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Autobiographical tendencies in the novels of Theodore Dreiser

Carroll, Alice Mary
Boston University

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Autobiographical Tendencies in the Novels of Theodore Dreiser
by
Alice Cary Carroll
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# Outline

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The Purpose of This Thesis

In the following thesis it is my intention to show the interrelation of Dreiser's novels and his life. To do this it will be necessary to give a rather detailed biography of not only Dreiser but of his entire family, as well as a brief mention of the period to which he was born.

Robert Shafer in *Humanism and America* has said that all of Dreiser's novels are "tales of human irresponsibility, constructed to illustrate life's contradiction of the hollow conventions of society and life's obedience to blind laws which make the individual's experience a chaos with an end unrelated to desert." (1) The reader, I think, will agree that Dreiser could write novels of no other type if he were to describe life as he knew it.

1. "Humanism and America"—Edited by Norman Foerster. p. 162
II

Biography of Dreiser

A. Introduction

A brief discussion of the conditions existing at the time of Dreiser's birth may prove helpful to a better understanding of the man.

For several years prior to his birth the history of industrialism had been undergoing a change. Transportation became cheap and rapid. The Crimean War created a high demand abroad for our commodities. The telegraph ruled time and space. Railroads were being constructed everywhere. Bigness and the spirit of Chicago was born. Population tripled in the next fifty years and capital was greatly changed. Up to approximately 1850 the merchant had done business with his own capital unaided. He had been obliged to invest heavily in stocks of merchandise and the turn-over had been necessarily slow because of lack of transportation facilities. His margin of profit had to be, therefore, large, but with the development of transportation and means of communication (railroad, telegraph, and telephone) and with the growth of banking facilities, the conditions of doing business were decidedly changed. Naturally the turn-over was much faster because people could go oftener to shop and also the merchant could borrow from two-thirds to three-
quarters credit. The aristocracy of business was destroyed thus by opening the field to men without capital. (1) This industrial revolution changed the whole spirit of American life. In place of romantic spirit born of youth and provincialism, and the dreams of immigrants, a spirit of materialism was springing up with increasing masses of population, and soon financial panics brought a feeling of disillusion to the East. The West still overflowed with a spirit of youth, and constantly it was crowding into the over populated East where, as the people dreamed, was opportunity, culture, and romance. Into this new age, here a revision of valuations was taking place, where "materialism was in the saddle"(2), where the demand was for the concrete thing, Theodore Dreiser was born.

B. His Family

His father was German by birth, a native of the region which borders on Belgium. He came to America in 1844 to escape conscription and to make his fortune. He was a weaver by trade and although he had considerable skill, as well as business ability, he was "of a mind and temperament so circumscribed by his eventually very high fanatical adherence to the Roman Catholic faith as to be entirely unsuited for the hum-

ming world of commerce"(1).

After his marriage at Dayton, Ohio, he moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he became production manager of a woolen mill. Later he went to Sullivan where he built a mill and went into business for himself. For a few years he prospered, but one spring he persuaded the surrounding farmers to deposit their season's fleece in the sheds about his mill, and it was destroyed by fire before any insurance had been placed upon it. Since he believed that "if one died owing money, heathen or Christian though he be, the flames of purgatory would have to surcease him of the injustice"(2), he felt his soul's salvation depended upon his paying dollar for dollar for all that had been destroyed; thus he was all but ruined financially.

While he was rebuilding (on borrowed capital), a beam fell and struck his head and shoulder, destroying the hearing of one ear and bringing on a long and painful brain illness. While he was thus ill, his mother was swindled out of the deeds of some properties and also some first and second mortgages, so that all his local wealth was lost.

This disaster, followed by the death of his first three children, completely broke his spirit. He concerned himself much more with the hereafter than the now. "One

1. "Dawn"--Theodore Dreiser. P. 3
2. "Dawn"--Theodore Dreiser. P. 524
needed to know him neither long nor intimately to learn that
to him God was a blazing reality, with the Son and Blessed
Virgin to the right and left, and the Holy Spirit, in the share
of a dove, hovering over all. His faith in the Catholic
Church, its Pope and priests, was implicit. He accepted liter­
ally the infallibility of the Pope, the Immaculate Conception,
the chastity and spirituality of all priests and nuns, trans­
substantiation on the altar, forgiveness of sins, communion and
the like. Never have I known a man more obsessed by a reli­
gious belief."(1).

He soon moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, where Theodore
was born. Here he spent much time in enforced idleness caused
by "shut downs" at the mills. Although one of the Ellis
Brothers, who controlled a well known Wabash mill, said that
Mr. Dreiser lacked only courage to become one of the most suc­
cessful woolen manufacturers, he failed to appreciate his own
value and lacked initiative. He was too lost in religious
zealotry to seek new enterprises.

His personality was somewhat driving, dictatorial,
and authoritative, but if he had been able to disentangle his
personality from religion, he might have been tender and mild
in his views. He was really a pathetic example of a beaten and
psychically depressed man.

His mother was of Pennsylvania Dutch origin, of

Dunkard or Mennonite faith. Her relatives were energetic farmers. She had run away to marry Dreiser's father as her family bitterly opposed him because of his allegiance to the Catholic faith.

Dreiser speaks of her as "a strange, sweet, dreamy woman, who did not know how life was organized; who was quick to forget the miseries of the past and contemplate the comforts of the present, or, those wanting, the possibilities of the future; who traveled romantically a colorful and, to her, for all its ills, beautiful world. She was, after her fashion, a poet who suffers much, yet unfailingly and irresistibly continues to contemplate beauty—her one enduring earthly reward"(1).

His mother was the center of all his experiences in his youth and exercised a curiously binding spirit over all her children. They all adored her and could not stay away from her very long at a time. Even the worst of her sons came home at irregular periods because he craved to see her. Another son dedicated a song to her, "I Believe It for My Mother Told Me So," and Theodore had almost an Gedipus-Jocasta complex. In "A Foolish Holiday" he says of her: "I had one of the most perfect mothers ever a man had—an open, uneducated, wondering, dreaming mind, none of the customary, conscious principles with which so many conventional souls are afflicted. A happy, hopeful, animal mother with a desire to live, and not much con-

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 10
structive ability wherewith to make real her dreams. A pagan taken over into Catholicism at marriage, because she loved a Catholic and would follow love anywhere. A great poet mother, because she loved fables and fairies and half believed in them, and once saw the Virgin Mary standing in our garden (this was in Sullivan) blue robes, crown, and all, and was sure it was she. She loved the trees and the flowers and the clouds and the sound of the wind, and was wont to cry over tales of poverty almost as readily as over poverty itself, and to laugh over the mannequin fol-de-rols of all too-responsive souls. A great hearted mother—loving, tender, charitable, who loved the ne'er do well a little better than those staid favorites of society who keep all laws."(1). Obviously Theodore inherited his great love of nature and his sympathy for all the unfortunates.

His mother worked and slaved most of her life, running a boarding house, taking in washing, going out to clean, doing anything and everything which might tend to keep her family from starving. Tragically, she never lived to see the better days. Her death caused him to suffer a profound emotional and philosophic shake-up.

Following the first three children who died, there were ten, five boys and five girls. The eldest was Paul, who at a very early age got in with bad boys and forged a note in his father's name. Even before this he had been arrested and

put in jail with several others on the suspicion of robbing a
store. While it was never proved, it required considerable
money to get him out and since the Dresers were in straight-
ened circumstances, the money had to be borrowed. Not long
after he was released, he smuggled some powder to a fellow-
prisoner still in the jail, who threw it in the eyes of the
keeper and thus escaped. It required great influence to con-
vince the authorities that it was merely a sympathetic and
foolish action of a boy under the control of strong and shrewd
leaders.

After his release a second time from jail, he dared
not enter his home for fear of his father's wrath, so lurked in
an outhouse, signaling his mother, who finally managed to have
him sent to the farm of a relative of hers.

The work here proved to be very heavy and since he
received no recompense except food and shelter, he left one
night, with no money and almost rags for clothes, arriving
finally at the home of a Catholic priest in Indianapolis. This
man had once ministered in Terre Haute and proved to be a real
Samaritan to Paul. He bought him a suit of clothes, gave him a
room and meals in his parish house, and some money to start
again.

Finally he connected himself with an itinerant cure-
call company, a troupe which traveled like gypsies from town to
town. The product sold was "Hamlin's Wizard Oil." His ability to sing and play had secured for him this position.

During these travels, he discovered that he could write comic songs and, making up with burnt cork, he earned some fame as a minstrel. At the end of three years he accepted a very good offer from one of the best minstrel companies of that day. His position was that of monologist, interlocutor, and "end man."

Soon after this, he returned home at a time when his mother was in dire need of financial aid, and before long, through the assistance of a "Madam" of a "house of ill repute," he removed his mother from these trying circumstances to a small, brick cottage in Evansville.

By this time he had already issued a pamphlet containing comic songs, called "The Paul Breiser Songster." He had felt that change of name suitable to his stage life.

Of all Breiser's brothers, he was by far the most successful, working himself up from "end man" to star of a claptrap melodrama, and finally connecting himself as a third partner in a song-publishing business which was to publish his own and other songs. Theodore often thought of him as Gray had "in regard to unknown Miltons and Caesars walking obscure ways in obscure places. For here was one of those great Falstaffian souls who, for lack of a little iron or sodium or
carbon dioxide in his chemical compost, was not able to be-
stride the world like a Colossus.

"---I can think of him now, with his large range of sym-
pathies and interests, as easily condensed or elaborated into
a Henry VIII, say, or an Omar (of the caliphat) or a shrewd
Saladin or a Leo X. A little more selfishness, a little more
iron of licithin, maybe; as it was, with these missing, he
could only sing, jest, and grow fat."(l).

Theodore also felt that Paul sympathized with, his
intellectual and artistic point of view better than any other member
of his family subsequent to his mother's death. It was Paul
who first suggested to him that he be a writer and had once set
him to the task of composing a humorous essay. Yet he felt
that Paul never quite understood what he was driving at. "His
world (Paul's) was that of the popular song, the middle-class
actor or comedian, the middle-class comedy, and such humorous
esthetes of the writing world as Bill Nye, Petroleum V. Nasby,
and the authors of the "Skoopendyke Papers" and "Samantha at
Saratoga." As far as I could make out—and I say this in no
lofty, condescending spirit—he was full of simple middle-class
romance, middle-class humor, middle-class tenderness, and
middle-class grossness—-all of which I am very free to say
I admire.---------But there is so very much more to be said of
him,----- For my brother was a humorist of so tender and

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 112

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delicate a mold that to speak of him as a mere middle-class artist or middle-class thinker and composer, would be to do him a gross injustice and miss the entire significance and flavor of his being. His tenderness and sympathy, a very human appreciation of his weakness and errors as well as the toils and tribulations of most of us, was his most outstanding and engaging quality and gave him a very definite force and charm. Admitting that he had an intense, possibly an undue fondness for women (I have never been able to discover just where the dividing line is to be drawn in such matters), a frivolous, childish, horse-play sense of humor at times, still he had other qualities that were positively adorable. That sunny disposition, that vigorous, stout body and nimble mind, those smiling sweet blue eyes, that air of gayety and well-being that was with him nearly all the time, even at the most trying times! Life seemed to bubble in him. Hope sprang upward like a fountain.----He seemed to radiate a kind of comforting sunshine and humor without a sharp edge or sting (satire was entirely beyond him), a kind of wilding asinity, your true clown in cap and bells, which caused even my morbid soul to chortle by the hour."(1).

Some of his songs achieved great popularity, such as "The Letter That Never Came", "The Pardon Came Too Late", "I Believe It for My Mother Told Me So", and "The Bowery."

1. "Newspaper Days"--Theodore Dreiser. P. 346
So much did Theodore admire his eldest brother that he included him in his book entitled "Twelve Men", and had in mind writing a novel about him.

The next son was called Marcus Romanus, but always known as Rome. This boy was always a problem, for although strong and handsome physically, he developed "into a vain glorious, determined and yet mistaken youth, who seemed to feel that the world was made for him, not he for it." (l). By the age of seventeen or eighteen, Rome had already developed characteristics which were unprofitable to himself and all intimately connected with him. He was frequently drinking and gambling and had allied himself with a group of loafing youths who were trying to make their way by their wits rather than by humdrum labor. All of the money which he won by gambling he devoted to drink and adventures with girls of a loose type. He never thought of anyone but himself, and he had an air of ironic superiority toward all who prospered.

Finally he left home and worked as a "train butcher" (popcorn, peanuts, candy!) All the latest magazines and papers! At odd times he would return for a short period, but long enough to disgrace the family. The intervals between these visits were spent in wandering in all sorts of places—Mexico, Honduras, California, etc. He never said good-bye, but would just say he was going out for a little while, and then they

would neither hear nor see more of him for perhaps two or three years. As the years passed, he became more of a waster and drinker, and the family came to dread these periodic visits, for they meant little more "than drunkenness, imposition, clashes with the local police and fines to be paid by some member of the family, followed by tearful repentances and promises to lead a better life and find work—at the end of which time he was to "wear diamonds" and do something for us all—and then another sudden departure, more postal cards, more returns, and so on. He seemed to be possessed of an incurable lust for wandering as well as a desire to unravel the mysteries of a phase of life considered unmentionable. Saloons, gambling houses, low dives, constituted the centres of his interest."(1).

On one particular occasion, he suddenly appeared in Sullivan, and finding that Paul was so popular and well placed there, immediately proceeded to advertise himself as his brother, borrowing money, drinking, gambling, passing worthless checks, and presently landing in jail. Paul, by making good the checks and by using his influence, got him released from jail. Soon after, he, in company with another wastrel, climbed into a buggy which stood hitched to a post and drove off, visiting saloon after saloon and finally leaving the buggy in an outlying livery stable. They were soon apprehended and arrested on a charge of grand larceny. Much maneuvering on the part

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 152

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of Paul again freed him, but this time Paul insisted that the
pardon be granted on the condition that Rome leave the city im-
mediately. It was three years or more before he was heard from
again.

The only redeeming trait possessed by this son was
his love for his mother. At the time of her death he was away
and since the family never knew where, it was impossible to no-
tify him. However, three weeks later he suddenly appeared in
the real estate office where Theodore was then working, and
said he had had a dream in which she had appeared on a black
horse and had asked him why he did not come home. He knew, he
said, that she was either dead then or going to die. When he
found that his fears were true, he burst into heavy, guttural
wooping and exclaimed, "I knew it! I knew it! The only friend
I ever had, the only friend. And she always wanted me to do
better?" (1). Learning that she was still in a vault in St.
Boniface Cemetery, he went there at once and spent the whole
afternoon in the vault alone with her.

Alphonse Joachim, shortened to Al, and occasionally
to Jake if the family wished to taunt him, was the next eldest
of the sons. When Theodore was still quite young, Al was sent
to a half-sister of his mother's, who with her husband farmed
a fairly good size tract of land near North Manchester, in
Northern Indiana. At the end of two years he returned, greatly

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 522
developed physically, and soon secured a position as a varnish in a coffin factory in Chicago. When the family moved to Evansville, he returned and secured a place first in a barber shop, then as a train boy on a local passenger train, and finally as varnisher in a chair factory. Theodore helped him often on Saturday afternoons to gold-leaf a design upon kitchen chairs. Again he left for Chicago for a prolonged period, returning to Warsaw for a stay of several months. His great desire at this time was to be a black-face or Irish comedian and he was really talented along these lines, being witty and having a knack for devising outlandish costumes as well as popular or comic songs and "lines" or gags. He did finally succeed in organizing a local minstrel show, taking it to four or five surrounding towns, but the financial return was not sufficient, so he was compelled to return to Chicago where he settled to electrical work.

Theodore always speaks of him as his small and different sort of brother, "Always when I think of him, I think of a natural intelligence thwarted by untoward conditions."(1). He was genial, sincere, industrious, trying hard always to amount to something. His taste for literature and artistic things in general was high, but entirely untrained. He was always interested in the color and the beauty of life. He had a good sense of humor and, much like his brother Paul, was fond

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 147
of imitating people, their languages, facial expressions, and
gestures. He had once a keen desire to become a writer, but
he seemed to be frustrated by the thought that he was not suf-
ficiently educated and also that he needed a small capital
whereon to lean while getting a start. "Too little force, say
you? Too poor a grip on his dreams? Very likely. Yet his
dreams cut and burned, making of his early life a yearning
search and of his later years a series of bitter disappoint-
ments. We crave so much and win so little, the majority of
us."(1).

The youngest of the boys was Edward Minorod, usually
called Ed, who was two years younger than Theodore and his
playmate and boon companion from the time he was five until he
was seventeen and left home. This brother was the soul of
physical activity, being very adept at all sports: baseball,
football, shinny, skating, swimming, anything at all. As a
playmate he was most generous, and would share half of every-
thing he won with Theodore, but he could be as stubborn and un-
reasoning as a mule. It was only by force that he was made to
attend school in Evansville.

In Chicago it was due to Ed that Theodore came to be
newsboy. He was always very quick to associate himself with
one type of urchin or another and found out about this trade
from some of them. Also many of Theodore's companions during

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser, P, 148
his youth were boys who took up with him because he was Ed's brother. Theodore says of him, "Let me say that never anywhere, I think, was there a more avid playboy or sport-lover than Ed. He was tireless in his pursuit of pleasure after this fashion--------Yet a greater dullard at books never lived. I can safely say that up to the age of fourteen, to say nothing of a much later period, and outside of such general knowledge as he gained at work or play, he knew nothing at all.--------Never once, up to the age of twenty at least, did I see him pick up a book and attempt to read it.------Girls interested him not much more than books."(1).

Theodore lived with this brother after he had broken away from the family awhile, and when on a visit to Chicago he found Ed merely driving a laundry wagon, he suggested he come to St. Louis and try his luck there. Subsequently he did, but not finding work, returned to Chicago. Some years later, Theodore again persuaded him to join him in New York and this time aided him until he became self-supporting.

To his sisters Dreiser has chosen to give different names in his autobiographies and to disregard the order of their birth; therefore, let us discuss them in the following order: Mary (sometimes called Eleanor); Theresa (Ruth); Emma (Janet); Sylvia (Amy); Claire (Tillie and Trina).

Mary, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, met a Colonel Silsby (the name is fictitious) a prominent lawyer and official. "Dawn"--Theodore Dreiser. P. 202.
holder in Terre Haute. The introduction was given by the family physician who chanced to meet him one day just as he was leaving the Dreiser home. A short time later this colonel, seeing Mary eye longingly the hats in a milliner's window, at Easter-tide, and knowing the family's financial status, asked her if she wouldn't like one of the hats. She promptly replied she would and he gave her ten dollars. Her mother, having no moral bias or social training, allowed her to keep the money, and afterwards when misfortune pressed severely, more beneficences were accepted from this man. It was he who got Paul out of jail for the second time. Of course, this friendship ended in intimacy.

It was Mary who was persuaded by Rome to call on the president of a local lumber company, famed for his generosity, and to beg him for a loan of fifty dollars—to pay the rent, say------. This she did and although most of the fifty was squandered by this young waster, it made it seem less evil in the eyes of Mary to accept the aid of the Colonel.

When the mother and the three youngest children left Terre Haute, this daughter remained behind to work, but since this elderly admirer would not hear of her working in the mill, he secured for her a clerkship in a local dry goods store, for which she was to say she was paid more than she received, allowing him to make up the difference. In the fall he induced her to leave this position and enter a private school east of
Terre Haute, but at the end of the first term, she returned to her mother, then living in Sullivan.

She soon, however, went to work in Chicago and at the boarding house where she was employed, she met the son of a wealthy dry goods merchant in the East, Harahan, as Dreiser chooses to call him, who came there to gamble. Finally they married, but considering himself above her intellectually, socially and in every other way, he decided, for some time at least, to maintain a residence on the north side in Chicago, instead of taking her East where his people lived. Before long she and her husband went to live with the Dreisers.

This marriage made Mary feel much above the rest of her family, for though the Harahans were little more than a new-rich Irish Catholic family, with "not a novel intellectual or artistic idea among them",(1) yet Mary being unaccustomed to anything so pretentious and having no artistic standards whatsoever to fall back upon, was duly impressed by their "huge commonplace house set in a great lawn, carriages, the standardized furniture and doings of their day and neighborhood."------

She desired to be worthy of it, and being worthy of it meant that she must give herself airs, dress to the extreme limit of her purse, and do her best to inculcate her new conceptions of taste and culture into the remaining members of her family."(2).

After the death of the mother, this domination and

air of superiority became so unbearable that Theodore, Ed, and
Claire left home to set up housekeeping for themselves.

Theresa, referred to in many places as Ruth "had the
artistic impulses of Marie Antoinette, also her weaknesses."(1)
She went to work for a family in Terre Haute when the family
moved to Sullivan and these people became so fond of her that
they wanted to adopt her, but because of her mother, she re-
fused the offer and soon returned to the home in Sullivan.
Later she went to Chicago where she was introduced by Mary's
friend Harahan to a wealthy manufacturer, a widower, "meticu-
rously dressed and light-treading, a springy sort of optimist
of perhaps forty or more years of age."(2). This affair ter-
minated as such affairs most frequently terminate------she was
deserted after a few years and almost broken in health. How-
ever, after prolonged treatment by the family physician, she
was restored to health and returned to Chicago, where she se-
cured a position as assistant to a dentist. Soon she formed an
acquaintance with a "literary-minded painter of photographic
backgrounds,"(3) which ripened eventually into marriage. Ex-
cept for the jealousy of his mother, this marriage proved to be
a happy one, but tragically, this sister was killed by a train
before very many years had elapsed.

Theodore always considered her to be the most inter-

3. "Dawn"--Theodore Dreiser. P. 325
esting of all his sisters, more quiet, thoughtful, and intelligent. He describes her as follows: "Her large, still contemplative blue eyes. Her heavy light hair and delicate face. Her spare and yet reasonably strong body, which with her delicate hands and feet seemed to match the softness and evenness of her voice. In all the days that I knew her I cannot recall her speaking harshly or cruelly to anyone. There was, as I have shown, a form of reserve and meditative self-balance, but little, if any, irony in any of her expressions or gestures. More than any of the girls I feel she resembled my mother, being, where she was interested, affectionate, peaceful, romantic and beauty-loving.——And she was also intelligent. In Warsaw, during her visit home to recover from that serious illness, I had found her reading some of the most valuable books of which I then knew."(1).

