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An American Document: *Sister Carrie* Revisited

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Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, begun in 1899 and issued in 1900, is the only American novel of its year now remembered, reprinted, and re-read. Despite attempts to smother the novel in its cradle, and a killing barrage of criticism, Dreiser's book lives; more than that, it has become a "classic," no less than eleven editions currently circulating in paperback alone.

How can we account for this phenomenon? The book has been said to hack its crude, amoral way across the American grain, to be an embarrassment stylistically, and to represent a long-repudiated Naturalistic literary viewpoint. Why then should its reputation grow ever more secure? And why is it that a contemporary reader, once delving into this story, typically finds the novel so impossible to lay down?

For an answer which goes beyond that of "story," we might look at the novel again, this time not as a work of literature, principally, though it surely is that, but emphasizing instead its values as a study of its times. Take it as a slice of history, if you will, or even as a piece of rudimentary sociology, but in any case as an American Document. Dreiser referred to his novel as "a picture of conditions"; and if we approach it in this manner, then I think that we will come to understand how very much of *Carrie's* continuing appeal stems from its relevance, not just to its time, but to ours as well.

In costume, setting, decor—in its total *mise en scène*—the

surface of *Sister Carrie* is lodged in the late Victorian age. But Dreiser, ever an acute and inveterate observer of the American scene, projects his vision far ahead. When he sat down to write this, his first novel, he poured into it his perceptions of a number of tendencies then active in American society, some of them sensed more than seen. Usually proving to be directly on the mark, he produced a book which anticipates things to come—and to which we respond. These tendencies, grown mightier and more pronounced with the passing years, are worthy of our consideration.

I. IMMIGRANT: Pilgrim in a New-Found Land

It may help to think of Carrie Meeber first as an immigrant,¹ a concept which at first glance may seem slightly ludicrous because, of course, Carrie comes to Wisconsin, not from overseas; she rides a railroad train, not an immigrant boat; and her destination is Chicago, not Ellis Island. And yet, if we turn this coin over, its obverse bears Carrie's likeness in the guise of an immigrant rather clearly imprinted on the metal.

What are the hallmarks of the immigrant state? First among them is the exigency of the arrival. Carrie, like others before her, has forsaken her past to stake all on a fresh beginning in a brave new world, and Dreiser twice in his chapter headings refers to her as a "pilgrim,"² a foreigner, and "alone, away from home, rushing into a great sea of life and endeavor."³ Chicago is Carrie's metaphorical America, "a great magnet, drawing to itself, from all quarters, the hopeful and the hopeless" (16), and she is but one of fifty thousand who in 1889 enter this microcosm of New-World Industrialism. Like the nation itself, Chicago is only half built; streets are laid out on the open prairie, telegraph poles strung, a lone house going up here, another there. It awaits peopling.

For the immigrant, dumped without ceremony into the American urban heart, the initial survival requirements are food, shelter, and clothing. The first two of these Carrie finds, as so many others found, in temporary quarters with family from the homeland who have come in the vanguard and prepared the way, in this case Carrie's sister Minnie and her husband, Sven

Hanson. Sven has begun in typical immigrant fashion, at the bottom of the heap; he cleans refrigerator cars at the Chicago stockyards. As swiftly as any newly-arrived Greek or Czech or Italian, Carrie necessarily makes a *tabula rasa* of her social self; her mind, wiped clean of old ties, is ready for the learning of new ways, the adoption of new allegiances. The past is irrelevant; this is why we are told practically nothing of Carrie's eighteen years in Wisconsin. She never looks back, being faced with life in a society so radically new that nothing in her previous existence can have done anything of consequence to prepare her for it.

Beyond surviving, the typical immigrant's great drive has been for Success, American-style. For most, all else has given way to that single compelling motive: achieving the American Dream. That the Dream exists, dominates, compels, is learned as Carrie learns it, through her eyes and her ears, by making of herself, as Henry James would have it, "one of those people on whom nothing is lost." Dreiser defines the Dream as well as anyone can or has, and he does it poetically, to emphasize the narcotic effect of ambition on the mind:

This atmosphere is easily and quickly felt. Walk among the magnificent residences, the splendid equipages, the gilded shops, restaurants, resorts of all kinds; scent the flowers, the silks, the wines; drink of the laughter springing from the soil of luxurious content. . . . It is like a chemical reagent. One day of it . . . will so affect and discolor the views, the aims, the desire of the mind, that it will remain forever dyed. A day of it to the untried mind is like opium to the untried body. A craving is set up.
(322)

This craving—expressed in terms like “yearning” and “longing”—takes possession of Carrie within the first weeks of her residence in Chicago, and it never releases its drug-like grip. Once survival appears to be assured, our heroine turns to finding a method for making the industrial machine operate in her behalf, heedless of customs, mores, and emotional attachments that must be jettisoned.

II. DOLLARS: Money Makes the World Go Round

Immigrants who expected to succeed in America must set aside their native tongue while they learned the English language. This might not seem a problem for Carrie, who of course has spoken English from her cradle. But to emigrate from a tiny Wisconsin village in 1889 and come to Chicago, buzzing hub of a new capitalistic industrial empire, was to stumble from night into day; Carrie might as well have come by steerage from an Ionian isle or the mountains of Bavaria. And her first responsibility, as she sees it, is to master the *lingua franca* of this exotic land—which is Money.

There is in *Sister Carrie* a repeated image in which Carrie sees herself waiting at the imposing entrance to Aladdin's treasure cave; the key to that heavy door is cash, which the always practical Carrie at once comes to think of as "something everybody else has and I must get" (70). Without money one is bereft of the primary tool of Success, which is also its emblem. This lesson begins for Carrie on her train ride into Chicago when her fellow traveler, Charles Drouet, pulls out his purse and she sees it bulge with soft green bills. Her own four dollars seems pitifully meager by comparison. At her sister's flat on crowded, noisy West Van Buren Street, Carrie observes with distaste as Minnie Hanson struggles with the problem of making eighty cents cover dinner for three and a baby; and when, after a dreary search, Carrie locates a job stitching shoes in one of Chicago's many loft sweatshops, she can see that her weekly pay of four dollars and fifty cents is scarcely sufficient to keep body and soul together.

Riding into Chicago, Drouet has assured Carrie that she will find plenty to see in the city; and what Carrie sees, and senses, everywhere is the warming presence of money. The new department stores are stuffed with dainty slippers and stylish jackets which call out to her appealingly, but Carrie cannot afford even the cheapest; when in an impulsive moment one rainy day she purchases a pretty umbrella for herself, her sister scolds, "you foolish girl" (61). From the cold of a windy Chicago street she peers into warm, brightly-lighted restaurants where those with money dine on roast beef and asparagus. She

wanders past great mercantile establishments, their ground floors blocked off by huge panes of plate glass which yet afford her a peek into the lighted warmth within, where clerks bustle to and fro and genteel men in expensive suits lounge about, conducting their monetary affairs. Fashionable ladies descend from coaches and elbow past her as if she is invisible. On the streets she watches as hordes of private carriages bear the well-to-do toward impressive destinations. Chicago is stuffed with all the allurements that money can buy; they seem the only things worthwhile, but none of them apparently is meant for Carrie.

Feeling “the drag of a lean and narrow life” (13), Carrie comes to think of Chicago as being populated by fortunate individuals “counting money, dressing magnificently, and riding in carriages.” She lusts to join in what seems to be a universal Success; there must be something she could do—anything” (18), but for an untutored girl of eighteen, to obtain money quickly means abandoning the principles learned in “the old country” and adopting, in their place, new ways, a different morality. Destitute after losing her assembly-line job at the shoe factory, Carrie accepts “help” in the form of twenty dollars from her new friend, Drouet, and before she knows it he has set her up in a flat at 29 Ogden Place as his mistress. Money is what makes all things possible in Chicago, and in New York, also, where Carrie moves later with George Hurstwood, again a wife in name only.

Never was a book so gravely concerned with dollars and cents as *Sister Carrie*. The fact of money permeates its every page, from the penury of the Hansons’ flat to the final scenes in which Carrie, now a grand success in musical comedy, contemplates her bank account as she inhabits a luxurious suite in the Waldorf, given to her at a reduced price because of the value of her celebrated name. We observe Hurstwood, out of desperation stealing ten thousand dollars from his employers to underwrite his escapade with Carrie, and we watch him pay the inevitable social price for his crime as the remnants of his money dissipate in New York, the ruined ex-manager plunging down the Success ladder in proportion to the disappearance of his dollars, until at last he is doling out nickels and dimes, a grungy bum existing in a fifteen-cents-a-night flophouse with

suicide his sole hope for escape. And we go with Carrie as she lands a job in a chorus line at twelve dollars a week, then is raised to thirty-five, then to one hundred and fifty, her social status and prestige inflating in direct accordance with her salary. Without money she is nothing; with it all doors open as if by magic. Here Dreiser forecasts the America in which worth will be indexed to income, a society rapidly shaping itself on an economic basis as it moves from an idealistically-conceived agrarian and “classless” society toward one in which all citizens will find themselves lodged in the appropriate “brackets” determined by their income, from “sub-poverty” level to millionaire.

In *Sister Carrie* Dreiser defines money as “stored energy . . . something that [is] power in itself” (70). Before its overwhelming influence all things give way—morality, family, ideals, emotions—to be replaced by “cash value” and “purchasing power” in the rapidly-arriving Consumer Society. “Ah, money, money, money!” sighs Carrie when at last she holds a bit of this precious elixir in her palm; “What a thing it was to have. How plenty of it would clear away all these troubles” (74-75), and how pitifully helpless she is without it.

III. FACADE: To See and Be Seen

Christopher Lasch may have dubbed ours the day when narcissism and exhibitionism reign supreme in America, but Dreiser presents these tendencies in *Sister Carrie* at their flamboyant and now rather innocent-seeming beginnings during the flush days of Veblen’s conspicuous consumption when the new millionaire class swaggered alone at the head of the parade.⁴

Being a newcomer to Chicago, having no good and great friend to pave the way for her, and not yet speaking the “language,” Carrie is restricted to judging the city on the basis of the appearance it offers. It is understandable that she should be so struck by outward signs that she never achieves any healthier basis for forming opinions. She arrives in the city during its great boom period, buildings rising on all sides, the prototype skyscrapers rearing their sawed-off heads upward.⁵

But in contrast to the skyscrapers' relatively "clean" design, ordinary architecture was running riot with pretension, and even in Columbia City Carrie must have watched as two-storied commercial "blocks" went up on Main Street, their owners' names and the date 1886 or 1888 carved high upon their fired-brick and terra cotta false fronts, calculated to abash the onlooker with the illusion of an additional story which was only make-believe.

In Chicago that need to be seen, to create an impression, to present an imposing "image," is magnified, a tendency which Carrie comes across first in her wanderings through streets that seem to her like brick-lined canyons, where the plate-glassed firms are locating during the decades which follow the great fire. She is intimidated by their entrance-ways, and is meant to be, those portals of heavy, chipped granite, often garnished with carved tendrils of vine, massive, and, like "the entire metropolitan centre[,] . . . calculated to overawe and abash the common applicant" (17). Thus dawns the day of the Image Makers who will proliferate in the new century and aid both individual and corporation to become that which they are not.

It takes all the courage Carrie can muster to intrude upon these commercial sanctuaries, and when at last she locates work at Rhodes, Morgenthau and Scott's, she feels ecstatic: "Her new firm was a goodly institution. Its windows were of huge plate glass" (30). But upon reporting to the job, Carrie is led past the grandeur of this facade to the fourth floor, "through dark, box-lined aisles," to a "large, low-ceilinged room" full of men at work before "clacking, rattling machines" (39), and from here to the sixth floor and the even darker and more crowded loft where gangs of girls run the stitching machines from morning until night amid floor litter, sour odors, and deafening noise.

It is no wonder that this shocking introduction to the realities of industrialism should turn Carrie off from the work ethic which has been reinforced in her by the Hansons, both of whom labor long days and scrimp in hopes of making headway over a period of years through their own hard work. The factory does nothing to augment the narcissism that is basic to Carrie's nature. She finds herself much more attracted by surfaces, especially since these promise opulence: fine clothes, fine

carriages, fine residences. Her friend Mrs. Hale takes Carrie driving along Chicago's North Shore where for the first time she sees at least the exterior show of true luxury in splendid mansions such as the imposing pile erected in 1882 by Potter Palmer. Carrie is deeply captivated by what she is permitted to witness: entrance-ways richly carved of stone, panelled doors, stained glass, and now and then a lamp "faintly glowing" (127) from a rich interior. And splendid carriages, whose doors footmen open for gentlemen to descend.

Among the other facades that Dreiser stresses are the great all-male resorts with which Drouet and Hurstwood are connected, glitzy, ornamented, brilliant, and expensive. Hurstwood is the manager of Fitzgerald and Moy's saloon on Adams Street in the Loop. It blazes with incandescent lamps, then "state of the art," with polished wood and glass and marble which give back one's own reflection set amid all this glory. And presiding is Hurstwood, in his office of polished cherry, or lounging by the door, thumbs locked in vest pockets, his fine imported suits on full display, his diamond solitaire flashing. His job, says Dreiser, centers on "creating an impression," and he "look[s] the part" (49, 48). As "official greeter" at Fitzgerald and Moy's, Hurstwood is the first public-relations expert in American literature. Along with Drouet the salesman, he himself is mostly facade; both of these men's occupations require the element of deception that comes with the surface presentation of the self as what it is not, thereby to sell oneself—and one's product—to the clientele, Hurstwood his saloon, Drouet his manufactured goods.

