositor simply followed

directions, and no one caught the error in a subsequent proofing.

Is there a chance, one wonders, that the passage was added by someone other than Dreiser--perhaps by an editor at Harper & Brothers who wanted Lester finally to overcome his scruples and declare his love for Jennie? Certainly that is a possibility. Preliminary comparisons of the Barrett typescript with the first edition indicate that the Harpers editors were not reluctant to alter and augment Dreiser's text. It seems unlikely, however, that they are responsible for this particular change. The paragraph containing Jennie's reaction--from "Jennie caught her breath." to "Then he spoke again."--is written in prose characteristic of Dreiser. The dashes, the halting diction, the wording of "this confession of spiritual if not material union," the phrase "a little silence"--all seem of a piece with Dreiser's style during this period. One must believe that these words are Dreiser's and, by extension, that the confession of love which precedes them was written by him as well.

What of the subsequent textual history of this mark of punctuation? Was it ever corrected? A check of subsequent impressions from the plates of the Harpers 1911 edition shows that no change was ever made. In reprintings issued by Harpers, A. L. Burt, Boni & Liveright, Doubleday, Simon and Schuster, and World, the quotation marks invariably follow *way*. The British edition, published by Constable in 1928, repeats the error, and it is still present in the photo-offset replating of this text issued by Schocken books in 1982. Only the Dell paperback edition, published in November 1963, corrects the error; there the quotation marks are moved to include Lester's entire speech. Alfred Kazin, who wrote an introduction for the Dell edition, has informed me that he was not consulted about the reading and that it was probably corrected by a Dell copy-editor.[3]

The most important thing about this crux is not the decision that faces an editor of a scholarly edition of *Jennie Gerhardt*. The likelihood is very strong that Dreiser added Lester's confession of love and Jennie's reaction to it in a late stage of revision, and that no one remembered to re-punctuate the passage. Dreiser probably did not have the reading corrected in the Harpers plates or in the British edition of 1928 because the error was never called to his attention. Perhaps no one ever noticed the mistake. It is quite easy to miss it when one reads the passage because one is so completely caught up in the drama and emotion of the scene. It would be more reassuring to an editor if other documentary evidence were extant, particularly if the stage of

the text in which Dreiser added the passage had survived. In the absence of such evidence one must rely, for the most part, on critical judgment. The evidence does seem to suggest, however, that this is no more than a typographical error. Lester, then, does utter his heartfelt words to Jennie; they are not a product of her imagination.

More important, however, is the realization that Dreiser did not add this important passage until very late in the compositional process. It is interesting to consider what *Jennie Gerhardt* would have been like had he not added it. In the manuscript and in the Barrett typescript, the effect of Lester's deathbed scene is different from its effect in the first edition. In the manuscript and typescript, Lester and Jennie smile and make small talk; then he offers her a straightforward apology for mishandling their earlier relationship. The scene appears to be building to a climax, but Lester does not seem to know what to say. The moment passes, and talk turns to the two orphans who are under Jennie's care. Her voice soothes Lester, and he persuades her not to leave. She stays nearby in the hotel until he dies. The chapter ends, and the reader feels disappointed.

Yet is such a flat scene not more typically Dreiserian than the powerful but sentimental scene created by the addition of Lester's declaration of love? Great moments do come in life, moments in which past and present seem briefly to coalesce, but often the participants in such small dramas do not recognize the significance of these moments, and they pass. According to one's tastes, then, the unrevised scene might be considered more appropriate for this naturalistic novel, more nearly in line with the rest of its philosophical argument, than the revised scene.

Jennie Gerhardt is in part about such scenes as these, about their genuineness, their value in a system of human conduct. At several points in the novel, characters apologize for past behavior and make gestures toward reconciliation with other characters. Jennie, for example, attempts to apologize to her father in Chapter XIV for having had a child out of wedlock. Old Gerhardt grudgingly forgives her but pushes her away when she tries to be affectionate. "It had been a frigid meeting," comments Dreiser (117). Jennie is kind and generous to her father during the years that follow, and one senses that his opinion of her changes, but he never tells her that he forgives her. Indeed, Old Gerhardt does not come to a reconciliation with Jennie until he is literally at the point of death. His dying words are, "You've been good to me. You're a good woman" (346). With this she must be satisfied; it is all she will ever have from him.

In Chapter LX, the chapter immediately preceding the one in which Lester makes his deathbed confession of love to Jennie, there is another such scene. Robert Kane, from whom Lester has been estranged for some years over the matter of Jennie, asks that Lester meet him in Chicago. The ostensible purpose of the meeting is to discuss a business deal involving the Western Crucible Steel Company, a firm in which both Robert and Lester are major shareholders. Robert proposes that Lester acquire a block of stock which has lately come up for sale; then, if Lester will pool his voting power with Robert's, they can oust the firm's manager and take control of the business. It is an attractive proposition financially, but Lester realizes that Robert's real purpose is to effect a reconciliation. "This was the olive branch," thinks Lester, "the control of a property worth in the neighborhood of a million and a half" (410). It is typical of Robert, whose business ethics are less gentlemanly and humane than Lester's, to make the gesture in this way. Lester, to his credit, sees Robert's offer for what it is. "I don't want it," says Lester. "I'm rich enough anyhow" (411). Lester also rejects Robert's proposal for a full reconciliation. "Bygones are bygones," Lester says. "I'm perfectly willing to talk with you from time to time. That's all you want. This other thing is simply a sop with which to plaster an old wound" (411). One applauds Lester's forthright behavior. Conciliatory gestures, made years after the fact, are easy and inexpensive. Robert has had things his way; Lester and Jennie--especially Jennie--have suffered. Now Robert wants his past behavior to be forgiven, but Lester denies him that satisfaction, probably because he doubts Robert's sincerity.

By the same token, one must question the sincerity of Lester's dying declaration of love to Jennie in the chapter that follows. It is too easy for him to say these words to her. He has suffered, to be sure, but not nearly so deeply as she has. After he shed Jennie and married Letty Gerald, their society friends--in another variation of the pattern--quickly forgave him and welcomed him back to their circle. All past misdeeds were forgotten. He and Letty lived an easy, indolent existence, and he did not have to pay very heavily for his past offenses. Jennie, by contrast, will pay for the rest of her life.

Is it not more in character for Lester *not* to tell Jennie, on his deathbed, that he loves her? Surely he must know that such a confession will cost him little, that it is fundamentally an insincere thing to do. There is nothing he can say to her now which will make up for the years of embarrassment and shame he has brought her. Perhaps Lester recognizes this; perhaps it is why, in the unrevised text, he

does not tell Jennie that he loves her. In the revised text, though, he makes the gesture, and Jennie, to her credit, responds generously: "It was the one thing she had waited for all these years--this testimony. It was the one thing that could make everything right--this confession of spiritual if not material union. Now she could live happily. Now die so" (422-23). Perhaps Jennie too is caught up in the emotion of the moment. Perhaps, later, she will see that Lester's words were easy ones to utter. Deathbed declarations are cheap because one does not have to follow up on them.

Thus far I have argued in such a way as to cast doubt on the wisdom of Dreiser's decision to add Lester's declaration of love and Jennie's reaction to it. One can adopt another critical stance, however, and argue for Dreiser's additions as improvements, as parts of an overall design for the novel which he only fulfilled with this late revision. It may be that Dreiser wanted us, in this penultimate chapter of the book, to contrast Jennie with Lester. Perhaps we are meant to see Jennie's generous and selfless outpouring of gratitude, her ready acceptance of Lester's apology, against the background of Lester's refusal fully to forgive Robert in the previous chapter. Throughout this novel Jennie's instinctive, emotional approach to life and her sensitivity to the beauty and underlying pattern of nature are presented as alternatives to Lester's bleak mechanistic determinism. Lester's response to Robert's proposal is consistent with his fundamental skepticism and inertia; Jennie's response to Lester's confession is consistent with her fundamental largeness of temperament and spirit.

Such an interpretation is attractive, but the reasoning may be specious and circular. The pattern I have just sketched may be wholly adventitious--an accidental product of an impulsive last-minute addition by Dreiser, the consequences of which he did not fully foresee. My reasoning may fall into this pattern: I discern a pattern in the text; therefore Dreiser intended to create this pattern; therefore any revisions that he made which help to create this pattern must be his "active" or "final" or "best" intentions because they help to create the pattern I have discerned.[4]

This is why one must, in the end, fall back on the bits of evidence that do survive. Lester's confession and Jennie's reaction were added in a late stage of revision. The wording and style of the added sentences indicate that they were written by Dreiser. It is quite plausible to assume that Dreiser, or a typist or compositor, simply forgot to move the quotation marks to include Lester's new words. And it is unlikely that Dreiser meant to hang significant meaning on a

single set of quotation marks. He was not that type of writer; one does not find that kind of thing in his other books.

Unless other evidence surfaces, then, a scholarly editor should probably move the quotation marks to include all of Lester's words, not leave the marks where they are in the Harper edition. But that editor should also include the history of this crucial set of quotation marks in his apparatus, and he should encourage users of his edition to speculate about their proper placement in the text.

I do not wish to suggest that this crux is the most important textual discovery that is likely to emerge from the upcoming Pennsylvania Edition of *Jennie Gerhardt*. Almost surely there are more significant revelations in store. This crux, however, does give us an opportunity to see Dreiser at work on a crucial scene, and it prompts us to examine the implications of that scene more closely than we otherwise might. We come to understand the published form of the scene more fully by contrasting it with an earlier, less satisfying, but perhaps more realistic version of it.