Emma or Janet was "simple, affectionate, motherly, not at all ambitious and only mildly practical."(2). She also went to work in Terre Haute during the winter that the family had moved to Sullivan. First she was a waitress, then a clerk in a candy store, but like her sisters in the spring she put in an appearance at Sullivan.

By this time she was more sophisticated and restless. "Attractive, her little head buzzing, no doubt, with thoughts of but three things---men, clothes, and the possibilities of

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 311

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combining the twain so as to produce a good time—a dance, a picnic, a patter of conversation—she gave a bad impression. 1. She took up with a type of youth not much hampered by the usual safe guards employed by watchful parents. Soon, however, having exhausted the charms of Sullivan, she induced Sylvia, one of her sisters, to run away with her. One of her admirers had suggested this plan, and while the sister was compelled to remain behind because of lack of funds for the train fare, Emma left to be gone for a year or more.

In Chicago this sister met an able and somewhat well-to-do, though somewhat aged, architect, and went to live with him in a hotel on South Halstead Street. The luxuries which she enjoyed here made a deep impression on the mind of Theodore who was once invited there during the absence "of the liege lord". 2.

Again she returned to the family circle at Warsaw and once more set forth to parade the streets "and to see what loafers or mashers they (she and her sister) could involve in their toils. A lack of training and social discretion, perhaps, led to certain exaggerated effects of costume and coiffure which might reasonably be described as gauche, if not bold." 3. A storm soon ensued when the father became aware of the social license into which this gay amiability was leading, and Emma was urged to go back to Chicago.

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 69
From Chicago shortly afterwards came the news of her marriage to a New York politician, "a deputy or second deputy somebody in the New York Street Cleaning Department,"[1] and also connected with Tammany Hall, one of its ward or district lieutenants. Sometime later rumors came of an expensive apartment, jewels, furs, then the birth of a boy and later a girl.

All this made Theodore speculate constantly on what was right and wrong in connection with human wishes and human conduct. Having felt that no respectable man anywhere would have such a girl as Emma, he was puzzled by the fact that a respectable Catholic man had been willing to marry her.

Later Theodore visited her in New York and found that her husband was a man about fifteen years older than she, a man that had been the rather successful manager of a wholesale drug company, reasonably well-placed socially, married, and the father of two or three children, the latter all but grown to maturity, at the time Emma had met him. They had eloped to New York and though times had been difficult after he had lost work and he had wearied of his wife and strayed elsewhere, she had proved to be one of the best wives and mothers, sacrificing much for her children.

Sylvia, whom Dreiser chooses often to call Amy, was much like Emma in temperament and these two sisters "struck up a close friendship which set them quite apart from the others.

and started them gadding around the streets, seeing the sights and making such friends as they might among the well-to-do young men of the town."(1). She was "a brown-haired, brown-eyed, pink-cheeked, plump creature----being scolded continually by the mother for her idleness and general inefficiency. She preferred to moon about.----she was all a-dream,----without any least conception of the problems that confronted her mother or herself."(2).

She said of herself in later years, "It never occurred to me that there was such a thing as a social scheme or pattern----marriage, home, children, training--to which most people adhered, or sought to.--------As a matter of fact, I really did not know what was meant by love and men. I felt myself being drawn to them, but as to consequences in connection with relations with them, I scarcely knew what that meant. My mind did not grasp the meaning of sex and its possible results.--------

"To illustrate, once mother gave me a dollar to buy a pair of slippers, and I went downtown to get them. In the first shoe store I went into, there was a young drummer standing about, only I didn't know he was a drummer. The clerk was out, and after looking me over, this man came over and said he would wait on me. 'How much do you want to pay for the slippers?' he asked. 'I just have a dollar,' I replied. 'Look at


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these,' he said, and opened a bag or small trunk in which he carried his samples. I was enraptured. There were eight or ten styles, and they seemed to me beautiful. 'How much are these?' I asked. 'Well, if any of them fit you, you can have them. They're worth four dollars, but I won't charge you anything! He leaned toward me and smiled. Of course, I was grateful and wanted the slippers. Besides, I thought he was handsome. I began to like him.'(1).

After much dilly-dallying, she not only accepted the slippers, but promised to run away with him. However, the station agent intervened as she was about to take the train, so that this episode ended safely.

Another time poor Sylvia was tempted to allow her employer at a candy factory to seduce her, but at the crucial moment, was stricken by remorse and cried so loud and long that he let her go.

Later she fell in love with one of her cousins and had it not been that he had been taken with lung trouble and removed to Arizona where he later died, this affair would have undoubtedly ended in a runaway marriage.

Very shortly after his removal to Arizona, however, Sylvia began a friendship with a local sport, philanderer, and gambler, much admired by women. His father was an ex-Colonel of the Civil War, quite well-to-do, and the family occupied a

fairly pretentious home. About a month after this friendship began, it ended, leaving Sylvia in a sad, almost hypochondriacal mood. After medicines had been tried to no avail, she confessed to her mother that she was pregnant.

The boy's family was interviewed by Sylvia but to no avail, and a doctor consulted, as well as a lawyer. Unfortunately, however, the lawyer chosen was backed politically by the boy's father, so could not have very well moved against him. Also Dr. Woolley had been for years the family physician of the culprit's family. Hence no good came of either appeal, so it was deemed best to send Sylvia to New York to Emma.

Naturally all this greatly impressed upon young Theodore the physical results of sex contact and also "the chill resentment, or at least evasive dread, which failure to conform to socially accepted arrangements invariably evokes in those who, willingly or not, bow to the conventions which inwardly they condemn. The sudden whispers, evasions, desires to avoid those who have failed to conform to the customs and taboos of any given region!"(1):

The child was sent home to be brought up by the family, while Sylvia went on being "the same sensuous, nebulous girl she had always been, self-conscious but chastened by circumstance, living, no doubt, in a world of dreams and never thinking of seeking any serious constructive employment, but

only of love, pleasure, romance"(1). Theodore describes her "as nearly always before her mirror, rouging her cheeks and lips, darkening her eyebrows and lashes, or fastening bows of ribbon on her dresses, or trying on hats, or feeling her waist and hips to see if they were trim enough to suit her. A perfect fool of a girl----. In fact, I doubt whether in all her youth she ever indulged in an unconscious laugh, smile, look, or action."(2).

Last of these five sisters was Claire, (called Tillie most frequently); a really intelligent and practical girl but lacking in warmth and sympathy. Theodore always disliked her for her critical attitude. She was always reporting the wrong doings of each member of the family to the other members, and finally succeeded in getting Ed and Theodore to leave home and live in an apartment with her. This scheme did not work very well, however, for being of a quarrelsome, fault-finding disposition and not having her sisters to fight with, she turned all of her attentions to Ed and Theodore and fussled that the burden of the work was left to her. She would have liked to have been supported by these two brothers so that she could spend all of her money on clothes. Life becoming unbearable under such conditions, Theodore and Ed left her.

Through her job in a crayon enlargement company Theodore learned much about the swindling game. This company

daily robbed the ignorant by offering to enlarge a photo for say fifty cents and, by means of introducing a ferret-holed agreement, making the person pay from seven to fourteen dollars. Needless to say, such a procedure made Theodore feel that all people were not as honest as his father had taught him to believe they were.

C. Dreiser's Youth

1. Terre Haute, Indiana.

The twelfth of thirteen children, Theodore was born August 27, 1871 at Terre Haute, Indiana. As an infant he was puny but soon developed reasonably good health. He was a very emotional and sentimental child, "a mother child" (1) hanging to her skirts as much as he was permitted.

He describes this period of his life as "a dour and despondent period which seems to have colored my life forever." (2). It was associated with much struggle on the part of his parents (the father having lost his mill and his local wealth). Here were enacted many dramas and tragedies in connection with relatives and friends. In later years he looked back upon this period as an epic. "From the time the mill burned until, after various futile attempts to right ourselves, at Sullivan and Evansville, we left this part of the country for good, it was one unbroken stretch of poverty and misery." (3).

It was a period of crucifixion for his mother and

many a day he had meagre meals, going often hungry. Whenever in later life he looked upon crowded tenements or small, shabby cottages in cheap streets, poorly-clothed children, or men with a worried look, he reverted in thought to this early period of his life and wished that life might be better organized, that "it would not permit the untrained or the inadequate to stew so persistently and helplessly in their own misery."

At the age of six, he was installed in St. Joseph's German Catholic School, a pay school. The regimen was too meagre and forbidding for his temperament, so that he felt he gained nothing from this school except some enchanting impressions of nature gained from some pictures in a primer.

2. Sullivan

Conditions having become unbearable in Terre Haute, the mother took the three youngest children to Sullivan after a very brief stay in Vincennes, where they had been the guests of a woman whom, previous to her marriage to a fire captain, had been helped by Mrs. Dreiser.

Theodore was much interested in the American-French town of Vincennes and also in the life of the fire station in which they lived. The stay was a short one, however, for his mother soon discovered that the station was really "an immoral nest."(2) Theodore also learned from this visit that all firemen were not the flawless heroes he had imagined. They

were often capable of peculation, appearing with pieces of
property taken from burning buildings. Even this early in life
he observed that all men did not abide by the Ten Commandments.

From this life in the fire station, the Dreisers
next took refuge with a family in Sullivan, the father of which
(Thomas Dooney) was a friend of Theodore's father. He was a
heavy, earnest, ignorant Irish immigrant. The time spent here
filled young Theodore with awe, pity, and disgust, for the at-
mosphere was very unpleasant. One of the sons later became a
bank robber and was electrocuted at Sing Sing under the alias
"Red Sullivan". The fact that the father of this family was
"a priest-ridden Catholic"(1) helped to sow the seeds of the
hatred which Dreiser has for the Catholic faith.

At the end of eight or ten days, the mother again
moved—this time to a small cottage, not far from one of the
mines and the town's one and only railroad yard.

Theodore considered this to be one of the most pleas-
ing periods of his youth. It was a period "compounded of inno-
cence, wonder, beauty, little or no knowledge of good and evil
or the broodings thereby entailed".(2). The eagerness of his
youth compensated for the poverty here. He was very inquisi-
tive, anxious to know; he loved to sit and gaze, drinking in
all of life, "the sensory feel and glory of it."(3).

He took great delight in watching the "through" freights and passenger trains and wondered when would come the day when he should be setting forth to see the world. If only he could become an engineer or a fireman, even a brakeman or a conductor! Do we not here see the beginning of that persistent craving for personal importance which is one of his outstanding characteristics?

The same craving is evident in his eagerness to devour every word of "Hill's Manual of Etiquette and Social and Commercial Forms", which was given to him by one of his mother's boarders. As he looked at the pictures of the seven wonders of the world, his mind mounted on wings of fancy. If only he could travel! "Ah, to have been with Washington at Valley Forge,"(1). He studied all the social forms and even the styles of penmanship used by the great men with the greatest awe.

Again we find evidence of this wish to be an important person in the fact that the realization that his family was not of a high standing caused him to have a bad inferiority complex. Since his mother had to take in washing, he had to frequently fetch the wash, and always he crept along back streets to avoid being seen. Also he and Ed were compelled to carry coal which they picked up from the railroad tracks. This made Theodore feel himself to be in a very self-meaning world.

position. He resented also, that his family had to take boarders and that his sister's escapades were placing the family's social position on a low level.

So desperate did the family's circumstances become that he became, as he says, "mentally colored or tinged with a sense of poverty or defeat and social-being in connection with the family that took years and years, and traces of which I still find darkly ensconced in certain corners of that subconscious which is a deeper and more mysterious self to me. For years, even so late as my thirty-fifth or fortieth years, the approach of winter invariably filled me with an indefinable and highly oppressive dread, and that at times when I needed not to be in dread of anything that winter or poverty, or the two together, could do to me. Similarly, any form of social distress—a wretched, down-at-the-heels neighborhood, a poor farm, an asylum, a jail, or an individual or group of individuals anywhere that seemed to be lacking in the means of subsistence or to be devoid of the normal comforts of life—was sufficient to set up in me thoughts and emotions which had a close kinship to actual and severe physical pain."(1).

Because of lack of shoes, he was obliged to remain away from school, a fact which delighted him, for always he hated the parochial school. He gained much knowledge of nature from his rambles with his dogs and also did some reading—books

of a sort, and copies of daily and weekly papers.

When it seemed the family could hold on no longer, the eldest son Paul, appeared and rendered financial aid, finally removing the family to Evansville.

3. Evansville

In this city the family lived in a large house in a remote and rural section. This change in the family's fortune was effected by the reigning courtesan of the region, then mistress to Paul.

Here Theodore began to read in an indiscriminate way, an odd mixture of books which he found in the loft of his new home. Among them were Gray's Elegy, The Deserted Village, The Traveller, Nanda, by Onida, and Lytton's Ernest Maltravers. He loved every one of them. With much interest did he also read The Family Story Paper, The Hirosida Companion, and The New York Weekly, all of which were romantic periodicals. The boys with whom he was chumming at that time introduced him to such stories as Diamond Dick, Brave and Bold, etc., and since they presented a colorful world, impossible from a practical point of view, but suggestive of the freedom of action found in dreams, he read them with delight. At times he became so dissatisfied with the tame life he was leading, he was all for running away and finding some device of his own by which he could see the world.
He was once more entered into a Catholic school, which he hated as ardently as he had the others. He feels that he gained not one atom of anything helpful to him in any way, and that the seeds here sown definitely alienated him from the Church.

His inferiority complex grew on him, for the boys were of a rough, vulgar, contentious type, and always a fight was brewing, largely as a test of strength. Theodore was always the dreamer—"watching the clouds and birds, noting the swaying of a tree in the wind, speculating upon the doings and thoughts of others, their homes, pleasures, means, travels. A passing train or boat, even an ambling street car, was ever a delight"(1)—and he hated to enter these fights. He was a great coward, he admits, and mortally afraid of being beaten. However if, by any chance, he should win, he was not adverse to being thought a hero.

He gained a great deal of his knowledge from his observations while going to and from school. He would linger before shops or factory windows. "From blacksmith, baker, tinsmith, grocer, I was learning the social organization of life. Barter, sale, the perfect, the imperfect, wealth, poverty, the idler, the industrious—all were paraded before me. ------all were being taught me by life itself."(2).

He learned much of another side of life also from

contact with Paul and his mistress. Being sent on an errand to the so-called "den of iniquity" he was much interested in the luxuries displayed in the house. It seemed to him a kind of fairyland, and in a flash came to him a knowledge of the nature of the life led there. He wished that he might remain and perhaps because this mistress had been so kind to his family, he felt no animosity toward the prostitute. If his brother Paul, such a strong bulwark against any further poverty, could love such a girl, must it not be all right? Nevertheless, his desire for social position made him somewhat resent that people must know about it.

At the end of two years, however, after an affectional difference had arisen between Paul and his lady, he decided to take to the road again and the family decided to move to Chicago.

4. Chicago

He considered it a great privilege to come to this city while still a child. The family occupied a six room apartment on West Madison Street. Directly across the street was a theatre, and in summer, an open-air beer garden, where was to be heard music and the applause of the entertained public. This gaiety and the strange types to be seen from the rear windows proved an endless source of delight to Theodore. He would watch for hours the constant and varying panorama.
Never had he seen before such congestion, such enthusiasm for living. He found life "glorious and sensate, avid and gay, shimmering and tingling." (1)

For a few days he worked as a cash-boy in a dry goods store, but most of the time he merely wandered about, watching the paving of the streets, the manufacturing processes of factories as seen through windows, the stores, the crowds. He did sell newspapers for a time, but more as an adventure, since the profits were usually invested in candy or an athletic article.

For the first time in his life he felt the tang and pang of love. A girl dwelling in his block struck him dumb with delight and desire. For ten or twelve days he could scarcely sleep, and in reality from this age on there seemed to him to be a toxic something in the mere form of a beautiful female. He was forever burning incense at the altar of Aphrodite.

But this first experience with love served to develop his fast growing sense of inferiority, for a youthful dandy of the neighborhood whom this little girl preferred, noticing Theodore gaze at her in an awe-and-love-stricken way, calmly walked over to him one day, and without a word, hit him on the lip. Since Theodore lacked sufficient fighting courage to return the blow, he was compelled to think keenly on his lack of

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 159
strength, or rather, courage, and the ills which it subjected him.

The sisters who joined the family in this city also supplied a network of emotions and interest for his youthful mind to disentangle. Frequently he suffered a depression or reduction in pride when he heard outsiders criticizing them.

Above him in the apartment house lived a musician and his wife who fought constantly and Theodore learned much, since a large airshaft carried the sounds perfectly into his bedroom.

Although his first stay in Chicago was short, it can be readily seen it was an impressionable period. Because of financial circumstances, the Dreiser family once more moved--this time to Warsaw.

2. Warsaw

Although Dreiser considers most of the cities and towns of America to be deficient in both individuality and charm, he found Warsaw to be one of the most agreeable minor residence towns he ever came to know. It lay in the very center of three small but beautiful lakes and had great beauty of landscape. A spirit of romance was induced. "Indeed," says, he, "Warsaw lakes and rivers, its handsome schools and bright square, its kept groves and winding lanes, are now identified with the most poetic and thrilling of all my youthful moods."1

Unfortunately, the first house occupied was situated

in a region where lived several women of questionable repute. His mother was so anxious to set the family, at least those who had not already strayed too far, on the straight and narrow path, that she moved almost immediately.

The second house was surrounded by a grove of trees and so many were the hours, swayed by a romancing mood, that I spent in one or another of the topmost branches of one or another of these trees, surveying the silvery windings of this little river and thinking of what? The great world beyond and where I should be and what doing."(1)

For once the finances of the family were such that, by care and much thrift, there was no immediate sense of worry or strain, and Theodore began to feel a sense of peace and beauty, plus adventure. Once more he was entered into school, only this time the public schools, where he was delighted to find an absence of the dogmatic and threatening dominance prevalent in the Catholic school, which had always oppressed, even terrorized, him. His "young American soul gave one bound and thereby attained to the meaning of freedom!"(2)

His teachers seemed to take a decided interest in him, three of them in particular. The first, May Calvert, he nearly fell in love with. She helped to decrease his ever growing sense of inferiority by paying him compliments and by almost affectionate consideration of any weakness he displayed.

The second teacher, a Miss Mildred Field from Malden, Massachusetts, not only made him think in a more optimistic way about himself than he hitherto had, but finally paid a year's tuition for him at a university. Having had a very hard life of her own,—in her youth she had been poor, socially nobody, cursed by an ungainly form and every physical disadvantage which could be inflicted upon a girl—and having fought her way to success, she had acquired an attitude of broad tolerance and generosity. It was she that helped Theodore through many trying days when the people of Warsaw began to avoid contact with the Freisers after the scandal of his sister having an illegitimate child. She assured him that only he could hurt himself, not the actions or words or opinions of anyone else. "I felt so much braver, stronger, walked with an air, a trifle of vanity swelling in me,"(1) he says.

The third of this group of teachers, a Miss Skarr, became interested in him because of his budding interest in world literature, and pointed out to him books in which he might be interested, lectures that were given at the homes of the school superintendent, and learning he was half German, urged him to take a German course, which opened the door to Schiller, Goethe, Heine, and others.

The superintendent of schools walked home with him one day, and suggested his reading Shakespeare, "Rise of the

German Empire," Carlyle's "French Revolution," etc. He had already been taking books from the public library. Many of the books were of a realistic nature, but inevitably he would turn to romance, for his nature seemed to crave the sentimentalism to be found in Gilda, Mrs. Harrison, and even Laura Jean Libby.

These books lifted him into an entirely different state, gave him a new outlook on life, and made him feel that he might like to imitate these works. Some day he might even go to college. He spent hours dreaming of changes, people, adventures, how life might make him "a general, a ruler, a judge, a doctor, a lawyer, anything you please."(1)

Socially, at this period of his life, he was a betwixt and between soul not entirely debarred from certain phases of association and companionship with older youths, yet never included in their more private and intimate adventures. He was really on tentor books most of the time. In the presence of any group, particularly if it included girls, he was tongue-tied, spellbound, almost hypnotized. However, he came into contact with various boys and girls who affected his outlook on life very definitely. Many of them were comparatively wealthy and therefore socially prominent, and while he enjoyed the prestige of being on friendly terms with them, he also envied them the financial and social start which life had given them. His lack of money, clothes, social background tended to

increase his natural bashfulness. He was sure also that he was
terribly lonely and without courage or charm of speech or man-
ner. He brooded continually over his personal (material) and
physical lacks. "Had I looks sufficient and money," he thought
"what great difference, where attractive girls were concerned,
would poverty or disgrace make. They would like me anyhow.
But to lack looks and means, and to suffer from social lowness
into the bargain! Actually such thoughts as these burned into
my brain as retarding facts. I was so hungry for life and
love! And what lovely and enticing girl would endure a boy
with big ears or large teeth or a mouth not cut like that of a
soldier or a beau? Obviously I was doomed to sex loneliness
and at the very time when I was most desirous of it." (1)

In this small town there was much scandal of a sex
nature; the place was rife, in boyland, at least, with stories
of secret trysts, girls leaving town to hush up the scandal of
having a child out of wedlock. His own sister had been sent to
New York to avoid this very shame, and another sister came home
from Chicago broken in health as she had been deserted by her
lover. The basis of such stories as *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie
Gerhardt* may have been formed here. He had here also his first
contact with sex, for he was urged into a relationship with a
baker's daughter.

At the end of his first year in high school, he began

to get restless, and realizing that unless one's parents were well placed socially in such a town as this, there was little opportunity for work, he decided to wander into the wider world to seek adventure.