All the calculated opulence that is Chicago Carrie sees. But, far from being *of* it, she remains a viewer from afar. Deep inside, she too yearns to be seen as well as to see. While she lives with Drouet, this longing finds an intermediate outlet in the pier glass which is stationed—ideally for showering light upon Narcissa—between the two front windows giving on Union Park. Here, adorned in the new finery which Drouet has purchased for her, she confronts herself in the glass:

She looked quite another maiden. The mirror convinced her of a few things she had long believed. She was pretty, yes, indeed! How nice her hat set,

and weren't her eyes pretty. She caught her little red
lips with her teeth and felt her first thrill of power.
(86)

Before this mirror⁶ Carrie indulges her natural gift for mimicry, at first imitating whatever hair style, gesture, or expression Drouet has seemed to admire in other women. And then she begins to re-enact scenes from the melodramas she sees at the theaters, creating illusion by calling back with pleasure the bodily actions and scraps of pathetic dialogue uttered by the *ingenues*, fancying herself in those roles, playing to an admiring audience.

And it is in the theater, of course, that Carrie will eventually satisfy her appetite for seeing and being seen. The gilded and glassed playhouses of the late-nineteenth century are harbingers of the riotously ornate movie palaces which will arrive in time, themselves primarily facade; they are all surface, sparkling and ornately-carved boxes within which the audience, dressed in their finest, may see and be seen by their peers. But when the house lights dim, it is the actress, transformed into another persona by the alchemy of costume, make up, and lights, who holds the stage.

IV. WHEELS: Moving Day in America

The American immigrant has typically been of a particularly adventurous nature, eager to march forward into hazard without a road map. Carrie Meeber surely falls into this category; one must imagine what a truly momentous event it was in 1889 for a girl of eighteen to go off to the Big City on her own. And once breaking with his past, the immigrant typically kept going, always aiming to move Up, crossing the Great American Desert, arriving at the Pacific, and going forward even then. This restless spirit has made us Americans the movingest people on the face of the earth, each year providing fresh statistics which astonish with the number of moves made by families and individuals in hot pursuit of the Dream. Carrie herself is forever on the move, her address altering as she goes to and fro, up and down the scale.⁷

How we get from one place to another is of vital

importance to our status, and the possibility of lateral transportation to accompany our chase of “upward mobility” has always been a key. In *Sister Carrie*, the magnified potentialities which would be offered in another time by automobile,⁸ bus, and airplane do not exist, obviously, but the railroads were in place to satisfy the pervasive wanderlust. Once our heroine has completed her first railroad journey, she is afoot, the usual condition of the unmoneyed newcomer. Chicago is laced with streetcar lines, many of them the possession of Charles T. Yerkes, whose drive to monopolize street transport in the city Dreiser would treat in his *Financier* trilogy.⁹ But Carrie lacks spare nickels to ride these cars willy-nilly, and we go with her as she sets out on foot in worn shoes from her sister’s rented flat and tramps the streets of the Loop in search of work. Charles Drouet lifts Carrie from foot travel to movement by streetcar, a solid mark of her socio-economic rise and one with which she is temporarily content.

Rented apartments and hotels¹⁰ are for Dreiser ever the symbol of the transient life in *Sister Carrie*. Drouet lives in rented quarters, but the apartment he takes on Ogden Place is very fine indeed when compared with the Hansons’ railroad flat on busy West Van Buren Street, and one night while he and Carrie watch carriages load after a theatrical performance, he says to her on impulse, “You stick to me and we’ll have a coach” (88). But she never will, for Drouet, mired in his middle-class imagination and means, represents but a way station on Carrie’s longer and more ambitious journey. Hurstwood, who stands just a step below the luxuriously rich, exists on a higher plane. He owns a fine brick home in North Chicago, where he keeps a private horse and buggy, and when he comes calling it is ever in a private cab. The difference is crucial to Carrie, who has been impressed by the various mobility symbols to be observed in the streets: the hordes on foot, the clerks and shop-girls who cram the jingling horse-cars, and then those far more fortunate few who ride in coaches of their own.

The ambition to have such a coach crystallizes for Carrie one day while she dines in a warm restaurant with Drouet, who has rescued her from the cold and windy street. She looks out

the window and sees “an elegant coach, with a prancing pair of bays . . . carrying in its upholstered depths a young lady” (77). For Carrie, having learned that coaches are connected intimately with Moving Up, this prospect is one of the appeals which Hurstwood holds for her. Her first coach ride comes on the evening when she performs in *Under the Gaslight* for Drouet’s Elks Lodge. It is provided, indirectly, by Drouet, being sent gratis by his Lodge. But after the performance Carrie steps into a private coach hired by Hurstwood, and at that point he has won—not her heart, but her loyalty. Soon afterward, Hurstwood takes Carrie driving and places the reins in her hands, a surrender as thrilling to her as if on a later day he should invite this unprivileged but ambitious girl to take the wheel of his Porsche—and at this peak of his appeal he declares his love.

Unfortunately, the path to Success seldom runs continually uphill. Carrie leaves Drouet because, among other things, he had promised a coach and offered only trolleys. With Hurstwood the grand symbol of her social mobility again proves to be illusory, for Hurstwood has stolen money from his employers and is on the lam. Having violated the great cult of Respectability, he must pay the world’s price. He reduces Carrie first to the status of the common day coach which she had possessed even before reaching Chicago, and then, in New York without discretionary funds, she is back to riding the streetcars again. The truth that a coach of her own will never come her way via Hurstwood is borne home when Mrs. Vance takes her to Broadway and Thirty-fourth Street and she sees that “the street was full of coaches . . . the whole street bore the flavor of riches and show” (341-42). That no coach will be hers so long as she remains tied to Hurstwood she sees most clearly on the night when the Vances take her to Sherry’s splendid restaurant in a carriage and she meets Robert Ames, whose possibilities make those of her other lovers appear trivial indeed. With Hurstwood she can look forward only to a sad downward mobility as the remnants of his stolen money gradually run out. It is probably no accident that Hurstwood on his downward track should in turn be reduced to playing a counterfeit motorman on a streetcar and then be left with only his own feet to carry him about the city. And as he falls, Carrie finds herself reduced once again to

travel afoot in search of a job.

Carrie will have her own coach, yes, but not until she has earned it through her own efforts in the theater, and by that time, having achieved both money and the mobility symbol that accompanies it, she will no longer pine for one. From her window high in the Waldorf, one of those hotels which Dreiser employs to signal intermediate stations in the migratory lives of those on the move in America, Carrie can gaze down into the storm and without envy watch “the old winding procession of carriages rolling up Fifth Avenue” (548). Her quick mind is already at work on the “farther step” (557) suggested by Ames, presumably upon the possibility of a triumphant European tour in a straight dramatic play and upon the means of travel which will take her there, one of the great new luxury liners then approaching their heyday.¹¹

V. CELEBRITY: The Beautiful People

When Dreiser refers to the upper echelon of habitues at Fitzgerald and Moy’s as “celebrities,” he becomes the first American novelist to employ that word in its most recent connotation, and he applies it repeatedly as he records the changing American attitudes toward the work ethic which are one of the marks of his modernity in *Sister Carrie*. As he wrote, America was poised on the brink of entering upon one of its important twentieth-century phenomena, the switch from an emphasis upon production to an emphasis upon service. Industrialism appeared to be in a permanent ascendancy in those *laissez faire* days of the post-Civil War period, but society was altering nevertheless; and in the meteoric rise of Carrie Meeber we hear Dreiser’s prophecy of the popular adulation awarded entertainers in a new world which, with the advent of new technology, would all too soon be marked by the invention of the Movie Star, then the Television Personality, and then the Sports Icon. The day was coming when the image of “Celebrity” would be created, master-minded, and managed by a corps of press agents and public-relations experts. Like many of these later gods of the hoi polloi, Carrie Meeber was to undergo a change of name and have her talent “packaged” in order to

project the appropriate image for her time: a star of musical comedy on Broadway.

James T. Farrell, much of whose relevance rested upon his perceptive observation of the American social fabric, reminds us of a comparative study made of the heroes of popular biography between 1900 and 1945 based upon mass circulation magazines such as *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.¹² It demonstrated that in 1900 any list of the Most Successful Americans emphasized Men of Affairs but named extremely few entertainers. However, the biographies of 1945 spoke less of the singleness of purpose, the drive, diligence, and achievement characteristic of inventors, financiers, statesmen, and industrial Titans. In contrast, the subjects who were concentrated upon now—largely entertainers—made little claim to accomplishment but showed instead a marked tendency to admit “I got a break.”¹³ This, says Farrell, “was a prophecy of the ‘Beautiful People’—and of the rest of us, who admire the ‘Beautiful People’ because they *are* the ‘Beautiful People’ and do all the glamorous things we can’t afford to do.”¹⁴

That the American Dream, as the grip of the work ethic loosened, was shifting from success through achievement to success through connections can scarcely have been manifest to Dreiser in 1899, it would seem, and yet here is the future all mapped out for us through the amazing rise to celebrity status of Carrie Meeber/Madenda. Carrie’s rise is prefigured by the early career of Hurstwood, whose prominence at Fitzgerald and Moy’s stems not from labor but from intangible gifts of personality, much as Carrie will succeed not because of any enormous store of talent but because something in her personality—Ames calls it her ability to project the world’s longing—happens to “catch on” with playgoing audiences. Hurstwood’s post at the saloon rests upon his capacity for creating an easy atmosphere of welcome. He knows everyone and greets each with precisely the correct tone of familiarity to tally with their celebrity status, or lack of it. His first duty, says Dreiser, is to be “invariably agreeable” (51) to all and sundry. To Hurstwood’s “truly swell saloon” (48) flock those local personalities and notables whose reputations lie in the public domain: merchants, politicians, actors, and the like. One of

Hurstwood's fondest memories is of a night when John L. Sullivan, the champion prizefighter, stood at his bar to be adored by an admiring throng of fans. Drouet, too, has such memories. Haunting such night spots as Rector's, where for the price of a drink he can rub elbows with his perceived betters, he has one evening seen, up close, Joseph Jefferson, the great star of *Rip Van Winkle*, and on another he has dined in company with another famous performer, Henry E. Dixie—at a location “only a few tables off” (47). He glows with the recollection.

Stage performers were then beginning to dominate the universe of “personalities,” but the day was not too far off when other areas of endeavor, such as athletics and politics, would be subsumed under the heading of Entertainment; and as soon as public-relations men saw that with the arrival of television any attractive personality might be “packaged” as the Stars were packaged, and sold to the public like bubble gum, then the day would inevitably arrive when the actor would blend with the politician and be offered free lodging, not in the Waldorf, as happens to Carrie, but on Pennsylvania Avenue. Thus the election of Ronald Reagan stands as both the culmination and the *reductio ad absurdum* of that ascending trendline whose beginnings Dreiser sensed in 1899.

VI. THEATER: A Star is Born

In selecting the theatrical world as Carrie's route to Success, Dreiser chose not only an area of American effort which he understood very well, but one which was ideal for emphasizing the Illusion/Reality concept which lay at the heart of all his best fiction.¹⁵ For we are, all of us, in his philosophy, leaves blown at random in the gales of Force, moths drawn to the bright flame. And the theater, in Carrie's day as in ours, was the bright spot where illusions came to us wrapped in the cloak of reality, and where reality might be suggested through illusion; a place of gilt and glass which Dreiser describes in relevant terms: “tinsel entertainment,” “showy world,” and a “gilded state where “the folly of celebrities” goes on display (409, 486, 506).

One must consider the options that were open to Carrie

then. Were she educated, she might become a schoolteacher, a respectable post. But in Chicago she can elect only to labor long days at bottom-scale, to marry or otherwise attach herself to a money/power figure, or to become a prostitute. Or she can enter the theater, one gate which is not closed to her. When she envisions in the theater her key to Aladdin's treasure cave, she selects a route chosen by immigrants before her and by a horde who followed. It was even then a place where a "hit" could be made overnight by one unable or unwilling to fall into lockstep with the Industrial machine, a lottery where with one lucky break celebrity status might be achieved rapidly, a fortune made. Carrie has trodden the path of hard labor in the shoe factory, underpaid and working until her neck, back, arms, and shoulders are a mass of aching muscles, and is then thrown on the street to starve. That path is not for her. More than any other industry, the field of entertainment has burgeoned since then. It has been—and is—a favorite with immigrants in a hurry; in movies, television, and sports their names are legion.

The seeds of a stage career are planted early in Carrie, during her train ride into Chicago when salesman Drouet flatters her with reference to "some popular actress of whom she remind [s] him" (6). The career is initiated when Drouet maneuvers her into the role of Laura: The Belle of Society in the amateur production of *Under the Gaslight* at Avery Hall.¹⁶ In attending Chicago theaters, she and Drouet and Hurstwood make an inveterate trio; and in these ornate *fin de siecle* playhouses, blazing with the new incandescent lamps and crammed with fine ladies and gentlemen whose coaches wait outside to whisk them off to restaurants or to expensive homes, Carrie's appetite swells.

