THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

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ROBERT P. SAALBACH
A DEDICATION

Professor Robert Palmer Saalbach, a founder and co-editor of the *Dreiser Newsletter* since its inception in 1970, retired from teaching at the conclusion of the 1976 summer sessions. To him, in recognition of his contributions to Dreiser studies, this issue is dedicated.

Professor Saalbach's interest in Dreiser began during the late 1920s at Pittsburgh's Schenley High School, where he heard Dreiser described as a risqué writer. Then, while earning a B.A. degree at the University of Pittsburgh, he read *An American Tragedy* as a freshman and wrote his first paper on Dreiser as a junior. By that time he was "hooked." In 1935, at the University of Chicago, he completed his M.A. thesis, "The Philosophy of Theodore Dreiser." Included in the research for this thesis was an interview with Dreiser, who was visiting the University of Chicago to deliver a lecture.

For his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1951, Professor Saalbach collected and edited 502 Dreiser poems. In the fall of 1959, he presented a lecture on Dreiser's poetry to the South Central MLA, and in 1969 published *Selected Poems (from Moods) by Theodore Dreiser*, based on his dissertation.

In 1971, Professor Saalbach chaired the Dreiser Centennial Committee, which brought scholars and devotees from many parts of the world to Terre Haute for a three-day celebration commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of Dreiser's birth.

Retirement will not mean the end of Professors Saalbach's interest and involvement in Dreiser studies. He will continue to support the *Dreiser Newsletter* as a contributing editor and engage himself in future Dreiser projects. Those of us who have worked with Professor Saalbach on the *Dreiser Newsletter* offer him our best wishes for a productive retirement.

DREISER'S ARTISTRY:
TWO LETTERS FROM
AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

James L. McDonald
University of Detroit

Although Theodore Dreiser ranks among the major American writers of his time, the literary merits of his works and his abilities as a novelist have not received the recognition they deserve. Obvious reasons for this neglect are his clumsiness, his apparent lack of sophistication, and his detachment from the formalist-symbolist tradition of James and Fitzgerald, Conrad and Joyce, which is so amenable to detailed analysis. And yet, as critics like Alfred Kazin, Irving Howe, and Richard Lehan have maintained, genuine artistry is discernible in Dreiser's works. Their studies of *An American Tragedy*, in particular, point to his skill as a novelist, his mastery of the elements of fiction. The letters Clyde Griffiths receives from Sondra Finchley and Roberta Alden in Chapter XLII (a pivotal section of the novel) provide an opportunity to further substantiate these claims.

These letters, of course, are of primary importance to the novel's plot for, as the narrator informs us, "the contrast presented by" them finally pushes Clyde to the realization "that he would never marry Roberta." Immediately after this, he reads the newspaper account of the "ACCIDENTAL DOUBLE TRAGEDY AT PASS LAKE" which eventually leads him to his plan to murder Roberta.

But the letters also show Dreiser's finely wrought presentation and dramatization of the characters of Roberta and Sondra. Further, they reveal his subtle use of irony to reverse the readers' previous judgments of the two women and to indicate the dimensions of the worlds they inhabit, thus deepening our awareness of Clyde's callowness and naiveté and complicating the whole problem of his guilt.

A hasty reading of the letters seems to confirm what readers have been led to believe about Sondra and Roberta. On the surface, Dreiser has been manipulating two stock characters: the beautiful but hollow and demanding rich girl--the worldly temptress, the mistress; and the rather plain but loving and fertile girl-next-door--the mother, the wife. Thus one can note an apparent contrast between the superficiality and frivolity of Sondra and the love and devotion of Roberta. Sondra, the wealthy golden girl of Clyde's dreams, writes--in a language characterized by baby-talk and imperious commands--of her carefree, trivial activities, the most unnerving of which seems to be an incident when her horse "bolted and Sonda got all switched and scwatched," in the world of wealth Clyde yearns to enter. Roberta, the poor battered girl who has become a handicap to Clyde's ambitions, writes simply and naturally about her loneliness, the discomforts of her pregnancy, and the virtues of the lower-class domestic world which he is trying to escape.

The sympathies of Dreiser's readers--formed in a respectable middle-class environment which views the pleasure-loving rich as decadent and immoral and sees the ordinary, average citizen as the salt of the earth--incline toward Roberta. So these readers are prone to interpret Clyde's preference for Sondra as a sign of his vanity, conceit, and ultimate folly. This view of Clyde is not incorrect. Yet Dreiser is also working to reverse these sympathies; and this irony makes possible a deeper understanding of the characters and the moral problems in the novel.

Dreiser juxtaposes two worlds. Sondra's letters come from and dramatize the world of wealth, "Pine Point Landing . . . . The Casino and golf course." It is an active, competitive society where golfing, boating, horseback-riding, swimming, and dancing are the privileges of charming, polished, carefree young people--a social climate which she thoroughly enjoys and wants to share with Clyde. Roberta's letters come from and present the world of the lower-class, "Blitz" and "Homer," where her sister and brother-in-law have "such a cute little home" with "pretty furniture, a victrola and all . . .": a passive, drearily domestic existence whose pleasures are dim and routine (playing cards and games)--a life which she does not enjoy, which makes her bored and lonely, but which she wishes to drag Clyde into.

Dreiser makes these worlds explicit in the styles of the writers: through contrasting diction, rhythm, emphasis, and tone, he specifies the essential qualities which mark the gap

between Sondra and Roberta, and the worlds they represent.

One is struck by the stylishness and dynamism of Sondra, from the very speed and intensity of the opening lines. As her diction and rhythm indicate, Sondra is more than just a social butterfly:

> Clyde Mydie:
>
> How is my pheet phing? All wytie? It's just glorious up here. Lots of people already here and more coming every day.

The sharp, arresting address, the playful banter which follows, and the abrupt, frank, natural summation of the situation reveal Sondra as a singularly dashing and vibrant young lady.

There is nothing striking about the beginning of Roberta's letter. It is utterly drab and lifeless:

> Dear Clyde:
>
> I am nearly ready for bed, but I will write you a few lines. [The letter is more than three times the length of Sondra's.] I had such a tiresome journey coming up that I was nearly sick.