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[1]Dreiser, *Jennie Gerhardt* (New York: Harper, 1911), 422. Subsequent quotations, cited parenthetically, are from this edition.

[2]Hitchcock to Dreiser, 1 June 1911, Dreiser Papers, Van Pelt Library.

[3]Kazin to West, 6 January 1984.

[4]For an elaboration of this line of thinking, see chapters 4 and 5 of Hershel Parker, *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1984).

DREISER: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENT, 1911

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On November 4, 1911, Dreiser placed at the top of a sheet of white writing paper what appears to be the beginning of a journal entry:

> Saturday Nov. 4th 1911
> Today, from the Knickerbocker Hotel I received the following note. "Where are you. I must see you at once. Write or phone me your address. G.R."

This was an instance of a ritual of personal notetaking that Dreiser had begun in Philadelphia in 1902 and would continue erratically into the late 1920s. Often what prompted such diary notes was the sense of a potential turning point at hand, the thought of what he calls in the following pages a "radical change" of life. The message from the English publisher Grant Richards excited Dreiser, who had only within the last year returned to writing fiction after nearly a decade of creative inactivity.

Dreiser knew that Richards, the distinguished publisher of George Bernard Shaw, A.E. Housman, and G.K. Chesterton, was an early admirer of *Sister Carrie*. Frank Norris had brought the book to his attention in 1901, and Richards had kept up with Dreiser's career in the intervening years. Though they had not met before, the two men had been corresponding since 1903. Richards knew as early as 1908 that Dreiser was trying to complete another novel, and he was eager to be Dreiser's publisher in England. On the day he received Richard's note, Dreiser stopped by the Knickerbocker Hotel and left him an inscribed copy of *Jennie Gerhardt*.[1] The following afternoon, on November 5, they met for the first time and their talk more than matched Dreiser's expectations.

Richards encouraged Dreiser, who by then had completed thirty-nine chapters of *The Financier*, to research Charles T. Yerkes's travels through Europe first hand, to follow Yerkes's

footsteps to all the famous European capitals.[2] Dreiser would be his houseguest in England and he would arrange to help finance the rest of Dreiser's first trip abroad. He bolstered up Dreiser's spirits still further, mentioning the chance of a Nobel Prize nomination, for which Richards would, as Dreiser later that week told Mencken, "organize the sentiment in England where he says I am a strong favorite."[3] All this plus the prospect of another book contract naturally energized Dreiser. On November 22, he and Richards boarded the *Mauretania* for the transatlantic trip to England. On November 25, while still on ship, Dreiser crossed out the initial diary entry and, on the same page, began to write a "record" of the nearly three weeks since his first meeting with Richards.

This is the occasion for the autobiographical fragment printed here for the first time. The manuscript of twenty-two holograph pages is in the Dreiser Collection of the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia.[4] It is listed as "Autobiographical Attack on Grant Richards," partly because in it Dreiser explores his feelings about the publisher. The title is not justified, however, since Dreiser has mainly nice things to say about Richards. The negative comments are not so much an "attack" on Richards as a catalogue of his aristocratic English traits, which Dreiser, along with Mencken and other contemporary heirs of 19th-century Young America sentiments, associated with British cultural dominance of American literature. Moreover, Dreiser was sensitive to what he felt was the publisher's class consciousness, and this influenced his elaborate portrait of Richards as "Barfleur" in *A Traveler at Forty*. Yet Dreiser did dedicate the book to Barfleur, and though he and Richards later had a falling-out over publication rights and something Dreiser wrote in the now lost manuscript of his book,[5] their relationship was friendly at this time.

Dreiser's comments on Richards are not, in fact, as interesting as the other associations he makes. The publisher's unexpected arrival struck Dreiser as another of those unaccountable events that mysteriously changed the course of his life. "The stars were propitious," he writes, though characteristically he dwells on the uncertainties of his future. "I felt curiously at this time as though I was on the edge of a great change."[6] The situation stimulated Dreiser to speculations that were becoming central to his conception of himself as a writer. Not surprisingly, he begins with reflections on the role of *Sister Carrie* in his career, particularly the history of its suppression as he had begun to formulate it. When he comes to assess his merits as a novelist and the forces that led him to his present juncture, his first impulse is to turn to Terre Haute and the

Indiana years. A brief passage contains the germ of an inquiry that, over the next decade, would result in the writing of large memoirs of those early years. Finally, Dreiser considers his role as a realist and, with a moving admixture of hope and bitterness, the reception of his brand of realism in America. All these somewhat rambling thoughts come together in what appears to have been the outpouring of a single writing session on November 25. Ending in mid-sentence, the document is a rough draft of ideas that he would later treat more fully. It offers, however, a glimpse of Dreiser's state of mind at an important time in his career.

* * *

To begin this record right I should say I was in an apartment at 3609 Broadway, that I was engaged in writing a novel,[7] one third of which was done. That I had just finished one other the previous spring & that it had been published by Harper & Brothers on the 19th of October.[8] I had been very uncertain as to its reception. Ten years before I had written a book "Sister Carrie" which the publisher--not the critics--pronounced immoral and which the said publisher, after he had printed a thousand copies, suppressed of his own accord.[9] G. R. had been an admirer of that book. He had refused to publish it in England at first, but after it had been published by another publisher[10] and hailed rather grandly by the English critics, he came to admire it very much. During the long ten years in which I was sick, was working for fifteen & eighteen dollars a week, was working for magazine publishers as managing editor & editor, he had written me an occasional letter. "What are you doing? Are you writing a new book? Will you let me see it?"

I was not. I was in no shape, mental or physical, to do it. Life was a tragedy to me. My life was slipping away. My one ambition was to write. And though by degrees I had climbed from $15.00 a week editing boys' weeklies for a certain publishing house to $7,500 a year editing seven magazines for another publishing house, I was still unhappy. I had always been looking forward to the time when I could stop editing and write again but I had been so long out of writing that I was afraid. Then came complications that altered my life radically.[11] I resigned my position, dug out my manuscript which I had begun ten years before just after I had finished "Sister Carrie" and began to try to finish it. I had decided to call it "Jennie Gerhardt" and when G.R. wrote me after a rather desolate winter of hard work, it was already on the market. The stars were propitious. The critics were publishing broadsides of approval. Magazines & newspapers were coveting my pictures. The New York newspapers like the

Sun, the Evening Post, the Times, etc, were interviewing me. I saw my name in large advertisements and to cap it all an English novelist of great repute[12] had just arrived and was stating in notable interviews that I was the leading literary figure of America. Think of it!

Did I believe it? I cannot say. I am too uncertain of myself. Life is too strange. The same crowd that will make a god of a man one day will make a fool of him the next. A bull, a snake, a dog and an ibis have by turns been worshipped as Gods. Do I think I am a great writer, an exceptional writer? I do not know. Time--perhaps a very little time--will decide that.

Anyhow comes this letter and since it resulted in another radical change for me, let me discuss my life quickly. My father was a woolen mill manager in his time. He came from Germany as an immigrant in 1844 and ran a woolen mill as a manager in Terre Haute, Indiana. I was born there. When I was about eleven years of age the family removed to Warsaw, Indiana where I staid until I was sixteen. I went to school there. I spent one year at the State University of Indiana. I went to Chicago afterward and was a hardware clerk, collector, driver.

When G.R. wrote I had suffered all I have said, done all I have said, witnessed all I have said. Then I called him up on the phone. He was not in. That same Saturday afternoon I called at his hotel, left him an inscribed copy of "Sister Carrie,"[13] congratulated him on his return to America, asked him to come up to breakfast the next morning which he agreed to do. From this the following peculiar events resulted.

Sunday Nov. 5th G.R. calls. Had got on wrong subway train and was late. Wanted to know what I was doing now. Had seen a full page picture of me in the Bookman while he was stopping with the publisher who had originally suppressed my book. Mr. G.R. as I think I have indicated is an Englishman--a publisher. He is what I would call rather distinguished looking. Many know him. He is nearly six feet tall, stocky, well set up, rosy, an inquiring, questioning gaze, a serene blue eye, a monacle, quite a grand air. His chief characteristic, I should say, which I have long noticed is not an uncommon trait in Englishmen, is a strong sense of individual and racial superiority. The rest of the world does not amount to much to G.R. The average man is either a fool, a knave, a dog or an inconsiderable quantity of something not to be bothered with. He takes things (nearly all things) with an air. "Oh, yes!" "You don't say?" "Dear me!" "Really" are some of his expressions. He usually begins with "I tell

you what we shall do," entirely irrespective of what you may be thinking of or wishing to do. He sweeps aside the ordinary objections of the individuals with whom he chooses to associate quite as one would sweep aside the whims of children.

"Isn't this quite hard on those who associate with him?"

It well may be.

"Doesn't it suggest a weakness in their character to be sculled about like this?"

It might.

"How about me."

I am a very peculiar person. I like being managed at times--only at times. Sometimes it is a great convenience as you might well imagine to have someone step forward and take from your weary shoulders the burden of responsibility. It is nice, as in this instance, to have in one and the same person a manager, an admirer, a reverent (as we say in America) fan. G.R. admires my work greatly. *At this time* he fancies I am a great writer. He likes my personality. Time will tell what becomes of all this. As for me I neither fancy nor predict. I do not know. I hope it lasts.

Do I like G.R.?

"Yes."

Do I admire him?

"Yes."

Is he very intellectual?

"Yes."

Is he artistic?

"Yes."

"Does he know the world."

"Oh quite."