Her professional career is born of necessity when Hurstwood's money runs out. She repeats her earlier experiences, afoot, searching for work, eventually being taken on at the bottom of the ladder as a chorus girl, one of many in a show whose stage manager calls her "Mason" rather than "Madenda" and whose drill-master screams at her, "What's the matter with your feet? Can't you dance?" (425). But a series of lucky breaks propels her Upward. Her good looks are noticed and she is invited to head an elaborately-gowned line. At a

crucial point in a play she interjects an impulsive bit of clever—and forbidden—dialogue, and the Star directs that it be retained, as it makes capital for himself. Dressed as a gray, silent Quakeress, Carrie frowns in an appealing manner and the audience responds enthusiastically, though for a mysterious reason which no one can fathom. Out go the press notices and the posters: “If you wish to be merry, see Carrie frown” (494). The result is “miraculous” (494). To no one’s surprise more than her own, she is on her way: “Manager and company realized that she had made a hit” (493).

Fame and its perquisites follow in dizzying sequence. Her letter box flows over with fan mail, millionaires propose marriage sight-unseen, the newspapers take notice and spread her name through the most powerful medium of the time. The Wellington Hotel offers her a luxury suite at a ridiculous price, capitalizing upon the monetary value of her publicized name. A private dressing room is hers, replete with light-ringed mirror in which she can admire her wonderful self in full make up and costume. She has a coach of her own. She is at last a Celebrity.

But the rewards of celebrity are precarious. Hurstwood in his day had been a major fixture at Fitzgerald and Moy’s, to see and be seen by the patrons, only to discover that his one slip would send him plunging down the Success ladder far faster than he had risen, toward ruin and the dead end of suicide. Ames warns Carrie that whatever appealing powers she may possess—nebulous as they are—could vanish overnight. Having “arrived,” she learns the emptiness of celebrity, that rude lesson learned by so many since that today’s darling might well become tomorrow’s discard. She is on the treadmill now, and looking about her, contemplating her fine clothes, her carriage, her fat bank account, she begins to understand that, although a far step beyond her “immigrant” status now, she has made her way Upward through a devotion to appearances, to the representation of reality, and that “time proved the representation false” (555). There remains only the “farther step” (557) suggested by Ames, that possible move, still in the theater but into straight dramatic roles where a more solid and perhaps lasting basis for Success might be gained and held for somewhat longer than a bubble lasts.

VII. WOMAN: The Two Carries

No American tendency since Dreiser's time has accelerated more rapidly than that of female emancipation, and Carrie's story presents one of our earliest and most authentic pictures of woman moving alone through a man's world, *in* it but never *of* it.

Carrie becomes dramatically aware of the money-power linkage on that momentous entry into Chicago when she spies Drouet's billfold crammed with greenbacks and compares it with the four dollars spirited away in her own tiny snap-purse. His seeming wealth speaks to her: "I am power; you are weakness." Her impression of the male as authority figure takes on substance at the same moment, and this process continues at the Hansons', where the daily routine is built around Sven's job. Minnie rises dutifully at four-forty in order to send her husband off to the stockyards with a good breakfast under his belt, and he does not return until after seven in the evening. The wife invariably "reflect[s] her husband's point of view" (15-16) in all matters. He speaks with the full authority of the patriarchal voice, so that his advice to Carrie on how and when and where to look for a job emerges as a command. When Carrie, starved for amusement and eager to attend one of the theaters Drouet has spoken of, suggests that they all go down to H. R. Jacob's vaudeville house, Minnie's reply is predictable—"Oh, I don't think Sven would want to go to-night" (34)—and her demeanor tells Carrie that the notion of squandering hard-earned cash on the theater is "poorly advocated" (34) in this respectable household.

Searching for work, Carrie encounters an intimidating male-dominated universe in which she is all but invisible. The great department stores are full of female clerks and shop-girls, but they are supervised by men on every level of management. The commercial firms employ doormen who turn Carrie away on sight. And even in the sweatshop, "manned" by a gang of young women busy at machines, the foreman is, of course, male, "a true ogre, prowling constantly about, keeping her tied down to her miserable task" (45). It is from this bondage that Carrie slowly and subconsciously determines to free herself.¹⁷

With Drouet and Hurstwood Carrie feels a partial release from the fact of male domination, principally because they have superfluous money which they give her to spend as she wishes. By now she has learned that one major route for a girl is to attach herself to a power/authority figure. She has observed this in the rich and pampered women who patronize the department stores and restaurants, spending their husbands' salaries, or who, splendidly garbed, ride about the city in their husbands' coaches. There is no question of romance here; Carrie loves neither the salesman or the manager. But with the one, because it is advantageous, she passes as "Mrs. Drouet"; and with the other she participates in a mock-wedding that makes her, for the moment, "Mrs. Wheeler," thereby paying the essential lip service to the prevailing mores.

When she arrives in Chicago, Carrie is a girl with one foot set solidly in the Victorian era and another, more adventurous, toe just about ready to step into the future. To live openly with her paramours as she does requires that she gather the courage to sidestep the twin Victorian demons: Duty and Respectability. The first is achieved by blanking out remembrances of those advisers she has left at home in Columbia City and the training received there at her mother's knee. Family ties must be severed before she can act independently; when she leaves the Hansons' she does so under cover of night, leaving a note which falsely represents her motives and contains no forwarding address. A lingering sense of shame is perceptible here, but it soon dissipates.

Carrie's triumph over Respectability comes somewhat harder. Standing before Drouet's pier glass, she sees two Carries. The first, dressed in the clothes provided by Drouet's funds, is a prettier girl than she has ever known, one who shows possibilities for rising in the world and entering better rooms than his. The second, seen in the mirror of her mind, loaded with "the world's opinions," is "a worse" (103) Carrie, who has flouted the most fundamental tenets of Respectability by succumbing to her seducer without remorse and, further, by then officially becoming his mistress. This step once taken, however, Carrie experiences few regrets. The past obliterated by act of will, society's opinion closed off behind a fence of pretend, she

looks only to the future, her mind ever on herself and her own welfare and independence, which becomes ever more fiercely important to her.

This new attitude provides Carrie with the courage to shrug off her men friends without remorse when they have served their purpose of lifting her free from the earthbound grip of poverty. In leaving Hurstwood, she quite definitely has developed that new independence, having gone out into the world on her own and located theatrical work even though it has meant degrading herself as she penetrates the man's world, exposing herself in one instance to the vulgar appraisal of a corpulent theatrical manager who "judge[s] women as another would horseflesh" and thinks to himself that since his chorus is "a little weak on looks" (420) she might spruce it up a bit. To succeed, Carrie must become a commodity, but succeed she does. Now *she* is the breadwinner. It is *her* paycheck which buys the coal and pays the butcher, and she resents deeply Hurstwood's despondent abandonment of the traditional male role of provider.

Carrie washes no baby's diapers and darns no man's torn stockings. She evidently understands enough about birth control—although Dreiser circumspectly dodges this issue—to assure that she will avoid the natural trap of motherhood. But this, too, is a part of the price that Carrie pays for her independence. Not tied to husband, child, or home, she must sacrifice the joys that might come her way along that path. She grows ever more definitively the career woman, her sole concern herself and her own welfare. We leave her at a moment when she is weighing her life, one thing against another, even as she cherishes her good fortune coming to realize an inevitable and—at that time—necessary sense of futility, asking herself, in effect, "Is this it? Is this all there is to it?" and coming up with no immediately satisfying answer except the necessity for continuing further along the road she has chosen, to see what the misty future may hold for her—alone.

Like similar American documents, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is a mirror in which we can see our society reflected as we appeared in another, quite different guise, and yet one in which we too are clearly recognizable. These have been but seven of the resemblances between the America of the 1890s and that of the 1990s. One might also, for example, perceive in the novel the coming emphasis upon clothing as a mark of status and a badge of

authority which reaches what must be its ludicrous nadir in works such as John T. Molloy's *Dress for Success*, and there reside everywhere in Carrie's story clear signals of the approaching domination of American life by the media, a domination which has increased as technology has developed from the newsprint which creates Carrie's celebrity status to film and then to television's ubiquitous electronic tape. One can do worse than to be an attentive reader of *Sister Carrie*.

Notes

1. Dreiser knew the immigrant state intimately, his father having sailed to America from Germany, and his mother being the child of immigrants. He writes of it specifically only when dealing with the heroine's father in *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), but most of the heroes of his novels are, like Carrie, newcomers to the city and in this capacity act as *immigrants manqué*.

2. These are Chapter XXVII, "A Pilgrim, an Outlaw: The Spirit Detained," and Chapter XXX, "The Kingdom of Greatness: The Pilgrim Adream." In editions after the first these headings were deleted.

3. Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Doubleday, 1900), 10. I have elected to use the first edition rather than the expanded "Pennsylvania Edition" (1981) as being the text approved by Dreiser and that most accessible and familiar to readers. Future quotations from the novel will be identified parenthetically.

4. For Dreiser's major treatment of the millionaire class, see his story of Frank Cowperwood in *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914), and *The Stoic* (1947).

5. Dreiser himself was fascinated by the skyscraper as a symbol of the city and industrial power. He was particularly fond of referring to the new Masonic Temple in Chicago, twenty-two stories in height, at the time of its erection (1892) being the tallest building in the world. The Rookery Building went up in 1886 at LaSalle and Adams, near where Dreiser locates Fitzgerald and Moy's saloon. Louis Sullivan's Auditorium Building was completed in 1899, the year of Carrie's arrival, and the pioneering Monadnock Building, which Sullivan called "an amazing cliff of brickwork," was then under construction, to be completed by 1891, about the time Carrie leaves for New York with Hurstwood.

6. Mirrors are pervasive in *Sister Carrie*, being a prominent feature of the fashionable restaurants, such as Sherry's, where the rich and the celebrated congregate and see themselves reflected in their peers as well as in the decor. In her Waldorf suite, Carrie is ecstatic to find that her private bathroom contains a wall set with bevel-edged mirrors, the newest and finest produced, of plate glass. Hers are flanked by dressing lights. Their reinforcement of the narcissism motif is obvious.

7. Carrie's story begins with her move to Chicago and ends with her contemplation of a move which may take her to London on tour with a non-musical play. In between these events, Dreiser records at least eight distinct changes of address for her, all involving apartments or hotels. Hurstwood, of

course, undergoes even more numerous moves.

8. As time progressed and the automobile came into common use, Dreiser introduced it into his novels, especially *An American Tragedy* (1925) and *The Bulwark* (1946), in both of which the use of the automobile for sexual purposes is explored as young men (Clyde Griffiths and Stewart Barnes) go for disastrous joyrides with their girl friends. The chauffeur-driven, closed automobile from which Clyde Griffiths watches Sondra Finchley descend before her palatial home on Wykeagy Avenue in Lyncurgus, New York, is fully as significant a symbol of her status as is the home itself.

9. Yerkes, portrayed as Frank Cowperwood, is ever alert to the essential American dependence upon mobility. He himself moves from Philadelphia to Chicago to New York and London in his efforts to enrich himself by monopolizing street transport and subway systems in these cities.

10. The hotel is used in virtually every Dreiser novel, but especially in *An American Tragedy*, where the Green-Davidson is not only a symbol of the transient state but is also a microcosm in which a poor boy, Clyde Griffiths, is inspired with hopeless ambitions to penetrate the world of those enjoying higher status than his nature or abilities have prepared him for.

11. The ocean liner was just coming into its own when Dreiser wrote *Sister Carrie*, the *Teutonic* being launched in 1889, the year of Carrie's entry into Chicago, and the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* (649 feet, 2300 passengers) at the time of her stage success. By the time the novel ends, Carrie has already sailed to England on tour with *The Wives of Abdul*, although Dreiser glosses over this trip in concentrating solely on events which transpire in New York. As Carrie contemplates a new tour, a Pullman train is rushing Hurstwood's family to New York, where they are scheduled to embark on a European vacation.

12. See my "A Conversation with James T. Farrell," *Partisan Review* 2 (1983): 266-78.

13. The chief exemplar of the accelerating American wish to succeed through lucky breaks is, as Farrell suggests, Clyde Griffiths of *An American Tragedy*, whose doom is sealed by his futile desire to reach a higher status rapidly and easily through establishing connections with the rich.

14. "A Conversation with James T. Farrell" 278.

15. Dreiser was highly attracted to the theater and on occasion wrote for it, notably in *The Hand of the Potter* (1918). His favorite brother, Paul Dresser, was a performer and celebrity, and it was he who introduced Theodore to the Broadway world of playhouses, actors, and managers which he utilizes in *Sister Carrie*.

16. *Under the Gaslight* is a particularly apt vehicle, as its story of a waif in high society emphasizes Carrie's wish to rise.

17. Drouet and Hurstwood also are patriarchal figures. Hurstwood has a son only a year Carrie's senior, and Drouet refers to Carrie as "a peach" whom he has picked up on the train. The resorts associated with these men, Rector's and Fitzgerald and Moy's, are places where men gather to socialize. No mention is ever made of female patrons, and Carrie never sets foot inside either of them.

**“The Logic of My Life and Work”:
Another Look at Dreiser’s July 20, 1945,
Letter to William Z. Foster**

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Perhaps the most frequently cited letter by Theodore Dreiser is the one he wrote to William Z. Foster on July 20, 1945, in which he expressed his desire to become a member of the Communist Party. (See the Appendix to this essay for the full text of the letter.) There is no denying the legitimacy of the letter. A carbon copy, on Dreiser’s personal letterhead, is in the Dreiser Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Library,¹ and the letter in printed form, on its appearance in the *Daily Worker* on July 30, 1945 (Dreiser, “Theodore Dreiser”), was not repudiated by Dreiser. There is also no denying its importance. During the Cold War, Dreiser’s action deeply affected how he and his work were perceived throughout the world, producing, on the whole, a negative effect in the West, a positive one in the East.

