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A STAR IS BORN: "CELEBRITY" IN *SISTER CARRIE*

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"There was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century."

Richard Schickel, 1985¹

"The 'Herald,' getting up an entertainment for the benefit of its free ice fund, did [Carrie] the honour to beg her to appear along with celebrities for nothing."

Theodore Dreiser, 1900²

When Theodore Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* applies the term "celebrities" to the highly-publicized notables who frequent the grand saloons, restaurants, and theaters of 1890s Chicago and New York, he becomes the first American novelist that I know of to emphasize that word as we employ it today. The term is used regularly in the novel and is central to the action, for a celebrity--in the modern sense of the word--is what Carrie Meeber eventually becomes. Through reference to this "gilded" state in which style is honored above substance and image above accomplishment, Dreiser drives home an emergent American theme, one which stems directly from the polarity of Illusion and Reality that motivates the better part of his fiction. "Celebrity," while still implying at least a modicum of the fame³ which derives from achievement, now suggests also a generous use of facade, and the support of--if not creation by--media publicity; in order to shine, celebrity also requires an encircling audience of "fans." All of these ingredients are found in abundance in *Sister Carrie*. Seen in that light, the novel stands poised at the first upward tilt of a trendline whose apogee we witness in America today.

I

Inherent in Dreiser's first novel is a pervasive quality of pretense, and Chicago itself partakes of this air as it

strives to become a celebrity among cities: young, vital, ambitious, able, rising Phoenix-like from its disastrous fire, straining to grow huge, to prevail, to make itself into the Florence of the West, shamelessly advertising itself and believing in its own publicity. The unfriendly streets down which Carrie walks in her daytime search for work seem to her cliff-like canyons of brick. They are filling rapidly with the offices of great firms. Because land is available, a corporation "of any pretension" (17), says Dreiser, occupies its own individual structure, generally fronted with the newly-introduced windows of plate glass, thick, flawless, and meant to shut out the casual visitor even as they invite him to peep in at the grandeur surrounding the commercial transactions taking place there. In 1889 these shining panes of glass shed "a distinguished and prosperous look" (17) on any firm that installs them. The quality apparently most sought after is an "imposing appearance" and, in fact, says Dreiser, "the entire metropolitan centre possesse[s] a high and mighty air calculated to overawe and abash the common applicant" (17).

At the heart of the commercial district, on Adams Street opposite the Federal Building, stands a place of business which itself is a microcosm of this pretentious effort at image-making: the truly "gorgeous saloon" (48) owned by Fitzgerald and Moy, itself a facade of imposing magnitude, blazing with incandescent bulbs (then "state of the art"), floored with tiles of bright colors, walled with dark, polished wood, equipped with a long bar afire with lights and cut glass, all calculated to endow the place with "a very sumptuous appearance" (48, emphasis added). And within this temple to conviviality lounges the first celebrity of any significance that Carrie meets: George Hurstwood. As manager of Fitzgerald and Moy's, Hurstwood participates personally in the general air of facade. He has in fact become so identified in the public's eye with his saloon that, although bartenders and waiters might come and go, the manager's "grace, tact, and ornate appearance" provide the establishment with an atmosphere of celebrity which is "most essential" (137) to holding its oldtime customers and drawing new ones.

Hurstwood inhabits an office of polished cherry and, when not occupied there, ranges about the saloon in expensive, tailored suits, a blue diamond stuck in his cravat, a solid-gold watch chain draped across his substantial chest. He is, says Dreiser, a "starched and conventional poser among men" (116), and his favorite pose is to stand with his coat open, thumbs in his vest pockets, the jewels in his rings afire in the lights. He "look[s] the part" (48) of the manager of a grand saloon, and his crowning attribute is "his own sense of

his importance" (49). As the "official greeter" at the saloon, he is the first public-relations expert in American literature. His principal task involves "creating a good impression" (49) which will assure that clientele are drawn to the business and sufficiently impressed to become regular patrons.

One of those attracted by Hurstwood's real but distinctly minor celebrity is Charles Drouet, Carrie's fellow passenger on her entry into Chicago, the successful but humdrum salesman who hungers for intimate contact with his perceived betters. Having become aware of Hurstwood's success and of his familiarity with a higher range of the illustrious, Drouet finds his way regularly into Fitzgerald and Moy's, just as he goes to Rector's and to other Chicago establishments which cater to celebrity; his feeling is that, if he cannot join this annointed group as an equal, at least "he could eat where they did" (48). Like any modern "fan," Drouet is fond of recalling an evening spent in the shared presence of Joseph Jefferson, renowned star of "Rip Van Winkle," and he brags of another night when he was privileged to dine "only a few tables off" (47) from that occupied by Henry E. Dixie. Drouet classes Hurstwood not far below these "greats" and is prideful of being on rather intimate terms with him; he serves his part of Hurstwood's narcissistic need for an immediate and admiring audience, reveling in the "the company, the glow, the atmosphere" (53) which the manager creates, one of many "moths" who come "to bask in the light of the flame" (52).

Hurstwood himself, able to "let down his hair" with lesser fry such as Drouet, maintains his more imposing facade with greater celebrities and uses a broad spectrum of cordiality in greeting them. Those he knows by name are met with a cheery "Well old fellow," while with the more publicized or rich he is "professionally tactful, assuming a grave and dignified attitude, paying them the deference which would win their good feelings without in the least compromising his own bearing and opinions" (50). In his private life (until he becomes infatuated with Carrie), Hurstwood is most proper and circumspect, the epitome of Respectability: a family man, owner of a fine and quite appropriate, status-correct home in North Chicago, ever prudent in his personal affairs, knowing well the precarious nature of celebrity.

In the midst of all this hoopla, Carrie is at first the archetypal "hick," the wide-eyed innocent, rubbernecking from street corners as the life of the city passes before her eyes like a movie⁴ or a television documentary. Even as she stared from the window of the train that bore her into Chicago, that

quality of "brave new world" had prevailed: miles of streets laid out in preparation for the population of one million which Chicago intends soon to claim; sewer lines and streetcar tracks ready; gas lamps blinking on empty corners where here and there houses have gone up as lonely outposts on the broad, flat prairie. Then come suburban towns; industrial smokestacks can be seen, the sound of hammer and saw heard. Then the Chicago River, crammed with the masts of boats. "You'll find lots to see here" (9), says Carrie's train-mate Drouet.

Carrie spends her first days wandering weary and in worn shoes through the Chicago Loop in search of work, properly awed, far too intimidated to make much of an effort at penetrating the imposing facades that shut her out. But she is a quick study. From the prevailing environment she draws a perception of what is thought desirable in this greatest of industrially-based metropolises; and, however mistakenly, she learns of those items that constitute the trappings of Success. The streets and the jingling horsecars that traverse them are crammed with clerks and shopgirls, but these are recognizably too much like her own shrunken self to appeal to the fires that burn within her ambitious heart. She takes more pointed notice of those more obviously lucky few, "her more fortunate sisters" (25) who elbow past her in the shops without a care or a glance, as if she is invisible. Carrie notes first of all their "manner," that air of superiority that clings to them like a second skin, then their splendid clothing, then the fine carriages they drive about in, and finally the splendid homes from which they come. She begins to realize "in a dim way how much the city [holds]--wealth, fashion, ease--every adornment for women, and she long[s] for dress and beauty with a whole heart" (25). Very early on it becomes clear to her that the key here is money, that without ready cash one is nothing. The great department stores, the warm restaurants, the clothes, the coaches, they all smell richly of money--and she has only the four dollars she has brought to Chicago in her little snap-purse, and no prospect of earning much more.

The city is Vanity Fair with a vengeance, stuffed full of commercial enterprises which peddle the trappings of facade:

Carrie passed along the busy aisles, much affected by the remarkable display of trinkets, dress goods, stationery, and jewelry. Each separate counter was a show place of dazzling interest and attraction. She could not help feeling the claim of each trinket and valuable upon her personally, and yet she did not stop. There was nothing there which she could not have used--nothing which she

did not long to own. The dainty slippers and stockings, the delicately frilled skirts and petticoats, the laces, ribbons, hair-combs, purses, all touched her with individual desire, and she felt keenly the fact that not any of these things were in the range of her purchase.
(24)

Taken in completely by the universal emphasis upon appearance, Carrie soon comes to connect all desirable qualities of "worth, goodness, and distinction" (44) with impressive clothing; she is easily persuaded to believe that one is what one wears. She considers her own poor raiment, which stamps her as "beneath notice" (44), a cipher among thousands of wageseekers, so lacking in distinction that a would-be employer stares at her as if she were "a package" (27). It is quite to be expected that she might arrive at the obvious definition of money as the *sine qua non* of city life: "something everybody else has and I must get" (70).

How to get money, that is the perplexing question. Carrie in her naivete tries the only route she has been told is open to her, applying the work ethic which governs the lives of her sister, Minnie Hanson, and her brother-in-law, Sven. Minnie arises at four-forty in the morning to see Sven off to a laborious dawn-to-dusk job cleaning refrigerator cars at the Union Stockyards. They scrimp and save, denying themselves all pleasures and some necessities in order to bank a small sum regularly in their Building and Loan account. By hard work and diligent saving they hope, over a long period, to better themselves. In time they anticipate owning a pair of lots far out in the west side of Chicago, on which they will perhaps erect a home for themselves, their virtue at long last rewarded. Carrie, meanwhile, secretly dreams only of people "counting money, dressing magnificently, and riding in carriages" (18).

Carrie's short-lived experiment at working for a living is disappointing in the extreme. Having gotten past the facade of Rhodes, Morgenthau and Scott, the shoe manufacturers, whose plate-glass windows persuade her it must be a goodly institution, she is led up to a dingy sixth-floor loft and put to work stitching shoes on an assembly line of girls just like herself, grinding labor which leaves her a single mass of aching muscles. She earns four dollars and fifty cents a week, of which the Hansons take four dollars for her room and board (which Hanson in his prudence applies to his Building and Loan payments). This route is not for Carrie. But in all Chicago, what other door is open except similar menial employment? To her rescue comes Drouet, the salesman.

Drouet himself is a celebrity of sorts, but one of the very lowest rank and only among his own circle of fellow drummers who are impressed by his reputation for successful sales trips, a reputation which rests in good measure upon self-publicity. Drouet cherishes his position and, full of his own importance when he rescues Carrie from a cold and windy street corner, takes her to the Windsor dining room where he purposely selects a table near the plate-glass front window where he can "see and be seen" (65) by the passing throng. Carrie is duly impressed by his proprietary air as he orders the waiters about, by his flamboyant expertise with knife and fork as he serves the sirloin steak and asparagus, by his suit, so new it creaks, by the flashing rings on his fingers. He captivates Carrie completely, and soon she finds herself rather willingly installed as his mistress in a comfortable flat on Ogden Place. She has rejected the past, represented by the Hansons, and chosen her future. Through Drouet she meets Hurstwood and is even more supremely impressed by his manner, his superior clothing, and his reputation as a well-known Chicago personality. For a time they form a trio, she, Drouet, and Hurstwood. Both men profess an intention to marry her, but their intentions are composed of appearance only, another facade; their real intent is seduction of this country "peach"⁵ (54) whom Drouet has picked up on a train.