Even at this age of fifteen or sixteen, he began to look back on his earlier days with a touch of regret—"those childhood perfections, and wonders—were gone. Never would I be so young again!" (1) Setting out to find work as a farm hand for the summer, he tells us that in his heart "was a sense of peace and possession which filled the old brick house among the pines. For as I could feel, it was really slipping from us. Our years were multiplying and while we were not going away forever, still was this not the beginning of the end of our youth? You may imagine the depression." (2)

The venture not proving successful, he finally convinced his mother to give him his fare and three dollars and he set out for Chicago to try his luck.

6. Chicago (again)

It had been three years since the Dreisers had moved away, and Chicago had been growing at the rate of at least fifty thousand a year. Theodore had been attracted here by the news of tremendous activity: the building of new depots and street car lines, the extension of social and financial activities in every direction. The odd bits of city life published

in the Chicago daily papers fascinated him. He felt that the fact that some of his family had not done quite as was socially expected of them would not matter here. "In Chicago were crowd, opportunities, theatres, libraries, museums, a great world!"(1)

His first impression of the city was that of a "scene in a play: an Aladdin view in the Arabian nights. Cars, people, light, shops! The odor and flavor of the city, the vastness of its reaches, seemed to speak or sing or tinkle like a living, breathing thing. It came with an inexpressible variety and richness, as if to say: 'I am the soul of a million people! I am their toys, their prides, their loves, their appetites, their hungers, their sorrows! I am their good clothes and their poor ones, their light, their food, their lusts, their industries, their enthusiasms, their dreams! In me are all the pulses and wonders and tastes and loves of life itself. I am life—I am the pulsing urge of the universe!----all that life or hope is or can be or do, this I am, and it is here before you! Take of it! Live, live, satisfy your heart! Strive to be what you wish to be now while you are young and of it! Reflect its fire, its tang, its color, its greatness! Be, be, wonderful or strong or great, if you will but be!"(2)

Although he could have looked up his sisters, he preferred to find work and be independent. He entered immense factories and stores, seeking anything in the line of work,


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but he was not fitted for many things. Consequently he met
with failure repeatedly, a fact which did not tend to lessen
his inferiority complex.

Once, a boy, visiting at the home where he was room-
ing, suggested that he try for work at a great railway yard,
where he and his father worked as cleaners. He went there the
very next morning and although given a try-out for three-quar-
ters of a day (with no pay) he was turned down. This greatly
discouraged him, for it convinced him that he was not as strong
and energetic as he should be.

At last he secured a job—a very unsatisfactory one,
but a job. It was nothing more than a combination dishwasher
and bus boy to a Greek who ran a dirty but somewhat prosperous
restaurant in Halstead Street, a neighborhood which interested
Dreiser because it teemed with life. He saw many apparently
degraded or semi-degraded individuals who taught him much of
methods of living and meeting difficulties of life.

John Paradiso was his employer, and "he was a smudgy,
pudgy Greek, such as might have been found in any of the long
roster of dirty Greek restaurants in the America of that day.
His fat, oily body! And round and, as they seemed to me, almost
meaningless eyes, dark and oily, not radiant or vivid. And his
black hair and eyebrows and moustache! I was unchangingly
amazed that anyone could be so consistently and oilily and

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odorously dirty and still maintain so cheerful and even intriguin; a presence of men. For with all this, he was kindly and agreeable, a really genial and likeable man. If only one might have cleaned and brightened him a bit, mentally and physically!"(1)

This man was not a hard master, however, and when things were not pressing, he was genial and talkative, telling Theodore of places and countries in which he had been. His outstanding fault seemed to be dirt. Theodore acquired an almost chronically irritated stomach from the smells and this dirt, and being of a sensitive temperament, the work became unbearable.

Soon he looked up one of his sisters and after some talk, it was agreed to write the mother to join them and before long most of the Dreisers were reunited. Being encouraged by his brother Al to quit his work at Mr. Paradiso's, he did so, telling his mother he was laid off.

Again began the dreary weeks of job hunting, until he chanced one day upon a large retail hardware place in his vicinity. Although he had had no experience, he was hired to clean stoves in a great rambling, dusty, smelly loft, crowded with old and rusty or smudgy stoves of every description. The "boss" of this loft seemed to be a veritable "Bill Sykes" for size and savageness. He eyed young Theodore as might a tiger

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 303
or a lion when he was put under his charge, and promptly put
him to polishing rusty stove-legs.

Theodore, being a dreamy, moony youth, began to think
of the mystery of the social worlds from which those stoves
came. That people had sat around them? More, outside the win-
dow before which he sat spread another fragment of the Chicago
world which he so loved. Soon, of course, he was romantically
afloat, but this man, deciding he was a fool or a shirker,
asked him to give him a lift with a big rusty stove. Realizing
as soon as he touched the stove that he could not lift it, his
spirit sank and then rebelled. He promptly announced that it
was impossible for him to lift it and was answered by a re-
sounding kick with the man's heavy boot. Backing out, he once
more found himself on the street hunting for a job. He was
bitter, however, and swelling with semi-impotent rage against
life and its hardships and its creatures. "Lack of strength or
means or education made of a man a mongrel to be kicked at.
Had I only been able to kick him as he had kicked me, and more!" he thought. He asked himself when, if ever, would he be strong
enough to do unto others as they did unto him.

His next job was as an assistant to his sister's fi-
ance, who was a painter but this only lasted a week or two, for
Theodore, thinking to impress his employer, chatted a line of
immature philosophic comment which the man found unendurable.

1. "Dawn"—Theodore Dreiser. P.320

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Telling the sister that Theodore needed to cultivate reticence, he employed the brother, Ed, who held the job for three or four years. That a shock this was to Theodore and it produced a silence which endured through several other jobs.

All of these experiences, however, did little to awaken him to a conception of things, earthly or material. It was always the sky, the clouds, the outlines of buildings, streets, colors, sounds, movements, voices, gesture of people that held him. He himself wondered at a later age why a boy should be so "moonshiny and dreamy."

For example, during a street car strike which was then on in Chicago, instead of being interested in the economic facts which produced it, he found the odd spectacle of persons, ordinarily accustomed to ride in street cars, now seated on chairs in wagons very interesting. It was only the exterior of America, its surface forms, not its internal nature, that registered on him, and while all these pictures which he was storing in his mind were of great value to him when he became a writer, they were of little economic value then.

Once more he took to the streets and he soon acquired a keen appreciation of the storms and stress of life that later manifested itself in his writings. He was greatly touched by the figures of other seekers like himself—"their eyes, worn faces, bodies, clothes, the weariness of them in line at so many
doors. "As a matter of fact, this was but the beginning of a long observation of the struggles and fortunes of man." (1)

One day his brother Rome, who had come on one of his periodic visits, took him to see a man connected with one of the great railroads entering Chicago concerning a position as tracing clerk in one of the giant railroad freight yards. The work fascinated him from its novelty. He secured the work and started the next morning. He memorized the names of great many railroads and saw many types of laborers--Swedes, Poles, Huns, Czechs, all largely a product of Central or Slavic Europe. His first day there he saw a crumpled body being removed. Being exceedingly impressionable, he was greatly depressed by the fear that life held for him nothing better than the meagre existence known to these poor laborers. The beauty of life was craved by him--not this dirt and shame and weariness.

After two days of this work, he fell ill with a cold, contracted by getting wet when he was in a thoroughly exhausted state. He could secure only a few hours' sleep since it was necessary to rise at four to reach this place on time. When he recovered, his mother decided the work was too hard for him, so again he was unemployed.

And so, once more, the streets from seven or eight in the morning until four-thirty of five in the afternoon. And, once more, his dreams and speculations. Standing outside

any office or store of any size, he would picture himself behind a great roll-top desk, a large enclosed office around him, himself dictating to somebody or other. All this was to be secured by hard work and study, once he attained another job. At other times, he was plunged into despair, and saw himself as one for whom there was no future at all.

And, once more, another job—small, to be sure, but very acceptable after he had tramped for days through the cold. It was with an immense wholesale hardware company. Here he was under the direct charge of a Mr. Purdon whom he heartily disliked. This man had a sort of roving commission as detective and spy, and took delight in reporting all he saw and heard to the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the company. He was "an angular, store-clothesy, squeaky-chod Irishman,"(1) very suspicious, contemptuous, and domineering. Very soon Mr. Purdon fixed on Theodore as "a shuffling, scatterbrained, meaningless and moaning incompetent."

The place was truly a school of economics and sociology to Theodore, for here he came into contact with inventions and effort of a wide range of character. It served to give him "a fair commentary on the unescapable growth of materialism."(3) Also it made him think much concerning work and wages, wealth and poverty, ignorance and intelligence, and the accepted differences in social station which gave boys of birth and station

precedence over youths of greater physical and mental capacity. He went frequently to view the spacious homes of the owners and how he envied their sons.

A man, named Christian Aberg, who worked on his floor exercised a great influence on him. While he came from a good Danish family, he had a degenerate, nerve-racked body, and was "a little, rickety, out-at-elbows, shambling man!"(1) About forty-five years of age, he had all the earmarks of having gone through the storms and rages of physical and mental dissipation, yet he still had a degree of breeding.

Theodore and he formed a friendship quickly while piling goods in the stockroom and since he had read nearly everything, he talked to Theodore a cut Ibsen, Strenberg, Grieg, Goethe, "Tagner, Schopenhauer, etc. By the hour he talked about the French Revolution and its prominent figures, not in a textbook way, but in a harsh realistic fashion. Again the talk would turn to Greece, of logicians, playwrights, sculptors, architects, statesmen.

"The one great fact which contact with Aberg brought home to me," says Dreiser, himself, "was that mind, and mind alone, makes the essential difference between the masses and the classes, and thus caused me to understand that mind, and mind alone, would make or break me."(2) This idea caused him to spend more of his leisure time reading, and he feels that

this period stands out with a colorful electric lustre, so feverish was his mental effort. He yearned for everything his eyes and mind could contemplate, and fortunately the city of Chicago seemed to be as feverish in its quest as he, for the World Fair was beginning to be talked about, the revision and rebuilding of the University of Chicago by John D. Rockefeller was contemplated, as was also the extension and cabling of the West and North Side street railways of Charles T. Yerkes.

All this conversing with Anberg, and dreaming of the rosy future did not impress Mr. Purdon, however, so that when Christmas came, at which time the employees either got a raise in salary or a discharge slip, Theodore secured the latter. That he deserved it he did not deny, for he had spent most of his time looking out of one window or another, noting the rumbling traffic, the streams of pedestrians, finding rhythm in every moving thing, deciding that everything in life moved according to the systole-diastole plan—clouds, bright weather; job and then no job; hunger and no hunger; waking and then sleeping. Likewise he chose to visualize the mansions he should have, the footmen, even slaves, who should bow and genuflect before him. The beauties who should note and receive him, eagerly and with passionate admiration and love! The throngs that should huzzah and at the same time part and bow before him! Nevertheless, he hated to have to tell his mother at this season of the year
that he was discharged, so he mustered up sufficient courage to make a plea to Mr. Bartlett, a member of the firm, who, being tender-hearted, gave him another chance.

This retention, however, proved of little value, for it being his nature to dream, he could never completely overcome this tendency, and Mr. Purdon, annoyed that his recommendation for removal had not been accepted was stricter than ever and informed Theodore that while he had got off by crying this time, he wouldn't again. This remark caused him to be ashamed that his spirit was so poor that it would endure an insult of this kind and still hang on. His physical condition also tended to increase his natural depression. His lungs, as an X-ray taken years later showed, had suffered a severe lesion.

At home was much family bickering, caused by the individuality of each member of the family, and Theodore learned many lessons in economics, sociology, order, force, and the like. As a relief from this he resorted to extensive reading. He tried to figure out what trade he would like to follow, but nothing technical appealed to him, and he felt he had little capacity for any such work. Again he was plunged in depression, for what was to become of him? And to gain relief from such a mood, he frequented the theatre, where the orchestra even seemed wonderful to him. He completely lost himself in the performance. He became 'the swan upon the lake; the idle dreamer,
in the tower; the water, and even the ripple; the trees; the
wind; the silence; the light.\(^{(1)}\) In spite of all his experi-
ence and reading he took stage drama, or rather melodrama, for
practically what it represented itself to be, and this fact was
responsible for the endurance in him of many illusions far be-
yond their normal length of life.

His great love of nature also helped him to recover
from many hours of hypochondria. In spite of his weak lungs, a
disordered stomach, and an imaginary sex weakness, he was able
to revel in the spectacular phases of life. He became very
fond of galleries of paintings, for here he saw the things of
life given beautiful expression. He liked to think of life as
a living, dancing picture. "It was a realm in which on every
hand plays and operas were being enacted."\(^{(2)}\) He began to
think that life was better than any book, for no one could
transfer by writing what could be felt and seen.

When things began to look the worst for him, physi-
cally at least, Miss Fielding, his former high school teacher,
appeared on the scene with the suggestion that he leave what he
was doing and go a year, at least, to the State University of
Indiana. After much discussion at home, the offer was accept-
ed, and after some weeks spent visiting about with Miss Field-
ing, and reading both at home and in the library with a view to
finding something of what college life was likely to be, he

left for Bloomington.

7. Bloomington

This one year which he spent at the State University, aside from the differing mental and scenic aspects of the life there as contrasted with his home life, was of little technical value to him. Doubtless, he gained large masses of facts of a general character about life, but he could not become interested in the particulars of any specific field of education.

In the main, he contacted and observed others, youths of his own age, and through them, heard as to what they were studying, and why and how. Such fields as medicine, law, philosophy left him cold. He wanted to know a little about all of them but it was narrow, dull, even futile, he felt, to follow anyone of them as a life course.

Mostly was he interested in the university as a whole—its buildings, professors, students, the life of the town of which it was a part. Men who subsequently became widely known were on the staff. The town itself was charming and offered a surcease from all his recent woes in so far as dust, early hours, hard work, etc. were concerned. Stretched before him were eighteen months of leisure and comparative peace.

He registered for Latin, geometry, algebra, English literature and Anglo-Saxon, and history. Of these he found only Latin to be difficult, so that he found much time for
social contact. He greatly enjoyed the hive-like conversations in the various rooms, and the group walks among the students. But, as usual, he suffered from his feeling of inferiority. He felt that his clothes contrasted poorly with those of the swag-ger student, and that his limited purse was a hindrance in making the social contacts he most desired. He longed to be ad-mired by the co-ed, and he felt from the beginning that he had no show against "the pampered pets of pampered parents--the usual college lah-de-da or social loafer."(1)

He was tortured by the vision of the girl who lived next door to where he was rooming. She was a small, vivacious hoyden-blonde, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed. (?)[1] Although she soon devised a scheme whereby she met him, he was so paralysed by the nearness of her that he stammered, blushed, and trembled so much that the girl departed in haste. Then the hours spent in self-contempt, the resolves to meet any other such golden op-portunity with courage and suaveness, but never were these res-olutions brought to fruit.

His roommate, a William Levitt, (or so he called him) proved to be very interesting to him, for he represented the athletic phase of college life in contrast to the meditative and speculative side represented by Dreiser. He was possessed of all the charms which Dreiser thought he lacked--looks, strength, grace, means--and in consequence thereof was a hero.

and an idol before the college year was over. He tried hard to bring Theodore out of his shell and to build up his physical strength.

However, he frequently caused Theodore hours of depression when he boasted of his easy conquests with women, and when he was invited to join a fraternity. From the bottom of his heart, Theodore envied him, and spent much time looking at himself in a mirror after Levitt had gone out, asking himself what chance he had.

Most of his time spent at this university was a period of such intense yearning that he had little mental peace, for there were so many things here which set up new wants and new ambitions which served to contrast his condition even more sharply with themselves than had the great prosperity of Chicago with its great poverty. For in such a large place as Chicago, one could find some compensations, but in this small world, sharp with imported levels and castes, and prides and prejudices, there was little to assuage the pangs of deprivations and envy. Here he found definite social segregations, as, for example, the Creek societies. Had he had a little audacity, he feels, he might have been a part of this life, but he was never invited to join, and since the social life of the college and also of the town was largely determined by these societies, Theodore felt he was definitely an outcast.
Naturally, he felt that there was much unfairness in the working of nature itself, for here he was lacking this and that, and hence and for no willed reasons of his own or greatly distinguishable errors on his part, out of it for good.

He soon fell in with a number of youths who, while interesting, were of no better position than himself. One of these boys, Howard Hall, a blonde, light-weight, and spare-built, not much mentally, was a law student. He was so poor that he was compelled to take a very small hall bedroom, but had so much pride that he insisted he could study better in a small, cool space than in a large, warm room. Such poverty—philosophies always irritated Dreiser, since he was always for looking life in the eye as directly as possible. He despised subterfuges. This poor chap had also an impediment in his speech which, like Demosthenes, he was trying to overcome, and since many of his family had died from consumption, he continually took exercise to build himself up. Nevertheless, at the age of twenty-four, he died, the victim of a constitution not sufficiently robust to endure the raw forces of life. What an impression this made on Theodore. He charged life with loading the dice and playing favoritism, and with unbelievable cunning and cruelty. "How indifferently man fares on this planet! How little, if at all, nature cares."(1)

Another youth who had on him a decided influence of

a serene and broad-minded nature was Russell Sutcliffe, a poet, philosopher, vegetarian, democrat, and student of modern nationalism. It was his high courage, his ready and willing acceptance of the inequalities as well as the difficulties of life as things to be met and struggled with if not conquered, that particularly interested Theodore. He soon came to feel that Sutcliffe was of more mental and ideally instructive as well as creative value to him than all other phases and persons of the university combined.

They met when Sutcliffe came to solicit his laundry, for he was helping himself through college by this means, as well as by having a share in a vegetarian dining club which he had helped to organize. Physically, "he appeared to be of a spongy, soft-jointed, Bakstian type, of about the roundness and meatiness of a youthful Ingersol, and with a head almost as round as a sphere. But mentally, how different, how stern, uncompromising and clean! But with good-natured and smiling eyes and mouth and a chin that would indicate defiance."(1)

Sutcliffe was particularly interested in philosophy and was tireless in his efforts at ferreting out the social anachronisms and idiosyncrasies of life and its arrangements: chemical, physical, and biological. He was an omnivorous reader, and just at this time was deeply "interested in not only the naturalism of Spencer, Huxley, Darwin, Alfred Russell Wallace,

Lecky, Draper, and others, but had just found and was considering the religio-social panaceas of Tolstoi. (1) Theodore and he met frequently in his room to talk and read together, for "I saw in him a most worthy preceptor of the Greek academy type and myself as a neophyte or disciple," (2) says Dreiser.

He proved to be a real comfort to Theodore philosophically and helped him to bear, more gracefully at least, the envies, despairs, unreasts, and self-disapprobations with which he was afflicted. He did much to turn Dreiser's mind toward altruistic inquiry. When he would see Theodore's eyes gazing wistfully toward the revelries of the campus, he would try to convince him that pleasure cannot be an end in itself, and that these evenings spent in study were necessary sacrifices, but never was wholly stilled in Theodore the yearning which these gayeties evoked.

For never in his life was he more heart hungry or sex hungry. There was a kind of fever for dancing, supping late, serenading, dressing for evening parties, etc. in the very air of the town. He watched the pleasures of others, especially Levitt, his roommate, with a hungry eye and a vivid imagination. The world around him seemed a-tingle with sex-love and the thing that most pained him was that there was no least indication that he would ever have the least taste of what he so much craved and envied. He greatly desired new and attractive

clothes and he was soon compelled to use reconstructed clothes, an overcoat of Paul’s, collars, ties, and socks which either Paul or Mary’s husband had discarded and sent home.

For this period his one escape lay in books, for, as he says, "since I could not play, I read and learned."(1) At times he became intellectually depressed, especially after he had a mind capable of plunging into anything and everything and understanding it. He felt that his brain was a mere feather compared to most people’s. "Why work in stores and factories when, could I but concentrate and think,—I might be surrounded by all the refinements of intellectual life?—Ah, why was I born to be a dub?"(2) Such were his thoughts frequently.

Another of his college friends who left an impression on him was O’Connor, the well-to-do son of a judge of one of the circuits of Indiana, a law student and possessed of much money and "savoir faire." He was a country Beau of the Richelieu type. Immediately upon meeting Dreiser, he devoted himself to him, and seemed determined to shower entertainment upon him. Through him, he met several girls—the very thing he had been craving for so long—but as usual in his contacts with members of the female sex, he became so nervous, awkward and almost paralysed that each adventure ended in failure and much brooding on his part.

This O’Connor came to Chicago during the Christmas

holidays and took Dreiser with him on an actual tour of the red light district. From one house of prostitution to another they went and while Dreiser, for lack of independent means only, had refused any contact with the beauties found there, he saw much of a depressing side of life. It all seemed not only a little pathetic, but really a farce. "Surely somewhere," he says, "must be forces of intelligence that look on and laugh, as we do, at comic toys. But where, oh, where is the toy maker who makes us? And can it be that he is ashamed to show us his face?"[1]

As soon as he returned from the vacation, he moved to the other end of the town where he had a room to himself, and he found peace from the mental and emotional tortures in which he had been steeped since his contact with Levitt and O'Connor. Also, here he saw a very happy and contented family life, for the Santee, who conducted the place, were honest, quiet, and industrious people. The son had received his degree the year before from the university and was then superintendent of a large, local spoke factory. Again, he soon made contacts with people of an earnest, clean, vigorous type, and from discussions held at the table he learned much.

And so, the year at college drew to a close, and while as far as making a place for himself in this world was concerned, he was no farther advanced, yet he felt advanced.

Within the classrooms, he had accomplished little beyond capturing here and there an idea or memorable statement, but outside he was really privately tutored by successful students. He owed much to Sutcliffe, whose study, inquiring, generous nature taught him to face life bravely.

