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Table of Contents

Mencken's Efforts to Reshape Dreiser as Man and Artist 2

Douglas C. Stenerson

Dreiser's Search for a "Religion of Life":
A Psychoanalytic Reading 21

Miriam Gogol
Fashion Institute of Technology

The Search for Ev'ry Month: An Update 31

Nancy Warner Barrineau
Pembroke State University

A Dreiser Checklist, 1988 35

Frederic E. Rusch
Indiana State University

Review:

The Power of Historical Narrative 42

Richard Dowell
Indiana State University

Dreiser News & Notes 44

MENCKEN'S EFFORTS TO RESHAPE DREISER AS MAN AND ARTIST

Douglas C. Stenerson

The first-and culturally most important-phase of the friendship between H.L. Mencken and Theodore Dreiser began in 1908 and ended in a bitter quarrel in 1926. The second phase started with a reconciliation in 1934 and lasted until Dreiser's death in 1945. Thomas P. Riggio has assembled the extensive correspondence between these two major spokesmen for their era in his recently published *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*.[1] Without continuing to develop the point in his later introductions, Riggio argues that between 1911 and 1914 Mencken "cast Dreiser in his own image."[2] The purpose of this essay is to explore the implications of this insight for the years 1915 to 1926. Before 1915, Mencken identified himself so closely with the novelist that he tirelessly guided and encouraged him, helped edit his manuscripts, reviewed his books with partisan zeal, and featured him as his main example of a great American artist victimized by a puritan and philistine society. This pattern of almost complete trust and amity changed after Mencken read the draft of *The "Genius"* early in 1915 because he believed that in its outlook, structure, and style the novel betrayed the integrity Dreiser had maintained in his previous work. In effect, his friend had defaced the image Mencken cherished. My aim is to focus on one aspect of that disillusioning experience: Mencken's determined effort to redirect and reshape Dreiser as man and artist until the recurring clash of egos disintegrated the friendship in 1926.[3]

Like a sculptor chipping away at granite, Mencken knew that he was working with recalcitrant material, but he persisted nonetheless. He tried, in the public prints as well as in private letters, to cajole, coax, persuade, prod, and shame the novelist into becoming a better man and a more conscious, consistent artist. True, he denied having any such intention. Disputing the merits of the reflective essays in *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub* (1920), he told Dreiser, "You are writing your books, and I am writing mine. . . . When you offend my pruderies, I shall bawl, but I'd

consider you an ass if you let it influence you" (416). In correspondence, however, he often made concessions to placate Dreiser. The bulk of the evidence suggests that he usually thought his friend more of an ass for ignoring his advice. Admitting that he himself "couldn't have done a single chapter of *Twelve Men* or *Sister Carrie*" (416), he never failed to acknowledge Dreiser's gifts as an artist, but in his mind's eye he envisioned the novelist as potentially much greater than his uneven output indicated. As part of his reshaping campaign, Mencken wished, to a greater extent than he realized, to see more of himself in Dreiser–an unswerving agnostic vision, a sustained effort to create a vivid literary style, an orderly private life.

Mencken's record shows that he needed to see a good deal of himself in any writer he admitted to his pantheon. He ridiculed or dismissed the characteristics running counter to his own preferences. In his *George Bernard Shaw* it was the iconoclastic dramatist he admired, not the socialist and "cart-tail orator."[4] In *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, as Ernest Boyd recognized, "Mencken created Nietzsche in his own image, hence the affecting superstition that he is a Nietzschean."[5] Ignoring or minimizing Nietzsche's idealism and mysticism, he portrayed the philosopher as a true successor to Darwin, Spencer, and Thomas Huxley, labeling him "the high priest of the actual," "the king of all axiom smashers and the arch dissenter of the age."[6] Joseph Conrad, who marveled at his good luck in consistently winning Mencken's approval, put his reactions on record:

> Mencken's vigour is astonishing. It is like an electric current. . . . When he takes up a man he snatches him away and fashions him into something that (in my case) he is pleased with–luckily for me, because had I not pleased him he would have torn me limb from limb. Whereas as it is he exalts me almost above the stars.[7]

As new works by and about Shaw and Conrad appeared, Mencken could add highlights or shadows to his selective portraits of them without any sense of being entangled in their private lives. In the case of Dreiser, close personal and professional ties greatly complicated this process. When they first met in 1908, Dreiser, at thirty-six, was widely known as the author of *Sister Carrie* and as top editor of the Butterick Publications in New York, with primary responsibility for *The Delineator* and two other women's magazines. Mencken, at twenty-seven, had built up a reputation in Baltimore as an enterprising journalist and was just beginning to reach a national audience. At Dreiser's request, he was already collaborating with a physician on some medical articles for *The Delineator*. Greatly as he and Dreiser differed in personality,

temperament, and modes of behavior, they were united by common hatreds and common goals.[8] The fact that they were German-Americans helps account for their antipathy toward the upholders of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, with its dependence on the traditions of England and New England and its efforts to impose morals through legislation and regulate art through censorship. Dreiser and Mencken, with a sharpened vision derived from their German-American heritage, their eager though differing responses to both the conservative and iconoclastic implications of social Darwinism, and their experience as reporters on big city dailies, saw the discrepancies between the Christian and democratic ideals widely professed and the base realities exposed in police courts and local politics. They rebelled against the hypocrisy of the officially sanctioned genteel code and cocked a cynical eye at plutocrats and political bosses. Having participated in the moral and aesthetic revolt of the 1890s, they also identified themselves with a tradition of dissent represented by such bohemian critics as James Huneker and such practitioners of naturalism in fiction as Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. By campaigning against literary colonialism, puritanism, and censorship, and by demanding a literature in which all nationalities and minorities would have a hearing, Mencken and Dreiser revived an ideal voiced by Walt Whitman. The indignities to which they and other German-Americans were subjected after 1914 made them more determined than ever to bring their joint efforts to a successful conclusion as soon as the war was over.[9]

Before 1915 Mencken had such a close affinity with Dreiser that he fulfilled what he called "the ideal office" of the critic: "to find out what an author is trying to do, and to beat a drum for him when it is worth doing and he does it well."[10] After reading the manuscript of *Jennie Gerhardt* in 1911, he wrote Dreiser, "The story comes upon me with great force; it touches my own experience of life in a hundred places; it preaches (or perhaps I had better say exhibits) a philosophy of life that seems to me to be sound" (68). In all four of Dreiser's novels up to 1914, he rejoiced to find "the same grim fidelity" to an art that "is almost wholly representative, detached, aloof, unethical," without any of "that pious glow, that mellow sentimentality, that soothing escape from reality, which Americans are accustomed to seek and find in prose fiction." Unlike "Norris, whose later work, particularly 'The Octopus,' shows a disconcerting mingling of honest realism and vaporous mysticism," Dreiser "has made no sacrifice of his convictions and done no treason to his artistic conscience."[11]

In his eagerness, under these circumstances, to establish Dreiser's reputation, Mencken often let his enthusiasm outrun his critical judgment. In a letter to the novelist, for example, he referred to Jennie's

unfailing goodness and self-sacrifice, raising the question of whether any character so "uncompromisingly exceptional" can be convincing (69-70), but he did not incorporate this reservation into his *Smart Set* review. Instead, he went to the extreme of asserting that Jennie, facing life alone at the end of the novel, "is more tragic thus than Lear on his wild heath or Prometheus on his rock."[12]

After reading Mencken's laudation of *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser wrote, "I confess that my cheeks colored some for I'm not ready yet to believe it" (78). In 1912 he asked his major ally to serve, if need be, as his literary executor. Mencken, startled and pleased by such a show of confidence, promptly agreed (107-8). In August 1914, out of gratitude for Mencken's loyal help and support, Dreiser offered him the original copy of any of his manuscripts. Delighted, Mencken chose *Sister Carrie* (148-49). This symbolic act marks the high point of the era of good feeling between the two men.

Within the next few months the first signs of strain began to develop. Mencken, who had just become the *Smart Set* co-editor, explained to Dreiser that the magazine's finances were precarious, but the novelist squabbled over the prices to be paid for three short plays and a short story (151-63). Mencken would have preferred to print part of *The "Genius,"* the forthcoming novel he had not yet seen, but couldn't get Dreiser to agree. With the help of a publisher's reader, Dreiser was already editing the huge manuscript of *The "Genius"* when he sent a heavily penciled copy to Mencken, asking for his advice on a large section singled out for possible submission to magazines other than *The Smart Set* (160, 166-70).