It is Drouet and Hurstwood, all the same, who introduce Carrie to the glitzy restaurants which for some time constitute all she knows of fame, and then to the theater, the true home of celebrity, in which she will find her own route toward that exalted state which she most passionately desires, but without quite understanding why. Her eyes and ears show her what America is becoming, and her intuition impels her to jump onto the bandwagon before it passes. But as she takes her first faltering steps toward her goal she knows only that she is "not going to be a common shopgirl" (61).

II

In common with much of his writing, Dreiser's treatment of celebrity has biographical roots so deep that to hear Carrie revolt against being cast as a cipher among the commonality is to hear her author rage against his own apparent fate at her age in that decade before *Sister Carrie* came into being. An ambitious young reporter, struggling to rise, encountering a modicum of success here and a blasting failure there, a wanderer from city to city, without roots or recognition, and always plagued by the threat of depressive spells, he yet shouted his silent boast--with none but himself to hear: "No common man am I!"⁶

In his role as reporter Dreiser had encountered many celebrities among the illustrious feature writers and columnists of which every metropolitan daily claimed a few, and more among the politicians whose careers and conventions he was assigned to cover. Towering above all of these, of course, were the most celebrated Americans of that rich and arrogant time, the new millionaires, whose names and extravagances blazoned in the press on a daily basis. Dreiser burned to join them on their seemingly carefree perch, a futile dream, obviously; and still, as he left St. Louis and his post on the *Republic* for an uncertain future, he ate breakfast on a Pullman--in his eyes a "mobile palace,"⁷ the acme of 1890s grandeur--and seeing farm boys in jeans and wrinkled hats gawk as the train paused at a small-town depot, he hoped that he would "be taken for a millionaire to whom this was little more than a wearisome commonplace" (ABAM 362).

Deep in the Dreiser personality ran an unslaked passion for celebrity which surfaced eventually many years later when *An American Tragedy* (1925) proved to be his biggest critical and financial success, Dreiser returning from a Florida vacation to find himself "a literary sensation" (D, 302). For the first time in his life (he was then in his mid-fifties) he was in possession of some real money, not only from book royalties but from the sale of movie rights to Famous Players; and Patrick Kearney was preparing a stage adaptation of the *Tragedy*, which would gross \$30,000 per week. Dreiser was interviewed endlessly, his word found worthy of quotation on any topic; magazines begged for a story, a poem, an essay; and his name was put forth for the Nozel Prize. He took a duplex apartment with stained-glass windows in the fashionable Rodin Studios on West Fifty-seventh Street, bought a Steinway concert grand piano and oriental rugs, and set up weekly soirees to which he invited his friends to bring "any personality you choose to sponsor" (D, 317). The personalities came, by the drove, to be wined and dined and entertained by nude African tribal dancers, and one of these guests, the novelist Fannie Hurst, said what must have been in the minds of many of the less outspoken who had known the penurious Dreiser of old: "Is it possible that that host of ours was Dreiser, *Theodore Dreiser*? Say what you will, I don't believe it!" (D, 318).

At the time he composed *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser owed most of his intimate knowledge of celebrity, if not his inborn yearning for it, especially as it concerned theatrical personalities, to his brother Paul Dresser (like Carrie Meeber, Paul underwent a change of name for stage purposes). There is much in *Sister Carrie* that stems rather directly from Paul's success as a popular song-and-dance man, a true

celebrity of the times, the first and only one that Dreiser saw close up before composing his novel. Paul, who was considerably older than his brother, visited his family in Indiana on various occasions during the 1880s and was viewed as a cheerful, portly figure who appeared like a fairy godfather in fur coat and silk hat and gold-headed cane, generous with money to relieve the pervasive poverty of the clan. Paul's more illustrious role as a celebrity was impressed upon Theodore during his newspaper stint in St. Louis when one night he came by the Havlin Theater and suddenly encountered Paul's face and name staring at him from a billboard announcing the arrival of a new play, "The Danger Signal" (ABAM, 344). His own low stature among his colleagues was immediately inflated by the mere fact of his relationship to this touring Broadway idol.

A few years later, Dreiser's travels brought him to New York, where he and Paul were much together. Here, in the "white light" area of Broadway below Forty-second Street, Dreiser learned what he would need to know of theatrical life for his novel. This was the home of great hotels, the Continental, Bartholdi and Normandie, as well as the Marlborough, where Paul occupied a splendid suite at the height of his success; and the Waldorf, where Carrie would end her story. Paul took his brother on the rounds of the imposing theaters in which he played with his musical-comedy troupes and where he was on intimate terms with personnel from ticket sellers to managers: the Herald Square, the Lyceum, the Empire, the Knickerbocker, and, at Thirty-ninth Street, "the far-famed Casino, with its choruses of girls, the Mecca of all night-loving Johnnies and rowdies" (ABAM 445), where Carrie would begin her professional career as a chorine and become a featured player in "The Wives of Abdul." At Twenty-seventh and Broadway Paul ushered Theodore into Delmonico's restaurant, where Carrie, halfway through her climb to stardom, would dine with her friend Lola Osborne, Dreiser marveling as Carrie does at "its pretentious and ornate furniture, its noble waiters and something about it which seemed to speak of wealth and power" (ABAM 446-47); and at Forty-second Street, "the end of all Rialtodom," Paul and his brother paused in the restaurant of the elegant new Hotel Metropole, much like Drouet at the Windsor dining room in Chicago, "to see and be seen" (ABAM, 446):

How well I remember it all--the sense of ease and well-being that was over the place, and over all Broadway; the loud clothes, the light straw hats, the canes, the diamonds, the hot socks, the air of security and well-being, assumed by those who had won an all-too-brief hour in that pretty, petty world of make-believe

and pleasure and fame. And here my good brother was at his best. It was "Paul" here and "Paul" there. Already known for several songs of great fame, as well as for his stage work and general personality, he was welcomed everywhere. . . . what amazing personalities, male and female, and so very many of them, pausing to take him by the hand, slap him on the back, pluck familiarly at his coat lapel and pour into his ear or his capacious bosom magnificent tales of success, of great shows, of fights and deaths and love affairs and tricks and scandals.
(ABAM, 446)

As Dreiser watched his brother "spin like a moth in the white light of Broadway,"⁸ he recognized that this was celebrity beside which that of Chicago was as nothing. With, so far as he could tell, only "a little luck and some talent" (76), Paul had come such a distance; with no more than that Carrie, too, would soar high in this brilliant sky. In Paul, Dreiser saw, too, the gift of mimicry with which he would endow Carrie, that knack for imitation which is the primary credential upon which she builds a career. Paul "could imitate so many phases of character so cleverly" (T, 80): an ancient Irish washerwoman, a truculent German, an outmoded actor once celebrated for his Hamlet, a miser, an Irish day-laborer, a Negro, a Hebrew. "How he could imitate them!" (T, 81).

Something of Paul's expansive personality went into Hurstwood as well--the portliness, the confidence that he was "a personage of sorts" (T, 80), his air of hail-fellow-well-met that made Hurstwood such a superb "greeter" at Fitzgerald and Moy's. And in the Hotel Aulic at Thirty-fifth Street Dreiser looked on as his brother engaged in bantering conversation with a bunch of his cronies, the secondary leads and comedians of various road companies, all "blazing with startling clothes" (T, 91) and all bent on telling how they had "knocked 'em dead" in Walla Walla or Pasadena--so very much like Charles Drouet coming off the road and, while changing his striped suit and brilliantly-polished tan shoes, dramatizing for Carrie the actor's strategies by which he had unloaded his line of goods on customers in the outland hotels and shops of LaCrosse and Rock Island.

In Paul's company Dreiser came into contact with any number of "those passing lords and celebrities" (T, 90) in sports, theater, journalism, and other professions who hovered about the bright lights of Broadway: Bat Masterson, the "bad man" of the West; the wrestler Muldoon; prizefighters James J. Corbett and Kid McCoy; James Murphy and Richard Crocker, Tammany Hall bosses. And he learned also of the poignantly brief lives of so many of that "gaudy clan that wastes its

substance" (T, 83) in courting celebrity. Paul's inexhaustible supply of sympathy went out to so many down-and-out actors and actresses, yesterday's darlings, who were now stranded perhaps in the hinterlands with a failed play and no train fare home, or worse yet, who required the cost of a coffin for a decent burial at the end of a brief and largely squandered life. In these exigent claims upon Paul's generosity can be seen much of the later, importunate Hurstwood, his celebrity vanished, moving down toward starvation on the streets of New York. "You know how it is," said Paul to Theodore. "As long as you're up and around and have money, everybody's your friend. But once you're down and out no one wants to see you any more. . . . We're all likely to get that way. You don't know what pulls people down sometimes" (T, 845).

A little of Paul went into Drouet, too: his generosity, his blithe spirit, unruffled by events, the flamboyant clothes that made him something of a "dandy," and that easy camaraderie that endeared him to his fellows. The spirit of Paul is in Drouet when the drummer, late in the novel, visits Carrie the celebrity, hoping to wipe out old arguments, to forgive and forget and pick up from there as if nothing had happened nor had years intervened. This is Paul, as Dreiser paints him, arriving at his sister's home at holiday time with gifts and food, ready to patch up their recent estrangement--but succeeding where Drouet fails.

Another and more immediate stimulus to Dreiser's concern with the quality of celebrity in *Sister Carrie* involves his departure from newspaper work late in the Nineties in order to free lance for the new, mass-circulation magazines then being launched. One of these was Dr. Orison Swett Marden's *Success*, an early organ of positive-thinking whose motto might be summarized thus: We can all succeed in making a name and a fortune if only we will try. For *Success* Dreiser produced a lengthy series of interviews with celebrated achievers of the day, interviews which Marden then reprinted (but without crediting Dreiser) in self-help books such as *How They Succeeded* and *Talks with Great Workers* (1901) and *Little Visits with Great Americans* (1905). For this series, Dreiser interviewed literary lights such as William Dean Howells and John Burroughs, photographer Alfred Stieglitz, opera star Lillian Nordica, inventor Thomas Edison, and greats of business which included Philip D. Armour, Andrew Carnegie, and Marshall Field. As his work for *Success* overlapped his composition of *Sister Carrie*, he was at the moment steeped in the idea of celebrity and must have found it rather natural and appropriate to advance in that direction with his heroine.

III

Carrie Meeber's rise to prominence as an actress takes place in the mid-Nineties, a moment at which America was turning an important corner in its socio-economic orientation. The change could be discerned and comprehended only by the most far-seeing of contemporary analysts--I know of none who predicted it--and was probably sensed by Dreiser more through intuition than through any kind of mental comprehension of what was taking place. After all, he was writing to report what he had seen and heard, besides expressing intimate yearnings of his own.