Am I having a good time with him?

So far, very. (I am writing this in retrospect. Nov. 25th 1911--some three weeks after it all began.)

But to go on. This is still Sunday Nov. 5th 1911. Witness this scene. A lovely brown decorated apartment overlooking the Hudson at Broadway at 149th Street, New York. Me in a gray silk dressing [gown], look[ing] over my mss The Financier and Mrs. Dreiser superintending the maid who is getting breakfast. I have just four hundred [dollars] left to my name in this world. There's $244.44 due for insurance on my life Nov. 20th. There is $175 due on a note which completes the payment of two lots at Grand View On the Hudson, N.Y. Life was not only to become but to be very bad. It did not make any difference to the vast majority and I don't think it does to this day that at the top there are a large number of gentlemen and ladies who know all about life and because of this very fact they are at the top. The mass does not understand that. The mass as old brother Campanella[14] sang in 1568 "is a beast of muddy brain" and it hasn't the faintest inkling of what is going on at the top. I for one throw down the gauntlet to this point of view and to this mass--all and sundry, here and now, and declare that the best thing for all of us--each and every one according to our capacity--is more knowledge--lots of it--all the facts no less as fast as we can get them. I do not believe new facts of whatsoever character ever hurt--to the ultimate hurt of life--any single human being. Life is divided roughly--though never squarely--into the low and the high, the ignorant and the intelligent, the quick minded and the slow minded, the passionless and the passionate, and it is high time that we all know more of each other than we do.

There is great bother and to do as to whether this is really so or not but it is so, just the same. The newspapers are proving that by their widening circulations; the magazines are proving it; our book sales are proving it. People want to know about what? you ask. About life and sex and subtleties of mind, and differences in orders and stations and clothes and countries. We are actually beginning to want to know whether there is any such thing as sin or truth or revealed religion or anything else under the sense[s]. We--not the nine tailors of Tooley Street[15]--but the whole living & breathing mass of humanity, and it can easily [be] proved by the craze for clearer insight everywhere displayed.

And who [is] this who sets himself up to tell us what "we the people" want. Oh, just another plain mannered normal individual who has quite as much right to speak for the mass based on his personal observation as the president of this or the secretary of that, and sometimes I think in my simple

pride a sight more so. Anyhow I speak, and I am ready to contend with all and sundry on this point and many others. I love contention anyhow.

But to return to America and books. So we found ourselves and then "Sister Carrie" came out and to my astonishment I found myself the center of a storm of criticism and abuse as well as the head and front of a peculiar company of individuals who were determined to see to [it] that in [the] long run both I and my book--or perhaps I had better say my book only--had justice. They wrote me. They wrote Messrs. Doubleday & Page. I recall one perfectly delightful letter in which Christ and the ass that carried him into Jerusalem were referred to. I was praised to the skies by some critics. I was damned to the lowest depths of insanity by others. "A hack newspaper reporter" I recall one critic writing "who would be highly flattered to be called the Zola of America." I have never read a line of Zola, I am sorry to report. "A cheap sensationalist who seeks to make capital out of all the silly newspaper horrors of the time--the bread line, the East Side lodging house etc." Then there were those who stated publicly that it was "the best novel ever written in America"; "the first piece of American realism worthy of the name," "a great human document" etc. Do I believe all this? I don't know. "Did I, at the time." I'm quite sure I didn't. I was the most surprised man or boy--for I was a boy in mind, just the same--that you ever saw. Something prompted me while I was writing to write sincerely. I would come to strange, hard bitter sad facts in my story, for after all it was a story, and I would say shall I put that down and something within the very centre of my being would say "you must! you must! you dare not do otherwise." At times, sitting at my little dining table in the flat I then occupied in 102nd Street near Central Park West, New York, I felt very much like Martin Luther must have felt when he stood before the Diet of Worms. "Here I stand. Otherwise I cannot do. God help me."

Was I writing such a tremendous book? I scarcely think. Weren't there better, stronger, realistic books written before ever I began, in France, Russia, Germany, Spain, England. There were Nana, Anna Karenina, Fathers and Sons, Smoke, Crime and Punishment, Pere Goriot, Cousin Betty, Madame Bovary, Vanity Fair, Tom Jones, Don Quixote, Don Pablo di Segovia. I had not read them all--only a few. I have not yet read Nana, Vanity Fair, Don Quixote entirely nor Crime and Punishment, but I am going to. And I know what they are--their point. But I was in America then--and when one is in America, life--and particularly life in literature--looks very troublesome. We have a strange time-consciousness ~~of~~ [word illegible]. It is very anxious to see the great works of the world written

but it doesn't want Americans to write them. If any Englishmen or Frenchmen or Russians or Germans do so--fine! It will applaud heartily. If any American attempts to do so, there is a great hue and cry--a lifting of eyes--or there was at the time of which I am writing. Are we as bad as this? the cry is. Can this be America? This man is libelling us. Hence, therefore--if, and, but--all the silly little quibbles and arguments and sneers and so ons until one wonders whether he is living in a free intellectual realm or not.

In some respects America is so gauche--so raw as we phrase it. It reminds me sometimes of the traditional yokel who guffaws before a statue of the Venus of Milo. "Gee Whiz, look at that." But it's a great, big, wonderful, forceful nation just the same, and it's going to come out of its hearty yokel point of view and write and read books and paint and hang pictures which will take the world by storm. I believe in America. I believe in its rawness--its brute force. I feel--I know--it has a tremendous work to do. I wish sincerely I could help do it. But it suppressed my feeble little bit of realism in 1900 and it may suppress me some more in time to come--but it won't suppress all realism. It can't. And it [will] love its realists after a while as it now loves its patriots--Nathan Hale and Ulyssess S. Grant, and Abraham Lincoln, and it will have the same noble basis for doing so.

Well, that's pretty much of a flight isn't it, to be dated Nov.16 1911 but I'm not through yet. For on this date a strange thing happened. Here I was writing, owing $300 on an insurance policy which

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[1]The inscription reads: "To Grant Richards who would have been the publisher of this in England if it could possibly have been arranged. With the esteem and good will of Theodore Dreiser. N.Y. Nov. 4, 1911."

[2]It is not clear who suggested the idea first. In *A Traveler At Forty*, Dreiser gives the impression that the European tour was the publisher's idea, that Richards simply announced to Dreiser that he was to return to England with him and proceed from there to the Continent [see *A Traveler At Forty* (New York: the Century Co., 1923), p.5; Dorothy Dudley retells Dreiser's version of the story in *Forgotten Frontiers: Dreiser and the Land of the Free* (New York: Robert Haas, 1932), p.269]. Richards offers a more plausible story. Dreiser, he recalls, was brooding over *The Financier* when they met on November 5, and when Richards asked what the trouble was, Dreiser said: "Money--finance...Yerkes was a

millionaire. His playground was Europe and he worked there too. I can't go on with my man's story unless I go to Europe..." Richards responded to the plea by arranging for travel funds on advances from both the Century Company and Harpers [see Grant Richards, *Author Hunting by An Old Literary Sportsman* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1934), pp.176-81]. It should be noted that this was not the first time Richards heard about Dreiser's desire to visit Europe; it was a subject of their correspondence from as early as January of 1909.

[3]Dreiser to Mencken, 11 November 1911, in Thomas P. Riggio (ed.), *Dreiser-Mencken Letters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), I, 83.

[4]The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, who own the copyright, and the University of Virginia, the owner of the document, kindly gave their permissions to publish this material.

[5]Grant Richards, *Author Hunting by An Old Literary Sportsman*, 205. While Richards makes only a vague mention of "Something in his manuscript" as the cause of the hard feelings, their correspondence suggests a more obvious cause: Dreiser's unwillingness to honor a verbal agreement of 5 December 1911 that gave Richards the right to publish *The Financier* in England [Richards to Dreiser, 6 December 1911 (UP)].

[6]Dreiser, *A Traveler at Forty*, 5-6.

[7]*The Financier*.

[8]*Jennie Gerhardt*.

[9]Dreiser is referring to Frank N. Doubleday.

[10]William Heinemann

[11]Probably a reference to the romantic entanglement with Thelma Cudlipp which forced Dreiser to leave his editorial post at the Butterick Publishing Company.

[12]Arnold Bennett

[13]On Saturday November 4, Dreiser left a copy of *Jennie Gerhardt*, not *Sister Carrie*. He did give Richards a *Sister Carrie* when they met the following day.

[14]Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), Italian Dominican priest, philosopher and poet whose attacks upon established

authority had brought him into disfavor with the Catholic clergy. Dreiser gives Campanella's year of birth as the date of his quotation.

[15]Dreiser's reference is to the "three tailors of Tooley Street," Southwark, who in English lore were said to address a petition of grievances to the House of Commons, beginning "We, the people of England." Hence the "three tailors of Tooley Street," came to be used of any petty coterie that pretends to represent the will of the nation. Dreiser ups the number to nine tailors, probably confusing this saying with the English proverb, "it takes nine tailors to make a man."

[16]Dreiser crossed out the "4th" in the date.

