SOME WOMEN IN DREISER'S LIFE AND THEIR PORTRAITS IN HIS NOVELS

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The rise of naturalism in American letters was born out of a reaction against romanticism by writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair and Robert Herrick,[1] who attempted to rid the American novel of romanticism by delving deeper into life's truths than did the realists Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and Henry James. The naturalists objected to the limited subject matter of the realists; they focused their attention on "slums, crime, illicit sexual passions, exploitation of man by man"[2] and other actualities of the world.

George Perkins outlined other distinctions between realism and naturalism in American literature.[3] He describes nineteenth-century realism, 1870-1890, as represented by writers who created a world of truth by keeping actuality clearly in mind. The emphasis was on the following:

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[1] Carl Van Doren, The American Novel 1789-1939 (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 223-244.

[2] George Perkins, Realistic American Short Fiction (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1972), p. 9.

[3] Ibid., pp. 2-12.

1. Using settings that were thoroughly familiar to the writer.

2. Emphasizing the norm of daily experience in plot construction.

3. Creating ordinary characters and studying them in depth.

4. Adhering to complete authorial objectivity.

5. Accepting their moral responsibility by reporting the world as it truly was.

"Naturalism," 1890-1910, is the term used to describe a movement in American literature which began as a reaction against the limitations of realism and its failure to tell the truth about life. The naturalists tried to make their fiction tell the truth about life as they understood the truth, starting where the realists left off. Their emphasis was on the following:

1. To give an accurate picture of the world in which they lived. Even though that world was more sordid than the world in which the readers lived, it was no less real for being out of the ordinary.

2. To show that man is controlled by forces outside of himself, that he has no real choice between good and evil, and that his strongest motivations are not the result of his reason, but are animalistic.

3. To make the major concern of writing the here and now and to reveal the truth by accurately reporting external facts of the world in which they lived.

4. To arrange their material so that the structure of the novel reveals the pattern of ideas or the scientific theory which forms the author's view of the nature of experience. The naturalist in practice thus became not an impartial observer but a crusading journalist and artist who manipulates his characters and his plots.

5. To illustrate the formula that "heredity plus environment plus chance equals fate."[4]

Chief among the early crusaders for naturalism in American letters was Herman Theodore Dreiser, who has been termed "the pioneer of naturalism in American letters."[5] Theodore Dreiser's first novel was Sister Carrie, published in 1900, a book considered to be "the first wholly original book of pure naturalism."[6] Dreiser, like his contemporaries, believed that the novel was an instrument for discovering life's truths and not a "mode of casual amusement."[7] Dreiser coupled his desire to tell the truth about life with intense

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[4] Ibid., p. 11.

[5] Sculley Bradley et al., eds., The American Tradition in Literature (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 977.

[6] Robert E. Spiller et. al., Literary History of the United States (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 1016.

[7] Haskell M. Block, Naturalistic Triptych: The Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 11.

empathy for the common forms of experience, pleasant or brutal. His eight novels, Sister Carrie (1900), Jennie Gerhardt (1911), The Financier (1912), The Titan (1914), The "Genius" (1915), An American Tragedy (1925), The Bulwark (1946) and The Stoic (1947) are naturalistic novels and products of the rebellion within him against "the Victorian ideals of refinement and gentility."[8]

It was Theodore Dreiser who became the "wheel-horse if not the spearhead of American naturalism,"[9] and Van Doren further states:

> Crane and Norris died too young to carry the movement far. Garland turned to romance, London and Sinclair inclined to melodrama, Herrick lacked flexibility and fire. The burden fell chiefly on Theodore Dreiser, and more controversy than ever on any other American novelist. The charges usually brought against him were that he wrote crudely about disagreeable persons. The truth was that he offended by bringing to the American novel a body of material and an attitude almost wholly strange to the native tradition. Before him all the American novelists had sprung from the older stocks among the people and had, though with occasional dissents, taken for granted certain patterns of life which were, however modified here or there, primarily Anglo-American. Dreiser was the first important American writer who rose from the immigrants of the nineteenth century, as distinguished from those of the seventeenth or eighteenth.[10]

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[8] Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill & Wang, 1966), p. 50.

[9] Van Doren, p. 259.

[10] Ibid., p. 245.

Dreiser is further described as a rebel in the following:

> To the young writers of the early twentieth century Dreiser became, in Mencken's phrase, the Hindenburg of the novel--the great beast who pushed American life forward for them who went on, blindly, unchangeably, trampling down the lies of gentility and the Victorianism of Puritanism and academicism. Dreiser was the primitive, the man from abyss, the stranger who had grown up outside the Anglo-Saxon middle-class Protestant sanctions and so had no need to accept its sanctions.[11]

Dreiser's title of "the pioneer of naturalism in American letters"[12] was vested in him as much by his peers as by historians:

> Sherwood Anderson dedicated Horses and Men (1923) to him and wrote that the writers who came after Dreiser would 'never have to face the road through the wilderness of Puritan denial, the road that Dreiser faced alone.' John Dos Passos sent a copy of U.S.A. (1938) to Dreiser with the inscription: 'Just wanted you to know that I still feel if it hadn't been for your pioneer work none of us would have gotten our stuff written or published.' And Sinclair Lewis, in his explosive Nobel Prize acceptance speech told his shocked audience that Dreiser, more than any other man, 'marching alone, usually unappreciated, often hated, clared the trail from Victorian and Howellsian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness and passion of life.' 'Without Dreiser's pioneering,' Lewis said, 'I doubt if any of us could, unless we liked to be sent to jail, seek to express life and beauty and terror.'[13]

Dreiser, in his eight novels which reveal life with its beauty and terror, created a variety of women whose lives

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[11] Alfred Kazin & Charles Shapiro, ed., The Stature of Theodore Dreiser (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1955), pp. 6-7.

[12] Sculley Bradley, et al., ed., p. 977.

[13] Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie, ed. Jack Salzman (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), pp. xxii-xxiii.

offer a study of the American woman during the early part of the twentieth century. He presented them as he saw them with little or no effort to make them appear to be more moral or upright than they were. As Geismar states,

> It is odd, too, that such a solemn author should have been able to create the bright gallery of women in the course of his novels--from Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt and the Aileen Cowperwood of The Financier, who is one of Dreiser's most fascinating figures, to the Roberta Alden of An American Tragedy and in the same novel, Sondra, with her dreadful baby talk.[14]

Theodore Dreiser was able to create a variety of female characters in his novels because he knew what women were like mentally, physically and emotionally. His knowledge sprang from his relationships with the women in his family: he was emotionally devoted to his mother, Sarah Schanab Dreiser, and inherited her sensitivity to life; he had five older sisters, Mame, Emma, Theresa, Sylvia and Claire,who provided him with an intimate picture of feminine youth and beauty; and he had two wives from whom he learned the response of the feminine mind and spirit to marriage.

The purpose of this thesis is to point out the extent to which the women characters in Dreiser's eight novels were, in actuality, life portraits of the most important women in his personal life: his mother, sisters and wives. By showing the relationship between the Dreiser heroine and the real-life Dreiser women, a better understanding of Dreiser himself will be evident.

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[14] Geismar, pp. 50-51.

An examination of Dreiser's background and family history is necessary for an understanding of his relationship with and feelings toward women. Dreiser provided much of his family history himself in his vivid autobiographies, Dawn and A Book about Myself.

John Paul Dreiser, the father of Theodore Dreiser, was born in Mayen, Germany, in 1821. At the age of twenty-three John Dreiser left Germany and came to the United States.[15] A weaver by trade, he worked in woolen mills in New York and Connecticut before moving to Dayton, Ohio, to work at the local mill. While in Dayton, Dreiser met Sarah Maria Schanab, an uneducated Mennonite farm girl from near Dayton. On January 1, 1851,Sarah and John eloped. At the time she was seventeen, and he was twelve years her senior.[16]

Before the year ended, they moved to Ft. Wayne, Indiana, where Dreiser was employed at a woolen mill. Seven years later, in 1858, he obtained a position as supervisor in a large mill in Terre Haute, where they stayed for nine years. In 1867, John moved his family, a wife and six children, to Sullivan, Indiana, where he became an independent wool manufacturer. Five more children were born to Sarah and John while they lived in Sullivan, making a family of eleven children.[17]

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[15] W. A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York: Scribner's, 1965), p. 5.

[16] Ibid., p. 5.

[17] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Gerber gives the following account of family misfortune:

> In 1870 a trio of misfortunes struck the Dreiser family in rapid sequence. Loaded with fleeces consigned by the farmers of the region, John Dreiser's woolen mill burned to the ground. During its rebuilding, a heavy beam crashed down upon the weaver's head and shoulders, destroying the hearing in one ear. While he convalesced, his guileless wife was cheated by 'yankee trickery' out of the remainder of the family property.[18]

In addition to the financial disaster, there was also family tragedy. The three oldest children, all boys, died within three years. After these misfortunes, John Dreiser was never quite the same again. He was a man broken in spirit.[19]

Being fanatically attached to the Roman Catholic Church, he turned to religion and came to rely more on God's strength than he did his own.[20] He believed that his soul's salvation depended upon his repaying every dollar that he owed as quickly as possible.[21] In order to repay his debts, he moved the family back to Terre Haute and made an effort to repay the money, but his efforts were mostly in vain.

John Paul Dreiser was a man of ". . . iron conventionalism and moral intolerance . . .,"[22] but his wife, Sarah Schanab Dreiser, proved to be a startling opposite. Theodore Dreiser

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[18] Philip L. Gerber, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 23.

[19] Theodore Dreiser, Dawn (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), p. 5.

[20] Swanberg, p. 7.

[21] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 5.

[22] Ibid., p. 10.

later described her as:

> . . . Beyond or behind so called good or evil. Neither moral nor immoral, she was non-moral, intellectually, emotionally, temperamentally. A strange, sweet, dreamy woman, who did not know life was organized; who was quick to forget the miseries of the past and contemplate the comforts 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 continued to contemplate beauty--her one enduring earthly reward, as I came to know.[23]

From the union of such diverse temperaments, Herman Theodore Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on August 27, 1871, two years before the birth of the last son, making a family of ten living children, with five sons and five daughters. The boys were John Paul, known as Paul; Marcus Romanus, called Rome; Alphonse Joachim, shortened to Al; Herman Theodore, nicknamed Theo or Dorce; and Edward Minerod, known always as Ed. The girls of the family were Mary Frances, or Mame; Emma Wilhemina, called Emma; Mary Theresa, shortened to Theresa; Cecilia, called Sylvia; and Claire, often called Tillie.

During Dreiser's childhood "the catastrophies initiated with the destruction of the family mill led to a constant bewildering succession of moves and separations."[24] Elias describes the reasons for the many moves:

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[23] Ibid., p. 10.

[24] Gerber, p. 27.

> From almost the day of his baptism he, Theodore, was part of a family that was on the move. It was not as though his parents were consumed with the legendary fire of the pioneer spirit; they moved simply because a mortgage had been foreclosed or because the rent had exceeded their means, and they did not move far.[25]

From the time of Dreiser's birth in 1871 until 1879, the family lived in five different houses in Terre Haute alone, each more inadequate than the one before. "Regularly the mother, in a burst of ambition, opened a boarding house. Regularly each new venture failed. The reason, according to her son: undercharging and overserving."[26]

It was during these first seven years in Terre Haute that Dreiser was subjected to the dogma and discipline of the parochial school. Even though Sarah had come to suspect that her children were not receiving the proper educational advantages at the Catholic school,[25] John Dreiser was adamant about their attendance. The experiences at St. Joseph's German Catholic School were not pleasant for the young Theodore:

> On a dias which faced us sat--as she then seemed to me--the Nemesis or Gorgon of the place, an outlandish figure of a woman clad in black, with a flaring white hood or bonnet . . . the uniform overawed me, as did that of the black-cassocked priest who occasionally on this first day, and almost regularly on every other day thereafter, strutted or prowled amongst us.[28]

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[25] Robert Henry Elias, Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 7.

[26] Gerber, p. 27.

[27] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 25.

[28] Ibid, p. 27.

However, St. Joseph's German Catholic School became a thing of the past in the spring of 1879,when Sarah and part of her family moved to Vincennes, Indiana. There Sarah had a friend named Susan Bellette, who offered her a small apartment over the local firehouse. As Swanberg describes the situation,

> It was arranged that Sarah, then forty-six, would go to Vincennes with six-year-old Ed, seven-year-old Theodore, and nine-year-old Claire. Eleven-year-old Al was sent to work at a relative's farm. Paul and Rome were gone, no one knew where. The four older daughters, Mame, Emma, Theresa and Sylvia, would stay in Terre Haute with John Dreiser, employed at a local rug factory, and would send what help they could.[29]

Unfortunately, Sarah and her three children's stay in Vincennes was ended after five weeks when Sarah discovered that Susan was running a fireman's bordello.[30] In the summer of 1879 Sarah and her three youngest were again in need of a place to live. A friend of Sarah's in Sullivan, a small town halfway between Vincennes and Terre Haute, offered her aid. She took the children to Sullivan and eventually found a cottage on the edge of town renting for only seven dollars a month.

Although poverty and struggle hovered over the Dreiser household, Dreiser later recorded:

> If I were asked to indicate any one period of my youth, or even life, of which I might say that it was compounded of innocence, wonder, beauty, little or no trace of the knowledge of good and evil or the broodings thereby entailed, I would fix upon the two or three years spent in the plain little white house that was our abode in Sullivan.[31]

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[29] Swanberg, p. 9.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 43.

During the stay in Sullivan, Sarah realized a lifelong ambition. At night, with her children Claire and Dreiser as her teachers, she learned to write, and this learning was one of the few good things that happened to her while in Sullivan, for in ". . . the Dreiser family, disasters were never far apart."[32] Theodore and Ed were sent home from parochial school because they had no shoes. Sarah solved the problem by taking in more washing in order to pay for the shoes.[33]

At age eighteen, Mame Dreiser joined her mother and the younger children in Sullivan because she was pregnant by her lawyer lover who refused to marry her. She stayed in Sullivan under Sarah's watchful and loving care. When the child was delivered, it was stillborn. "At midnight Sarah dug a grave near the house, performed a quick burial, and later showed Mame the grave."[34]

After a four years' absence, Paul joined the part of the family living in Sullivan and instigated another move in the summer of 1881. Now known as Paul Dresser, songwriter and actor, and prosperous, he encouraged his mother to move to Evansville, Ohio, where he was the leading man at the Apollo Theatre. There, he was carrying on an illicit love affair with Sallie Walker, the madam of a high-class brothel on Main

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[32] Swanberg, p. 11.

[33] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 52.

[34] Swanberg, p. 11.

Street, a fact which Sarah never knew. The Evansville house, provided largely by Sallie, was the finest one the Dreisers had occupied, and Sallie saw to it that there were always ample groceries. "John Dreiser, still in Terre Haute, had no idea that his wife and three youngest children were being subsidized by harlotry."[35]

While ". . . there was little that was not pleasant and even delightful . . ."[36] about life in Evansville, Dreiser was forced to attend Holy Trinity Parochial School with Ed and Claire. His bitter feelings about parochial school deepened.

"Although the Dreisers did not know it, their stay in Evansville depended not only on Paul's bounty but also on the serenity of his mistress, which fluctuated with Paul's own wavering affections."[37] In 1884, when Paul became interested in another woman, Sallie became angry and withdrew her financial aid to his family. When Paul left Sallie and Evansville to rejoin a touring minstrel show, Sarah and her three youngest had to move again, this time to Chicago, where Mame, Emma and Theresa had previously established themselves. The three sisters secured a third-floor apartment in a respectable neighborhood for their mother and younger brothers and sisters.

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[35] Ibid., p. 13.

[36] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 127.

[37] Swanberg, p. 14.

Dreiser was twelve when he moved to Chicago, making it the fifth town and at least the tenth dwelling for a rootless young boy.[38] Chicago was where Dreiser passed from childhood into boyhood. He got a summer job as a cash boy, but found it difficult to concentrate on his work; so his mother allowed him to quit. As Swanberg relates this period,

> He then ran head-on into a mystery that would convulse, torment, preoccupy and delight him for the remainder of his long life--that would drive him physically and mentally, profoundly influence his career, afflict him with insomnia, cost him the best job he ever had, break up his first marriage and cause him to be indicted for adultery and to become an object of some curiosity as a literary rake. This was the mystery of sex.[39]

Although he was only thirteen years old, Dreiser himself stated ". . . here and for the first time in my life I felt the tang and pang of love."[40]

John Dreiser, who had been working in Terre Haute, joined his family in Chicago after the mill in which he was working in Terre Haute closed. He was unemployed and despondent. As far as she was able, Sarah hid the daughters' affairs from their father because he was so harsh about what he considered to be immoral conduct. Mame was going with Austin Brennan, who was fourteen years her senior; Emma was dating an elderly architect; and Theresa was being courted by a wealthy widower.[41]

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[38] Ibid., p. 15.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 167.

[41] Ibid., p. 16.

The Chicago venture lasted only a few months before the Dreisers began to realize that they could not afford to live in Chicago. "The $35 monthly rent was a burden to which was added a $25 monthly payment on some $600 worth of furniture bought in a rash surge of confidence. . . . By summer's end, "it was apparent that Sarah would soon have to move to a cheaper place with her young trio."[42]

After losing the furniture because they could not keep up the payments, all that Sarah owned was a five-acre piece of land in Benton, Indiana, which had been willed to her by her father. For reasons known only to Sarah, she decided to move closer to this tract of land. "The Dreisers settled in Warsaw in the fall of 1884, sans a table to eat from or a bed to sleep on."[43]

For the impressionable Theodore, Warsaw, Indiana, was a place of great charm. As he relates,

> . . . I, too, was possessed of a sense of peace as well as beauty here--such sylvan and idyllic beauty as rarely elsewhere I have met--at least in the same mood as then possessed me. For after Chicago and those last few days in Evansville, this place suggested not only security but evoked a feeling of beauty and adventure.[44]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 188.

Warsaw was significant in the life of Theodore Dreiser, for it was here that Sarah at last defied John Dreiser, who had returned to Terre Haute to find work, and enrolled Theodore, Ed and Claire in the public school. Finally Dreiser was happy:

> . . . he had found a teacher who understood him. Mildred Fielding, gracious, sympathetic--not unlike his own mother in temperament--recognized in this awkward self-conscious youth something of herself as a young girl and went out of her way to praise his reading and composition, to comment favorably upon his mental abilities. Gradually, Theodore came to feel he might perhaps be of some worth after all.[45]

As with all the Dreiser moves, it was not long before trouble came. Rome appeared after a long absence, ". . . got drunk, lurched around the public square, buttonholed staid citizens and bragged of his exploits."[46] After his arrival and departure, John Dreiser appeared in Warsaw because the Terre Haute mill had closed down again. Much to Sarah's consternation, two of her frivolous daughters, Emma and Sylvia, also picked this time to visit the family. Emma had left her architect lover and Sylvia had lost her Chicago job. Trouble was imminent because John Dreiser refused to allow his girls to date when and as they pleased. Because of this conflict in the family, John returned to Terre Haute to work, Sylvia remained in Warsaw with Sarah and the younger children,

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[45] Gerber, p. 33.

[46] Swanberg, p. 18.

and Emma returned to Chicago, where she met and eloped with L. A. Hoskins, a man wanted by the law.[47]

As if that were not enough for Sarah and her younger children, Sylvia, who had remained in Warsaw, became pregnant by the son of a wealthy family. Sarah tried to get legal action taken against the man, but without success. Sylvia went to New York to await the birth of her child.

The gossip in Warsaw was thick concerning the Dreiser clan--a drunken brother, a boorish father, and immoral sisters. As Dreiser said years later, "We were a scandal."[48]

So it was that the Dreiser family was once more rejected by society. This time, Dreiser was the one to decide to move, prompted by the hope of doing better. "He was almost sixteen, skinny and gangling, in that summer of 1887."[49] He dreamed of happiness and success in Chicago. "As he entered the city, its bustle and excitement inflamed his imagination. As he attempted to support himself, the concrete realities discouraged him."[50]

Dreiser was able to find employment in Chicago as a dishwasher in a greasy,none-too-clean restaurant. Eventually he quit that job and found another one with Hillard, Spencer, Bartlett and Company, a wholesale hardware store.

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[47] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[48] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 264.

[49] Swanberg, p. 23.

[50] Elias, p. 23.

With Mame, Theresa, Al and Theodore all working in Chicago, Sarah wanted to be near them. Therefore, in September Sarah, Claire, age eighteen, and Ed, now fourteen, and Emma's illegitimate child went to Chicago and lived from the earnings of the working members of the family, plus what Paul occasionally was able to send. Theodore himself contributed three dollars out of his five-dollar weekly salary to his mother. With all the Dreisers working, they were able to enjoy better times. As Dreiser describes this period,

> In short, the state of our family, as a collective unit at this time, was perhaps as good as it ever was, before or after. As against the injuries and disappointments of the past, it was now comparatively sound, marriages and work having, temporarily at least, disposed of a number of ills.[51]

As Dreiser continued working at the hardware store, he became increasingly dissatisfied with his work. He never had to make the decision of whether or not to leave, however, because fate intervened in the person of Miss Mildred Fielding, his former teacher.

> . . . There arrived on the scene . . . that tall New England spinster of my Warsaw school days--Miss Fielding . . . and her proposal was that I resign the work that I was now shirking and spend the next year, or two, at best, at the State University of Indiana. And at her expense if you please!
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> She said, ". . . what I want you to do is to study and develop your mind. Read philosophy and history. You will see how life works and how mistaken or untrue most beliefs are. . . . You have the capacity for

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[51] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 348.

> rising high in the world, and I want you to do it. Don't let any little beliefs as to family scandals or disgraces lower your personal pride. Your life is yours, and people will take you as an individual, and only so. They will not trouble about your family if you are all that you ought to be.'
>
> I felt for the time being at least, that I was one of the most important youths that ever was.[52]

"Tall and shambling, wearing a cheap new suit, Theodore arrived in Bloomington in the fall of 1889 with a battered trunk and some romantic notion of college life gained from a quick reading of Four Years at Harvard and Tom Brown at Rugby."[53] When he entered Indiana University, Dreiser was eighteen years of age. He had no specific profession to which he aspired; he only wished to sample knowledge from many areas. Dreiser, who made a few male acquaintances, was unsuccessful with the college coeds and was rejected by campus fraternities. It was a year of both positive and negative experiences for Dreiser, but apparently by June, Dreiser's unhappy experiences were outstanding in his mind:

> On the last night, the students followed annual custom and burned their books in a campus bonfire--a revelry he refused to attend. 'They can all go to hell!' he said, meaning the fraternities, the clubs, the dances, the flirtations, the upper crust of college society to which he had dreamed of belonging but which had excluded him.[54]

Dreiser fled the college campus to the arms of his mother, who was then in Chicago in that spring of 1890, and once more

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[52] Ibid., pp. 368-370.

[53] Swanberg, p. 28.

[54] Ibid., p. 31.

became a contributing member of the Dreiser household. Although his father was unemployed again, the other children were working. Much to the pride of the family, Paul had written a top-selling song, "I Believe It for My Mother Told Me So."

Dreiser secured a job with Mr. Asa Conklin in his real estate office on Ogden Avenue. While his income was far from sufficient, he kept the job that summer because ". . . I had a buggy to ride in, a good horse to drive, a bright clean office. . . ."[55] Through the summer and early fall of 1890 Dreiser began to note a distinct change in his mother, who was then fifty-seven.

> It was just about this time, though, that the first, and quite the most profound, psychologic shakeup I ever received occurred. I had noticed that my mother was tending to become more and more sedentary, inclined to sit around in a kind of dreamy stupor and meditate on the spectacle of life.[56]

Sarah's condition worsened quickly and a doctor was called, but he proved to be of little help. Dreiser later recalled:

> . . . She began to lie abed late of a morning and to retire early in the evening, even lying down during the day--something I had never noted in connection with her before. And all those heavy burdens which for years she had assumed and insisted on were, perforce, though willingly enough on her part now, lifted from her shoulders!
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> I have never seen a family more speedily united in mood, more affectionately drawn together for the time, than was ours by this impending danger. For where all

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[55] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 498.