When *Carrie* was written, Industrialism with its clanging factories, its flood of manufactured goods, its battalions of ill-paid workers and its new, millionaire, entrepreneurial class dominated the American scene and appeared to be shaping its foreseeable future as well. Beneath the steaming surface of this life in which the factory was the central image, however, there was at work another force which ultimately would characterize the America of our own time, for the industrial revolution which spawned the City, the Capital-Labor dichotomy, and Veblen's Leisure Class, gave birth also to the Consumer Society in which merchandising, along with its necessary offspring, traveling salesmen and advertising experts, would take a central role. Hurstwood and Drouet both cater to the new industrial wealth and the life-modes it has fostered, merchandising and entertainment, fruits of the great transformation from production to service. In this light it is interesting that the two important male characters in the novel should be concerned, not with production, but with the emerging service industries: Drouet is the very model of a salesman, and Hurstwood is the first public-relations officer in American literature. Neither of these men creates anything; both sell. And what they sell actually, and what links them with the acting profession, is their own personalities.⁹

This drift toward consumerism is what Dreiser saw--or felt--or intuited when he allowed his story to shift from sweatshop to playhouse and to record *Carrie's* evolution from wage-slave into Superstar. For the greatest of the service industries would soon be dominant, known in our time as the "entertainment industry." It is one of the hallmarks of Dreiser's innate modernity that he somehow was inspired to catch hold of this new spirit and exploit it, for in centering upon the theatrical he anticipated that day when the development of electronic technology would spread the essence of illusion far beyond theater walls until it permeated every corner of life in these United States.¹⁰

Somewhere in the misty future ahead waited our own hyperbolic world of Instant Celebrity with its essential corps of Image-Makers, Press-Agents, and PR Experts. The invention of modern advertising techniques would become as common as breathing, and even a Hero of Sports would shed his chrysalis of amateurism to emerge as a millionaire Superstar of Entertainment who might be packaged to sell like any breakfast food. To be sure, the American Dream would retain as a major goal the piling up of fortunes, but these fortunes would more and more commonly be accumulated by the few who entertain the many. And fame would be the reward of those most readily exploitable by the electronic media, whether they performed before the moving-picture camera, on a rock-concert stage, at the Superbowl, or even in the once-sacrosanct arena of politics.

What is so clearly demonstrable today gave very few overt signals of happening as Dreiser wrote. But James T. Farrell, himself a writer whose relevance owed much to his attentive perception of the American social fabric, reminds us of a comparative study made of the heroes of popular biography between 1900 and 1945 based upon mass-circulation magazines such as *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.¹¹ It demonstrated that in 1900 any list of the Most Successful Americans was bound to emphasize a great many Men of Affairs, such as financiers, inventors, statesmen, and industrial titans--all of whom pooh-poohed the notion that luck had anything much to do with their achievements. This is borne out by the nature of the interviewees in Dreiser's series for *Success*, by that, for instance, with Philip D. Armour, the meatpacking baron, who was asked: "You attribute nothing to good fortune?" and who replied with the single word, "Nothing!"¹² Thomas Edison also turned down the chance to credit luck by pointing out that he worked up to twenty hours a day: "I never did anything worth doing by accident" (*LV*, 1, 28). Marshall Field agreed, saying that the first requisites for success included the qualities of honesty, energy, frugality, and integrity: "There is no success without them" (*LV*, 1, 89).

Hard work, that was the thing--hard work yoked to a brilliant idea or to an opportunity seen and seized upon. The Success lists of 1900 contained extremely few entertainers. However, in the biographies of 1945 the magazines spoke considerably less about the singleness of purpose, the drive, diligence, or solid achievements associated with industrialists. In their stead, the subjects who were concentrated upon now--largely entertainers--made little claim to accomplishment in the old sense, but instead showed a marked proclivity for admitting, "I got a break":

It was a prophecy of the idea of the "Beautiful People"-- and of the rest of us, who admire the "Beautiful People" because they are the "Beautiful People" and do all the glamorous things we can't afford to do. (Farrell, 278)

The American Dream, between 1900 and 1945, says Farrell, changed rapidly from success by achievement to success by connections; and, says he, Dreiser's works illustrate this change. Certainly *Sister Carrie* is a prime case in point.

The accuracy of Farrell's observations is supported by the latest poll of the "Heroes of America" which I have seen, that compiled for the *World Almanac*.¹³ Here the idols most characteristic of Dreiser's time are missing entirely. Who stands tallest among the "top ten" now? No inventors, certainly. No scientists. No writers. No men of medicine. No humanitarians. Not a single Captain of Industry. But entertainers, yes, and in abundance. Eddie Murphy: Number One. Then television stars. An Olympic gymnast, and a basketball player. Rock singers. Actors and actresses, of course. And standing in the Number-Two slot: Ronald Reagan, whose election embodies the logical end of that road which begins with Carrie Meeber. As soon as it occurred to politicians that a candidate for public office might best be packaged for vending by the same hucksters who wrapped and delivered the Stars, it was inevitable that actor and politician would meld, providing a new kind of Star who would be afforded lodging gratis, not in the Waldorf, as happens with Carrie, but on Pennsylvania Avenue. Mr. Reagan stands as both the culmination and the *reductio ad absurdum* of that trendline whose beginnings Dreiser sensed as early as 1899.¹⁴

In Carrie's rise we hear Dreiser's prophecy, not merely of the popular adulation showered upon stage players, but of the advent of the Movie Star, that national darling of the 1920s and especially of the 1930s, whose celebrated image would be made possible by new technology, master-minded and managed by a corps of press-agents and PR men. For it is to Hollywood and not to the Broadway theaters that Carrie Meeber would have gravitated had she come along thirty years hence, to the dream factory especially equipped for spinning gold out of dross, the very spot in which her creator spent his final years peddling scripts to the studios.

More than one reader has pondered the question of Carrie's theatrical triumph, given the meagerness of her talent and the fact that Dreiser never claims for her any unusual ability, not to speak of depth, as an actress. What she has going for her seems to be what thousands of others possess: slightly better than average looks, quite regular

features, the vitality of youth, of course--and a natural talent for mimicry. Not too much here to build upon, not too much to set her apart from the other girls on the chorus line. And yet there is something else--Farrell calls it "an emotional nature" to which audiences responded, propelling her toward fame. Dreiser puts it otherwise. Carrie has a "sad mouth"--and there is something about her eyes as well--she looks as if she might burst into tears upon the least provocation. It is this vulnerability which turns out to make all the difference, a quality which could only have been enhanced had she emerged, not during the 1890s, but during the 1920s, when the movie camera would have been available to exploit this sense of yearning, longing, in screen-filling close ups.¹⁵ It is of girls like Carrie that Norma Desmond speaks in "Sunset Boulevard" when she recalls that the stars of her day didn't need the vulgarity of voices, because they had faces. Carrie seems not to work excessively hard at learning her new profession, though the chorus drills she endures are grueling physical workouts. And she never, for instance, takes voice lessons or seems to require the services of a dramatic coach.

Carrie enters the theater quite by accident, it all being arranged for her by Drouet, who sees an opportunity to show his mistress off in his Elks Lodge benefit play; but he is motivated as well by his wish to shine among his lodge brothers, who need a player for the role of Laura: The Belle of Society in "Under the Gaslight." Carrie is "discovered" by talent-scout Drouet much as Hollywood starlets reputedly would be "discovered" during the 1930s, and the first thing that occurs in her transformation into actress is that she receives a new name, chosen by Drouet: Carrie Madenda. Her performance at Avery Hall comes near to being a disaster but she is helped through it by Hurstwood, who trains his black, hypnotic eyes upon her from his box seat and endows her with confidence; and by Drouet, who rushes to her dressing room between acts to give her a salesmanly pep talk. Revitalized, Carrie turns in a performance that wins the audience. But this is a "one shot" event. After the play, Carrie subsides for three years into her former pattern of succeeding financially through her connections with Drouet and then with Hurstwood, in both cases playing offstage roles as their "wives." Her success at Avery Hall is but a foreshadowing of the celebrity that eventually will be hers.

IV

Having cut herself loose in New York from the sinking ship that is George Hurstwood, Carrie is ready to become a celebrity, modern-style. Hurstwood is an indispensable

element in this story, his case representing that of the failed celebrity who, having lost the delicately-balanced connections that had brought him to prominence, and running out of lucky breaks, sinks inevitably downward to obscurity. In stealing ten thousand dollars from his employer, he has destroyed that precious "image" which has depended altogether upon his making himself "invariably agreeable" (51) to management and clientele. His early career prefigures Carrie's own, but his later path stands as an object lesson of the dangers which Carrie must at all cost avoid.

If Hurstwood's fall is precipitous and irrevocable, Carrie's case illustrates the meteoric rise which American society can provide for one who touches the public pulse in an agreeable manner. Her momentous switch (as it turns out to be) from production to service takes place very soon after her arrival in Chicago, precisely when she determines to junk the work ethic and take on instead the role of mistress to Drouet, then later to Hurstwood. This event, occurring quietly, by force of circumstance, marks her transition from success by hard work to success by connections with figures of power and authority. But of course her great turning point takes place with her deliberate entry into the theatrical life. Now she becomes purely and professionally an entertainer, a "personality."

A series of lucky breaks propels Carrie to celebrity status. But she begins at the bottom, taken on to fill out a chorus line at the Casino. At first, virtually untutored, she suffers the indignity of the truly obscure as a stage manager fails to catch her name, calling her "Mason" rather than "Madenda," and remarks cuttingly, "What's the matter with your feet? Don't go shuffling along as if you were dead. I've got to have people with life in them" (425). Here Carrie is genuinely the "nothing" she feels herself to be, and on the opening night of her comic opera she feels fortunate to have escaped the tongue lashing administered to some of her less fortunate fellow chorines.

It will not happen again. She not only survives but prospers. One night the stage manager observes her from the wings and asks of the master of the ballet:

"Who is that fourth girl there on the right--the one coming round at the end now?"

"Oh," said the ballet-master, "that's Miss Madenda."

"She's good looking. Why don't you let her head that line?" (437) Plucked by fortune out of obscurity, Carrie

before long has advanced again, this time to lead "the white column" in a more lavish costume and with a fifty-percent increase in pay.

Shows open and shows close. On the strength of this initial experience, Carrie is hired for another non-speaking role, another chorus line, this time in oriental costume as a harem girl in "The Wives of Abdul." Forbidden to interpolate lines or "business" which might encroach upon the guarded prerogatives of the stars, Carrie yet dares to respond when the leading comedian himself improvises a line in front of her, "Well, who are you?" She answers with a spontaneous rejoinder, "I am yours truly" (474). A triviality, the phrase appears to titillate the audience and Carrie is allowed to retain her bit by the star, who senses a possibility of making capital for himself from this brief exchange. The entire company, at that moment, knows that Carrie has taken a giant step upward. When another actress leaves the play, Carrie is chosen as her replacement. Again a raise in pay, nearly double this time.

