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HURSTWOOD ACHIEVED: A STUDY OF DREISER'S RELUCTANT ART

Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin
University of Ottawa

Dreiser's critics generally agree that Hurstwood's downfall is either inexplicable, or determined by social forces beyond his control, or, finally, due to reasons below the threshold of consciousness; and they usually consider the precipitating incident--the theft--as brought about wholly by chance. Julian Markels, for instance, sees Hurstwood as a "victim" of "cosmic chance."[1] According to F. O. Matthiessen, "There is no doubt about Hurstwood's desire to steal. But the act is an accident."[2] Charles C. Walcutt also considers the theft as an accident and views Hurstwood's degeneration as a "meaningless, almost unmotivated sort of tragedy."[3] Dreiser himself seems to support such views by talking in the second part of the novel of Hurstwood's "almost inexplicable apathy."[4] Most critics also feel that Dreiser "does not make even a pretense of controlling his conditions and discovering truths about the nature of human psychology and physiology,"[5] and they consider this as one of the major characteristics separating Dreiser from Zola. I believe, to the contrary, that there is nothing accidental in Hurstwood's theft, that his downfall is personally accountable, that he is a consistent and coherent character and that the characterization of him is a brilliant moral and psychological study.

Hurstwood is obviously determined to the extent that we all are. But, two brothers may have the same social background, suffer from the same handicaps or enjoy the same advantages, have basically the same opportunities and share the same heredity, and yet turn out to be two sharply different individuals. In Dreiser's own work, the same materialistic society gives rise to both Hurstwood and Frank Cowperwood. The final answer resides in the individual himself and not in the society that formed him. Neither can chance be blamed or given credit

for a person's eventual failure and success. Chance, paradoxically, is a constant in life. However it is not its presence that counts but what one derives from it. Money to be stolen, people to be taken advantage of, women to be seduced, occasions for self-indulgence, self-destruction, or, on the other hand, self-improvement, are all around us, and chance cannot be invoked as an excuse or as a reason for availing ourselves, or not, of such opportunities. Hurstwood cannot be exonerated for taking the money because it was suddenly made available to him; his final degeneration cannot be seen as the result of an accident or as a consequence of Carrie's betrayal. He is not victimized by her, or by his wife, or by New York. If he is anyone's victim, he is his own--the victim of his own "will-lessness," self-indulgence and refusal to face facts. Although a man cannot be held responsible for his psychological make-up, he is nevertheless responsible for the choices he makes. In the first part of the book, Dreiser sets the premises for Hurstwood's eventual decline so thoroughly that it becomes unavoidable--the only imponderable being how long the downward process will take. Only in this respect is chance allowed to intervene.

On the other hand, Dreiser himself does not seem to have been aware of his achievement in this respect for, in a letter to John Howard Lawson, he attributes Hurstwood's "mental and social decay" to three main reasons: first, "a sense of folly or mistake," second, a sense of social disgrace, and third, Hurstwood's failure to grasp Carrie's true nature--"Her charm betrayed him."[6] Thus, Dreiser sees Hurstwood's decline as beginning only in the second part of the novel and so, outside the novel, he gives too much importance to circumstance. Most critics have followed him on these two points.

That Dreiser had sensed the need to make Hurstwood more of a victim is obvious if one compares the early drafts of the novel with the published version as Richard D. Lehan did in his excellent book, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels.* As Lehan points out, Dreiser made Hurstwood less lustful and conniving in the last version of the novel, less obviously deserving of his final punishment. In order to put a chance event at the heart of the novel, Dreiser revised the safe scene several times. The evolution is from an explicitly debated temptation and conscious decision to steal in the early drafts to a shadowy ambiguity in the growth of motive and the forming of the decision in the last version so that the accident of the safe clicking shut will appear to account for the theft. Dreiser, however, did not succeed in making Hurstwood the victim of an "accidental" robbery--to the benefit of characterization, I might add, for the novel would thus have lost much of its insight into human nature. As Robert Penn Warren has commented,

there is in the published version "a movement toward a sense of logic behind the ambiguity, but a logic which undercuts all moralistic debate--a logic that grinds on its relentless way in the unconscious levels of life."[7]

A close study of Hurstwood's character and an explication of chapter 27, which is considered with reason as the turning point of the novel, will reveal that the potential for Hurstwood's downfall is already complete and the downward process already broached by the time he steals the money. Moreover, as Charles C. Walcutt comments: "Hurstwood has qualities which cause him to lose some of the reader's sympathy."[8] One can go further and say that Hurstwood has the instincts of a knave but neither the brains, the self-discipline nor the ability to forestall possible consequences which are necessary to be a successful knave. His lack of scruples is most obvious in his courtship of Carrie, while his family relationships evidence the basic weakness of his temperament.

We are first introduced to Hurstwood in chapter 5 and, although the introduction is rather short, it promptly reveals some of the major characteristics of his personality. First of all, we are told by Dreiser that his substantial air "was composed in part of his fine clothes, his clean linen, his jewels, and, above all, his own sense of his importance," and, moreover, that his managerial position was "a kind of stewardship which was imposing, but lacked financial control." (p. 42) Hurstwood is all exterior, all appearance, a front man, a perfect gimmick for house advertisement. It becomes even clearer when we find out that he has risen "by perseverance and industry, through long years of service, from the position of barkeeper in a commonplace saloon to his present altitude," (p. 42) and that the accounts which he keeps are very simple, for the chief executive and financial functions are the responsibility of the owners and of the cashier. It is thus made explicit that Hurstwood has no real abilities. This good-looking but mediocre man is also unctuous, manipulating his personality to suit the social status of the customers of Fitzgerald and Moy's. There is consistently a "cold make-believe" in his eyes which is only half displaced by the warmth and friendliness he occasionally affects. In brief, this first picture is that of an elegant-looking but clearly conniving man. Although it has often been pointed out that Dreiser himself was impressed by good clothes and a self-assured attitude and that he had "all the naive aspirations of a second-generation American from the wrong side of the track who had broken free from hick-town Indiana and gone to Chicago to make good,"[9] one cannot take literally, as Kenneth S. Lynn,[10] among others, has done, Dreiser's statement that Hurstwood was "altogether a very acceptable individual of our great American upper class--the first grade be-

low the luxuriously rich." (p. 43) Surely, this is irony. In this introductory portrait where he emphasizes the negative qualities of Hurstwood, Dreiser could only be suggesting that society judges people according to the shallowest of appearances, and values good appearance more than personal integrity. That Dreiser had no respect for Hurstwood, and that he bitterly resented the materialism of American society of which Hurstwood at that point is a symbol is clearly revealed in his portrayal of Hurstwood's family life.