Dreiser was especially fond of this story in which he had modeled the hero, the painter and editor Eugene Witla, upon himself, but Mencken was so appalled by it that he dropped his "ideal office" as drum-beater and applied his drum-stick to "a tenderer leather"[13]–Dreiser's hide. In his *Smart Set* review, while conceding that the book had some artistic power, he ridiculed Dreiser for dabbling in mysticism and playing the moralist.[14] (Later, in *A Book of Prefaces*, Mencken noted "a donkeyish solemnity" in the novel, "as if Dreiser, suddenly discovering himself a sage, put off the high passion of the artist and took to pounding a pulpit.")[15] In form, the volume "straggles, strays, heaves, pitches, reels, totters, wavers." The style is clumsy, prolix, and "as devoid of aesthetic quality as an article in the *Nation*."[16]

Differences over *The "Genius,"* while contributing to several later crises, did not prevent Dreiser and Mencken from working closely together for some months to come. In the spring of 1916 Dreiser

responded willingly when Mencken solicited information for an essay to be published in *A Book of Prefaces* (229-35). In a perfunctory but favorable review of *Plays of the Natural and the Supernatural*, Mencken, perhaps because he and his co-editor George Jean Nathan had given four of these short works refuge in *The Smart Set*, squelched any uneasiness he had about Dreiser's mysticism.[17] In his long and lavish commentary on *A Hoosier Holiday*, he felt no need for such restraint. In his review, entitled "The Creed of a Novelist," he argued that this account of a pilgrimage by car from New York to Indiana revealed Dreiser at his best. Brilliantly evoking the "drowsy villages and oafish country towns" of the Midwest, he had once again proved himself capable of writing with "an indeniable glow in it."[18]

Not long before the October 1916 *Smart Set* containing this enthusiastic estimate appeared on the news-stands, public controversy over *The "Genius"* led to further dissension. Despite strong denials from West Tenth Street, where Dreiser had lived since 1914, Mencken feared that his association with "the red-ink boys" of Greenwich Village was having a bad effect (196-99). When the Society for the Suppression of Vice proceeded against *The "Genius"* and forced the publisher to withhold copies from sale, Mencken agreed to help gather signatures for a Protest that would be widely publicized. When he discovered that Dreiser had allowed Village radicals like Floyd Dell and Max Eastman to sign, Mencken, convinced that such additions would alienate more orthodox writers, denounced it as "a damnably silly, perverse and dangerous policy." Dreiser retorted that he was not in close touch with any radicals. Even if he were, he informed Mencken, "It is really none of your business, any more than your public friendships or relationships are to me, still you persist. Have I tried to supervise your private life or comment on any of your friends or deeds? What's eating you, anyhow? (266-68)

Meanwhile, just as Mencken was having great success in collecting signatures, Dreiser sent him the manuscript of *The Hand of the Potter*, a play in which Isadore Berchansky, a victim of bad heredity and a slum environment, rapes and then murders an eleven-year-old girl. In a series of stinging letters, Mencken proclaimed it a hopeless botch as a play and demanded that Dreiser abandon the idea of either staging or printing it. Any publicity about it would provide further ammunition for the smuthounds, infuriate the public, and lead to the withdrawal of many names from the Protest. "You fill me with ire," he announced. "I damn you in every European language. . . . Put the ms. behind the clock, and thank me and God for saving you from a mess. . . . In brief, apply to this business the elementary reasoning powers of a streptococcus" (281-85).

Dreiser was angry and unconvinced. "I wonder sometime[s]," he asked, "whether you are allowing preconceived notions of what I can or cannot do to influence you?" (284). He granted that Mencken was within his rights as a critic to call the play a botch. What disturbed him, he wrote, "is your swift, dogmatic rulings as to the limits of the stage, the absolutely alien character of perversion, the reading into this play of a plea for perversion. . . ."

> But so long [Dreiser vowed] as I have any adequate possession of my senses current convention will not dictate to me where I shall look for art–in tragedy or comedy. My inner instincts and passions and pities are going to instruct me–not a numbskull mass that believes one thing and does another (285-87).

This dispute illustrates the tensions that recurred, between intervals of renewed camaraderie, for another decade. With the force of an ego that was a match even for Mencken's, Dreiser withstood outer pressures and trusted the inner promptings that motivated him as an artist. From his point of view it was painful to find his brother-in-arms in the fight against superpatriotism, puritanism, and censorship suddenly advocating constraint and conformity. One impulse was to lash out in anger. Another was to appeal to Mencken's better nature. He also acknowledged ruefully, "I rarely argue with anyone but yourself and when I do it results fatally–for me" (287). Seeing no immediate prospect of *The Hand of the Potter* being produced or published, Mencken dropped the issue and stayed on friendly terms.

In *A Book of Prefaces* (1917), which contains his most carefully and fully developed interpretation of Dreiser, Mencken reveals some of the ways in which he wanted to redesign his friend as man and artist. Frequently he uses Joseph Conrad as a norm by which to measure Dreiser's accomplishments and failings.

Like Dreiser himself, Mencken makes no sharp distinctions among realism, naturalism, and romanticism. What Conrad and Dreiser offer, he contends, is neither "plain realism" nor "plain romance," but "their artistic combination, as in life itself. . .–the subtle projection of the concrete muddle that is living against the ideal orderliness that we reach out for–the eternal war of experience and aspiration–the contrast between the world as it is and the world as it might be or ought to be."[19] "Both novelists," Mencken maintains, "see human existence as a seeking without a finding; both reject the prevailing interpretations of its meaning and mechanism; both take refuge in 'I do not know'" (88). Both are "fascinated by . . . the tragic vanity of the blind groping that we call aspiration, the profound meaninglessness of life–fascinated, and left

wondering" (11). Without a trace of sentimentality or any concession to the religious impulse, Conrad can look steadily into the blackness, exercising an irony that marks "his essential superiority as a civilized man" (18). Being "by birth and training, an aristocrat," he is "far more resolute" in his agnostic skepticism than Dreiser. "Dreiser more than once," says Mencken, "seems ready to take refuge behind an indeterminate sort of mysticism, even a facile supernaturalism" (12). "His intellectual and cultural heritage" has imposed upon him "the burden of a believing mind," so that "there come moments when a dead hand falls upon him, and he is once more the Indiana peasant, snuffing absurdly over imbecile sentimentalities, giving a grave ear to quackeries, snorting and eye-rolling with the best of them" (92-93).

These last remarks clearly suggest that Mencken saw in Dreiser so much of his own version of agnostic skepticism that he wanted to see more. Mencken was pleased when, as he said in a review of *The Titan*, Dreiser kept his face "plainly turned toward the hard rocks of science,"[20] but he squirmed in embarrassment when the novelist discerned occult or supernatural forces lurking behind those same boulders. This essential difference between the two reflected corresponding differences in family background, in temperament, and in each man's interpretation of the Darwinian tradition. Mencken had grown up in a freethinking atmosphere and was, by his own admission, anaesthetic to religious experience. Dreiser, despite his violent revolt against the narrow and puritanical Catholicism in which he had been brought up, had an instinctively religious nature. From boyhood on he had a wavering but recurrent perception that nature, in at least some of its workings, has a spiritual dimension.

Mencken and Dreiser discovered early that Darwin and his interpreters loomed large in the experience of both of them, but each drew from social Darwinism the doctrines that fitted his own predilections. What dismayed Mencken was that Dreiser, having drunk from the same fountains, was not consistently, like himself, a thoroughgoing materialist and agnostic. For Mencken, as for Thomas Huxley, who had provided him with a rationale for his homebred religious doubts, agnosticism was much more militant than "a state of professing not to know." Although Mencken would never have admitted it, there was a religious quality in his unyielding commitment to the assumptions of late nineteenth-century science, his aggressive faith in the scientific method, and his animus against orthodoxy. The ambivalences in Dreiser's views are too complex to trace here, but one concept that greatly impressed the novelist was Herbert Spencer's famous distinction between the Knowable and the Unknowable. If science and religion each has a realm of its own, then they are not deadly enemies, but can,

as Spencer argued, be reconciled on "the basis of . . . this deepest, widest, and most certain of all facts–that the Power which the Universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable."[21] It is therefore possible, Dreiser reasoned, to believe in both religion and science, even though the religious impulse may survive only in an attenuated and unconventional form. "Aren't scientists & philosophers at bottom truly reverential," he had asked in a letter to Mencken in 1909, "and don't they wish (pray) ardently for more knowledge. . . . the truth is men are not less religious–they are religious in a different way–and that's a fact" (37).

Mencken's truthseeking operated primarily within the confines of the Huxleyan worldview. For Mencken, what Huxley called the "ecclesiastical spirit" was not only the enemy of science, but also, because of its effort to legislate morals, the enemy of civilized living. In their opposition to the religious groups who backed Prohibition and other infringements upon individual liberty he and Dreiser were in thorough agreement. Yet Dreiser was also a seeker in the traditional religious sense, discerning in nature spirit and beauty as well as violence and struggle, turning for answers now to science, now to religion and philosophy, driven by conflicting desires and swinging between conflicting beliefs, but eternally seeking. Mencken was not equipped to appreciate this questing spirit or to acknowledge how vital it was in Dreiser's sensibility and in his development as an artist. He saw it only as a threat to his friend's integrity, even as a badge of inferiority, not as a major source of that "passionate compassion" for human strivings and sufferings he had identified as an essential part of Dreiser's tragic vision.[22]

In *A Book of Prefaces*, Mencken measures Dreiser's artistic control as well as his agnostic skepticism against Conrad's. Conrad, an aristocrat born and bred, with "the gift of emotional detachment" (92), is "almost as self-conscious as the Beethoven of the last quartets" (96). Dreiser has "in him, hidden deep-down, a great instinctive artist, and hence the makings of an aristocrat." His approach is intuitive rather than intellectual. *Sister Carrie*, for example, "was not the product of a conscious thinking out of Carrie's problems. It simply got itself there by the force of the artistic passion behind it" (94-95). The trouble with Dreiser both as man and artist is that "he is still in the transition stage between Christian Endeavour and civilization, . . . between being a good American and being a free man" (93), and thus has a long way to go before rivaling Conrad.