Another closing, and Carrie suffers a temporary setback, taking a non-speaking part as the little Quakeress in the new show at the Casino. Her job is to frown silently--no more. Now her one great physical asset--her sad mouth--is seized upon and exploited. Having become somewhat wiser to the ways of the theater, and being encouraged by the stage manager, she interjects a tiny bit of stage business, a mere intensification of the prescribed frown, but one which brings her to a genuine breakthrough:

In the second act, the crowd, wearied by a dull conversation, roved with its eyes about the stage and sighted her. There she was, grey-suited, sweet-faced, demure, but scowling. At first the general idea was that she was temporarily irritated, that the look was genuine and not fun at all. As she went on frowning, looking now at one principal and now at the other, the audience began to smile. The portly gentlemen in the front rows began to feel that she was a delicious little morsel. It was the kind of frown they would have loved to force away with kisses. All the gentlemen yearned toward her. She was capital. (492)

The approval of the audience overrides the star's natural objection to this bit of competition for the limelight, and Carrie finds herself suddenly, mysteriously, becoming the chief feature of the play. Audiences study her, decide she is delightful, and underscore that decision with their applause. While on stage, she creates a quaint, teasing, entertaining

atmosphere which causes both management and troupe to realize that this bit player has made a "hit."

The first manifestation of Carrie's new-found fame arrives in the form of fan mail. In one such letter an unknown millionaire begs for half an hour in which to plead his cause. Other notes in the same vein follow. Soon her letterbox is stuffed:

She had not had adulation and affectionate propositions before. Now they had come. Wherefore? She smiled to think that men should suddenly find her so much more attractive. (503)

While the letters pour in, it seems to Carrie as if the entire world is suddenly sympathetic with her, understands her, trusts her. Quite without asking for it, the doors of great homes and establishments seem to have opened wide to receive her. Flowers, love letters, offers of fortunes--her dreams run riot. A door into Aladdin's treasure cave seems to be swinging open.

But the underside of the coin of celebrity makes its presence known soon enough.¹⁶ Along with the affectionate notes pouring out the public's love upon her, their new idol, come letters of another sort, "mash notes"; Carrie remembers having received her first such letter back in Columbia City and discards them as being fraught with potential danger. "Why don't you see him?" asks her friend Lola Osborne of one importunate suitor, suggesting that the tone of his letter indicates its writer must have lots of money, which has always been Carrie's major criterion. "I know what he'd say," says Carrie; "I don't want to meet anybody that way" (504).

The media play an indispensable role in Carrie's rise. Even when she played in the amateur production of "Under the Gaslight" in Chicago, she was enviously aware of the press attention lavished upon the more experienced women who played the lead roles. Now it is her name that goes up on the Casino billboards. The newspapers, taking notice, inflate her reputation still further:

It was about this time that the newspapers and magazines were beginning to pay that illustrative attention to the beauties of the stage which has since become fervid. The newspapers, and particularly the Sunday newspapers, indulged in large decorative theatrical pages in which the faces and forms of well-known theatrical celebrities appeared, enclosed with artistic scrolls. The magazines also--or at least one or

two of the newer ones--published occasional portraits of pretty stars, and now and again photos of scenes from various plays. (486-87)

Carrie's first media attention comes in one of these Sunday supplements, a "wee notice" (487) which announces her portrayal of Katisha in "The Wives of Abdul," and calls her "one of the cleverest members of the chorus" (487). This small attention impels Carrie to hug herself with pleasure; "At last! The first, the long-hoped-for, the delightful notice" (487). More glowing pieces follow. "Miss Madenda presents one of the most delightful bits of character work ever seen on the Casino stage," declares the critic of the *Sun*, and his counterpart on the *Evening World* comes up with a catchy phrase: "If you wish to be merry, see Carrie frown" (494-95).

Before long a critic arranges for "one of those tinsel interviews which . . . display the follies of celebrities" (506), and the *Herald* issues its invitation for Carrie to appear at the ice-fund benefit, an unmistakable emblem of celebrity status. Hurstwood, down and out and reduced to reading newspapers discarded by guests in hotel lobbies, sees her picture in the *World*, surrounded by that attention-getting lacy scroll-work. He stops by the Casino to gaze upon Carrie's poster-picture as the Quaker Maid, in his shabby clothes presenting a dramatic contrast to everything that Carrie now seems to be, and which is lost to him forever.

From this point on, having "arrived," Carrie enjoys the perquisites of fame which are showered upon those who manage to touch the upper levels of celebrity. The author of the burlesque in which she is appearing composes a song especially to fatten her role. The theater manager gives her a private dressing room near the stage, far removed from the small fry upstairs, with whom she had formerly changed. She is deferred to by cast and management alike. Her every creature comfort is taken care of, often gratis. Hotel keepers beg her to take residence, nearly rent-free, relying upon the publicity value of her name to translate into profits at the registration counter from guests drawn by her celebrity. She moves to the Wellington Hotel, then to the Waldorf.

As she rises, larger and still larger salaries are paid Carrie in "good green bills of comfortable denominations" (488), though, with a nice irony, when Carrie receives the first of these monetary rewards, one hundred and fifty dollars for a week's work, she is nonplussed. The first intimations of the old question--new to her--creep into her conscious mind: "Can this be all? Is this It?" She ponders the

"convenient" roll of twenties, tens, and fives handed her with a smile by the usually sharp-voiced cashier: "Her hotel bill did not require its use. Her clothes had for some time been wholly satisfactory" (506); and the private coach she has always lusted after, once standing at her command, no longer holds its luster as a mobility-symbol. When Dreiser informs us that "with her one hundred and fifty in hand Carrie could think of nothing particularly to do [with it]" (505), he hints unmistakably at the dead end to which the role of celebrity in America so often has led.

"I get lonely; don't you?" Carrie asks Lola. She has needed to distance herself from her public.¹⁷ Hurstwood, reduced to beggary, hopes to ask for a handout but cannot break through the wall of security which surrounds her at her theater. Drouet returns, fundamentally unchanged, though considerably more affluent than of old, and wishes to pick up where they left off in Chicago. Significantly, seeing Carrie in her successful phase, Drouet imagines she has grown physically taller. When he asks her to dinner, she prevaricates--not tonight, please--"I can't. You mustn't ask me any more" (528). Too many of the fans who flood her mail with letters frighten her: "I know what kind they are" (507), she tells Lola, who shares her hotel suite.

It is Robert Ames, the electrical engineer met through the Vances, who suggests a future path for Carrie, and she listens to him intently because he represents a mysteriously attractive quality she has not encountered before in her men friends: intelligence. Money and fame are hers, but something vital is lacking; she begins to feel it. Earlier, at Sherry's, the fashionable restaurant's glitter of celebrity had captivated Carrie--all those top-of-the-line brand names, Haviland, Tiffany, and the like. But Ames disdained its crass air of conspicuous consumption and declared his lack of interest in mere money, particularly if it was to be spent "this way" (357). His rejection of the wealth ideal came as a shock to Carrie, who identified money inextricably with success and thought of establishments of crystal and lights and mirrors like Sherry's as the proper places for displaying it.

Now, Ames suggests a wholly new professional route: to get out of musical comedy as soon as possible and into more straight dramatic roles. He reminds Carrie of the poignant effect her face had had on him at their first meeting, that peculiar quality of the mouth and eyes that made her seem at any moment about to burst into tears. He analyzes this, telling how certain he is that she could win success as a dramatic actress through this special appeal, this gift of nature:

"The world is always struggling to express itself," he went on. "Most people are not capable of voicing their feelings. They depend on others. That is what genius is for Sometimes Nature does it in a face--it makes the face representative of all desire. That's what has happened in your case It's a thing the world likes to see, because it's a natural expression of its longing." (537)¹⁹

This gift is transient, explains Ames; with time it is bound to vanish. "If you turn away from it and live to satisfy yourself alone, it will go fast enough" (538). Nature will see to that. Ames feels that Carrie's special appeal has placed a corresponding burden of duty upon her. She paid nothing for her gift, and now that she has been given it, she must do something significant with it. Isn't there a higher degree of service to be sought than mere entertainment of the masses?²⁰ What is it? asks Carrie, and Ames explains one possibility, that in a wholly new and more demanding role she might have a chance to grow, to develop, to last. She must make her quality of sympathy and her melodious voice available and valuable to others; it will make her powers grow rather than fade.

At this point Carrie ends her story, unfulfilled by what her present success has brought her. Having before her the frightening specter of Hurstwood, she scarcely dares take a risk in which she also might lose all. Yet to remain on her present treadmill has become intolerable under the force of Ames's argument. There is no going back. She has gained most of what she has desired: gowns, carriage, furniture, money, publicity, applause--friendship, such as it is, but can you trust it to be sincere, or is the friendship she knows now a mere bowing and scraping in acknowledgement of her success? She walks amid "tinsel and shine" (556), a celebrity, unhappy.²¹

¹Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 23. Schickel's generalization is not quite as ironclad as it may appear, for he later suggests that "the first blocks of the modern celebrity system were sliding into place" (33) about 1895--which would coincide rather neatly with Carrie's New York success.

²Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York, Doubleday, 1900), 506. Future quotations from the novel will be identified parenthetically following the quote. Dreiser's

reference to the benefit for the free ice fund in which Carrie's celebrity will be used in furthering a charity anticipates Schickel's conclusion concerning the employment of contemporary celebrities "as the principal source of motive power in putting across ideas of every kind--social, political, aesthetic, moral.

³Schickel reminds us that the latin root *fama*, for *manifest deeds*, meant, at least until the 1940s, concrete and measurable achievement.

⁴In his chapter "Where I Came In," Schickel reports on the influence of 1930s movies which brought to him, as to all of us, the doings of the great world beyond his childhood corner. This world beyond was a place where people did interesting things, had more fun, and accomplished tasks impossible on the local scene. The places shown in the movies merged for him into a single "country of the mind" which he calls "The Great Other Place." Carrie Meeber has no movies to bring the outside world to her at the Columbia City Bijou; she must go to that Great Other Place to observe and learn. What she finds there corresponds to what Schickel observed in his weekly moviegoing--a place where people were beautiful, witty, thoughtful, sexy, sophisticated, and rich. This illusion is not so markedly different from that which Carrie derives from her observations of Chicago life, which are always seen from outside, by the attentive, distanced and awed observer, as in a movie.

⁵Dreiser's reliance upon George Ade for his description of the archetypal drummer of the 1890s, borrowed for the picture of Drouet in Chapter I of *Sister Carrie*, is well known. It would appear that Dreiser dipped further into Ade's *Fables in Slang* (Chicago: Herbert S. Stone, 1899) for the "peach" expression: see "The Fable of the Brash Drummer and the Peach Who Learned That There Were Others," about a small-town girl who is taken in by a fast-talking salesman until she meets a richer man who dresses far more elegantly.

⁶Quoted in W.A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 38. Future quotations from this book will be indicated by the abbreviation *D* and the page numbers.

⁷Theodore Dreiser, *A Book About Myself* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 301. Future references to this book will be indicated by the abbreviation *ABAM* and the page numbers.

⁸Theodore Dreiser, *Twelve Men* (New York: The Modern Library, 1928), 76. Future quotations from this book will be

indicated by the abbreviation *T* and the page numbers.

