

二十世纪英美文学精选

*Highlights of 20th
Century
British & American
Literature*

下卷

翁德修
陈永国
吴景惠
主 编

美国文学



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翁德修 陈永国 吴景惠

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再版前言

20 世纪英美文学的发展实际上是两千多年来横跨欧美两大洲几十个国家文明发展的自然结晶和集成。它起源于古希腊罗马文学和圣经文学,经文艺复兴和古典主义、浪漫主义、现实主义、自然主义以及各种现代主义文学运动,发展到 20 世纪,以其迭起的思潮和纷呈的流派显示了强大的艺术生命力,成为世界文学的瑰宝。

本书集 20 世纪英美两国的杰出作家和优秀作品于一体,力图反映其丰富多彩的艺术方法、风格、思潮和流派。为了适应英语专业文学课教学大纲的要求,满足英语自学者深化文学理解力和拓宽知识面的需要,我们在编写体例上突出重点作家的代表作品,力求全面反映 20 世纪英美文学发展的历史脉络,并对所选作家及作品加以评介,同时附有关于历史、神话、宗教、文化和语言等方面的注释和关于选文的思考题,是为入门之导引。

本书原收 20 名英国作家、22 名美国作家,合为一册出版。此次再版新增 4 名美国作家、1 名英国作家,时间上进一步推后到 20 世纪 80 年代末,分为英国卷、美国卷两册印刷,其它体例保持不变。现在本书共收小说、诗歌和戏剧计 47 篇。此外,英国卷后附上了 170 个常用的文学用语,除旨在为教学提供更新、更全面的素材外,也希望准备英美文学研究生入学考试的同学使用起来更为方便。本着文责自负的原则,我们在每篇评介后附上编写者的姓名,以资读者查鉴。限于水平,问题难免,欢迎读者教正。另,由于资料短缺,美国文学所增有限,英国方面尤有欠缺,只好留待下次再版予以弥补了。

编者

2000 年 8 月于长春

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THEODORE DREISER

Theodore Dreiser (1871—1954) is considered the first American writer who did not follow the old American tradition, and who is the pioneer and the guide of naturalism in American literature. Though he was born in America, he was the outsider, the yearner, and that fact determines the basic mood of his work.

He was born in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1871. He spent his childhood in misery and humiliation. Dreiser received formal schooling in an Indiana high school, where a high school teacher encouraged him to go to Indiana University. He stayed in that University for only one year, because he didn't think the curriculum concerned ordinary life. By the age of fifteen, Dreiser began to make his own living by doing various odd jobs. Dreiser experienced much family life during the period of his growing up. His sisters with their wayward lives and illegitimate children supplied him with his stories. From 1891 on, Dreiser gained his experience from newspapers.

In 1900, his first novel *Sister Carrie* was published. In 1907, it was reprinted and received the attention it deserved. His other books include *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914), and *The Stoic* (1947). *The Genius* was published in 1915. It was a fictionalized version of Dreiser's early efforts as a writer. Dreiser's masterpiece *An American Tragedy* was published in 1925. The novel was based on an actual murder trial.

Dreiser's thinking was deeply influenced by the evolutionary writers, especially Huxley, Spencer and Darwin. He was taught to view life as a massive struggle for survival. Based on these ideas he worked out his own theories about human behavior in terms of compulsions or "chemisms". He declared that the existence of modern man is inescapably tragic. He regarded man as merely an animal driven by greed and lust in a struggle for existence in which only the "fittest", the most ruthless, can survive. According to Dreiser, man is only a "mechanism" reacting to "chemic compulsions". Human actions and human tragedy are the result of the collision between man's biological

needs and the society's ruthless manipulation. Everything is determined by a complex of the internal chemisms and the social forces. So like all naturalists, Dreiser emphasizes determinism in his works, and his characters are subject to the control of the natural forces, especially of environment and heredity. Nearly all of his works have tragic endings.

An American Tragedy is Dreiser's greatest success. It is an examination of social aspirations. In this book Dreiser looks backward from the distance of the middle age and evaluates his own experience of success and failure, the burdern of personal pathos, the echo of the personal struggle to purge the unworthy aspirations and to discover his own sincerity. The book shows us Dreiser's concern with social and political matters and his interest in what he describes as a peculiarly "American" tragedy which involves the frustrations suffered by persons who cannot enjoy social and class advantages. It is an impassive work which becomes for a generation America's synonym for literary naturalism. Dreiser's major value for modern American fiction lies in the inclusiveness of his lifelong concern with American social structures and moral issues. He has a great influence upon the novel in America, and he is greatly admired by liberal critics and students of the American scene.

This selection begins near the end of Chapter 44, shortly after Clyde's reading of a newspaper account of an accidental drowning at Pass Lake has set in train the desire to murder Roberta. (Zhao Na)

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

But, good God! What was he thinking of anyhow? He, Clyde Griffiths¹! The nephew of Samuel Griffiths²! What was "getting into" him? Murder! That's what it was. This terrible item — this devil's accident or machination that was constantly putting it before him! A most horrible crime, and one for which they electrocuted people if they were caught. Besides, he could not murder anybody — not Roberta³, anyhow. Oh, no! Surely not after all that had been between them. And yet — this other world! — Sondra⁴ — which he was certain to lose now unless he acted in some way —

His hands shook, his eyelids twitched — then his hair at the roots tingled and over his body ran chill nervous titillations in waves. Mur-

der! Or upsetting a boat at any rate in deep water, which of course might happen anywhere, and by accident as at Pass Lake. And Roberta could not swim. He knew that. But she might save herself at that — scream — cling to the boat — and then — if there were any to hear — and she told afterwards! An icy perspiration now sprang to his throat felt parched and dry. To prevent a thing like that he would have to — to — but no — he was not like that. He could not do a thing like that — hit any one — a girl — Roberta — and when drowning or struggling. Oh, no, no — no such thing as that! Impossible.