On Dreiser's style Mencken is ambivalent. As a highly conscious craftsman himself, he could not help being uneasy about an intuitive approach. He misses in Dreiser the "painful groping for the inevitable word" and "the constant joy of sudden discovery" that accompanies it.[23]

Except in dialogue, in which "he comes very close to the actual vulgate of his place and time," Dreiser "seems to have absolutely no respect for words as words–no sense of their inner music, no hand whatever for their adept combination." The "flat, familiar, threadbare" style resulting from this "irritating slovenliness" affects Mencken "like music on a fiddle out of tune."[24] If Dreiser would only make the necessary act of will, Mencken implies, he could prune, condense, be more selective and evocative. In this context, Mencken appears to demand that Dreiser, through some unspecified process, pluck out from his being his heritage as an "Indiana peasant" and transform himself into an "aristocrat" in full command of himself, his subject matter, and his method.

At the same time, Mencken half recognizes that the novelist's writing originated in psychic needs and depths beyond his comprehension and control. He acknowledges that Dreiser had shrugged off all his efforts "to entice him in this direction or that," seeming "at last to be authentically no more than a helpless instrument (or victim) of that inchoate flow of forces which he himself is so fond of depicting." In evaluating *The "Genius,"* he had remarked that "Dreiser writes in this banal fashion, I dessay, because God hath made him so." "He must do his work in his own manner," Mencken explained, "and his oafish clumsiness and crudeness are just as much a part of it as his amazing steadiness of vision, his easy management of gigantic operations, his superb sense of character." In contrast to "stylist-novelists, fellows who tickle with apt phrases, workers in psychological miniature," Dreiser "works with a steam-shovel." But Mencken did not move on from these insights to William Marion Reedy's shrewd judgment that "If he should get a little more 'art,' Dreiser will become a 'literary' novelist and then he'll be a 'goner,' not fit even to be damned."[25]

Although the analysis in *A Book of Prefaces* was predominantly a tribute, Dreiser took offense at Mencken's strictures upon his outlook and style.[26] For over six months their correspondence and meetings stopped. Dreiser's neglect affected Mencken the more keenly because America's entry into the war intensified the already widespread fear and suspicion of German-Americans. The Baltimore *Sunpapers* had assigned Mencken to a tour of duty on the eastern front but had no further use for his services after his return early in 1917. Because of his association with it, *The Smart Set* fell under suspicion despite its policy of avoiding war issues. The Espionage and Sedition Acts forced him to restrict his protests against the conduct of the Wilson administration mainly to private letters. Deprived of Dreiser's companionship, he began to feel lonely on his trips to New York.[27]

In March 1918, responding to an offer by the publisher B.W.

Huebsch to act as peacemaker, Dreiser expressed "unchangeable affection" for Mencken the man but doubts about Mencken the critic. Dreiser had no objection to Mencken's critical methods, except when they assumed "a slapstick familiarity and condescension," but he observed that his friend's "profound admiration, apparently, is only for *Sister Carrie*, and *Jennie Gerhardt*, works which to me represent really old-line conventional sentiment." The "newer vein" of *The "Genius," The Hand of the Potter*, and the essay "Life, Art and America" were, in Dreiser's view, "somewhat above" Mencken's "present intellectual mood and taste." "I wish it were different," Dreiser concluded, "but for me, apparently, at present anyhow, there is only strenuous diverging work ahead."[28] In the same month Mencken reflected as follows upon his "falling out" with Dreiser:

> . . .we simply can't agree on the things he has written during the past few years. Needless to say, I shall start no offensive against him. I think some of his late stuff (still in ms.) will get a walloping, and that he will eventually admit my sagacity with tears streaming down his front. But maybe I am wrong.[29]

By mid-1918 Dreiser relented and offered Mencken his playlet *Phantasmagoria*. Mencken welcomed the overture, tactfully arranging for a rejection to come not from him, but from Nathan. Mencken and Dreiser resumed their old intimacy.[30] In their letters they once again discussed many topics amicably and often spoofed each other. Mencken encouraged Dreiser and acceded to his requests for editorial help. Among other tasks, he recommended changes in the manuscript of *A Book about Myself*.

Even so, serious points of contention continued to surface. Dreiser was still indignant over what he perceived as Mencken's critical lapses. The undertone of resentment in his letters is sharper than in the past. He did not take kindly, for example, Mencken's advice to concentrate on novel writing. Early in 1919 when Mencken chided him for not having completed *The Bulwark*, his friend referred sarcastically in his reply to "the impression that I am idling in the extended arms of a harem–dreaming sweet dreams and killing time. It is your Dreiser complex I fear." After describing the past few years as "the most strenuous of my life," marked by an extensive output ranging from plays, poems, and short stories to *A Hoosier Holiday* and the forthcoming *Twelve Men*, he added, "These things had to be done to release a psychic urge in me. It is useless to say they should not. A man must express himself in the field of his greatest craving" (334-36).

For his part Mencken had personal reasons for wanting Dreiser to

modify the lifestyle he led in Greenwich Village. Dreiser, like many in the Village avant-garde encouraged by the then current interpretation of Freud, sought inspiration for his art in a wide variety of sexual encounters. Mencken, despite his keen interest in the new psychology, upheld the good manners and decorum typical of Baltimore's comfortable middle class. In his view, "the primary impulse of sex . . . is opposed implacably by the discipline that is civilization; we must all learn to renounce, to take half a loaf, to practice a certain humility."[31] Since he and Dreiser had mistresses who were sisters and shared a flat in the Village, he was familiar with the novelist's difficulties in keeping his numerous bed-partners, who also served as his research and editorial assistants, from knowing about each other. He looked with more disgust than amusement at Dreiser's womanizing and the furtive way of life resulting from it. In a malicious aside, he told a friend that Dreiser "still keeps his manly powers and is first cock in Greenwich Village."[32] Mencken was also convinced that the women friends were partly responsible for the deteriorating quality of Dreiser's writing. The fact that Dreiser now relied more on their counsel than on his own piqued his masculine vanity. When venting his anger over *The Hand of the Potter*, Mencken urged, "Take the advice of men with hair on their chests–not of women" (285).[33]

When Dreiser slipped out of New York late in 1919 with his newfound second cousin and mistress Helen Richardson and settled in California, he told no one where he was going or who his companion was. This clean break with his life in the Village eased some of the old tensions, but he irritated Mencken by his secrecy and his refusal to send any address except a P.O. number in Los Angeles. Late in 1921 Mencken inquired, "How long are you going to stay out there among those swamis, actors, tourists, and whores?" His advice was "to show up in New York again; you are so damned securely buried that thousands of boobs are growing up who have never heard of you" (452-53). Dreiser did return, but not until a year later.

In mid-1919 a pleasant interlude had come with *Twelve Men*, the last of Dreiser's books that appealed strongly to Mencken. "The old boy," he confided to a mutual friend, "has come back with a bang." In his review in the New York *Sun*, he observed that Dreiser, though still unsparing in his use of banalities, shows "extraordinary skill" in character analysis, achieving in his semi-fictionalized sketches "not merely an objective likeness" but "a searching and at times almost shameless inner genuineness."[34]

But another dispute was soon brewing. Back in 1913 Mencken had urged Dreiser to follow up *A Traveler at Forty* with a volume of essays

(125-26), but he balked when it finally appeared as *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub*. In his *Smart Set* review he unmercifully poked fun at Dreiser's ponderous cerebrations set out in the "manner . . . of the honest householder repelling burglars with a table-leg."[35] Still smarting from Mencken's savaging of *The "Genius"* and *The Hand of the Potter*, Dreiser countered with the news that his new book was selling well. "I have to laugh," he commented, "when you speak of parts of it as unintelligible. I am convinced after long observation that you have no least taste for speculation" (413).

The estimates that each author made of the other in the early Twenties show the growing divergence between them. One of Dreiser's most perceptive remarks was prompted by Mencken's disillusionment with their mutual friend, James Huneker, an energetic and resourceful popularizer of European artists and thinkers. In *A Book of Prefaces* Mencken had devoted a whole essay to Huneker, hailing him as "the chief of all the curbers and correctors of the American Philistine,"[36] but, in 1920, he dismissed Huneker's autobiography, *Steeplejack*, as "crap," telling Dreiser, "The old boy tries his damnedest to appear respectable, and even assures everyone that he is a 100% American. The book leaves me very depressed. One by one they drop from the tree!" (389). Dreiser, no doubt more inclined to defend Huneker because of the severity of Mencken's judgments about himself, reacted by saying, "The truth is that you are an idealist in things literary or where character is concerned and expect men to ring centre 100 times out of 100" (395).