Married to a socially ambitious and utterly materialistic wife, and the father of two children whose only aim in life is to be accepted on an even footing with the rich, Hurstwood's family life is dreary and completely devoid of love. However, this is partly his own fault, for he has a tendency to let things drift out of his control. He cannot expect his wife and children to respect him when he cannot even make himself obeyed and respected by the successive maids. "What he could not correct, he would ignore. There was a tendency in him to walk away from the impossible thing." (pp. 78-79) In other words, it is easier to ignore than to correct, and to walk away from a problem rather than attempt to solve it. The man who will let his wife deprive him of his fortune without putting up even the semblance of a fight, and who will steal money from his employers partly because it enables him to have what he wants immediately (Carrie) and partly because it releases him from a disagreeable obligation (seeing the lawyer the next day) is already present in chapter 9, for it is not so much what is impossible that he walks away from as it is what he *considers* to be impossible. Neither is it what he cannot correct that he ignores so much as it is what he *will* not correct.

Moreover, Hurstwood is himself materialistic and, at the same time, an example as well as a true product of a society which puts respectability above integrity, one where double standards prevail. Infidelity is not a moral issue for Hurstwood. To him, the only thing which matters is not to be caught, because of the social consequences involved. Concerning a man whose indiscretions have become public, he thinks: "'It was all right to do it--all men do those things--but why wasn't he careful? A man can't be too careful.' He lost sympathy for the man who had made a mistake and was found out." (pp. 82-83)

He himself is not above such weaknesses. Before he meets Carrie, he has already spent ten thoroughly enjoyable days in Philadelphia without Mrs. Hurstwood. This little escapade only serves to make his home life seem more intolerable, and he begins to store up resentment against his wife, for the very fact that he has betrayed her: "He began to feel that she was a disagreeable attachment." (p. 84) While few readers will

disagree with that adjective, it appears obvious that Hurstwood himself defines the situation as a result of rather banal middle-age philandering. At the end of chapter 9, Dreiser points out that this marriage:

> ...ran along by force of habit, by force of conventional opinion. With the lapse of time it must necessarily become dryer and dryer--must eventually be tinder, easily lighted and destroyed. (p. 84)

Hurstwood is clearly ready for a liaison. That he has not had one earlier is only because no young woman has sufficiently attracted his attention--but it is only a matter of time before one will. Thus, if we take a last look at Hurstwood before he meets Carrie, we see a man who, from the point of view of career, is nothing more than a piece of window-dressing, a man without any real competence but whom a rather shallow form of success has led to believe that he is "something," a weak man who cannot control his household, who has no moral standards, who has already been casually unfaithful to his wife and who begins to find her more and more irksome. As he is socially "en vue," the odds are obviously in favor of his meeting an attractive young woman. The man who, much later, during the streetcar strike, will say, "'No; I'm not anything,'" (p. 372) is already present at the beginning of the book, only he is not aware of it.

Hurstwood's involvement with Carrie influences negatively an already unsatisfactory family life. The demands of matrimony become a chain bound around his feet; he pays little or no attention to his wife, shirks his domestic duties, and increasingly resents her complaints and goads. He does not have the grace, the elegance or, perhaps, merely enough sense to disguise his true feelings in order to protect, and retain, a family life, and the social life related to it, to which, paradoxically, he attaches a great deal of importance. We must remember that he does not contemplate getting a divorce and marrying Carrie. Until the time when he is forced out of his home, the only freedom he wants is that of enjoying *both* his home and his prospective mistress, and he has never looked forward to anything more than spending an occasional week with Carrie. At the same time as his relationship with his wife degenerates, he loses contact with his children, alienates himself from them by taking no part in their lives (and consequently is granted none), relinquishes his control over them and, with it, their respect. "All this Hurstwood could see, and it left a trace of feeling, for he was used to being considered--in his official position, at least--and felt that his importance should not begin to wane here [at home]." (p. 132) Instead of straightening out the situation, he lets things drift and escapes in dreams:

> He consoled himself with the thought, however, that, after all, he was not without affection. Things might go as they would at his house, but he had Carrie outside of it. (p. 132)

> He looked and dreamed a new dream of pleasure which concerned his present fixed condition not at all. He got back in fancy to the old Hurstwood, who was neither married nor fixed in a solid position for life. He remembered the light spirit in which he once looked after the girls--how he had danced, escorted them home, hung over their gates. He almost wished he was back there again--here in this pleasant scene [the park] he felt as if he were wholly free. (p. 135)

This escape to the world of dreams, which is also characteristic of his courtship of Carrie when she does not acquiesce to his desires as readily as he would like her to, clearly foreshadows his later inertness in New York. When reality is unsatisfactory, this man will dream up a more pleasant one, and thus deny the existence of his problems rather than attempt to solve them. Later on, when he is on the verge of losing Carrie, he will react exactly in the same way, settle back in a world of wishful dreams, watch her move further and further away from him and, finally, leave him without his lifting a finger to prevent her going:

> ...he was content to droop supinely while Carrie drifted out of his life, just as he was willing supinely to see opportunity pass beyond his control. (p. 359)

In view of that pattern, Dreiser's comment in chapter 22 that "Hurstwood was a man of authority and some fine feeling, and [that] it irritated him excessively to find himself surrounded more and more by a world upon which he had no hold, and of which he had a lessening understanding" (p. 190) is obviously ironical, for nothing has been established more clearly than the fact that Hurstwood has at *no* time had authority. Clearly what Dreiser means is that Hurstwood *thinks of himself* as a man of authority, but this flattering opinion of himself rests on the flimsiest of bases and is shared only by people like Drouet. His total lack of authority is conclusively demonstrated in his show-down with his wife. His self-assertive speech, that of a blow-hard:

> "It's a lie, I tell you, ... You've been searching around for some cheap accusation for months, and now you think you have it. You think you'll spring something and get the upper hand. Well, I tell you, you can't. As long as I'm in this house I'm master of it, and you or any one

won't dictate to me--do you hear?" (p. 198)

is met by her cold, self-assured answer: "'I'm not dictating to you' ... 'I'm telling you what I want.'" (p. 199) He owns himself defeated.

Through chapters 24 and 25, Hurstwood makes no attempt whatsoever to save his fortune from the grasping hands of a wife who, after all, has no conclusive proof of his infidelity and who is merely gambling on the intuition that she has of his weakness and indecision. Objectively, he has more cards in his hand than she, but he lets himself be hypnotized by what he considers an impossible situation, and paralyzed into complete inaction. He procrastinates, wanting to think his way out, but he does not even so much as outline a possible course of action. Instead of determinedly facing up to the problem, he convinces himself that there is no solution, no loophole left. He needs no one to defeat him, for he constantly argues against himself. Moreover, he refuses to foresee not only the possible, but the probable, and therefore cannot forestall the most obvious action on the part of his wife (p. 218). When the first challenge (the request for money) arrives, he fights the whole battle in his imagination. "He was forever confronting his wife, demanding of her to change her attitude toward him before he worked her bodily harm." (p. 214) He, in fact, yields step by step without any confrontation, does absolutely nothing tangible and, finally, complies abjectly. His wife's intimidatory action of locking him out of his own house might easily have been defeated by the simple expedient of calling a locksmith. One who is so willing to lose cannot but lose.