However, as he was about to leave he looked back over his college year, and was greatly irritated by the deprivations he had been forced to endure, and for the first time, set his teeth in hard defiance of life and fate. "I will get along and be somebody in spite of them! Beautiful girls will yet be interested in me, and society, too!(1) The greatest pain at the moment was related to a feeling of frustration in regard to the love he felt for a lovely daughter of the physician. Never had he spoken to her, but from a distance he had admired. He had on one occasion mustered up sufficient courage to hand her a note, but without uttering a word. Of course, she failed to acknowledge it, but on his last night at Bloomington, returning late at night from visits to Sutcliffe and Hill, he stood opposite her home and visualized her inside, asleep, a dream, until hurt to the heart, he fled. Never did he forget, however," her smooth, pale, oval face, delicate hands, and thin, petal-like eyelids."(2)

In the morning he left for Chicago with thoughts of deprivations, inefficiency, and impending difficulties of all

kinds crowding hard upon him. His year of pleasure was over, and in spite of all his idling and dreaming, he was a different youth from the one who had left Chicago last fall. He was stronger physically, had more courage and ambition, and at times a fairly optimistic opinion of his possible future achievements in some field.

8. Chicago (a third time)

Once more the old job of finding work was before Theodore. He found Chicago stronger, brisker, more colorful even than he had before. So many new enterprises were under way, that he was moved by the hope of prosperity and hence set out with a very optimistic feeling.

In about three weeks time he obtained a place in a real estate office and the conditions on which he was hired scarcely made it worth having. He was assured three dollars a week, with an additional nine dollars a week out of any earnings which exceeded the monthly cost of rent, gas, office expenditures and a salary of at least twenty-five dollars a week to his employer.

Had this employer been a business man of any capacity, this plan might have been a good one, but he was not. His name was Asa Conklin, and Dreiser later used him as the prototype of Asa Griffiths in "An American Tragedy". He describes him as "a really defeated and worn-out religious fuzzy-wuzzy, whose
intentions and aspirations were probably of the best but whose ideas of the commercial practicalities and necessities of life were of the vaguest.--------And he was such a little man, perhaps five feet three or four, stout and yet flabby-looking, and with a grizzled beard and a shock of silver-white hair such as you might see on some tanned and blustery down-east Yankee sea captain, only without the usual sea captain force or fierceness. He had none of that. On the contrary, a man most weak and variable, easy to persuade to this or that, even by me, an impractical dreamer, who knew nothing of the intricate and psychological and necessarily diplomatic field on which he had now ventured."(1)

He had been left five hundred dollars by someone, and was determined to make a success in real estate. He had been reading endless stories of sudden rises in property values and the great incomes made by renting agents, and without knowing anything about the district, except that it seemed to be growing, or anything about the renting or selling of properties, he proceeded to lease a large and attractive office, putting in a high accountant's desk, a roll-top desk for himself, a brass railing, etc.

Theodore was clerk and general factotum and occupied the accountant's desk. He kept the books, as well as waited on the customers, but soon, since Conlin had not initiative, he had to bustle around on the outside to secure business. Having


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seen in other real estate office windows cards which described this or that piece of property as for sale or rent, he secured similar cards. Next, using Conklin's light buggy, he sought out owners of unrented or unsold property.

Had he had a little better management behind him, Theodore might have developed a prospering business, for he soon made friends and secured a fairly good list of offerings. The part that most appealed to him was the meeting of so many curious and interesting people. He received the offer to call and court a pretty daughter of a buxom Irish woman, who had considerable property and money. The fact that she was a Catholic made Theodore hesitate to accept the offer, for he "resented the numskull state of mind that faith in the Catholic Church represents".(1)

He also came into contact with a widow, also well-to-do, who suggested that a thirty-five acre tract of land which she owned might be divided into lots and sold. Much enthusiasm was registered by Conklin over this find, but it necessitated return visits on the part of Theodore and these visits proved very distasteful to him, for the widow had intended him to become her lover, and, she being far from attractive, the idea did not entice him.

At this time arrived on the scene a Colonel Thomas Bundy, who turned out to be nothing but a "broad-chested, full-

gutted and impressive bluff." (1) Theodore was carried off his feet by him, however, as was Conklin. His swagger, his impressive clothes, and pompous attitude deceived them completely. Immediately he set about to pep up the business. The name of the firm was changed to "Conklin, Bundy, & Company," and Theodore Dreiser was secretary, no less. They were to deal in large properties, (Bundy to increase the treasury by fifty thousand dollars) and were all to be instantaneously rich. New office furniture was added and Bundy took up with the widow the proposition of the tract of land.

Unfortunately for Dreiser and Conklin, however, the fifty thousand was never forthcoming; instead he frequently borrowed five dollars from the already depleted cash drawer. Having borrowed fifty dollars from the widow, she would have nothing more to do with him, and soon all the nearby restaurants and stores came to collect for goods still not paid for.

The character of Conklin's wife interested Dreiser considerably. She was very earnest, tall, worn, pale and spiritual looking; "the kind of woman, or mentality rather, that sniffs, part, of a social as well as personal misery which finally finds escape in religion or faith of some kind." (2) Her business was running a mission. Having rented a store in a shabby street, she installed a small organ, a set of hymn

books, some chairs, a desk or rostrum, some mottoes or quotations from the Bible, a picture of Christ and a map of Palestine, and promptly set up in religion for herself. This business served to tide the family over periods when Conklin was unemployed, and since Asa had been everything from a grocer to the now would-be proprietor of a real estate office, such leadership was needed by his wife. Theodore liked her for her courage, patience, and soft voice.

Soon after the downfall of the Conklin, Bundy, & Company, "Dreiser's mother died and since the burial involved debts, which his father felt must be paid immediately if the mother's soul was not to burn in purgatory, Dreiser felt obliged to seek a more remunerative position. Conklin already owed him twenty dollars, a fact which caused his father to go to Conklin demanding immediate payment. This being an impossibility, Conklin suggested that Theodore use his credit at a certain clothing store for a suit and overcoat.

Arrayed in these new clothes, he set out again and "again," he says, "the same old trepidation, faltering before doors which I felt I ought to enter, but because of shame at being idle and this kind of a flotsam-jetsam job-seeker kept me back. Now and then a man or woman standing at a window, or at a door, or waiting inside, or a too publicly-exposed general office, or a too severe-looking proprietor or manager or clerk
at a desk, all and severally served to put me out of countenance with myself and make me slink away. ——Frequently I would walk away from a building, complaining to myself of my cowardice as I went, and then after going two or three blocks pull myself together and come back, only to find someone else at the door or some other hindrance, and so go away again."(1)

The artistry of any passing scene frequently compensated him for these weary, trying hours. A boat, a sail, a crowd, a tower, a flock of pigeons, anything almost—could hold him spellbound.

Soon, however, he again found a job—this time a driver of a laundry wagon. His work here was as interesting, from a character point of view, as any he had ever done, and contributed much to his understanding of people and life. He collected from homes, apartments, flats, and the people occupying these various places gave him many a lesson in human psychology. In some places he collected from bachelor apartments, luxuriously furnished, as for example, the one occupied by the two young sons of George M. Pullman. Returning the laundry between the hours of five and seven, he frequently saw the occupants dressed for a dinner, dance, theatre party, or opera. As usual, he found himself growling at the rich for enjoying pleasures which he could not enjoy, even though he was seeking eagerly to be wealthy himself so that he might do the same. But just now he was

poor, so he thought the poor were very much under-estimated and underpaid, and misunderstood—himself, of course, the shining illustration of this fact.

While these wealthier sections excited his fancy, the poorer ones aroused his curiosity and sympathy. One region contained houses of convenience or "bed houses," as he calls them. He was somewhat amazed when he found that frequently the husbands of the "madmes" of these houses were considered respectable men. One in particular, a Mr. Calverton, was assistant manager of the laundry at which Theodore was working. "Was there no end to the subtlety of people?"(1)

The routes which contained the type of individual he best understood were those which concerned a rather hardworking, saving, manorial class. Here he saw an excellent picture of American bourgeois virtue.

Again he ran across the shrew or cheat, always intent on making trouble. Every type proved interesting in its way, although he preferred the wealthy, for he so much wished to belong to this class.

The fresh air and exercise, the concomitants of this position, swiftly improved his health, but the lengthy working hours left him little time for play. However, he did manage to fall in love—or at least to pretend to—with a little Presbyterian Scotch girl, Nellie Macpherson. She was, as he described

her, "innocent, sweet, and pure-minded after the conservative and conventional formula, though I might term her 'a case of arrested development'." (1) Since her family thought he was a serious suitor for Nellie's hand, he was treated with much consideration, and Theodore loved to be made much of and admired. Unfortunately for Nellie, he was, as he himself says, only "an embryo historian, philosopher, and semi-scientific-minded experimentalist, blowing here and there in search of experience." (2) He was really not as much smitten with Nellie as he was with sex. In reality he found in her sister more of what he desired, but as her mother soon put a stop to any attempts on the part of Lilly to flirt with him, he continued with Nellie.

All of this period was marked by great romancing on his part. He was forever immersed in the spectacle of living and found himself "constantly and spiritually present at all its secret scenes, from hidden murder and debauchery of the Concl type to the inmost councils of state and darkest avenues of chicane, a la Richelieu." (3) He loved to picture himself at the zenith of his days -- wealthy, famous, and with some radiantly beautiful woman by his side.

Frequently, he came across little sex comedy-dramas which had a marked effect upon him. They set him to thinking about the security of marriage and whether a man had a right to be unfaithful to his wife. He knew the answer his father and


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the Catholic church would give, but he found himself siding with the individual and the passions which nature had created as opposed to the hard and fast rules of society. "Not that I did not respect society, or certain successful phases of it at least," he says, "and the care and rearing of children where I found them being well reared and cared for; but I could not help looking upon men and women as individuals, not teams, and in the face of the great passions which animate them, unaccountable."(1)

Feeling that he must advance above such a position, he reconcentrated on his reading: a little law, medicine, history, general literature, anything he could lay his hands on. He began to become acquainted with Stevenson, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Tolstoi (in his novelistic phase). It was the latter's The Kreutzer Sonata and The Death of Ivan Ilyitch that so astounded and thrilled him by the pictures of life they presented that it suddenly occurred to him that it would be wonderful to be a novelist. "If a man could but write like Tolstoi and have all the world to listen to him!"(2)

He decided to strive for intellectualty. The Chicago papers offered a fund of literary, artistic, social, dramatic, and scientific gossip. Again there was in Chicago at the time an interesting series of lectures being given. One of the lecturers, a Mr. Mangasarian, an Armenian, interested him most. He was a poet, artist, and philosopher turned lecturer and he

thrilled Theodore with the color of his emotional reactions to the surrounding world. All of these men offered good intellectual suggestions, liberal and sympathetic. "They attacked the wrongs of politics, the narrowness of sectarian views, the clanish isolation of families and social cliques and layers, and offered as a substitute a love of literature, art, music, and a freer, gayer public life."(1) Naturally Theodore, who had been seeking always to escape the "intellectual dry-rot of the Middle Ages, the horrible chunnel house of mediaeval ideas, as represented by his father's church,"(2) was greatly impressed.

The next spring, a rival laundry company sent a member of the firm to ask him to accept a position with them. The aim in such a procedure was that a laundry driver from one laundry would have his followers when he changed position. Since he was offered more money, he accepted and began the same type of work for his new concern, owned by three Jews. Here the work was more arduous, requiring more speed in driving, a swifter aptitude for making change, and greater skill in laying out the routes. The uncle of the brothers piloted Theodore for a week or so, and he was a finicky, irritable, piesyune creature. He criticised every move Dreiser made.

His experiences while he worked at this place were similar to those of the other laundry. "This place was," he tells us, "a veritable hot-bed of sex, presenting far more

flagrantly than even Munger's (the former place) a case of commercial license-work, for instance, in exchange for almost compulsory concubinage."

Soon he got into all kinds of difficulties. He did not secure enough new business; he was accused of returning the wrong change to customers. Finally he had an accident with the wagon and his connection with the concern severed.

And so in the full, he was once again on the streets, job-hunting. But one morning as he was to start out, he received a letter from the Lovell Manufacturing Company, offering him a job as collector at the salary of fourteen dollars. The company sold clocks, rugs, lamps, albums, and furniture of a cheap and gaudy nature. Most of these articles were priced at from twelve to eighteen dollars, the payments being distributed over a year or more by the paying of thirty-five cents a week on each article.

Mr. Nesbit was manager, and his wife, having seen Theodore when he collected laundry at her house (another of these houses of convenience), had recommended him to her husband.

From a philosophical and romantic point of view, what a world he now viewed! He went into bizarre neighborhoods, saw such curious types and characters. He visited houses of prostitution, foreign sections occupied by Swedes, or Germans,

Italians, Irish, or Poles. There were sections holding "horrible, scummy, soggy, animal types, joined in with thieves, panhandlers, hoboes, barrelhouse-bums regions in which the smoking of opium and the eating of cocaine, morphine and the allied soporifics were common."(1) He was often reminded of Hogarth's drawings of London in the time of Charles II (The Rakes Progress).

As to individuals, he found some scrupulously honest, while others would lock the door, post a guard, and refuse to pay a cent. Sometimes he met with curses, jeers, laughter; sometimes he was actually pushed out and the door slammed in his face.

He marveled that so many could be tricked into buying the gaudy fakes, and he was impressed with "the pathos of blundering humanity seeking in its purblind way a few crumbs from the magnificent banquet which has been spread for its devotees."(2)

At the end of just six months he was discharged for withholding twenty-five dollars which he had intended to repay soon. He had seen so many people devise methods to trick money out of the dull or unsophisticated that perhaps his sense of honesty was dulled. At any rate, needing a new overcoat, he decided to withhold twenty-five dollars from completed payments and only turn in the required weekly installments. Things might have gone smoothly had not a lady who had made a complete payment, had some trouble with a clock and called to the office to

complain. Of course, Theodore was asked to explain and then was discharged.

After a short period of unemployment, he again went to work for a similar concern at which place he remained for several months, when he resigned. Having used the time between these two positions to serve as clerk in the free Christmas bureau of the Herald, he became desirous of becoming a reporter and began to bend all his energies in that direction.

D. His Newspaper Days

1. Chicago

During the year 1890, Dreiser got his first dim notion as to what it was he wanted to do in life. For the previous two years he had been reading in the Chicago Daily News a column by Eugene Field, called "Sharps and Flats," and through this, he vaguely began to suspect that he wanted to write. He was enthusiastic about his daily notes, poems, and aphorisms, principally concerning Chicago. "All this comment on local life moved him as nothing else had. "It is given to some cities, as to some lands, to suggest romance," he says, "and to me Chicago did that hourly."(1) All of his adventures in the drear neighborhoods through which he had walked when collecting for the installment companies had fascinated him and suddenly he thought he would like to write about these things. "It would be interesting, so I thought, to describe a place like Goose

Island in the Chicago River, a murky and neglected reach then covered with shanties made of overturned boats sawed in two, and yet which seemed to me the height of the picturesque; also a building like the Auditorium or the Masonic Temple;—or a seething pit like that of the Board of Trade, which I had once visited and which astonished and fascinated me as much as anything ever had. That roaring, yelling, screaming whirlpool of life! And then the lake, with its pure white sails and its blue water; the Chicago River, with its black, oily water, its tall grain elevators and black coal pockets; the great railroad yards, covering miles and miles of space with their ears."(1)

As he walked from place to place collecting, he began to improvise rhythmic word-pictures about these things and many more. "My word-dreams concerned my day, my age, poverty, hope, beauty,—. I imagined myself a great orator with thousands of people before me, my gestures and enunciation and thought perfect, poetic, and all my hearers moved to tears or demonstrations of wild delight."(2)

After a time he put some of his ideas on paper and "in a fever for self-advancement"(3) sent them to Eugene Field. No word ever came from this man, but still Dreiser was undaunted. He felt confident that some day he would really write and be famous, too.

2. "Newspaper Days"—Theodore Dreiser. p. 3.
Just about this time, one of his sisters who was then working in a department store, brought a friend, Alice Kane by name, to spend the week-end. Although Theodore was seeing rather steadily Nellie MacPherson, he did not hesitate to try to win this new attraction. He soon succeeded, although she was at the time engaged. He told her that he was a reporter for the Herald although he was merely a clerk handing out free Christmas gifts, a position which served to fill the interlude between his collecting positions.

Anxious to live up to the reputation of reporter which he had created for himself, he visited several newspaper offices, but received no encouragement whatsoever. The necessity to live while making his way into journalism made his acceptance of a position as collector for a second installment company obligatory and the period spent here was not wasted, for with his keen power of observation, he was storing up much material for his future use. He says, "I think I grasped Chicago in its larger material if not in its more complicated mental aspects.---- I liked the life. I was crazy about it. Chicago was like a great orchestra in a tumult of noble harmonies. I was like a guest at a feast, eating, drinking in a delirium of ecstasy."(1) The fact that he finished with his work around noon was helpful, for he had much time to spend in reading, visiting art galleries, and going to theatres, lectures, and concerts.

Finally he broke with Nellie and spent all of his time with Alice, but even though he loved her, already his eye was scanning a farther horizon, in which neither she nor any other woman had a vital part. "Fame, applause, power, possibly, these were luring me."(1) Alice must have been shrewd enough to have vaguely sensed something of this feeling, for she really never relinquished her relationship with his predecessor.

Home life now became unsatisfactory. His eldest sister, Mary, began to dogmatize as soon as the mother was gone. Though she was married and only lived there between travels with her husband and contributed only a small portion to the upkeep of the home, yet her manner was always one of superiority. The other sisters would sulk and hence the burden of the work fell upon the poor father. The youngest of the girls, Claire, who was anything but a peacemaker, finally brought the situation to a climax by suggesting that Ed, Al, Theodore, and herself set up housekeeping by themselves. Theodore agreed, partly because he felt that there had been inadequate distribution of the family means, and partly because of a hatred which he bore against Mary. She had once accused him of keeping some money which had been sent by Paul to the mother. The money had been sent by check, and his mother had filled in her signature, and designated Theodore as the proper recipient. He secured the money and returned it to her, but either because of her in-

creasing illness or because she wished to keep it a secret, when Paul referred to it in another letter, she said she had not received it. After her death, the subject was reopened and inquiry at the post office proved that it had been paid to Theodore. His sister doubted the truth of his assertion that he had given it to his mother, and had the inspector of the post office interview him about it. For over fifteen years the memory of this one deed kept Mary and Theodore completely divided.

Late in March the new establishment was set up, but this home proved to be no more satisfactory than the other one, and in April, Dreiser resigned his position with the collecting company and left the apartment. With only sixty-five dollars in his possession, he got a room and began to think of his future in earnest. His eyes were constantly fixed upon people in positions far above him. "Those who interested me most," he says, "were bankers, millionaires, artists, executives, leaders, the real rulers of the world."(1)

He became greatly interested in public affairs. The general progress of Europe and America and Asia and Africa all concerned him. He was reading now Emerson, Carlyle, Macaulay, Froude, John Stuart Mill, and others. He had a fair conception of what Nietzsche in Germany, Darwin, Spencer, Wallace, and Tyn dall in England stood for. The forthcoming presidential campaign caused him some excitement.

The newspapers, by their intimacy with everything that was going on in the world, seemed to him to be the swift-list approach to all of which he was dreaming. At this time Chicago was in the heyday of its newspaper prestige. Some very remarkable editors, publishers, and newspaper writers were at work there.

At the end of one week of steady hunting for a job of reporter, he still had nothing, and had not a sudden inspiration come to his aid, he might have been waiting months. He decided to select one office, a small one, and simply worm his way in. He compares himself to a homeless cat hanging around a doorstep for days and days, meowing to be taken in. He took a seat in a far corner and simply waited for something to happen. Gradually the reporters began to talk with him, thinking he might be a member of the staff. He was always on the alert for some accident or bit of news he might report to the city editor. At last the copy-reader, John Maxwell, took notice of him, and finding he had come there everyday for two weeks, encouraged him by telling him to hang around, that the National Democratic Convention was to open in June, and that a few extra men might be taken on.

From this man he learned much, for Mr. Maxwell took a fancy to him. He told him of the most successful newspaper men, how some reporters did police, some politics, some general news,
etc. He tried to impress upon him that the newspaper world was a seething maelstrom, that the men engaged in this work were on the whole tricky and shifty, and above all, heartlessly unconsiderate of each other. Since Theodore seemed determined to stick it out, he offered to help him, though he felt certain that Theodore also would prove the ingrate once he got a start.

Before his actual newspaper work began, he was asked to sell, at a profit of ten cents a copy, a book written by the editorial writer. If he succeeded in selling one hundred and twenty copies, he would be given a chance to try out as a reporter at a salary of fifteen dollars a week. While he was much distressed at having to do this work, there were compensations. He again secured enticing pictures of sunny prosperity. What a contrast with the pictures he had secured while collecting. Of course, it set him "to riotous dressing, and longing made me ache to lounge, and pose after this same fashion."(1)

From this Mr. Gissel, the editor of the book, Dreiser learned how party councils and party tendencies were manufactured, or twisted, or belied, and it served to further reduce his estimate of humanity. He found that editors did not believe what they wrote, but penned what they were ordered to pen. He soon came to realize that "journalism, like politics,—was a slough of muck in which men were making busily and filthily for what their wretched rakes might uncover in the way of financial...

social, political returns." (1)

Having completed his task of book-selling, he was made a cub reporter and given the job covering the hotels for political news. For a day or so he merely drifted around the hotels where the delegates to the National Convention were to stop. He knew nothing about his work and no one seemed anxious to tell him, and worst of all he knew practically nothing of politics. His first article was nothing but mush about the political rot beginning to seethe, etc., and he was promptly told so.

His first real headway in this new game came purely by accident. He happened one night to go to the bar of the hotel before returning to the office to write up the very little that he had learned, and there entered into a discussion of who was to be nominated for president. One man insisted that Cleveland, Hill, or a third man, the name of whom meant nothing to Dreiser, would surely be the choice. Bursting with political knowledge gained from his associates at the office, Dreiser informed this man that he was wrong, and that the third man would be Senator McEntee of South Carolina. At this moment this particular senator was walking through the room, and hearing his name thus spoken of, stopped to inquire who Dreiser was. Finding he was a reporter from the Chicago "Globe," he returned the compliment Dreiser had just paid him by giving him a "scoop"

which proved to be of real value to the paper, and doubtless was the means of his holding his job.