Speaking confidentially to another correspondent, Dreiser noted in Mencken "certain defects of temperament which would never permit him to understand me." "He lacks for one thing," Dreiser asserted, "a sense of beauty [.]" Since Mencken was as much indebted to the aesthetic movement of the Nineties as Dreiser, this first item in the bill of indictment is especially damning. "Next," Dreiser persisted, "he has no least interest in anything save the visible face of life. The invisible mechanism with which science is always concerned interests him not at all, or so little that it may be dismissed as negligible. Anyone with these defects would never get me." Finally, "he takes unexplainable dislikes," a point Dreiser illustrated with inconsistencies and foibles in Mencken's criticism of *A Traveler at Forty*, *A Hoosier Holiday*, *The Hand of the Potter*, and *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub*.[37]

If Dreiser, much as he had done in 1918, chose Mencken the man over Mencken the critic, Mencken chose Dreiser the artist over Dreiser the man. Mencken's sense of coming from a class socially and intellectually superior to Dreiser's helps account for many of the ambivalences in his attitudes. There is more than a touch of snobbery

in the epithets he had applied to Dreiser–for example, portraying him, in his lapses from artistry, as an "Indiana peasant." As part of the prosperous Baltimore German-American bourgeoisie, Mencken had grown up in a financially secure and socially stable family. He took pride in ancestors who had gained distinction as scholars and lawyers in Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While accepting Dreiser as a fellow German-American, Mencken was aware that he came from a working-class family of rural antecedents which was plagued by poverty and debt, divided within itself, often scorned by its neighbors, and too nomadic to put down roots.

Conscious of a strain of "peasant" blood in his mother's family, Mencken could, at times, see an advantage in this kind of background for both himself and Dreiser. When Carl Van Doren revived the "peasant" label in an article in *The Nation* (16 March 1921), Mencken consoled Dreiser by finding "nothing opprobrious in the charge." "I am myself partly a peasant," said Mencken, "and glad of it. If it were not for my peasant blood, the Mencken element would have made a professor of me." He assured Dreiser "that the most valuable baggage that you carry is your capacity for seeing the world from a sort of proletarian standpoint. Imagine *Sister Carrie* written by a man without that capacity, say Nietzsche. It would have been a mess" (436-37).

But, while airing his personal grievances, Mencken was capable of attributing only the traits he disliked in Dreiser to his lower-class origins. In a long autobiographical statement he gave this summary treatment of his relations with the novelist:

> We remained on good terms so long as I was palpably his inferior–a mere beater of drums for him. But when I began to work out notions of my own it quickly appeared that we were very much unlike. Dreiser is a great artist, but a very ignorant and credulous man. He believes, for example, in the Ouija board. My skepticism, and, above all, my contempt for the peasant, eventually offended him. We are still, of course, very friendly, but his heavy sentimentality and his naive yearning to be a martyr make it impossible for me to take him seriously–that is, as man.[38]

Here Mencken speaks as the solid German-American burgher with intellectual interests–perhaps even with some of the ancestral pedantry he so much feared. In this passage *peasant* connotes not the understanding and compassion for the common people at the core of Dreiser's art, but ignorance, credulity, sentimentality, general inferiority. If Dreiser failed to cultivate the social and intellectual standards that, for

Mencken, marked the superior man, so much the worse for him. Mencken could hardly have voiced more baldly his vexation at Dreiser's obstinate resistance to his tutelage.

The mutual frustration created by Mencken's efforts to remake Dreiser as man and artist was not by itself enough to splinter their friendship. During the war and immediately thereafter, while they were passionately committed to a common cause, their contentiousness did not prevent them from turning to each other for help and support. This situation changed when, as Mencken had anticipated, the lifting of wartime restraints allowed their campaign to move quickly to a victorious climax. Once they had routed their enemies and achieved their objectives, the ties that had kept them together began to loosen. They won fame and notoriety as the leaders of a movement that was transforming the American scene. In the disillusioned, questioning, seeking postwar mood many more young intellectuals and writers turned to them for guidance. In his farewell essay in the December 1923 *Smart Set*, Mencken paid tribute to the "truly appalling tenacity" that had enabled Dreiser to defy all opposition and keep literary realism alive. Noting "the advance from *Sister Carrie*, suppressed and proscribed, to *Babbitt*, swallowed and hailed," Mencken held "that almost complete freedom now prevails for the serious artist."[39] With his own reputation secured and their common aims attained, Dreiser no longer needed Mencken to champion him. Mencken, in turn, was busy backing other writers, among them Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. At the same time his strong social and political concerns were beginning to overshadow his literary interests. "My work hereafter . . . ," he had told Dreiser in 1920, "will be a good deal more political than literary" (397). While retaining some literary emphasis in *The American Mercury*, he designed it to be a forum for commentary on the whole gaudy, gorgeous native scene.

Success forced Mencken and Dreiser to confront more directly the sharp differences between them. By 1925 a situation had developed in which any further friction could spark an explosion. The most important in a series of incidents touching off a climactic quarrel was Mencken's decision late that year that *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser's first novel since *The "Genius,"* was full of the same defects he had been trying for years to get the novelist to overcome.[40] The majority of the critics whose reviews preceded his acknowledge that the book has structural and stylistic faults but still consider it a masterpiece.[41] Mencken's comments reflect not only his impatience with Dreiser but also his lessening interest in fiction and a slackening off in the quality of his literary judgments. Mencken dismisses the novel as "a shapeless and forbidding monster . . . a vast, sloppy, chaotic thing of 385,000 words–at least 250,000 of them

unnecessary." Arbitrarily separating art from its substance, he labels it "a colossal botch" as a work of art even though it is "searching and full of a solemn dignity" as a human document. The "dignity" is evident mainly well into the second volume, where "once Roberta is killed and Clyde faces his fate, the thing begins to move" and "rises to the level of genuine tragedy." "The means are often bad," Mencken maintains illogically, "but the effects are superb."[42]

On 5 February 1926 Mencken had warned Dreiser, "I am performing upon you without anaesthetics in the March Merkur, but *with* reservations" (552-53). Dreiser may have seen a proof of the review Mencken had sent to an editor at Boni and Liveright,[43] or perhaps he merely guessed that Mencken would be doing his surgery with an axe. In his note of 8 February inviting Mencken to dine with him in New York, the novelist tried to control his rage, but at the end sputtered, "As to your critical predilections, animosities, inhibitions,–et. cet. Tush. Who reads you? Bums and loafers. We were friends before ever you were a critic of mine, if I recall. And,–if an humble leman may speak up–may remain so–despite various–well–choose your insults" (554). Mencken, already angered by Dreiser's recent behavior, chose not to reply. Their correspondence and meetings ceased. Affection and respect, memories of shared aspirations and activities, and pride in a remarkable record of joint accomplishment gave way before altered circumstances, disagreements, accumulated grudges, and mutual suspicion. Neither man had taken sufficiently to heart the principle Dreiser invoked back in 1916: "Really Henry L.–you and I must merely agree to disagree at times. . . . Not all that I do needs to appeal to you surely to keep us companionable" (286). Nearly nine years elapsed until, in the midst of the Great Depression, they renewed their companionship, not to be ended this time until Dreiser's death.

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[1]*Dreiser-Mencken Letters: The Correspondence of Theodore Dreiser and H.L. Mencken, 1907-1945*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1986). In this essay page numbers for the letters cited are inserted in the text; references to Professor Riggio's introductions and to the reprinted Mencken reviews appear in the notes. Because the pagination is continuous, volume numbers are omitted.

[2]*Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 59.

[3]W.A. Swanberg, in his *Dreiser* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), does not develop the "reshaping" theme in his detailed examination of the relationship. Vincent Fitzpatrick, "Two Beasts in the Parlor: The

Dreiser-Mencken Relationship," Diss. State Univ. of New York at Stony Brook, 1979–the most comprehensive treatment–deals with it only incidentally. Other sources on various aspects of the friendship include W.A. Swanberg, "Mencken and Dreiser," *Menckeniana*, No. 15 (Fall 1965), 6-8; Donald Stoddard, "Mencken and Dreiser: An Exchange of Roles," *Library Chronicle*, 32 (Spring 1966), 117-36; Guy Jean Forgue, *H.L. Mencken: L'Homme, L'Oeuvre, L'Influence* (Paris: Minard, 1967), esp. 317-27; Thomas P. Riggio, "Dreiser and Mencken: In the Literary Trenches," *The American Scholar*, 54 (Spring 1985), 227-38; and Vincent Fitzpatrick, "Private Voices of Public Men: The Mencken-Dreiser Inscriptions," in *Critical Essays on H.L. Mencken*, ed. Douglas C. Stenerson (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987), 165-74.

[4]*George Bernard Shaw: His Plays* (Boston: John W. Luce, 1905), [viii].

