

can realist very naturally came to recognize as his that Party, our brother, which tomorrow will be the best guarantee in America for a France at work, for a France rebuilding, against those great companies, those giant corporations which tomorrow may forget that

we fought together, Americans and French, to abolish a slavery, Nazi slavery, and who may help to recreate a new slavery, under whatever name. Theodore Dreiser, our friend Theodore Dreiser, knew that something had changed in the world, in the world

where national realities, diverse as the colors of a prism, make a single white light, whose enemy is shadow. The men of shadows strangely resemble one another in New York or in Paris.

Theodore Dreiser chose the road and the Party of light.

DREISER AND HIS AMERICA

By EDWIN BERRY BURGUM

DREISER's place in American literature is secure not because he wrote so well, but because what he wrote cut so deeply to the core of American life. Other novelists of his generation and later were capable of a better style, were more poetic or more brilliant or more subtle. What Sherwood Anderson and Hemingway later said was better said, but it was less worth saying. It was either more superficial or less genuine as a statement in fiction of the American personality and its problems. Dreiser's intention surpassed his accomplishment. But there are men in the arts whose integrity as men distracts attention from their limitations as artists. Their integrity dominates the imperfection of their utterance, draws the reader beyond the verbal statement into the very heart of the intended meaning; so that he is attentive solely to its significance and is willing to cooperate with the author in its elucidation. Dreiser's novels are of this sort. They raise vital problems and invite the aid of the reader for their solution. His novels are evidence from life that compels certain definite conclusions. It is for the evaluation of these conclusions that Dreiser appeals to the reader through the influence of his own unassuming, undogmatic disposition.

His first novel, *Sister Carrie*, published at the turn of the century, illustrates not only the type of problem with which Dreiser was concerned, but the quality of his plea to the reader for recognition of the facts, concurrence in their interpretation, and an awakening to their broader significance. Carrie, coming to live with her married sister in Chicago, is dissatisfied with the pale routine of their lower middle class domesticity. Her sister and her husband, cowed by the demands of respectability, possessing neither will nor ambition but only habit, are undisturbed by the pressure of any expanding capacities within. They work and economize and save and fear criticism. Restless under so

static and impoverished a conception of the good life, sister Carrie leaves to live with a man who offers her the pleasure of decent clothes and a real interest in her personality. Such non-conformity certainly has its risks, and Carrie shortly finds herself on a train out of Chicago with another man whose weakness of character has led him to pretend that he is taking her to visit her sick lover. She soon discovers that Hurstwood has run away from his own family with the intention of living with her. Since she already prefers him and is fairly helpless, she yields, and they establish themselves in New York. They become friendly with neighbors who introduce them to the sophistication of the theater and the glamor of fashionable restaurants. But high living on such a precarious basis is not enough for Carrie. She accepts it not merely as self-indulgence but as an avenue for the release of slowly gathering ambitions. Very soon a contrast develops between her lover and herself, which is that between weakness and strength of character, between a growing consciousness of talents awaiting expression and an increasing self-doubt that shrinks from responsibility. Hurstwood is demoralized by the fact that he came to New York with stolen funds. Under the need to keep his identity secret and his secret from his supposed wife, he loses his grip, sinks into more and more obscure jobs, and finally does the shopping for the house while Carrie, turning frivolity into opportunity, tries out for the stage. She becomes a successful actress in comedy on her own merits, and is at length freed from dependence upon men. Though she continues generously to support Hurstwood for some time, he recognizes that she no longer loves or respects him, and they eventually drift apart. Hurstwood degenerates into a derelict, while Carrie stabilizes her success.