Soon he was asked to write an article on Chicago's vilest slum, which lay between Halsted and the river, for the Sunday issue. This was easy for him, since he passed this district every day, and since he had always speculated much concerning scenes of poverty and degradation. He was puzzled why "nature, when left to itself, should devise such astounding slums and human muck heaps."(1) Some of this feeling he put into his article and Maxwell was impressed, treating him from then on as an equal.

The world of newspaper men with whom he now associated greatly broadened his viewpoint and finally liberated him from any moralistic and religionistic qualms. They had seen much and had become distrustful of conventional principles in general. "They did not believe—that there was a fixed moral order in the world which one contravened at his peril. Heaven only knows where they had been or what they had seen," but they doubted the motives, professed or secret, of nearly every man. No man, apparently, was utterly and consistently honest; that is, no man in a powerful or dominant position; and but few were kind or generous or truly public-spirited.——Most of these young men looked upon life as a fierce, grim struggle in which no quarter was either given or taken, and in which all men laid traps,

lied, squandered, erred through illusion: a conclusion with which I now most heartily agree,"(1) he added. He naturally came to feel that if one could do anything which the world really wanted, it would not trouble itself so much about one's private life.

He advanced in the opinion of the staff by his ability to write feature articles and even tried a few parables, mild, poetic commentaries on this or that, which were published under the name of Carl Dreiser, a nickname given him by Maxwell.

Very shortly he met a man who he later felt had a very marked effect on his career. "He was a tall, dark, broad-shouldered, slender-legged individual of about forty-five or fifty, with a shock of curly black hair and a burst of smuggler-like whiskers. He was truly your Bret Harte gold-miner type, sloven, red-eyed at times but amazingly intelligent and genial. --His nose and cheeks were tinted a fiery red by much drinking, the nose having a veinous, bulbous, mottled and strawberry texture."(2) John T. McEnnis was his name, a well-known middle-West newspaper man. He came from St. Louis, the son of a well-known politician there, and had taken up journalism for the same reason Dreiser had—as the most direct avenue to fame and fortune, but at forty-five he was a mere hanger-on, tossed from job to job because of his excess drinking.

Mr. McEnnis became city editor of the Globe during

1. "Newspaper Days"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 69
Dreiser's second month there. At first Theodore was afraid of
him, but the man took an immediate fancy to him, amounting al-
most to adoration. Under his guidance Dreiser's career was
greatly furthered. He urged him to leave Chicago and try for a
position on the St. Louis "Globe-Democrat," a paper of which he
had once been city editor.

One of the assignments given him by McEnnis was a
series of articles or a campaign to close a group of fake suc-
tion shops which were daily fleecing hundreds by selling bogus
jewelry. The police department derived a handsome revenue from
these shops, but it was not righteous indignation aroused by
such graft that brought about the campaign. The owner of the
paper simply wished to get even with his rivals—another exam-
ple of the use of the press for personal grudges. It increased
his belief that "men—all of us—were small, irritable, hasty
in their struggle for existence."(1)

Dreiser was successful in his handling of this cam-
aign and got his reward in the form of a position secured by
McEnnis for him on the St. Louis "Globe-Democrat." Thus ended
his days in Chicago.

2. St. Louis

In November, 1892 Dreiser arrived in St. Louis to
work for Joseph B. McCullagh, "a short, thick, aggressive,
rather pugnacious and defensive person of Irish extraction.

He was short, sturdy, Napoleonic, ursine rather than leonine. \(\dagger\) Dreiser came to have the greatest of admiration for him.

As usual he spent much time examining the city, its main streets, shops, hotels, its residence districts. These latter staggered him by their beauty and exclusive air of grandeur.

He had to do his best writing in this city, for Mc Cullagh was a brilliant personality and a real force. His editorials were beautifully written and proved an inspiration to a cub reporter.

Spiritually at this time, "I was," he said, "what might be called a poetic melancholic, crossed by a vivid materialistic lust of life. I doubt if any human being, however poetic or however material, ever looked upon the scenes of this world, material or spiritual, so called, with a more covetous eye. My body was blazing with sex, as well as with a desire for material and social supremacy—to have wealth, to be in society-----. In addition to this I was filled with an intense sympathy for the woes of others, life in all its helpless degradation and poverty, the unsatisfied dreams of people, their sweaty labors, the things—the things they would never have, their hungers, thirsts, half-formed dreams of pleasure, their gibbering insanities and beaten resignations at the end. I have sobbed dry sobs looking into what I deemed to be broken

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faces and the eyes of human failures."(1)

Happy though he was in his work, he was most despondent at times. His stomach still bothered him, because of a troublesome appendix, and he felt he had no courage at all. He summed himself up as a weakling of the worst kind. "Nearly all youths were far more proficient in all the niceties of life than I was: manners, dancing, knowledge of dress and occasions. Hence I was a fool. The dullest athlete of the least proficiency could overcome me; the most minute society man, if socially correct, was infinitely my superior. Hence what had I to hope for? And when it came to wealth and opportunity, how poor I seemed! No girl of real beauty and force would have anything to do with a man who was not a success; and so there I was, a complete failure to begin with."(2)

From his work here he became very familiar with the news of the courts, jails, city hospitals, police courts, etc. He got well acquainted with the Irish boss of the city, Edward Butler, and learned "boss politics," and also learned much about labor organizations from Terrance V. Powderly, the head of the dominant labor organization. The great amount of graft in every phase of life surprised him. The underlying currents of despondency in seemingly happy and prosperous people amazed him. For example a Robert Hazard, a member of the staff who seemed to have a flair for literary work, a gay, intellectual,

forceful character, and who wrote a wild-west thriller, with an eye for a quick sale, ended his life at a very early age by shooting himself. The great McCullagh finally committed suicide.

The two members of this newspaper staff with whom he was most closely connected were Richard Wood and Peter McCord, artists. Richard was thin, had pale, bony hands, long and graceful, and an air of "Touch thou me not, O defiled one."(1) He became very attached to him, but always thought of him as "a human, humorous, something to coddle, endure, decipher, laugh at. Surely Dick Wood, or "Richard Wood, artist," as his card read, might safely be placed in any pantheon of the unconventionally ridiculous and delicious."(2)

Spiritually he was as morbid as Dreiser, and had the same desire--"to share in the splendors of marble halls and palaces and high places generally."(3) He lived continually in a world of dreams, always playing the part of some noble, heir to or affianced to some maid with an immense fortune. How Dreiser did envy him his airs and, childish as it may seem, his watch, scarf pin, and a boutonnière of violets of which he was never lacking. Even "his sad, wan, reproachful, dying smile"(4) was envied by Theodore. He felt elated even to be permitted to scan the faintest outlines of his wondrous dreams, and dreams these were.

For some peculiar reason Wood felt there was some-

thing vastly mysterious and superior about the entire Chinese race. He hoped to get into some huge Chinese organization known as the Six Companies which he felt was slowly but surely getting control of the entire habitable globe. Likewise his dream of literary fame was to come about through a study of the underworld of St. Louis at first hand. In preparation for this scheme, he had made friends with all sorts of wayfarers whom, of course, Dreiser met. Theodore felt of him that "he was a rather underdone Poe or de Maupassant or Manet."(1)

Peter McCoy was the more cordial of the two fellows, as well as the more practical. From him Dreiser got some of the sanest conceptions of life. So much did he come to think of him that he made him the subject of one of his sketches in "Twelve Men." Peter's mind was so wrought up by the rich pattern which life was forever weaving right before his eyes that he hated to waste time to sleep. He loved, as did Dreiser, to prowl about after working hours. It was Peter who urged Dreiser to write a comic opera and offered to supply suggestions for costumes and color schemes.

The office of the Globe seemed to be flowing over with incipient literary talent. Hazard, in company with another man, had written a novel entitled Theo, "which was plainly a bog-fire kindled by those blazing French suns, Zola and Balzac."(2) The scene was laid in Paris and resembled the atmos-

phere of Zola's Nana, plus the idealism of Balzac's The Great Men from the Provinces. Dreiser became so enthusiastic about this novel that he in turn wished to create something, preferably a play. The most marked effect it had on him, however, was to form the opening wedge for him into the realm of realism.

Both the men insisted that if any such work was to be published, it must be done abroad, for America would not publish any such frank picture of life. This fact greatly puzzled Dreiser, for he had learned very decidedly from his newspaper work that "this idea of a perfect world which contained neither sin nor shame for any save vile outcasts, criminals and vagrants, was the trashiest lie that was ever foisted upon an all too human world. Not a day, not an hour, but the pages of the very newspaper we were helping to fill with our scribbled observations were full of the most incisive pictures of the lack of virtue, honesty, kindness, even average intelligence, not on the part of a few but of nearly everybody. Not a business, apparently, not a home, not a political or social organization or an individual but in the course of time was guilty of an infraction of some kind of this seemingly perfect and unbroken social and moral code. But in spite of all this, judging by the editorial page, the pulpit and the noble roulthings of the average citizen speaking for the benefit of his friends and
neighbors, all men were honest--only they weren't; all women
were virtuous and without evil intent or design--but they
weren't; all mothers were gentle, self-sacrificing slaves, sweet
pictures for songs and Sunday Schools--only they weren't."(1)

Talking over all these things, Dreiser, Peter McCord,
Dick Wood spent many an evening. All of them agreed that life
used people, sometimes to their advantage, sometimes not. Their
daily routine work provided ample proof that life was sad and
grim. All three were duly impressed by the prominent, their
work frequently bringing them in touch with the social doings
of the elite, and how they craved to be able to do these things.
Every time a chance came to interview a distinguished individu-
al, the first question asked, at least by Dreiser, was what was
the individual's thought of life, its meaning.

Not only did Dreiser come to be greatly impressed by
the kaleidoscopic character of newspaper work, but also did he
learn that honesty and charity had no place in business life.
"Get the news," he was told, and it mattered not how. "Cheat
and win and you were all right; be honest and lose and you were
fired."(2)

At this time Dreiser was writing a column for the
Globe, known as "Heard in the Corridors," in addition to his
regular reporting. This column was nothing more than a series
of imaginary interviews with passing guests at the various


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hotels. He enjoyed this because it gave him a chance to let his imagination have free rein.

Once in a while he indulged in verse, scribbling down his depressions and dreams. The mood for poetry writing came about through a fit of despondency over Alice, whom he had left behind in Chicago. Having left without saying goodbye, he had written her a letter and after some time received the following reply:

"'Dear Theo:

"'I got your letter the day you left, but then it was too late. I know what you say is true, about your being called away, and I don't blame you. I'm only sorry our quarrel didn't let you come to see me before you left. Still, that was my fault too, I guess. I can't blame you entirely for that.

"'Anyhow, Theo, that isn't what I'm writing you for. You know that you haven't been just the same to me as you once were. I know how you feel. I have felt it too. I want to know if you won't send me back the letters I wrote you. You won't want them now. Please send them, Theo, and believe I am as ever your friend,

"'Alice,'

"There was a little blank space on the paper, and then:
"I stood by the window last night and looked out upon the street. The moon was shining and those dead trees over the way were waving in the wind. I saw the moon on the little pool of water over in the field. It looked like silver. Oh, Theo, I wish I were dead."[1]

This letter cut him to the quick, but not being able to see how he could support a wife, and his natural tendency being to drift, he did not insist that she come to St. Louis. The mental stress which this situation produced, however, was sufficient to throw him into a soulful mood. He began to think that there was no pleasure without pain, and life offered no solution--only silence and the grave. Hence, he wrote a poem about this tangle of life.

However, this dream of becoming a great poet was soon somewhat submerged by his increasing fervor for drama. Having done a masterful job in reporting a terrific oil explosion, he was given the job of dramatic critic on the paper. Of course this job gave him passes to all the performances in the city, but since he still had his other duties, he soon found it no easy task. However, the theatre served to increase his ever-growing romanticism. "Love and mansions and travel and saccharine romance were the great things--. Nothing could be so wonderful as love in a mansion, a palace in some oriental realm such as were indicated in the comic operas in which DeWolf

Hopper, Thomas Q. Seabrooke, Francis Wilson, Eddie Foy and Frank Daniels were then appearing."(1) He became very fond of the actress type of girl. May not the aspirations of Sister Carrie to be an actress have grown from this admiration?

It was this work of dramatic criticism that finally cost him his job at the Globe. Twice he brought the editor, Mr. McCullagh, into the spotlight in an unfavorable way, once by giving a ridiculously high-flown account of a negro singer's concert which the rival papers poked fun at, and again by writing reports of three shows which because of heavy rains which had caused numerous wash-outs, did not even arrive in town. What a chance for a rival paper to get even, and the chance was not lost. Realizing what a storm this error would bring about at the office, he wrote a letter in which he resigned, and leaving it upon Mr. McCullagh's desk, finished his work for the Globe.

Soon he acquired a position on the St. Louis Republic. Mr. H. B. Wardell was city-editor here, and since he had a very forceful character, he succeeded in making a deep impression on Dreiser. "He was at once a small and yet a large man mentally, wise and incisive in many ways, petty and even venomous in others, a man to coddle and placate if you were behold to him, but on the whole, a man above the average in ability. And he had the strangest, fussiest, bossiest love of great litera-

ture of any one I have ever known, especially in the realm of newspapers. Zola at this time was apparently his ideal of what a writer should be, and after him Balzac and Loti. "(1) Constantly was he after Dreiser to imitate Zola's vivid description of the drab and the gross and the horrible. He thought he should handle the sensual and the poignant after the fashion of Balzac and Loti.

This man worked Dreiser to his limit, and called upon him to display sentiment, humor or cold, hard descriptive force, urging him to model after Hugo, Balzac, Dickens, Zola, etc., but it was good teaching for his future work. He did so well under his tutelage that Wandell gave him many special features to do. One of these extra jobs happened to be to write a humorous sketch of an approaching baseball game between the fat men of one local fraternity and the lean men of another. So cleverly did he handle the situation that Wandell gave him this job to perform and no other. Of course, this afforded him many hours of leisure and brought him into prominence.

Having thus established himself as a feature writer of some ability, he was given another feature assignment--this time to go to the World's Fair as traveling correspondent with a party of school teachers. This did not seem a cheery prospect to him, for his natural shyness in the presence of women made him nervous about his ability to be interesting and to

extract news out of them.

The expedition proved to be a pleasant one, giving him an opportunity to see his father and brothers again. Of the several teachers on the trip, he was most attracted to two, a Miss Ginity, a rosy, black-haired Irish girl, with snapping black eyes, and a Miss W----for whom the attraction was so great that it finally developed into marriage.

Even amid these gay surroundings at the Fair, Dreiser could not keep himself from wandering cityward, and speculating on how baseless and shifting a thing life was, how uncertain and unstable its seeming ties were—"that which one day we held dear was tomorrow gone, to come no more."(1)

It seemed most prosaic to return to the ordinary routine after the romantic days at the Fair. Interesting people came to his attention, however. One in particular was a mind-reader who by his skill set Theodore to pondering on the matters of psychology and chemic mysteries. Another was a Mr. Mooney, a spiritualist who was reported to have an orgiastic character to his seances, and whom the paper wished to use as an example and rid the city of him. Many lessons concerning "the crass, rough forces of life, its queer non-moral tangles, bluster, bluff, lies, make-believe, etc."(2) were learned by Theodore from his part in this job.

From all these and similar experiences, Dreiser came

to feel that "few there were who could afford to cast the stone
of righteousness or superior worth. Nearly all were secretly
doing one thing and another which they would publicly denounce
and which, if exposed, would cause them to be shunned or pun-
ished. Sex vagaries were not as uncommon as the majority sup-
posed and perhaps were not to be given too sharp a punishment
if strict justice were to be done to all."(1)

His ability as a newspaper writer had become very ev-
ident by this time, so much so that meeting Mr. McCullagh in
the Southern Hotel one day, he was offered his old job back.
How this offer thrilled Dreiser and lifted him high in his own
esteem!

Miss W-----, returning to her school work in September
of that year, came to St. Louis to visit an aunt and Dreiser
having written her a note, recalling their happy moments at the
World Fair, she arranged for a meeting. His love for this lady
was pure romance, almost poetry.

"Indeed I could only think of her as a part of some
idyllic country scene, of walking or riding with her along some
leafy country lane, of rowing a little boat on a stream, of sit-
ting with her under trees in a hammock, of watching her play
tennis, of being with her where grass, flowers, trees and a
blue sky were."(2) He was so vain of his standing in her eyes
that he wished her to believe he was more than a mere reporter,

a sort of traveling correspondent and feature man, for so beautiful was she and of so sweet and noble a mind that he feared he would never win her.

Being able to see his love only every two weeks, he wrote lengthy, intimate accounts of his own affairs, his work, his dreams, his theories and imaginings in regard to everything. These letters were really his first attempt at literary expression, for his newspaper work compelled him to confine himself within certain limits. It offered no outlet for his seething emotions.

The next five months were a period of just color and mood, "the richest period of rank romanticism I have ever endured,"(1) he feels. If he could have married soon, this affair would have been perfect, but such was impossible. Anyhow, he never was sure that he wanted home, peace, children, stability, and the like. What he really always wanted was the joy of possessing the lady of his choice "without any of the hindrances or binding chains of convention and monogamy, but she would have none of it. This unsatisfied desire, added to a huge world-sorrow over life itself, the richness and promise of the visible scene, the sting and urge of its beauty, the briefness of our days, the uncertainty of our hopes, the smallness of our capacity to achieve or consume where so much is, produced an intense ache and urge which endured," he says, "until I left "newspaper Days"—Theodore Dreiser. P: 326.
What notions of life for a fellow of twenty-two!

Being very conventional, Miss W----- insisted on a formal engagement and kept Theodore always in his place. However, this in no way prevented him from seeing beauty in other women and carrying on mild flirtations with several of them.

A strange thing concerning all of the more important of Dreiser's love affairs was that the lady with whom he was in love always seemed to have a sister, whom Theodore seemed to somewhat prefer, but having started with the one, he found it hard to change. Nellie had her sister Lilly, you will recall; Miss W-----likewise had a sister whose personality drew him; a girl whom he met through a murder story for the paper and to whom he was attracted proved also to have a sister, equally alluring. Was this just chance or did it prove that Theodore was just in love with love, and attached his sentiment to every beautiful female with whom he came in contact?

At any rate Miss W----- so held his interest that he became anxious to get ahead so he could marry her, and a period of mental dissatisfaction and unrest set in which finally took him out of St. Louis. He became obsessed with the idea of going East. The arrival of his brother Paul just at this time helped to increase this desire, for Paul was imbued with the feeling that New York was the one place to live, and urged Theodore to come

there.

At this time also Michaelson, a cub reporter who had come to St. Louis to get Dreiser to help him secure a position, began "to harp on" the advantages of being a country editor. He painted in such rosy colors the ease of the life, the security, etc. that Theodore, already depressed by the horrible grind of newspaper-dom, decided to consider the proposition. Had it ever materialized, "in six months I should have been arrested or drummed out by the preacher, the elders, and all the other worthies for miles around,"(1) he insists.

A paper in Grand Rapids, Ohio, near the farm of Michaelson's father, was finally decided upon, and Dreiser was assured that this should offer a solution for all his material and social aspirations. He might, by the way of this paper, become a state assemblyman, a senator, a congressman, or even United States senator. All the delights of a country life were pictured and Dreiser says his "imagination mounted to a heaven of unadulterated success, peace, joy."(2) Hence, after a very short time, he left St. Louis for Grand Rapids to begin this rural adventure.

3. The Route East

After looking over the prospects in Grand Rapids, he realized the hopelessness of the adventure, and decided to push on East.

His first stop was Toledo, a city which he found very agreeable. Here, as usual, he spent his first hours looking over the city, and his heart ached for the seeming comfort and luxury of the homes he saw. Next he hunted up the office of the leading morning paper, to find that the only job was a three or four day one, riding around on street cars during a strike to report how things were. It was a very dangerous job, for he ran the risk of being shot or hit with a brick, but he accepted it and found it very interesting. He was then sent to report upon some paintings exhibited at a charity bazaar.

The character of the city editor was the thing that appealed to Dreiser most. Had he been a girl, Dreiser says he would have married him, of course. It would have been inevitable, for they were intellectual affinities. Their dreams were almost identical, though the editor was a sentimentalist in thought and a realist in action, while Dreiser was a realist in thought and a sentimentalist in action. Like Dreiser, he had aspirations to write—either poems or novels.

His next stop was Cleveland and again he was impressed by the residences of the very rich, occupied by such men as John D. Rockefeller, Tom Johnson, Henry M. Flagler, and his envy caused him pain again, plus the urge to become famous somehow or other. He speculated much about "the little brain toiling for the big one."(1)

He eventually got connected with the Cleveland Leader, a very conservative paper, but only as a feature writer for the Sunday issue. Securing only seven dollars and a half for two descriptions, he decided he must move on again.

He made his next stop at Buffalo, but aside from the Falls he found little of interest. However, "here, as in Cleveland, I could not help but see that in spite of our boasted democracy and equality of opportunity there was as much misery and squalor and as little decent balancing of opportunity against energy as anywhere else," he says. "The little homes, the poor, shabby, colorless, dreary, drab little homes with their grassless yards, their unreeved streets, their uncollected garbage, their fluttering, thin-flamed gas-lamps, the crowds of ragged, dirty, ill-cared-for children! Near at hand was always the inevitable and wretched saloon, not satisfying a need for pleasure in a decent way but pandering to the lowest and most conniving and most destroying instincts of the lowest politicians and healers and grifters and crooks, while the huge financial and manufacturing magnates at the top with their lust for power and authority used the very flesh of the weaker elements for purposes of their own---------------. Shout as they might, there was here displayed before my very eyes ample evidence that, somewhere there was a screw loose in the 'Fatherhood of man-Brotherhood of God'-machinery."(1)

1. "Newspaper Days"—Theodore Dreiser; P. 320.
After mooting about for ten days, he decided to journey on, this time to Pittsburg.