[56] Ibid., p. 506.

> were previously so individual, touchy, argumentative, even bitterly quarrelsome at times, now they were united in the quieting bond of sympathy for her, and not only sympathy but a heart-clutching fear.[57]

The entire family, with the exception of Paul, Rome, Emma and Sylvia, was living in Chicago. Of these four, only Rome did not receive word about his mother's condition. The family did not know where or how to reach him.

On November 14, 1890, Sarah Schanab Dreiser died in Dreiser's arms as she asked him to help her sit up. What followed would always bring bitterness to Theodore Dreiser:

> John Dreiser's first thought was of the church, and a Bavarian priest came, spoke with him in German and grew doubtful as he learned the circumstances. Sarah Dreiser had not received absolution. In her illness she had not been to mass or confession for months. Despite Dreiser's servile explanations, the priest felt that this barred her from church ceremonies. . . . John Dreiser pursued the priest, who eventually relented, and Sarah was buried in St. Boneface Cemetery on the North Side. Engraved in Theodore's memory was that dreadful tableau--his mother dying in his arms, his father weeping, the priest refusing absolution.[58]

"Once the funeral was over, though, the fact of immediate importance to Theodore was that the part of him that was his mother was gone. He still had a father, brothers, and sisters, and a place to live; but it was different.[59]

His grief was deep and very real; in fact, Sarah's death marked a positive change in Dreiser's life:

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[57] Ibid., pp. 507-8.

[58] Swanberg, pp. 32-33.

[59] Elias, p. 29.

> For within me now was something else: a new sense of individuality which my mother's passing seemed suddenly to have completed. For now I was I and alone. Her part--her strength and living, sustaining love--had gone from me. I could not have her any more to lean on or turn to. And so must now turn to myself--must. And that thought seemed actually to swell in me as a new strength--which most certainly it was. For apart from her I did not really desire anyone else so much--really wished only to be alone for the time being--as I was for many years thereafter--a lone barque on a lone sea.[60]

The Dreiser family was not able to stay together after Sarah's death. They quarreled and bickered among themselves --mostly about money. Eventually Claire, Ed and Theodore left the family and took a small apartment on Taylor Street. John Dreiser remained with Mame, Theresa and Al. Sylvia and Emma were in New York, Paul was on the road, and no one knew anything about Rome.

Dreiser not only broke with some of his family, he also broke with Asa Conklin, after receiving an offer for a better-paying job delivering laundry for a Mr. Nesbitt. Unfortunately, Dreiser "borrowed" twenty-five dollars for an overcoat, which, when Nesbitt discovered the indiscretion, caused him to be fired, exactly ten days before Christmas, 1891. Dreiser later recalled this incident by saying, "But with this, as I have always thought, ended my true youth."[61]

The many months that Theodore had spent driving a laundry wagon were not in vain, however. During the years 1890-91,

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[60] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 516.

[61] Ibid., p. 585.

he became increasingly aware of what he wanted to do in life. What he was seeing and experiencing on his daily rounds produced a need to share his reactions. "I seethed to express myself."[62] Compelled to express himself through writing and realizing that he would not emerge as a recognized novelist overnight, he decided that his best beginning could be made by securing a reporter's job with one of the Chicago newspapers.

> Determined to force his way upward, at age twenty-one, he set out. . . . For weeks a brusque 'Nothing today!' iced down every flush hope; but at last true-blue American perserverance won out. John Maxwell, a copy reader of the city's lowest-ranking newspaper, the Daily Globe, accepted Theodore on a trial basis. After that his imaginative coverage of the 1892 Democratic convention won him a chance at a steady berth at a glorious $15.00 a week. For the next decade he was occupied exclusively in journalistic work; reporting, editing, publishing scores of feature articles in the popular magazines.[63]

In November, 1892, after Dreiser had worked on the Globe for six months, he was offered a job on the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. Leaving Chicago and going east to St. Louis was a sign to Dreiser that he was on his way to success. When he left Chicago, he also left his lover, Lois Zahn.

> Though he was ever insecure as a lover, he left a broken heart behind him, that of Lois Zahn, latest in a series of girls with whom he had become involved during his days at Conklin's real-estate office, while driving the laundry truck, and while working on his

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[62] Theodore Dreiser, A Book About Myself (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922), p. 3.

[63] Gerber, p. 40.

> newspaper career. These affairs, invariably painful, always burnt themselves out to the same grey conclusion. Sometimes the girl left him--each desertion an added blow to his ego; and sometimes he left her, thus igniting in himself a conflict of emotions. If the girls wanted marriage, as Lois did, then he shied away; for he was determined that marriage had no place in his life. He wanted to be ruthless, cold in avoiding romantic entanglements; but he found it no more possible than for a lamb to shed his fleece and grow a lion's mane. In his fiction he was able to create insensitive supermen who took women and discarded them like Kleenex. But except by way of fantasy these men's lives bore little resemblance to his own.[64]

Dreiser first experienced success in St. Louis on Saturday, January 21, 1893, when he was the only reporter at the scene of a disastrous fire involving seven oil tanks; for his complete vivid coverage, he was given a $20 bonus and his salary increased to $25 a week.

Not only financially and professionally, but personally Dreiser was making improvements in his life. He became closely associated with Peter B. McCord and Richard Wood, staff artists at the Globe-Democrat who were considered Bohemian. Also, his doubts about his virility were erased by his landlady, and he became confident about his ability as a lover.

Life at the Globe-Democrat was cut short in late April, 1893, by a mishap which took place after Dreiser became dramatic critic of the paper. Unfortunately, he was required to handle regular assignments also. One Sunday evening three

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[64] Ibid., p. 41.

new shows were scheduled to premier in St. Louis, with Dreiser's presence required at all three theatres. Moreover, he was also instructed to investigate a street-car hold-up in the far western suburbs of the city. Rather than relinquish his dramatic assignments to McCord or Wood, Dreiser foolishly decided to write up the theatre notices beforehand, using facts from various press agents. When Dreiser awoke the next morning and read the paper, he was dismayed and chagrined to discover that none of the three shows had even arrived in St. Louis due to wash-outs in other states.[65]

Because he felt that he was the laughing stock of not only the newspaper, but the entire city of St. Louis, Dreiser went into hiding for a week after sneaking into the city room, gathering a few belongings and leaving an apologetic note. When his funds ran low, he came out of hiding and immediately secured a position for $18 a week on the Republic, a paper inferior to the Globe-Democrat.

Under the watchful eye of city editor H. B. Wandell, Dreiser developed into a valuable feature man for the Republic. When the Republic staged a popularity contest among Missouri school teachers in the spring of 1893, sending the twenty who received the most votes to the Chicago World's Fair, Dreiser was allowed to accompany them and write about their activities.[66]

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[65] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, pp. 200-202.

[66] Swanberg, pp. 47-8.

One of the young spinsters whom Dreiser accompanied was Sara Osborne White, whose life would touch Dreiser's for the next forty-nine years. Sara was then twenty-four, making her a little over two years older than Dreiser. She was teaching in Florissant, a St. Louis suburb, although her home was seventy-five miles from St. Louis in Montgomery City.[67]

Dreiser later recalled his first impression of Sara, known always as Jug to family, friends and Dreiser:

> She was in white, with a mass of sunny red hair. Her eyes were almond-shaped, liquid and blue-gray. Her nose was straight and fine, her lips sweetly curved. She seemed bashful and retiring. At her bosom was a bouquet of pink roses, but one had come loose. . . . Of a sudden she seemed quite the most interesting of all those here, simple, pretty, vigorous and with a kind of tact and grace that was impressive. Also I felt an intense something about her that was concealed by an air of supreme innocence and maidenly reserve. . . . 'What a delightful girl,' I thought, with a feeling of intense satisfaction.[68]

There was something else about Jug which both attracted and frightened Dreiser.

> Despite her rustic background she had achieved a poise he could not muster, based on a family tranquility he had never known and expressing standards she accepted and practiced--an attitude that must have made him envious since he was groping blindly for standards, sure of nothing, least of all himself. . . . He could not get the maddeningly chaste Miss White out of his mind.[69]

While in Chicago, Dreiser took the opportunity to visit those members of his family still living there. His father

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[67] Ibid., p. 48.

[68] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, pp. 240-242.

[69] Swanberg, p. 48.

was then seventy-two and the reunion between father and son was very touching. After taking his father to the Fair, Dreiser visited Al, who had become an electrician, and Ed, who was driving a delivery wagon. Dismissing the fact that unemployment was high in St. Louis, he urged his two brothers to quit their jobs and join him in St. Louis. The boys took up the offer; but they discovered that when they had trouble finding work, Theodore's willingness to help financially cooled quickly, causing them to soon return to Chicago.[70]

Meanwhile, during the fall of 1893, Dreiser had extended his relationship with Jug. Although his original intention was seduction,[71] she managed to repulse any but the most innocent embraces. Weary and defeated, Dreiser grudgingly proposed and gave her a diamond. His plans for marriage were interrupted, however, by the arrival of Paul, whose fame and success caused Theodore's mind to turn from Jug and wedlock toward New York, where Paul assured him his intellect and ability would be appreciated. "He was dissatisfied, restless, sexually driven, allured by Paul's talk of New York but harboring a country-boy fear of the metropolis--in a disposition to give ear to almost any proposition that offered change and dream."[72]

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[70] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[71] Ibid., p. 50.

[72] Ibid., p. 51.

On March 5, 1894, Dreiser left St. Louis to go East, although New York was not his immediate destination. A friend had urged him to go to Grand Rapids, Ohio, to work in a country newspaper. The venture lasted only a few days and then Dreiser was off to Toledo, where he encountered Arthur Henry, city editor of the Toledo Blade, a man who was to become instrumental in Dreiser's career. Dreiser remained in Toledo less than a week, although Arthur Henry gave him a job on the Toledo Blade covering a streetcar strike and was very much pleased with Dreiser's work.

> The two began to talk freely. They had similar experiences in Chicago; they had mutual acquaintances; they shared almost identical dreams. Henry, lover of books and author of some poems and fairy tales, wanted to become a poet and novelist; Dreiser, of course, wanted to be a playwright, and was enchanted. By the end of Wednesday, March 28, when Dreiser wrote a last article, the two were intimate friends. A lonely wanderer, craving the affection of women, Dreiser found Henry's understanding rich in meaning. Had Henry been a girl, Dreiser would, he thought, have married him.[73]

Even though Henry encouraged Dreiser to remain in Toledo, the allure of New York led Dreiser to continue moving eastward. First Cleveland, then Buffalo, and finally in April, 1894, Pittsburgh, where Dreiser secured a job on the Pittsburgh Dispatch. He stayed with the Dispatch until the end of August, when, overcome by fear that he might be losing his future with

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[73] Elias, pp. 66-67.

Jug, he left Pittsburgh for a visit to the White's farm in Missouri. While there, a letter from Paul reached him, urging him to leave for New York at once. Dreiser did go to New York, but he found himself unable to cope with New York life.

> His imagination had not envisaged this kind of life, and the experience now suggested that New York was not readily mastered. When, in addition, he studied the newspapers to discover what working as a reporter in New York might mean, he was overawed by the tone of authority and condescension he detected in their editorials and, reflecting upon his own shortcomings, decided that here was a world without familiar rules where he might easily be overcome and that before attempting to breach it he had better return to Pittsburgh and save enough money to sustain him in case of failure.[74]

Dreiser did return to Pittsburgh, but only for a short time. In November of 1894, he once again experienced a deep yearning to return to New York, feeling that he was capable of dealing with life in so vast a city. Jobs were difficult to obtain, but finally he secured one on the World. Unfortunately, Dreiser's work proved inadequate and he left before he was fired.

It was during the miserable, unproductive days at the World that Dreiser began to study the fiction in Harper's, Century and the Atlantic Monthly.

> These stories invariably dealt with situations in which virtue, though assailed, was triumphant. This was so different from what he had observed in Chicago,

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[74] Ibid., p. 80

> St. Louis, Pittsburgh and New York that he was puzzled, thinking that the writers must occupy a social world higher and nobler than any he had privileged to see. He wrote several yarns imitating the nobility-requited theme, but they were rejected.[75]

However, all was not lost, for Dreiser entered the world of journalism in 1895 by forming a partnership with his brother Paul and publishing a magazine called Ev'ry Month, for which Paul wrote songs and Dreiser served as editor. By 1896, Ev'ry Month was a modest success and Dreiser was an editor who dealt with fiction, politics, and poetry. Unfortunately, Dreiser's unstable nature did not allow him to be contented for long.

> . . . by the fall of 1897 Dreiser felt his abilities were not being adequately appreciated. Arthur Henry was partly responsible for this feeling. Henry had come east to nose about among magazines and publishers, in the hope of making good as a writer outside the newspaper world, and to renew his friendship with Dreiser.[76]

Arthur Henry urged the discouraged Dreiser to do some free lance work, which proved successful. The September, 1897, issue of Ev'ry Month was Dreiser's last.[77] Dreiser undertook some free lance work which proved to be profitable.

Towards the end of 1898 he had sufficient money to marry Jug, who had been faithfully writing to him and waiting for him for five years. Still, Dreiser hesitated.

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[75] Swanberg, p. 67.

[76] Elias, p. 94.

[77] Swanberg, p. 75.

> Then came a letter from Rose White, the younger sister Dreiser sometimes thought he liked better than Jug--a very private letter reminding him of the promises and of Jug's despair. . . . This was reality and it shocked him. True, he loved Jug--or did he? He could never make up his mind because he was forever weighing the factors; sincere affection and sincere doubts, his desire to have the advantages of both estates and the disadvantages of neither, the pleasures of wifely admiration and home cooking plus the perfect freedom of the artist, philosopher and rake.
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> Unable to face a family wedding, he arranged to meet Jug in Washington. She arrived with her sister Rose . . . and on December 28, 1898, Theodore Dreiser and Sara Osborne White were married on Massachusetts Avenue by a Methodist clergyman named J. W. Duffy. Jug was four months shy of thirty. Dreiser, four months over twenty-seven, later described the event as 'the pale flame of duty.'[78]

Dreiser later reflected upon his union with Jug, which was to find its way to the center of a number of his novels, in the following statement:

> As I look back on it I can imagine no greater error of mind or temperament than that which drew me to her, considering my own variable tendencies and my naturally freedom-loving point of view. But since we are all blind victims of chance and given to far better hind-sight than fore-sight I have no complaint to make. It is quite possible that this was all a part of my essential destiny or development, one of those storm-breeding mistakes by which one grows. Life seems thus often casually to thrust upon one an experience which is to prove illuminating or disastrous.[79]

> All this is not to say that the marriage proved unhappy from the start; but even granting that both young people made an effort toward harmony, the honeymoon was brief. They were too different, clashed on too many issues of vital moment. Theodore was an artist, or hoped to be; Sallie (Jug) was philistine

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[78] Ibid., p. 80.

[79] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 260.

> to the core. Neither appears to have been in any event an easy person to live with; and with Sallie (Jug) insisting upon the sanctity and inviolability of monogamous Christian marriage and with Theodore holding to the pagan varietism he had long since adopted, only time staved off the inevitable clash.[80]

The newlyweds lived in New York until July, 1899, when Dreiser, heeding the summons of Arthur Henry, took Jug and went to Maumee, Ohio, the location of Henry's "House of Four Pillars." It was in this idyllic spot that Arthur strengthened his challenge to Dreiser to write more fiction.[81]

> Henry eagerly beginning work on his novel, A Princess of Arcady, urged Dreiser to try something in the same form. As Dreiser put it, 'He began to ding-dong about a novel. I must write a novel. I must write a novel.' And pat as the story sounds, Dreiser insists that to please his friend he sat down one day in September and, choosing a title at random, wrote Sister Carrie--thus turning a new page in American literary history.[82]

Dreiser, Jug and Arthur Henry returned to New York in late fall and Dreiser wrote his book. On May 2, 1900, Harper's rejected Dreiser's novel, with the suggestion that Dreiser try Doubleday, Page and Company, possibly because that firm "had been brave enough to publish Frank Norris' violent McTeague."[83] On June 9, 1900, Dreiser received the joyful news that Doubleday had agreed to publish his book. The message came from Walter Hines Page, a partner in the firm

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[80] Gerber, p. 47.

[81] Elias, pp. 102-103.

[82] Gerber, p. 50.

[83] Swanberg, p. 86.

and acting head while Frank N. Doubleday was in Europe.[84] However, Frank N. Doubleday's subsequent return and review of Sister Carrie marked a dismal time for Dreiser. Both Doubleday and his wife, Neltje De Graff Doubleday, considered the book immoral and disgusting. More than that, it implied that the "wages of sin might easily be success,"[85] an idea which lashed at traditional American values. Doubleday promptly canceled Dreiser's contract. Gerber describes what follows:

> Now began his long warfare with the censors. It was to endure, hot and cold, the rest of his life; and his vigorous aggressive fulminations against self-appointed watchdogs of the nation's bookshelves played a considerable role in the eventual breakthrough into the permissiveness characteristic of American writing in midcentury.[86]

Dreiser, being a man of untamed spirit, refused to accept the canceled contract, forcing Doubleday to publish the book. Doubleday did so, but printed only a thousand copies and provided no advertisement for its release on November 8, 1900. Only six hundred and fifty copies were disposed of, at a dollar and a half per novel, which made Dreiser's profit for his year-long task far short of one hundred dollars.[87]

Dreiser's discouragement over Sister Carrie had a severe effect on his lifestyle, bordering on disaster. The years

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[84] Ibid., p. 86.

[85] Elias, pp. 113-114.

[86] Gerber, pp. 73-74.

[87] Elias, pp. 114-116.

1901-1903 marked a gruesome, despondent time for the rejected artist, bringing him to the verge of suicide. But by Christmas Eve, 1903, we had regained a measure of physical and mental health, and felt strong enough to continue in his career.[88]

In the early months of 1904, Dreiser and Jug took a cheap apartment in the Bronx while Dreiser got a small-scale job as an assistant feature editor of the New York Daily News. He began a strenuous physical self-rehabilitation program and also resolved to educate himself in history and philosophy.[89] He soon left the Daily News and started editing dime novels. The ideas for Jennie Gerhardt were in his mind, but he apparently had little time to write. All the while, he dreamed of having Sister Carrie re-issued.[90]

Not only was Dreiser's marital life dismal, but in January of 1906, Dreiser faced another unhappy situation, this time concerning his family. His songwriter brother Paul, having had bad luck with his music, was living with his sister Emma. Dreiser had lost his father in 1900[91] and now realized that he was losing his brother. On January 30, 1906, Paul

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[88] Swanberg, p. 108.

[89] Ibid., p. 109.

[90] Ibid., p. 110.

[91] Ibid., p. 94.

died without money and without friends. "Dreiser took Paul's rectangular rosewood piano, a keepsake he would treasure for life."[92]

In April following Paul's death, Dreiser became the $40-a-week editor of the Broadway Magazine.[93] Dreiser made a success of the magazine and his confidence in himself rose. Another ego booster came in early 1907, when Sister Carrie was re-issued on May 18, through the Dodge Company. Sister Carrie was reviewed more widely than in 1900 and sales were good. Finally, Dreiser was installed as the $5,000-a-year editor of the Butterick "Trio" consisting of The Delineator, The Designer, and New Idea Woman's Magazine. At last the thwarted artist was a success.[94]

Dreiser's stay with The Butterick Trio lasted until October 15, 1910,[95] three short years with the best, most lucrative job he was ever to know. Although he took great pride in his job, he sacrificed it for one Thelma Cudlipp, the daughter of one of the assistant editors at Butterick. Dreiser met Thelma in the fall of 1909, when she was a mere seventeen.[96] Thelma was a direct contrast to Jug, and Dreiser was enthralled with her youth, beauty, and artistic imagination.

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[92] Ibid., p. 113.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., pp. 117-119.

[95] Elias, p. 150.

[96] Swanberg, p. 131.

Due to the scandal caused when the affair became public knowledge, Dreiser left Butterick's and his editorial responsibilities to return to his writing of Jennie Gerhardt. Almost simultaneously on October 3 he left Jug without even saying good-bye.

> For almost a year he had wrestled with tensions, yearning, enmities, gossip, embarrassments, insomnia, and feelings of guilt. He had been defeated at every turn. He had lost home, wife, Honeypot [Thelma], job, income, prestige and his splendid green-and-bronze office, and in the bargain he must have realized that he looked silly. . . . But he did not lose his wife, quite . . . Jug's status in his life would remain in doubt for more than three years. She still loved him, hoped that he would return. The decision was up to Dreiser, who seemed unable to decide.[97]

Harper and Brothers accepted Jennie Gerhardt at the end of April, 1911. The novel proved to be the first "of four new novels completed within five years of his leaving Butterick's."[98] Harper's encouraged Dreiser to follow Jennie Gerhardt with The Financier, a dramatization of the Philadelphia career of Charles Tyson Yerkes,[99] but Dreiser was engrossed in The "Genius," his novel in which he "sought to purge his spirit"[100] of his experience involving Thelma, Mrs. Cudlipp, Jug and Butterick. There is a possibility that

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[97] Ibid., p. 141.

[98] Elias, p. 152.

[99] Swanberg, p. 146.

[100] Ibid., p. 145.

Harper's was afraid of The "Genius" because it was only a thin mask of the real incidents.[101]

H. L. Mencken on reading Jennie Gerhardt wrote Dreiser: "Let no one convince you to the contrary; you have written the best American novel ever done, with the one exception of Huckleberry Finn."[102] Other praises of the book came in, but Dreiser was still skeptical of his career. The sales from Jennie Gerhardt surpassed Sister Carrie by totaling almost five thousand during the first month.[103] Still, Dreiser was dissatisfied about his work. He had a desire to travel, especially in Europe, in order to have an adequate background for The Financier, but he was in financial straits. An English publisher, Richard Grant, came to Dreiser's aid in early November by negotiating a $1,000 loan.[104] That, with the money Dreiser had on advances from Harper's, provided the necessary amount for the trip, and Dreiser left for Europe in the latter part of 1911.

Plagued by a lack of money, Dreiser returned to New York on April 23, 1912,[105] and began working furiously on The Financier, which he predicted would run to 500,000 words.

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[101] Ibid., p. 145.

[102] Elias, p. 158.

[103] Ibid., p. 156.

[104] Swanberg, p. 149.

[105] Ibid., p. 158.

Because of the length, Harper's urged him to divide it into three volumes, each one a complete story with individual titles.[106] The novel became a Trilogy of Desire, with the first two volumes being The Financier, published in 1912, and The Titan, in 1914. However, it was to be another thirty years before The Stoic, the final book, reached the press.[107] Never one to have only one or two projects to occupy his time, Dreiser was also working on A Traveler at Forty.

His relationship with Jug was coming to an end. He spent some time living with her and the rest of the time living with whomever he chose.

> One gets a picture of Jug staying sadly on at 3609, [Broadway] giving Dreiser aid and comfort when he chose to live there and trying to perpetuate the fiction that they were still cohabitating. One also gets a picture of Dreiser using 3609 as a convenient hotel and mailing address when handy and enjoying Jug's cookery on those occasions, but always the free agent. At times he took a juvenile pleasure in keeping his domestic status a close secret from his best friends. During this time he was paying Jug $100 a month, and he later dated his separation from her officially as October 1, 1910, although he was with her on the intermittent "hotel" basis for almost four years after that.[108]

By mid-July of 1914, Dreiser moved to Greenwich Village, his home for five years.[109] Here Dreiser lived and talked with people who were as unconventional as he; also, the rents

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[106] Ibid.

[107] Gerber, p. 87.

[108] Swanberg, p. 175.

[109] Ibid.

were cheaper. After taking a sentimental trip back to Chicago and the mid-west, in 1915, he returned to Greenwich Village to finish The "Genius." Having been started in 1910, it was delayed almost five years in publication because of Dreiser's preoccupation with other books as well as Harper's hesitancy to publish it.[110] It was published by Lane's, not Harper's, in early October, 1915, at the price of $1.50.[111]

> This was the weakest of Dreiser's five novels, the most vulnerable on purely literary grounds. In its preoccupation with sex it never could have found a publisher in 1900--probably not in 1915, had he not paved the way and won solid standing. . . .[112]

The poor reception of The "Genius" along with economic and romantic entanglements which were characteristic of Dreiser caused him to become ill in the early part of 1916. "There were times when his romantic web became so entangled that he could escape exposure and unpleasantness only by fleeing,"[113] which he did by taking a boat trip to Savannah in January, leaving all his women behind.