Without rejecting its authenticity as an indication of Dreiser’s wish to join the party, Dreiser scholars, however, have had grave misgivings about the letter. Dreiser’s early biographer, Robert H. Elias, using Helen Dreiser as a source, claimed that it was not composed by Dreiser. “Some of the party members drew up the letter,” he notes, “and he, after some comments and slight revisions, signed it” (306). An obvious confirmation of Elias’s account lies in the style of the letter, which in its stiffly correct but conventional political

phraseology in no way resembles Dreiser's habitual prose at any stage of his career. Also at issue is the sequence of events leading up to Dreiser's decision to join the Party in late July, 1945, after a decade and a half of participation in many of its activities without being a member. Elias viewed the decision as inseparable from Dreiser's general state of mind toward the end of career, but he also noted a specific cause in Earl Browder's imminent replacement by Foster as head of the American communist movement, since Dreiser had had a cool relationship with Browder but admired and liked Foster. Both W. A. Swanberg (513-14) and Richard Lingeman (469-70) explored more fully Elias's comment about Foster in an effort to forge a link between the July 20 date of Dreiser's letter and the furor in the internal politics of international and national communism during the spring and summer of 1945, leading up to Browder's departure. Both argued that Dreiser's knowledge of these events played a major role in his late July decision. A final issue, raised by Swanberg (515), is the heading of the letter as "Hollywood, California/July 20, 1945," when in fact Dreiser had departed Los Angeles for Portland, Oregon, on July 11, and did not return until August 2.

I would like in this paper to offer a fresh account, based on new evidence, of the facts surrounding the origin of Dreiser's letter to Foster. I will not be able here to take up the complex matter of the evolution of Dreiser's political ideas from the late 1920s to his 1945 request to join the party; that awaits a book-length study. But I can contribute to a clarification of the climactic event in that evolution, his letter to Foster.

I will begin with the major events occurring within the American communist movement in early 1945² and will then discuss the chronology of Dreiser's decision to join the Communist Party and of the preparation of his letter to Foster in relation to those events. The imminent conclusion of the European phase of World War II in the spring of 1945 led the Soviet Union to reexamine its policy, in place since the late 1930s, of encouraging cooperation by communist parties throughout the world with "bourgeois" governments in order to fight fascism. Of particular concern was the American communist movement, led by Earl Browder since 1930, since

Browder vigorously proposed that the movement should no longer consider itself a distinct political party in opposition to the established parties but should rather work with these parties to achieve goals favorable to the proletariat. Looking forward to this role for American communists, Browder was instrumental in having the American Communist Party renamed the Communist Political Association in May 1944 as a token of the disengagement of American communists from the conventional activities of a political party. At the heart of Browder's decision was a major challenge to orthodox Marxism, since the policy of cooperation beyond the pragmatic needs of wartime envisions social change as the product of gradual evolution rather than as the consequence of violent class conflict.

The Soviet Union clearly signaled its opposition to this challenge, as well as to the test of its own authority in international communism, by means of the famous "Duclos Letter," a long and blistering attack on Browder and his "revisionist" beliefs written by the French communist leader Jacques Duclos, which appeared in French in the *Cahiers du Communisme* in April 1945. The essay reached the *Daily Worker*, the principal journalistic organ of American communism, in early May; it was available in translated form to the National Board of the Communist Political Association by May 16; and it was published in that form by the *Daily Worker* on May 24. The essay caused a sensation in American communist circles, since it was universally accepted that it was prepared at the request of the Kremlin. The National Board met in emergency session in New York on May 22 and 23 and then again on June 2 and June 18-20. Initially, some reservations were expressed about accepting this new direction for American communism, especially since Browder spoke strongly against it. But by the meeting of late June, opposition to Browder had hardened, and he was clearly on his way out. He was officially dismissed as head of the American communist movement by an emergency convention held in New York on July 26-28, during which the Communist Political Association was also reconstituted as the Communist Party and William Z. Foster was named its national chairman.

To turn to Dreiser himself: the key document, as far as

establishing the chronology of Dreiser's decision to join the party is concerned, is a hitherto unnoted letter to Dreiser, dated April 17, by Carl Winter, President of the Los Angeles County Committee of the Communist Political Association. The letter reads:

Dear Brother Dreiser:

We were very pleased to hear that, in response to the tasks placed before everyone of us by the present political situation, you have expressed a desire to further strengthen your contributions to the anti-fascist cause by joining the ranks of the organized Communist movement.

Your decision and action will certainly be as great a contribution to clarity and greater national unity among the American people, as was the case in France when men like Joliot-Curie, Langevin, and Picasso joined the Communist Party.

Since this is more than a step of personal importance, great as its significance undoubtedly is to you, I am sure that you will agree that it would be desirable to discuss the form and circumstances best attending your enrollment. Would it be convenient for you to have me call upon you with one or two of our leading members to discuss this further? I might suggest Saturday afternoon, April 28th, about 3:00 p. m. Would you please let me know if that time is satisfactory.

With warmest fraternal greetings,
Carl Winter

P.S. I met Bill Foster in New York a couple of weeks ago. He reminded me of our visit to your home the last time he was in Los Angeles, and asked how you were getting on. He wanted to be remembered to you.

The letter is typewritten, but written at the bottom of the sheet in Helen Dreiser's hand is the note: "Lawson came to see T.D. Sat-May 12 & Friday-May18."

The letter is significant because it reveals that Dreiser's decision to join the party is not related, as has been assumed, to the turmoil caused by the Duclos Letter and to the consequent awareness within the party that Foster would be replacing

Browder. Those were events of late May and June; Dreiser's decision, and his "instruction" by John Howard Lawson (as Swanberg puts it [514]), were events of April and earlier in May. Perhaps the visit by Foster stimulated Dreiser to think again, as he had in the early 1930s, about joining the party, but the decision itself was not the product of a change in the leadership of the party. Elias probably came closest to a correct explanation of the basis of that decision many years ago when he implicitly accepted the phraseology of Dreiser's letter to Foster—that "the logic of my life and work" (Pizer 333) over many decades demanded it. He was responding, in short, to an imperative inherent in his own thinking about his beliefs and not to a change either in worldwide communist political policy or in the leadership of the American party.

It might be possible to construct an alternative scenario to Dreiser's decision to join the party. This timetable would assume Foster's knowledge of the Duclos essay considerably before its appearance, his communication to Dreiser of the effect of the letter on the leadership and direction of the American communist movement, and thus Dreiser's decision in April, based on what was to occur within the next several months, to apply for membership in the party. This scenario, however, since it depends on Foster's awareness that the Duclos essay was soon to appear, lacks probability. Both Edward P. Johanningsmeier, Foster's biographer, and Joseph R. Starobin, the principal historian of this phase of American communism, agree that though Foster had criticized Browder's policies during 1943 and 1944, he was as much shocked as others within the American party by the Duclos essay. The clear signals from Moscow during this period—both from Georgi Dimitrov, former head of the Comintern, and from Stalin himself—were that Browder's position was correct. Therefore, as Starobin sums up, on the appearance of Duclos's essay, "Foster was obviously as much surprised . . . as everyone else within the Communist ranks" (75).

Winter's letter also helps clarify the process by which Dreiser's July 20 letter to Foster was produced. Dreiser's action of joining the party, Winter notes, was of great importance to the party and would therefore require careful preparation and

expression, beginning, Winter implies, with his visit accompanied by “one or two leading members.” Helen’s later note indicating John Howard Lawson’s role in this process does not mark the limit of those participating in it, though Lawson, as an old acquaintance from the 1920s who was now a leading Hollywood screenwriter and communist activist (Schwartz), perhaps played the major role. (Other names mentioned in later accounts are Dan James and Berkeley Tobey [Lingeman 469], minor Hollywood figures and party members, both of whom served as honorary pallbearers at Dreiser’s funeral [Helen Dreiser 319].) Lawson later denied to Swanberg that he wrote the July 20 letter, though he did accept that he “gave advice about the wording” (514). In a letter to Elias on September 3, 1946, replying to Elias’s query about the circumstances of Dreiser’s joining the party, Helen Dreiser recalled that “Lawson and others did discuss it with him. The letter was drawn up by them and submitted to him for his comments and approval, but this was after he had made the decision to join.” Given as well Helen’s later confirming account to Swanberg (514) that Dreiser himself made some final revisions, the process of composition probably was an initial draft in Winter’s local office after discussion of the nature of the letter with Dreiser, with Lawson perhaps playing the major role in the discussion and group composition, and a final minor revision by Dreiser. Dreiser, of course, sought out and accepted throughout his career the aid of others in revising his writing, though almost always this aid was based on his own initial expression. That he on this occasion of the most important letter of his career reversed the process may suggest an aspect of the substance of the letter itself—his signaling of a willingness, in joining the party, to subordinate to some degree his own individuality to that of a group identity.

A second hitherto unnoted letter bearing on the preparation and chronology of Dreiser’s July 20 letter is that of Elizabeth Glenn, apparently a secretary in the office of the Los Angeles County Communist Political Association. She wrote to Dreiser on July 10 from the same address as the Association:

Dear Mr. Dreiser:

Enclosed is a copy of your letter of application,

on your letterhead, as you requested. Also, I am returning to you the extra sheets of letterhead which were not used.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Glenn

Glenn's letter solves in part the apparent anomaly between the specific heading of Dreiser's letter and his presence in Oregon. A draft of the letter for Dreiser's final approval was prepared in Winter's office and probably sent to Dreiser in late June or early July. He corrected the draft and returned it to Winter's office with a number of sheets of his letterhead for the typing of the final copy. Sometime before the 10th, it can be surmised, the original of the final version was sent or delivered to him for his signature and for mailing to Foster in New York. And on the 10th itself, the day before Dreiser's departure, Winter's secretary mailed to Dreiser the carbon of the final version and the unused letterhead sheets.

This account, however, does not explain why Dreiser dated his letter July 20 when it was clearly prepared sometime in early July. An explanation may lie in the fact that it was widely known within the party after the June 20 meeting of the National Board that Browder was to be replaced by Foster as head of the American communist movement. The emergency convention of the party called for July 28-30 was for the purpose of publicly and "democratically" confirming this change. Dreiser therefore may have been asked to date his letter July 20 in order that it could be published as a decision recently reached and thus function as an implicit endorsement of the change in party leadership announced in the same issue of the *Daily Worker* as the letter.

The carbon of Dreiser typescript letter of 20 July enclosed in Elizabeth Glenn's letter is addressed to Foster, care of the Communist Political Association, and Dreiser uses this term three additional times within the body of the letter in this version, including the statement in the last paragraph that he wishes "to apply for membership in the Communist Political Association." The published version of the letter in the July 30 *Daily Worker*, however, omits the Communist Political Association in Foster's address and elsewhere in the letter,

substituting the "American Communist movement" and, finally in the last paragraph, the "Communist Party" (Pizer 330-33). (These are the only variants in the two extant versions of the letter.) And when Foster replied to Dreiser, on August 7, welcoming him into the party, he did so under the heading of the Communist Party of America and signed the letter as "National Chairman" of the party. So though Dreiser's decision to join the party antedated the tumultuous events of May and June 1945, the events are reflected to some degree in the history of the documents expressing the decision.

Notes

1. This letter and the ones by Elizabeth Glenn and Carl Winter discussed later in this essay are in the Theodore Dreiser Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania. I wish to thank Nancy Shawcross of the University of Pennsylvania Library for permission to consult and quote from these letters. In addition, I wish to thank the Carl A. Kroch Library of Cornell University for permission to use the letter of Helen Dreiser to Robert H. Elias cited later in this article.

2. The account of international and national communist politics in 1945 which follows is indebted to the studies of Howe and Coser and of Starobin.

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**Appendix: The Text of Dreiser's July 20, 1945,
Letter to William Z. Foster**

Hollywood, Calif.,
July 20, 1945
William Z. Foster
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Foster:

I am writing this letter to tell you of my desire to become a member of the American Communist organization.

This request is rooted in convictions that I have long held and that have been strengthened and deepened by the years. I have believed intensely that the common people, and first of all the workers,—of the United States and of the world—are the guardians of their own destiny and the creators of their own future. I have endeavored to live by this faith, to clothe it in words and symbols, to explore its full meaning in the lives of men and women.

It seems to me that faith in the people is the simple and profound reality that has been tested and proved in the present world crisis. Fascism derided that faith, proclaiming the end of human rights and human dignity, seeking to rob the people of faith in themselves, so that they could be used for their own enslavement and degradation.

But the democratic peoples of the world demonstrated the power that lay in their unity, and a tremendous role was played in this victory by the country that through its attainment of socialism has given the greatest example in history of the heights of achievement that can be reached by a free people with faith in itself and in all the progressive forces of humanity—the Soviet Union. The unity of our country with the great Soviet Union is one of the most valuable fruits of our united struggle, and dare not be weakened without grave danger to America itself.

Communists all over the world have played a vital part in welding the unity of the peoples that insures the defeat of Fascism. Theirs were the first and clearest voices raised against the march of aggression in China, Ethiopia, and Spain.

Dr. Norman Bethune, the great pioneer in saving war wounded through the use of the blood bank, died in China helping the free

peoples of that country withstand the Japanese hordes years before the democratic countries came to their aid. His dying request was that it be made known that since many years he had been a Communist.