Roberta may be fertile, but her diction and rhythm are remarkably dingy, plodding, and labored.

Sondra continues, emphasizing the delights of the sphere she inhabits ("here" is the only word which appears twice in the first four sentences):

> I can hear Stuart and Grant with their launches going up toward Gray's Inlet now. You must hurry and come up, dear. It's too nice for words. Green roads to gallop through, and swimming and dancing at the Casino every afternoon at four. Just back from a wonderful gallop on Dickey and going again after luncheon to mail these letters.

Roberta's letter drags on, detailing her miseries, with a characteristic stress on "I," a word she uses 71 times in all:

> In the first place I didn't want to come much (alone) as you know. I feel too upset and uncertain about everything, although I try not to feel so now that we have our plan and you are going to come for me as you said.

Both women desire Clyde's presence; but their methods, like their personalities, present a sharp contrast. Throughout Sondra's letter, one is aware of her serene self-assurance, typified by her personification of herself as "Sonda" and her use of babytalk. Sondra is able to move outside herself, to set up an image she can try to emulate but, more important, can lead Clyde to admire and desire: enticingly, she invites him to come so "We could dance to 'Taudy.' Sonda just loves that song." The babytalk reflects a surface immaturity. But it also shows her confidence in the image she has created and in her social position: the babytalk about the accident directs Clyde's attention away from a possibly battered and disheveled Sondra to a desirable, commanding "Sonda" who, provocatively, "has to dress now," and can promise "Kisses. Big and little ones. All for baddie boy." And having so established herself, she can order him to "wite Sonda every day and she'll write 'oo."

Roberta, however, has no such self-awareness, much less self-assurance. She cannot go outside herself. Trapped within her own wounded ego and unable to cope with her physical predicament, she cannot see the image she presents to Clyde. Though "nearly ready for bed," she is anything but enticing. She cannot present herself as anything more than a self-centered, self-pitying, whining problem-child:

> You won't disappoint me any more and make me suffer this time like you have so far . . . . I promise not to be a burden on you, for I know you don't really care for me any more and so I don't care much what happens now so long as I get out of this . . . . Please write me, Clyde, a long, cheery letter, even though you don't want to, and tell me all about how you have not thought of me once since I've been away or missed me at all . . . .

In the abstract, and given the readers' predispositions, it would be easy and natural to sympathize with Roberta, her condition and the world she represents. But, juxtaposed to Sondra, Roberta comes off very badly. Her dullness, egotism, self-pity, her inability to cope with her situation ("Oh, dear, don't mind this blot. I just don't seem able to control myself these days like I once could.") are the results of serious weaknesses of character and the moral, as well as material, poverty of the class she comes from. Her condition is not advanced enough to be noticed; but Roberta has degenerated into

a pregnant lump. In Sondra's letter, a calculated artificiality is evident, in keeping with her self-styled role as fashionable darling among the wealthy elite. But before she can begin to behave and write so successfully, before she can offer such an image, Sondra has to know herself and her capabilities very well and has to appreciate the motives and predispositions of others. The fact is that she does not lack substance. And the world that she comes from--with its leisure, power, and almost unlimited opportunities--has helped provide that substance and has a richness and depth that Dreiser recognizes and communicates to the reader.

Clyde, however, does not understand the difference. He can see no more than the images the women present. His recognition of the great gulf between them is limited to externals: "the shabby home . . . that rickety house . . . those toppling chimneys" of Roberta's world; "the great estate . . . lying along the west shore of Twelfth Lake" of Sondra's world. But he has no knowledge of what is behind that "shabby house," what supports that "great estate." His dreams, like his character, are narrow and limited; and his response to these letters clarifies and defines the feebleness of his ambitions. Seen in this light, the question of his guilt is more complex than Belknap and Jephson point out, than Reverend McMillan realizes. Caught between a world he has outgrown and a world so sophisticated and dense that he cannot begin to understand it, Clyde can have only the dimmest motives, only a hazy awareness of his abilities and responsibilities. Society's condemnation of him, then, seems not only cruel, but arbitrary and even outlandish.

Such effects could not have been achieved by the great blundering oaf that Dreiser's detractors have caricatured. Rather, they were produced by an accomplished novelist, a thoroughly competent craftman in the art of fiction.

VIRGINIA WOOLF ON DREISER

Woolf's review of *Free and Other Stories* and *Twelve Men* seems to have escaped the notice of Dreiserians and to merit space in *DN* as an unexpected encounter of Bloomsbury with "A Real American," the title under which it ran, unsigned, in the *Times Literary Supplement* of August 21, 1919. Woolfe seems unaware that Dreiser had written anything but these short stories (which she reviewed in the American, Boni and Liveright, editions) though four of his novels, his plays, and *A Traveller at Forty* had already appeared in English editions. Only a fledgling writer of fiction herself in 1919, she had published *The Voyage Out* and was awaiting the publication that fall of *Night and Day*. The prediction in her final sentence, written on the brink of the 1920's, reads quaintly farsighted today; but the review as a whole is a triumph of Virginia Woolf's critical acumen over her prejudices--as well as yet another testimonial to Dreiser's "artless" art.