THE REVISIONIST VIEWS OF SARAH SCHÄNÄB DREISER

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In recent years we have witnessed a large number of revisions, corrections and additions to Dreiser's autobiographical accounts of his early life, some of them quite sweeping. One of the most sweeping has been an entirely new view of the character of Dreiser's mother, Sarah Schanab Dreiser. Starting with the publication of Vera Dreiser's *My Uncle Theodore* in 1976, biographical treatments of Sarah Dreiser seem to have moved precipitously in the direction of denying Mrs. Dreiser much of the stability, even the saintly characteristics with which Dreiser had adorned his mother in *Dawn* and indeed all of his later writings and private references. According to this new view, Mrs. Dreiser has become a largely self-serving individual who used passive but seductive methods to manipulate her children, a woman who surreptitiously (if not overtly) turned her children against their father, who cruelly and wantonly broke up the family in moving to Sullivan when Dreiser was seven, leaving her older adolescent children in a parlous state, bringing about a virtual destruction of the Dreiser family unit.

Early biographical treatments of Dreiser, such as those by Elias and Swanberg, have largely followed Dreiser in their treatment of Sarah Dreiser, taking his evaluations of his mother largely at face value. In 1986, however, a new biographical work by Richard Lingeman, *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City, 1871-1907*, takes up the views of Dreiser's niece, although not particularly developing them further. Indeed one is not clear exactly how avidly Lingeman has adopted the new view. His own view of Dreiser is largely sociological and historical, and elsewhere he is not strongly tempted into realms of psychological theorizing, but in this case he seems to have accepted the Vera Dreiser views without much critical analysis. One may be led to suspect that he is bitten by the old scholar's bugaboo that every new interpreter must take up, or at least nod to, all of the reinterpretations which have appeared since the last scholarly treatment.

Nevertheless, in the early chapters of his biography, Lingeman seems to have fully endorsed Vera Dreiser's views of Mrs. Dreiser. He is directly quoting and underscoring these views when he writes:

> Sarah Dreiser conveyed to her children in a hundred subtle and not so subtle ways her sacrifices, even her martyrdom, for them; she manipulated their emotions in myriad ways. She had a "form of brooding affection which would not let her cease thinking of them wherever they were, day in and day out....Her thoughts, like bands or chains, were reaching out to them, binding them to her. They were bound to her by these psychic chains--as each confessed--always thinking of her or going back to her in thought and wondering how she was getting along." For all the miraculous healing power of her tenderness, her emotional claims could be exorbitant, for what greater power is there than sweet, sacrificial abnegation--the velvety hand that conceals "hooks of steel."[1]

Still following Vera Dreiser, Lingeman avers that Sarah Dreiser controlled her children through "charm and seductivity" and considered them nothing but "dissociated implements," which, stripped away from psychological jargon, means mere extensions of herself for personal use and (presumably) abuse. Most important of all, Lingeman quotes from Vera Dreiser: "I am convinced from the stories my father has told me (confirmed by Mame, Sylvia and Rome) that she was a sweet charming woman, and a passively controlling woman who unfortunately had a disturbing influence on most of her children." Thus Mrs. Dreiser passes imperceptively out of the realm of normal motherhood into the dark recesses of the psychopathological.

Now Mr. Lingeman in his biography does not develop these views, but merely repeats them during the course of his work. Constantly when speaking of Dreiser's relations with his mother, he brings up the "psychic chains," or Sarah's "manipulating ways," but he makes no attempt to explain the wider implications of these alleged psychological mechanisms. Are we to assume that without them Dreiser and his brothers and sisters would have grown to maturity as quite different people? Healthier, more normal, or what? Do these psychic chains explain Dreiser's later psychosomatic complaints? His varietism? Do they explain his genius as a novelist? Do they explain the genius of Paul Dresser as a writer of popular sentimental songs? (If so, perhaps we have some reason to be grateful to Mrs. Dreiser and her psychic chains.) In any case, from the various succeeding passages of Mr. Lingeman we do not know what this new view of Sarah Dreiser is purporting

to explain. Is it, indeed, intended as some kind of psychological explanation, or is it merely uninterpreted psychological theorizing?

Before attempting to answer those questions, it might be worthwhile to look more carefully at Vera Dreiser's handling of this issue, for being a professional psychologist she does make an attempt to explain a little more fully the implications for the Dreiser family of Sarah Dreiser's behavior. Besides the rather general charges already made, Vera makes several very specific charges against her grandmother which are certainly thought-provoking and worthy of attention. One is that Sarah exhibited highly destructive behavior when she broke the family in two parts and moved the younger children to Sullivan. One may well admit that this was either irrational or immature behavior (Dreiser agrees with this judgment at least in part), and one supposes that it is not unreasonable to suppose that the action was hurtful to some of the older adolescents, particularly the girls, Sylvia, Theresa and Emma, who were left behind with their father. Perhaps it was especially hurtful to Al Dreiser, a tender eleven at the time of the splitting of the family. In any case, Vera Dreiser complains that Sarah "literally dumped the remaining boy Al, on her sister. The result was a trauma of such proportions that he eventually became the 'lost sheep' of the family, disappearing entirely as time passed." "The story of Al is significantly poignant and tragic," she writes, "because he remained in the memory of both my Uncle Theo and my father as the most talented of the Dreisers as a child."[2]

But what can we assume from all of this? If the family had stayed together and Al had not been "dumped," had Al stayed "chained" to his mother, would he have become the greatest genius of the Dreiser family? The truth is no one knows and no one can say. We can't even say for sure that Al's disappearance was due to his being "dumped" upon Sarah Dreiser's sister. The fact that he later disappeared and made no contact with his family is not prima facie evidence of his tragic fate. The fact is, we don't know whether he suffered a tragic decline. He may well have lived out his days in a perfectly normal middle-class existence. There is no hard evidence to back up this kind of blue-sky theorizing.

There is one other interesting, and certainly reasonable-sounding hypothesis about the relationship between Dreiser and his mother. Vera Dreiser offers evidence that Theodore, more than any of the other children, formed an unhealthy and unnatural "fixation" on his mother. "Every normal little boy loves his mother in a *forbidden* way, but passes through this phase easily when other family relations are normal. In

Theo's case they were not." And here we are given an actual explanation of some of Dreiser's behavioral patterns in later life:

> In Theo's case, his mother's behavior did great damage to his masculinity. He was always with her, while some of her other children became physically disengaged. His identification was such that in later life he was in competition with women, resentful of them, disappointed in them while under the pretext of being in love with them. He was able to write identical love letters to two women at the same time. Yet he confessed to me that he did not think he had ever really been in love.[3]

The terminology and the concepts here may well smack of antiquarian Freudian notions to many modern psychologists, but that is beside the point. Dreiser's relationship with his mother may account for his later abnormal relationship with women. On the other hand, the behavior of the son is not our major concern. Our major concern is the alleged abnormal behavior of the mother. Was Mrs. Dreiser as cruelly self-serving and manipulative as the Vera Dreiser-Lingeman theory would have it? Well, maybe there will never be a definitive answer to the question, but I believe that the weight of evidence is against it.

Let us look for a moment at Dreiser's own assessment of his mother as it comes out in numerous passages in *Dawn, A Hoosier Holiday* and other writings. On one level, Dreiser's view of his mother does not differ markedly from that of the psychologizers. Dreiser, of course, admits the strong ties to his mother; he admits that he was a "mother's child," freely confesses to those psychic chains. Too, he readily admits to many defects in his mother's character. In *Dawn*, his description of her was quite subtle and detailed. She was, he said, a "strange, sweet, magnetic dreamy soul," but admittedly always somehow out of sync with the world around her. Springing from a simple but prosperous farm family that was honest, energetic, thrifty, practical, religious and moralistic, she herself, by a curious alchemy, had been composed along soft and romantic lines. Poorly educated, almost illiterate, unsophisticated in the ways of the world, she was nonetheless possessed of a great deal of force, charm and charisma. Dreiser liked to say that she was neither moral nor immoral, but beyond good and evil, beyond the corrupting powers of circumstance to drag her down. She was a woman "who did not know how life was organized; who was quick to forget the miseries of the past or contemplate the comforts of the present, or, those wanting, the possibilities of the future; who traveled romantically in a colorful and, to her, for all

its ills, a beautiful world."[4]

Dreiser freely admits that his mother's decision to move to Sullivan was irrational, not well thought out. Once again, he admits that his mother was not a practical woman, but rather a person who always moved on instinct and feeling. "What most likely controlled her," he thought, "was a vague thought concerning life anew," away from the shadow of her husband's business reverses, his psychic despair, his rigid Catholicism, his tendency to wallow in worn-out old world values. "Possibly the thought of escape was gripping her imagination--a new world, a new life--the tang of a little adventure for herself. Could she but escape, how pleasing to shape three young lives not as yet wholly colored by the gloom of failure!"[5] Perhaps the move to Sullivan was a big mistake; surely it was traumatic to the older children left behind in Terre Haute with their father; perhaps it was traumatic to the young ones as well since the Sullivan interlude was an economic disaster which in time exposed the younger children to the fullest terrors of poverty they would experience. On the other hand, there is no evidence that staying on in Terre Haute would have been any better. It is the kind of issue of which there is no easy settlement.

But returning to the personality of Sarah Dreiser, there seem to be two clear-cut views on the subject. There is Dreiser's view, that his mother was a dreamy, impractical, but loving and sacrificial person, always looking for ways to shelter and protect her children from adversity. There is the psychological hypothesis, on the other hand, that the surface appearance was merely an elaborate smoke screen covering up a personality that was self-serving and manipulating. It is a view of a woman who merely wanted to use her children as pawns in her own chess game.