⁹A similar point is made by Philip Fisher in his fine analysis of *Sister Carrie*, "The Life History of Objeects," in *Hard Facts* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 162-63.

¹⁰Schickel presents an excellent summary of the linkage between the history of celebrity and the history of communications technology, especially on p. 28 ff.

¹¹See my "A Conversation with James T. Farrell" in *Partisan Review*/2, 1983, pp. 266-78.

¹²Orison Swett Marden, ed., *Little Visits with Great Americans* (New York: Success, 1905), 2, 520. Future quotations from this book will be indicated by the abbreviation *LV*, the volume and the page numbers.

¹³"Eddie Murphy is Leading Teen Hero," [Rochester, N.Y.] *Democrat and Chronicle*, 12 December 1985, B-1.

¹⁴Schickel notes that William Jennings Bryan was America's first celebrity politician (31), followed by Theodore Roosevelt.

¹⁵For an account of movie-star celebrity which includes the four pioneers, D.W. Griffith, Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks, as well as the consequences for celebrity of Griffith's development of the close-up, see Schickel, 34 ff.

¹⁶The special, double-edged role of the fan has been much examined in recent years. Schickel refers to a pertinent case, that of Jodie Foster, who resembles a latter-day Carrie in that she "received three thousand letters a month, and she is not truly a major star" (2).

¹⁷The need for and the problem of distancing from the fans is discussed in Schickel's chapter "Magic Bullets" (1-22). He cites the common and perplexing reaction of the celebrity: "They all know me; I don't know any of them," and Esther Williams' advice: "Walk fast. Don't stop and shake hands. You touch them, they don't touch you." Carrie's increasing sense of isolation and loneliness is exemplified by the scene in which Hurstwood waits outside the Casino Theater, hoping to intercept Carrie as she enters, but a coach drives up and discharges Carrie and Lola, who dash into the stage entrance so rapidly that he has no time even to call out to her. (516).

18 Dreiser employs a number of puns in *Sister Carrie*, including the triple pun on *Carrie-carry-carriage* which concerns her consistent yearning for a carriage which will carry her away wherever and whenever she pleases. It is Ames who outlines for Carrie the proper "aims" that will make life meaningful for one such as herself, gifted by nature and celebrated by society.

19 Schickel says of contemporary celebrities that famous people are used as symbols for "inchoate longings" in society (viii-ix). The most often employed term in connection with Carrie is *longing*, followed by its synonym, *yearning*.

20 See: Lawrence E. Hussman, Jr., "Thomas Edison and *Sister Carrie*," *American Literary Realism* (Spring 1975), 155-58, for a plausible case supporting the belief that Ames was suggested by Edison, whom Dreiser had interviewed for *Success*. But Dreiser draws upon another of his *Success* interviews as well, for he reports that Marshall Field told him: "There is no happiness in mere dollars. After they are had one cannot use but a moderate amount of them. It is given a man to eat so much, to wear so much, and to have so much shelter, and more he cannot use. When money has supplied these, its mission, so far as the individual is concerned, is fulfilled, and man must look further and higher" (*LV*, 1, 91). This is precisely Carrie's dilemma as her story ends, an intensification of the key scene in which she receives her first hundred-and-fifty-dollar salary and, seeing all her needs provided for, does not know what to do with the rest--or with herself.

21 The correspondence between Carrie Madenda and the most publicized movie celebrity of our time, Marilyn Monroe, are too intriguing and tempting to resist. There are, first of all, the obscure, nearly anonymous backgrounds from which both girls emerge. Then the uncanny coincidence of sound in their names: *Caroline*, which is Carrie's given name, and *Marilyn*, the movie-name given Norma Jean Baker. Both begin their careers with little talent and less training, playing the smallest of walk-on parts. Both girls have something special about them that accounts for their appeal; Carrie's sad mouth and about-to-cry expression arouse interest and sympathy, while of Marilyn it was said that the camera "loved" her, making her sex incarnate. Both girls rise quickly through lucky breaks and meet with their greatest success in musical comedy. And Carrie's urge to leave that genre for straight dramatics has its parallel in Marilyn's oft-repeated wish (taken as a joke by most) to make herself capable of playing Grushenka in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The vulnerability expressed by Carrie's facial expression was magnified in

Marilyn's case; in every way her career seems an inflation of what happens to Carrie. The girls share involvement with a series of husbands--in Carrie's case "husbands"--whom they discard as the career expands and as their attention is attracted by more intellectual men--Robert Ames and Arthur Miller. This sense that Marilyn is merely Carrie magnified is well exemplified in Carrie's feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction, an emotion shared by Marilyn but in her case taken to the extremity of suicide. Schickel reviews the Monroe celebrity at some length (111 ff.).

HAROLD DIES AND THE DREISER TRUST

Too many years ago, when I was a graduate student, I found a reference to Dreiser's "Amateur Laborer" manuscript. Assuming that it was a relatively short essay, I wrote the Curator of the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania to ask for a xerox copy. Dr. Neda Westlake graciously responded, suggesting that I make plans to study the manuscript at the Van Pelt Library, for its size and condition would make duplication a most impractical and certainly very expensive operation. She added that to get a reproduction of an unpublished Dreiser manuscript I would need the approval of Harold Dies, Trustee of the Dreiser Trust.

As embarrassing as it seemed at the time, this naive request was destined to be a very fortunate blunder. It stimulated my interest in "An Amateur Laborer," which years later I had the opportunity to edit for a University of Pennsylvania Press edition. It introduced me to Neda Westlake, whose support as Curator of the Dreiser Collection made many of my scholarly projects possible and whose friendship has been a highlight of my professional life with Dreiser. And it made me aware of Harold Dies, whose generous cooperation and professional care over the years have left me and the *Dreiser Newsletter* (now *Dreiser Studies*) in his debt.

Mr. Dies' duties as Trustee of the Dreiser Trust, in his own words, are as follows:

The Dreiser Trust was set up as a private trust, giving the trustee full authority to deal with agents and publishers with respect to the promotion and the sale of various rights to the Dreiser properties. . . . Generally I deal directly with publishers in the United States. But for the most part we have used the agency of Curtis Brown, Ltd., over the years to handle the foreign language rights since they have representatives in most of the major cities throughout the world. Also, in recent years, I have been using them in connection with motion picture, T.V. and legitimate stage rights due to

the specialized nature of these fields. Of course, in my capacity of trustee, all contracts are approved and signed by me on behalf of the various heirs to whom I make an accounting each year at the close of the fiscal period.

Since 1970, Mr. Dies has periodically kept the *Dreiser Newsletter* abreast of plans involving Dreiser properties, and frequently we have passed on to him queries from Dreiser scholars regarding publication rights and stipulations. Also, on occasion, we have been asked about Mr. Dies' background, specifically his relationship with the Dreiser family. About this matter, we previously had no specifics. Recently, however, at Vera Dreiser's suggestion, Mr. Dies sent us a copy of a letter he had written to biographer Richard Lingeman. Noting that Dr. Dreiser felt "that much of this background information would be of interest to Dreiser scholars," he authorized us to use whatever excerpts we found significant. We appreciate the opportunity to share this information with our readers and in doing so acknowledge Mr. Dies' many years of excellent service to Dreiser studies.

R.W.D.

DIES ON DIES

Some of Dreiser's biographers have been accused of being unsympathetic in the treatment of his life, while others tend to lean too much in the other direction. Certainly he was a very immoral man according to the Biblical standard, which, on the surface at least, was in vogue at the time, and one can't help but feel a certain ingratitude on his part toward Jug. Yet it seems to me that her loyalty too was somewhat suspect when one considers how she would leave him during financial reverses and return to her folks. Genuine loyalty would seem to dictate a need to help him out by trying to get a job herself. Even if she had suggested as much and Dreiser would not hear of it, she could have done so back home and tried to raise some much needed money to help him reach his goals during those dreadful days following the failure of *Sister Carrie* in 1900. But then she probably had no idea just how bad things really were. Of course I got sort of a one-sided view of Jug through the eyes of Helen Dreiser, who, along with Theodore, resented her refusal to give him his freedom over all those many years until her death. But Vera Dreiser presented another side of the story and that along with Richard Lingeman's account helps to balance out the picture and leaves it for the reader to commend or condemn.

I worked very closely with Helen Dreiser from 1948 to 1951 after leaving the army. I had encouraged her over the years to write her book *My Life with Dreiser* and she was in the process of writing it and making some revisions in earlier chapters at the time I came to live on her estate at 1015 North Kings Road in Hollywood. She wanted someone she could trust with whom to discuss the work and assist in the editing. Showing her appreciation, she wrote in my personally autographed copy of the book: "For my dear cousin Harold without whose confidence and constant encouragement this volume might not have come to completion. With love and appreciation from Helen. Hollywood, Calif. Feb. 18, 1951." I also took over the handling of the business with the various agents and publishers and, for lack of a better title, was dubbed "Literary Associate." So I came to be quite familiar with Dreiser's works and his life through this association. Earlier, during the war, I was commissioned as an army officer and assigned aboard ships operating out of the Los Angeles Port of Embarkation at Wilmington, California. These were merchant marine ships chartered by the army for transporting supplies and some troops to various locations in the Pacific. My first trip was a 40-day journey to Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, and then up the Indian Ocean to Calcutta, India. Then I was flown back to the States via North Africa to New York and then traveled by train to Los Angeles. Having a few days between trips, I visited Helen and Theodore, as I did on other occasions, and they were most hospitable, assigning me to her luxurious bedroom upstairs while she would share the one downstairs with Theodore. They had a Steinway concert grand piano in the music alcove, on which I enjoyed playing, and often Dreiser would come out from his study in the back of the house to listen, sitting in his favorite rocking chair. Also, Helen had a beautiful contralto voice and would often sing for us. I really got to know Helen quite well around the year 1938, when I was living in Portland, Oregon, and she was visiting her mother, who lived in one of the suburbs of the city. Her sister Myrtle also sang, and so we had a lot in common in those days due to our love of music.

Dreiser had a very searching mind, and so he enjoyed discussing my various trips. I remember on my return from India he wanted to know what I thought of conditions over there. I expounded at some length, not knowing that he had earlier written an article on India that revealed a far greater knowledge of the subject than anything I could have offered. Had I known this, most likely I would have been somewhat reluctant to express myself. But then that is probably the mark of a good author. By not letting on that he was familiar with a subject, he was able to draw out of others what they knew and add it to his own considerable knowledge.

Of course Theodore knew that I was a cousin of Congressman Martin Dies, of Texas, who headed the Dies Committee, forerunner of the Un-American Activities Committee. Many of the writers and other professionals in the movie industry were being raked over the coals for Communistic leanings, and of course Dreiser was not spared since he was known to be sympathetic with the Russians. So on one of our first meetings he asked me: "Do you go along with that cousin of yours, Martin Dies?" Assuring him that I had no connection with Martin or his political views made for a more amicable relationship. However, showing how strongly Dreiser felt with respect to the struggle the Russians were making to survive in a capitalistic world, when I remarked in one of our discussions that there was not a real equality in Russia and that some were living a very rich life while the masses for the most part had very little, Dreiser was provoked almost to the point of rage. He denied that there was any such condition and was so upset that Helen was afraid he might have a heart attack. Thereafter, I decided it was better to talk about something else since he had such strong feelings in the matter. Evidently Dreiser based his views of Russia on what he had learned first-hand some years earlier when he was invited to tour Russia, as described in *Dreiser Looks at Russia*. Apparently anything of an adverse nature that was published over here was immediately relegated to the status of propaganda.