--Ellen Moers

A REAL AMERICAN[1]

American literature is still terribly apt to excite the snobbish elements in an English critic. It is either feeble with an excess of culture, or forcible with a self-conscious virility. In either case it appears to be influenced by the desire to conciliate or flout the European standards; and such deference not only never attains its object, but, perhaps deservedly, brings its own punishment in the shape of patronage and derision. One cannot help, on such occasions,

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[1]From CONTEMPORARY WRITERS by Virginia Woolf, edited by Jean Guiguet, copyright © 1965, by Leonard Woolf. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

boasting of the English descent from Shakespeare. At first sight Mr. Dreiser appears to be another of those pseudo-Europeans whose productions may pass muster across the Atlantic, but somehow look over here like careful copies from the old masters. There are many stories, we should suppose, neither better nor worse and indeed much resembling "Free" in the current magazines. But what we should expect an English writer to rattle off with some dash and self-confidence, the American writer produces slowly, languidly, with much fumbling for words and groping for subtleties which seem to escape him. The end is apparent long before it is reached, and we come to it in a listless straggling way which makes the whole expedition seem rather pointless. As there is no more fatiguing form of mental exercise than the reading of short stories told without zest, the prospect of ten more to come descended like a mist upon the horizon. The cloud lifted, however, against all expectation, as a dull day gets finer and finer without one's seeing exactly where the light comes from. While we were growing more and more conscious that Mr. Dreiser lacked all the necessary qualities for a writer of short stories--concentration, penetration, form--unconsciously we were reading on at a great rate and enjoying the book considerably. At a certain point then it was necessary to come to terms with Mr. Dreiser and to inform him that, if he would consent to drop his claim to be a writer of short stories, we for our part would renounce our privileges as the lineal descendants of Shakespeare.

And yet what did our pleasure come from? It did not come from the usual sources; it did not come from excitement or shock; it came, as if surreptitiously, from a sense of American fields and American men and women and of America herself, gross, benevolent, and prolific. For some hundreds of years, of course, the existence of America has been a well-known fact; but the lettered classes have kept their country in the background, or presented it in a form suited to European taste. Mr. Dreiser, however, appears to be so much of an American that he describes it without being aware that he is doing anything of the kind. In the same way a home-bred child describes the family in which he had been brought up. There is little evidence that Mr. Dreiser had been influenced by Europe. He is not perceptibly cultivated. His taste seems to be bad. When he describes an artist, we, on the other hand, see a journalist.

> Davies swelled with feeling. The night, the tragedy, the grief, he saw it all. But also with the cruel instinct of the budding artist, that he

> already was, he was beginning to meditate on the character of story it would make--the colour, the pathos. "I'll get it all in!" he exclaimed, feelingly, if triumphantly, at last. "I'll get it all in!"

Mr. Dreiser gets a great deal too much of it in, but, together with the colour and the pathos, there is another quality which excuses his sins of taste, and perhaps explains them. He has genuine vitality. His interest in life, when not impeded by the restriction of a definite form, bubbles and boils over and produces *Twelve men*, a much more interesting work than *Free*.

Whether we are able to recognize the orginals or not, these twelve character sketches are extremely readable. And to an English reader they are, besides, rather strange. With superficial differences, each of these men is of a large, opulent, masterful character. Each is, as Mr. Dreiser defines it, "free", with "the real spiritual freedom where the mind, as it were, stands up and looks at itself, faces Nature unafraid, is unaware of its own weaknesses, its strengths . . . kicks dogma out of doors, and yet deliberately and of choice holds fast to many, many, simple and human things, and rounds out life, or would, in a natural, normal, courageous, healthy way". One of these men writes songs, another directs companies, a third builds toy engines. They are all busy and engrossed, and in love with life. Yet with all their power they seem childish--childish in their love of fame, in their love of mankind, in their sentimentality and simplicity. One is certain that their songs will be bad ones, their pictures melodramatic, their stories mere journalism. But their animal spirits are superb. Nor are they entirely animal. The abundance of life in their veins overflows into all kinds of fine and friendly relations with their fellows. Mr. Dreiser describes them with such enthusiasm that his work has a character of its own--an American character. He is not himself by any means a great writer, but he may be the stuff from which, in another hundred years or so, great writers will be born.

A DREISER CHECKLIST, 1975

Compiled and Annotated by
Frederic E. Rusch

This checklist covers the year's work on Dreiser in 1975 plus a number of publications omitted from previous checklists. With the exception of works reviewed in the *Dreiser Newsletter* and abstracts in *Dissertation Abstracts International* (DAI) and *Masters Abstracts* (MA), I have annotated all new publications I have been able to examine. Reprints have not been annotated unless they appeared with new introductory matter.

For their assistance, I wish to thank Mary Jean DeMarr and the authors who sent me copies of their publications.

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

Epitaph. New York: Heron Press, 1935. Rpt. Folcraft, PA: Folcraft Library Editions, 1975.

Fine Furniture. New York: Random House, 1930. Rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1975.

Sesuo Kerė [Sister Carrie]. Trans. Silvija Lomsargyte-Pukiene and Juozas Avizonis. Vilnius: Vaga, 1973.

Sobranie Sochinenii v Dvenadtsati Tomakh [Collected Works in Twelve Volumes]. Biblioteka "Ogonek." Moska: Pravda, 1973.

Vol. 1: *Sister Carrie,* ed. by N.K. Treneva with an introduction on Dreiser by S. Ivan'ko and a foreword to the novel by M. Volosov. Vol. 2: *Jennie Gerhardt,* ed. by V.A. Khinkis with a foreword by N. Gal' and M. Lorie. Vol. 3: *The Financier,* ed. by V.A. Khinkis with a foreword by M. Volosov. Vol 4: *The Titan,* ed. by I.G. Gurova with a foreword by V. Kurell and T. Ozerskaya. Vol. 5: *The Stoic,* ed. by T.A. Kudryavtseva with a foreword by M. Bogoslovskaya and T. Kudryavtseva. Vol. 6: *The "Genius,"* ed. by I.M. Bernshtein with a foreword by M. Volosov. Vols. 7-12 not seen. [MJD]

II. NEW DREISER STUDIES AND NEW STUDIES THAT INCLUDE DREISER

Anderson, David D. "Chicago as Metaphor," *Great Lakes Review*, 1(Summer 1974), 3-15.

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is among the novels Anderson uses to show how "in [Chicago] writers, especially those from [America's] heartland, have seen and portrayed the promise of the American ideal and the harshness of its reality personified."

Bender, Eileen T. "On Lexical Playfields: Further Speculation on 'Chemisms,'" *Dreiser Newsletter*, 6(Spring 1975), 12-13.

Bender discusses the works of Karl, Baron von Reichenbach, who, she speculates, may have been an indirect source for Dreiser's use of the term "chemisms" in his writings.