Which view should be accepted? To support Dreiser we could perhaps point out that Dreiser's views were not very much different from those of other contemporary first-hand accounts. All of Sarah Dreiser's children were powerfully drawn to her; all seem to have avidly accepted the notion that she was a woman of high character, considerable imagination. And if Dreiser is alleged to have been deluded by his mother's self-serving nature through his extreme psychic dependence, there is the evidence of all the Dreiser children, many of whom (such as Rome) were clearly never manipulated by anybody. There is the testimony of Mame Dreiser, who in family reunions of later years frequently asserted that her mother was a "saint." And there are sufficient references from outside sources--neighbors in Warsaw and elsewhere--who would in no sense be tethered by psychic chains, yet recalled Mrs. Dreiser

as a woman of character and distinction, possessed of considerable force and substance.

As against the Vera Dreiser view we would have the following. It is based entirely on second-hand evidence. Vera Dreiser was born long after her grandmother died, and she had no personal knowledge of her. She claims to have evidence, through "family tradition," a laying on of hands so to speak, of information that corroborates her view, but all of this evidence is purely anecdotal, well selected to fit into the Procrustean bed of her hypothesis. She simply ignores all the evidence that might be put up on the other side. In any case, she offers no evidence that anyone in her family (including her father) would have given assent to her hypothesis, only evidence that they related some anecdotal fragments that can be used *post hoc* to bolster the "self-serving" or "binding mother" hypothesis. But the overwhelming weight of the anecdotal material emanating from people who actually knew Mrs. Dreiser does not support this hypothesis.

In rebuttal, of course, we might well expect Dr. Vera Dreiser to resort to the old argument from authority, namely that her devisings are those of the trained professional psychologist, that specialized training allows her to perceive chains, to hear the clanking of psychic mechanisms. Well, perhaps, but most biographers usually insist that explanations of human behavior be stated in the general human idiom and not the argot of some specialized discipline. And there is a more telling argument against the appeal to authority in cases of this sort. There is a tried and true principle in the philosophy of science that you can determine whether a particular statement or hypothesis is scientific or not by noting whether *any* evidence that could *possibly* be presented would refute that statement or hypothesis. In the case of the Vera Dreiser "diagnosis" of Sarah Dreiser, it is clear that no evidence that could be presented on the other side could be employed to refute the theory since one would be pushed further and further into the misty background with such assertions that only a trained psychologist knows these things, can follow all of the subterranean passages of the mind, so that whatever counter-evidence might be offered would be waved further and further away by the appeal to authority. But this very technique is thereby proof that Dr. Dreiser's theories do not hold water scientifically. It does not, of course, necessarily mean that her statements are "wrong," just that they do not belong to scientific discourse; they are simply oracular and cannot be used in an appeal to specialized or scientific authority.

But there is one more aspect to this whole matter of the

psychological indictment against Sarah Dreiser that has not yet been discussed--and it is perhaps the most important of all. The reason for discussing this whole issue in the first place is to try to find out what light it shines on the life or career of Theodore Dreiser. Thus far we have been working with a theory that goes something like this. Mrs. Dreiser's "unhealthy" relationship with her children was traumatic, psychologically damaging, and this accounts for the truancy of some of the boys (Rome, Al, perhaps, maybe even Paul), the sexual delinquency of the girls, let's say. It accounts, we are told, for Dreiser's inability to relate to women in normal loving ways, his sexual varietism, and perhaps other unpleasant personal traits as well. Let us assume this for the moment, although the historically minded biographer (and I would certainly include Mr. Lingeman here) might well be expected to point out that these phenomena can also be accounted for by reference to a congeries of interpersonal relations and events. The Dreiser family instability in the early years can be accounted for with equal ease by reference to unfavorable economic circumstances, a conflict between old and new world values, the ongoing conflict over religious values, the bleak educational outlook of the family members (especially hard on the girls at a time when lack of both education and social status condemned one to a life as a factory drudge (there were no jobs as executive secretaries or "consultants" for women in those days), or as a sexual opportunist. And there are plenty of other things which could also account for the early instability and vulnerability of the Dreiser family besides those dredged up in the Freudian approach.

Once again, though, let us assume that the Freudian (or variant-Freudian) analysis holds. What are we to assume? What are the ramifications and preconceptions of it? Here we get no answer from the various proponents. Let us suppose that Mrs. Dreiser was not a binding mother (I wonder, by the way, if we might exonerate her of a little guilt on the grounds that the binding mother had not yet been discovered and, in the 1870s there was no such thing as a book on child psychology), where does this lead us? What if she had not broken up the family and moved to Sullivan? What if she had stuck with the difficult circumstances in Terre Haute? Would things for the family have been much different? What are we to assume? That the various family members would have matured to a normal middle class existence as so many contented housewives, certified public accountants, store owners, mill managers? Or what? Well, if such answers seem absurd, one still waits for the answer that isn't absurd.

One can only speculate as to what we should assume about

the effects on Dreiser the artist of his mother's allegedly manipulating behavior. At one place in her book, Vera Dreiser writes that Sarah Dreiser "incorporated Theo into her system and he very nearly didn't get out. In fact, he probably didn't escape, but he was strong enough to survive in spite of her unconscious crippling influences."[6] What can we possibly make out of this strange pronunciamento? What are the presuppositions that stand behind it? Are we to assume that if Sarah Dreiser hadn't been a psychologically crippling mother Dreiser would have gone on to have become an even "better" novelist than he was, albeit simply defreighted of some of his unsavory personal characteristics? What if there had been no "crippling system"? Would he have gone on instead to be a well-adjusted hardware merchant or real estate salesman? Well, all these speculations sound silly and fatuous, don't they? But other speculations along *any* other line would sound equally so. The only reason Dr. Dreiser's theories don't have this same absurd ring is that the presuppositions behind them are never explicitly spelled out.

In any case, all presuppositions of this sort tend to display ignorance of what writers are and where they come from. Writers are people who work and create *because* of their blemishes, not in spite of them. Whatever their psychic wounds they do the precise constructive and destructive things that they do. They are people to be revealed neither on an IQ scale nor in a profile of a normal individual (of course they can be placed in such contexts, but it is bootless to try). The writer is not simply a normal person with a little more brainpower or a few extra tricks in his bag. His creativity is in the warp and woof of his whole personality. Discussion of what changes could be made in it by altering the circumstances of his life simply can't be made, because as soon as the presuppositions behind them are revealed in full detail, they expose themselves as feckless and incoherent.

At this late date, I fear, we can't really provide a full and honest account of Sarah Dreiser either. The first-hand testimony is no longer available to do it. I, personally, am inclined to accept Dreiser's more generous and common-sense view of his mother as over against the psychopathological views of Vera Dreiser and Lingeman. The cumulative weight of evidence seems to be in its favor, I would think. Too, the strongest argument for Dreiser's view and against the notion that Mrs. Dreiser "crippled" her children is that they didn't seem to be all that crippled. Here was a mother, almost wholly without education, who through charm and force of personality, and in spite of much actual (even if sometimes dramatized) adversity, in spite of many economic and social reverses and tragic downturnings, managed to produce not one

but two sons who were prominent in the national life, as well as a number of other colorful, spirited and seemingly intelligent offspring. If this is the work of a crippling mother, then I suppose we can raise one or two cheers for the crippling mother.

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[1]Richard Lingeman, *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City, 1871-1907* (New York: Putnam, 1986), p. 30.

[2]Vera Dreiser, with Howard Brett, *My Uncle Theodore* (New York: Nash, 1976), p. 35.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 33.

[4]*Dawn*, p. 12.

[5]*Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

[6]*My Uncle Theodore*, p. 33.

A NOTE ON DREISER'S USE OF THE 1895 BROOKLYN TROLLEY CAR STRIKE

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Although Dreiser's remarkably powerful portrait of industrial unrest occupies a significant place in *Sister Carrie*, showing Hurstwood's spectacular fall from a life of comfort and ease against the backdrop of an even greater tragedy, few critics have taken the time to discuss its origins.[1] In his handling of the trolley car strike, Dreiser draws on three distinct sources: the vivid poverty of his own Indiana childhood, the many labor disputes he witnessed as a newspaperman in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Toledo, and New York, and the specific incidents of the 1895 Brooklyn trolley car strike reported in the *New York Times*. By the time he came to write *Sister Carrie*, then, Dreiser had been well educated in the industrial landscape of America. In order to find a voice for his chapter about the strike, to create a coherent and realistic synthesis, Dreiser exploited biographical fact, historical event, and newspaper comment.

As both a child and young adult, Dreiser had many painful experiences with poverty, and several critics have been quick to demonstrate how this grim education surfaces in his fiction.[2] Dreiser would also make use of his experiences as a young, naive reporter, and while working for the *Toledo Blade*, he covered a trolley car strike. Although the details of the incident bear little resemblance to the strike in *Sister Carrie*, the experience made a strong impression on the novice writer. Remembering the event in *A Book About Myself*, Dreiser could easily be writing about his own fictional account: "Without knowing anything of the merits of the case, my sympathies were all with the workingmen. I had seen enough of strikes, and of poverty, and of the quarrels between the money-lords and the poor, to be all on one side."[3] In his report of the Toledo strike, Dreiser, like Hurstwood, rode on one of the cars operated by the scab motormen, and witnessed many of the events that he would later use to provide a basic framework for the scene in *Sister Carrie*. Angrily denouncing the scabs "who miserably assisted the company in holding its

own," Dreiser noted the uneasy fear on the faces of the inexperienced motormen, the grim, conspiratorial glances of the motionless policemen, and the infectious anger of the swarming, noisy mob. He recorded the chants of the crowd and the breakneck speed of the empty car.[4] However, Dreiser's other source for the trolley car strike is far more revealing.