Out of the underground movements of tortured Europe, Communists have risen to give leadership in the face of terror and all-pervading military suppression. Tito of Yugoslavia won the admiration of the world for his leadership of his people to victory. The name of Stalin is one beloved by the free peoples of the earth. Mao-Tse-tung and Chou-En-lai have kept the spirit of democracy and unity alive in China throughout the years that divisive forces have split that country asunder.

In the United States, I feel that the Communists have helped deepen our understanding of the heritage of American freedom as a guide to action in the present. During the years when Fascism was preparing for its projected conquest of the world, American Communists fought to rally the American people against Fascism. They saw the danger and they proposed the remedy. Marxist theory enabled them to cast a steady light on the true economic and social origins of Fascism; Marxism gave them also a scientific understanding of the power of the working people as a force in history which could mobilize the necessary intelligence, strength and heroism to destroy Fascism, save humanity and carry on the fight for further progress.

More than 11,000 Communists are taking part in that struggle as members of the armed forces of our country. That they have served with honor and patriotism is attested to even by the highest authorities of the Army itself.

More and more it is becoming recognized in our country that the Communists are a vital and constructive part of our nation, and that a nation's unity and a nation's democracy is dangerously weakened if it excludes the Communists. Symbolic of this recognition was the action of the War Department in renouncing discrimination against Communists in granting commissions. A statement signed by a number of distinguished Americans points out that "the Army has apparently taken its position as a result of the excellent record of Communists and so-called Communists, including a number who have been cited for gallantry and a number who have died in action."

It seems to me that this ought to discredit completely one of the ideological weapons from the arsenal of Fascism that disorients the country's political life and disgraces its intellectual life—red-baiting. Irrational prejudice against anything that is truly or falsely labeled "Communism" is absurd and dangerous in politics. Concessions to red-baiting are even more demoralizing in the field of science, art and culture. If our thinkers and creators are to fulfill their responsibilities

to a democratic culture, they must free themselves from the petty fears and illusions that prevent the open discussion of ideas on the adult level. The necessities of our time demand that we explore and use the whole realm of human knowledge.

I therefore greet with particular satisfaction the information that such leading scientists as the French physicist, Joliot-Curie, and the French mathematician, Langevin, have found in the Communist movement, as did the British scientist Haldane, some years ago, not only the unselfishness and devotion characteristic of the pursuit of science, but also the integration of the scientific approach to their own field of work with the scientific approach to the problems of society.

I am also deeply stirred to hear that such artists and writers, devoted to the cause of the people, as Pablo Picasso of Spain and Louis Aragon of France, have joined the Communist movement, which also counts among its leading cultural figures the great Danish novelist, Martin Anderson Nexø, and the Irish playwright, Sean O'Casey.

These historic years have deepened my conviction that widespread membership in the Communist movement will greatly strengthen the American people, together with the anti-fascist forces throughout the world, in completely stamping out Fascism and achieving new heights of world democracy, economic progress and free culture. Belief in the greatness and dignity of Man has been the guiding principle of my life and work. The logic of my life and work leads me therefore to apply for membership in the Communist Party.

Sincerely,
Theodore Dreiser

Dreiser on Prohibition

Jonathan Auerbach
University of Maryland

In the summer of 1920, some six months after the start of Prohibition, Theodore Dreiser wrote a pair of letters in reply to a Doctor P. Charles Green of Philadelphia, who had asked him his opinion of the Eighteenth Amendment. Recently obtained at auction, these letters reveal rather mixed feelings on Dreiser's part about drinking.¹ Dreiser's honest ambivalence is somewhat surprising, given that other writers and intellectuals of the 1920s such as his good friend H. L. Mencken had swiftly decried Prohibition as the worst sort of narrow Puritanism run amok. Against this rather harsh knee-jerk dismissal, Dreiser's first letter to Green, dated June 8, 1920, opens by expressing his own fondness for drink ("the Gin Rickey"), yet quickly shifts by then endorsing the logic of the Prohibitionists, who saw alcohol as linked to larger social problems such as corrupt politics and the breakdown of the family. The rest of the letter continues in this conflicted vein, as Dreiser tries to sort out the relation between the saloon/Prohibition as mirror institutions (so that even the "religionist" and "vice crusader" are "drawing salaries") and drinking as an expression of personal desire. Such desire, uncontrolled, has led to the ruination of his brother and sister, he frankly confesses in an intimate autobiographical turn seldom seen in his other letters. But then he reiterates that he "personally" enjoys sociable drinking, particularly "the gin rickey" (again!).

Unable to resolve this tension between individual desire and unavoidable institutional pressures, Dreiser next turns to

nature. Presumably a tongue-in-cheek parody of his own naturalist tenets, Dreiser's question about drunkard ants and bees (both social animals) serves to underscore again the inevitable link between strictly human desire and strictly human weakness. He eloquently insists that such weakness "or its craving for pleasure & surcease" cannot be "restrained by law" because, as he remarks in his second letter, "repression merely leads to subterfuge and the readjustment of old desires to new fields." Yet this classic Dreiserian formulation, drawing on his reading of Freud, still doesn't address the problem of drinking as fueling destructive impulses, as he implicitly admits when he abstractly puts his faith in the nation ("the American people") to regulate drinking without outlawing it. In his postscript to the first letter, he can only once more self-consciously and comically call attention to his own ambivalence, followed by a plea, shifting terms yet again, for "the individual strong enough" to abolish this "debauchery"—by which he presumably means Prohibition itself, as well as the excesses in desire the Eighteenth Amendment was intended to curb.

Note

1. I am grateful to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania for permission to publish these two letters.

[ALS]

P.O. Box 181
Los Angeles
Calif.

June 8-1920

Dear Doctor Green:

My feelings concerning Prohibition are various. I long for the days of the Bushmill High Ball and the Gin Rickey. Again I have always felt that certain aspects of the saloon as a dispensary were horrible. Too often it was coupled with cheap

or crooked politics, graft & protected vice. Many people who dislike prohibition intensely despised the salo[o]n & would rather suffer drink-less than let the saloon as it was come back. Again thousands—possibly hundreds of thousands of families—that suffered via a boy, a girl, a father or mother or some other relative becoming an addict & irresponsibles turned their faces against the saloon & against liquor in general, not because they were were [sic] moralists or religious but because they were hurt or tortured. My mother suffered agonies over one boy—one of my brothers—who literally drank himself to death & in so doing stole, got in jail etc. A sister of mine has had 30 years of poverty & misery because hubby is a souse. Now in his old age when he cant get ‘it’ he seems to be a fairly respectable person intellectually[.] These cases—this type of case—started the moralists & the religionist & the vice crusader—all drawing salaries—on the war path. As you point out business at last saw that it could divert liquor money into shoe money, etc. and thats what turned the tide. Personally I long for the pleasant café & the gin rickey. Liquor never hurt me. I like it [—] it made a grand evening. And I dont believe human weakness or its craving for pleasure & surcease can be permanently restrained by law. But I may be wrong. Look at the Bee family. Behold the ant. Are there any drunkard Bees? Any souse ants? Maybe—maybe. But I haven’t heard, as yet[.] Nevertheless I regret that humanity or to come closer—the American people are such poor truck that they cant drink & regulate drinking so that it wont be a disgrace. At the same time I thoroughly believe that moonshine & all other drinks will soon be common in homes[.] Every liberty loving drunkard will have a small still still [sic] of his own. Would that I had one myself.

Theodore Dreiser

now if you know where I stand its almost more than I do. I would like to see the individual strong enough to stop this side debauchery.

[ALS]

P.O. Box 181
Los Angeles
Calif.

Aug 30-1920

Dear Dr. Green:

I've been intending to write & say that I cannot see that we are so very far apart on the question of liquor. I certainly believe that repression merely leads to subterfuge and the readjustment of old desires to new fields. I favor the repeal of the 18th amendment or at least a marked modification of its terms. Whether we will live to see that is a question. Personally I would like to live over the river from Detroit[.]

Theodore Dreiser

A Dreiser Checklist, 1991

Shane Elder
University of North Carolina at Wilmington
Frederic E. Rusch
Indiana State University
Stephen C. Brennan
Louisiana State University in Shreveport

This checklist supplements *Theodore Dreiser: A Primary Bibliography and Reference Guide*, by Donald Pizer, Richard W. Dowell, and Frederic E. Rusch (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991). It attempts to include all significant primary and secondary works published in 1991 as well as a few earlier items overlooked by other bibliographers. It does not include publications in which Dreiser is given only passing mention, nor does it include reviews of secondary sources. It represents the work of three persons. Shane Elder, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, created the basic list and annotated the majority of items. Frederic E. Rusch independently created a separate list and verified the accuracy and completeness of Elder's work. Stephen C. Brennan reconciled the two lists, added many annotations of works not available to Elder, and edited the bibliography for publication.

Even though a number of entries still lack annotations, the editors of *Dreiser Studies* have decided that scholars would rather have the bibliography as is rather than wait for an already long-delayed research tool. Over the next two issues, *Dreiser Studies* will publish additional updates, probably unannotated, that will bring the bibliography up through 1997. This checklist, future supplements, as well as the 1990 supplement published in *Dreiser Studies* 23.2 (Fall 1992), will also be published on the Dreiser Society's website: <http://www.uncwil.edu/dreiser/>.

For cross-referencing, each item in the bibliography is preceded by an alphanumeric identifier that essentially follows the system used by Pizer, Dowell, and Rusch in *Theodore Dreiser: A Primary Bibliography and Reference Guide*.

Writings by Theodore Dreiser

1991

A. Books, Pamphlets, Leaflets, and Broadsides

A91.1 Dreiser, Theodore. *A Hoosier Holiday*. Temecula: Reprint Services Corporation, 1991.

A91.2 ---. *Jennie Gerhardt*. Ed. Lee Clark Mitchell. World's Classics Paperback Series. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.

A91.3 ---. *Newspaper Days*. Ed. T. D. Nostwich. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991.

Using Dreiser's holograph as copy-text, the edition restores many passages cut from the "expurgated abridgements" available in all earlier editions of this autobiography, beginning with the 1922 *A Book About Myself*; offers "a new work of art" that is "almost purely Dreiser's work" rather than a collaboration.

A91.4 ---. *Sister Carrie*. Ed. Lee Clark Mitchell. World's Classics Paperback Series. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.

A91.5 ---. *Sister Carrie: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*. Ed. Donald Pizer. 2nd ed. Norton Critical Editions. New York: Norton, 1991.

Updates the 1970 Norton Critical Edition based on the 1900 Doubleday, Page first edition. Reprints much material relating to the novel's background, sources, and composition as well as twelve critical essays, five written since 1970. Also appends selected passages cut from the typescript before the novel's publication in 1900 but restored in the 1981 Pennsylvania Edition.

A91.6 ---. "The 'Rake.'" West 91.81, pp. 145-73.

Publication of Dreiser's 1915 abortive attempt to write *An American Tragedy*; draws upon the sensational Molineaux

murder case of 1899-1902.

D. Miscellaneous Separate Publications

- D91.1 ---. "Selected Works." *Library of the Future*. CD-ROM. Garden Grove, CA: World Library, 1991. Source: WorldCat Database.

G. Productions and Adaptations

- G91.1 *Sister Carrie*. Adapted by Louis Lippa. People's Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania. 27 March-9 June 1991.

Writings About Theodore Dreiser

1989

- 89.1 Kumar, Sukrita Paul. *Man, Woman, and Androgyny: A Study of the Novels of Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway*. New Delhi: Indus, 1989.

Considers Dreiser in relation to the liberation and mystification of sexuality in twentieth-century literature. Argues that Dreiser was seeking "a new morality of authenticity in relationship" and that his career reveals a movement from eros to agape. Concludes that with *The Bulwark* Dreiser ceased treating love as a means of masculine self-definition and offered the "ideal of androgyny" as a "cosmic principle."

1990

- 90.1 Lu, Min-Zhan. "Representations of the 'Other': Theodore Dreiser and Basic Writers." Diss. U of Pittsburgh, 1990. *DAI* 50 (1990): 3590A-3591A.

Examines critics' analyses of "flaws" in *Sister Carrie* and Mina Shaughnessy's analyses of "errors" in student writing. Critiques such "humanistic" approaches, which assume a stable self and reality outside writing, and argues that a writer's subjectivity and relation to the Other emerges "out of a process of conflict and change" in the act of producing and correcting errors and flaws.

- 90.2 Sheng, Chenliang. "Nietzsche's Superman Americanized: On

42 *Dreiser Studies*

Dreiser's *The Financier*." Diss. U. of Maryland, 1990. *DAI* 50 (1990): 3956A.

Examines the philosophy inherent in *The Financier* and demonstrates how Cowperwood is "constructed on the basis of the three spiritual metamorphoses of Nietzsche's superman."

1991

91.1 "Airmail Interview: Richard Lingeman." *Dreiser Society Newsletter* 1.1 (1991): 2-5.

91.2 Armstrong, Tim. "The Electrification of the Body at the Turn of the Century." *Textual Practice* 5 (1991): 303-25.

Explains how in the nineteenth century the fascination with electricity created a new sense of the body as circuitry. Argues that light imagery in *Sister Carrie* reveals Carrie to be "a desiring machine" and that Clyde's electrocution in *An American Tragedy* represents the "absorption" of a human being into "a system of production" indifferent to moral guilt or innocence.