[5]Boyd, *H.L. Mencken* (New York: McBride, 1925), 29. In one of the miscellaneous notes written late in life, Mencken confirmed Boyd's judgment. "Most of my fundamental notions," he wrote, "were actually formulated and expressed before I had ever read a line of him [Nietzsche], and a great deal of material in my book . . . would have astonished him, for it was much more mine than his." ("Minority Report," *Menckeniana*, No. 42 [Summer 1972], 1).

[6]*Nietzsche* (Boston: John W. Luce, 1908), xi; no. 3, 141-42; viii-ix.

[7]Conrad to George T. Keating, 14 December 1922, in G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1927), 2: 288.

[8]Riggio, *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, xii-xiii.

[9]On Mencken's literary tastes and standards see Douglas C. Stenerson, *H.L. Mencken: Iconoclast from Baltimore* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971), 56-61, 67-81, 104-113, 124-60; on the first World War as both an ordeal and a challenge for Mencken and Dreiser see ibid., 161-207.

[10]"Preface," *A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Knopf, 1917), [iii]. Mencken wrote a new preface for each later edition.

[11]Review of *The Titan* in *The Smart Set*, 43 (August 1914), rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 749, 750.

[12]Review of *Jennie Gerhardt*, in *The Smart Set*, 35 (November 1911),

rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 743.

[13]*A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Knopf, 1917), [iii].

[14]Review of *The "Genius,"* in *The Smart Set*, 47 (December 1915), rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 754-56.

[15]*A Book of Prefaces* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1927), 123. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[16]*Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 757-58.

[17]In *The Smart Set*, 49 (June 1916), rpt. in Jack Salzman, ed., *Theodore Dreiser: The Critical Reception* (New York: David Lewis, 1972), 268.

[18]*The Smart Set*, 50 (October 1916), rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 765.

[19]*A Book of Prefaces*, 146. Hereafter, wherever the context permits, page references to this work are inserted in the text.

[20]*Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 750.

[21]Spencer, *First Principles*, 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), 46. For analyses of Spencer's influence on Dreiser, see Ellen Moers, *Two Dreisers* (New York: Viking, 1969), 134-41, 144-45, and passim; Robert H. Elias, *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature*, emended ed. (Ithaca: N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1970), 80-83, 90-91; and Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1976), 10-14 and passim.

[22]*A Book of Prefaces*, 136.

[23]Ibid., 84, 85.

[24]Review of *Free and Other Stories*, in *The Smart Set*, 57 (November 1918), rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 768.

[25]*A Book of Prefaces*, 68; *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 758, 755; Reedy, "Reflections: Dreiser's 'Titan'," *Reedy's Mirror*, 29 May 1914, rpt. in Salzman, 179.

[26]For some of Dreiser's worries about *A Book of Prefaces* prior to its publication, see the entry for 13 August 1917 in his *American Diaries*,

1902-1926, ed. Thomas P. Riggio, James L. West III, and Neda Westlake (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1983), 181.

[27]Swanberg, *Dreiser*, 223.

[28]Dreiser to B.W. Huebsch, 10 March 1918, in *Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, ed. Robert H. Elias, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1959), 250-51.

[29]Mencken to George Sterling, 18 March [1918?], in *The New Mencken Letters*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Dial P, 1977), 85.

[30]Swanberg, *Dreiser*, 228-29.

[31]"The Advent of Psychoanalysis," *The Smart Set*, [56] (September 1918), rpt. in *H.L. Mencken's Smart Set Criticism*, ed. William H. Nolte (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1968), 150.

[32]Mencken to George Sterling, 18 March [1918], in Bode, *Letters*, 85.

[33]For further information about Dreiser's relationships with women and Mencken's reactions, see the introductory material by Thomas P. Riggio in Dreiser, *American Diaries*, 24-28, and *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 183-86.

[34]Mencken to Marion Bloom, [2 July? 1919], in Bode, *Letters*, 103; review in the New York *Sun*, 13 April 1919, rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 792, 791.

[35]*The Smart Set*, 62 (May 1920), rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 795.

[36]*A Book of Prefaces*, 190-91.

[37]Dreiser to Edward H. Smith, 31 January 1921, in Elias, *Letters*, 344-46.

[38]Statement sent to Burton Rascoe, [Summer 1920?], in Forgue, *Letters*, 185-86.

[39]"Fifteen Years," *The Smart Set*, [72] (December 1923), rpt. in Nolte, *Smart Set Criticism*, 328, 330.

[40]For details about two recent incidents that had particularly incensed Mencken, see his correspondence with Dreiser in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 544-54; Swanberg, *Dreiser*, 295-305; and Carl Bode,

Mencken (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1969), 324-26.

[41]See, for example, the reviews by Stuart Sherman, Sherwood Anderson, Burton Rascoe, Clarence Darrow, W. Elsworth Lawson, Abraham Cahan, and Joseph Wood Krutch reprinted in Salzman, 440-71.

[42]"Dreiser in 840 Pages," *The American Mercury*, 7 (March 1926), rpt. in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 797, 799.

[43]Mencken to Dreiser, 28 January [1926], in *Dreiser-Mencken Letters*, 551-52. Mencken refers to the editor Tom R. Smith as "Schmidt."

DREISER'S SEARCH FOR A "RELIGION OF LIFE": A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING

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In the last years Theodore Dreiser was alive, from 1933-1945, much of his writing took the form of inquiries into the mystical nature of life. He gathered scientific and pseudo-scientific data in an attempt to prove the existence of a higher, benevolent force. This data was published posthumously under various titles, including *Notes on Life* (1974). While gathering this material, he also returned to complete *The Bulwark* (1946), a novel he had begun in 1914 and abandoned until 1942. He completed the novel just months before his death in 1945.

Critics regard *The Bulwark* as an "anomaly," a "radical departure"[1] from all of his previous deterministic principles. The novel appears a mystery and raises a series of puzzling questions: Why couldn't Dreiser tell his story when he first began it in 1914? Why did he return to it at the end of his life? And what let him finish it then? What connection does it have with his own search for religion?

In this essay I would like to address these questions. I believe that answers can come only from an examination of the inner workings of Dreiser's mind, in childhood and as he approached death, and also in an examination of his preoccupation with searching for a "religion of life," (a term coined by John Woolman, the eighteenth-century Quaker saint who, as you will see, figures largely in *The Bulwark*). I believe Dreiser's struggle to come to terms with religion and also the psychological conflicts that he felt about his father explain why he had to stop writing *The Bulwark* and could not finish it for over twenty years.

In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud theorizes that the primary protective figure, the mother, is soon replaced by that of the stronger father. Freud suggests that at the root of religion is the father-son relationship. God becomes the exalted father from whom the son seeks love, consolation, and protection. But, as Melanie Klein later analyzes,

this image of the good father is from the pre-oedipal phase. Before the mind is integrated, before the child perceives people as mixed characters, as both good and bad, there is what Klein calls "primitive splitting": the child perceives the father as either good or bad (Klein 22). According to my interpretation, religion can be seen as a regression back to the early levels of the mind–a regression from the oedipal phase to the pre-oedipal good father, a father who provides strength, enhancement, empowerment.

Dreiser's life offers credence to Freud's theory. As Dreiser's autobiographies, published letters, and the recent, highly acclaimed biography by Richard Lingeman attest, Dreiser was very ambivalent toward his own father. By all accounts, most notably Dreiser's own, his father, John Paul Dreiser, was tyrannical, weak-willed and self-absorbed, traits that manifested themselves in his fanatical Catholicism. Dreiser found his father destructive: when destitute (that is, when his family was hungry, his children without shoes), he continued to pay tithes to the Church and send his children to parochial school (Lingeman 36). Dreiser's father was such a negative, tyrannical father that there was great hunger in Dreiser for the opposite. As generally accepted in psychoanalytic theory, the worse the father, the greater the need and consequently the greater the search for the good father. During *The Bulwark's* thirty-two-year gestation, I would argue, Dreiser completed his search for the good father by coming to terms with his own ambivalence toward his father, toward God, the spiritual embodiment of him, and toward religion.[2]

We know that Dreiser began to write *The Bulwark* as early as 1914 and worked on it until 1920, at which time he abandoned it for more than two decades. We also know from his early handwritten drafts and synopses that Dreiser originally intended *The Bulwark* to totally reject religious beliefs. The novel was to be ironic, based in part on his own life. The main character, Solon Barnes, a devout Quaker, was to be as pathetic as Dreiser perceived his own father to have been. In Dreiser's early autobiography, *A Book about Myself* (1923), he described John Paul Dreiser as a "religious tyrant" who in the end was "just a broken old man whose hopes and ambitions had come to nothing. . . . Here he was, alone, his wife dead, his children scattered and not very much interested in him[self] anymore" (250). This is also the characterization of Solon in the early handwritten manuscripts of *The Bulwark*. Solon too is a stern religionist who kept meeting with disaster after disaster. He failed at business. His children rebelled against him. By the end, his wife dies of worry and he, broken-hearted, succumbs to cancer. Often in these early drafts, Dreiser uses a bitterly sarcastic tone: he characterizes Solon as of a "decidedly moralistic or religious turn of mind–one of these who see

in the manifestations of life a divine order which somehow the innate perversity of man has corrupted. *Thus we could see at once how sound were his esoteric faculties*" (italics mine, 1914 draft, 22-23). But in the years 1914 to 1920, Dreiser, then in his mid- and late-forties, was unable to commit himself fully to an irreligious point of view, and, I would suggest, the implied rejection of his father that commitment would have entailed. He therefore abandoned the writing of *The Bulwark.*

But Dreiser returned to work on *The Bulwark* when he was seventy-one. According to recent psychological studies,[3] this is a time in life when, commonly, there is a tendency toward increased religiosity, especially in those who have been interested in religion at an earlier age. One conclusion that has emerged is that active commitment to religious beliefs and practices tends to reduce the intensity of manifest fear of death. One such study attributes this lessening of fear to the religious person's belief in the hereafter, an explanation consistent with Freud's claim that the promise of immortality provides man with a defense against the fear of death (Dhawan 35).