I was away on a leave of absence when I heard of Dreiser's death, which came as a shock since I had no knowledge of any serious illness. On my return to Los Angeles I visited Helen, and she appeared to be bearing up well, probably due to all the publicity associated with Dreiser's death, and was absorbed in her new responsibilities with respect to the release of *The Bulwark* and final preparation of *The Stoic*, which was to complete his *Trilogy of Desire*. I stayed in the army for the next two years since I was having the opportunity of seeing many interesting parts of the world. On one of my "round the world" trips I visited China, Korea and Japan. In fact I was able to get away on leave and travel all down through Japan from Yokohama to Hiroshima, where the bomb was dropped, and saw the people still sleeping in the park for lack of homes. I also visited Koby, Japan, where my mother, Myrtle Dickerson before her marriage, worked as private secretary to a big tea merchant around the turn of the century. Later my mother returned to the States and settled in New York, where she met Paul Dresser and worked for a time as his secretary. Through Paul she became a close friend of Vera's mother Mai, who did a lot of entertaining at her home, where Paul was often present. My mother had a beautiful coloratura soprano voice and later was on the stage in some of

the various light operas. So she fit in well with that musical family. She did not get to know Theodore due to the estrangement between Paul and him at the time. But she told me on several occasions how cut-to-the-heart Paul was when Theodore would walk down the street with his top hat and cane and not even speak to his brother when passing on the street. This must have been after Theodore was on the rise and before Paul's final business failure. My mother was one of those who attended Paul's funeral, and since Louise Dresser was only an adopted sister to Paul, the family asked my mother if she would mind riding in the carriage with Louise. So in this way they got to know each other. Paul and Theodore's mother and my maternal grandmother, Esther Schnepf, were sisters, and so my mother was their first cousin. My grandmother lived with my father and mother during the latter years of her life in Seattle, Washington. This was sometime before and after my birth in 1914. I don't recall just the year that she died, but according to her the family name was Schnepf rather than Schanab. My mother was the only child of her mother's second marriage to Samuel Dickerson. Therefore, my relationship to Helen was that of a half cousin since her mother, Ida Patges, was a half sister to my mother.

Theodore was very interested in the Bible, and, according to Helen, he did regular reading in it. Later in going through his library I noted that he often would compare one translation with another. For instance I remember that in his King James version where it reads at Psalm 90:1, "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations," he had penciled in "refuge," indicating research in some other translation. But unfortunately Dreiser never came to understand the Bible, and so he never found the answers to his questions concerning life. In his essay "My Creator," written after a lifetime of research, he had to admit that he was just as confused about life as he was when he started. Had I had the understanding of the Bible then that I have now, we might have had some very interesting discussions on the subject.

Helen suffered a stroke in 1951, followed by a second one that impaired her mind, making it impossible for her to further function with respect to financial or literary matters. Her sister Myrtle applied to be her guardian and planned to take her to her home in Gresham, Oregon. I did not contest this, feeling it was best for Helen's peace of mind, and in the hope that she might possibly recover, I bowed out of the picture and became active in the full-time evangelizing work of Jehovah's Witnesses. Subsequently, in 1953 I came here to Brooklyn, New York, to join the world headquarters staff, which has for its United States legal instrument the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. I am

presently serving as one of the directors of that corporation. But in 1955, following the death of Mrs. Dreiser, Myrtle Butcher and I were appointed as coexecutors and eventual trustees of her estate, which controls the royalties from all of Dreiser's published works, Dreiser having left his entire estate to Helen. After some years Myrtle's health began to fail, and so she resigned her position as trustee, leaving me as sole trustee of the Dreiser Trust as it has been designated. According to the will of Helen Dreiser and the compromise agreement among the heirs, upon my death or resignation, the University of Pennsylvania is authorized to name the succeeding trustee of the Dreiser Trust.

A DREISER CHECKLIST, 1986

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This checklist covers work on Dreiser in 1986 plus a number of publications omitted from previous checklists.

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

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

"Mencken: Don't Be So Bullheaded. Love and Kisses, Dreiser," *New York Times Book Review*, 9 Nov. 1986, 30. Rpts. two letters.

II. NEW DREISER STUDIES AND NEW STUDIES THAT INCLUDE DREISER

Anderson, Sherwood. *Letters to Bab: Sherwood Anderson to Marietta D. Finley, 1916-33.* Ed. William A. Sutton. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985, pp. 36-37, 147, 276-77, et passim.

Aristides. "An Older Dude," *American Scholar*, 55 (1986), 439-47.

Baida, Peter. "Dreiser's Fabulous Tycoon," *Forbes*, 27 Oct. 1986, pp. 97-98, 102.

Beaver, Harold. "Theatrical Models," in *The Great American Masquerade*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985, pp. 141-55.

Boswell, Jeanetta. *Theodore Dreiser and the Critics, 1911-1982: A Bibliography with Selective Annotations.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986.

Brandon, Craig. *Murder in the Adirondacks: An American Tragedy Revisited.* Utica: North Country Books, 1986.

- Brennen, Stephen C. "The Publication of *Sister Carrie*: Old and New Fictions," *American Literary Realism 1870-1910*, 18 (1985), 55-68.
- Brevda, William. *Harry Kemp: The Last Bohemian*. Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1986, pp. 89-90, 97-98, 100-05, et passim.
- Burke, John J. "Season of Despair: Theodore Dreiser in Philadelphia, 1902-1903," *Pennsylvania English*, 12 (Spring 1986), 31-38.
- Davis, Nancy H. "Sexual Politics and Theodore Dreiser's Women," in *Design, Pattern, Style: Hallmarks of a Developing American Culture*. Ed. Don Harkness. Tampa: American Studies Press, 1983, pp. 43-44.
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- Dickstein, Morris. "The Critics Who Made Us: Lionel Trilling and *The Liberal Imagination*," *Sewanee Review*, 94 (1986), 323-34.
- Dukhovyi, T. T. "Do temy borot'by proletariatu v tvorchosti T. Draizera," *Radians'ke Literaturoznavstvo: Naukovo-Teoretyehnyi Zhurnal* (Kiev, U.S.S.R.), no. 6 (June 1986), 49-53.
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- Epstein, Joseph. "The Mystery of Theodore Dreiser," *New Criterion*, 5 (Nov. 1986), 33-43.
- Faletti, Heidi E. "Crime and Controversy: The Filming of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, in *Crime in Motion Pictures*. Ed. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead. Kent: Kent State Univ., 1986, pp. 101-09.
- Foley, Barbara. *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986, pp. 167-69.
- Galinsky, Hans. "Vom Sohn eines Mayener Auswanderers zum Ameri-kanischen Dichter: Der Weg Theodore Dreisers," *Eifel*, 80 (1985), 279-81, 346-48.

- Gerber, Philip L. "The Tangled Web: Offstage Acting in *Sister Carrie*," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 17 (Fall 1986), 1-8.
- Good, Howard. *Acquainted with the Night: The Image of Journalists in American Fiction, 1890-1930*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986, pp. 30-32, et passim.
- Ivan'ko, S. E. "Teodor Draizer--pisatel, 'kommunist [Theodore Dreiser--Writer, Communist]," *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya* 2 (1985), 127-43.
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- Joyce, Joyce Ann. *Richard Wright's Art of Tragedy*. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1986, pp. 21-22.
- Kazin, Alfred. "H. L. Mencken and the Great American Boob," *Menckeniana*, no. 99 (Fall 1986), 1-8.
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- Pizer, Donald. "Self-Censorship and Textual Editing," in *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*. Ed. Jerome J. McCann. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 144-61.
- Poitras, Jean-Maurice. "Leonard Keene Hirshberg and Henry Louis Mencken," *Menckeniana*, no. 97 (Spring 1986), 1-7.

Riggio, Thomas P. "Farrell, Masters and Mencken on Dreiser: the Los Angeles Public Library Celebration," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 17 (Spring 1986), 10-15.

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Singh, Brij Mohan. "Theodore Dreiser's Short Stories: A Study in Themes," *Panjah University Research Bulletin*, 15 (Oct. 1984), 25-35.

Whalen, Terry. "Dreiser's Tragic Sense: The Mind as 'Poor Ego'," *The Old Northwest*, 11 (1985), 61-80.

Yagyu, Nozomu. *Eibei Bungaku ni miru Gendaijin no Ishiko no Henyo* [Changes in Modern Consciousness and Anglo-American Writers] (Japan). Tokyo: Jordan-sha, 1985.

III. REPRINTS OF EARLIER DREISER STUDIES

Conder, John J. "Dreiser's Trilogy and the Dilemma of Determinism," *Naturalism in American Fiction: The Classic Phase*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984, pp. 86-117, rpt. in *American Fiction 1914 to 1945*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986, pp. 37-60.

Gerber, Philip L. "Dreiser: The Great Sloth of the Thirties," *Journal of Life, Art and Literature* (India), 3 (Jan. 1984), rpt. in *The Old Northwest*, 11 (1985), 7-23.

IV. ABSTRACTS OF DISSERTATIONS AND THESES ON AND INCLUDING DREISER

Goldman, Irene Carolyn. "Captains of Industry and Their Mates: A New Look at the American Business Novel from Howells to Dreiser," *DAI*, 47 (1986), 1323A (Boston U.).

Lenarcic, Faye Mertine. "The Emergence of the Passionate Woman in American Fiction, 1850-1920," *DAI*, 46 (1986), 2693A (Syracuse).

Mizruchi, Susan Laura. "The Power of Historical Knowledge: Narrating the Past in Hawthorne, James and Dreiser," *DAI*, 46 (1986), 3035A (Princeton).

Robertson, Michael. "The First 'New Journalism' and American Fiction, 1880-1925: Studies in Howells, James, Crane, Dreiser, and Hemingway," *DAI*, 45 (1985), 3641A (Princeton).

Schwartz, Carol Ann. "Class Consciousness in the Novels of Theodore Dreiser," *DAI*, 46 (1986), 2695A (Columbia).

Strychacz, Thomas Frank. "Challenging Mass Culture: American Writers and Literary Authority, 1880-1940," *DAI*, 47 (1986), 2161A (Princeton).

REVIEWS

WAS DREISER TOM WOLFE'S GRANDPA?

Theodore Dreiser's "Heard in the Corridors": *Articles and Related Writings*, Ed. T.D. Nostwich. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988. 192 pp. \$22.95.

Dreiser scholars will welcome the publication of these one-hundred-seventy-five short columns written for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in 1892 and 1893, which, up to now, were available only in the files of the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser Collection.