Hurstwood, however, has the ability, or rather the determination, to see only what he wants to see. It is wishful thinking on his part to imagine that his wife will be content with such partial victory; it is also a complete misconception of human nature, for only a selfless person would not press an advantage so easily gained, and Mrs. Hurstwood is far from disinterested. Her logic, of course, prevails over his self-delusion, and the second and third challenges soon follow in the form of the lawyer's letters. Both are met with the same passivity: in each case, Hurstwood folds up the letter and puts it in his pocket. In this manner he lets six full days elapse in complete inaction.

Thus, from the point of view of his family relationships, Hurstwood finds himself in a trap before the night of the theft. But it is a trap of his own making, and, if it has closed its grip around him, it is because he has allowed it to. Why Hurstwood has let himself be caught in such a predicament is impossible to assess. Dreiser is not really interested in

probing Hurstwood's subconscious in order to discover hidden motivation or hereditary tendencies. He is merely, but most importantly, interested in the process through which an individual makes or destroys himself and, in this respect, he clearly foreshadows F. Scott Fitzgerald's treatment of his own protagonists--Dr. Richard Diver, in particular. Whether Hurstwood's inertness can be attributed to a Baudelairian fascination for the "gouffre," or, in the fashion of Giraudoux's croud in *Electre*, to a more or less conscious hope that, if he stays sufficiently passive, the wrath of the Gods will pass over him without noticing him and leave him unscathed, remains for the reader to ponder. Dreiser himself is interested more in an experimental demonstration of the operation of these subconscious forces, whatever they may be,[11] than in a probing into the nature of these forces. As he is well aware, his theory that mental activity is a chemical reaction does not offer a full explanation of that activity.

Hurstwood's early courtship of Carrie reveals the least attractive aspects of his personality, that of a cynical, cold-blooded, scheming and unscrupulous individual, while it evidences, at the same time, some of the basic shortcomings already discussed.

When Hurstwood first meets Carrie, "He never for a moment concealed the fact of her attraction for himself. He troubled himself not at all about Drouet's priority." (pp. 98-99)Having decided, at the very first meeting that he wants Carrie, he sets about the task of seducing her. In his desire to "hoodwink" Drouet, to use Hurstwood's own word, he is ready to use any means coming within his reach, however dishonest. For instance, when he sees the drummer having lunch in a restaurant with another woman, he immediately plans to take advantage of such an incident should it occur again: "Why, if he would just let Carrie see one such little incident as that of Thursday, it would settle the matter." (p. 100) Now that he has an advantage over Drouet, he becomes even more ostentatiously friendly to him. Dreiser describes Hurstwood as "blasé," a "roué," a "rounder" whose cynical attitude toward women is well grounded in a long round of negative experiences, as a predator (a hawk) ready to destroy its unsuspecting victim (Drouet), and as a spider slowly weaving its web to attract an innocent and defenseless insect (Carrie):

> If, unfortunately, the fly has got caught in the net, the spider can come forth and talk business upon its own terms. So when maidenhood has wandered into the moil of the city, when it is brought within the circle of the "rounder," and the roué, even though it be at the outermost rim, they can come forth and use their alluring arts. (p. 113)

It is interesting to note that Hurstwood is here associated with the city with its "cunning wiles," its delusions and its indifference to the fate of the individual. Dreiser states plainly that Carrie is better than this man, just as she is superior mentally to Drouet (p. 114), and he extols her innocence, her freshness, her lack of sophistication and guile at the same time as he expands on Hurstwood's worldliness (pp. 112-14)

Thus, Hurstwood decides to seduce Carrie without taking into account that she might have feelings to be hurt. He looks upon her merely as an attractive object to be had, without concerning himself about consequences and responsibilities:

> As yet, Hurstwood had only a thought of pleasure without responsibility. He did not feel that he was doing anything to complicate his life. His position was secure, his home-life, if not satisfactory, was at least undisturbed, his personal liberty rather untrammelled. Carrie's love represented only so much added pleasure. He would enjoy this new gift over and above his ordinary allowance of pleasure. He would be happy with her and his own affairs would go on as they had, undisturbed. (p. 122)

He lies to her, takes advantage of Drouet's absence, exercises his epistolary style on her with perfect deliberation, appeals to her sympathy, gives her the illusion that he needs redeeming from his worldliness and that she is the only one who can help him and make his life pleasant and delightful. However, he is no Valmont[12] and he fails in that, weak-willed as he is, he convinces himself of his love for her at the same time that he convinces her. Listening to his own moving plea, he begins to believe it and, since Carrie's refusal to become his mistress increases his desire for her, he does not hesitate to promise to marry her:

> "Any time you say," he said, with ease, refusing to discolour his present delight with this miserable problem....
>
> He did not trouble over little barriers of this sort in the face of so much loveliness. ...he would not try to answer the objections which cold truth thrust upon him. He would promise anything, everything, and trust to fortune to disentangle him. He would make a try for Paradise, whatever might be the result. He would be happy, by the Lord, if it cost all honesty of statement, all abandonment of truth. (p. 187)

Hurstwood will try anything in order to gain an immediate advantage while refusing to consider the obvious consequences of

his actions. Because of this, he arouses the reader's impatience rather than his pity. There is also evoked the uneasy feeling that there is a brash weakness, a romantic triviality in Hurstwood, something that everyone usually prefers to leave unacknowledged.

The portrayal of this banal man who, without the slightest scruple, sets out a seductive trap for another human being, but is the one to be caught in it reveals Dreiser's ironical view of life. There are several such dramatic reversals and ironic juxtapositions in the novel. It is amusing to note, for instance, that Carrie is worried that Hurstwood might discover the fact that she and Drouet are not married, while she is unaware that Hurstwood is himself married. Hurstwood's early indifference to the plea of a beggar "who looked the picture of privation and wretchedness" (p. 128) is a heavy foreshadowing of his own fate at the end of the novel. It is also ironical that he who has asked Carrie whether she will abandon everything and run away with him, if he should come to her one night and tell her that he is going away never to return, will himself be the one to lose everything when the elopement actually does take place, under the very conditions he has described. Earlier, he has only wanted to use her for his temporary pleasure, and is merely planning a junket of a week or two. Such dramatic reversals suggest that Dreiser's conception of life is somewhat closer to that of Stephen Crane than is usually granted.[13] As is true of Crane, Dreiser is concerned with the ironic tension created by the contrast between man's vision of his own destiny and the way he actualizes himself in the stress of experience. Man's delusion that he controls his world is bound to be shattered, but exterior forces such as environment and chance cannot be blamed for his failure, for man brings about his own doom by trying to outreach himself. Dreiser extracts very much the same point in his presentation of Hurstwood. He continuously emphasizes Hurstwood's shortcomings, not the fact that external circumstances are unfavorable to him. In fact, up to chapter 27, chance plays a very small role in Hurstwood's predicament. While in chapter 27 it plays a more important role, it is not a determining one.