In this last period of his life, Dreiser wished to attain peace of mind, to resolve the conflict aroused in him by his anger with his father, who had died many years before in 1900. Dreiser sought to find forgiveness of him through inquiries into the spiritual nature of life.[4]

Pastoral psychology describes four phases a person goes through in order to achieve this forgiveness. I don't have time to fully discuss them here, except to say that they involve a willingness to "dirty" oneself with realities that are painful in others as well as in oneself, the humility to perceive the offender with empathy, the ability to free oneself from the need to accuse, and the redefining of one's relationship with the offender based upon a developing awareness of oneself and the offender. This awareness is not only of his or her limitation and capacity for sin and evil, but also of his or her kinship and commonality in humanness under God. The pastoral psychologist, B. Cunningham, emphasizes that this union is not through denial or fantasy. Rather, it is a realistic acceptance that we all live with scars that are tender and often easily opened.[5]

Dreiser passed through all these phases. He had often used writing therapeutically to express his neurasthenia (*The "Genius"*), to work out his marital conflicts ("Free"), his sexual conflicts (*The Trilogy of Desire*) and now I assert to resolve his conflicts with religion and his father. I offer *The Bulwark* as Dreiser's acting out of the last phase I just mentioned, that is, the redefining of one's relationship with the offender (in Dreiser's case, of course, that is his father). In *The Bulwark* Dreiser shows the union of father and son in kinship and commonality under

God. But the only way that Dreiser was able to come to terms with his rage at his father, a peace he deeply wished for, was precisely through denial and fantasy. Indeed, *The Bulwark* is a testament to that ultimate fantasy of the "good" father, in this case, carried to the extreme of beatification. Acceptance by Dreiser of his father as he really was would have required living with the very conflicts Dreiser felt so painfully and was so eager to escape (his early rage at his father's inability to support his family, his father's refuge in religion). It was easier for Dreiser to deny the existence of his anger through revisionist biography, if you will, thus alleviating the conflict. This is what he sought and, I believe, achieved in the writing of *The Bulwark*.

So in 1945, just months before Dreiser's death, a radically different version of *The Bulwark* emerged. Some of the major differences include the opening (which shifts from biography to parable), the closing (which moves from parable to hagiography) and most strikingly the tone (from sarcasm to piety). Dreiser now empathizes deeply with the character of Solon and, by implication, with his own father. The novel becomes a story not just of the idealized father, but also, by extension, of the idealized son because, as Dreiser incorporates his own religious quest into the text, Solon becomes virtually indistinguishable from Dreiser. The novelist invests him with the authority of his own experience and convictions.

In both the 1914 and 1945 versions of *The Bulwark*, Solon's faith is tested again and again, most tragically by the death of his youngest son, Stewart, who commits suicide after accidentally killing a girl he had drugged and seduced. If the novel had ended here, as the synopsis of the earlier version did, we would have indeed an ironic look at Christianity: the chronicle of a devout Quaker defeated, "lost" in his attempt to live by the Beatitudes in the modern world.

But in the 1945 version, Solon "finds" God and is found by him. He ceases abruptly to question God's inscrutable providence and accepts responsibility for the fate of his children. He realizes that *he* has erred in trying to forcibly compel Stewart to avoid material and sexual temptation. He now believes he should have shown love and patience. The novel becomes a parable of loss and reaffirmation of faith. As we see in three mystical events that follow after the death of Stewart, Solon moves to a new level of acceptance of God. He says, echoing Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will but thine" (315).

Two of the mystical events are taken directly from Dreiser's own life, showing further that Dreiser is creating a fantasy-projection of his own life and that of his father. To conflate father and son is not unusual, but

in Dreiser's case, the identification was not apparent to him nor apparent in his fiction until his later years.

The first mystical episode takes place in Solon's garden. He is captivated by the sight of a beautiful green fly eating a flower bud. He asks, "Why was this beautiful creature, whose design so delighted him, compelled to feed upon another living creature, a beautiful flower? For obviously, as it ate, it was destroying the bud of this plant, and in so far [sic] as he could see or know, the plant had no way of defending itself. Which was intended to live–the fly, the bud, or both?" (317).

This passage confronts the mystery of the predatory nature of life, something Dreiser was famous for portraying in the lobster and squid scene in *The Financier* (1912). But, in total reversal of the depiction of the raw reality of the survival of the fittest, here in *The Bulwark*, Solon's question leads to a celebration of the benignity of nature. He considers the blade, the climbing vine, all with a "kind of religious awe and wonder. Surely there must be a Creative Divinity, and so a purpose behind all of this variety and beauty and tragedy of life. For see how tragedy had descended upon him, and still he had faith and would have" (317). We are then told that the universe is "good" in some "larger and realer sense," but with no further interpretation. Dreiser simply posits this "truth," and leaves it to the reader to accept.

Dreiser based this episode on a mystical experience that was to him a turning point in his life. In the summer of 1937 he had studied at the Cold Spring Harbor Biological Laboratory in Maine as part of his search for proof of a higher benevolent force. There Dreiser had written of his conviction that the common flower has "the same design, the same beautiful detail that he had been observing in the tiny forms under the glass [of the microscope]. What care, what love, had created those things. Not only some great intelligence, but a careful, loving Artist. . . . " *"After that, I began to feel differently about the universe. . . .* I saw not only the intelligence, but the love and care that goes into all created things" (italics mine, Tjader 77, 127).

The second mystical experience of Solon/Dreiser is with a puff adder.[6] Solon surprises the adder, which swells up in fright. But he decides to talk to it, reassuring it that he means no harm. The snake responds by crossing over his shoe in a gesture of friendship. From that encounter, Solon comes to feel that there is a universal language for all of God's creatures: "If our intention is good, all creatures in their particular way understand" (318-19). All creatures speak the same language because they all are a part of God. The essential truth is "the need of love toward all created things" (319).

The point here is that Solon *is* Dreiser. Even the wording of Solon's response to nature reflects Dreiser's philosophy at this time of his life. In Dreiser's 1943 essay, "My Creator," he professed his faith in this Creator: "I am moved not only to awe but to reverence by the Creator . . . concerning whom–his presence in all things from worm to star to thought–I meditate constantly. . . "

But the most striking change in the two *Bulwark*s is the transformation of Solon from inept, disciplinarian father (that is to say, *John* Paul Dreiser) into the spiritually effective *John* Woolman. With this transformation of character, as if by magic, Dreiser creates an idealized "father" with whom he becomes one and the same and then joins in mystical union with God the "Father." As Solon becomes Woolman, the novel evolves into hagiography. Chapter 66, the penultimate chapter, was written in the 1940's. The chapter is virtually only quotations from the *Journal* of John Woolman; it becomes central to the novel by offering a text within the text that illuminates the fullest meaning of the novel. The author withdraws and lets Revealed Word (or at least previously printed word) present the divine message. Here we see the stature of John Woolman, a saint, and his message from God, one that Solon recapitulates in the following chapter.

When the author returns in Chapter 67, Solon has become John Woolman. It opens with Solon echoing Woolman's own question in the preceding chapter: "Daughter, what has become of that poor old man who was dying of cancer?" (332). More important than the question itself is what it signifies. Referring to himself in the third person as "that poor old man" suggests Solon's separation from himself, just as the words "John Woolman is dead" in the preceding chapter signify the separation of Woolman from himself, that is, from his own will. Solon's will, too, has died.

I think pastoral psychology is again the most appropriate discipline to use to explore this psycho-theological experience: this death of the will or "willingness" means yielding one's will to God, surrendering one's self-separateness, entering into, immersing oneself in the deepest processes of life. It is a realization that one already is a part of some ultimate cosmic process, and it is a commitment to participate in that process.

Willfulness, on the contrary, means setting oneself apart from the essence of life in an attempt to master, direct, control, or otherwise manipulate existence. Understanding the distinctions between these concepts is crucial to an understanding of the process of forgiveness. For it is only in giving up the will, giving up "willfulness," that one can seek

and find forgiveness. It is the will that keeps one from God. It is appropriate that the climax of this novel is Solon's/Woolman's repudiation of will. In this repudiation we see a fictional re-creation of Dreiser's own longing for just such a repudiation of will, a prerequisite to forgiveness and thus union with God, and with his own father.