Obviously the story has the simplicity of a formula. If as you read it, the un-

pleasant awareness of a formula is wanting, it is not that the shocking nature of the one he has chosen distracts attention from its presence, but that the inductive method Dreiser follows does away with the sense of formula altogether. For Dreiser seems intent only to discover through his operations the ethical principles by which men and women actually live, and not at all concerned to impose a preconceived ethical rule upon them by a preconceived selection of material. More empirical than Zola's *Nana*, *Sister Carrie* is free from the taint of special pleading through the accumulation of sensational detail. Its proof appears limited to the essential, and the essential appears valid because it is clearly the very stuff of daily life in the colloquial diction men actually use. Dreiser's conclusions, therefore, seem, like those of the scientist, to arise solely from an honest examination of the material. It was probably the unassailable nature of his evidence that caused the contemporary reactions of hostility. Dreiser faced his public with conclusions, incapable of rebuttal, which exposed the hypocrisy of official standards. After his story had been thus simply and directly told, however, he did not hesitate to drive the lesson home in the now quaint diction, blended of the ages of enlightenment and evangelicalism, which came naturally to him when he generalized. "Not evil, but longing for that which is better, more often directs the steps of the erring. Not evil, but goodness more often allures the feeling mind unused to reason."

Now what is intriguing in the present day about this conception of goodness is that it is, as theory, no more than an honest extension into the field of ethics of the philosophy of practical life dominant in America during the period of industrialization. It has been clarified for us, as far as business is concerned, in Gustavus Meyer's *History of*

the *Great American Fortunes*. This work not only proves that these fortunes were assembled by means of a ruthless breaking of the statute laws for which the average man was penalized; it suggests that the average man, when he admired the millionaire for breaking the very laws he dared not break himself, was accepting a double standard. Our popular pragmatism in practice turned up rudiments of Nietzsche's belief in the two moralities, the one of conformity applicable to the common man, and the other permitting the superior man the right to make his own rules. In both instances a distinction of quality of personality was taken for granted. The man who got ahead by breaking laws thus proved his possession of superior qualities of purposiveness, integration, self-confidence, whereas the ordinary man, unsupported by these admirable internal qualities and therefore incapable of breaking the laws without making a mess of things, by his inner weakness recognized his need of these outer controls. Dreiser did no more than extend these assumptions of business ethics into the sphere where the mores of the day refused to recognize they could also apply, but here he found them equally valid. He had been enabled to do so because his insight as a novelist into personality enabled him to pass from the ethical into the psychological aspect of the situation. And in psychological terms he saw that the private life of Carrie's sister was qualitatively similar to this dependence upon the law by the average man; whereas a woman like Carrie herself clearly obeyed inner pressures whose legitimacy her later success pragmatically announced. Her breaking of the ordinary precepts of personal ethics in twice becoming a man's mistress was in obedience to a higher law of her own personality. Dreiser recognized that she suffered no more penalization by so doing than did the elder Morgan or Vanderbilt in their public careers. The strong individual imposes his will upon society and is accepted at his own evaluation.

Such was the way of the world in the United States as Dreiser found it. But though he was quite willing to accept this prevalent idealization of success and to extend its application thus boldly to every area of human interest, though he himself shared the ambitious man's contempt for failure when he thought in general terms, he was troubled because success did not bring happiness. By becoming better than the average, one alienated himself from human con-

tacts. Sister Carrie, "since the world goes its way past all who will not partake of its folly . . . now found herself alone." Love and friendship are somehow associated with the weak and commonplace, and by demanding to be superior, Carrie has missed them. "Know, then, that for you is neither surfeit nor content. In your rocking chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone." At the end of his novel Dreiser left this dilemma for his reader to meditate upon.

BUT in his next novel he was ready with a partial clarification of his own. In *Jennie Gerhardt*, parting company with the ethic of the marketplace, he finds a higher law than success. That emotional loyalty we call love he now understands better than he did in *Sister Carrie*. It is no longer merely a natural yielding to sensations of pleasure and almost casual companionship. An emotion that is constant, cooperative and self-sacrificing, it now seems the opposite to the will to success, which is self-centered and competitive, ruthless and disloyal. Dreiser turns in something like disgust against the code he had been expounding. "Virtue is that quality of generosity which offers itself willingly for another's service, and, being this, it is held by society to be nearly worthless. Sell yourself cheaply and you shall be used lightly and trampled under foot. Hold yourself dearly, however unworthily, and you will be respected. Society, in the mass, lacks woefully in the matter of discrimination. Its one criterion is the opinion of others. Its one test that of self-preservation." Clearly from this passage the direct influence upon his thinking has not been Nietzsche but social Darwinism. His social views at this time were a projection upon his observation of our competitive life of his desultory reading about Darwin's survival of the fittest. He recognizes the accuracy of the description. In *Sister Carrie* he sought to explore its potentialities for good, and had found them limited. The system now began to offend his moral sense. But though his pity deepened for every individual caught either by its cruelty or its limitations, he began to identify it with "society, in the mass." And he developed a Nietzschean contempt for "society, in the mass" just at the time when he began to reject those justifications of the superman he had found in the pragmatic American worship of success. He still puts the superior individual against society. But his new definition has responded to his better

understanding of moral values. The superior individual is no longer the tycoon who seeks the material security and shallow satisfaction of success, but a woman whose understanding of love is deeper than sensuality.