Environment, circumstances, temperament and motivation are perfectly balanced to make the theft not only the logical consequence but the unavoidable conclusion of the preceding chapters. Although Dreiser explicitly exonerates Hurstwood from blame (p. 239), he does not exempt him from responsibility; in brief, Dreiser will not condemn him morally, but Hurstwood nonetheless is a human being responsible for his actions. Much later, when asked how he got out of his managerial position at Fitzgerald and Moy's, Hurstwood answers that nothing but his own foolishness led him to his present predicament (p. 420).

"Men," Dreiser tells us, "are still led by instinct before they are regulated by knowledge." (p. 239) But he also points out that instinct goes in both directions: on one hand, it pushes us toward the satisfaction of our desires and, on the other, it detains us because of the fear of wrong and punishment. Instinct represents both desire and caution, both lust and prudence. Hurstwood's indecision and successive changes of mind exemplify this duality and, although there are various extenuating circumstances, the end result is undeniable: he does *decide* to steal the money.

Social forces, in particular the enticement of money and the lure of luxury, determine much of the action of this novel, but they play a disguised role in this key chapter. It is impossible to forget that Hurstwood lives in a predominantly materialistic society where money is all powerful and seems to open the way to the satisfaction of every desire. This obviously accounts for the almost hypnotic effect of Fitzgerald and Moy's stacks of bills: "They were so smooth, so compact, so portable." (p. 239) Furthermore, drinking is also a socially induced custom, especially for men like Hurstwood:

> If Hurstwood had one leaning, it was toward notabilities. ... in situations like the present, where he could shine as a gentleman and be received without equivocation as a friend and equal among men of known ability, he was most delighted. It was on such occasions, if ever, that he would "take something." (pp. 235-236)

However, not everyone steals or becomes intoxicated.

Circumstance--chance or fate, as one might prefer to call it--plays a more obvious part than social force in bringing about the theft. However, they work together. It is chance that brings Hurstwood's friend, Mr. Frank L. Taintor, to his door at a time when Hurstwood is so utterly depressed. It is also chance that several other of Hurstwood's friends should turn up; the very sort of people with whom he was likely to drink. It is fate that Mayhew, the cashier, should be preoccupied with his own problems on that same night and forget to lock the safe. It is also fate that there should be so much money in the safe when usually there is very little, and that the safe should click shut while Hurstwood has the money in his hands. Finally, and most importantly, it is chance that when his company takes leave, Hurstwood should arrive "at that state where his mind, though clear, was, nevertheless, warm in its fancies. He felt as if his troubles were not very serious." (p. 236) Dreiser makes much of Hurstwood's intoxication and insists that it is partly responsible for his actions.

> The manager was no fool to be led blindly away by such an errant proposition as this, but his situation was peculiar. Wine was in his veins. It had crept up into his head and given him a warm view of the situation. (p. 238)

and later again:

> The imbibation of the evening had not yet worn off. (p. 239)

However, it is Hurstwood's own temperament and desire which turn an accidental situation into a predicament.

First of all, Hurstwood's drinking cannot be attributed wholly to social custom, for he had yielded to that same temptation without any social pressure on the evening of the day when his wife had locked him out of his house: "He drank more brandy and soda than he had any evening in months." (p. 217) Surely the main reason for Hurstwood's intoxication on the night of the theft is that liquor helps him forget, and Hurstwood is not one to face hard facts if he can avoid it:

> To-night, disturbed as was his state, he was rather relieved to find company, and now that notabilities were gathered, he laid aside his troubles for the nonce, and joined in right heartily. (p. 236)

Escapism is, of course, one of Hurstwood's major characteristics. Dreiser stresses that he will grasp at any straw, provided it offers a possibility of escape from reality, however inadequate. Having Carrie offers itself to his mind as an alternative to solving his marital problem: "If he could only have Carrie, perhaps he could get out of the whole entanglement--perhaps it would not matter." (p. 233) Stealing the ten thousand dollars becomes a means of achieving that goal and of not having to face the lawyer the next day:

> He could get Carrie. Oh, yes, he could! He could get rid of his wife. That letter, too, was waiting discussion tomorrow morning. He would not need to answer that. (p. 238)

If securing the money answers the needs of the various problems defined by his weakness, it seems incontrovertible that his temperament is the determining factor in the theft. Hurstwood does not suffer from external chance; he suffers from himself. And that, precisely, is why stealing the money does him no good.

Dreiser's psychological study of Hurstwood's encounter with temptation brilliantly evolves from subconscious desire

(p. 237), and a debate with himself as to whether he will succumb or not, to a decision to put the money back in the safe. The reasons for his decision are not founded on the true ethics of the situation, but merely the fear of consequences. That "in his excitement" Hurstwood should put the various sums in the wrong boxes can be attributed to fate, but also to an unconscious desire to do something drastic from which there will be no pulling back. After he has straightened the matter of the boxes, and while he still has the money in his hands, the lock clicks: "Heavens! he was in for it now, sure enough." (p. 240)

Robert Penn Warren raises the question whether "the slamming of the door [is] an accident or an alibi, a trap of fate or a masking of the unconscious decision to steal."[14] Whether the door locks itself by accident or whether Hurstwood locks it himself unconsciously, because he wishes it shut, is irrelevant; if one looks objectively at the situation, in no way does the locking of the safe force upon Hurstwood the obligation to steal.[15] Wishfulness aside, such a view contradicts logic. Had this happened at another time when he was in a less receptive frame of mind, he would not have stolen the money. Several other alternatives remain open to him, and stealing the money is a conscious and responsible decision even if it is an impulsive and foolish one. In fact, he uses the closing of the safe as an excuse for doing what he wanted to do in the first place. It is important to note that when he is involved in the act of stealing, he is still aware of the options:

> "Supposing I do lay it on the top," he said, "and go away, they'll know who took it. I'm the last to close up. Besides, other things will happen." (p. 241)

This, of course, is not the only other option open to him or even the most obvious one. In fact, he might have made himself both unusually trustworthy and responsible by reporting the safe's closing to the owners. What is important is that he dismisses any such move and for such a ludicrous reason. That he repents rapidly while he is still in his office ["'I wish I hadn't done that,' he said. 'That was a mistake'" (p. 241)] and soon after, on the train ["'What a fool I was to do that,' he said over and over. 'What a mistake!'" (p. 245)] does not alter the fact that he could easily reverse the process and retain his position. However, this would oblige him to justify himself, and Hurstwood inevitably likes the easy way out even though, in the long run, it is self-destructive.