4. Pittsburg

This city he considered to be the most agreeable in which he had ever worked or lived. "What a city for a realist to work and dream in!" he exclaims. "The wonder to me is that it has not produced a score of writers, poets, painters and sculptors, instead of—well, how many?"(1)

His interest soon centered in the many battles of labor and capital. Just at that time, "America was entering upon the most lurid phase of that vast, splendid, most lawless and most savage period in which the great financiers were plotting and conniving at the enslavement of the people and belaboring each other. Those crude parvenu dynasties which now sit enthroned in our democracy, threatening its very life with their pretensions and assumptions, were then in their very beginning. John D. Rockefeller was still in Cleveland; Henry M. Flagler, William Rockefeller, H. H. Rogers, were still comparatively young and secret agents; Carnegie was still in Pittsburg, an iron master, and of all his brood of powerful children only Frick had appeared; William H. Vanderbilt and Jay Gould had only recently died; Cleveland was President, and Mark Hanna was an unknown business man in Cleveland. The great struggles of the railroads, the coal companies, the gas companies, to overawe and tax the people were still in abeyance, or just being

born. The multi-millionaire had arrived, it is true, but not the billionaire. On every hand were giants plotting, fighting, dreaming; and yet in Pittsburgh there was still something of a singing spirit."(1)

As usual he made his rounds of the newspaper offices to find only one, the Dispatch, at all interested in his services. The city editor of this paper, a shrewd, canny, reticent man, yet one who was always gracious and who was an excellent judge of news, gave him a tentative promise of a job in a week or so.

This period, as you can well guess, was cut to good use. Having secured from a stationery store a man of the city, he roamed to his heart's delight. One of the first places he wished to see was the enormous Carnegie steel plant which only recently had played such a great part in the industrial drama of America. The details of the Homestead strike which had taken place only fifteen months before were still very vivid in Dreiser's mind: how the Carnegie Steel Company had planned to break the power of the Amalgamated Steel Workers, whom the company thought to be growing too forceful, and how the Amalgamated, resenting the introduction of three hundred Pinkerton guards to protect, supposedly, the plant, had attacked them, killing some and injuring others, and thus permitting the introduction of the State militia which quickly and permanently broke the power of the strikers. For six months, the strikers

waited and starved, and then finally returned to work, such of them as would be received. But the men never forgot; there was a compound feeling of defeat and sullen despair. For months the company imported Poles, Hungarians, Lithuanians to replace the ousted strikers. There were whole colonies here, housed under the most unsatisfactory conditions. (1)

On another day he explored the east end of Pittsburg, which was the exclusive residence section of the city. What a contrast he found here to the hovels and deprivations which he had witnessed at Homestead! The arboretum or botanical garden under glass, situated in Schenley Park interested him immensely. This had been the gift of Phipps of the Carnegie Company. Likewise a large, graceful library of white limestone, a gift of Andrew Carnegie was in process of construction. The fact that Carnegie, one of the chief beneficiaries of Homestead, was the possessor of three great houses—one here, one in New York, and one in Scotland—made Theodore think considerably about "these things called democracy and equality about which men prated. Had they any basis in fact? There was constant palaver about equality of opportunity which gave such men as these" (Carnegie, Oliver, Frick, etc.) "their chance, but I could not help speculating as to the lack of equality of opportunity these men created for others once their equality at the top had made them. If equality of opportunity had been so excellent for them why not for others, especially those in their immediate care? True

all men had not the brains to seize upon and make use of that
which was put before them, but again, not all men of brains had
the blessing of opportunity as had these few men. Strength, as
I felt, should not be too arrogant or too forgetful of the ac-
cident or chance by which it arrived. It might do something
for the poor—pay them decent living wages, for example.”(1)

Going to work soon for the Dispatch, he settled to
his regular routine of newspaper work. Two men on the staff
proved helpful to him—one the political man, who gave him a
clear insight into the general cleavage of local and state pol-
itics and personalities; the other, the labor man who took him
into various mill slums in and near the city. Here he saw mills
in operations and secured a quite detailed knowledge of the
work. Likewise he inspected the tenements occupied by the work-
ers. One lavatory served twenty families; and there being no
water pipes, all water had to be secured from a hydrant. The
conditions everywhere were deplorable, and again Dreiser felt
the injustice of these people being forced to endure such hard-
ships in order that Mr. Carnegie might give the world one or
two extra libraries with his name plastered on the front, and
Mr. Frick a mansion on Fifth Avenue.”(2)

It was during a visit to the Allegheny Carnegie Li-

erary that he chanced upon Balzac’s Wild Ass’s Skin and he felt
after an afternoon’s reading that a new and inviting door to

life had suddenly been thrown open to him. The discovery proved to be a literary revolution for him. "For a period of four or five months," he says, "I ate, slept, dreamed, lived him and his characters and his views and his city."(1) He thought that Pittsburgh was very similar in many ways to Paris, at least in the picture it afforded.

Inspired by the vivid descriptions of this author, he found it quite easy to depict local scenes for features in the Dispatch, and his ability was so esteemed by the members of the staff that his status was completely changed. No longer was he a cub reporter but a feature man whom the city editor, the Sunday editor, in fact all the important men of the office asked to dine. Instead of seizing the opportunity to advance himself, he mooned and dreamed as usual, spending much time reading at the Carnegie Library and gathering all sorts of data as to the steel magnates—Carnegie, Phipps, and Frick especially. He learned all about their homes, clubs, local condescensions and superiorities, data that was of great value to him when he came to write his novel The Financier.

Several things at this time conspired to revive his desire to work in New York. For one thing the papers gave great space to New York events. One paper, Town Topics, reported the exclusive society affairs so vividly that Dreiser got the impression that there existed in New York "a kind of

1. "Newspaper Days"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 412
Elysian realm in which forever basked the elect of fortune."(1)
To cap all this he received a letter from Paul who was now working there urging him to come, so after a brief visit to his fiancée, he boarded the train for New York.

5. New York

This city greatly appealed to him. He felt as if life here was harder, more cynical, ruthless, brazen, and shameless, yet all the more alluring for these very reasons. Everywhere was the feeling of indifference to ideals, a sense of power, of virtue with little idealism, of huge dreams and lusts and vanities.

He spent his first few days getting glimpses of the worst and the best New York had to offer. Especially was he interested by Wall Street, "a kind of cloudy Olympus in which foregathered all the gods of finance."(2) The Herald, Sun, World, and Times buildings seemed like fortresses to him, so overawed and frightened was he by their size.

Deciding that it would be best to return to Pittsburg and save a little money before he tried to storm these editorial offices, he left New York for a period of four months, during which time he almost starved himself to save two hundred and forty dollars.

While reading in the library during his spare moments, he discovered three authors who "quite blew me, intellectually,

to bits," he exclaims. "Hitherto, until I had read Huxley, I had some lingering filaments of Catholicism trailing about me, faith in the existence of Christ, the soundness of his moral and sociological deductions, the brotherhood of man. But on reading Science and Hebrew Tradition and Science and Christian Tradition, and finding both the Old and New Testaments to be not compendiums of revealed Truth but mere records of religious experiences, and very erroneous ones at that, and then taking up First Principles and discovering that all I deemed substantial—man's place in nature, his importance in the universe, this too, too solid earth, man's very identity save as an infinitesimal speck of energy or a 'suspended equation' drawn or blown here and there by larger forces in which he moved quite unconsciously as an atom—all questioned and dissolved into other and less understandable things, I was completely thrown down in my conceptions or non-conceptions of life."(1)

He came to feel that spiritually we never get anywhere, that all our joys, ideals, struggles, sorrows, and deprivations are merely chemic compulsions, that man is "just a mechanism, undevised and uncreated, and a badly and carelessly driven one at that."(2)

While he was gloomily speculating about all this, a news item in one of the papers told of Kipling's arrival in America and of the enthusiasm with which he was being received.

He was filled with envy and a desire for a career of his own, so he again returned to New York. But he found it no easy task to secure a position. He tramped the streets for hours, starting in at the shops—wanderings which he later depicted in *Sister Carrie*. The idea of "Hurstwood" was born from his observations of bums, loafers, idlers, "the flotsam and jetsam of the great city's whirl and strife."(1)

Finally, becoming dour and somewhat angry at being refused admittance to the city-editors' rooms, he got sufficient courage to force his entrance to the room of the city editor of the *World*. So much attention was attracted by this unprecedented action, that Mr. Arthur Brisbane noticed him and saw that he got a position, but it proved to be far from the enticing one he had been anticipating. Mr. Joseph Pulitzer was the owner of this paper and according to Dreiser "a semi-neurasthenic, a disease-demonized soul, who could scarcely control himself in anything, a man who was fighting an almost insane battle with life itself, trying to be omnipotent and what not else and never to die."(2)

Dreiser was given a position as "space-man", and paid only a small amount for his time. All the good stories he got were turned over to other men on the staff, but the experience here served as a good school of life, however. He learned that in every phase of life there was graft and dishonesty. Even

the city officials, politicians, and policemen "were closely connected with all sorts of gambling and wire-tapping and bunco-steering, and even the subornation of murder."

The sights which he saw at the Bellevue Hospital left an indelible impression on his mind.

Nevertheless, his awe of the disgusting forces of life itself, encouraged by the reading of Spencer, Huxley, and Balzac; a depressed physical condition at this time; the astounding contrast between wealth and poverty which was so evident in New York; the disillusionment caused by the sharp contrast between the professed ideals and preachments of such a paper as the World and the heartlessness and savageness of its inner workings—all of these things contributed to drive him from newspaper work to the field of editing and finally authorship.

E. His Later Life

This section of the thesis will, of necessity, have to be rather inconclusive, for although Mr. Dreiser has expressed his intention of relating the experiences of his later life in two volumes: A Literary Apprenticeship, and Literary Experiences; as yet these books are still unpublished. The following few facts seem to be all that are available at this time.

In 1891, he married Miss Sarah Osborne White, the school teacher referred to as Miss W----. This marriage was apparently not a successful one, for he says in Newspaper Days

that he undertook this perilous adventure "after the first flare of love had thinned down to the pale flame of duty. Need anything more be said? The first law of convention had been obeyed, whereas the governing forces of temperament had been overridden—and with what results eventually you may well suspect. So much for romance."(1)

At this time he was engaged in magazine work. From 1895 to 1898 he was editor of Every Month. Then came special work for Harper's, McClure's, Century, Cosmopolitan, and Munsey's. In 1905 he became editor of Smith's Magazine, a position which he held for a year. In 1906 he accepted the position of managing editor of Broadway Magazine. Then came the position of editor-in-chief of the Butterick Publication (Delineator, Designer, New Idea, English Delineator) which he held from 1907 to 1910. In 1907 he organized a National Child Rescue Campaign. He finally accepted the position of editor of the American Spectator, a position which he relinquished in January, 1934.

His first novel, Sister Carrie, published in 1900 was banned, although Frank Norris, who was then reader for Doubleday Page, recommended it most enthusiastically. Eleven years elapsed before the second novel, Jennie Gerhardt, appeared. From this time on Dreiser produced at least one book almost every year, in the following order:

1912: The Financier

1913: Traveller at Forty
1914: The Titan
1915: The "Genius"
1916: Plays of the Natural and the Supernatural; A Hoosier Holiday
1918: Free and Other Stories
1919: Twelve Pen; The Hand of the Potter
1920: Rev Rub-a-Dub-Dub
1922: A Book About Myself (now called Newspaper Days)
1923: The Color of a Great City
1925: The American Tragedy
1926: Moods, Cadenced and Declaimed
1927: Chains and Lesser Novels
1928: Dreiser Looks at Russia
1929: A Gallery of Women; My City
1930: Epitaph; Fine Furniture
1931: Dawn
1932: Tragic American

He has travelled during this period to some extent, taking a European tour in 1911 which was financed by a Mr. Barfleur, an English gentleman who was anxious to publish a book containing Mr. Dreiser's impressions of Europe. These ideas are well expressed in Traveller at Forty. He likewise travelled through Russia with a similar intent. In the companion-
ship of Franklin Booth, who has illustrated many of his works, he toured the West, revisiting the scenes of his early childhood.

At the present time he is living at the Hotel Ansonia, New York City.
III

Autobiographical Tendencies of His Novels

A. Introduction

It is inevitable that a man who had undergone as many hardships as Dreiser had in his early life should always visualize the world from an economic viewpoint. His characters are usually of the lower middle class, "put in a multitudinous world and become mannikins played with by forces which they can never control and to which they are usually unable to adjust themselves. It is a grim world, but the grimness comes less from the sight and the thought of social hardships than from the consciousness of ruthless, supernatural forces."(1) None of his characters are ever totally happy, for they seem unable to experience for long either surfeit or contentment.

An outstanding characteristic of Dreiser seems to be a persistent wish to be an important personage and this is consistently true of his main characters. His idea of an important personage seems to be to have talent or genius of some nature, "equipped with a heavy purse, and acclaimed by the public.--He feared poverty because it menaced one's illusion of self-importance; he craved wealth and prestige because they enhanced the feeling of self-importance."(2)

Another marked characteristic is the indulgence

in reminiscent emotion. He forever pictured to himself the future in rosy hues and all his leading characters dream in exactly the same rosy fashion of their futures. Again he lived much in the past and had continually a sense of life slipping too fast away. Scarcely one of his principal characters fails to lapse frequently into the future and the past, and to sigh for what is not.

B. Sister Carrie

This book, the first of his novels, was suppressed in alarm by a timorous publisher. Before the appearance of this novel it had been tacitly held that all men were honest, industrious, altruistic, faithful to one love, and true to the spirit of democracy. All women were likewise virtuous; at least prostitutes were in a negligible minority. This book was, of course, scandalous, since Carrie, a seduced village maiden, is far from reformed and set back on virtue's path at the end of the story, nor is she punished with poverty and disgrace for her sins.

It is easily discernible in this story that Dreiser himself is the prototype of Carrie. Both were eighteen years of age when they set out for Chicago "bright, timid, and full of illusions of ignorance and youth."(1) They found the same thrill at the approach to the great city. She fell immediate victim of the city's hypnotic influence, as he did.

Her wanderings in search for a position were typical

of his trampings of the Chicago streets. Both were timid of receiving a curt rebuff and would go past places several times before securing sufficient courage to go in and inquire for work. The panorama of life to be seen during these walks compensated both somewhat for the miseries endured.

How Dreiser craved the material things of life! Carrie no sooner received her first pay envelope than she was mentally "indulging in a buying orgy." She could never walk through a department store without longing to own everything there. He visited always the residence district as soon as he arrived in a city and visualized all the happiness that was existing within those spacious homes. Carrie also was enraptured by the sights of broad lawns, and lovely mansions. "She imagined that across the richly carved entrance-ways, where the globed and crystalled lamps shone upon panelled doors set with stained and designed panes of glass, was neither care nor unsatisfied desire. She was perfectly certain that here was happiness. If she could but stroll up yon broad walk, cross that rich entrance-way, which to her was of the beauty of a jewel, and sweep in grace and luxury to possession and command—oh! how quickly would sadness flee; how, in an instant, would the heartache end. She gazed and gazed, wondering, delighting, longing, and all the while the siren voice of the unrestful was whispering in her ear."(1)

This love of wealth, social position, and fame was the

dominant characteristic of both. Over and over again do they utter: "What a wonderful thing it is to be rich! How great it is to be famous." How thrilled Carrie was when her picture and a brief account of her success was first in the paper. Just so was Dreiser thrilled when he saw his name in print for the first time.

Fine raiment was a necessity for the happiness of both Carrie and Dreiser. So much was this true of Dreiser that he embezzled twenty-five dollars to secure a fashionable new overcoat, a deed which cost him his job. Carrie was so ashamed of her moderately stylish clothes when she first went on Broadway that she resolved never to go there again until she might fit in the fashion parade. "Ah, then she would be happy!"1 Her final break with Hurstwood was the outcome of this desire to have all her money to spend on herself.

The characteristic of indulging in reminiscent emotion, which I have already mentioned as one of Dreiser's outstanding traits, is very noticeable in Carrie. Frequently he stood at a window and watched the swaying of the dead branches of trees across the way, a feeling of despair and loneliness creeping over him. So we find Carrie doing likewise many times, thinking frequently of the pictures of her early life—the home back in Columbia. "Sorrow in her was aroused by many a spectacle—an uncritical upwelling of grief for the weak and the helpless. She was pained by the sight of the white-faced, ragged

men who slopped desperately by her in a sort of wretched mental stupor. The poorly clad girls who went blowing by her window evenings—she pitied from the depths of her heart."(1) All such sights took her in fancy back to the scenes of her own poverty and struggles. She could also spend hours picturing her future—what she could accomplish with her one hundred and fifty dollars a week, but the pleasures when they actually came were diverting for but a few days. She was always lonely and discontented. Forever did she crave what was just beyond. Dreiser says of her: "Oh, Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart! Onward, onward, it saith, and where beauty leads, there it follows.----It is when the feet weary and hope seems vain that the heartaches and longings arise. Know, then, that for you is neither surfeit or content. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel."(2) Could not this be said verbatim of Dreiser himself?

Everywhere can be seen effects of his journalism. For example, his vivid description of the car strike tallies closely with the scenes which he reported while working in Toledo. The introduction of John L. Sullivan, the pugilist, into the bar scene at Hurstwood's resort recalls to mind his interview of this notable in St. Louis. The humorous account of a baseball game read by Hurstwood in a New York paper reminds us of the facetious reporting of such a game by him when working for the

Republic in St. Louis. The several "sticks" reporting Hurstwood's theft showed the social injustice committed by newspapers. All these periodicals were interested in was the crime, not the complication of life which produced it. How often had he noticed this injustice when he was a reporter.

The whole character of Hurstwood sprang into being from Dreiser's experiences in New York—his attempts to secure positions and the rebuffs he met, his finding of graft in every phase of city life, his knowledge of the life led by the poor victims of fortune, who had to depend on charitable organizations for existence. A dreary picture it was, and the moral, physical, and social deterioration of Hurstwood is a profoundly tragic narrative.

C. Jennie Gerhardt

It was eleven years before this second novel appeared, and it was in reality a more mature and more epical treatment of the same theme as that in Sister Carrie. Always Dreiser feels that environment is the dominant molding force, and in all of his novels he shows the disintegration of a character under the pressure of environment.

"Jennie Gerhardt" is a very simple, emotion-stirring tale of a poor girl who through the force of circumstances allows herself to be seduced, a mistake for which she pays dearly.

A remarkable similarity between the family life of Jennie, the heroine of this novel, and that of Dreiser can read-
ily be noted.

The father of Jennie, a German, opposing his army conscription, had fled to Paris and from there had set forth to America. He was a strongly religious man, believing the minister of the church to be all-powerful. "He had inherited the feeling that the Lutheran Church was a perfect institution, and that its teachings were of all-importance when it came to the issue of the future life."(1) Dreiser's father had likewise escaped from Germany to Paris and finally to America; likewise was he a narrow, hide-bound religionist. Again we find the same attitude shown to Jennie's father by the members of the family as that shown to Dreiser's father. Being over-religious, he was prone to scan with a narrow eye the pleasures and foibles of his children. Any fun they got they had to get on the sly and so he never knew the going-ons of his children until they became public gossip. Now like Dreiser's father from whom everything was kept as long as possible. The occupations even are similar, for both worked in mills—Jennie's in a glass-blowing one and Dreiser's in a woolen. Both men were away from home much, coming home only at times when they were out of work caused by a "shut down" of the mill.

The same similarity is observed in the mothers, for both were of the Mennonite faith, both were simple, home-loving creatures, both had "an open, uneducated, wondering, dreaming

mind, none of the customary principles with which so many conventional souls are afflicted."(1) It was to the mother in both homes that the children turned for sympathetic understanding. Both women craved the luxuries of life, not so much for themselves as for their children. The same ray of hope sprang into the heart of each when their boys set out to seek their fortunes in larger cities. Bass in Jennie Gerhardt went to Cleveland for much the same purpose as Theodore went to Chicago--to try to make a new start for the family in the hope that the past history might be buried in the new surroundings. Even the last illness of these two women was identical in nature. Both became sedentary in their habits and grew weak, a slow case of systemic poisoning taking place. Then came periods of depression during which both remarked, "The leaves coming down make me think I am never going to get well!"(2) The death in each case caused the final breaking up of the family.

The early home life of the children was much the same. Poverty-stricken conditions existed for both families. The fathers being frequently out of work, the children were obliged to eat very meagre meals, fried potatoes being the nearest they ever came to luxurious food; and coffee being an infrequent treat. Coal was secured by picking it up in buckets and baskets along the maze of tracks in the nearby railroad yard. Any odd-job that could be secured by the mothers was undertaken,

such as washing, and cleaning. The limit of credit that could be secured from any grocer was exhausted, before a new one was found and pleaded with. Frequently a child had to remain home from school for lack of shoes.

Naturally the children raised in these homes would crave luxuries, and be carried off their feet by any display of prosperity. The luxurious furnishings of the hotel completely over-awed Jennie, as did the apartment of Senator Brander. Theodore was frequently deeply impressed by apartments of the rich. Again his sister Mary so craved a new hat that it did not seem wrong to accept ten dollars from a Colonel Silsby to purchase it. Jennie felt no great qualms of conscience when she accepted a watch from Senator Brander.

That this Colonel Silsby was the prototype of Senator Brander is obvious. Both men offered to send their mistresses to private schools. Both helped the families of the girls considerably. It was Colonel Silsby who secured the release of Paul from jail, and it was Senator Brander who freed Sebastian from jail.

Jennie's mood during the months previous to the birth of her child was much like that of Sylvia Dreiser, and both girls left their illegitimate child to the care of their mother.

In many places Sebastian resembles Dreiser. Both at one time were employed by installment firms, dealing in clocks, rugs, etc. The impressions of Cleveland received by Sebastian
on his arrival there are not unlike the first impressions that Theodore got of Chicago.

However, there are times when traces of Theodore's personality can be seen in Lester Kane. Could not the following paragraph describe Dreiser?