Having recovered somewhat, Dreiser completed A Hoosier Holiday in February and continued working on The Bulwark. As the summer of 1916 approached, Dreiser looked ". . . forward to becoming established and even secure--until suddenly, late

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[110] Ibid., p. 187.

[111] Ibid., p. 193.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., p. 199.

in July, 1916, a blow fell, promptly laying part of his income under an interdict."[114] John S. Sumner, executive secretary for the New York Society of the Suppression of Vice issued a message on July 25, to the John Lane Company stating that the Society would bring criminal charges unless all offending matter was removed from The "Genius" or its sale, advertisement and publication were discontinued.[115] Dreiser's attempts to fight the censorship were time consuming and caught in the maze of the courts. The "Genius" remained in the Lane stockrooms until Horace Liveright re-issued it in 1923.[116]

Dreiser was in financial straits in 1917-1918, and he resolved the problem by writing short fiction, which brought him some financial success. He continued writing, having affairs and fighting with publishers until midway into 1920. "Dresier was then at one of his lowest ebbs. . . . However, fate was preparing for him the most protracted, searing, and significant romantic attachment of his life in the person of Oregon-born Mrs. Helen Patges Richardson."[117] Helen, recently divorced, and a second cousin to Dreiser, was twenty-five and

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[114] Elias, p. 193.

[115] Ibid., p. 195.

[116] Ibid., p. 202.

[117] Swanberg, p. 241.

Dreiser was forty-eight when she walked into his life, where she was to stay for the next twenty-six years.[118] Helen later recalled:

> It was a late September afternoon in 1919 when Theodore Dreiser and I faced each other . . . he was concentrating on his book of essays, Hey Rub-a-dub-dub! . . . something was happening. . . . After a few moments, I started to leave, inwardly more nervous and excited and bewildered than I had ever been in my life. . . . What combination of chemicals had been carelessly or carefully, intentionally or accidentally, thrown together at this psychologic moment and why?[119]

Helen was to play a major part in the rest of Dreiser's life. It was Helen "who proved in the end to be the one woman without whom he could not get along."[120]

> Like him, Helen was an emotionalist. Added to her beauty were other attractive qualities; a pleasant contralto singing voice, a naturally sweet nature; a real depth of feeling; an ingenious reverence for skill in any field, particularly writing; and ambition to succeed as an actress; a practical knowledge gained from knocking around from coast to coast; a native shrewdness in money affairs; and remarkable courage. On the debit side, she was repetitive in conversation and her naivete sometimes deserved a harsher name. From the start she referred to Dreiser as a genius.[121]

Within a month after meeting Helen, the two decided to move to California so that she could pursue a movie career. They remained in Los Angeles until 1922.[122] Dreiser worked

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[118] Ibid., pp. 242-243.

[119] Helen Dreiser, My Life with Dreiser (New York: World Publishing, 1951), p. 3.

[120] Swanberg, p. 325.

[121] Ibid., p. 244.

[122] Elias, p. 217.

on various projects while in California, but much to the consternation of Horace Liveright Publishers, Dreiser turned from working on The Bulwark, which was long since overdue, and finished twenty chapters on An American Tragedy.[123]

When Dreiser and Helen returned to New York in mid-October, 1922, they lived in separate apartments, so that Dreiser, according to Helen, could complete his main objective, writing An American Tragedy,[124] which was based on the Chester Gillette and Grace Brown case from 1906. However, they traveled around upper New York in June, 1923, in order to gather more data for the novel.[125] Dreiser's A Book about Myself, published the previous December, had sold less than 3,000 copies by summer.[126]

An American Tragedy was not the only thing occupying Dreiser's time. He was having multiple affairs and was anxiously avoiding Helen's inquiries about when he was going to divorce Jug and marry her.[127] Marriage was not to Dreiser's liking and Jug, as his estranged wife, served as his insurance policy against further restricting entanglements.[128] By

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[123] Helen Dreiser, p. 63.

[124] Ibid., p. 66.

[125] Ibid., p. 71.

[126] Swanberg, p. 275.

[127] Ibid., p. 277.

[128] Ibid.

March, 1924, Helen decided she had suffered enough humiliation and decided to return to Portland. Dreiser saw her off at Pennsylvania Station.[129]

> No sooner had Helen gone than Dreiser missed her terribly. He had black fits of morning depression and other symptoms. . . . He wrote Helen daily for nine days--handwritten letters often 2,000 words long, addressing her as Babu Mio, My Golden Girl and Dearest Deario. He even broached (grudgingly) that subject he despised, marriage, but his letters contained the inevitable evasions and falsehoods.[130]

Dreiser was fifty-three that August[131] and was beginning to feel that time was closing in on him. Helen returned to New York, Dreiser, and An American Tragedy in mid-October because, as she said, ". . . it was where I belonged."[132]

An American Tragedy had been promised for the fall of 1924 but had never arrived. Liveright then made plans for a spring, 1925, release, but still Dreiser was unable to meet the deadline. For this one project, Dreiser dropped his chaotic half dozen projects simultaneously, and An American Tragedy became a wholehearted, concentrated effort.[133] The original manuscript of The Tragedy was at least a million

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[129] Helen Dreiser, p. 91.

[130] Swanberg, p. 282.

[131] Ibid., p. 289.

[132] Helen Dreiser, p. 103.

[133] Swanberg, p. 291.

words long. With the help of several female assistants and Liveright's, the completed book ran about 385,000 words when it was finally published in December 1925.[134]

From the very outset, An American Tragedy outdid his other books in sales. By the end of the first month more than 13,000 copies had been sold, bringing him almost $12,000 in royalties. Five months later the sales were doubled.[135] Dreiser found himself a literary sensation and quite rightly so, for An American Tragedy was to be one of Dreiser's finest works.

> Had the fates granted Dreiser but a single novel in which to dramatize the beliefs and lessons of his lifetime, that volume would of necessity have been An American Tragedy. In it, not only are his novelistic short-comings reduced to their minimum, but the single story blends the author's major attitudes harmoniously.[136]

Dreiser was learning the meaning of financial security. Early in 1927 he and Helen moved into a duplex apartment where he formally entertained artists. He also bought an estate overlooking Croton Lake in Westchester County, made two trips to Europe, one in the summer of 1926, concentrating on Scandinavia, and the other late in 1927, concentrating on Russia.[137]

"In October of 1927, Dreiser was invited by the Russian Government to observe at first hand what had been achieved

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[134] Ibid., pp. 295-297.

[135] Elias, p. 225.

[136] Gerber, p. 147.

[137] Elias, p. 226.

by the Soviets in the ten years that the U.S.S.R. had been functioning."[138] This experience was to find its way into much of his thinking in the future.

Upon returning to the United States in February, 1928,[139] Dreiser took up his old habits of living with Helen, conducting numerous affairs, and writing. In November, 1929, Liveright published his A Gallery of Women, "15 kiss-and-tell stories."[140]

In 1930 Dreiser's "desire to review the United States from east to west . . ."[141] became a reality when he and Helen began such a trip on March 20. Also in 1930, Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser were contenders for the Nobel Prize. It went to Lewis, as had the Pulitzer in 1925, and ". . . his own failure to win this recognition cut deeply into old wounds."[142]

Arriving back in New York in early July, 1930, Dreiser, at almost fifty-nine had completed a 10,000 mile tour.[143] In 1931, having promised Liveright a new novel, Dreiser took Dawn, the first volume of his autobiography to the publishers. The second volume, A Book About Myself, had already been published. Politically he was also experiencing changes:

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[138] Helen Dreiser, p. 163.

[139] Ibid., p. 183.

[140] Swanberg, p. 359.

[141] Helen Dreiser, p. 202.

[142] Gerber, p. 151.

[143] Swanberg, p. 365.

". . . he was moving, with some reservations (and depending on his mood), toward the left."[144]

In May, 1931, Dawn was published, "representing the Dreiser of 1917 rather than the Dreiser of 1931."[145]

> Although there were some complaints about the careless writing, the reception was generally favorable. Critics were amazed at his frank revelations of his childhood poverty, the family tensions, his libido, his masturbation, his abstraction of funds to buy an overcoat, the sexual adventures of his sisters. His sisters were also amazed, especially Mame . . . Emma and Sylvia were also outraged, while Rome had a different reason for complaint. At the time Dawn was written Dreiser had believed Rome dead. Now, on page 11, it told of Rome dying, an alcoholic death in a Clark Street dive--an error Dreiser had neglected to correct.[146]

Beginning in 1930, Dreiser spent almost a decade committing himself to a series of varied social causes.[147] "Grievance was essential to him. He had to fight something. For a quarter-century he had assailed censorship and prudery. . . . Now and for the rest of his life the enemy was entrenched wealth. . . ."[148] Paradoxically, "Dreiser's years of glory, of public notoriety, were coming to an end; he was slipping

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[144] Ibid., p. 370.

[145] Ibid., p. 375.

[146] Ibid., pp. 375-376.

[147] Elias, p. 242.

[148] Swanberg, p. 379.

back into a period of frustration and turmoil which seemed his natural condition."[149] While feuding with Liveright concerning rights to the dramatized version of An American Tragedy, Dreiser became chairman of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners.[150] He visited the coal fields of Kentucky and talked with people on the street corners of Harlem. Swanberg describes this period,

> Just as he felt qualified to question science, serve as ballet impresario, design a country house and lecture on marriage and morality, so Dreiser now moved in on economics, sociology and politics. He worked at it with a sort of fury, sacrificing time and energy in a period when his income slipped badly. . . . Actually he was the most non-political of men, thinking in vague philosophical terms and unaware of political realities. . . . But he was unrivaled in his violence, his misinformation and his blind hatred for capitalists.[151]

Dreiser let his work on The Stoic slide while he completed his outline for reform, Tragic America, published in January, 1932, by Liveright.[152] By 1935 Dreiser's publisher was Simon and Schuster, who were distressed because he again put aside The Stoic and revised a previous collection of poems, Moods. Dreiser was scattering his talents.

It was during this time that Dreiser drew up his will. As Helen relates the incident,

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[149] Gerber, p. 153.

[150] Elias, p. 248.

[151] Swanberg, p. 391.

[152] Ibid.

> . . . Teddie came to me to say that he had drawn up a will in my favor, making me the sole heir to his estate. He had also deeded the Mount Kisco and California property to me. I was utterly dumbfounded and said so, for up to then, I had no least security and I could hardly grasp the full significance of his action. He knew and understood, however, that I was deeply grateful and added: 'I want you to know how things stand, in case anything happens to me. Life is uncertain, you know.'[153]

Dreiser made another trip to Europe in 1938 and returned with few funds, his financial condition being the worst it had been since 1926. In August of 1938 Dreiser celebrated his sixty-seventh birthday by being interviewed by The Times.[154] On September 7, he journeyed to Hyde Park to meet President F. D. Roosevelt, who took the writer with all the social conscience aboard the yacht Potomac for a friendly conference.[155] Dreiser ended 1938 by taking Helen and moving to Los Angeles, because, according to Helen, ". . . he was tired of his complicated life in New York and felt, if I could go with him, we might make a fresh start in California."[156]

Dreiser's life style in California was similar to that he had led in New York.

> Fighting off old age, rejecting the rules of caution usually observed by men in their late sixties, Dreiser was occasionally ill, spending about a month in bed in the spring of 1940. Helen always cared for him tenderly. Since she was also his secretary and

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[153] Helen Dreiser, p. 235.

[154] Swanberg, p. 454.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Helen Dreiser, p. 263.

> they had no servant, her work was strenuous and she could hardly be blamed for resentment when, after she nursed him back to health, he would run off with another woman.[157]

By 1940, Dreiser had not published a new novel in fourteen years. "Although his works sold substantially in Europe, he was almost forgotten as an author in the United States. Indeed, many of the younger American generation thought him dead."[158]

In late December, 1940, Helen and Dreiser purchased a house of white Moorish design on North Kings Road in Hollywood.[159] On August 27, his seventieth birthday, Helen gave a large garden party, although no reporters came to interview him.[160] In the fall, Dreiser took $8,500 of his own money to buy his way out of Simon and Schuster.[161] After trips to Canada and India, Dreiser returned to Los Angeles and Helen, signing a contract to deliver The Bulwark to Putnam by June 1, 1942.[162]

> Dreiser's chronicle of Solon Barnes, Quaker, was the last novel he completed during his lifetime and the one which took him longest to finish. . . . The Bulwark gave Dreiser more difficulty than any other

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[157] Swanberg, p. 466.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Helen Dreiser, p. 276.

[160] Swanberg, p. 477.

[161] Ibid., p. 480.

[162] Ibid., p. 482.

> single volume. It became a literary stepchild, continually relegated to his desk drawer in favor of manuscripts whose birth proved less difficult. Plays, short stories, and novels were advanced to the immediate list while the gestation period of the Quaker novel lengthened by years into decades. . . . Time itself was running out, a day approaching when no more work would be possible. . . . He had wanted all along very desperately to finish his last two volumes, initiated so many years before. Failing in health, he rallied with Helen's aid to put forth one last tremendous effort. The Stoic would never be wholly completed, but The Bulwark was written and sent to Doubleday.[163]

Dreiser's private life was also taking a different turn. Jug had died at the age of seventy-three in St. Louis in October, 1942.[164] Although Hollywood believed Helen and Dreiser to be married, a few intimates knew the true situation. Helen wanted their union legalized, but Dreiser rejected the idea.[165] However, after going to New York in the spring of 1944 to receive the Award of Merit Medal, presented every five years by the American Academy of Arts and Letters,[166] Dreiser journeyed to Stevenson, Washington, where Helen Patges Richardson became Mrs. Theodore Dreiser. Just as Jug's sister, Rose, had urged Dreiser years before to honor his pledge to her sister, so in his second marriage, Myrtle, Helen's sister, told him that it would be a fitting gesture to marry Helen. Helen was elated, for at last "he fulfilled her long-cherished dream."[167]

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[163] Gerber, pp. 155-156.

[164] Swanberg, p. 487.

[165] Ibid., p. 497.

[166] Helen Dreiser, p. 295.

[167] Swanberg, p. 497.

Financially, Dreiser was doing poorly until 1944, when he wrote to Stalin concerning the royalties from his books, which were doing well in the Soviet Union. For two months he received no word from the Soviet Chief, but then a letter arrived from Dreiser's Los Angeles bank stating that the Soviets had deposited $34,600 in his account.[168] His days of financial worry were over.

On August 27, 1945, while he was trying to complete The Stoic, the last of his trilogy, Helen gave him his last birthday party, his seventy-fourth.[169] A month before on July 20, 1945, Dreiser made application for membership in the Communist Party,[170] feeling that ". . . joining the Communist Party would safeguard his position on the side of the common man."[171] The Stoic was about two-thirds completed, but it required great physical effort from the aging Dreiser. Also, this last year was, according to Helen, an enriching one for their relationship:

> Never in our long relationship of twenty-six years had we ever been so close, emotionally, spiritually and physically as we were this last year of his life. If a woman ever experienced a complete renewal of her love life combined with a new depth of spirit, I had that joy, and no one could have been more surprised. Teddie

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[168] Helen Dreiser, p. 294.

[169] Swanberg, p. 516.

[170] Helen Dreiser, p. 304.

[171] Ibid., p. 305.

> flooded me with his love. He praised me for things I had long forgotten, and expressed many little tendernesses I didn't know he was capable of. . . . I was filled with happiness that I knew would carry me through to the end. For my life had become whole, and as I looked at Teddie, I could see that he, too, was content at long last.[172]

On December 27, 1954, after working until five o'clock on the last chapters of The Stoic, he and Helen took an afternoon ride to the beach to watch the sunset.[173] In the middle of the night, Dreiser awoke with an intense pain and was immediately taken to the hospital. At 6:50 p.m. December 28, 1945, Herman Theodore Dreiser died.[174] Memorial Services for Theodore Dreiser were held in the Church of the Recessional at Forest Lawn Memorial Park, in Glendale, California, on January 3, 1946.[175]

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[172] Ibid., pp. 308-309.

[173] Ibid., pp. 312-313.

[174] Ibid., p. 316.

[175] Ibid., p. 319.

CHAPTER II

LIFE PORTRAITS OF DREISER'S MOTHER

SARAH SCHANAB DREISER

"I certainly had one of the most perfect mothers ever a man had,"[1] Dreiser wrote in A Hoosier Holiday, a work dedicated to his mother, Sarah Schanab Dreiser. The picture that Dreiser painted of Sarah is one of sensitive adoration, bordering on sainthood. She was a significant family member to whom he constantly referred.

> Dreiser's feelings about the strengths and weaknesses of his own family . . . were charged with an emotion which, in the Dreiser family, was of greater than ordinary intensity--the blind, radiant passion of mother love. Dreiser wrote often but never clearly about his mother; the facts of her existence were, to him, always emotions. She was, he wrote in one of his simplest tributes, 'the birth of all sympathy and tenderness in me.' A shapeless, humble semiliterate woman who took in other people's washing, Mother Dreiser meant beauty, love, youth, hope, and humanity to Dreiser. And there must have been something extraordinary about the woman, for similar tributes to her spirit came from all her many children, different from each other as they were in endowments, and far from each other as they wandered in everything except love for their mother.[2]

While his relationship with the other members of the family was often one of misunderstanding, it was Sarah who provided

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[1] Theodore Dreiser, A Hoosier Holiday (New York: John Lane, 1916), p. 334.

[2] Ellen Moers, Two Dreisers (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 81-82.

the love "that sustained him to the last day of his life."[3] Helen Dreiser felt that it was Sarah who basically stimulated the narrative within the author.[4] "Dreiser wrote many passages of loving tribute to her swelling into rhythms of a Whitman-like amplitude in order to reach her emotional generosity. . . ."[5] For example, "this love woman who was my mother is of strange import to me . . . a lamp, a dream, an inspiration, one whose memory even now walks ever on before making a path of beauty."[6]

Dreiser's autobiographies are especially rich in recollections of and tributes to Sarah. He remembered little things, like ". . . her simple dresses always suggestive of that Mennonite world from which she sprang and so devoid of any suggestion of smartness. . . ."[7] Sarah, as the mother of ten living children, had a great burden to bear in connection with their care and feeding. Dreiser recollected that "she faced life most cheerfully, even gaily, bore with her ills most bravely, and through it all succeeded in drawing her children

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[3] Helen Dreiser, My Life with Dreiser (New York, World, 1951), p. 290.

[4] Ibid., p. 290.

[5] F. O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (New York: William Sloane, 1951), p. 8.

[6] Theodore Dreiser, Dawn (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), p. 50.

[7] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

to her as with hooks of steel."[8] Not only did she charm the members of her family, but she was also able to warm the hearts of people outside the family circle.

> As uninformed as she seemed at times, and at times as recklessly romantic as she was imaginative, still, as I clearly learned in later years, she was a personage of temperament to be reckoned with: strong, patient, understanding, sympathetic, creative, humor-loving, and helpful. And it was varying phases of all of these qualities that drew to her by degrees, and usually permanently, not only her own children but individuals of all walks and shades of temperament and experience.[9]

Plagued by poverty, a weak husband, and too many children, Sarah proved to be stronger than any problem she encountered. Not only did she persevere, but "she seemed to inspire respect as well as confidence and affection,"[10] an imprint which stayed with Dreiser throughout life. As Dreiser describes her character,

> To her very last hour, indeed, and in spite of a marked physical, if not mental degeneration, she sought to retain her enthusiasm for life, an enthusiasm lovely because altogether childlike in quality. It was not that she personally wished to appear so well before the world as that she so strongly desired to have her children succeed in a definite way, since, alas, and as she now knew, neither the understanding nor the direction of herself or their father had been sufficient to aid them to any great extent.[11]

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[8] Ibid., p. 7.

[9] Ibid., p. 40.

[10] Ibid., p. 99.

[11] Ibid., p. 11.

Dreiser also used Sarah, with her kind nature, as a foil to his father, John Dreiser, whom he portrayed as stern, rigid and cold.

> In all his autobiographical writings, Dreiser opposed his mother's gentle tolerance to his father's rigid piety, her love to his pride, her forgiveness to his harshness, her warmth to his dourness, her encouragement to his repression, her boundless charity to his mean thrift, her improvident generosity to his niggardly concern with paying off every cent on the dollar of old debts. Dreiser underlined these sharp, probably unfair contrasts by calling his father a religious fanatic, crank, and bigot and his mother a pagan. But, "pagan" hardly describes the very special formation of Sarah Dreiser.[12]

Dreiser found it difficult to understand why a man of his father's "iron conventionalism and moral intolerance should have fallen in love with and married a woman of so little moral and social sophistication. . . ."[13] It was, however, her unconcern with traditional moral standards and her gentle dreamy nature which drew Dreiser to her. "For his mother Dreiser never felt any but the most tender of sentiments. If the father was bound rigidly by his adamant morality, Sarah seems not to have acquired that trait from him. Whatever the reason . . . she simply was unconcerned with moral codes."[14]

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[12] Moers, p. 299.

[13] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 10.

[14] Philip L. Gerber, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 26.

She was of a passionate and pagan nature, and Dreiser later thought it quite possible that she had taken a lover.[15] Dreiser, an advocate of free love, cared little whether she had one lover or several.[16] Her unconcern with morality, coupled with a poetic mind and tender heart, brought forth utmost devotion from Dreiser and many others.

> To him she was perfect, a lovely combination of pagan and poet, so artlessly tender that utter strangers were drawn to her instantly and mere acquaintances called on her for help, always getting it even though she needed help far more than they. Plump, handsome, smiling Sarah had an irresistible maternal warmth of the kind the old Greeks worshipped in Demeter.[17]

Sarah combated the poverty, illness and defeat which the Dreiser clan was heir to by trusting in the future:

> Never was there such a dreamer or mental web-spinner as my mother! Her eye was always on the future, where lay wonder and delight, if not fame and power. . . . I think a part of the love of her children for her was due to her faith in and enthusiasm for them. Something in her eye, her words, her half-spoken dreams, built up in each one of us a longing to go forth and do. I cannot recall a single one of my youthful plans for the future in which, somehow, my mother was not included.[18]

A basically insecure man, Dreiser credited Sarah as being the one person in his life who helped him meet his need for security. He wrote in Dawn: "Yet it always seemed to me that no one ever wanted me enough, unless it was my mother."[19]

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[16] Ibid., p. 4.

[17] Ibid., p. 4.

[18] Ibid., p. 157.

[19] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 81.

Because she provided for him a measure of security and understanding which Dreiser did not receive from his father and because she represented goodness and love to him, Dreiser composed the following hymn of adoration to her written in his youth:

> For who shall sing the song of the true mothers of the world?
> Or dare curse life when patient, unrequited hands take up so heavy a load?
> Or assert that cruelty in this life realm is not balanced by tenderness?
> Or that self-immolation does not even the scale against selfishness?
>
> For over against grasping greed I place the endless patient risings at dawn of mothers:
> And opposite vanity and selfish indifference I set down the white, strained faces of watching mothers:
> And against the fevers and cruelties of desire
> I put over the self-immolations of the mothers of the offspring of that desire--
> And I defy you to say that the scales that weigh inequity are not even![20]

Sarah Schanab Dreiser, mother of author Theodore Dreiser, became a key figure in his works. Her memory, as well as recollections of his entire family, were very real to Dreiser when he developed the ideas for his novel Jennie Gerhardt.

Jennie Gerhardt is based more explicitly upon the Dreiser family than any other of the author's novels . . . and the destitution Dreiser shared as a boy is utilized to full impact. The Gerhardts exist beneath the shadow of poverty as under a precipitous cliff of shale which threatens with the

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[20] Ibid., p. 367.

slightest earth tremor to thunder down upon them. With every action colored by lack of money, life is lived breathlessly in a day-to-day battle for survival.[21] However, poverty was not Dreiser's only theme in the novel:

> . . . he portrayed a conflict between a strict old German father like his own and a rebellious, pleasure-loving daughter like his sisters to show the strength of material attractions in the face of an ascetic religion that refused to acknowledge their appeal.[22]

Nowhere is Sarah's influence more prevalent than in the novel Jennie Gerhardt. She provided the foundation for two very important characters in the novel: Mrs. Gerhardt, who assumed Sarah's life experiences, and Jennie, who assumed Sarah's loving spirit.