Therefore, as far as Hurstwood is concerned, chance plays a very small role in the novel, for the major incidents which are usually attributed to chance--the meeting with Carrie, Mrs.

Hurstwood's discovery of her husband's philandering, the locking of the safe, and, finally, the loss of the Warren Street resort--are almost all logically foreseeable, given Hurstwood's temperament and position in life. As already discussed, Hurstwood is at that time in life when a liaison with a pretty woman appears particularly satisfying. Had he not met Carrie, he would have met someone else. His social behaviour and his attitude toward his wife make it impossible for her not to find out that he is involved with another woman. The closing of the safe, which is invested with so much significance by most critics, merely offers him an excuse for doing what he wants to do in the first place. The fact that the safe is left open by Mayhew is, in reality, much more important than its accidental closing while Hurstwood has the money in his hands, for it submits him to a temptation that he is not strong enough to resist. In any case, even then, given Hurstwood's temperament and family situation, any speculation as to what he might have done, had not this large sum of money been suddenly made available to him, leads inevitably to personal failure and decay. Finally, had the owners of the Warren Street resort not sold the property, Hurstwood was bound to fail for, in the third year of his management, he had already begun to lose patronage through his lack of interest in the place. (p. 300) Sooner or later, the New York streets and poor-houses, or those of any other city, would be awaiting him. It is thus impossible to say that chance controls Hurstwood's fate.

In this discussion, I have avoided making any reference to Carrie except as the object of Hurstwood's desire. This novel deals with two parallel life stories. The lives of Carrie and Hurstwood meet, join for a time, and then separate. Even during the years of their common life, it is impossible to think of them as a "couple," for each one is exclusively interested in himself, pursues his own interest and uses the other for his own purposes. Hurstwood is for Carrie a pedestal to fame and fortune, while Carrie is for Hurstwood a diving-board to self-destruction. We have, in this novel, two protagonists (it seems impossible to refer to either of them as hero or heroine, for they are too mediocre; nor is it possible to refer to Hurstwood as victim, for he is crushed by naught but his own banality) who can be discussed separately for they do not really influence each other in any significant way. In the eyes of either of them, the other has no reality except as a means to a personal end. Never does either of them come to the realization of the reality of the other. It is therefore unimportant to have an insight into Carrie's personality to understand fully Hurstwood's, and vice versa. Perhaps this is the saddest thing that can be said about him.

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[1]Julian Markels, "Dreiser and the Plotting of Inarticulate Experience," *The Massachusetts Review*, II (Spring, 1961), p. 439.

[2]F.O. Matthiessen, *Theodore Dreiser* (New York: Sloane, 1951), p. 75.

[3]Charles C. Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 188.

[4]Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 359. All subsequent references to *Sister Carrie* are made to this edition, and will be incorporated into the text.

[5]F.O. Matthiessen, *Theodore Dreiser*, p. 85.

[6]Theodore Dreiser, "Letter to John Howard Lawson," New York City, October 10, 1928; printed in *Masses and Mainstream*, 8 (December, 1955), p. 21-22.

[7]Robert Penn Warren, *Theodore Dreiser* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 23.

[8]Charles C. Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism*, p. 192.

[9]Kenneth S. Lynn, Introduction to the Rinehard Edition to *Sister Carrie* (New York, 1957), p. x.

[10]*Ibid*. Lynn believes that Dreiser describes Hurstwood "admiringly."

[11]Charles C. Walcutt (*American Literary Naturalism*, p. 193) believes that Dreiser "is concerned with bringing out the shifting, uncertain, mysterious nature of life as it appears when being acted upon by forces which it cannot fathom and which--most terrible truth--have no purpose that can be related to the purposes of men." But Walcutt believes that these forces are external forces, while I content that they are psychological forces which are, however obscurely, related to the purposes of men.

[12]Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Valmont and his mistress--the two protagonists--are cynical and successful seducers of virtue.

[13]Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 20. Pizer also believes that Dreiser is "something of an ironist," but he feels that "Dreiser's

irony differs from Crane's intense and pervasive ironic vision of life, a vision which colors every incident or observation in Crane's work with the implication that things are not what they seem." While I generally agree with Professor Pizer, I think that Dreiser's conception of a "fate" where intentions give rise to dramatically opposed results, where purpose and effects are ironically contrasted, is closer to Crane's than he suggests--particularly since man's own misconceptions are, together with chance, at the origin of such fate.

[14]Robert Penn Warren, *Theodore Dreiser*, p. 22.

[15]Robert H. Elias, *Theodore Dreiser, Apostle of Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 109. Elias' comment, " ...whether the decision to take the money is made by Hurstwood or whether it is forced upon him by the accidental clicking of the lock, [Dreiser] carefully left uncertain," suggests that opportunity validates the perpetration of crime. This, of course, is highly questionable. Moreover, opportunity can only partly motivate a decision, it cannot take the place of the decision.

Dreiser News & Notes

Ellen Moers was in Europe this fall, where, among other things, she lectured on Dreiser at universities in Budapest, Paris and Italy. Upon her return she wrote, "this seems to be a big Dreiser year abroad. He--or at least Sister Carrie--is a set text for all aggregation candidates in Amer. Lit. in France, and interest is high elsewhere." . . . The spring 1978 issue of *The Rectangle*, the official publication of the Sigma Tau Delta National English Honor Society, is dedicated to the memory of Theodore Dreiser. Included in the issue are three essays on Dreiser which were the winners in the Frederic Fadner Award competition for 1978. *DN* editor Richard Dowell was the judge for the competition, the topic for which was the works of Theodore Dreiser. . . . Visitors to New York City may wish to take a literary tour of America during the 1890's in the Berg Exhibition Room at the New York Public Library. Dreiser is included in the first section of the exhibition, which runs through October 1979.

THE COMPOSITION OF *SISTER CARRIE*: A RECONSIDERATION

Stephen C. Brennan

The strong influence of Arthur Henry on the writing of *Sister Carrie* has long been acknowledged--and for good reason. In the well-known letter Dreiser wrote to H. L. Mencken in 1916, he gives full credit to his friend for nagging him, first to write short stories, then a novel: ". . . he began to ding-dong about a novel. I must write a novel, I must write a novel. . . . Finally--September 1899 I took a piece of yellow paper and to please him wrote down a title at random--*Sister Carrie*--and began."[1] In the same letter Dreiser says that it was Henry's pressuring that drove him to finish the book when he dropped it twice in disgust and that the cutting of the book was based primarily on Henry's suggestions.