91.3 Bardeleben, Renate von. "Personal, Ethnic, and National Identity: Theodore Dreiser's Difficult Heritage." *Interdisziplinarität: Deutsche Sprache und Literatur im Spannungsfeld der Kulturen. Festschrift für Gerhart Mayer zum 65. Geburtstag*. Ed. Martin Forstner and Klaus von Schilling. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991. 319-40.

Explores Dreiser's efforts to come to terms with his German heritage. Focuses on his visit to Germany as recounted in *A Traveler at Forty* and the uncut typescript of that book. Argues that the *memento mori* of seeing his own name on a tombstone in Mayen, his father's birthplace, constitutes the book's structural and emotional center and marks Dreiser's closest identification with his heritage, though he continues to feel "isolated personally and culturally."

91.4 ---. "The Thousand and Second Nights in 19th-Century American Writing: Echoes in the Work of Irving, Poe, Twain, and Dreiser." *Festgabe für Hans-Rudolph Singer*. Ed. Martin Forstner. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991. 855-86.

Discusses how nineteenth-century writers, lacking any direct knowledge of Arabic culture, relied upon the "secondhand image" supplied by the *Thousand and One Nights*.

Finds that Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* establishes the "pattern" of describing American cities in terms of Aladdin's lamp, a pattern Dreiser adapts to his naturalistic enterprise in *Sister Carrie* to express "the magic and mysterious forces" that rule human destiny.

- 91.5 Barrineau, Nancy Warner. "The Second Issue of *Ev'ry Month*: Early Roots of Dreiser's Fiction." *Dreiser Studies* 22.1 (1991): 23-32.

Shows how Dreiser's editorial comments anticipate the aesthetic revealed in *Sister Carrie*. Focuses on Dreiser's rejection of European models, his embrace of American theater, his attempt at writing towards a mixed-gender audience, and his positive attitude towards social and industrial progress.

- 91.6 Brennan, Stephen C. "*The Financier*: Dreiser's Marriage of Heaven and Hell." *Studies in American Fiction* 19.1 (1991): 55-69.

Argues that Dreiser was inspired by Ernst Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* to create a new mythology based on outmoded Christian patterns. Finds Cowperwood both Satanic and Christlike in his rises and falls and in his creation of a personal moral system in an amoral universe.

- 91.7 Casciato, Arthur D. "Dictating Silence: Textual Subversion in Dreiser's Soviet Diary." *West* 91.81, pp. 174-90.

Traces the impact of the sexual on the textual in the construction of Dreiser's diary of his 1928 trip to the Soviet Union. Discusses the merging of Dreiser's voice and that of his secretary Ruth Kennell in the diary and Dreiser's later removal of Kennell's presence in the 1928 Liveright edition of *Dreiser Looks at Russia*.

- 91.8 Cassidy, Thomas John. "Desire and Representation in Twentieth Century American Realism." Diss. State U of New York, Binghamton, 1991. *DAI* 52 (1991): 914A.

Finds in *Sister Carrie* and works by Cather, Hurston, and Morrison a critique of "male-authored marriage" that is also an "analogous critique of forms of representation" that posit the dominance of subject over object. Concludes that these works implicitly valorize "community-based relationships" and a "community of voices" with which to express "reality."

- 91.9 Cassuto, Leonard. "From the 1890s to the 1990s: *Sister Carrie* on the Modern Stage." *Dreiser Studies* 22.2 (1991): 26-32.
Reviews the 1991 production of *Sister Carrie* by The People's Light and Theater Co. in Malvern, Pennsylvania., a production drawing upon both the 1900 Doubleday, Page edition and the 1981 Pennsylvania edition. Concludes that Dreiser's novel survives interpretative modifications by the director and playwright, though only narrowly in some scenes.
- 91.10 Coltrane, Robert. "The Crafting of Dreiser's *Twelve Men*." *West* 91.81, pp. 191-206.
Analyzes Dreiser's selection and ordering of sketches for *Twelve Men* and his revision of previously published material. Examines the autobiographical elements of the sketches, proposing that the characters are "consistent with others in the Dreiser canon."
- 91.11 Den Tandt, Christophe. "Animistic Economics in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*." *BELL: Belgian Essays on Language and Literature* (1991): 88-99.
- 91.12 Dowell, Richard. "Dreiser Meets Fitzgerald . . . Maybe." *Dreiser Studies* 22.2 (1991): 20-25.
Surveys six accounts of a party hosted by Dreiser in the winter of 1922-23, at which Dreiser and F. Scott Fitzgerald allegedly became acquainted. Concludes from accounts by H. L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson, Carl Van Vechten, Llewelyn Powys, Ernest Boyd, and Burton Rascoe that the event was a "dismal failure."
- 91.13 Eby, Clare Virginia. "Cowperwood and Witla, Artists in the Marketplace." *Dreiser Studies* 22.1 (1991): 1-22.
Maintains that among Dreiser's protagonists, Frank Cowperwood in *The Financier* and Eugene Witla in *The Genius* most fully represent Dreiser's vision of "the genius," though Cowperwood transcends Witla as an artist. Concludes that, in Dreiser's view, wealth may lead to art but art will not lead to wealth.
- 91.14 El-Baaj, Habib. "Thomas Hardy and Theodore Dreiser: A Comparative Study." Diss. U of Glasgow. *DAI* 52 (1991): 2134A-2135A.
Discovers a direct line of influence from Hardy to Dreiser.

Maintains that the tragic endings in the novels of both authors are effects of “social, cultural, and universal influences.”

- 91.15 Erstein, Hap. “Fine ‘Sister Carrie’ Leads Philly Drama Renaissance.” *Washington Times* 25 Apr. 1991: E1-2.
Reviews production of *Sister Carrie* by People’s Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania.
- 91.16 Gammel, Irene. “The City’s Eye of Power: Panopticism and Specular Prostitution in Dreiser’s New York and Grove’s Berlin.” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 22.2 (1991): 211-27.
Compares the treatment of women in the city in Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* and Grove’s *Fanny Essler*. Links Carrie’s New York to “progress, growth, and the future” while yoking Fanny’s Berlin to a “masculine yearning towards a maternal home.” Asserts that in both novels the city allows women “to be,” but only as aesthetic objects rather than as thinking, feeling subjects.
- 91.17 Gatti, Rose. “What Dreiser’s Handwriting Reveals.” West 91.81, pp. 207-13.
Analyzes Dreiser’s handwriting in the manuscript of “A Story of Stories.” Concludes that Dreiser was a man of “deep, unexpressed emotions” who felt sympathy towards human weaknesses and anger at the “the powers that be.”
- 91.18 Gelfant, Blanche H. “Speaking Her Own Piece: Emma Goldman and the Discursive Skeins of Autobiography.” *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect*. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Wisconsin Studies in American Autobiography. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991. 235-66.
Compares the theme and style of anarchist Emma Goldman’s autobiography *Living My Life* and Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, which have similar beginnings. Concludes that Dreiser was one of many influences on Goldman’s book, having told her that she “had to” write it.
- 91.19 Gerber, Philip. “‘A Beautiful Legal Problem’: Albert Levitt on *An American Tragedy*.” West 91.81, pp. 214-42.
Introduces lawyer Albert Levitt’s 1926 prize-winning essay, “Was Clyde Griffiths Guilty of Murder in the First Degree?” which finds Clyde legally innocent and morally guilty, though

not as guilty as the society that produced him. Argues that the essay demonstrates the widespread contemporary interest in *An American Tragedy*.

- 91.20 ---. *Theodore Dreiser*. Twayne's United States Authors Series and OCLC American Authors Catalog. Diskette. New York: Twayne, 1991.

Computer disk format of the book first published in 1964.
Source: WorldCat Data Base

- 91.21 Gordon, Mary. "Good Boys and Dead Girls." *Good Boys and Dead Girls*. New York: Viking, 1991. 3-23.

Places Clyde Griffiths in a tradition of "boy killers," such as Faulkner's Joe Christmas and Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, who retain their innocence despite causing the deaths of women who restrain their freedom. Argues that Dreiser's melodramatic handling of Roberta's death violates the novel's realistic "moral vision," which lures readers into identifying with Clyde.

- 91.22 Hapke, Laura. "Dreiser and the Tradition of the American Working Girl Novel." *Dreiser Studies* 22.2 (1991): 2-19.

Agrees with previous scholarship that Dreiser accurately portrays the "economic, social, and psychological forces" that shaped the lives of wage-earning women. Finds "ambivalence" in Dreiser's treatment of the type, however, since his Carrie Meeber and Jennie Gerhardt, like the heroines of contemporary labor novels, are "too refined" to remain long in the world of laboring women and require rescue by a male savior.

- 91.23 Hayne, Barrie. "Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*." *Rough Justice: Essays on Crime and Literature*. Ed. M. L. Friedland. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 170-86

Explores whether *An American Tragedy* is the "sociological treatise" Sergei Eisenstein was denied the chance to film in 1930 or "the simple detective story" or love story Paramount wanted. Concludes that Eisenstein was largely correct and that the book is a "crime novel" governed by the "presuppositions of naturalism."

- 91.24 Hochman, Barbara. "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Actress: The Rewards of Representation in *Sister Carrie*." *Pizer* 91.54, pp. 43-64.

Refutes Dreiser's claims that he wrote *Sister Carrie* largely

in bursts of solitary inspired creativity. Asserts that Carrie's career as actress reveals both Dreiser's stake in maintaining "creative autonomy" and his "need for editorial and moral support" from a "responsive audience." Relies on the 1970 Norton Critical Edition.

- 91.25 Horwitz, Howard. "Dreiser, Debs, and Deindividuation: Hypothecation, Union, Representation." *By the Law of Nature: Form and Value in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. 192-217.

Examines Dreiser's Trilogy of Desire to locate Emersonian doctrine in the actions of "robber barons."

- 91.26 Hurm, Gerd. *Fragmented Urban Images: The American City in Modern Fiction from Stephen Crane to Thomas Pynchon*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.

- 91.27 Hutchisson, James M. "The Creation (and Reduction) of *The Financier*." West 91.81, pp. 243-59.

Offers a textual history of *The Financier*. Discusses the radical alterations in the novel from its inception in 1911 through the much shorter 1927 edition, the only version currently in print. Scrutinizes editorial revisions by Ripley Hitchcock and H. L. Mencken and Dreiser's desire to comply with them.

- 91.28 James, Harold. "The Literary Financier." *The American Scholar* 60 (1991): 251-57.

Tracks the rise and fall of the financier as a prominent character type in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Considers Dreiser's *The Financier* as a "particularly accurate" depiction of the turn-of-the-century Philadelphia Stock Exchange. Compares Dreiser's financier with those of Trollope, Balzac, and Thomas Mann.

- 91.29 Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. 200-210.

Agrees with Walter Benn Michaels, in *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987), that Dreiser's work expresses rather than critiques the ideology of consumer capitalism. Argues, however, that Dreiser's very failure to escape the "infernal machine" of market culture reveals a potential for radical change from within that culture.

- 91.30 Keeble, Robert. "Dreiser's Method: Triangles, Motive, Tension, and Contrast in *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*." Master's Thesis. Stephen F. Austin State U, 1991.
- 91.31 Kimmel, David P. "Crane, Sinclair, and Dreiser in the Temperance Tradition." Diss. Ohio State U, 1991. *DAI* 52 (1991): 1747A-1748A.
Argues that Dreiser's and others' use of ideas and forms characteristic of contemporary temperance literature imbues his novels with "uncertainty" and "hesitancy." Finds that Dreiser's treatment of Hurstwood's saloon partly breaks from the temperance tradition but only by "removing drinking from the discussion."
- 91.32 Kingston, Jeremy. "US Theater: Premiere Weekend Philadelphia." *London Times* 1 May 1991.
Reviews production of *Sister Carrie* by People's Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania.
- 91.33 Lehan, Richard. "*Sister Carrie*: the City, the Self, and the Modes of Narrative Discourse." *Pizer* 91.54, pp. 65-85.
Argues that *Sister Carrie* should be read as a narrative in the "naturalistic mode," as an "exercise" in rendering Herbert Spencer's deterministic universe of "matter in motion." Rejects the New Historicist readings by Walter Benn Michaels and June Howard for treating Carrie as a metaphor for capitalism or history, respectively. Concludes that an edition recognizing the novel's naturalistic mode would be a "composite" of the 1981 Pennsylvania Edition and the first edition.
- 91.34 Lenard, G. T. "New Lives, New Names: Dreiser's Carrie." *Midwestern Miscellany* 19 (1991): 29-36.
Discusses how the names given Carrie by others mark the changes in her life and in her social roles. Concludes that Hurstwood's "nameless" corpse reveals his absolute loss of identity while Carrie's choosing the stage name of Madenda indicates a limited assumption of power and freedom.
- 91.35 Lingeman, Richard. "Mencken, Dreiser, and God." *Menckiana* 119 (1991): 1-9.
Recounts the stormy friendship between Dreiser and Mencken, positing that "a hairline crack" in their friendship

occurred very early on when the “pagan” Mencken’s attack on prayer offended Dreiser with his lingering “craving for the absolute.” Finds that this essential opposition, along with an “aristocratic-peasant” enmity, eventually became a “geological fault,” though mutual love and respect endured to the end.