Curry, Martha Mulroy. *The "Writer's Book" by Sherwood Anderson: A Critical Edition*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975.

This "first edition of the 'Writer's Book' in its entirety" is based on Curry's Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Loyola University in 1972. There are a number of comments on Dreiser in Anderson's text plus numerous references to him in Curry's lengthy commentary.

Dailly, C. "Jennie: A Daughter of Nature," *Annales de l' Univ. d' Abidjan*, 5D (1972), 145-50.

Dunlop, C.R.B. "Human Law and Natural Law in the Novels of Theodore Dreiser," *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 19 (1974), 61-86.

In this study of Dreiser's ethical and legal theory, Dunlop focuses on *The Financier* and *The Titan* to show that "Dreiser is torn between a view of the world as disordered and amoral, and a yearning for a fundamental law which can be used to measure and judge modern society and human law."

Dunlop, C.R.B. "Law and Justice in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*," *University of British Columbia Law Review*, 6, No. 2 (1971), 379-403.

Dunlop points out some problems in Dreiser's ethical and legal theory after examining the forces that shaped it and demonstrating how it underlies *An American Tragedy*.

Garner, Stanton. "Dreiser and the *New York Times Illustrated Magazine:* A Bibliographical Supplement," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 69, No. 1 (1975), 118-19.

Garner lists, and comments on the importance of, eight works by Dreiser omitted from Donald Pizer's checklist in *Proof I* (1971), 247-92. The addenda are items in the *New York Times Illustrated Magazine* between October, 1897, and December, 1898.

Gerber, Philip L. "Dreiser: 'Extreme and Bloody Individualism,'" in *American Literary Naturalism: A Reassessment*. Ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Lewis Fried. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975. Pp. 107-21.

Arguing that Dreiser's enduring quality lies in his life-view, "founded in the nightmare of human beings trapped by an overwrought acquisitive sense that flogs them to pursuing their desires with destructive individualism," Gerber traces the way Dreiser came to this view and shows how it is developed in his major novels.

_____. "Dreiser's Stoic: A Study in Literary Frustration," in *Literary Monographs*. Vol. 7. Ed. Eric Rothstein and Joseph Wittreich, Jr. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1975. Pp. 85-164.

See review by R.W. Dowell in the *Dreiser Newsletter*, 6 (Spring 1975), 22-23.

_____. "Hyde's Tabbs and Dreiser's Butlers," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 6 (Spring 1975), 9-11.

Gerber demonstrates how Henry M. Hyde's novel *The Buccaneers* (1904) was a source for Dreiser's portraits of Edward and Aileen Butler in *The Financier* and for the "basic situation" between the Butlers and Cowperwood, namely, "antipathy between a powerful father and a dynamic lover, with the girl in the middle."

Graham, D.B. "'The Cruise of the "Idlewild"': Dreiser's Revisions of a 'Rather Light' Story," *American Literary Realism*, 8 (Winter 1975), 1-11.

Graham examines the "nature and effect" of the changes Dreiser made in the text of "The Cruise of the 'Idlewild'" that appeared in *The Bohemian* in 1909 when he revised the story for *Free and Other Stories*.

Griffith, Clark. "Sister Carrie: Dreiser's Wasteland," *American Studies*, 16 (Fall 1975), 41-47.

Griffith points out the importance of the meeting between Carrie and Hurstwood in Chicago's Jefferson Park in chapter 15 of *Sister Carrie*. "Viewed in the context of their one glorious and really breathtaking encounter [in the park]," he argues, "Carrie and Hurstwood emerge as essentially tragic figures, in the specifics of whose fall Dreiser sets forth nothing less than the general tragedy of modern life itself."

Halfmann, Ulrich. "Dreiser and Howells: New Light on Their Relationship," *Amerikastudien*, 20, Pt. 1 (1975), 73-85.

Not seen. Halfmann's abstract of his essay is reprinted in *American Literary Realism*, 8 (Autumn 1975), 375.

Harter, Carol Clancy. "Strange Bedfellows: *The Waste Land* and *An American Tragedy*" in *The Twenties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. Ed. Warren French. Deland, FL: Everett/Edwards, 1975. Pp. 51-64.

Harter demonstrates how Eliot's poem and Dreiser's novel "embody--however much they are diametrically opposite as literary forms--many of the same themes, symbolic motifs, and views of the human condition as it is manifested in the modern world."

Heim, William J. "Letters from Young Dreiser," *American Literary Realism*, 8 (Spring 1975), 158-63.

This note presents the texts of three letters Dreiser wrote to a friend in Warsaw, Judson Morris, while living in Chicago in 1888-89.

Hussman, Lawrence E., Jr. "Thomas Edison and *Sister Carrie*: A Source for Character and Theme," *American Literary Realism*, 8 (Spring 1975), 155-58.

Hussman identifies Thomas Edison, whom Dreiser interviewed about a year before he began writing *Sister Carrie*, as the source of many of the ideas expressed by the

character Bob Ames and as an influence in Dreiser's depiction of Carrie as feeling unfulfilled after attaining the objects of her desires at the end of the novel.

Lundén, Rolf. "The Scandinavian Reception of Theodore Dreiser," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 6 (Spring 1975), 1-8.

Lundén presents an overview of the number of translations and the critical reception of Dreiser's works in Sweden, Denmark and Norway from the time he became known in Scandinavia with the publication of *An American Tragedy* to the present.

Oldani, Louis. "Dreiser and Paperbacks: An Unpublished Letter," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 6 (Fall 1975), 1-9.

In a letter dated May 6, 1939, Dreiser asked William C. Lengel to act as his agent in getting one of the "cheap paper book publication companies" to issue a paperback set of his works. Oldani presents the text of this letter and shows how it was one of many attempts by Dreiser to realize a dream of having a collected edition of his works published.

Pizer, Donald, Richard W. Dowell and Frederic E. Rusch. *Theodore Dreiser: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1975.

See review by Neda M. Westlake in the *Dreiser Newsletter*, 7 (Spring 1976), 19-21.

Rusch, Frederic E. "A Dreiser Checklist, 1974," *Dreiser Newsletter* 6(Fall 1975), 17-24.