This process parallels classic psychoanalytic thought about suspension of self, merging with one's source, and consequent feelings of strength. It is what psychoanalyst Ernst Kris called "regression in the service of the ego." The mind and the emotions regress as one moves to a level of fusion with the significant other–in this case, Dreiser with his "father"–and in so doing one may acquire a sense of enhancement or empowerment by the experience. It is a sacrifice of one's own differentiated "willful" self. It is "merging," not "emerging," giving up "identity" to seek "identification," yielding "Almighty" self to find the "Almighty."[7]

Here in *The Bulwark*, completed just months before his death, we see Dreiser, known throughout his life as a naturalist, a believer in the deterministic notion of will as subject to fate, transform that belief into the spiritual notion of total subjection to God, to "father." This novel, regarded as such a "departure" from Dreiser's deterministic principles, is really those principles carried to another level. Determinism becomes divine providence. Fate becomes faith. Why Dreiser changed can be explained by considering his psychological needs in the last years of his life. His novel calls out for such a reading.

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[1]See James Lundquist's *Theodore Dreiser*, p. 74; F.O. Matthiessen's *Theodore Dreiser*, p. 242; Sidney Richman, "Theodore Dreiser's *The Bulwark*: A Final Resolution," p. 235.

[2]That religion in one's life is greatly influenced by the religiosity of one's parents continues to be found in psychological studies today. In "Religion, Age, Life Satisfaction, and Perceived Sources of Religiousness" (1985), Bruce Hunsberger, a psychologist, noted that the most powerful social background predictor of a person's religious involvement appears to be the religious involvement of his or her parents. Some empirical research also has suggested that the father has a more central role than the mother.

[3]See Bruce Hunsberger, "Religion, Age, Life Satisfaction, and Perceived Sources of Religiousness: A Study of Older Persons." *Journal of Gerontology*. 40.5, (1985), 615-20.

[4]Both Dreiser's niece, Vera Dreiser, and W.A. Swanberg in their biographies attest to Dreiser's early anger at his father and Dreiser's change of attitude toward him in the 1940s. Swanberg describes a scene in 1944, one year before Dreiser's death, in which Dreiser with his younger brother Ed sang a German lullaby Father Dreiser had sung to them as children and "sp[oke] warmly of the old man Dreiser had so long disparaged" (605). Vera Dreiser explicitly connects Dreiser's father with Solon Barnes and suggests that through the fictional Solon Dreiser recreates his father in terms that show his new acceptance of him.

[5]Pastoral psychologist B. Cunningham defines the act of forgiving by comparing it to the process known in psychology as "reframing," whereby feelings and conceptualizations pertaining to an event change, altering the meaning and consequences of that event in the life of a person. According to Cunningham, although the facts of an event cannot be changed, it is not the concrete facts of an event that give us trouble. Rather, it is the evolving feelings associated with an event that bring about a change in our feelings and in our perceptions of the meaning of the event and its consequences (143).

According to Cunningham, the first phase of forgiveness is a willingness to face realities that are painful in others as well as yourself. Dreiser openly confronted such realities about himself and his "notorious" family, especially his father, in his many autobiographies. The second phase involves having the humility to perceive the offender, in this case Dreiser's father, with empathy. The third phase is to become free from the need to accuse, punish, and seek revenge. In confronting one's own needs for forgiveness, one experiences a new resource which enables one to "reframe" the affront. That Dreiser passed through both the second and third phases in his last years we know from the 1942 account of his second wife, Helen. She describes Dreiser's new empathy with the fictional Solon Barnes: "I know [that] he [Dreiser] was thinking not only of his father, but also of what he considered his own shortcomings" (302).

[6]Dreiser had an identical experience. In the summer of 1936, he had spoken with kindness to an adder at Iroki, his Mount Kisco home, and felt that he had been understood. Indeed, he had soon decided men could talk with animals or birds, perhaps even with the grass and the flowers. Dreiser had other mystical experiences as well while writing *The Bulwark.* When a certain bluebird repeatedly perched near him, Dreiser remarked, "He knew me," and noted the bird was not afraid (Elias 288, 298).

[7]I would like to express special thanks to Zanvil A. Liff, former President of the Division of Psychoanalysis at the American Psychological

Association, for his careful reading of my manuscript and his invaluable suggestions.

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THE SEARCH FOR EV'RY MONTH: AN UPDATE

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Just over fifty years have passed since a ground-breaking article by John F. Huth, Jr., established the importance of *Ev'ry Month*, the piano music monthly edited by Theodore Dreiser in the 1890s for Howley, Haviland, & Co., the firm which employed his songwriter brother Paul. The same article also began the often frustrating search for the first twenty-four issues of the magazine, October 1895 through September 1897, which Dreiser both edited and frequently contributed to. "So little does the name of this magazine mean today," Huth wrote in 1937, "that I have been unable to find anyone who knows anything about it, and apparently none of Dreiser's various biographers, bibliographers, and critics has ever seen a copy" (208). Huth claimed that even Dreiser, who was, of course, still alive, had "preserved none and [knew] of the existence of none" (208).[1]

Huth's interest in the magazine began, apparently, when he stumbled on eleven issues of *Ev'ry Month*-September 1896 through July 1897-in his attic.[2] But for two decades after this promising beginning, the search unfortunately stalled, either because scholars were unable to find additional issues or, more likely, because no one was particularly interested in looking. In the meantime, virtually nothing was written about this phase of Dreiser's career. Then, in 1969, the quest was resumed by Ellen Moers, who "after five years of letter-writing and advertising" leading up to the publication of *Two Dreisers*, reported that she had discovered five more issues: June 1896, August 1896, and August-October 1897 (*Two Dreisers* 324 n. 6). Moers noted optimistically, "As this book goes to press, I learn that advertising is finally turning up more issues of *Ev'ry Month*, and there is a chance that a complete file will some day be included among the Dreiser Papers (U. Pa.)" (324 n. 6). However, twenty years later her prediction has yet to come true.

In 1972 Joseph Katz announced that Neda M. Westlake, Curator of Rare Books at the University of Pennsylvania Library, had, after "an intensive hunt" unearthed three new issues-April, June, and July 1896-as well as duplicates of several others (64 n. 1).[3] Katz's own discovery was even more promising. He claimed: "By sheer good luck I have since

found the most extensive run of *Ev'ry Month* known. It is complete during Dreiser's editorship except for the first two issues, October and November 1895, no copies of which have yet been discovered. The copies in my collection will be published in facsimile as *Theodore Dreiser's 'Ev'ry Month': A Nineteenth Century Woman's Magazine* in 1973, with a foreword by Neda M. Westlake and an introduction by me" (64 n. 1).

Dreiser scholars had by then recognized the significance of the magazine to a thorough understanding of Dreiser's development as a novelist, but, unfortunately, they waited in vain for the facsimile edition, which, a decade and a half later, has not yet appeared. To the best of my knowledge, Professor Katz has not divulged to anyone the fate of his collection, and by now it seems safe to assume that it is lost, at least to scholarly use. However, recent discoveries have once more increased the available numbers of *Ev'ry Month.* In particular, the first two issues, which scholars have never before examined, have both surfaced. The October 1895 issue was first discovered in the stacks of the Eastman School of Music by Paul Orlov,[4] and the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection also owns a copy of this issue. More recently, the November 1895 issue (as far as I can determine, the only one in existence) was found stashed in the attic of their home in Athens, Georgia, by Mary and Grady Hutcherson, who noticed Dreiser's name on the masthead, suspected the magazine's significance, and generously loaned it to me.[5] These discoveries mean that if Katz's run were to materialize, all of Dreiser's *Ev'ry Month* could be collected. Without these issues, unfortunately, the search must begin again.

After months of writing to scholars and librarians, following every lead available to me, I have located copies of all but three issues: December 1895 and January and February 1896.[6] Fortunately, since Donald Pizer used Katz's run when he edited *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* (1977) and when he compiled (with Richard Dowell and Frederic Rusch) *Theodore Dreiser: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1975), scholars have access to some of the relevant missing columns and to the titles and contents, at least, of the others.

My search indicates that the other twenty-one issues (either originals or microfilm or xerox copies) are available in several repositories. Both the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection and the Yale University Library own microfilm runs of Huth's collection, the September 1896 through July 1897 issues. The Pennsylvania holdings also include several original copies, but only the October 1895 issue was published while Dreiser was editor.[7] Indiana University's Lilly Library owns original

issues (in fragile condition, but available for copying) of the March, June, September, October, and December 1896 issues, as well as several later ones.[8] In addition, the Ellen Moers Papers, located in the Butler Library of Columbia University, includes photocopies of both the University of Pennsylvania collection and the issues which Moers unearthed. Most of these are incomplete duplicate copies available from other locations, but one–June 1896–is apparently unique.[9] Finally, the Eastman School of Music owns thirteen issues which can be purchased on microfilm from Eastman's Sibley Microfilm Services. Five of these–April, May, and August 1896 and August and September 1897–are available nowhere else.[10]

Almost ninety years after the publication of *Sister Carrie*, our understanding of where it came from and how the almost uneducated Dreiser could produce a novel of such enduring power is still woefully incomplete. But we do know that his early experience as a hack journalist during the 1890s–as newspaper reporter, *Ev'ry Month* editor, and popular magazine free-lance writer–was a major influence on his fictional aesthetic. *Theodore Dreiser Journalism, Volume One*, T. D. Nostwich's recent collection of Dreiser's early newspaper pieces (1988) and Yoshinobu Hakutani's *Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser* (1985, 1987) should revitalize criticism which seeks to explore the sources of the author's aesthetic. Discovery of the three still missing issues of *Ev'ry Month* and the publication of a long-overdue facsimile edition of the magazine would provide another vital clue to the puzzle of Dreiser's artistic origins.