The shift of attitude, however, has not eradicated the dilemma of human happiness. Though Jennie Gerhardt's ideal of life is better, though she has a richer personality than sister Carrie, she is perhaps even more unhappy. For she enjoys neither worldly success nor any requital of her love. Jennie remains poor and miserable not because she has sinned with a lover, not because she is a weak person, but because her lover, bowing to the pressure of his wealthy family, is himself too weak to carry out his desire to marry her. His acceptance of conventional morality is a hypocrisy which he uses to yield to an even more shallow convention of social status against the promptings of his better nature. Strength, now dissociated from a vulgar success, becomes constancy in love in defiance of external circumstances. When Jennie's lover, long since estranged and married in a distant city, falls critically ill, he sends for her; and for this moment of crisis love renews itself in spiritual support. But convention once more resumes control and Jennie is left more desolate than Carrie.

In *Jennie Gerhardt*, however, one must disassociate the meanings of the narrative from Dreiser's own interpretations of these meanings. Actually, "society, in the mass" is not to blame. The action points the sharpest contrast between ways of life in the proletariat and in the upper classes. Bourgeois standards, not working class ones, are responsible. Jennie's old father, the night watchman, has qualities of fidelity and humanity which are reflected in the daughter. His freedom from meretricious conceptions of status, which have also been an influence upon Jennie, cannot fail to be contrasted with the shallowness of aims, whether of morals or manners, in upperclass circles. Jennie's lover is weakened in moral character by his social position in which the "ambition" of poor sister Carrie to keep her head above water has been only too lavishly rewarded. Dreiser is still consciously thinking rather in terms of purely personal relationships, of relationships between individual "wills," than in the terms of environmental influences. But the nature of the plot shows the direction in which he is tending.

Not until almost fifteen years later, when *An American Tragedy* ap-

Theodore Dreiser in the Soviet Union

Moscow: by cable.

IT WAS with deep sorrow that Soviet intellectuals and the Soviet reading public learned of Theodore Dreiser's death. He was esteemed here as one of America's great novelists, one who had had a major role in the development of American realism, one who had taken a vigorous part in the life of his people and one who had been unyielding in his anti-fascism.

Dreiser's works were printed and reprinted in the Soviet Union in large editions. Especially popular were his novels *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, *The Titan*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, *The Genius* and, of course, his monumental *An American Tragedy*. Not only was *An American Tragedy* published in several large editions but it was dramatized and produced in the theaters of Moscow, Leningrad and the Ukraine. The Soviet intellectuals who had that privilege recall with pleasure their meetings with Dreiser on his extensive visit to the Soviet Union in 1927. His book *Dreiser Looks At Russia* did, we knew, much to acquaint the American people with the reality of Soviet life. His personal knowledge determined his consistent friendship for what revolution had brought to Russia.

The Soviet people were aware that in Dreiser they had an earnest and high-principled friend. Dreiser did much to strengthen the cultural and social ties between the Soviet and American peoples. When the Second World War began his voice was heard by all the nations; it was the voice of an ardent anti-fascist calling for an alliance of democratic nations. In the crucial days of the war the Soviet people again heard Dreiser's voice, among those of other world intellectuals, raised in their support. With enduring gratitude the Soviet people will remember his activities in collecting funds in aid of the women and children who had suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

Soviet writers and critics have written extensively on the art of Theodore Dreiser. A large, twelve-volume edition of Dreiser's Collected Works was issued in 1928-1930, with accompanying critical introductions and commentaries. All courses in Western literature have included the study of the works of Theodore Dreiser. On the occasion of his death commemorative meetings and lectures were held in Moscow, Leningrad and other Soviet cities. In Moscow the Writers' Union held a memorial meeting and The Library of Foreign Literature devoted a special exhibition to his life and work. The State Publishing House is to issue a new edition of his collected works.