This checklist of works by and about Dreiser published in 1974 includes annotations of new studies and of reprints with new introductory matter.

Saalbach, Robert P. "Dreiser and the Powys Family," *Dreiser Newsletter*, 6 (Fall 1975), 10-16.

Saalbach points out how many of the things Louis Marlow says about Llewelyn and John Cowper Powys in *Welsh Ambassadors* could also be said of Dreiser.

Stepanchev, Stephen. *Dreiser Among the Critics: A Study of American Reactions to the Work of a Literary Naturalist, 1900-1949*. Folcraft, PA: Folcraft Library Editions, 1972.

This pamphlet is an 8-page abridgement of Stepanchev's Ph.D dissertation submitted to New York University in 1950.

Sullivan, Jeremiah J. "Conflict in the Modern American Novel," *Ball State University Forum*, 15 (Spring 1974), 28-36.

In the course of tracing the history of conflict in the American novel since the Civil War, Sullivan asserts that Dreiser and Anderson began the tradition of the conflict between healthy impulse and inhuman codes and demonstrates how the tradition has been carried on in the works of the prolitarian novelists in the thirties and the modern novelists John Updike, Ralph Ellison, and William Styron.

III. REPRINTS OF EARLIER DREISER STUDIES

Frohock, W.M. *Theodore Dreiser*. Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers No. 102. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1972. Rpt. in *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*. Ed. Leonard Ungar. New York: Scribners, 1974. I, 497-520.

IV. ABSTRACTS OF DISSERTATIONS AND THESES ON AND INCLUDING DREISER

Bayer, Roberta M. *"Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman:* A Comparative Study of the Development of the Artist in the Works of Hermann Hesse, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Theodore Dreiser," *DAI*, 35 (1975), 7245A (New York Univ.).

DeMuth, James David. "Small Town Chicago: The Comic Perspective of Finley Peter Dunne, George Ade, and Ring Lardner (1890-1920)," *DAI*, 36 (1975), 3711A (Minnesota).

Gasser, Larry Winston. "Social Reform in the Late Nineteenth-Century American Strike Novel," *DAI*, 36(1975), 887A-888A (Denver).

Griffin, Joseph Patrick. "The Short Stories of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study," *DAI*, 35 (1975), 4521A (Notre Dame).

Hapke, Laura. "The Uses of the Popular Novel: Satire and Affinity in the Fiction of Selected American Realists and Naturalists, 1865-1910," *DAI*, 35 (1975), 4523A (CUNY).

Johnson, Mary Dillon. "Dreiser's Naturalistic Novels of Compassion," *DAI*, 36 (1975), 316A-317A (Univ. Cal., Berkeley).

Starr, Alvin Jerome. "The Influences of Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and James T. Farrell on the Fiction of Richard Wright," *DAI*, 35(1975), 6162A (Kent State).

Wood, Bobbye Nelson. "A Prototypical Pattern in Dreiser's Fiction," *DAI*, 35 (1975), 7929A (North Texas State).

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DREISER SEMINAR AT 1976 MLA CONVENTION

During the 1975 MLA convention, a seminar was held to open discussion of the criticism of Dreiser's fiction. We are pleased to announce now the sequel to that initial event, a 1976 Dreiser seminar that aims at continued discussion of the subject yet with a more specific focus than the previous meeting.

This special session is entitled "Perspectives on Dreiser Criticism, II: *An American Tragedy*" and will take place during the 1976 MLA convention to be held from December 26-29 in New York. The meeting is intended to provide a forum in which several critical approaches may be brought to bear on what many consider to be Dreiser's greatest novel, both to help stimulate new awareness of the artistry of that work and to imply the possibility of further recognition of meaning in Dreiser's other novels. The format of the session is to be centered in panel discussion: no formal papers will be read, but each panelist will make an opening presentation of a viewpoint on the novel which may include reference to a written paper; following that, the meeting will be open to discussion and debate between panelists and, as time permits, between members of the audience and the panel.

Chairman and discussion leader is Paul A. Orlov, U. of Toronto. Panelists are: Prof. Richard D. Lehan, UCLA; Prof. Donald Pizer, Tulane U.; and Prof. Charles Shapiro, York College, CUNY. Reservations for seating or further information may be obtained from the chairman, Mr. Orlov, at: 755 Steeles Ave.-West, Apt. PH4, Willowdale, Ontario, Canada, M 2 R 2 S 6.

REVIEWS

The Dreisers: Theodore and Vera

My Uncle Theodore: An Intimate Family Portrait of Theodore Dreiser by Vera Dreiser with Brett Howard. New York: Nash Publishing Co., 1976. Illustrated. x + 238 pp.

Referring to Granville Hicks' review of Dreiser's *America Is Worth Saving*, Ruth Epperson Kennell writes in *Dreiser and the Soviet Union* (p. 290):

> Hicks' reference . . . to the "Soviet Union, of which he (Dreiser) thinks well" is a gross understatement of Dreiser's regard for the first socialist society. After what he saw there, he had come to believe that socialism was the ultimate solution to imperialist crimes and starvation in the midst of plenty.

Then, saying that Dreiser's hatred of England in that book "was not just a blind hatred of government," she continues:

> He was beginning to perceive the pattern of imperialism as defined by Lenin--an apparatus for sucking wealth out of the undeveloped countries in the name of religion and democracy.

In much the same vein, Dr. Vera Dreiser tells us on p. 221:

> In tone and subject, *America Is Worth Saving* appears strikingly contemporary; today Operation Breadbasket is seeking to eradicate the injustice that Dreiser identified in 1941 when he wrote, "In California nature's mountain ranges are rapidly being rivaled by mountains of 'surplus' oranges and potatoes which we carefully spray with poison so that the hungry may not eat."

Her conclusion, however, is somewhat different from Kennell's. Three pages later, Dr. Dreiser writes:

> One of the legends arising from Dreiser's involvement in liberal causes in the thirties was that he was a member of the Communist party during the "Red Decade" . . . [but] he never subscribed to party doctrines . . . nor did he ever support the party for doctrinaire reasons. He remained an individualist throughout his life . . . .