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[1]"Theodore Dreiser: 'The Prophet.'" *American Literature* 9 (May 1937): 208-17.

[2]See "Theodore Dreiser, Success Monger." *Colophon* 3 (Winter 1938): 120-33. His article on *Ev'ry Month* does not mention how he discovered the magazine or how many issues he had access to, but Ellen Moers provides additional information which came from her correspondence with Huth thirty years after the fact. (See *Two Dreisers*. New York: The Viking Press Inc., 1969: 324 n. 6.)

[3]"Theodore Dreiser's *Ev'ry Month*." *The Library Chronicle of the University of Pennsylvania* 38 (1972): 46-66. Westlake acquired the April and June through December 1896 and January through May, November and December 1897 issues for the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection.

[4]See Paul A. Orlov, "Theodore Dreiser's *Ev'ry Month*, I, 1, Found at Last: Revealing More Roots of a Writer's Thought." *American Literary Realism 1870-1910*, 22 (Fall 1989), 69-79.

[5]The Hutchersons will soon donate this issue to the University of Pennsylvania Dreiser collection.

[6]I followed a number of leads which turned out to be dead ends. According to the *Union List of Serials*, one complete copy is housed in the Library of Congress and an incomplete run in the Oberlin College Library. However, both of these disappeared or were discarded years ago. Yoshinobu Hakutani notes that W. A. Swanberg claimed that "there are four scattered issues . . . at the Los Angeles Public Library," but my inquiries have turned up no such copies. (See "Theodore Dreiser's Editorial and Free-Lance Writing." *The Library Chronicle of the University of Pennsylvania* 38 [1971]: 84 n. 2.)

[7]The other issues in the collection are November and December 1897, March, and June through December 1898, and January through April 1899.

[8]Its holdings also include the February, March through May, and July through October 1897, March, June, August, September, November, and December 1898, and January through March 1899. Some of these issues are "cut."

[9]Columbia's description of the Ellen Moers Papers indicates that this issue, as well as several others, is a copy of "issues in the collection of the late Dr. Saul Starr" and that the present location of the originals is unknown. Still others were copies of issues which a librarian found in the stacks of the Brown University library, which still owns a run beginning with August 1896. The Moers collection also includes incomplete photocopies of *Ev'ry Month* from April, July and August 1896, February and July through October 1897, February and March 1898, and August 1899.

[10]The Eastman run also includes the October 1895, September 1896, and November 1896 through March 1897 issues. Recent responses from music curators have turned up only duplicate copies, not any missing issues. The holdings of Harvard's Widener Memorial Library include *Ev'ry Month* beginning with Vol. 3 (October 1896), and the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, owns the April 1896 issue.

A DREISER CHECKLIST, 1988

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This checklist covers work on Dreiser in 1988 plus a number of items omitted from previous checklists. The *Index to Theses* cited in part IV is an abbreviation for Aslib's *Index to Theses Accepted for Higher Degrees by the Universities of Great Britain and Ireland and the Council for National Academic Awards*, which began including abstracts in its 1988 issues.

Once again I wish to thank Shigeo Mizuguchi for providing the information on Dreiser studies published in Japan.

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REVIEW

THE POWER OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Power of Historical Knowledge: Narrating the Past in Hawthorne, James, and Dreiser by Susan L. Mizruchi. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988, 313 pp.

In *The Power of Historical Knowledge*, Susan L. Mizruchi argues that American literature portrays a society in which "narrative power is political power." It is her contention that those characters who understand their own actions and motives can reinterpret them to advantage, gaining greater self-esteem, public recognition and control over those who lack this historical perspective and thus the ability to tell their own stories. As she notes, "Within the act of historical narration, in portraits of characters and narrators attempting to reshape their own and their community's past, struggles for personal identity and political power are waged."

After two chapters discussing the problems associated with historical narrative in general, Mizruchi demonstrates the relevance of her thesis to a Romantic novel, Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*, two Realistic novels, James' *The Bostonians* and *The Wings of the Dove*, and a Naturalistic novel, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. For the purposes of this review, I will restrict my observations to the latter, discussed in a chapter titled "The Power of Mere Fable: Reconstructing the Past in *An American Tragedy*."

Mizruchi sees in Dreiser a loss of faith in historical narration, for in view of its political use and manipulation, the truth of the past is virtually irrecoverable. History becomes as "delusive and politically distorted as any more overt form of self-inflation or tyranny." This sense of futility results in a narrator--a "bitter, mocking figure"--who enjoys his private jokes but stands aloof and jeers at the futile pursuits of characters confronted by the "static complacency of a conservative caste system."

Yet, despite the narrator's cynicism, Mizruchi challenges critics' tendency to read *An American Tragedy* as a thoroughly deterministic novel. Rather, she sees the novel's determinism as a "strategy of containment" employed by the upper classes to maintain the status quo and accepted by the lower classes to excuse their failure. For example, Samuel Griffiths has been able to rewrite his past, turning his materialistic aims and exploitive approach to labor into public service; his personal success is reconstructed as an inevitable process engineered by unknowable forces in recognition of his inherent virtues. Thus, he can salve his conscience, escape the consequences of his actions, and instill dedication and monastic values in his underpaid employees, whose initiative is checked and materialistic expectations are limited as they wait for this "divine intervention." The poor, in fact, participate in safeguarding the system that exploits them.

Roberta is a victim of the status quo that Samuel has achieved. Despite being intelligent, energetic and determined to rise above her home environment, she makes little significant social advancement. Yet, because she has maintained sympathetic ties to the past, Roberta has the power to understand her actions and communicate her story to the world through her letters to Clyde, achieving a posthumous justice.

In contrast, Clyde himself increasingly loses his sense of the past. He has accepted Samuel's monastic ideology of success characterized by impassivity and passionless aloofness, an ideology tragically at variance with his romantic and sensual self. This approach neutralizes his ability to act and isolates him between the worlds of the haves and have-nots. More importantly, in attempting to conform to this contradictory and thus unattainable code of conduct, Clyde becomes more and more detached from his true feelings and motives and can never thereafter produce an authoritative narrative of his life, not even to save himself at the trial. And because of his loss of power as an historian of self, his story can be reshaped by others, each to fit his own political or material needs. This view of determinism as merely a rhetorical strategy of the elite to curb the initiative and thwart the ambitions of aspirants like Clyde allows Mizruchi to suggest that ultimately *An American Tragedy* places the power for social change in human hands.

Occasionally, Mizruchi's thesis application is less than a tight fit, as evidenced by the above example regarding Roberta. Having identified her as one with historical knowledge and narrative power, Mizruchi must still concede Roberta's total ineffectuality in controlling her life, suggesting that perhaps for the poor historical consciousness is after all an "empty" category, that the "poor characters exercise power, if at all, only from the grave." Overall, however, Mizruchi's thesis is compelling

and provides a fresh perspective from which to evaluate *An American Tragedy*'s characterization and narration. Also, her sensitivity to the manner in which the past impinges upon the present leads Mizruchi to some provocative insights into structural parallels, devices of repetition, foreshadowing, verbal echoes and other time-related techniques. This careful and perceptive reading of the text should in itself make *The Power of Historical Knowledge* a stimulating study for Dreiser scholars.

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DREISER NEWS & NOTES

The Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania has received an NEH Grant to process and preserve the Dreiser Collection. The Grant will extend from 1 July 1990 to 30 June 1992, during which time the materials will be rearranged, catalogued and computerized. While this work is being carried out, access to the collection will be limited. Those wishing to use specific items should write or call Nancy Shawcross, Curator of Manuscripts, to make arrangements in advance of their arrival. She can be reached at 215-898-2065. . . . The Department of English at SUNY Brockport is planning a conference to observe the ninetieth anniversary of the publication of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. The dates are October 25, 26, 27 October, 1990. Professor Philip Gerber writes that "the title of the conference is 'Working Girls: Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* at Ninety.' We expect to deal also with other 'working girls' novels, *Jennie Gerhardt* and *An American Tragedy*. We will be looking at these not only from a 'Women's Issues' standpoint, but also from the standpoint of Cultural Diversity, and for that purpose will include speakers with a non-American orientation, including Yoshinobu Hakutani of Kent State University and Arun P. Mukherjee of York University (Canada, via India). We expect to include a Black perspective on the novels as well." Those interested in receiving information or in serving on the program can contact: Philip L. Gerber, Department of English, SUNY Brockport, Brockport, NY 14420.