Theodore Dreiser's mother was a vital part of the home.

> Home, that's what it meant to me! The comfort of having brothers and sisters, but most of all, my mother within, the one who . . . still sufficed to unite all our cares and desires within one single sanctuary of her heart. . . . The mother bird spreading thinly-feathered wings over weak nestlings.[23]

Likewise, Mrs. William Gerhardt was that part of the Gerhardt household which was so necessary that "living depended on her."[24]

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[21] Gerber, p. 78.

[22] Robert Elias, Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 106.

[23] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 97.

[24] Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt (New York: World, 1956), p. 186.

Both Sarah and Mrs. Gerhardt served as intermediaries between stern husbands and promiscuous children: Sarah acted as referee between John Dreiser and his daughters who stayed out late;[25] Mrs. Gerhardt became a counselor when she had to tell her husband that Jennie was pregnant.[26] Just as Sarah relied on Mame, her oldest daughter, to help deliver babies and take care of the home,[27] Mrs. Gerhardt relied on Jennie. "Mrs. Gerhardt had come to feel in a way dependent upon her."[28] The two women became the heads of their homes when their respective husbands took work in other cities, John Dreiser in Terre Haute and William Gerhardt in Youngstown.[29] In her hour of death Sarah was surrounded by most of her children, who yearned for her recovery.[30] The Gerhardt family also kept a watchful vigil beside Mrs. Gerhardt's sick bed.[31] After Sarah's death, the members of the Dreiser family went their various and sundry ways;[32] a similar reaction took

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[25] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 229.

[26] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 87.

[27] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 7.

[28] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 111.

[29] Ibid., p. 95.

[30] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 510.

[31] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 186.

[32] Theodore Dreiser, A Book About Myself (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922), p. 9.

place in the Gerhardt home when the death of the mother hastened the final breakdown of the family.[33]

The experiences and situations which were a part of the two women were similar. Sarah's knowledge of the world and of life was small and she had no formal education; her children, Theodore and Claire, taught her to write.[34] All the Dreisers had a "lack of social placement and skill."[35] Mrs. Gerhardt's learning was also limited, her mind being "untutored but poetic."[36] Sending one or more children to steal coal from the railroad tracks was something Sarah did every winter from necessity.[37] Mrs. Gerhardt was forced to send her children to the railroad yards for coal in an attempt to keep warmth in the house.[38] Sarah was happy to use for family needs the money her daughter Mame received from her lawyer boyfriend,[39] and Mrs. Gerhardt was grateful for the money that Senator Brander gave her daughter.[40] Both daughters gave birth to illegitimate children. Sarah's grandchild was

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[33] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 187.

[34] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 53.

[35] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 1.

[36] Ibid., p. 2.

[37] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 22.

[38] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 3.

[39] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 13.

[40] Ibid., p. 13.

stillborn;[41] Mrs. Gerhardt's was a normal, healthy baby girl.[42]

Because both women were more lenient with their children than their husbands, they were often called upon to hide certain situations or facts which might disturb a religiously devout mind. Sarah never told her husband that it was Mame's lover who got Paul out of jail.[43] Mrs. Gerhardt went to her grave without telling her husband that Jennie and Lester Kane were not legally married; she had lied to him about their marriage "from sheer force of circumstances."[44]

Poverty had a significant bearing on each of the women and they were of one mind in their dreams of a decent place to live. When Paul and his mistress provided the Dreisers with a home in Evansville, Sarah was "quite like one who has seen a fairy wave her wand and work a miracle."[45]

> . . . we beheld a completely furnished home. No shabby makeshifts and leavings here, as at Sullivan. Instead, in the dining-room a shining new table with a complete set of chairs, and in the parlor, not only parlor furniture but a piano! Carpets on the floors, new carpets, and in the kitchen a shining cookstove with dishes and an ample array of cooking utensils![46]

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41 Ibid., p. 75.

42 Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 102.

43 Dreiser, Dawn, p. 13.

44 Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 170.

45 Dreiser, Dawn, p. 117.

Mrs. Gerhardt had her dreams come true when Lester Kane purchased a home for Jennie and her family in Cleveland.

> When the time came for actually moving, Mrs. Gerhardt was fairly beside herself with joy, for was not this the realization of her dreams? All through the long years of her life she had been waiting and now it had come. A new house, new furniture, plenty of room--things finer than she had ever imagined--think of it! . . . Mrs. Gerhardt roved to and fro like a person in a dream. She could not believe that these bright bedrooms, this beautiful parlor, this handsome living room were actually hers.[47]

Paradoxically, both Sarah and Mrs. Gerhardt had their dreams of a decent home and ample food provided as a direct result of their daughters' illicit relationships.

The relationships which their children entered into were the primary cause of the gossip and social ostricism which plagued both families as the children grew older. When Sarah's daughter Sylvia became pregnant by a prominent town boy who refused to marry her, the social rejection was severe.

> The sudden whispers, evasions, desires to avoid those who have failed to conform to the customs and taboos of any given region. . . . For although hitherto there had been . . . some inclination to receive us--we three younger children at least--into the best school society of the town, all this was now quickly ended. . . . We were a scandal.[48]

Jennie was the main cause of gossip about the Gerhardt family. Talk of her long visits in Senator Brander's hotel

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[47] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 182.

[48] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 264.

room caused Mrs. Gerhardt great pain.[49] When Senator Brander made his visits to the home to take Jennie for rides, the neighbors' talk became even more damaging and degrading.[50]

Both Sarah and Mrs. Gerhardt died in autumn in their respective homes. The women were survived by their husbands.

The marriage relationship between John and Sarah matched the fictional marriage of the Gerhardts. Both John Dreiser and William Gerhardt bordered on fanaticism in regards to their religious beliefs. Dreiser wrote of his father, "Never have I known a man more obsessed by a religious belief."[51] Mrs. Gerhardt's husband was equally preoccupied with the spiritual life:

> Gerhardt was convinced that everything spoken from the pulpit of his church was literally true. Death and the future life were realities to him. Now that the years were slipping away and the problems of the world was becoming more and more inexplicable, he clung with pathetic anxiety to the doctrines which contained a solution. Oh, if he could only be so honest and upright that the Lord might have no excuse for ruling him out. He trembled not only for himself, but for his wife and children. Would he not someday be held responsible for them? Would not his own laxity and lack of system in inculcating the laws of eternal life to them end in his and their damnation?[52]

While both women observed the religious practices of their faiths, neither one had the religious zeal that characterized

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[49] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 46.

[50] Ibid., p. 58.

[51] Dreiser, Dawn, pp. 5-6.

[52] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 56.

their husbands. Sarah's religious conduct was indifferent;[53] Mrs. Gerhardt was often amused by her husband's religious idiosyncrasies.[54]

Sarah and Mrs. Gerhardt, though often keeping secrets from their husbands, were dominated by them in regard to disciplining the children. Sarah stood helpless as John disciplined his "wayward" daughters,[55] just as Mrs. Gerhardt took no action to stop William from forcing the pregnant Jennie from her home.[56] Nonetheless, both husbands often resented their wives, feeling that they were responsible for the moral decay of the children. Dreiser said of his father, "I think that at times, in moments of anger, he actually hated my mother, looking on her as the cause of the moral wreck of the family."[57] When Gerhardt learned of Jennie's unwanted pregnancy, ". . . he turned on his wife the major passion of anger possessing him."[58]

> You were always shielding her. It is your fault that she is where she is. If you had let me have my way there would have been no cause for our trouble tonight. You are the cause of this . . . you are the sole cause. If you had done as I told you to do this would not have happened. No, you wouldn't do that.[59]

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[54] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 188.

[55] Dreiser, Dawn, pp. 231-233.

[56] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 90.

[57] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 229.

[58] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 89.

[59] Ibid., p. 89.

Fortunately for both women, their husbands were not always living in the family home. Sarah, early in Dreiser's life, took the three youngest children and made a new home in Vincennes, Indiana,and John remained behind working in a small carpet mill in Terre Haute.[60] William Gerhardt did not move to Cleveland with his family but remained in Youngstown to work.[61]

Sarah and Mrs. Gerhardt had like natures and personalities. Sarah was as "romantic as she was imaginative."[62] Mrs. Gerhardt also had a romantic imagination. Upon learning that Lester Kane wanted to take Jennie away,

> Mrs. Gerhardt, with her imaginative nature, endeavored to formulate some picture of this new and wonderful personality that had come into Jennie's life. He was wealthy; he wanted to take Jennie; he wanted to give them a good home. What a story![63]

Devotion to home and family was a basic part of each woman's character. Intent on providing the children with as many of the benefits of life as possible, Sarah "was content to remain and act as servant to, as well as cement between, the various and restless and changing spirits of her children."[64] Mrs. Gerhardt also worked and did without for her family.

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[60] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 32.

[61] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 96.

[62] Ibid., p. 40.

[63] Ibid., p. 169.

[64] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 366.

> Everyday Mrs. Gerhardt, who worked like a servant and who received absolutely no compensation either in clothes, amusements or anything else, arose in the morning while the others slept and built the fire. . . . When they arose breakfast was always ready. When they returned at night supper was waiting. Each of the children received a due share of Mrs. Gerhardt's attention. The little baby was closely looked after by her. She protested that she needed neither clothes nor shoes as long as one of the children would run errands for her.[65]

Sarah Dreiser and Mrs. Gerhardt both knew the joy which comes in being loved by one's children. When Sarah became ill, all the Dreiser clan were affected: "I have never seen a family more speedily united in mood, more affectionately drawn together for the time, than ours by this impending danger."[66] Mrs. Gerhardt, although forced to go without many of the benefits of life, was aware of the great affection that existed between herself and her children."[67]

Not only did Dreiser picture his mother in Mrs. Gerhardt, but he also pictured her in the loving nature and inner spirit of Jennie Gerhardt, the fictional heroine of the novel. "In . . . Jennie Gerhardt (1911). . . he was writing out the misery and passion of his experience."[68] Dreiser took Sarah's feelings and attitudes accrued from life's experiences and incorporated them into Jennie, "who is the most innocent of

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[65] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, pp. 112-113.

[66] Dreiser, Dawn, pp. 507-508.

[67] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 113.

[68] Charles Shapiro, Theodore Dreiser: Out Bitter Patriot (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), p. 4.

heroines, the least ambitious, the least cunning, the least deserving of her fate."[69] In many ways, Jennie became Dreiser's favorite heroine.[70]

> Jennie is the fragile blossom that, deprived of care and protection, will be trampled underfoot. She is all love and affection. . . . Dreiser saw much of Jennie . . . in his mother . . . compassion, gentleness, a yielding softness, generosity, selfless love, and fidelity which 'would follow love anywhere.'[71]

The entire novel of Jennie Gerhardt is Dreiser's stage for portraying "this daughter of poverty"[72] whose most poignant characteristic, like Sarah's, was her loving nature.

> There are natures born to the inheritance of flesh that come without understanding, and that go again, without seeming to have wondered why. Life, so long as they endure it, is a true wonderland, a thing of infinite beauty, which could they but wander into it wonderingly, would be heaven enough. . . . In the world of the actual, Jennie was such a spirit, From her earliest youth goodness and mercy had molded her every impulse. Did Sebastian fall and injure himself, it was she who struggled with straining anxiety, carried him safely to his mother. Did George complain that he was hungry, she gave him all her bread. Many were the hours in which she had rocked her younger brothers and sisters to sleep, singing wholeheartedly betimes and dreaming far dreams. Since her earliest walking period she had been as the right hand of her mother. What crubbing, baking, errand-running and nursing there had been to do she did. No one had ever heard her rudely complain, though she often thought of the hardness of her lot. She knew that there were

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[69] Richard Lehan, "Airmail Interview--Richard Lehan," Dreiser Newsletter, 2 (Spring, 1971), 15.

[70] F. O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (New York: William Sloane, 1951), p. 16.

[71] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 15.

[72] Ibid., p. 15.

> other girls whose lives were infinitely freer and fuller, but, it never occurred to her to be meanly envious, her heart might be lonely, but her lips continued to sing.[73]

This description is not unlike that which Dreiser painted of Sarah:

> A great poet mother. . . . She loved the trees and the flowers and the clouds and the sounds of the wind, and was wont to cry over tales of poverty almost and readily as over poverty itself, and to laugh over the mannskin 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 the staid favorites of society who keep all laws.[74]

Dreiser also related in Dawn, "She appealed to me as thoughtful, solicitous, wise and above all tender and helpful--qualities which evoked in me not so much dependence as love."[75]

Dreiser described Sarah as being "neither moral nor immoral, she was nonmoral, intellectually, emotionally, temperamentally."[76] Sarah provided a limited amount of moral direction in the early part of her children's lives.

> . . . but never to the extent of demanding interest in or respect for the hard and fast conventions of narrow-minded or socially biased persons. Human beings, as she often indicated in many ways, had trouble enough in maintaining themselves without being harried further by finicky and non-understanding social opinion or social notions. Knowing much, and this by direct experience, of the driving passions and weaknesses that affect us all, she was far too generous and innately understanding to criticize much.[77]

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[73] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[74] Dreiser, A Hoosier Holiday, pp. 286-287.

[75] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 4.

[76] Ibid., p. 10.

[77] Ibid., p. 115.

Jennie, too, took on the characteristics of a "nonmoral" person as she grew mentally and emotionally. Her realization that life was more than "do's and don'ts" came when Lester took her to Europe.

> Jennie . . . was transported by what she saw, and enjoyed the new life to the full. Before Luxor and Karnak--places which Jennie had never dreamed existed--she learned of an older civilization, powerful, complex, complete. Millions of people had lived and died here, believing in other gods, other forms of government, other conditions of existence. For the first time in her life Jennie gained a clear idea of how vast the world is. Now from this point of view--of decayed Greece, of fallen Rome, of forgotten Egypt, she saw how pointless are our minor difficulties, our minor beliefs. Her father's Lutheranism--it did not seem so significant any more; and the social economy of Columbus, Ohio--rather pointless, perhaps. Her mother had worried so of what people--her neighbors--thought, but here were dead worlds of people, some bad, some good. . . . Admitting that she had been bad--locally it was important, perhaps, but in the sum of civilization, in the sum of big forces, what did it all amount to? They would be dead after a little while, she and Lester and all these people. Did anything matter except goodness--goodness of heart? What she was there that was real.[78]

An emotionally sensitive heroine, Jennie felt deeply the unfortunate events which happened to her; however, she was never conquered by tragedy, nor did she break under calamity. When Lester was making the decision of which he valued most, Jennie or his inheritance, Jennie's calm reflected her inner strength of coping with unhappiness:

> His was not the sorrow of lacerated affection, of discarded and despised love, but of that painful sense of unfairness which comes to one who knows that he is

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[78] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, pp. 305-306.

> making a sacrifice of the virtues--kindness, loyalty, affection to policy. . . . The virtues which she possessed were quite dear to his mind. He had gone over them time and again. Now he was compelled to go over them finally, to see that she was suffering without making a sign. Her manner and attitude toward him in these last days were quite the same as they had always been--no more, no less. She was not indulging in private hysterics, as other women might have done; she was not pretending a fortitude in suffering she did not feel, showing him one face while wishing him to see another behind it. She was calm, gentle, considerate--thoughtful of him--where he would go and what he would do, without irritating him by her inquiries. He was struck quite favorably by her ability to take a large situation largely, and he admired her. There was something to this woman, let the world think what it might. It was a shame that her life was passed under such a troubled star.[79]

Sarah's life also seemed to pass under a "troubled star," and with like fortitude she survived one unhappy siege after another. When Dreiser was fired from a job that was providing an essential portion of the family income, Sarah's reaction was one of calm:

> 'Yes, well, that's all right. Don't you feel too bad about it. You'll get something else, I know'--a typical reply that was out of the depths of a simulated and all too tired courage, but which somehow for all her disappointments and defeats never failed her or her children.[80]

> 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

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[79] Ibid., p. 369.

[80] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 516.

> fashion, a poet who suffers much, yet unfailingly and irresistibly continues to contemplate beauty--her one enduring earthly reward, as I came to know.[81]

Like Jennie, Sarah seemed to have a special reservoir of strength. "She had suffered enough blows and defeats and disasters to dissipate the fighting strength of even a stronger and more capable woman,"[82] but she remained strong.

Both Sarah and Jennie knew poverty. Sarah, despite a few shining moments of plenty, lived most of her life in poverty's shadow. "For . . . at forty-eight or thereabouts, she had come such a long way in poverty, and yet was still laboring through its aftermath."[83] Jennie, reared in poverty, felt that it followed her despite her plentiful life with Lester. ". . . She experienced a peculiar feeling . . . namely, that this fairy existence could not endure. Her life was fated. Something would happen. She would go back to simple things, to a side street, a poor cottage, to old clothes."[84]

Sarah and Jennie were alike in that, despite their strength and courage, neither was an aggressive woman. Sarah's method of bringing charges against a prominent town boy who was reponsible for Sylvia Dreiser's pregnancy was one of softness and lack of daring.[85] Jennie was similarly passive

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[81] Ibid., p. 10.

[82] Ibid., p. 109.

[83] Ibid., p. 366.

[84] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 318.

[85] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 259.

in her attempts to keep Lester from marrying Mrs. Malcolm Gerard. Although realizing she might keep him if she fought to do so, she could not. "One needed education, wealth, training, the ability to fight and scheme. She did not want to do that. She could not."[86]

The love of home and devotion to the members which made up the home were instinctive in both women. Jennie's misery was twofold when Lester left her, for she lost her lover and her home:

> On her part it was one of intense suffering for she was of that stable nature that rejoices to fix itself in a serviceable and harmonious relationship, and then stay so. For her life was made up of those mystic chords of sympathy and memory which bind up the transient elements of nature into a harmonious and enduring scene. One of those chards--this home was her home, united and made beautiful by her affection and consideration for each person and every object. Now the time had come when it must cease.[87]

Sarah, too, had a strong feeling for home. It was her life. "I cannot imagine what this home, any more than any of the others earlier, would have been without her. For that curiously binding spirit which she exercised and which bound us all was here as powerful as elsewhere. . . ."[88]

It was to small, uncluttered towns that both women went when they needed to begin again, escape present miseries, or bind up their wounds. Sarah called Evansville and Sullivan

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[86] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 371.

[87] Ibid., p. 368.

[88] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 366.

home at different times when she retreated to both with her three youngest children.

> And yet here she was, hidden away in this rag of a town, seeking to make a living for herself and her three younger children, to say nothing of some of the older ones as they appeared from time to time.[89]

After William Gerhardt's death and Lester's departure, Jennie retreated with Vesta, her child, to a town called Sandwood,[90] an unsophisticated village where Jennie could temporarily block out the problems of the world and reorganize her own life.

Dreiser said that his mother had "seen too much of life,"[91] an impression he also felt about Jennie. After learning that Lester was going to marry Mrs. Gerard and leave her with only an allowance, she rationalized the problem in her mind:

> Jennie felt hurt through and through by this denouement, and yet as she sat there she realized that it was foolish to be angry. Life was always doing this sort of thing to her. It would go on doing so. She was sure of it. If she went out in the world and earned her own living what difference would it make to him? What difference would it make to Mrs. Gerard? Here she was walled in this little place, leading an obscure existence and there was he out in the great world enjoying life in its fullest and freest sense. It was too bad. But why cry? Why?[92]

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[89] Ibid., p. 109.

[90] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 365.

[91] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 316.

[92] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 388.

Loving, gentle, strong, courageous, sensitive women who wanted nothing more than to live simply and peacefully with those dear to their hearts, Sarah and Jennie were cast from the same mold and bound by some of the same miserable circumstances of life.

The strength and courage exhibited in times of stress which Dreiser used to characterize his mother and Jennie, he used also to characterize Elvira Griffiths, the mother of Clyde Griffiths, in An American Tragedy.[93]

Although Sarah and Elvira maintained opposite religious beliefs and moral codes, they both had their beginnings in the country, a part of the farming community. "Mrs. Elvira Griffiths, before she had married Asa, had been nothing but an ignorant farm girl."[94] Sarah's life was happy before her marriage to John Dreiser.

> She was the daughter of a prosperous Moravian farmer, of Dunkard of Mennonite faith, who was a unit of the sect that then centered about Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The world of her rearing must have been a pleasant one, for often I have heard her speak of her parent's prosperity as farmers, of orchards and meadow and great fields of grain, and of some of the primitive conditions and devices of pioneer life that still affected them--neighbors borrowing fire, Indians coming to the door to beg or be sociable, the spinning of wool and cotton on hand looms, the manufacture of soap, shoes and furniture.[95]

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[93] Gerber, p. 136.

[94] Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York: World, 1948), p. 25.

[95] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 4.

After marriage, neither woman had a "real" home; both were constantly on the move and never knew what it was to have a permanent address. The Reverend and Mrs. Griffiths had conducted missions in Grand Rapids, Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago and Kansas City by the time Clyde had reached his twelfth year. "They moved here and there . . . because of a larger and better religious field in which to work."[96] In Terre Haute alone, Sarah and her children lived in five or six houses.[97] Sarah and Elvira were both heads of matriarchial homes, having husbands who did not or could not claim the respect needed to be the domestic leader.

> . . . the mother [Elvira] alone stood out as having that force and determination which, however blind or erroneous, makes for self-preservation, if not success in life. She, more than any of the others, stood up with an ignorant, yet somehow respectable air of conviction. . . . A kind of hard, fighting faith in the wisdom and mercy of definite overruling and watchful power which she proclaimed, was written in her every feature and gesture.[98]

It was Elvira Griffiths, not Asa, who assumed their daughter Esta's burden and took care of her after she became pregnant.[99] Elvira, like Sarah during the birth, death and burial of Mame's child,[100] was a refuge in the time of trouble

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[96] Dresier, An American Tragedy, p. 23.

[97] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 21.

[98] Dreiser, An American Tragedy, pp. 16-17.

for Esta. It was Elvira, not Asa, who tried futilely to save Clyde from the electric chair.[101]

Neither Mrs. Griffiths nor Sarah was blessed with great wisdom, but both had strength, courage and sympathy. Clyde Griffiths' mother did not fully understand the boy and his longings, but that did not interfere with her love or sympathy for him. "He could not help respecting his mother, a woman whose force and earnestness as well as her sweetness, appealed to him."[102] Dreiser also gave Elvira Sarah's optimistic and cheerful countenance. "Despite much mission work and family cares, she managed to be fairly cheerful, or at least sustaining, after declaring most emphatically 'God will provide' or 'God will show the way' especially in times of too great stress about food or clothes."[103] When Elvira learned that Clyde had been sentenced to death, her courage and strength were great. Like Sarah and Jennie Gerhardt, Elvira responded to tragedy without panic.

> And now this American witness to the rule of God upon earth sitting in a chair in her shabby, nondescript apartment, hard-pressed for the very means to sustain herself--degraded by the milling forces of life and the fell and brutal blows of chance--yet serene in her trust--declaring: 'I cannot think this morning. I seem numb and things look strange to me. My boy found guilty of murder! But I am his mother and I am not convinced of his guilt by amy means! He has written me that he

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[101] Dreiser, An American Tragedy, p. 804.

[102] Ibid., p. 18.

[103] Ibid.

> is not guilty and I believe him. And to whom should he turn with the truth and for trust if not to me? But there is He who sees all things and knows.'[104]

Mrs. Gerhardt, Jennie Gerhardt and Elvira Griffiths are three Dreiser heroines who experienced hardship, poverty, and personal tragedy. The heart and mind of Sarah Schanab Dreiser is a part of all of these fictional characters and it is the part of her that makes them live.

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[104] Ibid., p. 798.