SIMON DREIDEN.

peared, did the new direction emerge into Dreiser's conscious thinking. During the long interval he mulled over the same problems in the same terms, as though, hypnotized by their significance, he could solve them by repetition. The story of Cowperwood in *The Financier* and *The Titan* does not clear up the ambiguities, only buries them in the garrulities of social history. It presents the environment instead of using it; and one who would like to know what life resembled in the financial circles of Philadelphia before the Civil War and in the sprawling young Chicago afterwards will read them with interest. The relation between graft in politics and success in business is laid bare. But

the ethical problems involved remain in suspension: the problems of separating the good from the bad in sex and ambition, of discovering what strength of character means, of relating strength and weakness to the mores of society. The appearance of *The Genius* only increased the confusion. Perhaps, when these problems were made applicable to the artist, they struck too close to home. Whatever is laudable in ambition, in fulfilling one's talents, is now corrupted by a weakness for women, to whom the artist is drawn with a monotonous "biological urge" and from each of whom he parts in rebellious disillusionment. Only his wife, Angela, remains constant as a shallow version, almost a

parody, of the faithful Jennie Gerhardt.

When he did reach a conclusion, he chose to state it negatively. *An American Tragedy* accepts the principle that the environment is responsible for the individual personality. But the novel presents a warning rather than an ideal. A society that operates upon the wrong principles will train individuals who do wrong. *An American Tragedy* is not, like the early novels, the story of a woman of strong character, but of a weak boy who finds himself convicted of murder. With sedulous care Dreiser traces the environmental influences which assembled so pitiable a specimen of American manhood. No longer contrasting the individual to his society, he continues nevertheless to indict our society for its low standards and hypocrisy. He has grown out of his previous social cynicism, just at the time when the other novelists of the twenties were plunging into it. Finding the individual now inextricably bound to his society the large-minded pity he had always felt for the individual now extends to the society that produced him. And his novel becomes an appeal to that society to understand itself, to understand that Clyde Griffiths' tragedy is not an individual one but typically "an American tragedy" in the present generation. What gives the novel its significance is not so much the convincing accumulation of proof, but that what is proved about Clyde Griffiths typifies the combination of good intention and ineffectuality in the American youth of the respectable deferential lower middle class.

Trained with the aid of an evangelical religion into an unrealistic ideal of virtue, over-protected by their struggling parents from the vulgarity of the workaday world into which they must enter, our lower middle class youths too often grow up with meretricious aims and no strength of character to achieve them. The code of virtue they have been taught to follow has filled them with shame for their biological urges, so that, when these break forth, they are unable to control them. So Clyde Griffiths lives on two levels both in love and ambition. Working in his rich uncle's factory, he will not admit to himself that he is a worker among other workers, but assumes that he is slated to rise into an economic position comparable to his uncle's. In these circumstances which compel him to meet the world on its own terms without the protective coddling of his family, he becomes involved in an affair with a factory girl at the same time that his re-

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THE GRAY SHIP'S CAPTAIN

By HOWARD FAST

The following is the fourth and last of a series of sketches written by Mr. Fast on a voyage to India just before V-J Day. The first three have appeared in the preceding issues of NM.

THE captain of the gray ship had learned with sail, which meant that his seamed face had seen half a century of seafaring and more; actually, he had first shipped out on the squarerigger in which, at a later date, Joseph Conrad had cruised around the world; and so small a world is this, with all its millions, that three generations later the captain sat in a German concentration camp with Conrad's brother.

You can't speak of the captain without speaking of the German concentration camp and the two years he spent there. Two wars with Germany had burned into him a fierce hatred of the enemy; two years in the concentration camp had given him the wherewithal to understand them—and you can't hate the enemy properly without understanding him properly.