According to the *New York Times*, the Brooklyn trolley car strike of 1895 was "the first general electric strike in the United States, and in magnitude has never been surpassed by any street-car strike in any of the great cities East or West."[5] With over 5,000 men on strike, 200 miles of railroad idle, and four city-wide systems shut down, the walkout quickly paralyzed the city. The ceaseless ebb and flow of city life, a dominant motif in *Sister Carrie*, came to a halt. As the tactics of both strikers and companies became more violent, the daily events became front-page news. Reading the news reports of the day, it is clear that Dreiser did more than simply plagiarize selected events. The highly dramatic news reports provided Dreiser with a range of characters, emotions, and narrative incidents that would give shape, depth, and realism to his fictional handling of the event.

One of the most effective aspects of the daily reports was the reporters' ability to vividly capture the emotions of the actors in the violent and chaotic drama: the police, who lacked "the sense and courage to deal effectively with the situation"; the "trembling" motormen; and the swarming mobs of strikers intent on stopping the cars that challenged their blockade. These same characters appear in *Sister Carrie*, giving Dreiser's scene the complex and subtle layers of emotion and confusion that the real event produced. Dreiser's account of the changing mood of the strikers is an accurate summary of the events reported by the *Times*: "All at once they blazed forth, and for a week there was storm and stress. Cars were assailed, men attacked, policemen struggled with, tracks torn up and shots fired, until at last street fights and mob movements became frequent, and the city was invested with militia."[6] The many character sketches that Dreiser incorporates into this brief scene allow him to shift focus away from Hurstwood and onto the tangled human and social composition of the confrontation.

Second, Dreiser adapted specific narrative incidents of the strike that appeared in the newspaper accounts. One of the first riots to erupt was reported on January 15:

> A mob of 500 strikers, among whom were a number of frenzied women, charged on two cars. . . .The mob bombarded the car and the police, and the women threw

> sticks and stones. . . .A stone thrown by one of the mob struck Starter Jackson, who was acting as motorman, on the head, and knocked him from the car.[7]

The following day, the paper included a similar incident:

> The motorman, meanwhile, had taken off the motor brake, and with it in his hand, stood trembling in the car. The instructor went to see what the size of the trouble was. Burly strikers seized him and dragged him from the car. He was flung about and blows were rained upon him as he was hustled down the avenue. He received a parting kick and disappeared in his best speed, stopping only to shout to the motorman of an approaching car that his life would be in danger if he went in.[8]

Both accounts, highlighting the escalating violence of the strike, reveal Dreiser's debt to contemporary reports. By reworking these incomplete fragments into his novel, Dreiser found a ready-made structure for the scene. Selecting only the most dramatic episodes of the sixteen-day strike, his compressed narrative punctuates, more effectively than the newspapers, the confrontation between the strikers and the scabs, protected by the police. By reducing these events into a twelve-hour period, Dreiser skillfully orchestrates the mounting tension, stressing the desperate situation of the powerless strikers.

In addition to these two scenes recorded above, a final piece of evidence must be introduced. One of the most shocking elements of Dreiser's fictional account is the vicious brutality of the police. One example of this official violence, suppressed in the Doubleday, Signet, and Norton editions, has been restored by the recent Pennsylvania edition. In the afternoon, Hurstwood encounters another mob trying to block the track and is ordered by the policeman traveling with him to "'Run over 'em'" (427). This scene has been taken from a story reported on January 16. Traveling on a car operated by a scab motorman on the Flatbush line, a reporter recalls the following exchange between the frightened motorman and his police escort: "'Here!' he shouted, 'run the car right through them! Put on full speed!'"[9]

In short, these brief reports were a storehouse of images and events for a magpie-writer like Dreiser. He constructed a detailed mosaic out of the news reports and offered the reader an exhilarating insight into the complexity and emotion of a modern-day strike. Dreiser's scene, full of the rhythmic chants of the crowd, the barrage of bricks and stones hitting both cars and scab motormen, the conspiratorial presence of

the police, and the bloody violence of a classical confrontation between the oppressed and the agents of the company, vividly illustrates the decay and violence of America's industrial environment. It is a landscape that was shown to American readers in a controversial naturalistic novel and in the pages of a respectable New York newspaper.

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[1]Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), has identified Dreiser's use of the 1895 strike.

[2]From among the many critics who practice this biographical approach, see Charles Shapiro, *Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962); and Richard Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

[3]Theodore Dreiser, *A Book About Myself* (New York: The World Publishing Company, Inc., 1922), p. 373.

[4]"The Strike To-Day," *Toledo Blade*, 24 March 1895, pp. 1, 6.

[5]"Trolley Strike is On," *New York Times*, 15 January 1895, p. 1.

[6]Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, eds. James L. W. West III et al (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 241. All further references are to this edition.

[7]"Trolley Strike is On," p. 1.

[8]"Violence By Strikers," *New York Times*, 16 January 1895, p. 1.

[9]"Violence By Strikers," p. 2.

REVIEWS

THE REAL AMERICAN TRAGEDY

Murder in the Adirondacks, by Craig Brandon. Utica, N.Y.: North Country Books, Inc., 1986. 328 pp. $18.95.

Ever since the publication of *An American Tragedy* more than sixty years ago, scholars attempting a comprehensive treatment of Dreiser's career have dealt in varying manner and degree with the relationship between the Chester Gillette-Grace Brown murder of 1906 and Dreiser's version of the crime as presented in his longest and most-praised novel. Critic-writers, including myself, have generally relied upon information which is sketchy, even if accurate, concentrating often upon the data preserved in the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania.

Now comes Craig Brandon, a reporter for *The Daily Press* in Utica, New York, with his book *Murder in the Adirondacks*, which makes accessible at long last the full story of the original crime.

Brandon got into his book, rather appropriately as it turns out, not as a literary critic or even as a Dreiser enthusiast, but through, originally, a somewhat routine assignment to produce a feature article for his newspaper in observance of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Grace Brown's murder. His question: why had this crime continued to hold the interest of residents of central New York? He had, he says, "no idea" of what he was stepping into, but his initial research into the documents still extant in Herkimer County, New York, and elsewhere led him to pose the obvious query: why at some juncture over the past decades hadn't anyone put the story of the murder into a single extensive and readable account?

Brandon decided to undertake this task, and of course found that way led on to interminable way, so that now, five years later, after poring over thousands of pages of court

transcripts and newspaper accounts and after traveling untold miles to interview informants and explore an ever-expanding gyre of background materials, he has published what must surely be the full and definitive account of Dreiser's inspiration.

Brandon has had the advantage of being based in Utica, geographical center of the story, within two hours' driving time of gloomy Big Moose Lake, where Grace Brown drowned; the small city of Cortland, where Chester Gillette and Grace worked in the Gillette Skirt Manufacturing Company plant; Herkimer, the County Seat, in whose courthouse Chester was put on trial and condemned; and Auburn Prison, where he was executed. The newspaper files of the Utica *Daily Press* and other local newspapers were close at hand, as were the important resources of the Herkimer County Historical Society. But Brandon, rather than confining his exploration to those local resources, has gone far afield in his search for all of the truth that can be found.

Those residents of the locality who attended the trial or otherwise kept track of the murder and its subsequent events have long since died, of course, but Brandon has hunted up their relatives and found scrapbooks, letters, and other documents squirreled away in attics, college archives, and the basements of historical societies. He has been able to document in gratifying detail the early lives of Grace Brown and, particularly, of Chester Gillette, visiting not only Oberlin College, which Chester attended, but also Zion City, Illinois, which the boy's missionary parents helped to found. The result is that we now have not only the greatly expanded and sharply detailed portraits of these two principals, but also Grace's love letters to Chester, the day-by-day log of their last tragic trip into the Adirondack Mountains, a full depiction of the arrest and trial, the poignant role played by Chester's mother, and the execution.

Besides constituting an exciting tale in its own right--which has been Brandon's approach in this valuable work--the chief value of his book to Dreiser scholars may well be to confirm the manner in which the novelist deliberately distanced himself from his source. Brandon makes clear the minimal research done by Dreiser and Helen on their 1923 trip through the area; clearly the novelist was interested chiefly in the broad outlines of the story rather than aiming at any slavish adherence to fact. Thus he was not impeded in playing with the geography of the various sites, moving locales into closer proximity as it suited his artistic purpose.

Brandon's lengthy and, so far as I know, only now

revealed account of Chester Gillette's boyhood helps us to appreciate the creative genius that produced Book One of the novel, spun from the novelist's own imagination to form a prelude to the main action. Grace Brown's letters to Chester, printed here in their authentic versions, make clear the liberties taken by Dreiser in using them for the novel. For his account of Chester's trial, Brandon relies chiefly upon files of the Utica newspapers, whose reporters, being accountable to residents who could detect whether they were writing with accuracy and fidelity to fact, proved to be considerably more reliable than visiting journalists. A small army of reporters for the New York Pulitzer and Hearst papers, in that day of yellow journalism, descended upon Herkimer to cover the trial, vying with one another for sensational headlines.

This invasion of hot-shot journalists led to any number of inaccuracies, distortions, and outright frauds in the race to beef up the story for big-city sales. Lacking a good photograph of Grace Brown, one newswoman had her own picture taken and sent into her home office, with the result that for years afterward she was inaccurately identified as the murder victim. Sensational Monday stories--because they followed weekend inactivity in the courtroom--were difficult to come by, and so a good number of these were fabricated out of whole cloth. One reporter, claiming that Chester Gillette was scheduled to go out in a boat on the Mohawk River and re-enact the drowning in detail, but subsequently finding that no such event was to take place, reported on it in detail nevertheless, a total invention.