This material, which T.D. Nostwich notes is "a segment of a larger complete edition of Theodore Dreiser's newspaper stories written from 1892 to 1895 that I have edited but which in its entirety of more than 2300 pages has proved too expensive to publish" (p. ix), is sandwiched between eleven pages of introduction and fifteen pages of notes. The articles are printed in newspaper-size columns; the thin volume is physically tasteful, stylish and handsome--qualities too often lacking in university press publications.

Much of this juvenilia is ephemeral. Nonetheless, it is true, as Mr. Nostwich aptly notes, that these "slight compositions ... anticipate not only the more mature critical reflections which, a few years later, as editor of 'Ev'ry Month,' he would publish under the pseudonym, 'The Prophet,' but also such characteristic motifs, sounded still later in his novels, as the inherent inequality of men, the function of instinct in behavior, the role of luck in achieving success, the all-importance of money in American life, the saintliness of the loving mother, the nature of literature, the character of the artist-writer" (p. xxii).

To his credit, Mr. Nostwich has done a fair amount of homework, particularly in the trying sphere of attribution. He also identifies some largely-forgotten public personalities referred to in the articles, and, on several occasions, draws

worthwhile parallels between the articles and the fiction, identifying themes common to both. Certain opportunities are missed, however, perhaps due to the limitations of space. And, unfortunately, the larger question of what we are to make of this material is, for the most part, ignored.

Some rather trivial "missed opportunities" include the fact that no note is taken of certain key "firsts" represented in this collection. For example, the collection includes the earliest examples now in print of plagiarism on Dreiser's part.¹ Why not call it that? Why not include a brief glance ahead toward later instances of plagiarism that would continue to get Dreiser in trouble throughout his life--plagiarizing from Dorothy Thompson, for example (which led to legal proceedings against Dreiser), or from Sally Kusell, or from company catalogues? While Mr. Nostwich notes that certain articles were not original, he avoids flagging these instances for the reader as early signs of Dreiser's troubling habit of passing off someone else's text as his own. Some other Dreiser "firsts" which pass without notice are Dreiser's first story about a murder (no. 42, p. 43), and his first articles about Russia (No. 48, p. 48; No. 127, p. 95).

Also interesting (but again not "flagged" for the reader) are articles whose content is ahead of their time. The most striking piece in this category is an 1892 column which may be one of the earliest articles in America to suggest a strong, unequivocal direct link between cigarette smoking and a variety of diseases--including the one we now refer to as cancer (No. 14, p. 17).²

Mr. Nostwich sums up the significance of the book by noting that he has chosen to present "in a short volume what is perhaps [Dreiser's] most significant journalism, his earliest creative work, which, as he said, gave him the opportunity to test his wings as an imaginative writer--more so, indeed, than any of his other reportorial assignments (p. ix). Yet the contradictions in even this brief summary sentence suggest the contradictions at the heart of this material--problems, one must add, which are Dreiser's rather than Mr. Nostwich's, but which Mr. Nostwich has not done much to elucidate. There is a basic tension between "reportorial" and "imaginative" writing, between "journalism" and "creative work," and the working out of these tensions led to some of Dreiser's most important literary achievements. The "fault line" that strikes the reader from the first page of the editor's preface is the difficulty of determining what exactly is the product of Dreiser's imagination and what is the product of his careful listening and observation.

It is striking that Dreiser's career at the *Globe-Democrat* was, so to speak, framed by fraud. Dreiser got the job initially because John T. McEnnis, his editor at the Chicago *Globe*, bragged about the skill with which he had exposed fraud in Chicago auction shops.³ Dreiser later left the *Globe-Democrat* under a heavy cloud of embarrassment and shame because of some theatre reviews he had gotten up without having seen the plays. (The plays, held up by a flood on the railroad tracks, never ran; Dreiser's reviews, however--complete with comments on the audience's enthusiastic applause--did.)

In between being hired for exposing fake auction shops and resigning for concocting fake reviews, Dreiser made a name for himself by whipping up the largely fake interviews that make up his "Heard in the Corridors" columns--the exasperatingly slippery blend of reporting and invention presented in this volume.

"I could write any sort of story I pleased," Nostwich quotes Dreiser, "romantic, realistic or lunatic, and credit it to some imaginary guest at one of the hotels, and if it was not too improbable it was passed without comment....I... decided that I could manufacture names as well as stories, and forthwith scribbled six marvels, attaching such name as came into my mind. The next day these were all duly published and I was told to do the column regularly as well as my regular assignments" (p. xxi).

Scholars have long known that Dreiser admitted to having made up much of the "Heard in the Corridors" material. But this volume adds little that is new to our general sense that Dreiser "piped" a good deal of what he passed off as reporting. Are questions about this confusion somehow arcane and out of place in today's universe of inquiry? After all, we live in an era when distinguished historians such as Hayden White and respected anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz draw our attention to the "constructed" nature of (respectively) historical explanation and ethnography, teaching us that these forms of narrative have much more in common with their fictional first cousins than we previously thought. Scholars of the media echo these concerns (one might cite any of a number of contributors to the influential journal *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, for example). These trends in criticism have helped us learn to approach with greater sophistication texts we were content to relegate, in simpler times, to a relatively uncomplicated realm of naive empiricism. But while we understand that newspaper articles are as "constructed" in their own way as novels are, this awareness of how they are "made" should not obscure our

sensitivity to what they "do"--i.e., to how they function within the conventions of a particular community of readers.

It is these questions that are most intriguing about this newest collection of Dreiser's writings and, unfortunately, are least addressed by the editor. What did Dreiser's readers make of these stories? Did they accept them as fact? Did they assume they were invented? In other words, were they an early example of newspaper fraud--precursors to contemporary purveyors of "fabrifacts" such as Janet Cooke, Christopher Jones and Alastair Reid?⁴ It is probably impossible to answer these questions with more than conjectures, but those conjectures, framed by an awareness of the social history of journalism, would be quite valuable.

But if the responses of readers of the newspapers in the 1890s are relatively inaccessible to us, there is another community of readers whose response may be easier to analyze: our own--i.e., scholars in the 1980s who read this book. What do we make of what lies before us? Do we take it as social history or biography or reporting? Or do we take it as imaginative and creative work?

For that matter why should we care? Why does it matter? What difference does it make what it is, anyway, since we know that it is, after all, at best, journalistic ephemera and literary juvenilia. It matters, I would argue, for a number of reasons.

Social, cultural and literary historians have a tremendous hunger for the bits of the mosaic that just such ephemera and juvenilia might yield. But here they don't even know which mosaic to fit the piece into. Let me give a few examples.

No. 17, for example, is an eye-witness account of an exchange involving racism, police brutality, and Southern railroads (p. 19). Did Dreiser make it up, or did it happen? Clearly it's hard to know. But is it necessarily impossible to know? The information allegedly comes from a "Mr. William Clark, formerly Assistant Superintendent of the Wabash Railway System," who, at the time of the incident he recounts, "had charge of the Queen and Crescent line at Shreveport, La." Surely if such a person existed, there would be some record of him today. If railway system records yielded no information, city directories might be a potential source. Or parish records, perhaps. I am not suggesting that Mr. Nostwich should have tried to track down every individual named as an interview subject--although that is, in fact, precisely the kind of detective work which social historians practice. I do

find it a bit odd, however, that in those cases where we would particularly want to know if the person interviewed existed, we have no indication that the editor's efforts to research the question were stymied--or, indeed, that they were even made. (When the speaker is a known friend or relative of Dreiser's, Mr. Nostwich does note that the exchange is probably completely made-up.) What difference would it make in this particular case? If the speaker were real, and the incident could be presumed to have actually taken place, then it might be inserted into any of a number of "mosaics" with which scholars in history and literature concern themselves: the accumulating literature, for example, documenting turn-of-the-century racism, particularly in the railway system (one of the most famous accounts in this category is that of the eloquent black journalist Ida B. Wells); it might find its way into the history of how American newspapers treated the issue of race and racism during this period, which, of course, was the period that came to be known as the "nadir" in American race relations. It would provide a useful counterpoint to articles by black reporters documenting similar events.⁵

But let us assume, for the moment, that the story was Dreiser's invention. This, too, would lead us to ask some interesting and fruitful questions. Why would Dreiser invent a tale like this at this time? What does it tell us about his own developing attitudes on the subject of race? Where do we get if we fit it into a mosaic that includes other St. Louis articles he wrote about blacks--his glowing review of the performance by a black opera singer, for example, which drew his editor's ire, or his article about a lynching in Rich Hill, which he would later re-work into the short story "Nigger Jeff"?

But the point, of course, is that we don't know how to take this article--which is precisely the problem. Since we don't know whether it happened or was made up, the article proves to be less than useful for either the social historian or the literary historian. Neither fish nor fowl, it turns out to be a bland gruel that leaves one disquieted and unsatisfied.

There is something strangely familiar about these columns--something about each lead sentence that strikes us as weirdly contemporary. A few typical openings make the point: "'No, sir, I repeat it, a real lover never amounted to anything,' said Pat Sheridan, as he leaned back and blew rings of smoke to the ceiling, during a discussion of the modern philosophers in the corridors of the Lindell" (No. 29, p. 33). "'I'll wager the wine there is not a gentleman present who can guess within ten years of my age,' said Calvin S. Freeman, who

sat talking with some fellow traveling men in the rotunda of the Southern" (No. 21, p. 26). "'I once stopped in a haunted house,' said Albert Jones, while sipping lemonade in the Lindell annex" (No. 36, p. 38).

Of each of these pieces, one might say--as one critic has, "The piece didn't open like an ordinary...article at all. It opened with the tone and mood of a short story."⁶ The speaker cited here is not referring to Dreiser's 1890s "Corridors" pieces at all, but rather to a 1962 magazine article by Gay Talese about Joe Louis. It is, of course, Tom Wolfe who is holding forth, celebrating the birth of the "new journalism." The techniques he enumerates as central to what the "new journalists" were trying to do are: "scene-by-scene construction," "recording the dialogue in full," "third-person point of view" and "the recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating...and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene....symbolic, generally, of people's *status life*."⁷ With the possible exception of third-person point of view, all these techniques--the dialogue, the scene-setting, the status details (lemonade and smoke rings)--characterize Dreiser's "Corridors" stories as well.

And if the techniques are familiar, so are the problems associated with them. As John Hersey wrote in the *Yale Review* in 1980 in an essay on Capote, Mailer, Wolfe and the New Journalism in general, "I will assert that there is one sacred rule of journalism. The writer must not invent. The legend on the license must read: NONE OF THIS WAS MADE UP. The ethics of journalism, if we can be allowed such a boon, must be based on the simple truth that every journalist knows the difference between the distortion that comes from subtracting observed data and the distortion that comes from adding invented data."⁸

The ambiguity and confusion wrought by the mixing of reporting and invention is not the only problem Dreiser and the New Journalists have in common. As Hersey noted in his *Yale Review* article, all of the voices Tom Wolfe "quotes" in *The Right Stuff* end up mysteriously sounding like Wolfe himself--because, of course, they are. The characters Dreiser "quotes" in his made-up "Heard in the Corridors" interviews have the uncanny talent of sounding just like Dreiser.