CHAPTER III

LIFE PORTRAITS OF DREISER'S SISTERS

Theodore Dreiser had five older sisters: Mame, Emma, Theresa, Sylvia and Claire. Claire was only two years his senior, but the other girls were eleven to sixteen years older than Dreiser. Dreiser was influenced and touched by his older sisters from his very first recollection, ". . . in the earliest days of my unfolding sensory faculties, I was moved by strange impressions in connection with them."[1] Dreiser observed, learned and gradually understood his older sisters; and eventually all of them, except Claire, served as material for his novels.

The Dreiser sisters as a group had many things in common. They were all Midwestern girls, spending most of their early years in Indiana and Ohio.[2] Living in five different houses in Terre Haute[3] alone, not to mention other towns, the five sisters were a part of a rootless family that experienced poverty and failure.[4]

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[1] Theodore Dreiser, Dawn (New York: Liveright, 1931), p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

[3] W. A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York: Scribners, 1965), p. 8.

[4] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 12.

The same schism that existed between John Dreiser and Theodore also existed between John Dreiser and his daughters. They resented his strict lectures and stern adherence to the church.[5] On the other hand, they, like Dreiser, were drawn to their mother because she allowed them to face their own problems.[6] When Sarah decided to move her three youngest and herself to Vincennes, the four older girls stayed with their father to serve as loom-hands in the carpet factory he was managing.[7] The girls eventually returned to their mother because they hated both working for their father and being separated from their mother. "My elder sisters came, to avoid their father and have the consoling counsel and love of their mother."[8]

Once back under Sarah's permissive care, "passionate as all the Dreisers were passionate, sick of their father's lectures,"[9] the girls enjoyed affairs with men. They proved rebellious in their willingness to contribute large portions of their incomes to the family treasury. Mame, Emma, Theresa

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[5] Swanberg, p. 7.

[6] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 172.

[7] Ibid., p. 30.

[8] Theodore Dreiser, A Hoosier Holiday (New York, John Lane, 1916), p. 42.

[9] Swanberg, p. 7.

and Sylvia gave little to Sarah for the upkeep of the family and "seemed more concerned with spending precious money in selfish, sinful pleasure than in practicing the virtues. . . ."[10]

The Dreiser sisters had little or no money, talent, or social standing.[11] Dreiser described their situations as "a lack of training and social discretion . . . they were unsophisticated and errant in regard to certain small-town conventions or aspirations."[12] However, the girls were not totally lacking for they did possess youth and beauty. Their "unwilled sex lure"[13] enhanced their youth and beauty and they were extremely desirable. "My sisters must have shone as . . . choice morsels, for they were soon sought after and attended."[14]

Generally, most of his sisters' thoughts revolved around three things: "men, clothes and the possibilities of combining the twain so as to produce a good time--a dance, a picnic, a patter of conversation. . . ."[15] Dreiser, later discussing these motivations with Emma, received from her the following explanation:

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[10] Robert Elias, Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 13.

[11] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 21.

[12] Ibid., p. 13.

[13] Ibid., p. 99.

[14] Ibid., p. 227.

[15] Ibid., p. 69.

> I don't know whether it was because we were poor or because father was so insistent on the Catholic faith, but I was wild for anything that represented the opposite of what I had. Father was always talking about honorable marriage, but I didn't want to get married. I had not met anyone who interested me enough. I don't think I really knew what I wanted, unless it was just passing contact with men or boys, and to go about, be admired for my looks, have everything I saw in the shop windows and see everything that I thought girls ought to see. I know I hated to go to church, and I wouldn't do it. I despised the idea father had of saving money and going without decent clothes in order to pay old debts. On the other hand, I loved mother, and was sorry for her. When men proposed marriage, I found I didn't like them well enough to marry them, but when they told me I was beautiful and wanted to give me things and take me places, it was a different matter. Where I liked a man, it was easy enough to go with him--it was fun--there wasn't really anything wrong with it that I could see. Aside from the social scheme as people seem to want it, I don't even now see that it was.[16]

Their resistance to their father and his religion, as well as their strong sex drives, proved a significant factor in the social rejection and alienation of the Dreiser family from society. More than once gossip concerning the Dreiser girls caused Dreiser to say, "We were a scandal."[17]

Mame, the oldest Dreiser daughter, was the first of Dreiser's sisters to tarnish the family name. At the age of sixteen she had an affair with Colonel Silsby (a fictitious name given to him by Dreiser) who was a prominent lawyer and office holder in Terre Haute.

> The meeting between Mame and Silsby came about through no less a personage than the family doctor, who met the Colonel outside the family gate one day as he was leaving. Later, seeing her eyeing longingly the hats in a millner's window at Eastertide, and knowing the family's financial

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[16] Ibid., p. 69.

[17] Ibid., p. 264.

> state, this same Colonel asked Eleanor (Mame) if she wouldn't like to have one.
> "Indeed I would" she replied.
> "Then you take this ten dollars and see if you can get one!"
> After some persuasion she took the money. And so began a friendship which ended in intimacy and what by some might be deemed seduction.[18]

The Dreiser family began to depend on the Colonel for help, ". . . when misfortune pressed most severely, this man's beneficenses [sic] were accepted . . . when Paul was in jail . . . it was this same Colonel Silsby who got him out."[19] Sarah allowed Mame to keep the money and hid the Colonel's generous gifts from her husband;[20] in fact, Sarah used some of the money for family expenses.

Mame found that the Colonel's generosity did not extend to accepting responsibility when she became pregnant. "She was 'in a delicate condition,' and the very eminent position of her accomplice made it necessary that he should be most guarded in connection with the case."[21] Giving her "a hundred dollars and the address of an old doctor some fifteen miles out of Terre Haute;"[22] the Colonel dispensed with Mame, leaving her to her own resources. When an abortion was denied for

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[18] Ibid., p. 13.

[19] Ibid., p. 13.

[20] Ibid., p. 13.

[21] Ibid., p. 73.

[22] Ibid., p. 73.

"fear of local censure or punishment perhaps,"[23] Mame returned to her home, and with the help of her mother, had her baby. The child was still-born.[24]

The remainder of Mame's life lacked the tenseness of the first sixteen years. Mame eventually married a traveling dry-goods man named Austin Brennan, who was fourteen years her senior.[25] They lived in Rochester, New York, and after Sarah Dreiser's death, John Dreiser lived with them.[26] In 1903, three years after John Dreiser's death, Brennan and Mame moved to New York.[27] Brennan's prosperity eventually dwindled, and Mame became dependent on Dreiser for financial aid. By 1931, Mame was a widow, which caused her reliance on Dreiser's generosity to increase.[28] Mame underwent surgery for cancer at the age of eighty-three in 1944. After surgery she went to live with her sister Sylvia in Astoria and died soon afterward.[29]

Emma, John and Sarah's second daughter, was considered by her strict father as "being loose and in need of watching."[30]

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[23] Ibid., p. 74.

[24] Ibid., p. 75.

[25] Swanberg, p. 16.

[26] Ibid., p. 79.

[27] Ibid., p. 103.

[28] Ibid., p. 369.

[29] Ibid., pp. 498-502.

[30] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 69.

Emma liked to dress up and go "gadding about the streets of Sullivan,"[31] with the hope of finding a young man and a good time. Never lacking boyfriends, Emma managed often to cause gossip concerning her escapades.[32] In Chicago in 1886, Emma fell in love with L. A. Hopkins, a debonair, charming cashier of Chapin and Gore, a fashionable downtown bar. Although aware of the fact that he was already married, she eloped with him to Montreal. In Montreal Hopkins admitted that in a state of drunkenness he had removed $3,500 from the Chapin and Gore safe. Fear of the police prompted him to place all but $800 of the stolen cash in a letter to his former employers begging them not to prosecute. Emma and Hopkins escaped prosecution but not publicity as the Chicago papers reported all the bizarre details. The Dreisers were able to escape publicity only because Emma had taken an assumed name. Emma and Hopkins eventually went to New York, where they remained.[33]

In 1894, eight years after their elopement, Emma and Hopkins were not the same people they had been in Chicago. "She was matronly, not the beauty that she had once been. . . . Her self-assured husband had sunk from his comfortable Chicago estate and now was only intermittently employed."[34] Emma's

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[31] Ibid., p. 71.

[32] Swanberg, p. 19.

[33] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[34] Ibid., p. 59.

domestic problems increased as Hopkins made no money and her fascination with him faded. Finally, in 1895, she walked out of his life.[35] It was to her apartment that Paul Dreiser, the song writer, went when he became ill. He died there in 1906. Emma continued to live in New York taking in one Dreiser after another, until her death in 1937.[36]

Theresa Dreiser, the third sister, was a gentle, more obedient daughter than were her two older sisters. Dreiser described her as "a beautiful girl, if there ever was one. I never saw a more sylphlike figure."[37] Theresa's life was not tainted by an illegitimate child or a dishonest husband. While living in Chicago she met and married a "literary-minded painter of photographic backgrounds."[38] Dreiser referred to their union as a "true harmony of spirit."[39]

Theresa distinguished herself in Dreiser's mind as being the daughter most affected by Sarah Dreiser's illness and subsequent death.

> I recall my sister Ruth's [Theresa] strange depression at the very first suggestion of something untoward. A haunting fear that settled in her eyes and on her face. Her beloved mother, her beloved mother--one could read it in her every look and word.[40]

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[35] Ibid., p. 66.

[36] Ibid., p. 450.

[37] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 150.

[38] Ibid., p. 325.

[39] Ibid., p. 325.

[40] Ibid., p. 506.

Theresa put her personal life aside as she stepped into the position as head of the house while her mother lay dying. Although more passive by nature, the crisis brought forth her strength. Dreiser recalled:

> I think I never saw a more lovely devotion. So moved by love and tenderness was she that her steps were noiseless, her eyes strained and full of fear, her face pale, her voice low, reduced almost to a whisper. And as for service, there was no limit to it or the time in which to perform it. For her there was no time nor weariness.[41]

The entire Dreiser clan was affected and moved by Sarah's illness, but Theresa proved especially touched by her mother's illness, expressing her grief and anxiety in little gestures, as well as large ones.[42]

Theresa was not a religious woman, her alienation stemming from "her father's dogmatism."[43] Her lack of interest in spiritual matters was reinforced by her husband, who was an unbeliever.[44] Theresa's happy, though childless, marriage was ended abruptly when she was killed by a train in Chicago in the fall of 1897.[45]

Sylvia, Dreiser's fourth sister, had many of the same inclinations and tendencies as did her sister Emma.[46] Dreiser later described his impressions of Sylvia:

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[41] Ibid., p. 508.

[42] Ibid., p. 511.

[43] Swanberg, p. 33.

[44] Ibid., p. 33.

[45] Ibid., p. 78.

[46] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 221.

> . . . she was pagan, sensuous, decidedly attractive physically and fairly spoiling for sex contacts, but with no mental skill or reasoning faculty in so far as I could see. I recall her as nearly always before her mirror, rouging her cheeks and lips, darkening her eyebrows and lashes (which ere effective enough without any exterior aids), 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, as I thought at the time, and one concerning whom there would be talk unless rigidly guarded. In fact, I doubt whether in all her youth she ever indulged in an unconscious laugh, smile, look or action.[47]

After Emma's marriage, Sylvia returned to Warsaw from Chicago to experience an affair of her own. She fell in love with Don Ashley, who belonged to one of Warsaw's best families. Dreiser described him as ". . . twenty-five or six, lean in body and carefully tailored, with a long, thin wolfish and yet handsome face, shiny, hard eyes, and long graceful hands."[48] Ashley was well-known in Warsaw "as a sport, a philanderer and gambler."[49] The son of an ex-Colonel of the Civil War, young Ashley enjoyed the prestige and benefits which accompanied his family's station in life. When Ashley began dating Sylvia, he did not call at the home, preferring to meet her on streetcorners.[50] Eventually, when Sylvia's beau called at home, Dreiser immediately sensed trouble.

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[47] Ibid., p. 223.

[48] Ibid., p. 255.

[49] Ibid., p. 255.

[50] Ibid., p. 256.

> He was entirely too distant and condescening in his manner: the grand young person of means deigning to meet the family of the girl whose hand in marriage he was presumably seeking. He was too utterly cool and obviously so contemptuous of all that he saw.[51]

Sylvia and Ashley had dated for a month or so, according to Dreiser, when suddenly the visits ceased, leaving Sylvia with a "drooping, spiritless attitude."[52] Sylvia's grieving became quite evident to everyone in the house, especially Sarah, who was finally able to extract the reason for her depression.

> She was enceinte, and Don Ashley was the acknowledged cause. He had promised to marry her and take her away, but when she had gone to the appointed place to meet him, he had not appeared. She had written him, even called at his home, only to be told he had left Warsaw. An unsigned letter, in a disguised hand, beginning "Dearest Amy," arrived some weeks later, urging her not to grieve, that his flight was compulsory, owing to debt, etc., and that money would be sent her later. But no money ever came, nor any other word.[53]

Sylvia did not deal with her problem very well. As Dreiser recalled, ". . . she sat about moping and crying and composing love verses to her 'darling Don' expressive of her misguided faith, plight and despair. . . ."[54] An added burden to both Sylvia and Sarah was the attitude of the Ashley family. Mrs. Ashley harshly dismissed Sylvia with: "This looks like blackmail to me. You musn't trouble me

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[51] Ibid., p. 256.

[52] Ibid., p. 256.

[53] Ibid., p. 258.

[54] Ibid., p. 258.

with this matter. My son couldn't marry you if he wanted to. He has other obligations. Besides, how do I know you weren't bad long before you met him?"[55]

Sylvia was advised by a lawyer to go to a doctor for an abortion, but instead of performing an abortion, the doctor lectured her on her duty and virtue, not Ashley's, and sent her on her way.[56] Eventually, she went to New York to have her child, where she was looked after by Emma and Mame.[57] After the baby's birth, Sylvia found a job in New York and sent the infant to Warsaw to be tended by Sarah.[58] Remaining in New York, Sylvia aspired to become a songwriter like her brother, Paul,[59] although her results were negligible. By 1898, Sylvia had given up song-writing and married a Japanese-born photographer named Hide Richima.[60] The depression years found Sylvia, like Mame, relying on Dreiser for financial support.[61] In 1944,when Mame went to Astoria during her bout with cancer, she lived with widowed Sylvia,who had become a devout Christian Scientist and believed Mame "would recover if she willed it."[62] Neither Dreiser nor his biographers make mention of Sylvia's death.

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[55] Ibid., pp. 260-261.

[56] Ibid., pp. 261-262.

[57] Ibid., p. 263.

[58] Swanberg, p. 21.

[59] Ibid., p. 73.

[60] Ibid., p. 79

[61] Ibid., p. 398.

[62] Ibid., p. 498.

In 1916 when Dreiser wrote Dawn, the first volume of his autobiography, he revealed "such intimate revelations of his sisters' sexual adventures that immediate publication was impossible."[63] For reasons of his own, however, Dreiser did give fictitious names to his sisters in Dawn: Mame was called Eleanor, Emma was referred to as Janet, Theresa became known as Ruth, Sylvia was known as Amy, and Claire was called Trina.

Because Dreiser was a man of sensitivity and emotion, he was deeply stirred by the trials and tribulations of his sisters. Their vicissitudes were so engraved upon his mind that when Arthur Henry urged Dreiser to attempt a novel, Dreiser used his sisters' life experiences as his frame of reference.

> Eventually, to please Henry, Dreiser had taken a sheet of yellow paper and, apropos of nothing in particular, had scribbled the title Sister Carrie. Then he had begun to wonder what kind of story might be woven about a girl, a Midwestern girl, a dreamer; . . . The Midwestern girls whose problems Dreiser knew best were his sisters, and he thought of how they, like himself, had dreamed of the city, where everything would turn out wonderfully. He thought in particular of the one who had been supported by the architect, and then of her preference for the restaurant manager, and his taking of the money and the elopement to New York by way of Canada. For the architect he substituted the traveling salesman, Drouet, the kind who had intrigued more than one of his sisters. And for the technique that would enable Drouet to intrigue, he relied to some extent on George's 'Fable of the Two Mandolin Players and the Willing Performer.'

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[63] Ibid., p. 203.

> His sister became Carrie, and like one of the women in Bob Hazard's unpublished novel, she developed into an actress. Hannah and Hogg's became Fitzgerald and Moy's and its manager became, with a slight change in name, George Hurstwood, providing facts for the earlier chapter of the story. All the characters moved in regions Dreiser had known, Carrie living in Chicago only a few doors from where Dreiser had lived himself at various times, and Hurstwood participating in a streetcar strike like the one Dreiser had reported in Toledo and mingling among the wretched poor whose shifts to find a night's lodging Dreiser had described in the course of his work for the magazines.[64]

Carrie Meeber was like the Dreiser sisters in many ways: she was a Midwestern girl, living in Columbia City, a few hundred miles from Chicago.[65] In August 1889 she was eighteen years of age, which meant that she grew up in the same time period as did the Dreiser girls. Like the Dreiser girls, Carrie was "bright and full of the illusions of ingorance and youth."[67] Like them, Carrie knew poverty:

> When Caroline Meeber boarded the afternoon train for Chicago, her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel, a small lunch in a paper box, and a yellow leather snap purse, containing her ticket, a scrap of paper with her sister's address in Van Buren Street, and four dollars in money.[68]

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[64] Elias, pp.106-107.

[65] Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (New York: World, 1951), p. 1.

[66] Ibid., p. 1.

[67] Ibid., p. 1

[68] Ibid., p. 1.

The four oldest Dreiser sisters, bored with small towns and small-town gossip, were enthralled with the largeness and anonymity of the city.[69] Carrie, too, was fascinated by the big city:

> . . . she was venturing to reconnoitre the mysterious city and dreaming wild dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy, which should make it prey and subject--the proper penitent, grovelling at a woman's slipper.[70]

Just as Emma Dreiser had rejected religion and centered her goals around clothes and men, Carrie wanted "wealth, fashion, ease."[71] "She longed for dress and beauty with a whole heart."[72] When Drouet "loaned" Carrie twenty dollars for new clothes, she took the money and "felt bound to him by a strange tie of affection,"[73] just as Mame Dreiser had also taken money from an older man for pretty clothes.[74] When the time came for Carrie to surrender her virtue to Drouet, she did so with relatively few qualms for, "Carrie had no excellent home principles fixed upon her."[75]

Carrie Meeber, following in Emma's footsteps, was involved with Hurstwood, a married man.[76] Like Emma's lover,

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[69] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 156.

[70] Ibid., p. 25.

[71] Ibid., p. 25.

[72] Ibid., p. 25.

[73] Ibid., p. 69.

[74] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 13.

[75] Dreiser, Sister Carrie, p. 89.

[76] Ibid., p. 245.

Hopkins, Hurstwood managed a fashionable bar[77] and eventually stole a large sum of money from the safe.[78] Carrie was ignorant of the theft, as was Emma about Hopkins' theft, and voluntarily remained with him after he duped her on to a train bound for Canada. The authorities apprehended Carrie and Hurstwood, just as they did Emma and Hopkins, but charges were dropped when most of the money was returned.[79] Just as Emma and Hopkins had settled in New York after a short stay in Canada, so Carrie and Hurstwood established themselves in New York.[80] Emma eventually left Hopkins in 1895,[81] just as Carrie, having grown weary of supporting Hurstwood, walked out of his life forever.[82]

The irony of Carrie Meeber's story was that America at that time could not or would not acknowledge that what Carrie (and Emma) did was true-to-life and quite similar to what other young women had done. Dreiser discovered his first opposition to Emma's story in the form of Neltje DeGraff Doubleday, wife of the famous publisher Frank N. Doubleday, whose firm had contracted to publish Sister Carrie.

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[77] Ibid., p. 91.

[78] Ibid., p. 280.

[79] Ibid., p. 317.

[80] Ibid., p. 331.

[81] Swanberg, p. 66.

[82] Dreiser, Sister Carrie, p. 485.

> . . . When she read Sister Carrie, she was horrified at the prospect of its bearing the Doubleday imprint. The book was not merely frank and vulgar, it was immoral. It scorned the accepted idea of love and implied that the wages of sin might easily be success. With a strength of purpose that had been a support to the firm in the past, she impressed her feelings upon her husband. He read the book and agreed.[83]

Although Dreiser had written a novel "from what he knew,"[84] the American public, along with the Doubledays had a shallow frame of reference for the naturalistic novel.

> Carrie was a direct affront to current mores. . . . Carrie, far from being punished, played fast and loose with two sinners and wound up in luxury, a successful actress, with audiences' cheers ringing in her ears as she collected a large salary--a denouement that could be construed as advocating unchastity as a way of life. In 1900 Dreiser's novel also could be indicted on the following charges:
>
> It dealt with uneducated people who spoke colloqually, with none of the niceties of Charles Major's ladies and gentlemen. It was vulgar.
>
> Dreiser obviously liked these characters, compounding his crime by showing great sympathy for these vulgarians in their sordid tribulations.
>
> Carrie, Hurstwood and all the rest appeared almost as helpless creatures adrift on ships in a story sea, devoid of will, unable to steer any course, able only to seize whatever comfort was washed their way (precisely as Dreiser had intended). This flew in the face of the moral doctrine of free will that each individual could choose his own path for good or evil.
>
> Sister Carrie was steeped in a pessimism that offended the national taste for sweetness.[85]

"The national taste for sweetness" was offended by Carrie Meeber. The American ethic was "that a woman's virtue is her

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[83] Elias, pp. 113-114.

[84] F. O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (New York, William Sloane, 1951), p. 61.

[85] Swanberg, p. 88.

only jewel, that the wages of sin are death; yet Carrie let herself be seduced without a struggle, yielding first to a traveling salesman then to Hurstwood; and instead of dying in misery, she became a famous actress."[86]

Whether or not American society was prepared to admit that there were Carrie Meebers in the world was not Dreiser's primary goal. He was painfully aware of the fact that there were Emma Dreisers in the world. The events and situations of the novel were actually a refined version of the real life experiences which Dreiser had observed.[87] He was translating his personal experiences "into the desperate, hopeless yearnings of his characters."[88]

Sister Carrie was one of two Dreiser novels which dealt primarily with a woman as the central character. Jennie Gerhardt also revolved around the life of a woman. "For Jennie Gerhardt Dreiser returned once more to memories of his sisters for material."[89] The novel was Dreiser's statement about "the shabby way his sisters were treated."[90] Jennie, like Carrie, also had her personality and life shaped by the Dreiser sisters.

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[86] Malcolm Cowley, "The Slow Triumph of Sister Carrie," New Republic, 25 (June, 1947), 24.

[87] Matthiessen, p. 66.

[88] Swanberg, p. 83.

Dreiser began Jennie's story in the fall of 1880, when she was eighteen years of age,[91] the same time period that the Dreiser sisters were in their teens. Just as the Dreiser sisters were from the Midwest, Jennie, too, was a Midwestern girl from Columbus, Ohio.[92] Like Dreiser's sisters, Jennie had youth, beauty, charm and sexual appeal. Senator Brander, her first lover, was very much impressed on first encountering her:

> When he had reached the upper landing an impulsive sidewise glance assured him, more clearly than before, of her uncommonly prepossessing appearance. He noted the high, white forehead, with its smoothly parted and plaited hair. The eyes he saw were blue and the complexion fair. He had even time to admire the mouth and the full cheeks--above all, the well-rounded, graceful form, full of youth, health, and that hopeful expectancy which to the middle aged is so suggestive of all that is worth begging of Providence. Without another look he went dignifiedly upon his way, but the impression of her charming personality went with him.[93]

Jennie, like the Dreiser's sisters, was the product of a home in which the father held stern, dictatorial religious principles,[94] and, like the Dreiser girls, Jennie did not accept as her own her father's strict, religious outlook on life. "Religion had as yet no striking hold upon her. It was a pleasant thing to know that there was a heaven, a fearsome

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[91] Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt (New York: World, 1956), p. 1.

[92] Ibid., p. 1.

[93] Ibid., p. 7.