One group of reporters dressed themselves as locals and pounded on the jail door, shouting that they wanted to lynch Chester Gillette, thereby placing themselves technically within the framework of fact in reporting that a group of citizens had stormed the jail in a lynch attempt. Since Dreiser relied chiefly upon reportage in the New York *World*, his favorite reading, such purple prose and yellow journalism took him further from his source than perhaps he knew. Not that it made much difference, if we consider that Dreiser's objective was to write a novel, not to produce a documented essay of this sensational scandal.

In all of this, perhaps the amazing thing is to see how very closely Dreiser managed to hold to the broad outlines of the actual story, yet to preserve his freedom to change, adapt, winnow, and invent for his own purposes. Dreiser's use of the Gillette-Brown case forms but a small portion of *Murder in the Adirondacks*, but the implications are large. The novel comes through as more indubitably a work of art than many of

Dreiser's detractors might wish to acknowledge. Not intending in any sense a piece of Dreiser scholarship, Brandon nevertheless has given us a very important document which will have a permanent place in Dreiser studies and probably inspire further scholarly work on *An American Tragedy*. The book fills an important void and it does so in superb fashion.

Philip L. Gerber

ANOTHER LOOK AT DREISER'S LIFE

Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City: 1871-1907, by Richard Lingeman. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986. 478 pp. $22.95.

For better or worse, I have devoted such a large portion of my scholarly pursuits to Theodore Dreiser that in the minds of my friends, colleagues, even family, our identities have seemingly become interrelated. Thus, over the years, they have assumed the responsibility for keeping me current by vigilantly searching out references to Dreiser in the most obscure and sometimes embarrassingly obvious places and seeing that I get them. It was inevitable, then, that my mailbox should begin to overflow with the publication of Richard Lingeman's *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City: 1871-1907*, the first volume of a two-volume biography. One of these clippings came from a colleague who obviously finds the sustained interest in Dreiser incomprehensible. "Is another Dreiser biography really necessary?" he asked as he made his contribution to my horde of early announcements and reviews. At the time, I had not yet read Lingeman's book, so I tried to hedge a bit by saying that a good study was always welcome. There was no need for such caution. *At the Gates of the City* is in most respects quite a good study, one which should stimulate the public interest in Dreiser much as Swanberg's *Dreiser* did twenty-one years ago.

As Lingeman points out in his "Acknowledgments," the time has come for another comprehensive look at Dreiser. A lot has happened since 1966, when Swanberg published the last major biography. The courtship letters that Dreiser wrote to Sara

Osborne White have at last been made available to scholars, with permission to quote freely, and other significant correspondence has surfaced. The University of Pennsylvania Press has issued the "restored" *Sister Carrie, The American Diaries, 1902-1926*, and *An Amateur Laborer*, with their attendant scholarly apparatus. T.D. Nostwich has collected and shared with Lingeman Dreiser's newspaper writings, a large portion of which will soon be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Jack Salzman's *Theodore Dreiser: The Critical Reception* has brought together a vast number of the reviews of Dreiser's books. And Donald Pizer's *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* and Yoshinobu Hakutani's first volume of *Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser* have made additional journalistic efforts readily available. Obviously the list could be continued at great length to include some excellent secondary sources. Lingeman has made profitable use of these recent studies, what he terms his "solid scholarly coin," but he has also drawn heavily upon unpublished materials, ranging from the *Jennie Gerhardt* holograph and the voluminous Dreiser correspondence at the University of Pennsylvania to the bits and pieces that could be found in the local libraries of Sullivan, Indiana, and Montgomery City, Missouri. When we add to this the standard works by and about Dreiser as well as the hundreds of biographies, autobiographies, diaries and other background studies of the people, places and events that helped shape Dreiser's early career, we begin to appreciate the truly impressive scholarly preparation that has gone into the making of *At the Gates of the City*.

As evidenced by Professor George Douglas's essay appearing elsewhere in this issue, the most controversial aspect of Lingeman's study is likely to be his interpretation of Sarah Dreiser. Rejecting Theodore's reverential presentation of his mother, Lingeman leans toward Vera Dreiser's assessment that Sarah was "a sweet charming woman, and a passively controling woman who unfortunately had a disturbing influence on most of her children." Practicing various forms of emotional blackmail, she drew the children to her and away from the father, whose failure she resented because it had denied her family the middle-class respectability it had previously known. Ultimately, she undermined John Paul's authority over the children and broke up the family unit to save the three youngest and regain for them the "vanished glory"--a quest that kept them on the move for the rest of Dreiser's childhood. Through her rebellion and permissiveness, Sarah created an unstable situation that contributed to her daughters' promiscuity and left Theodore with an impractical bent as well as a sense of foreboding and anxiety that haunted his adult life.

On the other hand, Lingeman's treatment of John Paul is quite sympathetic. He points out that Theodore's ambivalence toward his father was primarily a reflection of Sarah's resentment. He also demonstrates that the family legend portraying John Paul as a weak man destroyed physically and emotionally by an injury and resultant business failure just before Theodore's birth is at best a half-truth. Lingeman presents evidence that John Paul was in all probability injured five years before Theodore's birth and recovered sufficiently to function successfully in the woolen business a few years thereafter. In reality, he was less the victim of his personal limitations than of an economic depression and industrialization which made his skills obsolete.

Though tidying up several biographical details and, as indicated above, departing from the traditional views of Sarah and John Paul, Lingeman's account does not alter the Dreiser story greatly, nor is it ultimately a particularly probing psychological study. Rather, its chief merit lies in the drama and thoroughness with which it captures the first thirty-six years of Dreiser's life, seen against the backdrop of a changing America. For example, Elias and Swanberg each devote approximately seven pages to Dreiser's editorship of *Ev'ry Month* and twenty to the years of his struggle with neurasthenia; Lingeman has allotted twenty and seventy-five respectively to his study of these periods. And a similar ratio can be demonstrated in regard to all the major events of Dreiser's early career. The result is a biography that is full, colorful and impressively buttressed by primary sources. Access to the "Jug" letters has allowed Lingeman to flesh out dramatically Dreiser's ambivalent four-year courtship, during which he was consumed by erotic desires, panicked by the fear of losing his "little red-halo-ed Venus," yet always hesitant, seemingly reluctant to interrupt his ardent pursuit of wealth and terrified by the thought of a formal wedding ceremony. Lingeman's treatment of Dreiser's years as a newspaper reporter is also based primarily on primary sources. Whereas earlier biographies, particularly Swanberg's, have depended largely on *Newspaper Days* for Dreiser's activities between 1892 and 1895, Lingeman has gone to the journalistic work itself, quoting liberally to demonstrate not only that *Newspaper Days* is occasionally an untrustworthy source but also that Dreiser, in the words of a contemporary, was "better as a writer than in getting the news." Lingeman reveals Dreiser, during those apprenticeship years, to have been ambitious, idealistic, intrigued by the drama of the city and blessed with keen powers of observation, a fertile imagination and a facile pen. On the other hand, he tended to be woefully naive about political and social realities, could be careless about getting the facts and was often quite inaccurate in

presenting them. Although at times he was capable of excellent reporting, as Lingeman demonstrates, "literary effusions" were clearly his preference. Failure in New York seems the logical conclusion to this stage of his career.

Lingeman's fullness of detail and dependence on primary sources as well as his intimate knowledge of the New York magazine industry have clearly brought into focus the mercenary nature of Dreiser's free-lance years between 1897 and 1900, when in Lingeman's words he became the "Th. Dreiser Co." He researched a staggering variety of topics, some seemingly quite foreign to his interests and range of knowledge, and wrote in a style that was stilted, hyperbolic, wordy and uninspired. He recycled and resold articles, sometimes plagiarizing himself and others, and continued to be cavalier with the facts. Occasionally, his own idealism, disillusionment or compassion would intrude upon the conventional formulae he was following, but in most instances, "Theodore played the game." Lingeman's ample background on the magazine priorities of that era lends credence to Dreiser's comment to Robert Elias concerning his seeming reverential attitude toward the robber barons: "If you will look at the magazine [*Success*] you will understand why a denunciation of Mr. Carnegie would have lost me $100."

And, of course, the climactic drama of Lingeman's book is the saga of *Sister Carrie*. Virtually half of *At the Gates of the City* is devoted to that novel's sources, composition, revision, abortive first publication, traumatic effects on Dreiser's health and republication in 1907. Upon finishing this extensive history of *Sister Carrie*, a reader may wonder with justification how Lingeman will treat the seven remaining novels and significant minor works in a single second volume.

Lingeman is perhaps at his best when sketching in the cultural and intellectual environment that Dreiser confronted around the turn of the century. Snippets of popular songs and poems, allusions to plot incidents and characters from significant novels, bits of juicy gossip, statistics from sociological studies, humorous observations by prominent people, and many more indices of the period run throughout the volume. The literary worlds of Chicago, St. Louis and New York, the World's Fair of 1893, the Bowery, the New York music-publishing industry, the patriotic fervor surrounding the Spanish-American War, the Comstock crusades--all are vividly captured. Considerable space is also devoted to colorful figures of the day, such as ebullient Paul Dresser strolling along Broadway dispensing V's to those down on their luck, Hamlin Garland lending Stephen Crane fifteen dollars to reclaim the manuscript of *The Red Badge of Courage* from an

unpaid typist, Dr. Orison Swett Marden scavenging with shears and paste pot while squeezing his contributors, or Herbert Spencer scrupulously avoiding the tragedy of "a deduction killed by a fact." These and many other arresting personalities are woven into the fabric of Dreiser's life. If Dreiser is the star of the show, he certainly has a memorable supporting cast.