"He was a naturally observing mind, Rabelaisian in its strength and tendencies, but confused by a multitude of things, the vastness of the panorama of life, the glitter of its details, the unsubstantial nature of its forms, the uncertainty of their justification. Born a Catholic, he was no longer a believer in the divine inspiration of Catholicism;—he was by no means sure that he wanted marriage on any terms. Of course the conjugal state was an institution. It was established, yes, certainly. But what of it? The whole nation believed in it. True, but other nations believed in polygamy. There were other questions that bothered him—such questions as the belief in a single deity or rules of the universe, and whether a republican, monarchical, or aristocratic form of government were best. In short, the whole body of things material, social, and spiritual had come under the knife of his mental surgery and been left but half dissected. Life was not proved to him. Not a single idea of his, unless it were the need of being honest, was finally settled. In all other things he wavered, questioned, procrastinated, leaving to time and to the powers back of the universe the solution of the problems that vexed him." 1

Was not Lester's whole life with Jennie what Dreiser craved with Miss W—and would have had, doubtlessly, had she been less strict in her moral views? Also Lester's idea of the goodness of Jennie—the interpretation that goodness is not to be judged by conventions, but by the motive of the individual—is Dreiser's viewpoint.

In Jennie, herself, can be observed some of Dreiser's traits. Her ardent love of nature compares with his admiration for it. "Nature's fine curves and shadows touched her as a song."(1) No matter how despondent Theodore might become, he could always find a relief in nature. Jennie repeatedly thought how nice it must be to be famous and from a youngster up that thought was dominant in Dreiser's mind.

The impermanence of life and fame, however, was always a source of speculation to Dreiser and we find Senator Brander saying: "What a great fight we make to sustain ourselves! How little difference it will make to me a few years hence!"(2)

Everywhere can be seen evidences of his journalistic life. The write-up given as a Sunday feature in a society paper of the romance between Jennie and Lester shows the feature writer's skill. His graphic descriptions and keen observations are the marks of the reporter. Journalism taught him that destiny was stern and inconsiderate. There never seemed to be any reasonable explanations for disasters which fell upon good, respect-

2. "Jennie Gerhardt"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 21
able people. No matter how hard some people tried to lead a calm, well-ordered existence, fate seemed to dictate otherwise. Jennie was a good illustration of this. She was good to everyone, never harming anyone intentionally. She was the essence of self-sacrifice, but no matter how hard she struggled to follow the straight and narrow path, circumstances forced her to do otherwise. What she was made to suffer was entirely out of proportion to her sins. She lost mother, father, two lovers, and a child, and in spite of all this pain, remained sweet and loving to the end.

The fondness for Hardy which Dreiser had can readily be seen in this book, for there is marked similarity between Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jennie Gerhardt.

D. The Financier

This novel, published in 1912, was the first of a "Trilogy of Desire," of which only two volumes have as yet appeared. It is primarily the biography of the hero, Frank Copperwood, for whom Charles Tyson Yerkes, the Philadelphia and Chicago traction magnate, served as model. Dreiser made an exhaustive study of everything he could find written about this American capitalist. He also went to the city historian and secured access to all the material concerning Old Philadelphia for a half century back. The novel well shows by almost a photographic exactitude in picturing the stages of its hero's pro-
gress in finance the result of such an extensive study. In fact, he massed his facts so deeply that they strain the reader’s capacity to assimilate them.

As a social history the book is very important, and Mr. Dreiser is unique in the fact that he treats the era of capitalism as an inevitable consequence of events and forces, rather than "an arbitrary arrangement effected by a few malign and sinister individuals. He is alone in seeing in industrial expansion the equivalent of war, and in seeing an analogy between the great manipulators of finance and the great strategists of war. He is alone in having achieved a perspective upon the great human drama involved in the war of finance and thus in being able to treat it with the same detachment the epic poets have had toward heroic events of the remote past."(1)

From the time Dreiser was old enough to think about himself his one desire was self-aggrandizement, the same desire which so greatly animated Cowperwood. As a mere youngster Frank became interested in gold as a medium of exchange and dreamed of owning a gold-mine. Soon he decided he must become a broker, a financier, or a banker, for these were the people who handled all the money and who were very rich. No sooner had this dream become a reality and he had acquired enormous wealth, than his goal began to include beauty as well--beauty of women, of material background, of life.

How Dreiser would have enjoyed purchasing the spacious home with its front lawn and some attempt at floral gardening, and what a pleasure he would have experienced in being able to make a splendid, authentic collection of art objects. To be really great, one must have a great distinction of presence and an artistic background.

All of his life Dreiser was made to feel the lack of social distinction which his family had. How he craved to be "in on things" with the leaders. Cowperwood also realized the value of social standing and regretted that his family prestige was not greater. Mrs. Cowperwood's indifference to great social endeavor weakened his interest in her.

Since travel was also conducive to the creating of an air of importance, both these men longed for the day when such would be possible.

Neither is Cowperwood an exception to the other outstanding characteristic of Dreiser, that of indulgence in reminiscent emotion. "For days and weeks he thought—of the life he was tossed into, for he was already thinking of what he should be in this world, and how he should get along."(1) "He thought he might get to be worth a million and when he did he would retire. Curiously thirty-five was the age at which he fancied he might be worth that sum if nothing happened. He was progressing rapidly. The other day, in an idle mood, he had

tabulated his assets and liabilities. He balanced the former at five hundred thousand dollars, and the latter at three thousand dollars clear almost, at a forced sale.---When he was thirty-five--yes, in six years now--he might well be worth a million, and then he could buy a yacht and build himself a large mansion and travel and see the world. The world! The world!

It called alluringly to Frank Cowperwood. Back of that solid, corrective brain, which stood like a mailed knight at the drawbridge of his fortune, was a vague, cloudy realm of beauty as sensuous as a summer landscape, as alluring as a tinted sea. He often thought, when he was through fighting what would he do? Where would he live? With whom would he dwell?"(1)

Like Dreiser also did Cowperwood forever question everything. Particularly did he ponder the meaning of life, "for he could not figure out how this thing he had come into--this life--was organized. How did all these people get into the world? What were they doing here? Who started things, anyhow?"(2) At an early age he came to believe that things lived on each other, like lobsters on squids. "From the prowling hunger of the Hyrcan tiger to the Canopus there is this same ruthless, sightless disregard of the individual and the minor thing. Life moves in an ordered hierarchy of forces of which the lesser is as nothing to the greater. No, slave!"(3)

Again Cowperwood tells us that life is "a dark, insoluble mystery; but, whatever it was, strength and weakness were its two constituents. Strength would win; weakness loses."[1] And still again: "Strength and weakness—there lay the key, the answer. Between upper and lower wheels of strength lay weakness. Were you strong, or were you weak? If you were not strong enough to win, heaven help you. --The weaklings had to die."[2]

In A Hoosier Holiday Dreiser tells us that "the big fellow, the merger swallows the little. The man who succeeds must have so much more than the mere idea--must have vision, the ability to control and to organize men, a magnetism for those who are successful—in short that mysterious something which we call personality."[3] Repeatedly he expresses his admiration for Nietzsche and his theory of the survival of the fittest.

Both men are convinced that we are all pathetic victims of chance. "The damnable scheme of things which we call existence brings about conditions whereby whole masses suffer who have no cause to do so. It rains on the just and the unjust impartially. We suffer for our temperaments, which we do not make, and for our weaknesses and lacks which are no part of our willing or doing,"[4] thinks Cowperwood.

Dreiser tells us: "We are born, we struggle, we plan,

and chance blows all our dreams away."

(1) And again: "Life is always grim. Fate is kind or it is not. It puts you ahead, or it does not. If it does not, nothing can save you. I acknowledge the Furies. I believe in them. I have heard the disastrous beating of their wings." (2) Another time he says: "I conceive of life as a blind goddess, pouring from separate jars, one of which she holds in each hand, simultaneously, the streams of good and evil, which mingling, make this troubled existence, flowing ever onward to the sea." (3)

Cowperwood's ideas concerning religion and morals are almost identical to those of Dreiser. In *A Hoosier Holiday*, Dreiser says, "Religion is a weak man's shield." (4) Always he feels that religion is represented as an illusion capable of deceiving only those blind to life's realities. And of Cowperwood he says, "Religion was nothing to him—a lot of visionary speculations which had no basis in fact—Religious people struck him as being caught by some emotion or illusion which had no relation to life,—." (5) "Religion—he smiled. It was for the weak, the fearsome." (6)

As to morals, Mr. Cowperwood tells us: "Morals—those who had them had them; those who didn't, didn't. There was no explaining——One found oneself in a given social order, theory or scheme of things. For purposes of social success, in

order not to offend, to smooth one’s path, make things easy, avoid useless criticism, and the like, it was necessary to create an outward seeming—ostensibly to conform. Beyond that it was not necessary to do anything. Never fail, never get caught. If you did, fight your way out silently and say nothing.” (1)

As for monogamy, Cowperwood says: “One life, one love, is the Christian idea; and into this sluice, channel, or mold it has been endeavoring to compress the whole world. Fagan thought held no such belief.——Life cannot be put into any mold, and the attempt might as well be abandoned at once. Those so fortunate as to find harmonious companionship for life should congratulate themselves and strive to be worthy of it. Those not so blessed, though they be written down as pariahs, have yet some justification, and besides, whether we will it or no, theory or no theory, the large basic facts of chemistry and physics remain. Like is drawn to like.” (2) It never occurred to Cowperwood that he could not like other women at the same time. “There was a great deal of palaver about the sanctity of the home.—–There was—much talk of purity and chastity, and cleaving to one woman. He was not so sure about that.” (3)

Is not this passage decidedly similar to that one quoted on page 71 of this thesis? Dreiser also says his idea concerning morals and monogamy “is that life in general appears to be chronically and perhaps incurably varietistic and plural—


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istic in its tastes and emotions."(1) In spite of what we hear of one life, love, etc., he thinks a person can hold four, five, or six women in emotional regard at one time. It is not necessarily love, he points out, but at least a related state. "Monogamy may be good for care of children, but it is the death of affectional and social experience. If such a state was unanimous, where would such a story as Carmen, be——or Tristan and Isolde——or Il Pagliacci, Madam Butterfly or Louise?"(2)

The amount of trickery and deceptiveness in almost every phase of life is very evident at all times to both Dreiser and Cowperwood. Although men will "slap you on the back" during your days of prosperity, they will quickly turn on you in adversity with subtle eyes, contemptuous of your weakness, anxious to save themselves, and caring nothing at all of what becomes of you. "All of us are too busy grasping at immediate gains to trouble about far-off evils and errors."(3) What people profit by directly or indirectly they say nothing about, and merely wink their eyes at things not publicly sanctioned.

Everywhere were evidences of the subtleties and ramifications of these political-financial-commercial arrangements which occur in every American city. Even the judges were the tools of the big politicians and though they dealt in graft themselves, preached earnestly from the bench that punishment must be meted out to people who invaded and plundered with im-

punity the treasury of the city, and that there was "still a power in the law to vindicate itself and to protect the public."[1] The warden and allied politicians made a good thing out of the prison industries. The overseer granted many privileges to prisoners for a price.

If mortal life is built in such a fashion that only honesty and virtue shall prevail, Dreiser questions "the intention of the overruling, intelligent, constructive force which gives to Myctero perca"[2] (the scientific name for Black Grouper) the ability to adapt itself to all conditions. "Its great superiority lies in an almost unbelievable power of simulation. An implement of illusion one might readily suspect it to be, a living lie, a creature whose business it is to appear what it is not, to simulate that with which it has nothing in common, to get its living by great subtlety, the power of its enemies to forfend against which is little."[3] Would you say in the face of this that a beatific, beneficent creative overruling power never wills that which is either tricky or deceptive?[3]

Just as Cowperwood believed that honesty was merely an ideal, Dreiser tells us in A Hoosier Holiday that no matter how trained we are in honesty, industry, sobriety, economies, etc., unless we are particularly talented, we are used and then discarded. We must have qualities or charms which draw life to


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us or compel life to come. "Life is above the petty rules, however essential they may be to the strong in ruling the weak. All good things are gifts—beauty, strength, grace, magnetism, swiftness and subtlety of mind, the urge or compulsion to do."(1)

A few minor autobiographical tendencies can also be noted. For example, Edward Butler, father of Eileen who is Cowperwood's mistress, is very similar to the Edward Butler, Irish boss of St. Louis. Both were garbage contractors as well as great politicians. Both were earnest Catholics, although not adverse to graft if it was to profit them. Likewise, Asa Conklin, whom the reader will recall to be the real estate agent in Chicago, serves as model for Asa Conklin, the Mayor of Philadelphia in this story.

Dreiser's knowledge of houses of ill repute and of the hypocrisy of public life was obviously a result of his keen observations while working as a collector and as a journalist.

E. The Titan

The second volume of the trilogy, appearing in 1914, continues the life of the hero, Frank Cowperwood, depicting in a solasque manner his experiences after he is freed from jail in Philadelphia and sets out to become the financial giant of Chicago. The novel "is epical in scope, dignity and solidity of form, and is warm with life,"(2) but as in "The Financier" one has a teeming cosmos with a swarm of individual characters.

which play their parts for but a few pages, and yet parts that are quite necessary to the whole effect. A vivid picture is given of the period in which gigantic fortunes were created out of public utilities, out of gas and street railways, and the formation of trusts; and in the conscientiously piling up of every little detail of circumstance, affecting his people or their history, Dreiser reminds one of Defoe and Dostoevsky.

One cannot help agreeing with the critic who says that Dreiser's books "are in effect huge club sandwiches 'composed of slices of business alternating with erotic episodes,'"(1) for Cowperwood in his desire for self-aggrandizement does not exclude amatory conquests.

As in "The Financier," the autobiographical tendencies seem to be chiefly the desire to be important and the continual indulgence in reminiscent emotion.

Until his name became world famous, Cowperwood never rested. Always was he wondering when his dreams of grandeur were to be realized. He felt, like Dreiser, that fame and fortune could compensate for all misfortunes. "If he could only secure an octopus—grip on one or all of them (street-railway lines); if he could combine and control them all! What a fortune! That, if nothing else, might save him from some of his woes—a tremendous fortune—nothing less."(2) "He might readily become the sole master of street-railway traffic in Chicago.

He might readily become the most princely financial figure in
the city—and one of the few great financial magnates of the
nation."(1)

Just as Dreiser forever bemoans the evanescent quality of all things, Cowperwood exclaims frequently: "Change! Change! the inevitable passing of things! Who parts with a perfect thing, even if no more than an unreasoning love without a touch of self-pity?"(2) Again Dreiser tells us that Cowperwood "had been stung by the wonder of passing life—how youth comes in, ever fresh and fresh, and age goes out."(3)

The great love of art continues in Cowperwood's life and compares to Dreiser's fondness for it. Also the impressions of places in Europe are similar to those expressed by Dreiser in *Traveller at Forty*.

The philosophy of life held by Dreiser is readily discernible in the theory continually expressed by Cowperwood. The latter says that to him "the most noteworthy characteristic of the human race was that it was strangely chemic, being anything or nothing, as the hour or the condition afforded."(4) Dreiser tells us that "all our ideals, struggles, deprivations, sorrows and joys are only chemic compulsions. Man is a mechanism, undevised and uncreated, and a badly driven one at that."(5)

Again we are informed in "The Titan" that it is "one.

of the splendid yet sinister fascinations of life that there is no tracing to their ultimate sources all the winds of influence that play upon a given barque—all the breaths of chance that fill or desert our bellied or our saging sails. We plan and plan, but who by taking thought can add a cubit to his stature? Who can overcome or even assist the Providence that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we may.”(1) Is this not similar to Dreiser’s idea that we are all victims of chance?

At the end of the novel Dreiser points out that Cowperwood is an example of the equation of life. A balance, he believes, is invariably struck “wherein the mass subdues the individual or the individual, the mass—for the time being.—

"Rushing like a great comet to the zenith, his path a blazing trail, Cowperwood did for the hour illuminate the terrors and wonders of individuality. But for him also the eternal equation—the pathos of the discovery that even giants are but pygmies, and that an ultimate balance must be struck.”(2)

F. The "Genius"

Although this novel was published in 1915, it was withdrawn after a year because of a complaint by the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice, and it was 1923 when it was offered to the public again.

The "Genius" concerns the life of Eugene Witta, a weak-willed, muddled, acutely sensitive, highly introspective artist.

1. "The Titan"—Theodore Dreiser; p. 188.
He lacks purpose and is swayed this way and that by sentiment until at the end he is, comparatively speaking, a failure. He contrasts very sharply with Cowperwood—the go-getter. While Cowperwood is the Casanova type in his love affairs, Titla is the Don Juan, being continually disillusioned by each experience. Every new glimpse of beauty he sees embodied in a woman convinces him that here at least will be the realization of his ideal. The pursuit of this realization becomes frequently more important than his work, and he is carried from the peak of fame to the abyss of despair. (1)

The life of Eugene Titla so closely resembles that of Theodore Dreiser that one feels as if The "Genius" is an autobiography. Eugene is described in the beginning of the novel as "not very strong to begin with, oddy, and to a notable extent artistic. Because of a weak stomach and semi-anaemic condition, he did not really appear as strong as he was. He had emotion, fire, longings, that were concealed behind a wall of reserve. He was shy, proud, sensitive, and very uncertain of himself.---When at home he lounged about the house, reading Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, and Poe. He browsed idly through one book after another, wondering about life. The great cities appealed to him. He thought of travel as a wonderful thing. In school he read Taine and Gibbon between recitation hours, wondering at the luxury and beauty of the great courts of the world. He cared nothing for grammar, nothing for mathematics,

nothing for botany or physics, except odd bits here and there. Curious facts would strike him—the composition of clouds, the composition of water, the chemical elements of the earth. He liked to lie in the hammock at home, spring, summer, or fall, and look at the blue sky showing through the trees. A soaring buzzard poised in speculative flight held his attention fixedly. The wonder of a snowy cloud, high piled like wool, and drifting as an island, was like a song to him. He had wit, a keen sense of humor, a sense of pathos. Sometimes he thought he would draw; sometimes write.—(1) Would not this description fit Theodore equally as well?

He had a sister named Sylvia as did Dreiser, and one named Myrtle, who resembles very closely Myrtle Trogo, the object of Dreiser's youthful adoration when he lived in Warsaw.

The life of Alexandria, the home of Wilte may easily be compared to that of Warsaw. There were the town dandies who kicked their heels outside the corner boot store, the principal loaing place of the town. Many of these boys had clothes beyond his wildest dreams; some even had a horse or runabout and went for weekend larks. All these things caused Eugene to brood over his unhappy lot in life as they did Theodore in Warsaw.

It was for the same reason that both boys set out for Chicago. The lure of the big city was vividly depicted in the Chicago Saturday afternoon paper and the magnet gripped them as

they lay in their hammocks, speculating on this tangle called life. Eugene had not had overwhelming success with the opposite sex, and like Theodore was always despondent over his unfulfilled desires. A beautiful girl named Stella had just failed to reciprocate his affection. The way by which these two met was identical to that by which Theodore met Alice.

The impressions of Chicago upon their arrival were much alike. Both felt that no one could portray the bigness, the fascination of this city. Both inquired of a stranger where a room could be secured and were informed that an old lady living across the street might take them in. This old lady, in both cases being a tall, kindly woman, of a rather patriarchal turn, agreed to rent a room.

Like Dreiser, Eugene "walked about these wonderful streets, gazing in the windows, looking at the boats on the river, looking at the ships on the lake. One day, while he was standing on the lake shore, there came a ship in full sail in the offing—the first he had ever seen. It gripped his sense of beauty.------Ah, the sea! Some day, perhaps he would go to New York."(1) How Theodore loved to watch a sail boat!

After much tramping of Chicago's streets, Eugene received a job of polishing stoves in a hardware store, where he remained not much longer than Theodore did at this same position, for he was also asked to lift heavy stoves by a veritable Bill Sykes, and when, like Theodore, he refused, was shoved

1. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 40.
against the wall and nearly kicked down stairs. Both escaped
by protecting themselves by a stove leg. The employer let them
go and their pride was sorely wounded.

Again Eugene took to the streets, and after a week he
became a house runner for a real estate concern, a position very
similar to that held by Theodore in the office of Conklin & Com-
pany, Real Estate Office. Again both succeeded very well until
the company in each case failed after three months.

During this time both boys had their impressions of
life greatly hardened and sharpened by the show of luxury seen
on Michigan Avenue and Prairie, on Ashland Avenue and Washington
Boulevard. The visions of beautiful lawns, magnificent furnish-
ings, distinctive equipages, etc. subdued and saddened them a
little. They felt life was unfair.

Soon Eugene secured a job as driver for a laundry.
Here he stayed for some time, and being lonely, he soon became
acquainted with a Margaret McDuff, a little Scotch girl who
worked here, just as Theodore became friendly with Nellie Mac-
Pherson, a little Scotch girl working at the laundry at which
he was employed. Both men were interested in these girls only
in a physical sense, for they felt that when they became great
men, as, of course, they were to be, they would desire more in-
tellectual women.

While driving the laundry wagon, Eugene became ac-
quainted with a woman whose husband managed "The People's Furni-
ture Company," and she recommended Eugene as a collector. Just such an experience was had by Theodore. This company, in both cases, dealt in the sale of clocks, silverware, rugs, etc. on the installment plan. Just as Theodore had found pleasing the fresh air, the outdoor life, the walking, the quickness with which his task could be completed, so Eugene found his work as collector very enjoyable. Both were particularly pleased by the fascinating sights to be seen in the strange and new parts of the city to which the work brought them.

At this time Eugene suffered considerably from stomach trouble and it will be remembered that Theodore had the same complaint. Both were also very restless during this period of their lives and spent much time attending concerts and lectures in order to find out more of life and to avoid feeling depressed and lonely. Perhaps the physical condition of both young men helped to increase their sense of reserve which slogged their actions at everything in the way of social diversion. At any rate, Eugene and Theodore both were extremely shy and nervous for fear of criticism. It was an almost agonizing experience for both to attend a party.

At such an affair, however, Eugene met an Angela Blue, a school teacher from Blackwood, a small town eighty-five miles from Chicago. This young lady is a replica of Sarah White, the school teacher whom Theodore met on the convention to the World's Fair. Both girls were five years older than their lovers; both
taught in small towns; both were decidedly conventional, being thoroughly virtuous and considering marriage and children the fate and duty of all women. Also they had a distinct preference for those who conducted themselves according to given standards of propriety. "As it was written socially and ethically upon the tables of the law, so it was. There might be charming characters outside the pale, but they were not admitted to association or sympathy."(1)

Intellectually Miss White and Theodore were at separate poles, and likewise were Miss Blue and Eugene. Again both men had no regard for the conventional side of life. A human being was merely a human being with all this's chemic compulsions. Nevertheless these women seemed to complement the men "as a satellite complements a larger luminary"--(2) for Eugene's and Theodore's egoism required praise, sympathy, and much feminine coddling.