[94] Ibid., p. 55.

one to realize that there was a hell. . . . Otherwise the whole religious problem was badly jumbled in her mind."[95]

As the Dreiser girls looked to their mother for sympathy and understanding and feared their father, so Jennie also found her mother's consoling attitude to be the opposite of her father's. Upon realizing that she was pregnant with Brander's child, Jennie turned to her mother for help:

> 'Oh!' she [her mother] said at last, a great wave of self-accusation sweeping over her, 'it is all my fault. I might have known. But we'll do what we can.' She broke down and sobbed aloud. . . .
>
> Now that the first shock had passed, there came the vivid consciousness of ever present danger. What would Gerhardt do if he learned the truth? . . .
>
> 'I'm so afraid of your father,' Mrs. Gerhardt often said to Jennie . . . 'I don't know what he'll say.'
>
> 'Perhaps I'd better go away,' suggested her daughter.
>
> 'No,' she said; 'he needn't know just yet. Wait awhile.' But in her heart of hearts she knew that the evil day could not be long postponed.[96]

Because the Gerhardt family, like the Dreiser family, was driven by poverty, Jennie was "untutored"[97] and lacked social placement.

Just as the Dreiser girls brought shame and disgrace upon the Dreiser household, so Jennie was the source of mortification in the Gerhardt family. Her unsanctioned pregnancy and subsequent dismissal from the family home caused such severe shame that Gerhardt wanted to move his family from Columbus

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[95] Ibid., p. 55.

[96] Ibid., p. 86.

[97] Ibid., p. 1.

immediately. "Any place was better than Columbus after this; he could never expect to hold up his head here again. Its memories were odious."[98]

Jennie and Mame Dreiser had like experiences in connection with their first lovers. Jennie's first lover, Senator Brander was fifty and she was eighteen.[99] Mame's lawyer lover was also older and more experienced than she.[100] Jennie was given ten dollars by Brander, which "Jennie accepted . . . with mingled feelings."[101] The same amount was given to Mame by her lover at their initial meeting.[102] When Jennie's brother, Bass, was arrested for stealing coal, it was Brander who calmly assumed responsibility; "I will arrange about your brother," he said quickly. "Don't worry. I can get him out in half an hour."[103] Likewise, Mame's brother, Paul, was released from jail through the help of her lawyer lover.[104] Both women became pregnant by their lovers but were left to have ther babies alone. Brander was prevented from honoring his pledge to Jennie because of an attack of typhoid which led to his death.[105] When Mame discovered she was pregnant,

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[98] Ibid., p. 95.

[99] Ibid., p. 20.

[100] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 13.

[101] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 22.

[102] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 13.

[103] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 75.

[104] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 13.

[105] Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 83.

her lawyer lover simply left town after giving her some money for an abortion and the name of a doctor.[106]

Not only did the Dreiser sisters find their lives incorporated into the lives and personalities of major literary heroines, Jennie Gerhardt and Carrie Meeber, but they also became a part of minor female characters in Dreiser's novels, An American Tragedy and The Bulwark. Roberta Alden and Esta Griffiths of An American Tragedy and Etta Barnes of The Bulwark all found their beginnings in the lives of the Dreiser sisters.

Roberta Alden, the young woman who met her death in An American Tragedy, "was cute and pretty,"[107] in her late teens and possessed "a warm, imaginative, sensuous temperament."[108] She was a product of poverty[109] and had shared her family's deprived state. Yearning for a greater, newer life she was engaged in work at Griffiths and Company in Utica, New York.[110] Her intimate affair with her foreman, Clyde Griffiths, was similar in many respect to the affair Sylvia Dreiser had with Don Ashley.[111]

Both Sylvia and Roberta were poor girls who fell in love with men who considered themselves on a higher social level.

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[106] Dreiser, Dawn, pp. 7-5.

[107] Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York: World, 1948), p. 267.

[108] Ibid., p. 269.

[109] Ibid., p. 268.

[110] Ibid., p. 269.

[111] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 255.

Clyde early reminded himself that Roberta "was a working girl . . . a factory girl . . . and he was her superior."[112] Dresier described Ashely as "entirely too distant and condescending in his manner: the grand young person of means deigning to meet the family of the girl whose hand in marriage he was presumably seeking. He was too utterly cool and obvously so contemptuous of all he saw."[113] Abortion producing medicine was the solution both Roberta and Sylvia experimented with when they realized that they were pregnant. Clyde bought Roberta hers in the hopes that it would relieve him of a tremendous burden,[114] but Sylvia purchased hers on her own.[115] The medicine proved ineffective in each case. Roberta was promised marriage, but, instead, met death at Big Bittern;[116] whereas Sylvia was deserted by Ashley and left to face the problem with only the help of her family.[117]

Esta Griffiths, a minor character of An American Tragedy and sister of Clyde Griffiths, also had experiences taken from the Dreiser family history. Like Sylvia, she was a young, "sensuous weak girl who did not appear to know yet what she

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[112] Dreiser, An American Tragedy, p. 267.

[113] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 256.

[114] Dreiser, An American Tragedy, p. 411.

[115] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 257.

[116] Dreiser, An American Tragedy, p. 531.

[117] Dreiser, Dawn, pp. 262-263.

thought."[118] Similarly, Esta did not share her parents' religious convictions, for

> . . . in spite of her guarded up-bringing, and the seeming religious and moral fervor which at times appeared to characterize her, she was just a sensuous, weak girl who did not by any means know yet what she thought. Despite the atmosphere in which she moved, essentially she was not of it.[119]

Like the Dreiser sisters, Esta was part of a family that "was always 'hard up,' never very well clothed, and deprived of many comforts and pleasures."[120] Also, Esta, like the Dreisers, had known homes all over the Midwest--"Grand Rapids, Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, Kansas City."[121]

Yearning for "pretty dresses, hats, shoes, ribbons,"[122] Esta was caught in a maze of wanting and desiring what she religiously was not supposed to want and desire.[123] In a quest for a more exciting life, she began to form friendships with the town boys, but "she became secretive and hid her ways from her parents."[124] It was an actor who finally persuaded Esta to leave the mission life and run away with him

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[118] Dreiser, An American Tragedy, p. 531.

[119] Ibid., p. 28.

[120] Ibid., p. 17.

[121] Ibid., p. 22.

[122] Ibid., p. 29.

[123] Ibid., p. 29.

[124] Ibid., p. 30.

under the promise that "she was to have new and better clothes than she had ever known, delicious adventures, love"[125] -- a promise much like Sylvia received from Ashley.[126]

Unfortunately, clothes, love and marriage were not what either girl received; Esta returned to Mrs. Griffiths a few months after running away "in trouble, pregnant--and with no money and no husband."[127] Mrs. Griffiths took the responsibility of hiding Esta from her family and the mission people because Esta's condition "was not right, unmoral as people saw it."[128] Esta's son was taken care of by Elvira, as Esta sought a new life beyond the mission and her illegitimate son,[129] just as Sylvia left Sarah Dreiser with the responsibility of caring for her illegitimate child.[130]

Theresa, another sister, served as Dreiser's model for Etta Barnes of The Bulwark. Theresa had kept a bedside vigil beside Sarah Dreiser while she lay dying, acting as a "quiet, sacrificial devotee."[131] Dreiser commented that he had never seen "a more lovely devotion."[132] Therefore, when Solon

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[125] Ibid., p. 30[illegible]

[126] Ibid., p. 258.

[127] Ibid., pp. 109-111.

[128] Ibid., p. 111.

[129] Ibid., p. 874.

[130] Dreiser, Dawn, p. 312.

[131] Ibid., p. 508.

[132] Ibid., p. 508.

Barnes, the main character in The Bulwark, lay dying, it was with memories of Theresa that Dreiser created Etta Barnes, Solon's youngest daughter. As Solon grew weaker with cancer, it was Etta, like Theresa, who tended to his every need:

> As the days grew shorter, Solon appeared weaker and less and less able to get about, seldom going out of doors and most of the time remaining in bed, or at least in his own room. Etta, finding at times that it was hard to make conversation with him, yet desiring to be with him and pay him as many attentions as she could, frequently brought a book or the morning paper into his room to read to him.[133]

Solon himself was able to appreciate her many acts of devotion towards him and remarked to a visitor, "As for Etta, she is so kind and brave that I think she will be happy. . . ."[134] Etta was left alone with her father, except when the other Barnes children came to visit.[135] She devoted herself to his every need, ". . . and in spite of Etta's loving care, Solon's physical condition grew gradually worse."[136] Like Theresa, Etta was faithful to the last.[137]

Carrie Meeber, Jennie Gerhardt, Roberta Alden, Esta Griffiths and Etta Barnes are five young women characters whose creation was marked, with varying degrees of intensity, by Mame, Emma, Theresa and Sylvia Dreiser. Dreiser had observed and absorbed his sisters' lives to such a degree that he used his sisters as life portraits for five women in four novels.

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[133] Theodore Dreiser, The Bulwark (New York: Doubleday, 1946), p. 327.

[134] Ibid., p. 326

[135] Ibid., p. 322.

[136] Ibid., p. 323.

[137] Ibid., p. 334.

CHAPTER IV

Life Portraits of Dreiser's First Wife, Sara Osborne White

Theodore Dreiser's emotional and psychological temperament was of such a blend that he could not and would not be peacefully bound to the state of monogamous marriage.

> . . . I am inclined to suspect that the monogamous standard to which the world has been tethered much too harshly for a thousand years or more is entirely wrong. I do not believe that it is Nature's only or ultimate way of continuing or preserving itself. Nor am I inclined to accept the belief that it produces the highest type of citizen. . . . It is a product, I suspect, of intellectual lethargy or dullness, a mental incapacity for individuality.[1]

Dreiser knew his own temperament well and realized that he "could like two, three, and even more women at the same time, like them very much indeed."[2] The tendency to want many women was a part of his character until the day he died, making his relationship with both his wives at times a nightmare.

It was a paradox that a man as opposed to marriage and convention as Dreiser should be married twice in his lifetime. Nonetheless, Dreiser went twice to the altar to promise undying devotion; once in 1898 to Sara Osborne White and again in 1944 to Helen Patges Richardson. His first wife, Sara White, known

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[1] Theodore Dreiser, A Book About Myself (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 326.

[2] Ibid., p. 261.

as Jug, had been engaged to Dreiser for six years before their marriage on December 28, 1898.[3] Dreiser had been prompted to end the six-year engagement by marriage, not so much by Jug, but by her younger sister, who wrote Dreiser in New York "a very private letter reminding him of his promises and of Jug's despair. . . . This was reality and it shocked him."[4] Alternating between "sincere affection and sincere doubts,"[5] Dreiser married Jug in Washington, D.C., at the age of twenty-seven when Jug was almost thirty.

For twelve years Dreiser and Jug lived under the same roof as man and wife. The years were filled with misery. Dreiser left Jug in 1910, although he lived with her intermittently until 1914.[6] They were separated, but never divorced, for thirty-two years; Jug's death in 1942 gave Dreiser the freedom which was so precious to him.[7]

Dreiser's unconfined life as a "free" man lasted only two years. In 1944 he married his mistress of twenty-five years, Helen Patges Richardson, a former actress who had forsaken her career to be his mistress.[8] For a second time, sisterly

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[3] W. A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 80-81.

[4] Ibid., p. 80.

[5] Ibid., p. 80.

[6] Ibid., p. 175.

[7] Ibid., p. 487.

[8] Helen Dreiser, My Life with Dreiser (New York: World Publishing, 1951), p. 63.

intervention prompted Dreiser to marry. Myrtle Patges, Helen's younger sister, wrote Dreiser a letter in which she urged him to add legality to his relationship with Helen. Dreiser did so in Stevenson, Washington, on June 13, 1944.[9] At the time of his second marriage, Dreiser was seventy-two and Helen was twenty-three years younger.

Thus, Theodore Dreiser, the man who rebelled against marriage, knew it from a broad spectrum, having married a virgin farm girl and a long time mistress. While Dreiser never wrote a book about his second wife, Helen, he took the events of his courtship, engagement and marriage to his first wife, Jug, and wove them in The "Genius," his novel concerning his wife and marriage, as an explanation to the world as to what really transpired between himself and Jug. "In The "Genius" he sought to purge his spirit of the recent ordeal involving Thelma, Mrs. Cudlipp, Jug and Butterick."[10]

The name Dreiser gave the central heroine of The "Genius" was Angela Blue, considered by critics to be a malicious paraphrase of Jug's maiden name of Sara White.[11] Their backgrounds were identical in many ways. Jug was from the country, born to honest, hard-working parents. Dreiser first visited her home in July in 1894 and was deeply moved:

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[9] Ibid., p. 299.

[10] Swanberg, p. 145.

[11] Ibid., p. 145.

> I felt that never before had I been so impressed with a region and a home. It was all too simple. The house, though old and decayed, was exquisite. . . . I found a home in which lived a poverty-stricken and yet spiritually impressive patriarch, a mother who might serve as an American tradition so simple and gracious was she, sisters and brothers who were reared in an atmosphere which somehow induced a gracious, sympathetic idealism and consideration. Poor as they were, they were the best of the families here. The father had been an office-holder and one of the district leaders in his day, and one of his sons still held an office . . . all but three daughters were married, and I was engaged to one of the remaining ones . . . a farm of forty acres to the south of the house was tilled by the father and two sons.[12]

Angela Blue also had her beginnings on a farm surrounded by a warm, country atmosphere:

> The Blue homestead was located in the center of a rather wide rolling stretch of country which lay between two gently rising ridges of hill covered with trees. One corner of the farm, and that not so very far from the house, was cut by a stream, a little shallow thing, singing over pebbles and making willows and hazel bushes to grow in profusion along its banks, and there was a little lake within a mile of the house. . . . The house was long and of no great depth, the front a series of six rooms ranged in a row, without an upper storey. . . . In all its parts the place was shabby and run down but picturesque and quaint.[13]

Mrs. Blue, Angela's mother, was

> . . . a comfortable, round bodied mother of sixty, who greeted Eugene cordially. He could feel in her what he felt in his own mother--in every good mother--love of order and peace, love of well being of her children, love of public respect and private honor and morality.[14]

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[12] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 425.

[13] Theodore Dreiser, The "Genius," (New York: World, 1954), p. 116.

[14] Ibid., pp. 117-118.

Eugene was also impressed with Angela's father, Jotham, " . . . no petty little ground-harnessed ploughman this, but a farmer in the big sense of the word--a cultivator of the soil, with an understanding of it--an American who loved his state and his country."[15]

Rose White, Jug's younger sister, figured in Dreiser's thoughts long before she wrote him urging him to marry Jug. Upon first meeting Rose and Jug on the train Dreiser noted that

> . . . the personality of the younger sister was appealing to me quite as much as the elder. She was so radiant of humor, freckled, plump, laughing and with such an easy and natural mode of address. Somehow she struck me as knowing more of life than her sister being more sophisticated and yet quite as innocent.[16]

Marietta Blue, Angela's younger sister,also proved to be very alluring to her future brother-in-law, Eugene, who

> . . . wondered in a vague way whether Marietta did not have the sweeter temperament--were not really more lovable and cosy. But he put the thought forcefully out of his mind. He felt he must be loyal to Angela.[17]

Both women had the same profession. Angela taught school in Blackwood, Wisconsin,[18] and Jug taught school in Florissant, Missouri.[19]

The personal qualities that attracted their future husbands were identical in both women. Dreiser described Jug as

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[15] Ibid., p. 121.

[16] Dreiser, A Book About Myself,p. 247.

[17] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 122.

[18] Ibid., p. 66.

[19] Swanberg, p. 48.

> . . . natural, winsome, inviting, as well as understanding and patient; a quiet and restful and undisturbed patience. I liked her immensely. She seemed from the first to offer me an understanding and a sympathy which I had never yet realized in any one. She smiled at my humor, appreciated my moods.[20]

Likewise, Eugene was attracted to Angela because she was " . . . innocent, simple and good hearted."[21]

> Eugene liked what he considered the guileless naivete of her confessions--the frankness with which she owned up to simplicity and poverty. Most girls didn't. She almost made a virtue out of these things--at least they were charming as a confession in her.
>
> He was glad to have met her. This was the right sort of girl, clean, honest, simple, attractive. That was the way the best women were--good and pure--not wild pieces of fire. . . . [22]

Jug and Angela were both beautiful, charming women during youth. When Dreiser first spotted Jug on the train to Chicago, she presented a very striking picture:

> She was in white, with a mass of sunny red hair. Her nose was straight and fine, her lips sweetly curved. She seemed bashful and retiring. At her bosom was a bouquet of pink roses, but one had come loose.
>
> Of a sudden she seemed quite the most interesting of all those here, simple, pretty, vigorous and with a kind of tact and grace that was impressive. Also I felt an intense something about her that was concealed by an air of supreme innocence and maidenly reserve.[23]

Angela was considered by Eugene to be as beautiful as any girl he had ever seen.[24] When he first saw Angela

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[20] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 249.

[21] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 89. [22] Ibid., p. 67.

[23] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, pp. 241-242.

[24] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 90.

> She was dressed in white, he noticed, with a band of golden brown ribbon pulled through the loops above the flounces at the bottom of her dress. Her hair was a wonderful ashen yellow, a great mass of it--and laid in big, thick braids above her forehead and ears. Her nose was straight, her lips were thin and red, her cheekbones faintly but curiously noticeable. Somehow there was a sense of distinction about her--a faint aroma of personality which Eugene did not understand. It appealed to him.[25]

Dreiser lived in St. Louis and worked as a newspaper man during the early days of his relationship with Jug, while she lived in Florissant, about twenty-five miles out of St. Louis.[26] Because distance separated the two young lovers, their time together was limited. Jug tried to remedy the situation by visiting her aunt who lived in St. Louis, thus providing Dreiser a convenient place to court her.[27] Like Jug, Angela lived away from the city where her new romantic interest worked. She, too, solved the problem by visiting her aunt who lived on Chicago's North Side:

> She came shortly after his art school opened, and at her invitation he went out to the residence of her aunt on the North Side, a nice, pleasant brick house in a quiet side street, which had all the airs of middle class peace and comfort. He was impressed with what seemed to him a sweet, conservative atmosphere--a fitting domicile for a girl so dainty and refined as Angela.[28]

The courtships at Jug's aunt's home did not last long. Dreiser, although engaged to Jug, decided to go East . . . alone:

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[25] Ibid., p. 61

[26] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 318.

[27] Ibid., p. 318.

[28] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 80.

> Owing to a driving desire to get on, to do something, to be more than I was and have all the pleasures I craved at once, there now set in a period of mental dissatisfaction and unrest which eventually took me out of St. Louis and the West and resulted in a period of stress and distress.[29]

Eugene, like Dreiser, also left his betrothed in the Midwest to go to the East to seek his fortune " . . . The lure of the big eastern city was in his mind, its palaces, its wealth, its fame. It was the great world he knew, this side of Paris and London."[30]

After Dreiser went East, he sustained their relationship by writing long involved letters to Jug:

> We fell into a correspondence which swiftly took on a regular form and resulted, on my part, in a most extended correspondence, letters so long that they surprised even myself. I found myself in the grip of a letter-writing fever such as hither to had never possessed me, writing long, personal, intimate accounts of my own affairs, my work, my dreams, what not, as well as what I thought of her of the beauty of life as I had seen it with her in Chicago, my theories and imaginings in regard to everything.[31]

When Eugene went East to pursue his art career, it was letters which helped to keep his and Angela's love alive. "At night he would return to his bare room and indite long epistles to Angela, describing what he had seen and telling her of his undying love for her . . . "[32]

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[29] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 337.

[30] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 96.

[31] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 319.

[32] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 103.

Dreiser remained in New York, away from Missouri and Jug for almost two years, after which he felt "an uncontrollable impulse to return and see her and St. Louis. . . . "[33] The visit proved to be a turning point in his relationship with her, causing him to be more bound to her than ever.

> This trip to St. Louis was for me a most pivotal and deranging thing, probably a great mistake. At that time, of course, I could not see that. Instead, I was completely lost in the grip of a passion that subsequently proved detrimental or devastating. The reality which I was seeking to establish was a temporary contact only. Any really beautiful girl or any idyllic scene could have done for me all the things that this particular girl and scene could do, only thus far I had chanced to meet no other who could displace her. And in a way I knew this then, only I realized also that one beautiful specimen was as good a key to the lock of earthly delights as another . . . [34]

Just as Jug received a visit from her lover, Angela, after sixteen months of waiting while Eugene established a career in New York, was reunited with him when he returned to Blackwood.[35] The visit proved to be a strengthening bond in their relationship and "Eugene carried home with him not only a curiously deepened feeling for Angela but moreover a growing respect for her family." [36]

Both Jug and Angela had firm convictions concerning the sanctity of marriage. Dreiser wrote of Jug:

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[33] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 422.

[34] Ibid., p. 423.

[35] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 113.

[36] Ibid., p. 134.

> In her was none of the variability that troubled me. If ever a person was fixed in conventional views it was she. One life, one love would have answered for her exactly. She could have accepted any condition, however painful or even degrading provided she was bolstered up by what she considered the moral law. "To have and to hold, in sickness and in health, in poverty and in riches, until death do us part." I think the full force of these laws must have been imbibed with her mother's milk.[37]

Angela, like Jug, had been taught the then conventional view of marriage:

> She had learned to believe from childhood that marriage was a fixed thing. She believed in one life and one love. When you found that, every other relationship which did not minister to it was ended. If children came, very good; if not, very good; marriage was permanent anyhow. And if you did not marry happily it was nevertheless your duty to endure and suffer for whatever good might remain. You might suffer badly in such a union, but it was dangerous and disgraceful to break it. If you could not stand it any more, your life was a failure.[38]

Unfortunately for Jug and Angela, such monogamous views were not held by Dreiser or Eugene. Even during his engagement to Jug, Dreiser had affairs with other women:

> Marriage might be well enough for the average man, but it never seemed to me that I should endure in it, that it would permanently affect my present free relationship with the world . . . One of the things which troubled and astonished me was that I could like two, three, and even more women at the same time, like them very much indeed. It seemed strange that I could yearn over them, now one and now another.[39]

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[37] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 261.

[38] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 82.

[39] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 261.

Not only did Eugene have affairs with other women, but he also began to have serious reservations about his choice of a bride:

> Toward the end of spring Eugene concluded he would rather go up in the mountains near Christina's bungalow this summer, than back to see Angela. The memory of that precious creature was, under the stress and excitement of metropolitan life, becoming a little tarnished. His recollections of her were as delightful as ever, as redolent of beauty, but he was beginning to wonder. The smart crowd in New York was composed of a different type. Angela was sweet and lovely, but would she fit?[40]

After a six year engagement, Rose White, Jug's sister wrote Dreiser a letter which prompted him to action;[41] and Sara Osborne White became Mrs. Theodore Dreiser, although she was hardly the blushing young bride. Having waited six years and being "forced at last to apply pressure, she was in a nervous despairing condition by the time they were married."[42] Dreiser later wrote of the marriage, "I undertook that perilous adventure with the lady of my choice--and that, of course, after the first flare of love had thinned down to the pale flame of duty."[43]

Just as Dreiser and Jug were married away from home, family and friends, so Eugene and Angela were also married

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[40] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 153.

[41] Swanberg, p. 80.

[42] Ibid., p. 81

[43] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 502.

after a long engagement and away from home. Like Dreiser, Eugene was prompted to marry by a long letter from Angela's sister, Marietta, which "preyed on his mind."[44]

> The marriage ceremony between Eugene and Angela was solemnized at Buffalo on November second. As planned, Marietta was with them. They would go, the three of them, to the Falls, and to West Point, where the girls would see their brother, David, and then Marietta would return to tell the family about it. Naturally, under the circumstances, it was a very simple affair, for there were no congratulations to go through with no gifts--at least immediately--to consider and acknowledge. Angela had explained to her parents and friends that it was quite impossible for Eugene to come west at this time. She knew that he objected to a public ceremony where he would have to run the gauntlet of all her relatives, so she was quite willing to meet him in the East and be married there.[45]

One of the greatest shocks Jug received when she began living with her husband in New York was that his friends and acquaintances knew little or nothing about their marriage:

> When they took up housekeeping, she discovered that he had not told his relatives and friends, who exhibited astonishment when they called and found him married. A few of his bohemian acquaintances, some of them women, apparently were not warmly cordial at first, annoyed by Dreiser's failure to tell them and regarding Jug as something of a backwoods interloper. His lack of subtlety and tact in such matters was disastrous. The whole effect was hardly flattering to Jug, who was hurt and upset.[46]

Angela was confronted by two of Eugene's female friends, Miriam Fitch and Norma Whitmore, when she moved to New York and the results were most unpleasant.