Ultimately, however, we must confront the question Joseph Epstein recently asked in *The New Criterion* (November 1986): Does a fresh interpretation of Dreiser's life or work emerge from *At the Gates of the City*? For those who have remained abreast of Dreiser scholarship over recent years, the answer is likely to be that there are few major surprises. However, in fairness it must be noted that the book is not directed at a scholarly audience but at the general reader. The scholarly apparatus is kept to a minimum; the detail is often selected for its human-interest appeal; and the style is lively, anecdotal and witty. In the Fall of 1981, Lingeman wrote *The Dreiser Newsletter* regarding his intentions:

> "My talismanic word for my approach is 'holistic'--a word I shall not try to defend but which means a blend of psychological, critical and sociological perspectives, with emphasis on the latter. . . . I would be happy to do nothing more than write a vivid portrait that interests people in [Dreiser's] writings while placing the man and his work where they deserve to be placed in the history of our literature and intellectual life--that is, at the top."

With *At the Gates of the City*, Lingeman seems well on his way to achieving that goal.

Richard W. Dowell

THE DREISER-MENCKEN LETTERS

Dreiser-Mencken Letters: The Correspondence of Theodore Dreiser and H. L. Mencken, 1907-1945. Ed. Thomas P. Riggio. 2 vols. Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. $69.95.

In the summer of 1942 H. L. Mencken arranged to have photostats of Dreiser's letters to him sent to the University of Pennsylvania, and, in return, he received photostats of his letters to Dreiser that were among the Dreiser papers given to the university. When the exchange was completed, Mencken put the letters in order and began reading through the series. "It is," he wrote Dreiser on February 23, 1943, "full of interesting stuff, and will no doubt edify posterity." The accuracy of Mencken's statement has long been known to students of both men. Yet, because only 238 of the more than 1200 letters that were exchanged between Dreiser and Mencken appeared in published collections of their letters, biographers, literary historians, and other scholars needing access to the letters had to travel to the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania or the Mencken collection at the New York Public Library to complete their research. Now, with the publication of *Dreiser-Mencken Letters: The Correspondence of Theodore Dreiser and H. L. Mencken, 1907-1945*, such costly and time-consuming travel is no longer necessary. Edited by Thomas P. Riggio, this new collection provides a complete record of the known correspondence between the two men.

In his preface to the letters, Riggio provides a brief overview of the long history of Dreiser and Mencken's relationship, the details of which will probably be familiar to the scholar, but should be of value to the student and the general reader. Following the preface is an "Editorial Note" in which Riggio clearly outlines the definitions and principles that guided his work. He states that "by letter is meant any communication, whether handwritten, typed or telegraphed, including postcards, telegrams, and even a few messages written on music programs and on joke items, like the dust jacket of a best-selling novel." Of the 1204 extant pieces of correspondence fitting this definition, Riggio has printed 1036 of them in full. The remaining 168 pieces,

"letters that either repeat the contents of other letters or are trivial notes of invitation to dinner, confirmation of a scheduled meeting, and the like," are listed in an appendix with brief descriptions of their contents. In accordance with the principles of modern textual editing, Riggio prints the texts of the letters "as received," that is, without normalizing spelling and punctuation, and without emendations and interpolations. In addition, he describes the nature and identifies the source of each letter, and provides notes that correct errors of fact or dating; explain illegible words and marginalia; and discuss people, events or documents that the "reader might find obscure."

Although the letters are presented in chronological order, they are grouped into six historical periods, each period corresponding to a stage in the friendship of the two men. At the beginning of each period, Riggio includes an introduction "designed to provide the necessary historical and personal background." During the first period, 1907-1910, Dreiser was an editor for Butterick Publications, and Mencken was a Baltimore newspaperman seeking a wider audience for his work. In his introduction to this period, Riggio notes that while many of the letters deal with "journeywork" that "might have occupied any editor and journalist," they also "provide the fullest picture on record of Dreiser as editor." In his position as editor, Dreiser was able to help Mencken during this period; in the second period, 1911-1914, Mencken was in a position to help Dreiser. During these years Dreiser returned to full-time authorship, and Mencken was becoming "a power in literary circles" through his book reviews. Thus, as Riggio points out, Dreiser through his fiction gave Mencken the opportunity "to elaborate his critical premises on a living American novelist," and the "letters were the raw material for Mencken's reviews of Dreiser--essays that instilled in his readers the idea that realism and naturalism need not exclude a sense of human dignity or high artistic standards."

The years between 1915 and 1918, the third period in Riggio's divisions, mark the outbreak of storms in the friendship caused largely by disagreements over Dreiser's *The Genius*. At first, the men argued over the literary quality of the novel, and later, after Mencken agreed to help Dreiser protest the suppression of the novel, they argued over how to conduct the campaign. Commenting on the protest, Riggio remarks that

> the disagreements offered an excuse for airing two issues that would become constant motifs in the letters for the next three decades: the argument over Dreiser's connections to literary Bohemia and to the political

left; and the more allusive but persistent tension over Dreiser's expression of sexuality, both in his work and in his personal life.

During the first three periods Dreiser and Mencken saw each other frequently; during the last three their friendship was maintained largely through correspondence. Between the years 1919 and 1923 Dreiser traveled to the South and Indiana and finally settled in Los Angeles. As Riggio notes, there is more humor in their correspondence during this period, but the humor "is a clue to more serious concerns," as "Dreiser's difficulty in finding a shape for his longer fiction paralleled Mencken's increasing uneasiness with literary criticism." Both men were able to overcome these difficulties in the period that followed, 1924-26, but "their triumphs did nothing to strengthen the friendship." In their letters the two become more peevish, more willing to find insult, and finally, with the publication of Mencken's unfavorable review of *An American Tragedy*, the correspondence came to a halt. It was not until eight years later that the exchange of letters resumed and, by then, the two had grown apart intellectually and emotionally. As a result, the letters in the final period, 1934 to 1945, lack the fervor of the earlier years. According to Riggio,

> at the outset, Dreiser established the tone for these last years by acknowledging--or rather, exaggerating--their differences: "fundamentally we never agree on anything." For the most part, they agreed to accept this half-truth, which relieved them of the burden of having to work out past conflicts.

Following the correspondence, Riggio has appended the letters from Mencken to Helen Dreiser; the texts of a number of public documents "that are essential for an understanding of the interaction of the two men," including Dreiser's memoir of Mencken that appeared in Isaac Goldberg's *The Man Mencken* and Mencken's reviews and essays on Dreiser's works; and an annotated list of the omitted letters. Finally, he has added two indexes, the first to names and subjects in the correspondence and the second to the works of the two men mentioned in the letters.

Although the two volume set is expensive, the *Dreiser-Mencken Letters* is an extremely worthwhile addition to the list of works by and about Dreiser published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. As Riggio notes in his preface,

> the issues and events that engaged [Dreiser and Mencken's] considerable energies--including the cause of

literary realism, the politics of nativism, "puritanism," two world wars, Prohibition, the struggle against censorship, postwar modernism, and the turmoil of the Great Depression--give their letters historical as well as biographical and literary value.

But the value of the letters can be realized only if the editor has done his job well. And in this regard, Riggio is to be commended for providing a model of how a collection of letters can be put together to meet the needs of the scholar, the student, and the person who simply has a general interest in the people who wrote them.

Frederic E. Rusch

DREISER NEWS & NOTES

With this issue, we welcome Professor James L. W. West III of Pennsylvania State University to our staff of Contributing Editors. Professor West has been the textual editor of the Pennsylvania Edition of *Sister Carrie, The American Diaries: 1902-1926* and *An Amateur Laborer* and most recently published *A Sister Carrie Portfolio*. We look forward to his active association with *Dreiser Studies*. . . . The second of two volumes of *Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser*, edited by Yoshinobu Hakutani, has been issued by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. Volume Two contains twenty-six essays and is divided into four sections: "The World of Music," "The American Landscape," "Science, Technology, and Industry" and "The City." There is also a checklist of Dreiser's free-lance articles in the 1890s. . . . Professor T. D. Nostwich informs us that the Iowa State University Press is bringing out his edition of Dreiser's "Heard in the Corridors" articles and related pieces, probably in December 1987. . . . Correction: in the Fall 1986 issue of the *DN*, it was announced that the European diaries would be edited for the Dreiser Edition by Professor Rolf Lunden; that volume has now been assigned to Professor Arthur Casciato, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. Also, in addition to the previously announced editors, Professor Philip Gerber, State University College at Brockport, N.Y., will undertake *The Financier*. . . . At its June meeting, the Editorial Board of the Dreiser Edition will welcome a new member, Professor Noel Polk, University of Southern Mississippi. . . . The Library of America will be using the Dreiser Edition texts as they become available; however, their first volume (*Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt* and *Twelve Men*), which was scheduled before the Edition was announced, will adhere to the first-edition texts. . . . Dr. Neda Westlake, retired Curator of the Dreiser Collection at the Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, writes that she is still active on the Dreiser Committee of the University of Pennsylvania. "After 'living' with TD for so many years, I would feel lost without the companionship of all of his 'children.'" Dr. Westlake can be reached at Normandy Farms Estates, Box 1108, Apartment E-317, Blue Bell, PA 19422. . . . The *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, edited by Professor Thomas Riggio, has been nominated by the *Library Journal* as one of their outstanding books of 1986.