In the holograph manuscript of *Sister Carrie* there are several places where handwriting other than Dreiser's appears, and the usual assumption of critics, influenced no doubt by Dreiser's statements, is that these passages were written by Henry. Ellen Moers says that a list of questions appended to the end of Chapter III is in Henry's handwriting.[2] These questions about the historical accuracy of the early chapters (date of first skyscraper, population of Chicago in 1884, the use of the term "flat," etc.) suggest that whoever wrote them was working closely with Dreiser in creating the effect of "reportorial realism" that characterizes the work.[3] Richard Lehan attributes to Henry a long passage at the beginning of Chapter XLVI (deleted from Chapter XLIII in the published version) in which Hurstwood's difficulties in selling his furniture are described.[4] But it is Donald Pizer, first in the *Library Chronicle* and more recently in *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser*, who makes the most of this evidence of outside help in the writing of *Sister Carrie*.[5] Besides the passage Lehan mentions, Pizer identifies two other sections in the main body of the first draft as being written by Henry: slightly more than a page near the beginning of MS Chapter XX that is part of a Hurstwood family quarrel and slightly less than a page in MS Chapter L that deals with the Fleishman breadline. From this evidence, Pizer concludes, "It appears that at several . . . points when Dreiser had difficulty continuing, Henry would read to that point and then pick up the plot for a few pages,

after which Dreiser would again proceed."[6]

According to Pizer, Henry played an even more significant role in the revision of the original conclusion, a revision which shifted the emphasis away from Hurstwood and back to Carrie and which thereby "significantly altered the theme as well as the form of this portion of the novel."[7] Attached to the end of the holograph are thirteen unnumbered pages of notes about the final impression of Carrie that Dreiser wanted to convey. The existence of these notes seems to belie Dreiser's romantic account in 1907 of his composing the epilogue in a burst of inspiration while lying on a ledge of the Palisades.[8] And because Pizer identifies many of these notes as being in Henry's hand, he concludes that Henry played a large part in the compression of the lengthy treatment of Ames and the presentation of Carrie in the epilogue as a seeker of beauty, not sexual involvement. It is even Henry, according to Pizer, who wrote the fair copy of the epilogue that was used almost verbatim in the published version. Thus, from Dreiser's accounts of the writing and editing of the novel and from the six major instances of a different hand in the manuscript, Pizer has theorized that the more experienced Henry was an important influence at every stage of *Sister Carrie*'s development.

But a close examination of the handwriting in these passages leads to some surprising conclusions. All the passages not in Dreiser's hand are similar in that they are in a hand somewhat larger than Dreiser's and slant to the right, while Dreiser's slants slightly to the left. When the short passage in Chapter L is compared with the letters Henry wrote to Dreiser in 1900, it is clear that the passage was written by Henry. However, a comparison between this passage and the other passages reveals some striking differences in both general appearance and the characteristic formation of particular letters. And when these other passages are compared with Sarah White Dreiser's handwriting, there seems little doubt that she, not Henry, actually wrote them.[9] Some correction of the currently accepted estimate of Henry's and Jug's roles in the composition of *Sister Carrie* seems, therefore, necessary.

First, although Henry may have encouraged Dreiser when he wanted to give up, Jug, more than Henry, seems to have been working closely with Dreiser during the actual writing. The one section in Henry's hand is almost entirely a transcription of a section from Dreiser's article "Curious Shifts of the Poor," parts of which he patched into the concluding chapters of *Sister Carrie*. Rather than doing any actual writing, Henry is merely copying into the MS material already written by Dreiser for another purpose. There is some minor rewording in Henry's hand near the end of the passage, but Dreiser even had

to go back himself to adjust verb tenses to make the passage fit the context of the novel, for these changes are clearly in his hand.

It is also not likely that Dreiser's wife did any actual writing of the novel. The passage in MS Chapter XX is part of an account of Mrs. Hurstwood snapping at a maid and nagging her husband about his vacation plans, and hardly seems the kind of passage that Dreiser would get stuck on and need help to finish. Actually, Jug picks up the narrative in mid sentence and continues for just a page, at which point Dreiser resumes the narrative. It seems likely that Dreiser was transcribing some worked-over material and merely asked Jug to take over briefly--it not mattering that it was in the middle of a sentence. The next, much longer passage written by Jug is also quite possibly transcription. The four pages describing Hurstwood selling his furniture show almost no reworking, which suggests that Jug was making a fair copy and not herself composing. The only change is the crossing out of a brief bit of dialogue ("Ah come") and moving it to the more correct position at the beginning of a new paragraph. Jug apparently saw a technical fault while copying, corrected it, and in so doing made a minor editorial change, rewriting "Ah" as "Aw." She seems to have been more intimately involved in the writing of the epilogue, but the notes in her hand and her polishing Dreiser's rough draft do not indicate that she did any independent writing.

But if Jug did not actually write any of *Sister Carrie*, the fact that Dreiser used her as an editor and relied on her judgments, not only about matters of style but about character and theme, may have had an effect on the final form of the novel.

Besides the major passages already mentioned, there are about 220 other places in the MS where I have found evidence of Jug's hand. This compares to only about a dozen for Henry's.[10] Most of these are simple editorial changes ranging from single letters to single sentences. It is the distribution of Jug's handwriting that may give a clue to her contribution to the novel. Almost ninety percent of Jug's editorial revisions appear in the first thirty-one chapters of the first draft, which take Carrie and Hurstwood up to their arrival in Montreal. It has frequently been noted that Hurstwood takes over the last half of the novel and that Carrie demonstrates, in Julian Markels' words, "thinness and lack of warmth" and a "pasteboard quality."[11] In the 1916 letter to Mencken, Dreiser indicated the "intense interest" he took in the last part of the novel, "much more . . . than in anything which had gone before."[12] It is easy to understand why he found the

tragic decline and death of Hurstwood more interesting than Carrie. And it is perhaps significant that in turning his attention primarily to Hurstwood, Dreiser was no longer as concerned about accurately presenting a feminine point of view.

When Dreiser was concerned primarily with Carrie, he relied heavily on the editorial advice of his wife, perhaps feeling unsure of his treatment of a woman even though he had written many articles for and about them as a free-lance writer. Thus she read carefully and edited fairly heavily the first thirty-one chapters. But when Dreiser became highly involved in Hurstwood, he seems not to have needed her help. In the nine chapters (MS XXXII-XL) covering the time from the couple's arrival in Montreal to the point at which Carrie has begun her search for a job on the stage and Hurstwood has settled into apathy, the handwriting is Dreiser's only, except for notes made later by typists. Jug's hand begins appearing again in Chapter XLI of the MS and at the top of the first page of this chapter Dreiser has written "Carrie's need of clothes." Jug makes no important changes in this chapter and her handwriting is sparsely scattered throughout the rest of the MS, except for the long transcription in MS Chapter XLVI and the epilogue. But it does seem that at a point when Dreiser was concerned about a woman's viewpoint he relied on Jug's judgment and editorial aid. And when in the epilogue he wanted to leave his readers with a final clear impression of his heroine, he relied on Jug more than at any other point in the novel.