Like a ventriloquist throwing his voice into others' mouths, Dreiser creates a large cast of characters, all of whom sound exactly like him. A long parade of speakers marches by; but the reader here, like the reader of Melville's

Confidence-Man, perhaps, retains the odd sense that everyone in the procession may in fact be but another avatar of one mysterious, ubiquitous being that somehow manages to feed all of them their lines. (This technique would stand Dreiser in good stead in his fiction, when he would, for a time, "become" Carrie, for instance, or Clyde, projecting his own voice as if it were theirs.)

It is, in fact, precisely this weakness which curiously redeems this odd collection, and allows us to savor some of the rare insights and ironies it offers: despite the fact that he puts the words in the mouths of others, it is pure Dreiser we are hearing--early, awkward, yearning, unembarrassed, questing Dreiser--emboldened by the fact that he is sure his readers have been fooled: it is not he who is speaking; it is whomever he reports having "Heard in the Corridors."

Here is a spark of the vanity and confidence that will enable Dreiser to transform mere mortals like Charles Yerkes into the stuff of great fiction: "'There is only one way to obtain undying fame,' said Wicklyff Bates, who is at the Laclede. 'That is to write something. People who write, providing they write well enough, are sure of eternal fame. It isn't so with the statesmen, generals, kings or priests. Some of these live through the writer, but only as a subordinate character. Everybody recognizes and feels constantly while reading that the writer might have chosen another character and written as well. So it makes one feel that the character is simply a protege of the author'" (No. 112, p. 86).

Here is an early (transparent and somewhat ridiculous) attempt to inflate his own limited experience (in this case, as a low-paid collector for an easy-payment home-furnishings company) into something scientific, noble and respected. (It has all the marks of some of the pompous bombast that would intrude into even his most successfully-realized fictions): "'As a compiler of statistics and a student of social conditions I have recently made some studies that may be interesting,' said F.T. Croyden, who is at the Lindell. 'It is in reference to the effect that the time or easy payment credit system has upon the people throughout the land. I have studied this phase of the social problem in three of the largest cities in the country, and find the system to be an evil influence among the poor classes. To do this I have been compelled to be a collector, and visit daily a certain number of persons where payments fell due weekly or monthly....'" (No. 133, p. 99).

Here are the plaintive musings of a young man who knows that the "jury is still out" on whether his own talents will wither or bloom." "It is asserted by many," began Denton Trowbridge, who is at the Laclede, "that whatever ability a person has will certainly find a vent and find its level and proper environment regardless of adverse circumstances. Others again maintain that a flower was born to blush unseen, etc., which may be equally true. But regardless of the truth of either, it is always interesting to note what exceedingly trivial occurrences often serve to develop some latent talent and declare to the sleeper for all time that he is indeed a man" (No. 97, p. 77).

Here is a poignant youthful fantasy of the writer's life--one which Dreiser never abandoned, and always sought: "Whenever I go into a book store I notice that I always build up a kind of delusive fiction about the names of the various authors I find there," said A.O. Dross, who is at the Lindell. "I suppose it's the same with everyone. You pick up a novel nicely bound and you read the title at once; then the name of the author. Whenever I read the author's name I always recall the leisure that he must have had to write a novel; and then, again, I always fancy him a man of wealth, who has plenty of leisure to devote to novel-writing, with a choice home near the seashore, a large library to work in, and plenty of scenery about, through which to ramble and gain rest of mind and inspiration. I imagine an author (still looking at the book) to be a man of culture and refinement, with delicate tastes, and a sense of gratification in soft, luxurious surroundings; a man who lingers in bed late of a morning and delights in a leisurely toilet of several hours. That may make up someone else's idea of a fop and a dandy, but to me that constitutes the ideal and successful author. Of course I know different; I know that, out of thousands of authors, all but four or five have no such environment. The most of them are poor strugglers, with disheveled appearance and no money to gratify the better tastes which they may possess. I imagine that the poor thin-coated stragglers who stand before every book stall and glance idly among the pages of dusty, worn books, exposed to the elements, must be chained in by some such thought of delightful existence on the part of others. They think of others living comfortably, and they just stay and vacantly long to be well off and happy also" (No. 164, pp. 118-119).

And here are some early strains of the misogyny that would so painfully complicate Dreiser's relationships with women throughout his life: "Some philosopher whose card I have mislaid once remarked: "As between men and dogs, give me dogs," said Stephen Howe, an old ship captain, as he

rolled to a seat in the rotunda of the Lindell. 'I have been frequently tempted to indorse the sentiment. When a dog tells me that he is my friend I bank on his statement every time. When a man tells me the same thing I wonder if he is telling the truth. When the man chances to be a woman I reject it as preposterous. Not one man in a dozen knows what friendship is. Not one woman in a thousand has the slightest conception of its meaning'" (No. 22, pp. 27-28).

Perhaps the descendents of Wicklyff Bates, F.T. Croyden, Denton Trowbridge, A.O. Dross or Stephen Howe may yet rise to lay claim to their ancestors' words of wisdom. Until they do, however, "*Heard in the Corridors*" will yield to readers the pleasure of eavesdropping on the consciousness of a young man tentatively and awkwardly groping towards his calling.

¹Mr. Nostwich notes: "Investigation reveals that . . . Nos. 9, 53, and 62 . . . were simply lifted from printed sources: magazines, newspapers or standard reference works" (p. xxiii).

²According to Dr. Leonard Plaine of New York City, discussions of the potential links between cigarette smoking and a variety of diseases appeared in the medical literature in this country from time to time throughout the second half of the 19th Century. Articles like this one in the popular press, however, were rare (personal communication).

³Theodore Dreiser, *Newspaper Days* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1922), p. 82.

⁴See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 207-17 and pp. 249-54, for a discussion of "fabrifacts" and controversies involving Cooke, Jones and Reid.

⁵If the story were real, for example, I would use it as a point of departure to compare with accounts of similar incidents that appeared in Afro-American newspapers during this period in an anthology I am currently co-editing of articles from the 19th Century Afro-American press.

⁶Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 10.

⁷Wolfe, pp. 31-32.

⁸John Hersey, "The Legend on the License," *Yale Review*, 70 (Autumn 1980), 1-25.

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MEMORIES OF DREISER

Philadelphia Rebel: The Education of a Bourgeoise, by Clara Clark Jaeger. Richmond, Va.: Grosvener Books, 1988. 229 pp. \$8.95.

Clara Jaeger's account of her turbulent years growing up in a Quaker background in Philadelphia after World War I is an absorbing story. Her revolt against social restraints and the lure of the Jazz Age permissiveness are told with humor and honesty. She describes objectively her personal reconciliation in the 1940s with the Oxford Group, later Moral ReArmament, that brought her maturity and a purposeful life.

For those interested in Theodore Dreiser, her memoir of the decade of the 1930s will be compelling reading. In the summer of 1931, at the age of twenty-two, she picked up a new book in her parents' library in Germantown and "found a kindred spirit, someone who has put down in writing all I have been bewildered by for so many years."

The book was *Dawn*, Dreiser's searching account of his first nineteen years, a book that prompted Clara to discover the sixty-year-old renowned author of *An American Tragedy*, then at the height of his fame. She wrote to him, expressing her admiration and her own search for beauty and meaning in life. His reply: "Clara...your letter speaks to me...would you come to see me here in New York?" Clara moved to New York in November 1931 and became Dreiser's intimate companion-typist-editor. Thus began a stormy four-year relationship that might be dismissed with a yawn and "Here we go again. Successful, aging author attracts a young devotee who does his typing for him and is discarded when his mistress blows the whistle."

The difference is that this is Clara Clark Jaeger

speaking; she writes with the advantage of looking back some fifty years on the experience with the clarity of memory, humor, and self-analysis that made Dreiser's own autobiographical excursions, written and published long after the events, illuminated by distance and his rueful embarrassment--"How could I have been such a dolt?"

So it is with amused retrospection that we can read a starry-eyed response to the meeting with Dreiser, a trip with him to Texas in 1932, encounters with George Jean Nathan, Ernest Boyd, Sinclair Lewis, and Sergei Eisenstein in New York and her red-faced humiliation when Dreiser stormed out of a crowded restaurant, cursing a badly cooked omelet.

In the summer of 1932 at Dreiser's invitation, Clara met Helen Richardson, Dreiser's companion of many years, at Iroki, the incredible gingerbread house at Mt. Kisko, New York. She offers new insights on that relationship and on her own awkward response to the situation that culminated in the auto accident, with Clara at the wheel, that destroyed the car and slightly injured Helen and Dreiser.

For two years after that, Clara lived in New York working for Dreiser, until he told her in 1934 that he no longer had enough work to justify her staying in the city, and she returned unhappily to Philadelphia.

Later meetings with Dreiser were casual; on one occasion in 1939 when she tried to explain how the Oxford Group had influenced her changed attitude toward life, giving her new direction and peace, he responded, "Alas, honey, I'm one of the irreconcilables as you know."

Clara was with the Group in Los Angeles in 1945 when Dreiser died. She attended the funeral service in Forest Lawn with her brother and her future husband. Recalling that funeral and her previous relationship with Dreiser, she concludes wistfully, "If only I could have another chance to talk to Dreiser now that I have learnt so much more. But sadly, that chance is gone."

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DREISER NEWS & NOTES

The Gospel of Wealth in the American Novel: The Rhetoric of Dreiser and Some of His Contemporaries, by Arun Mukherjee, was published by Croom Held of London in 1987. *Dreiser Studies* had hoped to review this study in this issue, but the review copy was either not sent or lost in shipment. . . . Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*, about a quarter of which is devoted to Dreiser, has been issued recently in a paperback edition by the Oxford University Press. It was published in hardcover by Johns Hopkins in 1985. . . . Tom Riggio, Editor of the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition, informs us that *Journalism, Vol. I* is in galley and should be available this spring or summer. This volume is edited by T. D. Nostwich. . . . Harold Dies, Trustee of the Dreiser Trust, writes, "We are in the process of signing a contract with the American Playhouse for a TV production of *The 'Genius,'* most likely to be shown over public television. We have other motion picture and/or television interests but none at the contract stage at this time." . . . This spring, at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture/American Culture Association, in New Orleans, there were two sessions on Dreiser: Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism I and II. These sessions were chaired by Miriam Gogol, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, N.Y. Papers included "An American Tragedy: Dreiser's Non-Naturalistic Artistry," Paul Orlov, Pennsylvania State; "Jennie Gerhardt and Carol Gilligan: Dreiser in a Different Voice," Lee C. Mitchell, Princeton; "The 'Genius': Convention or Freedom?" Miriam Gogol; "Sister Carrie: A Feminist Reading," Laura Niesen de Abruna, Ithaca College; "An American Tragedy: Quirks in the Language and Their Function," Michael G. Barry, SUNY, Buffalo; "An American Tragedy: A Bakhtinian Defense," Caren J. Town, Stetson. The respondent to these presentations was Richard Lehan, UCLA.