Those acquainted with the irreconcilable differences between philisophical socialism (or, in its utopian form, communism) and philosophical individualism will note here a rather immense difference of opinion. I point the difference out, in opening this review, not in order to take sides nor to argue one view against the other, but only to show that two people, both of whom knew Dreiser quite well, have seen, not merely the objective Dreiser, but also the Dreiser colored by their own views. Biographies, I feel, are always so colored; one can never take a biography as purely objective fact. Yet, to an aware reader, biographies of varied colorations do help us to an objective understanding of the subject--and so it is with both Mrs. Kennell and Dr. Dreiser.

If, following the line of dialectic, one seeks the objective Dreiser in a reconciliation of the two views expressed, the person will find, I think, that the reconciliation lies in the fact that Dreiser was, in the broad sense, a poet, defined by *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* as "a creative artist of great imaginative and expressive gifts and special sensitivity to his medium." Though his actual poems have long been adversely criticized, I am hoping that Dr. Dreiser's habit of beginning each chapter with a quote from *Moods* will help to revive work which I have long admired. To take just two examples: the chapter on John Paul Dreiser, Sr., begins with the quotation "For I have made me a garden under the shadow of swords," and the following chapter on Sarah Schnepp Dreiser quite aptly opens with "A Vision from a Mountain Top, Maybe." The quotations which head the other chapters are just as fitting.

Something of Dreiser the poet, as defined above, does most certainly come through in Dr. Dreiser's book. Despite its flaws, which no book is entirely without, one can appreciate in this biography the emotions which Dr. Dreiser is experiencing as she writes. The daughter of Edward Dreiser, Theodore's youngest brother, and Mai V. Dreiser, Vera records for us the rich "family portraits" of her mother and father, her aunts, her uncle Paul (whom she was never permitted to know personally), and Paul's protégée, Louise Dresser, perhaps best remembered as the mother in the Hollywood version of *Grapes of Wrath*. More to the point, Dr. Dreiser uses letters never before published to

illuminate the relationship between Theodore and Sara "Jug" White, his first wife, whom Vera came to know and love. There are also extracts from Dr. Dreiser's personal diaries to illumine her emotions in reference to her uncle Theodore. On p. 204, she includes the following entry:

> I wanted to slip my arms around him and hold him tight. He seemed so all at sea. I don't know why I had such a need to let him know he was not alone . . . that I understood. I wanted to be close, to talk and talk because I sensed his need and knew that I could feel part of it.

The above passage refers to an automobile trip made late in Dreiser's life, one during which he and his niece shared the back seat while Helen Dreiser chauffeured them to Palos Verdes.

An earlier chapter uses the diary to explain Mai Dreiser's reaction to a stage performance of *An American Tragedy* (pp. 169-70):

> 1926. Mom is having a fit because she doesn't want me to read uncle Theo's *Tragedy*. What a marvelous book! Mom does an about face when she gets a special invite to the play. Duke and I are going too. How exciting!
>
> My gosh, was I embarrassed by Mom's remarks. She annoyed everyone around us. "Tsk, tsk, tsk. . . Filthy, ect.!" She almost walked out on the bedroom scene, only Dad refused to let her.
>
> Duke can't understand Mom's attitude. She told him tonight that she didn't know how anyone could write such filth. She said she was ashamed to know him!

This kind of imperceptive Comstockian criticism has been noted by many writers, but--so far as I know--never before within the intimate setting of a "family portrait."

When we turn to Dreiser's letters to "Jug," we come upon something which I find to be quite illuminating. There is a notable absence of the "baby talk" which one finds in *An American Tragedy;* yet there is genuinely deep sentiment. On p. 102, Dr. Dreiser includes the following excerpt:

> We have exactly the same opinion about publicity of affection. I could not kiss you before a crowd--nor friends, nor relatives. . . . people who make public display of affection sicken me.

> Went and read an article on "all that relates to the marriage ceremonies" and, oh dear, I almost gasped in agony. I can't. I can't do all these things. I shall be a dismal failure. . . .I can't tell you, Jug, what a nervous horror I have of doing before others what seems a private matter of ours.
>
> I would rather lounge under the trees there, Baby, than to be prince here. There, it seems, life means so much more, especially to me who dwells so much within myself. I would give all if I might come and always have such pleasures as that--resting beside you and enjoying nature's wide simplicity. I am not happy anymore, anywhere, except beside you.

Dr. Dreiser's interpretation of these well-chosen passages shows her training in psychology. In the first two passages, she finds the *aloof* Dreiser, afraid but feeling deeply. The last reveals the *feeling* Dreiser, still afraid, but afraid in a muted sense. The insecurity is traced by Dr. Dreiser to Theodore's ambivalent feeling for his parents, particularly his mother. In analyzing this ambivalence, Dr. Dreiser makes much of Sarah's calling attention to her worn-out shoes, saying (p. 32) that to the young Theodore this incident carried a message which "conveyed clearly that there was little joy in wifehood, and there was no particular good in being a man."

If there is such a thing as psychological (latent) homosexuality, as Dr. Dreiser apparently believes, she touches here on something no other biographer I am aware of has commented upon. The picture she gives us is that of a man tortured by feelings of inferiority for being a man, and then she proceeds to show how both the "cover-up" Dreiser (the one who boasted of his many affairs with women, who fell in love with Thelma Cudlipp while married to "Jug" and lost his job with *The Delineator* because of the ensuing scandal) and the fearful Dreiser whom she perceived as she sat next to him while being chauffeured by Helen are both of one piece. She goes even further than that, explaining his genius in terms of neurosis, suggesting that--without Sarah's sad reference to the shoes--there very well might never have been *An American Tragedy*. As Dr. Dreiser concludes on p. 140: " . . . despite all of the placebos he indulged in--enacting the role of a Don Juan, minor attempts at using stimulating drugs (which were totally ineffectual), interest in psychic phenomena, etc. [--] in spite of himself and because of himself Uncle Theo survived and will, insofar as the world is concerned, continue to survive--as a man of genius. Incredible, unfathomable, controversial--the artist as

functioning schizophrenic. And, in the creative world, he is not alone. "