Exactly what effect Jug's editing had on the novel is difficult to determine, but a passage in MS Chapter XVI may give a clue. In this passage, later deleted entirely, Dreiser had originally written:

> With Drouet's experience and opinion for a guide she had learned to select colors and shades which had value in relation to her complexion. Her dresses draped her becomingly *for she wore excellent corsets and laced herself with care*. Her hair *had grown out even more luxuriantly*. She had always been of cleanly instincts *and now that opportunity afforded, she kept her body sweet*. Her teeth were white, her nails rosy. She had color in her cheeks, a large soft eye, a plump dainty chin and a round full neck. Altogether and at all times she was pleasing to look upon (emphasis mine).[13]

In the MS the italicized sections have been penciled out and Jug has reworded the third sentence to read: "Her hair always she now dressed prettily, rolling it back from her wide clear brow." Jug is here concerned with presenting an accurate ac-

count of women's fashion, but more importantly, she seems to represent conventional attitudes toward the human body. References to undergarments, luxuriant hair, and personal hygiene have been carefully excised. We are left with only a conventional description of a pretty girl, with little suggestion of sexuality.

Another result of Jug's editing may have been to contribute to the disconcerting preciosity that strikes such a sour note in the book. A few pages after the above passage, for example, Dreiser had originally written of Carrie that "On her feet were yellow shoes and in her hands her gloves." Jug, perhaps not thinking that yellow shoes matched Carrie's blue and white outfit, has penciled out the sentence and rewritten it as "Her brown shoes peeped occasionally from beneath her skirt. She carried her gloves in her hand." Jug's close reading and editing of the MS may have accounted for the frequency of such phrasing, if not because she provided much of it herself then because she apparently approved of it.

It is not surprising then that when Dreiser worked closely with Jug in changing the conclusion of the novel, the result was the turgid lyrical epilogue and the spiritualizing of Carrie into a kind of Hester Prynne or anchorite of beauty turning her back on the world: ". . . she now found herself alone. Her purse was open to him whose need was greatest. In her walks on Broadway, she no longer thought of the elegance of the creatures who passed her. Had they more of that peace and beauty which glimmered afar off, then were they to be envied."[14] With this new conception of Carrie, Dreiser went back and revised MS Chapter XLIX and removed all implications of the passion that was clearly the basis of her feelings for Ames in the first draft. The end of the novel in its final form has more than a trace of poetic justice; Carrie's withdrawal from life is at least partially an apology for and an expiation of evil rather than a dramatic expression of the "first principles of morals."[15]

Much in *Sister Carrie* denies conventional morality. However, besides his own still powerful reluctance to deny the values imposed upon him all his life, Dreiser had as his wife and close working companion on the novel a woman of a temperament quite different from his own. His portrait of her in *A Book About Myself* is telling: "I felt a very definite point of view in her, very different from mine. In her was none of the variability that troubled me: if ever a person was fixed in conventional views it was she. One life, one love would have answered for her exactly. She could have accepted any condition, however painful or even degrading, providing she was bolstered up by what she considered the moral law."[16]

Opposed to this rigid conventionality was the young Dreiser, "little more than a pulsing force, with no convictions, no definite theories or plans."[17] In 1900, Dreiser was certainly capable of sentimentality himself, as the most casual review of his free-lance articles of the 1890s will show. And there are patches of it throughout his later writings, when Jug was no longer with him. But she almost certainly encouraged these tendencies in Dreiser during the composition of *Sister Carrie*, and it is at least partly because of her influence that critics have found the book to be "both the apogee of Victorian prudery and, simultaneously, the beginning of the modern American novel."[18]

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[1]*The Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, ed. Robert H. Elias (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), I, 213.

[2]*Two Dreisers* (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 157 n.

[3]This phrase was used by the editors of Harper's, who rejected the novel because of its unsuitability for the women readers of the day. See *Letters*, I, n. 6.

[4]*Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1969), p. 65.

[5]See *The Library Chronicle*, 38 (1972), 14-15 and *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1976), pp. 45-47.

[6]Pizer, *Novels*, p. 45.

[7]Pizer, *Novels*, p. 47.

[8]This account is in an interview in the *New York Herald*, 7 July 1907, p. 2. Part of this interview is reprinted in Pizer, *Novels*, p. 46.

[9]I base my comparison on letters in the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania. I thank Neda Westlake, Curator of the Rare Book Collection, for allowing me to examine these documents. I examined many letters from Henry to Dreiser written in 1900, but based my analysis of Mrs. Dreiser's handwriting on a letter from her to Dreiser dated September 4, 1907. Both Neda Westlake and Donald Pizer have examined the evidence and agree with my general conclusions as to who wrote the particular passages already mentioned. But the interpretations I make about the significance of the handwriting are entirely my own. The particular letters which seem to be

the most significant in differentiating the handwriting of Henry and Mrs. Dreiser are lower case *p*, terminal *d* and *t*, and capitol *Th*.

[10]These are only rough estimates since many of the passages are so brief that my judgments are often guesses. But it seems clear that Jug's editorial changes greatly outnumber Henry's. In fact, I can only positively identify one or two of these minor revisions as Henry's.

[11]"Dreiser's Plotting of Inarticulate Experience," *The Massachussetts Review*, 2 (1960-61), 444.

[12]*Letters*, p. 213.

[13]I wish to thank Harold J. Dies, Dreiser's literary executor, for permission to quote briefly from the MS of *Sister Carrie*.

[14]*Sister Carrie* (New York: B. W. Dodge & Company, 1907), p. 556.

[15]In Chapter X, Dreiser uses this phrase to present Carrie's budding passion for Hurstwood in terms of natural, universal processes, such as "the rose's subtle alchemy." See *Sister Carrie*, p. 101.

[16]*A Book About Myself* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 261.

[17]*A Book About Myself*, p. 359.

[18]Sheldon Grebstein, "Dreiser's Victorian Vamp," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, 4, No. 1 (1972), 3.

REVIEWS

A Dreiser Handbook

Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser, by Philip L. Gerber. Archon Books, 1977. 153 pp. $12.50.

Like the other volumes in Archon Books' "Plots and Characters Series," Philip Gerber's *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser* has three sections: a chronology of Dreiser's publications and of important events in his life, plot synopses of his novels and short stories arranged in alphabetical order by title, and an alphabetical list of characters who appear in Dreiser's fiction. Included also is a preface by Gerber.