After a short period of courtship carried on during the girls' occasional visits to Chicago to visit their aunts, they became engaged. Nevertheless, these engagements seemed in no way to hinder Eugene and Theodore from carrying on love affairs on the side. A Ruby Lenny, artist model, had already entered into a relationship with Eugene, and he saw no reason to break it. This girl resembles very closely the Alice loved by Dreiser in his early newspaper days. Both of these girls had

been adopted by Irish people who liked them and gave them full
rein. They were both attractive girls, clever at clog dancing,
very good natured, with passion for adventure. To both men they
appealed as delightful mistresses, but not as prospective life
mates. Neither Eugene nor Theodore at that time could have
satisfied all sides of his character with any one woman. We
are told of Eugene, that "Beauty was the point with him. Any
girl who was young, emotional or sympathetic to the right de-
gree and beautiful would have attracted and held him for a while.
He loved beauty—not a plan of life. He was interested in an
artistic career, not a founding of a family. Girlhood—the
beauty of youth—was artistic, hence he craved it."(1) Could not
this be equally well said of Theodore?

The letters which Eugene wrote to Angela were similar
to the type written by Theodore to Sarah White, and in both
cases afforded opportunity for pouring out the ideas and no-
tions of the writer. City scenes were described vividly and
in the both cases this type of description later brought them
success as a Sunday feature writer. Life seemed a very dramat-
ic thing to both these men—"the wagons in the streets, the tall
buildings, the street lamps—anything, everything."(2)

Very soon to Eugene the situation in Chicago grew
irksome, exactly as it did to Theodore. The field seemed too
limited to both of them and a desire to go East—New York in

1. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 82.
2. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 89.
particular, dominated both. The dream of wealth, and fame was always in their minds, so Eugene left Chicago and finally arrived in New York, having left Angela and Ruby behind. Feeling that he must finally break with Ruby, he departed without even saying goodbye, just as Dreiser left Alice when he went from Chicago to St. Louis. In both cases a letter was written after the arrival in the new city and the replies were identical. (See P. 91). Like Theodore, Eugene felt tempted to write her to come to New York, feeling that he might set up an establishment for them, but finances fortunately prevented such action on the part of either of them.

A few years after his arrival in New York, and after many love affairs, some of an illicit nature, he finally married Angela and it might have been said of the adventure that it was undertaken "after the first fleer of love had thinned down to the pale flame of duty. Need anything more be said? The first law of convention had been obeyed, whereas the governing forces of temperament had been overridden--and with what results eventually you may well suspect." (1) The results in this case of Eugene were very disastrous for Angela, for she had the torture of seeing her husband fall madly in love with almost every beautiful girl of eighteen years of age. "He was an idealist by temperament, in love with love, and that there was no permanent faith in him for anybody--except the impossible she." (2)

He even loved her sister Marietta, but here at least he refrained from an affair, feeling loyalty to Angela a necessity. Often he wished it might have been she he had met first. Similarly Theodore felt the same way about Miss White's younger sister.

Eugene experienced much the same conditions during his job seeking as did Theodore. Frequently he pretended to be merely a spectator or to be looking for someone if he found a crowd of applicants, and lacked courage to apply. One of the men, a Mr. Daniel Summerfield, by whom he was finally employed was remarkably similar to Mr. Joseph Pulitzer, owner of the World, for whom Theodore worked for a time in New York. Both had the habit of flying into an insane fury, of raving and cursing, and of discharging people in no way to blame for the trouble. A demoniac gleam in the eye was characteristic of both, and such an example of nagging and irritating insistence on quantity of work and speed was set up that the result in both places of employment was "a beer-garden, a den of prize-fighters, liars, cut-throats and thieves in which every man was for himself openly and avowedly and the devil take the hindmost."(1)

It is very obvious that the two outstanding characteristics of Theodore Dreiser--the persistent wish to be an important personage, and the indulgence in reminiscent emotion are also the dominant characteristics of Eugene Witta. When first

he arrived in New York, he was hypnotized by the wonder of the place, by the seething masses of people, by the display of success and luxury. He read of the fame accorded scientists with great novels, financiers with successful investments. "Youth and ambition had the call--he saw that. It was only a question of time, if you had talent, when you would get your hearing. He longed ardently for his, but he had no feeling that it was coming to him quickly, so he got the blues."(1)

Again he tells us that "the carriages on Fifth Avenue, the dinners at the great hotels, the constant talk of social functions in the newspapers, made his brain dizzy. He was inclined to idle about the streets, to watch the handsomely dressed crowds, to consider the evidences of show and refinement everywhere, and he came to the conclusion that this was not living at all, but existing."(2) And again: "He felt an eager desire to tear wealth and fame from the bosom of the world. Life must give him his share. If it did not, he would curse it to his dying day."(3) Of fame Eugene says: "The hope of fame--what hours of speculation, what pulses of enthusiasm, what fevers of effort, are based on that peculiarly subtle illusion. It is yet the lure, the ignis fatuus of almost every breathing heart.--Fame partakes of the beauty and freshness of the morning. It has in it the odour of the rose, the feel of rich satín, the color of the cheeks of youth. If we could but

3. The "Genius"--Theodore Dreiser. P. 150.
be famous when we dream of fame, and not when locks are tinged with grey, faces seamed with the lines that speak of past struggles, and eyes wearied with the tensity, the longings and the despairs of years!"(1)

As soon as his salary permitted, Eugene indulged to his heart's content in all the material things he so loved. "It seemed to him as though all his life he had naturally belonged to this perfect world of which country houses, city mansions, city and country clubs, expensive hotels and inns, cars, resorts, beautiful women, affected manners, subtlety of appreciation and perfection of appointment generally were the inherent concomitants. This was the true heaven—that material and spiritual perfection on earth, of which the world was dreaming and to which, out of toil, disorder, shabby ideas, mixed opinions, non-understanding and all the ill to which the flesh is heir, it was constantly aspiring."(2)

Like Dreiser, Hitler was forever dreaming of the past and future. He was never content with the present, for he either felt sorry that the existing state could not last or wished that he might hasten forward to a time when he would be in a position to derive more enjoyment from it. A scene of beauty hurt him to think that such joy might not always be. Frequently he would feel that now he was young, "life was beautiful, but how would it be when he was old? A morbid anticipation of

disaster seemed to harrow his soul."(1)

When Angela was in his arms and he felt nothing more lovely could ever come again, he uttered, "Dear God! and there are only seventy years of life—not more than ten or fifteen of true youth, all told."(2) Again this idea of fleeting youth is repeated when he first came to New York and was overwhelmed by its great display of luxury. He wanted to participate immediately in the life he saw about him. "He was young now; he was vigorous now; he was keen now; in a few years he might not be—seventy years was the allotted span and twenty-five of his had already gone. How would it be if he never came into this luxury, was never allowed to enter society, was not permitted to live as wealth was now living. The thought hurt him."(3) Also when one of his mistresses, Christina Channing, was beaming adoration upon him, he cried again: "You are so beautiful, so wonderful, and life is so short.—Seventy years isn't enough. Eternity isn't enough of life as it is now."(4) Again, "To think that the quintessence of life should not stay with us always,"(5) he sighed.

Whenever he revisits places, he ponders that things should grow old, that things which were once vital should become mere memories. Dreiser had this same feeling during his whole trip West which he describes in "A Hoosier Holiday."

2. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 133.
3. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 150.
4. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 158.
As soon as he met any opposition, he was plunged into the depths of despair, almost hypochondriacal at times, and he would walk about speculating on the mysteries of nature, and what was to become of him. Probable poverty and obscurity would loom up in the future and also the idea that time and youth was slipping away. He was forever tearing "himself up by the roots in order to see how he was getting along. He would daily and hourly, when not otherwise employed, lift the veil from his inner mental processes as he might the covering from a well, and peer into its depths. -----there he saw nothing but shifty and uncertain currents. It was very dark down there.-----------Shame upon himself! Shame upon his week-kneed disposition, not to be able to recover from this illusion of beauty. Such were some of the thoughts which his moments of introspection brought him."(1)

After he acquired reasonable success and wealth, he still resented the passage of time, "for he was daily and hourilly growing older, and what had he achieved? The more Eugene had looked at life through the medium of his experiences, the more it dawned on him that somehow all effort was pointless. To where and what did one attain when one attained success? Was it for houses and lands and fine furnishings and friends that one was really striving?"(2) Always is he saddened by the tangle of human emotions, the proximity of death, old age,-----

everything.

The ideas held by Witle and Dreiser concerning religion are also alike. Eugene's whole aspect of this phase of life was changed radically by his reading of Spencer's *First Principles* and Dreiser tells us that after reading this book "I was completely thrown down in my conceptions or non-conceptions of life."(1) Both felt that there was no hereafter—"there was nothing save blind, dark force moving aimlessly."(2) Also that God did not care for any one individual, but for the idea of man or a race of men as a whole was their opinion. "Only fools were held by religion, which in the main was an imposition, a graft, a lie. The honest man might be fine, but he was not very successful. There was a great to-do about morals, but most people were immoral or unmoral."(3) Does not this sound like Dreiser? As does also this: "Religion gives life a habitation and a name apparently—though it is an illusion."(4) Always they both felt that what did the great forces of life care "whether this system which was maintained here with so much show and fuss was really maintained at all or not?"(5) Both spent much time speculating on the subtleties of mortal existence, reading Kant, Spencer, Spinoza, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, and many others. At times Eugene, like Theodore, believed "God was a spirit,—but whether this spirit concerned itself with mortal affairs, where was so much suffering and contention, was another

2. The "Genius"—Theodore Dreiser. P. 156.
Peculiarly, both Dreiser and Witla were quite superstitious. One should suppose that such free thinkers would scorn the narrowness of mind involved in superstition, but Eugene tells us that the finding of money indicated the receiving of money, that a twitching of his left eye foretold a quarrel, the squeaking of doors signified sickness to come, and the howling of a dog indicated death. If he met a cross-eyed boy, he was sure to have good luck; but a cross-eyed woman signified bad luck. A heavy black-bearded man whom he saw occasionally on a train was an omen of good luck to him. Dreiser tells us in "A Hoosier Holiday" that he repeatedly meets a small, heavily bearded Jew just before good fortune comes to him.

How they both loved dreams! Eugene says: "Of dreams and the beauty of dreams is the world compounded."(2) And again he says: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and only of dreams are our keen, stinging realities compounded. Nothing else is so moving, so vital, so painful as a dream."(3) Dreiser says: "We were conceived in ecstasy and born in dreams. We might as well dream, for of dreams and the memory of them is life compounded."(4)

As for their idea of life, Witla tells us that beauty is the key to life. "Life at bottom, in spite of all its teem-

ing terrors, was beautiful."(1) Dreiser likewise tells us that life is good despite the contest, bitterness, defeated hopes, lost ambitions, sickness, envy, hate, and death. So much does he believe this to be true that he bemoans the fact that life can obliterate itself. If he could add a chapter, he says, to Dante's Inferno, "it would be one in which, alone and lonely, sits one who contemplates the emotions and the fascinations of the world that is no more."(2) Is not this same idea of life echoed in almost the last words of Wilts: "What a sweet, wert life is--how rich, how tender, how grim, how like a colorful symphony."(3)

G. An American Tragedy

This, the last of his novels yet to appear, was published in 1925, and while it has been proclaimed a masterpiece and the best of all of his works, it is far from the most interesting. As Robert Shafer in his essay entitled "An American Tragedy" in "Humanism and America" says the plot is very similar to, "Agamemnon" of Aeschylus. The hero, Clyde Griffiths, is merely a complete plaything of "chermic compulsion," a veritable paragon of irresponsibility. He felt that he could not help his craving for ease, luxury, beauty, and love--a "particular kind of love that went with show, wealth, position, his eager and immutable aspirations and desires."(4) Consequently, how


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was he responsible for the death of Roberta Alden? His lusts and needs were stronger than all the moral precepts which his parents endeavored to inculcate, so that temperament, which Mr. Dreiser seems to feel is the one irresistible, compelling force in life, to which all else is ultimately obedient, completely overrules his use of reason. In similar fashion did Clytemnestra plead that Destiny—not she—slew Agamemnon. She did not make herself, yet was she not compelled to act only out of her inborn nature? However, Mr. Shafer feels that while Aeschylus showed that man is fully responsible for the consequences of his acts, whatever his motives or compulsions, Mr. Dreiser has so manipulated facts and selected them as to deny that human life has any meaning or value at all. It becomes almost a meaningless chaos of blind energies. (1)

The father and mother of this Clyde are replicas of Asa Conklin and his wife, whom Dreiser knew so intimately from his real estate experience in Chicago. Like Asa Conklin, Asa Griffiths "was one of those poorly integrated and correlated organisms, the product of an environment and a religious theory, but with no guiding or mental insight of his own, yet sensitive and therefore highly emotional, and without any practical sense whatever." (2) Any untoward blows of life were received by either of them with an ineffectual "Tst! Tst!", while the wives bore the real burdens. Mrs. Griffiths, as Mrs. Conklin, had

great force and determination, "which, however blind or erroneous, makes for self-preservation, if not success in life."(1) One glance at either was sufficient to cause one to say, "Well, here is one who, whatever her defects, probably does what she believes as nearly as possible."(2)

There is a marked similarity in the frustration to be seen in the life of Clyde Griffiths and Theodore Dreiser. Both these boys started from a poor environment, where they were frequently without sufficient food or decent clothes, and how they both longed for the material things of life! Constantly they thought of how they might better themselves if they had a chance, of places to which they might go, things they might see, of how differently they might live, if only things would change and their dreams come true. Both greatly resented the social background to which they were born. "What a wretched thing it was to be born poor and not to have anyone to do anything for you and not to be able to do so very much for yourself,"(3) thought Clyde. Like Theodore, he felt that proper clothes were an absolute necessity to happiness. "No good-looking girl, as it then appeared to him, would have anything to do with him if he did not possess this standard of equipment. It was plainly necessary—the thing. And once he did attain it—was able to wear such clothes, well, then was he not well set upon the path that leads to all the blisses? All the joys of life would then

most certainly be spread before him. The friendly smiles!—(1)
As a youth in Warsaw, Theodore frequently brooded thus.

Any display of luxury or wealth greatly impressed
either of them. Just as Theodore was in awe of the rich furnish-
ings in any hotel lobbies, Clyde trembled with excitement at the
imposing appearance of the Green Davidson Hotel. Their ideas
of luxury were in the main so extreme and mistaken and gauche—
were wanderings of a repressed and unsatisfied fancy, which as
yet had had nothing but imaginings to feed it."(2)

Very despondent and sad were they concerning their
lack of practical training in any field which would permit them
to aspire to the great worlds of which prominent men seemed to
be a part. They wished and wished they could get into some work
where they could rise and be somebody. They must win beauty,
wealth, position and be able to forget the poverty and social
inferiority of their present lives. Was it not this very desire
that produced mental or moral cowardice in Clyde? The vision of
new opportunities such as previously had never appeared to be
within his grasp "had affected his 'perhaps too pliable and
sensual and impractical and dreaming mind.'"(3) No better de-
scription could be applied to Dreiser.

We see in Clyde also the same love of beauty. Beauty
in women was a passion with both men. Neither could they re-
frain from standing in awe before the beautiful lawns, wrought

iron fences, and flower-bordered walks of rich homes.

Continually does Clyde indulge in reminiscent emotion. He asks himself over and over, "Oh, the devil—who was he anyway? and what did he really amount to? What could he hope for from such a world as this really,--?"(1) Like Theodore, he had the torture of wondering how many people would find out about his sister's having had an illegitimate child, Esty and Amy having some similarity. At any disappointment his resentment of life and deprivation would overwhelm him, and he would, like Dreiser, turn his mind back to happier scenes. Both were able rarely to enjoy the present, for they had the sentimental viewpoint referred to by Shelley when he said: "We look before and after and sigh for what is not." Religion is again represented as an illusion. Both Clyde and Theodore failed to be convinced of the reality and force of all they were taught by their parents concerning religious beliefs. Life itself interested them with its phases of beauty and pleasure. For their critical judgment were presented frequently occasions when God seemed to fail to act for their parents. A contempt was felt by both "for religion and its fruits—the constant and yet fruitless prayers and exhortations of the father and mother,"(2)

Again the effects of Dreiser's newspaper work is seen, as for instance in the reporting of the trial and the politics which are played even in the case of justice. Self-advancement

is the God of all.

A few minor autobiographical elements may also be noted. For example, Clyde's visits to houses of ill-repute closely resemble those made by Theodore under the guidance of O'Connor during his visit in Chicago. The same nervousness in the presence of the female sex can be observed in both boys. Also they both worked as dish-washers in a restaurant—Clyde in St. Louis; Theodore in Chicago.

While this novel is a good study of crime as partly the affair of determinism, and raises for careful consideration the question of free will and moral responsibility, it leaves you with a confused feeling. Perhaps this was Mr. Dreiser's intention, for he says of life: "Life is to me too much a welter and play of inscrutable forces to permit, in my case at least, any significant comment. In short, I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came, confused and dismayed." (1)

IV

Conclusions

It is obvious from the foregoing evidence that Theodore Dreiser's realism is a direct outgrowth of his environment. He secured his naturalistic philosophy from his awakening to the contrast between the ethical standards of his father and church and his own spontaneous impulses and desires. He felt that by ethical standards he stood condemned, so he treasured every impression which tended to prove these standards senseless and impossible theories.

Mr. Robert Shafer in "An American Tragedy" feels that Dreiser "has seen in life only what he has desired to see, or rather he admits the reality of only what has suited him, and sets down all else as either hypocrisy or delusion. All of us bring a selective attention to bear on the outer world, but Mr. Dreiser has become a slave to mere temperament, and surrenders helplessly to the chaotic flow of natural impulses. His attention has been centered only on the antics of complicated beasts with strange illusions.----What he has seen is existent in grievous plenty but his naturalism lights up the animal in man but tells nothing of that which distinguishes man from beast--actually denies that there is distinction."(1)

It is certainly youthful prejudice that created his

idea of religion. Firmly does he believe that religion is merely an illusion since it bestows on the convert no worldly rewards. In "A Hoosier Holiday" he exclaims that he is amazed that nature should be "taken in" by religion. He can not understand why "hordes of working people who have been given by the good God wrathful, condemnatory manufacturers, and clubbing, cynical police should worship."(1) He smiles at a world who does "not devise some really poetical or ethical reason for worshipping or celebrating or what you will, but must indulge in shrines, genuflections and temples to false or impossible ideas or deities."(2) He thinks religion should be considered like theorems and formulae in algebra and chemistry. It makes the living of life a little easier for some. He compares it to a certain weave of mesh in fishing--it holds some and lets others get away.

While he stresses the illusory nature of religion, he does believe that there is a larger intelligence than men at work who does not care for the individual at all, or at least only as a carpenter cares for his tools. "There is, he says, "some idle scheme of entertainment (possibly self-entertainment) which is being accomplished by some power which is not necessarily outside man, but working through him, of which he, in part, is the expression."(3) This power, he feels, recognizes only a mass delight or a mass sorrow. "Can you share, or understand,"

he asks, "the pains or delights of any one atom in your body? Why may there not be an oversoul that bears the same relationship to you that you bear to the individual atoms or ions of your physical cosmos? -- let the religionist call it God if he will, or the sufferer, a devil." (1)

Believing that we can not possibly conceive what the ultimate significance of anything is, he feels we should not try to label it, but should strive to secure anything that will make us happy, and should live as fully and intelligently as possible. He is like Emerson in his insistence on the right of the individual to live his own life and to cast behind him all conformity.

He, and in turn all his characters, are drenched in self-pity, for they realize the brevity of life and fear that they will never have the means to share in the wealth, fame, and beauty of this world. Of himself, he once said that the best he should ever do was to think and dream, standing aloof as a spectator; and certainly all his characters entertain such an idea. Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt, Frank Cowperwood, Eugene Witlea, Clyde Griffiths -- any one of these might have exclaimed the following words of Dreiser:

"The frame of any man is an infinitesimal shell. The soul of him so small, a pale lamp which he carries in his hands. The passions of which we boast or from whose imagined horrors


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we flee are such little things—rush lights—scarcely able to
glimmer in so great a dark. I have eaten and drunken, and
thirsted after all, but should the curtain descend now, how
little I have had! How little could any man ever have!

"Oh, great, scheming, dreaming Prince of Life—what is
it that you are after? What blood moods in your soul is it that
we, your atoms, hurry to fulfill? Do you love? Do you hate?
By billions sweating, blazing, do we fulfill some quaint desire
of yours? Drop you the curtain then on me. I do not care—I
am tired. Drop it and let me dream no more the endless wonders
and delights that never, never, can be."(1)
Summary

In this thesis I have endeavored to prove that there is a marked correlation between the life of Theodore Dreiser and his novels.

In section II I have given a rather complete account of not only his life but also of his family.

In section III I have showed the interrelation of this biographical material and his six novels. I have found that there are two outstanding characteristics of Dreiser, namely: the desire to be an important personage and the indulgence in reminiscent emotion. These two characteristics are also dominant in all his main characters from Sister Carrie to Clyde Griffiths. His utter disregard for religion is the outgrowth of an overflow of religious training, even to abnormality. Likewise the absence of Puritanism in his novels can readily be accounted for by the fact that his family, excepting his father, had no conception of Puritan ideals. Early in life he came to have a bitter sense of the world's indifference to his desires and of its unconscious cruelty and brutal injustice. There is not one of his principal characters that does not entertain this idea.

As Burton Rascoe says: "Dreiser is a romantic naturalist who found an epic quality in the rise of individuals to
merciless and remorseless power through the adaptation of their combative instincts to the peculiar conditions of the American struggle for existence."(1)

VI

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