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[44] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 171.

[45] Ibid., p. 197.

[46] Swanberg, p. 81

> "Why didn't you make him tell us, Mrs. Witla?" she demanded archly of Angela, but with a secret dagger thrust in her eyes. "You'd think he didn't want us to know."
>
> Angela cowered beneath the sting of this whip cord. Miriam made her feel as though Eugene had attempted to conceal his relationship to her--as though he was ashamed of her. How many more women were there like Miriam and Norma Whitmore?[47]

The two women took to marriage and all the domestic chores accompanying marriage with vigor and assurance. Jug provided the mother like protective atmosphere for which one part of Dreiser's personality yearned. "In Jug he had a helpmate who cooked, sewed, mended his clothes, gave him the medicine and pills he constantly felt he needed . . . "[48] As for Angela, she found that her long awaited ambition had become a reality:

> She had been dreaming of housekeeping and cooking for Eugene, of petting and spoiling him, and now the opportunity had arrived.
>
> Angela attended strictly to her marketing. She was gay and smiling, but practical. She was busy wondering in what quantities she should buy things, how she would keep fresh vegetables, whether the ice box was really clean; how much delicate dusting the various objects in the studio would require.[49]

The happy times were short-lived for both young marriages. In 1902 Dreiser, discouraged about his troubles in the publication and sale of Sister Carrie, was on the verge of a

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[47] Dreiser, The "Genius," pp. 214-215.

[48] Swanberg, p. 111.

[49] Dreiser, The "Genius," pp. 204-205.

nervous breakdown. "Morbidly self-centered,"[50] Dreiser felt as if there was "an element of fatality"[51] about his life. "Insomnia racked him, as did the pain in his fingertips. He imagined that his hair was falling out. At times he could hardly keep from weeping."[52] After consulting nerve specialists and stopping work on Jennie, Dreiser

> . . . decided he must send Jug back to Missouri and go it alone. He even asked . . . for a special low fare due to hardship, but the Pennsylvania Railroad replied, "We are not permitted to make reductions in rates except in cases of absolute destitution." The parting must have been a sad one, with Jug fearing for her Honeybugs' actual sanity.[53]

Angela shared a similar situation to Jug's in that her husband's career was faltering and he was mentally unable to cope with the situation. "Eugene's mental state, so depressed, so helpless, so fearsome--a rudderless boat in the dark . . ."[54] Eugene's mental state was such that he, like Dreiser, felt it best to send his wife back to her home.

> . . . He had given Angela one hundred and twenty-five dollars . . . to take her back to Blackwood and keep her there until he could make such arrangements as would permit her to join him. After a long discussion they had finally agreed that this would be best, for, seeing that he could neither paint nor

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[50] Swanberg, p. 101.

[51] Ibid., p. 101.

[52] Ibid., p. 101.

[53] Ibid., p. 102.

[54] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 297.

> illustrate, there was no certainty as to what he would do . . . She had her home where she was welcome to stay for a while anyhow. Meanwhile, he figured he could weather any storm alone.[55]

In 1903 Jug rejoined her husband who had regained his mental faculties.[56] Not only was Dreiser mentally more secure, but professionally he was advancing in the world of magazine publications. By 1907, five years after his nervous collapse, Dreiser had been contacted by George Wilder, president of Butterick Publishing Company, "one of the nation's biggest, publishers of dress patterns and prim magazines bought by millions of strait-laced women."[57] Wilder offered Dreiser a contract as top editor of the Butterick "Trio," three magazines, the Delineator, the Designer and New Idea Woman's Magazine. Dreiser's contract called for a startling salary of $5,000 a year plus circulation gains.[58] For Jug and Dreiser, the days of want were a thing of the past.

Angela, like Jug, was reunited with her husband after almost a year's absence.[59] Eugene, with Angela's help was stronger mentally, emotionally and physically within a few years and became an illustrative artist. He was eventually

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[55] Ibid., p. 298.

[56] Swanberg, p. 108.

[57] Ibid., p. 118.

[58] Ibid., pp. 118-119.

[59] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 358.

offered the art directorship of the Summerfield Advertising Agency by the President, Mr. Daniel Summerfield.[60] Eugene was paid $75 a week, an enormous sum to a man who had so recently known poverty.[61] Angela and Eugene savored their good fortune.

Despite the financial prosperity and advanced social placement, neither Jug nor Angela was completely happy. Because of their backgrounds, they were unable to accept with suffering the infidelity which was so vital a part of their husbands. Even though Jug knew that marriage to Dreiser meant marriage on Dreiser's terms, she ". . . was too possessive, too conventional, too much the Methodist moralist!"[62] She remembered "her own large and happy farm family"[63] and wanted her husband to remain faithful and true, as had her father.

Dreiser later recalled that "For her, marriage and one love were for life. For myself, whether I admitted it or not, love was a thing much less stable."[64]

Angela believed in and yearned for the same kind of monogamous marriage as did Jug:

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[60] Ibid., p. 415.

[61] Ibid., p. 416.

[62] Swanberg, p. 86.

[63] Ibid., p. 111.

[64] Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p. 426.

> She was not prepared yet to believe, poor little depender on the conventions as she understood them, that the world was full of plots and counter-plots, snares, pitfalls and gins. The way of the faithful and well-meaning woman in marriage should be simple and easy. She should not be harassed by uncertainty of affection, infelicities of temper, indifference or infidelity. If she worked hard, as Angela was trying to do, trying to be a good wife, saving, serving, making sacrifice of her time and services and moods and wishes for her husband's sake, why shouldn't he do the same for her?
>
> She knew of no double standard of virtue. If she had she would not have believed in it. Her parents had raised her to see marriage in a different light. Her father was faithful to her mother. Eugene's father was faithful to his wife--that was perfectly plain. Her brothers-in-law were faithful to his sisters. Why should not Eugene be faithful to her?[65]

Jug and Angela watched their marriages fall apart through an identical set of circumstances. Both Dreiser and Eugene met and fell in love with young women, who, although they did not marry the men, proved alluring enough to destroy their marriages. Dreiser's new love, Thelma, was the daughter of Mrs. Annie Ericson Cudlipp:

> Mrs. Cudlipp, a handsome widow from Richmond, was an assistant editor at Butterick and a frequent guest at the literary soirees at the Dreiser apartment. She had a beautiful and talented seventeen-year-old daughter, Thelma, a brunnette beginner at the Art Students' League who she hoped would rise to success. Jug was fond of the charming widow, and the Dreisers paid visits to the Cudlipp apartment at New Brighton, Staten Island sometimes accompanied by a few of Dreiser's proteges. . . .[66]

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[65] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 281-282.

[66] Swanberg, p. 131.

Eugene's extramarital affair involved Suzanne Dale, whose mother was the fashionable Mrs. Emily Dale.

> Mrs. Dale was a strikingly beautiful and intelligent widow of thirty-eight . . . the widow of an eminent banker of considerable wealth who had been killed in an automobile accident near Paris some years before. She was the mother of four children, Suzanne, eighteen; Kinroy, fifteen; Adele, twelve and Ninette, nine, but the size of her family had in no way affected the subtlety of her social personality and the delicacy of her charm and manner.[67]

While the Dales had many homes, they spent most of their time in the ancestral home on Staten Island.[68] It was at a house party on Long Island that Eugene encountered Mrs. Dale "and their friendship began at once."[69] When Mrs. Dale invited Eugene and Angela to her home, the friendship was secured, for Mrs. Dale liked Angela from their first meeting.[70]

Dreiser met Thelma in the fall of 1909 and saw in her freshness, beauty and art.[71] Jug was not in good health that winter; so Dreiser alone joined the Fantastic Toe Club, a dancing club of which Thelma was also a member. It was not long before Jug and Mrs. Cudlipp became aware of the relationship, and henceforth, "both women began working to break up the attachment."[72]

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[67] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 499.

[68] Ibid., p. 500.

[69] Ibid., p. 501.

[70] Ibid., p. 502.

[71] Swanberg, p. 131.

[72] Ibid., p. 131.

Eugene, like Dreiser, met his new love through his acquaintance with her mother. After about six months of social contact with Mrs. Dale, Eugene and Angela met Suzanne when she helped serve at a tea.[73] Eugene was immediately enthralled with Suzanne.

> Eugene watched her pretty face intently. Her mouth and nose fascinated him. She was so sweet! He noted the configuration of her lips and cheeks and chin. . . . He parted from Miss Dale reluctantly, for she seemed some delicious figure as delicately colorful as Royal Dresden, as perfect in her moods as a spring evening, as soft, soulful, enticing as a strain of music heard through the night at a distance or over the water.[74]

Suzanne was not long in responding to Eugene's feelings and "there followed . . . a series of meetings contrived with difficulty."[75] The difficulty derived from trying to keep Angela, Mrs. Dale and Eugene's bosses from learning of the affair.

Angela, during the time that Eugene and Suzanne were secretly courting, was battling an attack of rheumatic fever. Also, despite her weakened state, she learned she was pregnant.[76]

Angela had a sensitivity much like Jug's, and subsequently, she began to suspect the interest Eugene took in the young Suzanne. One evening Eugene and Suzanne were out on the Witla balcony, oblivious to Angela's presence:

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[73] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 503.

[74] Ibid., p. 505.

[75] Ibid., p. 559.

[76] Ibid., p. 560.

> He began an easy pretence to talk, the while stroking her pretty arm, which was bare. Insanity over her beauty, the loveliness of the night, the charm of the music, had put him beside himself. He drew her into his arms in spite of her protest, only to have Angela suddenly appear at the other end of the room where the door was.[77]

After being discovered, Dreiser was determined to have Thelma, but Jug refused to give him the divorce he requested.[78] Eugene was as determined to keep Suzanne as Dreiser was to keep Thelma. Once Eugene and Suzanne were exposed, Angela, like Jug, refused to consider Eugene's request for a divorce. She told Suzanne, "You can't marry him. I won't give hime a divorce. I can't . . . and he has no grounds for obtaining once."[79]

Eventually, it was the mothers, not the wives, who were the most instrumental in separating the lovers.

> Mrs. Cudlipp . . . had learned something of Dreiser's previous affairs--very possibly Jug listed them for her--and she took melodramatic steps. She told Thelma that her signature was needed for the sale of a house the mother owned in Richmond. Thelma innocently went with her, discovered the deception after reaching Richmond, insisted on returning to New York and boarded a train with her mother which she believed was returning northward. Instead it took them to Saluda, North Carolina, where Thelma was placed in the house of a relative, without money and virtually a captive. Mrs. Cudlipp then returned to New York and issued an ultimatum to Dreiser: If he did not give up Thelma she would lay the whole matter before the executives at Butterick.[80]

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[77] Ibid., p. 561.

[78] Swanberg, p. 133.

[79] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 563.

[80] Swanberg, pp. 133-134.

After many frantic days of trying to persuade Suzanne to give up Eugene, Mrs. Dale developed a plan similar to Mrs. Cudlipp's for separating her daughter from Eugene: "she must get Suzanne out of the city--out of the country, if possible, or lock her up, and she must do it without antagonizing her too much." [81]

Eventually, Mrs. Dale, with the aid of her son Kinroy, worked out a plan to get Suzanne out of New York.

> Finally she thought of pretending to agree with Suzanne, removing all barriers, and asking her to come to Albany to confer with her guardian, or rather the legal representative of the Marquardt Trust Company, which held her share of her father the late Westfield Dale's estate in trust for her, in regard to some property in western New York, which belonged to her. Mrs. Dale decided to pretend to be obliged to go to Albany in order to have Suzanne sign a waiver of right to any share in her mother's private estate, after which, supposedly, she would give Suzanne her freedom, having also disinherited her in her will. Suzanne, according to this scheme, was then to come back to New York and go her way and her mother was not to see her anymore. [82]

Although both mothers were able to get their daughters out of New York, they were not able to completely sever the relationships. As a result, both mothers, who were more able to deal with the situations than the wives, engaged in more deceit.

> Mrs. Cudlipp, in her fear of the half-crazed Dreiser, was deceiving him. Still on speaking terms with him, she insisted that Thelma was too

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[81] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 629.

[82] Ibid., p. 631.

> young but gave him some hope of eventual marriage if the pair would first agree to a long separation. Actually her intention was to separate them forever.[83]

Mrs. Dale's ruse worked and Suzanne found herself in eastern Canada, far away from Eugene.[84] This separation, however, did not totally destroy Eugene and Suzanne's plans, but it did postpone them. Mrs. Dale went so far as to promise to help persuade Angela to divorce Eugene.[85] Like Mrs. Cudlipp, Mrs. Dale used the lie to buy time.

The final act in the melodrama involved Eugene and Dreiser's jobs. Dreiser knew that Mrs. Cudlipp was serious when she told him that if he did not stay away from Thelma, she would report him to his superiors. He also knew that he would lose his position which he treasured. But he was in love, tired of Jug, and disgusted with Mrs. Cudlipp's intervention. He, therefore, ignored her warning. Not only did Mrs. Cudlipp approach Wilder and Ridgway, Dreiser's bosses, and threaten to expose Dreiser to the press,[86] but she also had another piece of information which gave her power in the situation. She "knew of an office romance being carried on by Ridgway and let him know privately that unless Dreiser was fired she would tell about that too."[87] Her threats and

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[83] Swanberg, p. 135.

[84] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 638.

[85] Ibid., p. 653.

[86] Swanberg, p. 134.

[87] Ibid., p. 134.

Dreiser's stubborness proved sufficient, for "Dreiser was fired . . . with the face-saving announcement that he was taking a year's leave of absence."[88]

Mrs. Dale was also responsible for having Eugene fired, but she did so only because he absolutely refused to leave Suzanne. When Mrs. Dale returned to New York from Canada, she immediately went to Eugene's boss, Mr. Colfax, and threatened to create a scandal about the affair.[89] Eugene's boss was convinced that a scandal would hurt the business, and so Eugene was released from his job and told to "take a year off and think things out."[90]

Dreiser's attempts to have Thelma all to himself were in vain. Mrs. Cudlipp was given a year's leave of absence at Butterick's, and she and Thelma sailed for England; "Dreiser was not given their London address--was forbidden to communicate with Thelma for a year."[91] The year was sufficient to destroy the relationship, but also destroyed were Dreiser's prestigious position and Jug's financial security as well as her marriage. Two days after Dreiser was fired from Butterick's, he left Jug and took a room at a New York hotel.[92]

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[88] Ibid., p. 135.

[89] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 662.

[90] Ibid., p. 666.

[91] Swanberg, p. 138.

[92] Ibid., p. 135.

Eugene and Suzanne's denouement was much the same as Dreiser and Thelma's. The result of all Eugene's efforts to possess the beautiful Suzanne was failure, for she sailed to England with her mother. Eugene's problem with Angela was solved simply and easily: she died in childbirth.[93]

Mrs. Theodore Dreiser and Mrs. Eugene Witla both shared the joys and sorrows of marriage to men who were temperamentally unsuited for marriage. They watched in horror as young, pretty women took first place in their husbands' affection. Both women lost position, health and financial security as a result of the affairs, but worst of all, the lost the men they loved.

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[93] Dreiser, The "Genius," p. 724.

CHAPTER V

LIFE PORTRAITS OF DREISER'S SECOND WIFE, HELEN PATGES RICHARDSON

Theodore Dreiser's life and works were filled with curious and uncanny situations, especially where women were concerned. One of the unique situations involving a real-life woman and a fictional character concerns the striking resemblance between Helen Patges Richardson, Dreiser's long-time mistress and second wife, and Aileen Butler Cowperwood, heroine of The Trilogy of Desire. What made their similarities peculiar was that Aileen existed in Dreiser's mind and in print several years before Helen came into his life. Dreiser published The Financier, the first of his three books dealing with Charles Yerkes, the business tycoon in October, 1912.[1] However, Helen recorded that The Financier, featuring Aileen as the heroine, was forming in his mind as early as 1904.[2] The Titan was published in 1914[3], and thirty-three years later the trilogy was completed with The Stoic in 1947.[4] Helen

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[1] W. A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York: Scribners, 1956), p. 161.

[2] Helen Dreiser, My Life with Dreiser (New York: World, 1951), p. 81.

[3] Swanberg, p. 174.

[4] Ibid., p. 527.

entered Dreiser's life in September, 1919[5], and began, in many ways, to reenact Aileen's story.

"The Financier, like all of his novels, was a fictional rendering of fact."[6] However, the events in Dreiser's fiction more than once appeared before the fact. "Hurstwood in his disorientation and terrible ruin is a picture of what Dreiser feared he himself might become. It is an almost clairvoyant preview of the depths which indeed he did approach a few years later."[7] In 1900 Dreiser suffered a nervous breakdown which lasted for three years when he had difficulty getting Sister Carrie published. He became very despondent as his marriage to Jug was torture and he felt that he was losing his creativity, along with his health. By the end of 1903, Dreiser had recovered sufficiently and was once again employed as a writer.[8] Just as Dreiser gave a "clairvoyant preview" of his own downfall in the character of Hurstwood, he also gave a similar preview of his long, involved affair with Helen Patges Richardson in the person of Aileen Butler Cowperwood. Aileen was the kind of woman Dreiser himself needed, and his search for a woman with Aileen's beauty, personality, strength and weakness was ended when Helen entered his life.

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[6] Swanberg, p. 146.

[7] Tanner, James B., unpublished notes, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1973.

[8] Swanberg, pp. 94-108.

Both Aileen and Helen were beautiful, physically attractive women. Aileen, upon arriving at the Cowperwood's for a party, was described as

> . . . naturally of exquisite figure, erect, full-breasted, with somewhat more than gentle swelling hips. . . . Her full, smooth, roundly modeled neck was enhanced in its cream pink whiteness by an inch-wide necklet of black jet cut in many faceted black squares. Her complexion, naturally high in tone because of the pink of health, was enhanced by the tiniest speck of black court-plaster laid upon her cheekbone; and her hair, heightened in its reddish-gold by her dress, was fluffed loosely and adroitly about her eyes.[9]

Helen, too, had charming physical attributes, as she was ". . . tall, shapely, sinuous, sensual, with a smiling face framed by a mass of gold-chestnut hair."[10] Because of their good looks and enticing personalities, Aileen and Helen had no trouble attracting men.

> Aileen always reminded Cowperwood of a high-stepping horse without a check-rein. He met her at various times, shopping with her mother, out driving with her father, and he was always interested and amused at the affected, bored tone she assumed before him--the 'Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Life is so tiresome, don't you know,' when, as a matter of fact, every moment of it was of thrilling interest to her. Cowperwood took her mental measurement exactly. A girl with a high sense of life in her, romantic, full of the thought of love and its possibilities. As he looked at her he had the sense of seeing the best that nature can do when she attempts to produce physical perfection. The thought came to him that some lucky young dog would marry her pretty

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[9] Theodore Dreiser, The Financier (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927), pp. 123-124.

[10] Swanberg, p. 241.

> soon and carry her away; but whoever secured her would have to hold her by affection and subtle flattery and attention if he held her at all.[11]

Dreiser, in writing of his first look at Helen as she came to his apartment, introducing herself as his second cousin, recalled:

> . . . I opened the door . . . welcoming her as I would a beautiful light in a dungeon. And her smile and her eyes were all light. I would scarcely have imagined up to that moment that any so glorious a maid could have been kin to me. A painted flower in a meadow, say, as contrasted with a coarse weed in a city lot. A little mincing gazelle and a tusked boar, wild and evil--Pierette decked for a May party and old Boreas scowling darkly by her side.[12]

The feeling of being enchanted with a newly discovered person was reciprocated by both women. Even before Aileen became Cowperwood's mistress, she realized that she had a tremendous, vibrant feeling about him:

> When he touched her hand at parting, it was as though she had received an electric shock, and she recalled that it was very difficult for her to look directly into his eyes. Something akin to a destructive force seemed to issue from them at times.[13]

Helen was smitten from her very first encounter with Dreiser in his studio. When he asked her to write her name on a sheet of paper, Helen reacted in almost a school-girl manner:

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[11] Dreiser, The Financier, p. 89.

[12] Helen Dreiser, p. 7.

[13] The Financier, p. 137.

> I could scarcely hold the pen, my hand trembled so, and I had a keen desire to run away to the safety of my own room so I could think about this meeting, for I felt that something different and important had happened to me. After a few moments, I started to leave, inwardly more nervous and excited and bewildered than I had ever been in my life. I felt as if I had been looking for Dreiser all my life.[14]

There was one identical situation which existed that could have placed clouds over the new love relationships, that being the fact that both Cowperwood and Dreiser were legally and morally bound to other women. However, neither Aileen nor Helen allowed that factor to mar their happiness. Aileen, in the initial stages of her love, felt that it was love, not matrimony she desired: "She did not know that she wanted to interfere with the claims of his wife. She did not think she did. But it would not hurt Mrs. Cowperwood if Frank loved her--Aileen--also."[15] Helen chose to ignore the existence of Mrs. Dreiser. During her first visit with Dreiser she asked if she might meet Mrs. Dreiser, to which Dreiser responded, "No, I live alone."[16] After that, the subject was closed.

Whereas both Cowperwood and Dreiser were married, the role that Aileen and Helen were to play was that of mistress. Ironically, neither of the women hesitated to become concubines. Cowperwood tried to delicately explain the nature of the matter to Aileen:

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[14] Helen Dreiser, pp. 4-9.

[15] The Financier, p. 141.

[16] Helen Dreiser, p. 4.

> He explained the whole theory of illicit meetings calmly, dispassionately. "You are perfectly safe, except for one thing, chance exposure. It might just so happen; and then, of course, there would be a great deal to settle for. Mrs. Cowperwood would never give me a divorce, she has no reason to.
>
> He paused. Still gazed thoughtfully at the water below, her mind running out to a yacht on a sea with him, a palace somewhere--just they two. Her eyes, half closed, saw this happy world; and, listening to him, she was fascinated.[17]

Later, Cowperwood rented a home which was used solely for liaisons with Aileen. She visited the home often.[18]

Within a month after their meeting, Helen accompanied Dreiser on a ship to New Orleans and then went on to Los Angeles. They lived together in Los Angeles for three years.[19]

For Aileen and Helen alike, their new-found loves were the men they had been dreaming of and envisioning for years. With Aileen, Cowperwood had existed inside her mind since her early teens:

> For the past nine or ten years there had been slowly forming in her mind a notion of what her lover should be like. He should be strong, handsome, direct, successful, with clear eyes, a ruddy glow of health, and a certain native understanding and sympathy--a love of life which matched her own. Many young men had approached her . . . then came Frank Cowperwood and by degrees, because of his presence and contact, he had been slowly built up in her mind as the ideal person. She was drawn as planets are drawn to their sun.[20]

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[17] The Financier, p. 144.

[18] Ibid., p. 146.

[19] Helen Dreiser, p. 26.

[20] The Financier, p. 139.

As for Helen, Dreiser was the end of a long quest for the ideal man:

> I felt as if I had been looking for Dreiser all my life. I recalled a conversation I had had a few months before with a young man who had been paying considerable attention to me. We got to talking about men, and he asked me rather impatiently what kind of man I wanted anyhow. When I told him, he said contemptuously, "you don't want a man, you want a god!'
>
> 'Maybe so,' I replied, 'but I'll meet him one of these days, I know I will.'
>
> And now I realized that the outline of the man I had drawn in the empty frame was a perfect likeness, spiritually, mentally, and physically, of Dreiser himself.[21]

In the early years of the two relationships, both Cowperwood and Dreiser were completely captivated by the women. Cowperwood, having dismissed his wife as beneath him, felt that Aileen was the woman to complement his way of life:

> These two felt unutterably bound to each other. Cowperwood, once he came to understand her, fancied that he had the rest of his life. She was so young, so confident, so hopeful, so undismayed. All these months since they had first begun to reach out to each other he had been hourly contrasting her with his wife.[22]

Dreiser declared his eternal affection at dusk one evening on a hilltop overlooking Los Angeles. Taking Helen's hand in his, Dreiser sobbingly declared, "I shall never leave you, Helen! Never."[23] It was a promise she never forgot.