I also found it interesting to learn that Helen had visited the Ed Dreisers before going to see Theodore in the Village; and, although she is described as "long suffering," Helen is not treated in the book with the same love displayed for Sara White. Mai Dreiser is blamed for a rift between Theodore and Ed, and--if Dr. Dreiser is to be believed--her uncle Theodore thought much more highly of Ed than Dreiser's autobiographies reveal. *A Book About Myself* is treated as a book full of inaccuracies, written when the author was fifty-one and "faced with the need to fortify his own masculine identity and was not likely to recall a dismal failure in the arena of love with either clarity or objectivity" (p. 100). On the other hand, *Dawn* is treated with respect and is the source of some of Dr. Dreiser's psychological interpretations, particularly those concerning Dreiser's relationship with his father and mother.

Perhaps this is the time to mention the co-author, Brett Howard, a woman writer of short stories, of historical articles, and (with others) of socio-medical books. Though I am admittedly only guessing, I believe that the sections of the book calling for a literary approach were written by Brett Howard, while the passages relating to the "intimate family portrait" and its psychological interpretation were written by Dr. Dreiser. For example, Chapter 4 seems to be characterized by the "literary approach"; on the other hand, Chapter 11 appears to be Vera's own.

There is little or no point, as I see it, in criticizing this work for what it never set out to be. it is *not* a scholarly volume; it is written, rather, for the general public. Scholars, no doubt, would want many more footnotes, with all statements carefully--rather than generally or not at all--documented. Furthermore, scholars would desire, I believe, that the chapters on Paul and his protégeé Louise be omitted, and that the entire volume be tightened around its primary thesis. Whether the general public will agree remains to be seen. In any case, the reader who is willing to accept the book for what it is, an "intimate family portrait," will find it rewarding reading.

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Dreiser's Novels

The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study, by Donald Pizer. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1976. 382 pp. $20.00.

The publication of Donald Pizer's *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser* is an important event in the history of Dreiser criticism. For a long time so-called literary naturalism was looked down upon as an uncouth cousin of realism, and to the extent that it was the object of critical interest, naturalism was usually viewed in a political or ideological context. Those thinking of literature as a weapon in class and social struggle tended to see in naturalism implicit criticism of various kinds of injustice. Radicals defended naturalism (while at the same time criticizing it for not going far enough) for taking the poor and despised as its subject; naturalism was of value because it was true to the unsmiling aspects of life. Because the aesthetics of naturalism hardly seemed relevant, they were seldom dealt with. The anti-art-for-art's-sake spirit and scientific orientation of naturalism did not predispose critics to take it very seriously aesthetically. The number of American critics who have devoted themselves to naturalism have been relatively few. Maxwell Geismar comes to mind, but his primary interest in literature--even when he takes off his Marxist and puts on his Freudian glasses--is ideological. At the other end of the critical spectrum, representing the ploddingly philological approach, is an Ahnebrink. Somewhere confidently between these extremes is Pizer, drawing on concepts and points of view from various schools, but committing himself to none.

What Pizer has committed himself to--and we are all in his debt--is the systematic study of our literary naturalists. He has committed himself to the study of naturalism in spite of its unfashionable reputation in academia; and he has produced a body of work which has the effect of helping to elevate naturalism as a genre to a level where one does not have to feel apologetic about being a student of it. A Henry James does not have a monopoly on artistry and sensibility; Garland, Norris and even Dreiser, Pizer has now demonstrated, were not devoid of imagination. Literary naturalism is not the aesthetically negligible sub-genre it was once assumed to be, and for this Pizer deserves a good deal of credit. In spite of what I felt was a lack of adequate focus in *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser*, I

learned much from Pizer's discussions of individual novels. I occasionally found judgements which I disagreed with and arguments I was not persuaded by, for example, Pizer's defense of Dreiser's dramatization of Clyde's inner turmoil--and the Giant Efrit!--at the end of Book Two, but for the most part I could not help admiring the way in which a fine critical intelligence sorts out and makes sense of the individual novels of one of our most prolix and contradictory writers. The chapter on *An American Tragedy* is a major critical achievement, and the one on *Jennie Gerhardt* will help to substantiate Pizer's claim that it is one of Dreiser's best novels. Nobody has attempted a more ambitious study of Dreiser, and if this leaves Pizer open to more criticism than others may have received, it should also earn him the right to be recognized as one of our foremost Dreiserians.

Pizer begins his study of Dreiser's novels with a brief examination of four short stories Dreiser wrote at Maumee, Ohio, in the summer of 1899, not, as Dreiser thought, in 1898. (It is a sign of the care of Pizer's research that he dates more accurately than Dreiser did important events in Dreiser's own life.) The brief introductory section, "A Summer at Maumee," serves an important purpose, for Pizer extracts from the stories what he considers the "significant characteristics of Dreiser's novels." Perhaps the usefulness to the reader of "A Summer at Maumee" will depend in part on whether he or she is persuaded by Pizer's thesis, stated in the Preface, that there is no "single overriding theme or direction in Dreiser's work" (viii). At times Pizer does accord preeminence to the idea of "equation inevitable" in Dreiser's work, but usually he is faithful to his original proposition, and the last thing he could be accused of is schematic criticism. The problem with Pizer's caution about schematization is that the unity which should hold a critical, as well as an imaginative, work together depends heavily upon the preeminence of a theme or an idea. There are some rather important themes and ideas in Pizer's book, but no one of them individually, or all collectively, provided this reader with an adequate sense of unity or direction, which is why more than once I had to return to "A Summer at Maumee" for reorientation. Like the young reporter in "Nigger Jeff," Pizer at times appears determined to get all or most of it in, but without a satisfactory principle of selectivity.