- 91.36 ---. “Theater.” *The Nation* 27 May 1991: 711-12.
Reviews production of *Sister Carrie* by People’s Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania.
- 91.37 Livingston, Paisley. *Literature and Rationality: Ideas of Agency in Theory and Fiction*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991.
Sees Dreiser oscillating “between naturalism and superstition” in both his life and his writing. Demonstrates that *The Financier*, *An American Tragedy*, and *Sister Carrie* expose the complex web of influences that create desire. Uses *Sister Carrie* to challenge the idea that an explanation of conditions adequately explains the course of an agent’s life.
- 91.38 Lutz, Tom. “Making It Big: Theodore Dreiser, Sex, and Success.” *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991. 38-62
Considers Dreiser’s treatment of his own neurasthenia of 1903 in the context of a culture obsessed with success and military conquest. Finds in *An Amateur Laborer* that Dreiser’s “neurasthenic crisis” is portrayed as a “heroic battle” enabling the sensitive artist to adapt to modern complexity. Also traces “neurasthenic themes” in *The “Genius”* and *An American Tragedy* with an emphasis on the links between sex, economics, and conquest.
- 91.39 Masters, Marcia Lee. “Ghostwriting for Theodore Dreiser.” *Chicago Tribune* 10 Nov. 1991, sec.10: 33.
- 91.40 McNamara, Kevin Richard. “Urban Verbs: Representations of the City in American Modernism.” Diss. U of California, Irvine, 1991. *DAI* 52A (1991): 1331A.
Discusses *Sister Carrie* in relation to James’s *The American Scene*, Williams’s *Paterson*, and other works. Explores how the circulation of money, desire, and other “objects” either “aids or problematizes” efforts to give “unity” to the city’s diverse elements.

- 91.41 Menzer, Paul. "Bibliographical Anomalies in the Foreword of *The Color of a Great City*." *Dreiser Studies* 22.1 (1991): 33-38.
Demonstrates that Dreiser's foreword to his 1923 collection offers "an apocryphal version of the articles' origins" by claiming much later dates of composition than the actual ones. Suggests that Dreiser was hiding the fact that many of these journalistic pieces were "quick copy written for ready cash" during his free-lance days.
- 91.42 Michaels, Walter Benn. "An American Tragedy, or the Promise of American Life." *The New American Studies*. Ed. Philip Fisher. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991. 171-98.
Argues that *An American Tragedy* illustrates the erasure of difference between the individual and the social. Discusses Clyde Griffiths' attempt to "drift" across classes while maintaining his individuality, and concludes that one has to belong to a class to be considered an individual.
- 91.43 Mitchell, Lee Clark. Introduction. *Sister Carrie*. By Theodore Dreiser. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. vii-xxiv.
- 91.44 ---. Introduction. *Jennie Gerhardt*. By Theodore Dreiser. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. ix-xxx.
- 91.45 Mizruchi, Susan. "Fiction and the Sense of Society." *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.
- 91.46 Mizuguchi, Shigeo. "Nippon niokeru Theodore Dreiser no Shoshi." [Bibliography of Theodore Dreiser in Japan] *Geibei Bunqaku [English and American Literature]* 51 (1991): 157-206.
- 91.47 Muller, Kurt. *Identitat und Rolle bei Theodore Dreiser: Eine Untersuchung des Romanwerks unter Rollentheoretischem Aspekt*. Paperborn: Schonigh, 1991.
Discusses role playing in *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, *The Titan*, and *An American Tragedy*. Places the novels in the context of a society whose fragmentation prevents the development of a coherent self. Applies analysis of the novels to Dreiser's own life. Source: Sauer, Thomas. "Dreiser's Novels and Role Theory." *Dreiser Studies* 22.2 (1991): 33-37.

- 91.48 Myers, Robert M. "Dreiser's Copy of *McTeague*." West 91.81, pp. 260-67.
 Concludes from Dreiser's bookplate and his typical marginalia that a copy of the 1903 edition of *McTeague* in the University of Miami library once belonged to Dreiser. Surveys Dreiser's accounts of reading *McTeague* and finds no direct influence on *Sister Carrie*.
- 91.49 Nathan, David. "Philly Goes for the Long Shots." *Jewish Chronicle* 3 May 1991.
 Reviews production of *Sister Carrie* by People's Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania.
- 91.50 Nash, Charles C. Review of the Pennsylvania Edition of *Newspaper Days*. *Library Journal* 116.13 (1991). 98-99.
- 91.51 Newlin, Keith. "Melodramatic Naturalism: London, Garland, Dreiser, and the Campaign to Reform the American Theater." Diss. Indiana U, 1991. *DAI* 52 (1991): 2925A.
 Challenges the idea that naturalistic drama is an offspring of realism and that O'Neill was the first serious American dramatist. Argues that Dreiser and others employed the conventions of melodrama to express evolutionary thought, creating an experimental "hybrid" form dealing with subjects previously confined to the novel and preparing the way for O'Neill.
- 91.52 Pizer, Donald. "Dreiser and the Naturalistic Drama of Consciousness." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 21.2 (1991): 202-11.
 Argues that, contrary to prevailing criticism, naturalistic novelists did often "seek to write a drama of consciousness." Focusing on moments of crisis in the lives of George Hurstwood, Lester Kane, and Clyde Griffiths, demonstrates Dreiser's growing sophistication in rendering an internal drama of conflicting desires by means of "concrete analogues," whether metaphorical or literal.
- 91.53 ---. Introduction. Pizer 91.54, pp. 1-19.
 Provides biographical background for *Sister Carrie* and a history of its composition, publication, and critical reception.

52 *Dreiser Studies*

- 91.54 ---, ed. *New Essays on Sister Carrie*. The American Novel. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.
Includes four essays and an introduction, annotated elsewhere in this checklist: 91.24, 91.33, 91.53, 91.61, 91.76.
- 91.55 ---. Preface. Dreiser A91.5, pp. viii-x.
Briefly surveys the critical history of *Sister Carrie* and defends the use of the 1900 first edition as copy-text as opposed to the holograph, the copy-text for the 1981 Pennsylvania Edition.
- 91.56 ---, Richard W. Dowell, and Frederic E. Rusch. *Theodore Dreiser: A Primary Bibliography and Reference Guide*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991.
Updates the 1975 bibliography. Contains a classified list of works by and about Dreiser. Lists interviews, speeches, library holdings, productions of Dreiser's plays, and adaptations of Dreiser's works. Cites translations of Dreiser's work and provides indexes of authors, editors, translators, and subjects.
- 91.57 Plank, Kathryn M. "Dreiser's Real American Tragedy." West 91.81, pp. 268-87.
Examines Dreiser's 1935 article "I Find the Real American Tragedy" to debunk the myth that *An American Tragedy* typifies a pattern Dreiser found in the Gillette case and in the several other actual murder cases he studied over the years. Argues that the "paradigm" Dreiser finds in these cases is actually his own creation and derives from his own experiences and social attitudes.
- 91.58 ---. "Introduction to *The 'Rake.'*" West 91.81, pp. 140-44.
Describes the incoherent state of the manuscript of this early attempt at *An American Tragedy*, based on the Molineaux murder case. Argues that Dreiser could not complete the novel because he could not reconcile Molineaux's high social status with the Clyde Griffiths-like yearnings of his protagonist.
- 91.59 Review of *Sister Carrie*: Audio Version. *Kliatt Young Adult Paperback Book Guide* 25 (1991): 51.
- 91.60 Richenderfer, Dolly. "Theodore Dreiser, Anti-Religionist Religionist: The Religiosity of Theodore Dreiser." Master's Thesis. Eastern Washington State U, 1991.

- 91.61 Riggio, Thomas P. "Carrie's Blues." Pizer 91.54, pp. 23-41.
 Considers Dreiser a "psychological realist" who expressed his own "depressive personality" in Carrie's pervasive melancholia. Traces this melancholia to childhood deprivations and argues that Carrie cannot establish lasting bonds because her "primary relation to home and family is full of rebellion and shame."
- 91.62 ---. "Dreiser's Final Hours." West 91.81, pp. 300-04.
 Presents extensive excerpts from the diary of Dreiser's wife Helen Richardson to provide "the only first-hand account of Dreiser's final hours."
- 91.63 Rose, Lloyd. "Smashing 'Sister Carrie.'" *Washington Post* 23 Apr. 1991: E1.
 Reviews production of *Sister Carrie* by People's Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania.
- 91.64 Rubin, Merle. "To Think, To Feel, To Read." *Christian Science Monitor* 1 Aug. 1991: 16.
- 91.65 Rusch, Frederic E. "A Dreiser Checklist, 1989." *Dreiser Studies* 22.1 (1991): 39-44.
 Lists works by and about Dreiser published in 1989 and adds items not included in previous checklists.
- 91.66 ---. Review of *Jennie Gerhardt*, 1989 Penguin edition. *Dreiser Studies* 22.1 (1991): 48-9.
- 91.67 ---. Review of Norton Critical Edition of *Sister Carrie*, 2nd edition. *Dreiser Studies* 22.1 (1991): 50-51.
- 91.68 ---. "The Dummy of *The Hand of the Potter*." West 91.81, pp. 288-99.
 Demonstrates that the 1918 publisher's dummy is based on the missing unrevised galleys and thus, when compared to the holograph and revised page proofs, offers clues as to the nature and extent of Dreiser's revisions before and after submitting the play to Boni and Liveright.
- 91.69 Ryan, Bryan, ed. *Major 20th-Century Writers: A Selection of Sketches from Contemporary Authors*. Gale Research, 1991.

871-76.

- 91.70 “‘Sister Carrie’: Breaking Walls and Traditions.” *People’s Light Journal* 1 (1991): 1-2.
Reviews production of *Sister Carrie* by People’s Light and Theater Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania.
- 91.71 Smith, James F. “Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*: A Dreiser Novel for the 1980’s.” *Journal of American Culture* 14.3 (1991): 43-51.
Draws parallels between Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* and Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Finds naturalistic elements in both authors’ treatment of the individual in an urban setting.
- 91.72 “Snooty Putdowns?” *Dreiser Studies* 22.2 (1991): 46-50.
Presents an exchange of letters between Robert H. Elias and Arun Mukherjee in which Elias defends himself against Mukherjee’s charge that he initiated a trend of “snooty putdowns” of Dreiser and Mukherjee defends her original contention.
- 91.73 Stenerson, Douglas C. “Some Impressions of the Buddha: Dreiser and Sir Edwin Arnold’s ‘The Light of Asia.’ ” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 22.3 (1991): 387-405.
Demonstrates the influence of Arnold’s poem on Dreiser’s understanding of Buddhism and suggests parallels between Buddhism and Dreiser’s own beliefs.
- 91.74 Stillinger Jack. *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. New York: Oxford, 1991. 157-62 passim.
Considers *Sister Carrie* “an epitomizing example” of “collaborative authorship” and criticizes the editors of the Pennsylvania Edition for attempting to produce what is only “a hypothetical ideal,” a purely authorial text based on the holograph.
- 91.75 Takeda, Miyoko. *The Quest for the Reality of Life: Dreiser’s Spiritual and Esthetical Pilgrimage*. American University Studies IV: English Language and Literature. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.
Analyzes *The “Genius,” The Bulwark,* and *The Stoic* as stages in Dreiser’s search for an absolute “Reality.” Finds a movement from the aesthetic to the spiritual, with Dreiser

finally arriving at a form of "Dreiserian Hinduism" that reconciles "the beauty of women and the beauty of Brahman."

- 91.76 Tractenberg, Alan. "Who Narrates? Dreiser's Presence in *Sister Carrie*." Pizer 91.54, pp. 87-122.
 Discovers in *Sister Carrie* a "hybrid narrative-discursive method" that reveals the unconscious feelings and desires of his inarticulate characters and transvalues values by establishing a perspective both inside and outside "the popular, the demotic, the vulgar." Finds Dreiser's treatment of consciousness strikingly similar to that of William James.
- 91.77 Traister, Daniel. "Dreiser and Libraries." *PACSCL News* 1.2 (1991): 1-8.
- 91.78 Tuerk, Richard. "The *American Spectator* Symposium: Was Dreiser Anti-Semitic?" *Prospects* 16 (1991): 367-89.
 Examines Dreiser's public and private statements about Jews during the mid-1930s. Concludes that despite his denials of anti-Semitism Dreiser consistently expressed anti-Semitic attitudes that "hurt the Jews markedly at one of the worst times in history for a person of his stature to do so."
- 91.79 Updike, John. "Not Quite Adult." *New Yorker* 66.48 (1991): 89-92.
 Provides a biographical sketch of Dreiser. Discusses Dreiser's stylistic flaws but finds in his work a redeeming "maverick naturalness" that gives him "a lantern glow of the heroic."
- 91.80 Waldmeir, John Christian. "Individual Trinities: Time, God, and Mammon in *The American Trilogy*." Diss. U of Chicago, Divinity School, 1991.
- 91.81 West, James L.W. III, ed. Theodore Dreiser Issue. *Papers on Language and Literature* 27 (1991): 139-304.
 Presents a special issue of the journal devoted to the life and works of Dreiser. Contains 11 previously unpublished items annotated elsewhere in this bibliography: A91.6, 91.7, 91.10, 91.17, 91.19, 91.27, 91.48, 91.57, 91.58, 91.62, 91.65.