This captain was a master, and therein a fine distinction must be drawn; there are captains who are captains, because they hold the papers; there are captains who are masters, because the crew are their children, the ship their home, and the waters the part of the land God truly made, when he abandoned the hard and unfeeling earth. There are captains who fight the sea, fight it for a decade, a generation and two generations; and because nothing human could win such a fight, the sea destroys them, twists them out of all shape and goodness; but there are other captains who make their peace with the sea, then a compact, and then the sea respects them, and they in turn come to love the sea. That was the path this captain took. He was sixty-four years old, but sound as a dry nut with juicy meat inside. He had been born in Denmark, spent his childhood there, and from there he had gone to sea. His eyes were small and blue, and they had seen every port and every body of water. They had seen the white sails billowing, and then the reciprocating engines, and then the turbines and diesels.

Early in the war, the captain was called out of retirement, at a time when our merchant marine was expanding hugely, and we were so desperately in

need of masters. He accepted willingly enough; he didn't like fascism; he didn't like Nazis, and he didn't like small peoples, such as those in his own native land, to be pushed around. A seafaring man has his own proper idea of freedom, and he's generally not the last to do something about his ideas. So the captain went back on the bridge of a cargo ship, and he was there when a German torpedo ripped out its guts.

The Germans fished him out of the water and took him on board the sub. From there to a concentration camp, and in a concentration camp twenty-four agonizing months had to pass by. It's not easy for a man in his middle sixties, however hard he is, to give away twenty-four months of his life; it wasn't easy for the captain, and he was far from soft. He played cards; he kept a journal; he took his exercises as if he were on his own quarter-deck, and through it all he had a dream. I think in the long run it was the dream that sustained him.

He had a dream of his own ship, his own bridge, his own crew, and his own cargo of war supplies to push through enemy waters. He had a dream of his inevitability; the Nazis had come and they would go, and as before them so after them free men would drive their vessels through the oceans. Nothing had ever stopped the ships of free men, and nothing would. And eventually, after the two years had passed, the captain stood on his bridge again.

That is why there was a little more zest in everything he did. When he took the eight paces on his quarter-deck, four port, four starboard, he took them like a young man.

When he raised his quadrant to the heavens, it was as if he had never seen the sun-drenched sky before; when he drove his gray ship through four days of bitter monsoon, it was with the satisfaction that would have welcomed a typhoon. After he was repatriated, he had only ten days at home, but there was a valid question as to whether this wasn't his real home, start to finish. He hated the enemy, but that alone wasn't enough to drive him clear around the world after what he had been through. His contribution to the war was not a stinting one, a son in the tank corps losing a leg in the Battle of the Bulge, a daughter in the Red Cross in the Philip-

pires—yet he hardly spoke of them, as if the very mention of them would lessen his own desire to be back in the fight.

On one of the gray ships, the captain is the master, in every sense of the word. If power, pure and simple, be spoken of, the power of an absolute ruler, the power of life and death over men, then surely there is no clearer manifestation of it today than the captain of an ocean-going ship. He bows to no one; in the case of any infraction of law, he is both the judge and jury. It is true that once he has returned to port, he may be brought to an accounting, but so long as he is on the deck of his own ship, he is both the law and the judgment. Yet, for all I have seen, from all I have heard, there is no one more humble in the use of his power, more carefully exacting in the definition of it than a sea master.

THE captain of the *Gray Victory* was a hard man; you don't go through what he went through unless you are as hard as nails—yet in all the time I was with him, I never saw him overstep the use of his power. In giving an order, he never raised his voice, and he always left you with the impression that he was asking rather than demanding; nor have I ever seen orders better obeyed, more quickly executed. Indeed, the discipline on a gray ship is something to marvel at, the more so since it never appears to be forced; I find I can't recall any case of an order, given by any ship's officer, resulting in even a degree of hesitation. One of the reasons, perhaps, is that orders are not given simply for the sake of ordering.

The captain was old and punctilious in the tradition of the sea. Though this voyage of the *Gray Victory* lasted almost ninety days, and though in that time the captain came to know the name of almost every man on board, he never used a given or family name, except occasionally in the case of the first officer. The second officer was "second," the third, "third." The chief engineer was "chief," and the steward, with whom he played bridge for months, remained "steward" to the last day of the voyage. The messman who served him was "mess," and so on, down through the officers and crew. In all this delivery, there was an antique, formal dignity,