Pizer's particular strength as a critic is his positivistic approach to fiction. He is something of a hounddog in tracking down data concerning the sources of the novels and Dreiser's method of composition. Dreiser's family history and the manuscripts of his novels--from the earliest holographs to the

various typed versions--have been the object of intensive examination by Pizer. He sets the record straight on a couple of disputed points of biography and brings to light for the first time facts concerning dates and circumstances of composition. For example, it has been known for many years that Arthur Henry aided Dreiser's first efforts at creative writing, but Pizer shows how extensive that aid was, particularly in the writing and editing of *Sister Carrie*, prompting at least this reader to wonder whether the character of Ames, who offered Carrie such sound, if unheeded, advice, was partly inspired by Henry, to whom Dreiser dedicated the novel and whom he said he would have married had he (Henry) been a woman. If Pizer avoids the latter kind of speculation, it is probably because he is not as influenced by prevailing systems of belief such as psychoanalysis and Marxism, as many other critics interested in naturalism are. He draws upon psychoanalysis and Marxism on a few occasions, but his overall approach, as I have said, is eclectic. Abstract speculation and reductivism may be the bane of contemporary criticism, but they are not among Pizer's vices as a critic.

On the contrary, what Pizer has a tendency to do, particularly when his own apparent feelings about ideologists are operating, is to stay too close to, and perhaps overstate, the obvious, as in the case of the similarity between Ames and Dreiser. "Ames is the Dreiser of 1895-99." So Pizer says flatly on page 66. Because Pizer feels uncomfortable with the Dreiser of 1895-99, and with Ames, whose very name reminds us of the purposefulness of his life and character; and because he perhaps does not understand them sufficiently, Pizer does not do justice to the complexity of either Ames or the Dreiser of 1895-99. I use "complexity" in spite of my agreement with Pizer and others who see Ames as a character seriously lacking in dimension. Ames is a simplified character, but he is not a simple one, if I may be allowed that distinction, just as Carrie, conversely, is far more contradictory than she is complex. Ames is important in understanding *Sister Carrie*, just as the Dreiser of 1895-99 is important--much more important than generally recognized--in understanding Dreiser's career as a whole. I single out Ames because he is a morally and philosophically committed man--and even though the morality and philosophy to which he is committed are not narrow or sectarian, Pizer is obviously not sympathetic to him as a character, whereas Dreiser obviously was. I would not say the Dreiser of 1895-99 and Ames are identical, but they do share significant moral values--especially if we associate the Dreiser of 1895-99 with the Prophet, as Pizer does. Because Pizer in dealing with the early Dreiser over-

simplifies Ames, and the Prophet he resembles, as "a prig," we are not surprised to find him, in dealing with the late Dreiser, oversimplifying Solon Barnes as "a saint." *The Bulwark* is not one of Dreiser's better novels, but the main trouble is not that "the lives of saints are not as interesting as those of sinners" (p.330), to quote Pizer. I assume that most saints are not free of sin, and I know that Solon Barnes, who does not strike me as a saint, was not.

Pizer's tendency to see the religious element in Dreiser as working against his effectiveness as a novelist makes sense only if we accept the notion that *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic*, especially their endings, are Dreiser's only religiously inspired fiction. Religious beliefs, or more accurately, religious feelings, play an important part in all of Dreiser's novels. If these feelings are not readily apparent, it is because Dreiser himself--except at the beginning and end of his career--was ashamed of openly acknowledging them. But fiction is one of the hardest areas in which to hide the truth. Even when Dreiser was consciously trying to repudiate religion and morality, as in the first two volumes of the trilogy, he could not help occasionally revealing his incorrigible faith in something more than the survival of the fittest or even "equation inevitable." *The "Genius"* too reveals Dreiser's religious biases. Because Pizer is not clear about Dreiser's and Eugene's religious roots--both were deeply influenced by the social gospel spirit of the Judaic-Christian tradition, particularly the teachings of the prophets before and after Christ--he suggests that Dreiser's attitude toward religion and Christian Science is so "muddy" that the meaning of that faith in *The "Genius"* is nearly incomprehensible (see Pizer's footnote 36, p. 359). Instead of analyzing the admittedly puzzling role of religion in Eugene's life and *The "Genius"*, Pizer falls back on a letter to Edward H. Smith in which Dreiser tried to disassociate himself from Eugene's attraction to religion. Dreiser's letter to Smith echoed the public criticism he made of religion as "bunk" and a bandage for sore brains.

But Smith, Mencken, and others who knew Dreiser were nearly convinced that he publicly denounced religion because privately he could not escape its hold on him. Critics like Trilling and Stuart Sherman before him took Dreiser the materialist and naturalist more seriously than he deserved to be taken. While acknowledging the decisive personal influence of Dreiser's mother on him, Pizer does not note the impact which the communistic-pietistic elements of her Mennonite background had on his development as a person and artist. (The religion Dreiser

rejected was much more the dogmatic and institutionalized Catholicism of his father.) By a curious logic, Pizer associates Dreiser's passion for social justice with, or perhaps we should say, subordinates it to, Dreiser's love of beauty. At least that is how I interpret Pizer's concept of Dreiser's "aesthetic morality" and "morality of beauty." Like many of Dreiser's previous critics, Pizer has difficulty explaining the reformist-religious zeal of the late Dreiser because he failed to take into account the depth and sincerity of it in the early Dreiser. Pizer's opinion that Dreiser's prophetic pieces are an illustration of the "obligatory do-goodism of popular journalism," or at best, mere priggishness, is not consistent with his characteristically sound critical judgment. But this of course is a matter of opinion, which is easily influenced by prejudice, my own no less than somebody else's.

If serious scholarly work on Dreiser began with Elias, continued with Matthiessen, Shapiro, Salzman, Gerber, Lehan, Moers, and others, it reaches a new level with Pizer, who has synthesized the best of previous Dreiser criticism (without unfortunately finding room to acknowledge adequately all of his obligations, as he explains at the opening of his Notes) and produced a book of impressive scope and thoroughness. It is my own view that of the two major aims announced in the Preface--(a) to establish the facts and sources and composition of each of Dreiser's novels and (b) to study the themes and form of the completed work--it is more the former than the latter which will make *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser* of enduring value to students of one of our great, if uneven, American novelists.

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