The fact that the two couples were not legally bound to each other did not alter the psychological climate of the

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[21] Helen Dreiser, p. 9.

[22] The Financier, p. 147.

[23] Helen Dreiser, p. 40.

situation; they were both endeavoring to merge two lives and personalities into one, which called for major decisions and sacrifices to be made by someone. Aileen was faced with the grave situation of parental disapproval versus the man she loved. Choosing Frank Coperwood, she felt it necessary to leave the family home. Before running away, Aileen wrote her father the following:

> Dear Father, -- I just cannot do what you want me to. I have made up my mind that I love Mr. Cowperwood too much, so I am going away. Don't look for me with him. You won't find me where you think. I am not going to him; I will not be there. I am going to try to get along by myself for awhile, until he wants me and can marry me. I'm terribly sorry; but I just can't do what you want. I can't ever forgive you for the way you acted to me.[24]

Helen's decision involved either pursuing a movie career or pursuing Dreiser. Dreiser needed to return to New York to visit the actual scene where Grace Brown had been murdered by Chester Gillette, the basis of his forthcoming novel, An American Tragedy, while Helen needed to be in California to continue in her movie career.

> The decision was final, there was no other way. We would have to discard our little home and move eastward. I knew that New York meant change, and I was afraid of change; yet I realized that Dreiser belonged to the world, not to me alone. As for my picture career, I knew I should stay in California and Teddie agreed on the wisdom of this. But the movies had no real hold on me.[25]

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[24] The Financier, p. 374.

[25] Helen Dreiser, p. 63.

Aileen chose Cowperwood over her family for essentially the same reason that Helen chose Dreiser over her movie career; both women believed that their lot in life would improve if they remained in the shadows of such great men:

> . . . Instinctively in Cowperwood Aileen recognized a way out--a door--and by the same token a subtle impending artistic future of great magnificence. This man would rise beyond anything he now dreamed of--she felt it. There was in him, in some nebulous, unrecognizable form, a great artistic reality which was finer than anything she could plan for herself. She wanted luxury, magnificence, social station. Well, if she could get this man they would come to her. There were, apparently, insuperable barriers in the way; but hers was no weakling nature, and neither was his. They ran together temperamentally from the first like two leopards. Her own thoughts--crude, half formulated, half spoken--nevertheless matched his to a degree in the equality of their force and their raw directness.[26]

Helen declared, "I longed to develop spiritually, mentally, and artistically. Where, I thought, could I do this better than at the side of so great a man as Dreiser?"[27]

Aileen, having foresaken her family and friends, broke all ties with her Philadelphia life and moved with Cowperwood to Chicago. After Cowperwood had obtained a divorce, he and Aileen were married in an obscure Pennsylvania town.[28] Unfortunately, Aileen's dreams of happiness with Cowperwood were marred by the fact that he was no longer satisfied with the love and adoration of one woman:

> When he had first met Aileen he had many keen intuitions regarding life and sex, and above all clear

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[26] The Financier, p. 164.

[27] Helen Dreiser, p. 64.

[28] Theodore Dreiser, The Titan (New York: John Lane, 1914), p. 31.

> faith that he had a right to do as he pleased. Since he had been out of prison and once more on his upward way there had been many a stray glance cast in his direction; he had so often had it clearly forced upon him that he was fascinating to women. Although he had only so recently acquired Aileen legally, yet she was years old to him as a mistress, and that the first engrossing--it had been almost all-engrossing--beauty, but for her faithful enthusiasm; but the power of others to provide in him a momentary interest, and passion even, was something which he did not pretend to understand, explain, or moralize about. So it was and so he was. He did not want to hurt Aileen's feelings by letting her know that his impulses thus wantonly strayed to others, but so it was.[29]

Just as Aileen's dreams were tainted by other women, Helen's life with Dreiser after the three years in California was markedly different. Upon returning to New York, Dreiser and Helen took up separate residences, as Dreiser recoiled from their marital-like relationship. "Fond though he was of her, he regarded love as essentially a selfish passion and was determined to be free."[30] Helen later recalled, "In Circulating and meeting people, he had become involved in several light attachments which eventually narrowed down to one serious emotional entanglement, and a real triangle developed."[31]

Feelings and passions which ran deep were characteristic of both Aileen and Helen, and subsequently, their reactions to other women were often quite strong. When Aileen discovered that Cowperwood had been having an affair with her good friend, Rita Sohlberg, she calmly invited Rita up to her

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[29] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[30] Swanberg, pp. 26-27.

[31] Helen Dreiser, pp. 67-68.

boudoir one day when Rita was visiting. After accusing Rita of trying to steal Cowperwood,

> Aileen descended upon her in a whirlwind, animal fashion, striking, scratching, choking, tearing her visitor's hat from her head, ripping the laces from her neck, beating her in the face, and clutching violently at her hair and throat to choke and mar her beauty if she could. For the moment she was really crazy with rage.[32]

Helen, tormented by so many female rivals for Dreiser's time and affection, once had to be restrained by Louise Campbell, a Dreiser assistant, from tossing a plaster head of Dreiser out the window. The sculpture was a gift from a woman he admired,and Helen despised it so that she neglected to consider the people on the street thirteen stories below.[33]

Living with a man who desired many women proved to be unnerving and emotionally draining for Aileen, as it did for Helen. Aileen ranted, raved and threw temper tantrums[34] in an effort to free her troubled soul from its heavy burden. Helen, faced with the exact problem, periodically left Dreiser. Traveling to Oregon and California in 1924, Helen wrote that she "was spiritually exhausted and ill."[35] It was not to be her last trip to escape her highly-charged love affair.

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[32] The Titan, p. 147.

[33] Swanberg, p. 356.

[34] The Titan, p. 247.

[35] Helen Dreiser, p. 92.

Aileen Cowperwood was noted in her youth for being a person of force and spirit, characteristics which had initially attracted Cowperwood to her.

> She supplied something he had not previously known or consciously craved. Vitality and vivacity. No other woman or girl whom he had ever known had possessed so much innate force as she. . . . Healthy and vigorous, she was chronically interested in men--what they would think of her--and how she compared with other women.[36]

However, her great love for Cowperwood and the discovery of his unfaithfulness uncovered her basic insecurity. As shamefully as he treated her, she was unable to live without him, preferring to live through a hellish marriage. "To take the love of a man like Cowperwood away from a woman like Aileen was to leave her high and dry on land, as a fish out of its native element, to take all the wind out of her sails--almost to kill her."[37]

Helen likewise discovered that under her self-assured, confident exterior, there was a woman who was woefully insecure when placed outside the circle of Dreiser's life. Returning from California, Helen again lived with Dreiser and re-entered his unique lifestyle, which afforded her little peace.

> It was now December 1, 1925. We had taken the apartment in Brooklyn almost a year before. What had happened that year? For one thing, I had lived through the most complicated emotional experiences of my entire life. But, I will always know that I learned more in that one year than I ever learned in any five years up

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[36] The Financier, p. 90.

[37] The Titan, p. 145.

> to that time. For I was enveloped in an emotional triangle, in which Dreiser's creative mood cared for nothing but its expression and accomplishment, over which no one had control. While I had no contact whatsoever with the other woman, I felt her every mood and vibration as they registered in Teddie. It seemed there was a living seething current flowing back and forth, touching us all with its penetrating force. Even Dreiser, with his great strength, was battered by it.[38]

Music proved to be an emotional escape for the two women. A bruised soul often speaks through music, and many times after the tantrums and raving Aileen would express her hurt on the piano. After one violent fight with Cowperwood, Aileen

> . . . swung out of the room with a defiant air. . . and went down to the music room, from whence a few moments later there rolled up to him from the hall below the strains of the second Hungarian Rhapsody, feelingly and for once movingly played. Into it Aileen put some of her own wild woe and misery.[39]

Helen had studied vocally since childhood, and tried, sometimes unsuccessfully, to pursue a singing career. Her music often reflected her unstable relationship with Dreiser:

> One day I would sing very freely and happily, expressing myself. Another day I would come in hardly able to stand, hazy and confused. This exhaustion emanated from Theodore, his mood about me or his temporary abandonment of me, or so I imagined, which seemed to rob me of my strength.[40]

After initial passionate love had turned to violent reaction against any women that caught Cowperwood's eye, eventually a calming thought pervaded Aileen's soul: she decided that she could endure his many loves, as long as he did not

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[38] Helen Dreiser, p. 113.

[39] The Titan, p. 315.

[40] Helen Dreiser, p. 67.

form a strong alliance with any single woman. "So long, indeed, as Cowperwood was genuinely promiscuous, so long as he trotted here and there, not snared by any particular siren, she could not despair. . . ."[41]

Helen, after running away from Dreiser only to return more despondent than before, found her consolation in the fact that it was she, Helen, to whom Dreiser always returned.[42]

Ironically, feeling passionate love for one man, both Aileen and Helen had unfulfilling affairs with other men. Aileen's affair with Polk Lynde, a young actor, was short-lived, but it eventually did Aileen's aching spirit more harm than good:

> . . . She was now grieving over the futility of this romance which had got her nowhere, and which, in all probability, had alienated Cowperwood for good. . . . Their relationship was now colored by a sense of mistake and uncertainty which existed on both sides, but which, in Aileen's case, amounted to a subtle species of soul-torture. Hitherto she had been the aggrieved one, the one whose loyalty had never been in question, and whose persistent affection and faith had been greatly sinned against. Now all this was changed.[43]

Helen's affair amounted to little more than a friendship with a young musician that she referred to as Jason. When she asked Dreiser if he would object to her forming an emotional attachment with someone, he flew into a rage. Helen paid for her indiscretion:

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[41] The Titan, p. 499.

[42] Helen Dreiser, p. 94.

[43] The Titan, p. 383.

> An impregnable door was closed against me. If I thought I had been neglected and lonely in times past, I was to learn what spiritual isolation meant. True, he showed no indication that he wanted me to actually leave him, but he seemed to be trying to kill me by degrees with neglect and indifference. Day after day he spent most of his time away from the apartment. If he came in during the late afternoon, it was merely to dress for dinner and an evening out.[44]

A new dimension, like an added curse, became evident in the relationships. With women too weak to leave them and particularly willing to abide their indiscretions, Cowperwood and Dreiser both became vicious in their attempts to degrade their women. In an effort to be rid of a prying Aileen so that he might delight himself in Bernice Fleming, Cowperwood employed a young European named Tollifer to entertain and amuse his disconsolate wife. Aileen, at first flattered by so much attention, eventually learned the truth. She was wild with anger:

> To think that any man should stoop to such degrading employment! To think that she, Frank Algernon Cowperwood's wife, due to her husband's plotting should be the victim of it! To be thus publicly displayed as an unwanted wife, one so distasteful to her husband that he had to hire help to get rid of her![45]

Some of Helen's most degrading moments occurred after the success of An American Tragedy when they lived in a lavish apartment and entertained regularly.

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[44] Helen Dreiser, p. 149.

[45] Theodore Dreiser, The Stoic (New York: Doubleday, 1947), p. 208.

> Proud to show off Helen's beauty in this splendid setting, he felt he had made great concessions to her in supplying it and in displaying her to the world as his mistress. In return he wanted his own sexual freedom. Usually, to keep the peace, he conducted his other affairs with some degree of secrecy. . . . When Helen objected to one of his affairs in particular he reacted with explosive brutality.
>
> He brought the girl home, telling Helen that as a lesson to her he would spend the night with the newcomer and wanted not a word of complaint. He did this and in the morning Helen, utterly cowed, served the pair breakfast without reproach.[46]

While a loss of self-respect and personal worth became deeply engraved upon both women's characters, Aileen and Helen drew their consolations from the fact that, despite innumerable affairs, each still remained as the central woman in their husband's lives. Aileen drew strength from the fact that she would be the last Mrs. Frank Cowperwood and that, ". . . after all, she had ensnared him and held him deliciously--without variation, she believed, for all of ten years--a feat which no other had achieved before or after."[47] While Helen always gloried in the fact that she was mistress to so great a man as Dreiser, her courage to remain with him was buoyed when after twenty-five years, he decided to marry her. Helen wrote of the wedding:

> What a privileged woman I was to have had such a companion! Here we were at the end of a long journey, to stand before a justice of the peace who would place

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[46] Swanberg, p. 320.

[47] The Titan, p. 499.

> an official seal, like a period, on a long relationship that had withstood many trials.[48]

Through years of countless affairs and momentary loves, Cowperwood retained a special place in his heart for Aileen, as did Dreiser for Helen. Cowperwood, after contemplating leaving Aileen for Bernice Fleming, chose to remain with Aileen, at least legally:

> Yet for all the courage of him for the very life of him, he could not tell her. He could not forget that once, behind the grim bars in the penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, he had cried on her shoulders. He could not be an ingrate and wound her with his inmost thoughts any more than he could deceive himself. A New York mansion and the dreams of social supremacy which she might there entertain would soothe her ruffled vanity and assuage her disappointed heart. . . .[49]

Helen, because she knew his every mood, ". . . proved in the end to be the one woman without whom he could not get along."[50] Once during one of Helen's visits to California in order to retore her troubled spirit, Dreiser wrote:

> You are never out of my heart. I may have said harsh things and seemingly meant them--even to myself at moments. I may have seemed cruel and to you have been cruel, but I have tortured myself more in so doing because within me you have always been--safe and centered in my very heart--and when I have hurt you I have felt so sad afterwards--ah--so very sad.[51]

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[48] Helen Dreiser, p. 299.

[49] The Titan, p. 388.

[50] Swanberg, p. 341.

[51] Helen Dreiser, p. 99.

Both Cowperwood and Dreiser died before Aileen and Helen. The nearness of death caused both men to think more gently of the women who had loved them so dearly. Frank, as he lay dying, dictated a letter to Aileen:

> Aileen, I am dying. When this reaches you, I will be no more. I know all my sins and all those you charge me with, and I blame only myself. But I cannot forget the Aileen who helped me through my prison days in Philadelphia. Yet it will not help me now, or either of us, to say I am sorry. But somehow, I felt that in the depths of your heart you will forgive me, once I am gone. Also it comforts me to know that you will be taken care of. I have arranged for all that, as you know. So now, good-bye, Aileen! No more evil thoughts from your Frank, no more ever![52]

Helen's reconciliation was of a more durable nature, although it, too, came as death approached :

> Never in our long relationship of twenty-six years had we ever been so close, mentally, spiritually and physically as we were this last year of his life. If a woman ever experienced a complete renewal of her love life combined with a new depth of spirit, I had that joy. And no one could have been more surprised. Teddie flooded me with his love. He praised me for things I had long forgotten, and expressed many little tendernesses I didn't know he was capable of.[53]

Frank Cowperwood left the bulk of his estate to Aileen.[54] After his death, she remained faithful to him by continuing to carry out his business ventures as he directed.[55] When Aileen died she was laid to rest beside the man to whom she had given over thirty years of her life.[56] Likewise, Dreiser left Helen

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[52] The Stoic, p. 270

[53] Helen Dreiser, p. 309.

[54] The Stoic, p. 255.

[55] Ibid., 283.

[56] Ibid., 285.

the bulk of his estate, a sum of over $100,000.[57] After Dreiser's death, Helen, like Aileen,dedicated herself to completing her husband's business. Ironically, it was The Stoic, the last of Aileen's story,which required Helen's time and energy.[58] And finally, in 1955, Helen was buried beside the man she had chosen as her religion--Theodore Dreiser.[59]

Mrs. Frank Cowperwood and Mrs. Theodore Dreiser were two women, cast from the same mold, who proved that love endures. They loved with passions which could not be checked and sacrificed beyond comprehension. Their roles as concubines, lovers, and wives were drawn by Dreiser himself with the fictional character touching his life before the real-life person.

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[57] Swanberg, p. 527.

[58] Ibid., p. 527.

[59] Ibid., p. 528.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The novels of Theodore Dreiser are rich in women characters based upon life portraits of women important in his life. These characters, Jennie Gerhardt, Mrs. William Gerhardt, Carrie Meeber, Roberta Alden, Esta Griffiths, Mrs. Elvira Griffiths, Etta Barnes, Angela Blue and Aileen Cowperwood, provide an understanding of Dreiser himself as well as his views of women. They are women who, without exception, have needs, desires, wants and passions which are common to all women. They know what it is to experience life's sharp realities and taste life's bitter inequities.

In his novels Dreiser's theories of naturalism become reality in his women characters. He tells the truth about their lives as he saw it. Refusing to be persuaded by the romanticists that life was good, kind and full of hope, he wrote of the cruelties and hardships of life. He saw women suffer, the victims of society, life, and a merciless fate, just as his characters do. As far as Dreiser's women characters were concerned, he did not have to look far for models who had encountered the vicissitudes of life: within

his immediate family were women who found life more a burden than a gift. By using those women as models, he created a group of women characters unparalleled in American letters for their encounters with the negative forces of life.

The most significant family member who served as a model for Dreiser's fictional characters was his mother, Sarah Schanab Dreiser, the greatest positive force in his life. From Dreiser's earliest recollections it was Sarah who believed in him, had confidence in his abilities and encouraged him to strive for life's best. Dreiser returned Sarah's affection and truly adored her; indeed, there was no other woman in his life that he loved with the consistency and depth that he loved his mother. Nor was there any other woman for whom he felt so keenly the injustices of life. Dawn and A Book About Myself are filled with paragraphs railing against a world that treated a woman of his mother's temperament so unkindly. Despite tragedy and misfortune, Sarah looked at life with an attitude of love, and it was her love spirit which Dreiser used to characterize his women who were noted for goodness and love.

Jennie Gerhardt, Dreiser's young heroine whose suffering is almost without relief, has the same forgiving, courageous spirit as Sarah Dreiser. The trials and tribulations to which Dreiser subjects Jennie are no worse than those to which his mother was subjected. Dreiser invested in Jennie Sarah's

ability to cope with the worst and believe in the best. Dreiser realized that his mother's loving nature was the exception rather than the rule; hence, Jennie is the rarest of his women characters, the only one of his heroines with his mother's loving nature. Jennie inherited the paradox which surrounded Sarah's life; to the world, she was a nothing, but to those whose lives she touched, she was the greatest of women.

The word "mother" was synonymous with "Sarah" in Dreiser's mind, and like Sarah, the mothers in his novels are protective, gentle, trusting and understanding. Mrs. William Gerhardt and Mrs. Elvira Griffiths were both created with Sarah in mind. They love their children earnestly and work hard trying to provide them with the best. Like Sarah, they know what it was to lie to protect a child, comfort a pregnant daughter, and nurse each child in his time of sickness. Dreiser remembered Sarah's lack of knowledge and foresight when he created Mrs. Gerhardt and Mrs. Griffiths,and he allowed them to suffer the consequences as did Sarah. She was the "love mother" and they were cast from the same mold.

Dreiser's mother was not the only woman member of his family to serve as material for his novels; four of his older sisters, Mame, Emma, Theresa and Sylvia,also had their experiences and personalities incorporated into the women characters of his novels. Dreiser did not feel the same kind of

love for his sisters that he did for his mother; so their contribution to his work was of a different kind. To Dreiser, his sisters represented what traditional, staid, cruel society, combined with poverty, could do to destroy youth and beauty.

The Dreiser sisters had moral standards which differed from the society of their day. Although Dreiser was not extremely close to his sisters, he felt keenly the social ostracism they endured because the world considered them "immoral." He also was deeply touched by their battle against proverty and their desire to obtain a respectable position in society. Their problems with men and town gossips became, in part, his problem. He suffered for them as they struggled for freedom from their father's firm grip, and he empathized with them in their love for their mother.

Sister Carrie, Dreiser's first novel, is based on a part of Emma Dreiser's life, demonstrating Dreiser's awareness of his sister's plight at the very outset of his writing career. Carrie Meeber differs from Emma Dreiser in that she never had to pay the price for ignoring society's moral code. Carrie's life is, perhaps, Dreiser's wish for all his sisters; the detachment, the success, the wisdom to remain uninvolved. Carrie, unlike the Dreiser girls, is not passionate and involved with life; she never has gossips talking about her, she never becomes pregnant, she is never rejected by a lover and she never lets her heart rule her head. Carrie, although

fashioned after Emma Dreiser, is unlike her in that Dreiser allows her to fly successfully in the face of convention.

Jennie Gerhardt, another detailed female portrait, is the opposite of Carrie Meeber. Jennie, like Dreiser's sisters, pays dearly for ignoring society's moral code. As Dreiser reflected upon his sisters' vain struggle for acceptance into "decent" society, he wove the incidents of Jennie's life. Jennie, pregnant by a United States Senator, almost bridges the gap between her world and the world of society, but not quite, just as Dreiser's sisters were never able to. Jennie, the innocent victim, is punished for her sins, but her transgressor goes unpunished. Dreiser transferred his sisters' shame and remorse to Jennie when she commits the ultimate sin against society by having an illegitimate child. The hurt Dreiser attaches to Jennie is a reflection of the hurt he observed in his sisters.

Roberta Alden, like the Dreiser sisters, is another young girl who falls in love with a young man who feels he is above her socially. Dreiser often observed the young men who used his sisters, but would not take them home to dinner with their families, and he invested the same hurt and anguish his sisters' experienced into Roberta Alden. Roberta is sweet and lovely but tragic because like the Dreiser sisters, she tries to invade a world which is closed to her.

When Dreiser wrote An American Tragedy and created the Griffiths family, his frame of reference for the oldest daughter was his own sisters. Esta Griffiths, like all the Dreiser girls, is poor, uneducated, forced to adhere to a religion she does not believe in and ignorant in the ways of the world. Esta, like Sylvia and Mame Dreiser, is used by a man and then left to suffer the consequences by herself. Dreiser had Esta do the same thing he had seen his sisters do--return home to her mother and let her raise the child.

The background and experiences of Etta Barnes differ greatly from that of the Dreiser sisters. She is born to loving, well-to-do parents and knows very few of the cruel aspects of life until she is in her teens. However, Dreiser still found it necessary to lift a situation from the Dreiser family history and incorporate it into Etta's story. Dreiser never forgot his sister Theresa's faithfulness to Sarah when the latter lay dying. Theresa emerged as the central, guiding child in the time of crisis. As Solon Barnes lies dying, Etta, like Theresa, becomes the nurse, aid, comforter and friend to her father. Dreiser incorporated Theresa's gentleness and sensitivity during that special time into Etta Barnes as she faces the same crisis.

Sarah White Dreiser (Jug), Dreiser's first wife, served as material for only one character, Angela Blue. Angela is

so much a replica of Jug, however, that it is difficult to think of her as being fictional. With the possible exception of Angela's pregnancy and subsequent death, her life follows Jug's in almost all respects. Dreiser wrote The "Genius" to purge his soul and to tell the world his side of his marriage and his affair with Thelma Cudlipp. He had no shame in revealing to the world that Jug, in the guise of Angela Blue, had a bad temper, responded to him sexually and had a tendency to nag. While his other women characters were conceived out of love and loyalty, Angela Blue remains the one Dreiser heroine based on a family portrait who was conceived out of revenge.

Helen Patges Richardson, Dreiser's second wife, had a stronger influence over him than did any other woman, save his mother. Dreiser needed Helen for many reasons: her beauty, her belief in his talent, her need to mother and protect him, and, most of all, her willingness to stay even when he mistreated her. In creating Aileen Cowperwood to fulfill the lover-mistress-faithful wife role in Cowperwood's life, Dreiser was expressing his desire for such a woman. When Helen entered his life in 1919, he discovered the one woman who would remain with him until the end.

The personalities, drives, ambitions, dreams and experiences of the women in Theodore Dreiser's family had a direct influence when he created the female characters in his eight novels. His mother, sisters and wives touched his life in

such a forceful way, both positively and negatively, that as he expressed himself through the art of fiction, they, too, were revealed. Jennie Gerhardt, Mrs. William Gerhardt, Carrie Meeber, Roberta Alden, Esta Griffiths, Mrs. Elvira Griffiths, Etta Barnes, Angela Blue and Aileen Cowperwood were all modeled, to various degrees, on a Dreiser woman.

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