Reviews

***The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*, by Christophe Den Tandt. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998. 288 pp. Cloth \$49.95. Paper \$18.95.**

It comes as no surprise to Dreiserians that the new generation of scholars continues to struggle with American naturalism's divided nature. Call it, as Charles Child Walcott did, positivism versus transcendentalism; as Eliseo Vivas termed it, inconsistency in mechanist thought; as many have found in it, the old dichotomy of free will versus determinism; or as Den Tandt posits, something else entirely. The premise of this weighty new rereading of Dreiser and his fellow naturalists and realists Frank Norris, William Dean Howells, and their contemporaries is that naturalism, using the "plurivocal approach [to] an unrepresentable social world" (xi), exists in a dialogic interplay with the romantic sublime. To read naturalism in general and Dreiser in particular in terms of the naturalist urban sublime, phrased sans Bakhtinian language, is to attempt a way into the terror and wonder, the grim documentary truths and discourses of desire. At the core, then, of the knowable Dreiserian metropolis, so tempting to classify, muckrake, or extol, is a sense that human beings are unconsciously aware of a great unknowable, forces whose influence can only be sensed. For how else is one to explain the duality between what Dreiser saw as the inexorable Progressive-era economic/social reshaping of urban order and his own "vitalist" vision of instinctual striving?

Does this thesis sound ambitiously radical for an understanding of the profit-driven, manipulative, victimizing, and generally hardball Dreiserian surround? Indeed. Den Tandt, however, builds an impressively rigorous argument for what he terms "Dreiser's sublime economic vision" (246). Den Tandt

tackles the contested terrain of the commodified city, remorseless as it is seductive, capitalistically comprehensible as it is subject to the illogic of merciless forces outstripping the simple market society of producer and consumer. Contextualizing Carrie's rise and Hurstwood's fall within these opposing forces, Den Tandt constructs a brilliant critical structure on which to understand what in earlier decades seemed to be a clash between Dreiser's "Victorian" pseudo-science (recall those ambiguous references to "chemisms") and his modern economic understanding.

Even the above explanation simplifies the way Den Tandt draws both expertly and creatively on Alan Trachtenberg's "mystified city," Rachel Bowlby's "spectacle of consumerism," Frederic Jameson's "dialectic of powerlessness and exhilaration . . . the postmodern sublime," and Bakhtin's understanding of the positivism and gothic embedded in the naturalist and realist "rhetoric of terror."

The book's synthesis of diverse elements, critical schools, and Dreiserian literary thesis and antithesis, however, seems at times in service to its own thesis, as when describing Dreiser's "failed" urban sublime (43, 66). Coming full circle to the tension between success and failure, empowerment and victimization at the crux of literary critical studies of naturalism, Den Tandt concedes that it is "impossible to resolve or interpret this contradiction through an intrinsic reading of the text" (66). While it is generally agreed that the New Criticism of past decades is a limited way into the text, this reader wonders whether the term "sublime" itself, instead of one less linked to the sacral and the ineffable, does not somewhat hamper the discussion. Phrased more jocularly, can an American city ever contain an element of the sublime?

This said, though, the book clearly provides the Dreiser community with a new and tremendously valuable set of critical tools. Dreiser scholars must now integrate or challenge the Den Tandt argument that "Dreiser constructs a cosmic soul of his urban scene" (61). In bringing, to use his terminology, a supernatural dimension to Dreiser's mental universe, Den Tandt has written an important book.

—Laura Hapke, Pace University

Harbingers of a Century: The Novels of Frank Norris,
by Lawrence E. Hussman. New York: Peter Lang,
1999. 224 pp. Paper \$23.95

One of Dreiser's most undervalued virtues is his sense of historicity, as Frederic Jameson defines it: the ability to see the present with enough detachment as to regard it as part of a historical trajectory. Dreiser used his fiction, set ostensibly in the nineteenth century, as a vehicle to seek meaning in his turn-of-the-century present through a forward-looking perspective. It is not fashionable to say this so unreservedly, because he was a man, and men have their faults, to say nothing of artistic shortcomings. But there is a lot to be admired in any such attempt when so many are timid and apologetic. And though (perhaps because) our age is *so* retrospective, as one sepulchered, literary father continues to admonish us, and we still write histories, biographies, and criticism, no one has yet produced the study that convincingly shows the prophetic Dreiser to us. Fortunately, we have an instructive, parallel example.

A century ago, Frank Norris was one of those brash few to seek the new under the sun, as Lawrence E. Hussman ably reminds us in *Harbingers of a Century: The Novels of Frank Norris*. Contrary to the popular notion that the author was a "throwback to the nineteenth century," Hussman argues, through an interweaving of close reading with theory, biography, concise plot summary, intertextual comparisons, and textual/documentary analysis, that Norris represents an "important transitional figure" into the twentieth century and modernism/postmodernism (x-xi). Specifically, the study's contribution is to treat Norris' philosophical meanderings in his novels as a serious attempt to arrive at an existential system of ethics in the new age deprived considerably of religious faith. In this regard, Norris was, reversing Joseph McElrath's assessment, a naturalist who used humanist methods, "first adopt[ing] the skepticism of the Materialist philosophy, and later append[ing] it with an ethical code of love and

compassion" (185). He thus not only echoes contemporaries like Dreiser and Crane, but anticipates writers like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Sherwood Anderson.

The moral trajectory Hussman discerns in Norris' *oeuvre* makes sense of what have often been seen as troubling inconsistencies, from the "romantic" subplots of *McTeague* to the disjunctively optimistic ending of *The Octopus*. "In deterministic novels [like *Vandover and the Brute*] with their typically weak-willed characters, desire or apathy nearly always wins out over duty. In Norris' later novels, however, although they will be equally deterministic, duty will take precedence" (34). What enabled this transformation in Norris' themes, evident even in his "popular" (read "bad") novels like *A Man's Woman*, was his recognition that "compassion for humanity . . . begins with love and respect for a particular person. This approach to understanding the many, by extrapolating their worth from the valued one, constitutes Norris's ultimate recommendation for a postreligious ethical system" (129). Hussman acknowledges that Norris, even in his best works, failed to create a fully realized artistic vision consonant with this theme, nor could the writer articulate *why* "men, simply specks of dust, owed each other any particular consideration" (159), a dynamic seen most famously and concisely in Crane's "The Open Boat." That *why*, the basis for a "new moral imperative" divorced from the demands of religion, has occupied the great writers of the twentieth century, from its "advance scouts" to those composing this day.

The study uses the same chronological chapter-per-book format familiar to Dreiserians from older studies like those of Philip Gerber, Richard Lehan, etc. But Hussman considerably freshens this somewhat dated approach through constant comparisons of the main work under consideration to Norris' other novels and to a wide range of works by American authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In so doing, the study recurs directly and obliquely to its thesis with startling regularity—I say "startling" because one observes Hussman's thesis evolving along with Norris' career, maturing from the general to the specific, in a manner that never induces readerly lethargy, a common side-effect of many thesis-driven critical

books.

Because of his adherence to his agenda of taking Norris' philosophy seriously, Hussman is not timid about offering up Norris' themes often and authoritatively. His expert use of textual evidence goes a long way in justifying what can thus be (mis)taken as a strictly New Critical approach. Fans of authorial ambiguity, however, will find that Hussman makes no attempt to dissolve it in making his own case: for instance, despite Norris' self-professed didacticism as a "Novel[ist] with a Purpose" and the apparent "moral message of *The Octopus*," Hussman respects "the novel's very philosophical open-endedness. Rather than supplying 'the Answer,' the novel invites us to entertain many 'answers.' We are freer to agree or disagree with Presley at its end than would be the case if Norris, through the omniscient narrator, were more openly guiding our interpretation" (160). Hussman thus runs against the grain of much criticism that has underanalyzed characters like Presley, dismissing them as Norris' mouthpieces. The critic reveals the complexity of Norris' use of voice and point-of-view, thus further legitimizing him as a writer of great literature.

Besides the obvious, implicit parallels, Dreiserians will find plenty in Hussman's study to pique their interest. Direct comparisons and contrasts between Norris' work and Dreiser's number about two dozen—which is not surprising, considering Hussman authored the now-indispensable *Dreiser and his Fiction: A Twentieth Century Quest* in the early 1980s. For those who admired the dry wit Hussman brought to the subject of Dreiser's often humorless novels, it continues but little muted in the Norris study. For example, the critic assesses Annie Derrick of *The Octopus* as "representative of that effete group of Americans who believe that if they lead a good life on their native soil, they'll die and go to Europe" (138). And as Hussman consistently defends Norris against stubborn myths and charges ranging from his supposed avoidance of sexuality to downright prudery in his works, comparisons to Dreiser, perhaps one of the most problematic figures in the literary history of sexuality, are inevitable (84). Other intertextual analyses between Dreiser's and Norris' works, on the grounds of parallel themes, deterministic philosophy, gender, plot/

composition, point-of-view, and mutual influence, can be found in abundance.

Hussman concludes with an excellent short chapter arguing for the continuing relevance of reading “naturalists” like Norris, Crane, and Dreiser, whose works “reopen[ed] the debate about free will” which authors in the ensuing century have consistently attempted, unsuccessfully, to solve (204). The debates over the rights of animals and their kinship with human beings, over humanism’s place in a world of declining religious faith, over violence in art and society—all these issues and more were not just heralded by, but deeply embedded in, the “naturalist” works of a century ago. The seekers for meaning in the coming century may just make advances over their literary fathers, if they heed works like Norris’ and Hussman’s.

—Shawn St. Jean, State University of New York College at Fredonia

News & Notes

Donald Pizer, who is preparing a new edition of Dreiser’s letters, would appreciate hearing about letters in little-known public repositories or in private hands. He can be reached at the Department of English, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118, or by e-mail: dpizer@mailhost.tcs.tulane.edu

Philip Gerber, professor of English at SUNY-Brockport, has been named Distinguished Professor by the SUNY Board of Trustees. Phil earned his doctorate from the University of Iowa and has taught at SUNY-Brockport since 1966. Besides having written a number of books and articles on composition, he has ranged widely across twentieth-century American literature in his scholarly career. While others may know him better for his work on Willa Cather and Robert Frost, readers of *Dreiser Studies* know him best for his contributions to the Dreiser renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s. His Twayne *Theodore Dreiser* (1964) is a standard work, and his several studies of the Cowperwood trilogy have achieved like stature. From the first issue of the *Dreiser Newsletter* in 1970, Phil has been a frequent contributor to

this journal and has long served on its editorial board.

Miriam Gogol has just returned from Ostrava University in the Czech Republic, where she was a Senior Fulbright Scholar. They kept her very busy—when she wasn't teaching courses on gender and American Literature (with Dreiser as a central example), she was repeatedly invited to co-teach and give presentations to the faculty. She's happy to report that Dreiser is experiencing a renaissance there in the 1990s. Virtually all of her Master's level students have read *An American Tragedy*, and they were knowledgeable about his other major novels.

The Dreiser Society will host two sessions at the American Literature Association Annual Conference, 25-28 May 2000, at the Hyatt Regency Long Beach, in Long Beach, CA. For further information, visit the Dreiser Society web site: <http://www.uncwil.edu/dreiser/> or the ALA web site: <http://www.americanliterature.org>

Dreiser Essay Prize

The International Theodore Dreiser Society is pleased to announce the First Annual Dreiser Essay Prize. The award is sponsored by the Dreiser Society and is given annually to the graduate student or untenured Assistant Professor who submits the best previously unpublished essay on any aspect of the work of the American writer Theodore Dreiser.

Applicants may submit essays that consider any part of Dreiser's corpus, or that connect his life or work to those of other writers or to his times. In addition to a cash award of \$250, the winning essay will appear in *Dreiser Studies*, a refereed journal sponsored by the Society. Other worthy essays besides the winner will be considered for publication as well.

Essays should follow MLA style. Applicants should not identify themselves on the essay but should instead provide their names, addresses (including email address), and "Dreiser Essay Prize Competition" on a separate cover page. Submit *three* copies of the essay by May 15, 2000, to:

Stephen Brennan, Chair
Dreiser Essay Prize Committee
Department of English
Louisiana State University in Shreveport
Shreveport, LA 71115
email: iroki2@aol.com

A Sister Carrie Centenary

Theodore Dreiser's great novel *Sister Carrie* will mark the 100th anniversary of its first publication on 8 November 2000. In celebration of the event, the International Dreiser Society, together with the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, will host "A Sister Carrie Centenary" in Philadelphia, on the Penn campus, 9-11 November 2000.

The Centenary, sponsored also by the University of Pennsylvania Press and by Kelly Writers House at Penn, will involve Dreiser scholars and critics, Penn faculty and students, alumni of the university, and Dreiser readers from the Philadelphia area and elsewhere.

The Centenary celebration will open on the 9th of November with a public lecture by the essayist and critic Joseph Epstein, recently retired as editor of *The American Scholar* and a longtime Dreiser admirer and advocate. The lecture will coincide with the opening of a major exhibit at the Van Pelt Library of *Sister Carrie* materials from Dreiser's papers at Penn and from other libraries and collections.

Also planned are a production of *Under the Gaslight*, the Augustin Daly melodrama in which Carrie makes her theatrical debut in Chicago, and a performance of the songs of Paul Dresser, Dreiser's brother, by Tedi Dreiser Godard, the author's grandniece.

The Centenary will include a Dreiser film festival, with showings of *Sister Carrie*, *A Place in the Sun*, and *My Gal Sal*; a panel session with three Dreiser biographers; a scholarly session on the texts of *Sister Carrie*; and a session on women in Dreiser's fiction.

Also planned are alumni book talks led by Dreiser scholars and Penn faculty members, an online alumni book club, and an event website: <http://celebrate250.library.upenn.edu/celebrate/carrie/carrie-index.html>

To receive information about the conference, including plans for the scholarly sessions, send your name, address, and e-mail address to :

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