The chronology section is the least satisfactory in the book. While it includes most of the significant events in Dreiser's life and literary career, including the dates of his posthumously published works, it occasionally gives dates that are incomplete or in error, and it has one notable omission. The date for Dreiser's return to Chicago at the age of sixteen, for example, should be 1887, not 1886, and the period from the death of his mother to his move to St. Louis to work for the *Globe-Democrat* should read 1890-92, not 1890. Some of the dates in Dreiser's literary career are in error, too. For instance, he began work on *Jennie Gerhardt* in 1901, not 1907; *The Hand of the Potter* and *Twelve Men* were published in 1919, not 1918; and his long story "Fine Furniture" was first published in 1929 in *Household Magazine*. The notable omission is the failure to note that Dreiser published a revised edition of *The Financier* in 1927. Naturally some errors are bound to be overlooked in any reference book regardless of how carefully it is proofread; yet, in this instance, I can't help but suspect that Gerber simply copied the chronology that appeared in his *Theodore Dreiser* (New York, 1964), since it had many of the same errors and omits mention of the revised *Financier*.

The section of plot synopses will be most useful to anyone wishing to learn of the contents of Dreiser's novels or stories that he has not had the time or opportunity to read or to anyone wishing to recall the plot of a work that has dimmed in his memory. Gerber's summaries of the novels are parti-

cularly well-done, as he manages to suggest the richness of detail found in every Dreiser novel without obscuring the pattern and development of the plot itself. His summaries of the short stories are equally clear, but their usefulness is mitigated somewhat by his failing to indicate, either in his preface or in his synopses, that Dreiser often heavily revised his stories for book publication. Quite correctly, Gerber summarizes the revised versions, that is, the versions that appeared in *Free and Other Stories* and in *Chains*, since they represent Dreiser's "final intentions" for the stories. At the same time, however, he misleads a user by giving the date of the original publication of a story in the heading for the synopsis. As Donald Pizer has pointed out in an article on "Nigger Jeff" and, more recently, Donald Graham in articles on "The Cruise of the 'Idlewild'," "McEwen of the Shining Slave Makers," and "My Lost Phoebe," Dreiser's revisions were numerous and often significant. Sometimes he changed the names of his characters or added new ones: the reporter Elmer Davies in the revised version of "Nigger Jeff" (1918) was called Eugene Davies in the version Dreiser published in 1901, and the character Stephen Bowers in the 1918 version of "The Cruise of the 'Idlewild'" did not appear in the original publication of the story. More significantly, when he revised the stories, Dreiser often added passages that can change one's interpretation of them or that reflect changes in his philosophical outlook. Thus when Gerber concludes his synopsis of "Nigger Jeff" by stating that "Davies learns that it is the writer's job not to indict but to interpret," he is summarizing an addition to the story, and when he states that McEwen "is struck . . . in particular by 'this odd, strange thing called *life*'" at the conclusion of his summary of "McEwen of the Shining Slave Makers," he is including a quotation that reveals Dreiser's beliefs at the time he revised the story. In giving these examples, I do not intend to suggest that it was Gerber's responsibility to list Dreiser's revisions in his book; however, I do think it was his responsibility to point out in his preface that Dreiser did revise many of his stories; also, to avoid confusion, Gerber should have given the dates of the revised versions of the stories in the headings for his synopses.

The value of the third section, an alphabetical list of the characters in Dreiser's fiction, should be obvious to anyone who has ever tried to recall the function or spelling of one of the minor characters in a Dreiser novel or story. Even after omitting "any person who is merely named in passing and who remains a name only," Gerber identifies around one thousand characters. His descriptions vary in length, depending on the importance of a character, yet each includes the name of the work in which the character appears; a comment on who he or she

is, such as an Irish foreman, a girl-friend, or a Philadelphian; and a statement of his or her function in the plot. In addition, he lists any aliases under which the character may appear in the work and has cross-references from the alias to the character's orthonym.

In his preface Gerber indicates some of the ways one might use this book besides the obvious ones of reviewing plots and identifying characters. He notes, for example, that the plots, when gathered together, reveal how Dreiser recognized "patterns" in life that we now associate with an urban-industrial society, and that, thematically, "these plots show themselves to be variations upon a single major story, that of the human individual ineffectually struggling against hostile forces and impotent even to comprehend them." Turning to the list of characters, Gerber points out that "in Dreiser's fiction the immigrant peoples, for the first time in our literature, take on a vast importance," and he reflects on the significance of "the prevalence of the alias" in many of Dreiser's works. Although much of what Gerber says in the preface will already be familiar to Dreiser scholars, his comments suggest that some users of the book, perhaps new students of Dreiser who are not yet aware of the cliches of Dreiser criticism, will discover previously unrecognized patterns in Dreiser's fiction.

In summary, *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser* is a worthwhile addition to Dreiser studies. Useful as a handbook, it will, I suspect, prove to be even more valuable as a sourcebook for studies of Dreiser's lesser-known fiction and for new hypotheses about Dreiser as an artist and a thinker.

--Frederic E. Rusch
Indiana State University

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

INDEX TO VOLUMES VIII-IX

ARTICLES

Brennan, Stephen C. *The Composition of Sister Carrie: A Reconsideration.* IX, ii, 17.

Dowell, Richard W. *Ask Mr. Markle?* VIII, i, 9.

__________. *Dreiser and Kathleen Mavourneen.* VIII, ii, 2.

Ensor, Allison R. *"All of Us Fail": Theodore Dreiser Writes a Creator of Nick Carter.* VIII, ii, 19.

Graham, Don. *Dreiser's Use of the "English Jefferies" in Jennie Gerhardt.* VIII, i, 6.

Griffin, Joseph P. *Dreiser's Later Short Stories.* IX, i, 5.

Krieg, Joann. *Theodore Dreiser and the Penitentiary System.* VIII, ii, 5.

Price, Alan. *Dreiser at the Aquarium.* VIII, i, 1.

Rosenman, Mona G. *An American Tragedy: Constitutional Violations.* IX, i, 11.

Rusch, Frederic E. *A Dreiser Checklist, 1976.* VIII, ii, 9.

Scharnhorst, Gary. *A Possible Source for Sister Carrie: Horatio Alger's Helen Ford.* IX, i, 1.

Silet, Charles L. P. *Theodore Dreiser's Introduction to McTeague.* VIII, i, 15.

Tavernier-Courbin, Jacqueline. *Hurstwood Achieved: A Study of Dreiser's Reluctant Art.* IX, ii, 1.

REVIEWS

Gerber, Philip L. *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theo-*

dore Dreiser (Reviewed by Frederic E. Rusch). IX, ii, 24.

Pizer, Donald, ed. *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* (Reviewed by Richard W. Dowell). IX, i, 19.

MISCELLANEOUS

Dreiser News & Notes. VIII, i, 5; VIII, ii, 20; IX, ii, 16.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Kathleen Mavourneen* (poem). VIII, ii, 1.

Orlov, Paul A. *The Future of Dreiser Seminars*. VIII, i, 19.

Rusch, Frederic E. *Dreiser Seminar at MLA*. VIII, i, 17.