He took his straw hat and went out, almost before any one heard him think, as he would have phrased it to himself, such horrible, terrible thoughts. He could not and would not think them from now on. He was no such person. And yet — and yet — these thoughts. The solution — if he wanted one. The way to stay here — not leave — marry Sondra — be rid of Roberta and all — all — for the price of a little courage or daring. But no!

He walked and walked — away from Lycurgus — out on a road to the southeast which passed through a poor and decidedly unfrequented rural section, and so left him alone to think — or, as he felt, not to be heard in his thinking.

Day was fading into dark. Lamps were beginning to glow in the cottages here and there. Trees in groups in fields or along the road were beginning to blur or smokily blend. And although it was warm — the air lifeless and lethargic — he walked fast, thinking, and perspiring as he did so, as though he were seeking to outwalk and out think or divert some inner self that preferred to be still and think.

That gloomy, lonely lake up there!

That island to the south!

Who would see?

Who could hear?

That station at Gun Lodge with a bus running to it at this season of the year. (Ah, he remembered that, did he? the deuce!) A terrible thing, to remember a thing like that in connection with such a thought as this! But if he were going to think of such a thing as this at all, he had better think well — he could tell himself that — or stop thinking about it now — once and forever — forever. But Sondra! Roberta! If ever he were caught — electrocuted! And yet the actual misery of his present state. The difficulty! The danger of losing Sondra. And yet, murder —

He wiped his hot and wet face, and paused and gazed at a group

of trees across a field which somehow reminded him of the trees of ... well ... he didn't like this road. It was getting too dark out here. He had better turn and go back. But that road at the south and leading to Three Mile Bay and Greys Lake — if one chose to go that way — to Sharon and the Cranston Lodge — whither he would be going afterwards if he did go that way. God! Big Bittern — the trees along there after dark would be like that — blurred and gloomy. It would have to be toward evening, of course. No one would think of trying to ... well ... in the morning, when there was so much light. Only a fool would do that. But at night, toward dusk, as it was now, or a little later. But, damn it, he would not listen to such thoughts. Yet no one would be likely to see him or Roberta either — would they — there? It would be so easy to go to a place like Big Bittern — for an alleged wedding trip — would it not — over the Fourth, say — or after the fourth or fifth, when there would be fewer people. And to register as some one else — not himself — so that he could never be traced that way. And then, again, it would be so easy to get back to Sharon and the Cranstons' by midnight, or the morning of the next day, maybe, and then, once there he could pretend also that he had come north on that early morning train that arrived about ten o'clock. And then ...

Confound it — why should his mind keep dwelling on this idea? Was he actually planning to do a thing like this? But he was not! He could not be! He, Clyde Griffiths, could not be serious about a thing like this. That was not possible. He could not be. Of course! It was all too impossible, too wicked, to imagine that he, Clyde Griffiths, could bring himself to execute a deed like that. And yet ...

And forthwith an uncanny feeling of wretchedness and insufficiency for so dark a crime insisted on thrusting itself forward. He decided to retrace his steps toward Lycurgus, where at least he could be among people.

There are moments when in connection with the sensitively imaginative or morbidly anachronistic — the mentality assailed and the same not of any great strength and the problem confronting it of sufficient force and complexity — the reason not actually toppling from its throne, still totters or is warped or shaken — the mind befuddled to the extent that for the time being, at least, unreason or disorder and mistaken or erroneous counsel would appear to hold against all else. In such instances the will and the courage confronted by some great difficulty which it can neither master nor endure, appears in some to recede

in precipitate flight, leaving only panic and temporary unreason in its wake.

And in this instance, the mind of Clyde might well have been compared to a small and routed army in full flight before a major one, yet at various times in its precipitate departure, pausing for a moment to meditate on some way of escaping complete destruction and in the coincident panic of such a state, resorting to the weirdest and most haphazard of schemes of escaping from an impending and yet wholly unescapable fate. The strained and bedeviled look in his eyes at moments — the manner in which, from moment to moment and hour to hour, he went over and over his hitherto poorly balanced actions and thoughts but with no smallest door of escape anywhere. And yet again at moments the solution suggested by the item in *The Times-Union* again thrusting itself forward, psychogenetically, born of his own turbulent, eager and disappointed seeking. And hence persisting.

Indeed, it was now as though from the depths of some lower or higher world never before guessed or plumbed by him ... a region otherwise than in life or death and peopled by creatures otherwise than himself ... there had now suddenly appeared, as the genie at the accidental rubbing of Aladdin's lamp — as the efrit emerging as smoke from the mystic jar in the net of the fisherman — the very substance of some leering and diabolic wish or wisdom concealed in his own nature, and that now abhorrent and yet compelling, leering and yet intriguing, friendly and yet cruel, offered him a choice between an evil which threatened to destroy him (and against his deepest opposition) and a second evil which, however it might disgust or sear or terrify, still provided for freedom and success and love.

Indeed the center or mentating section of his brain at this time might well have been compared to a sealed and silent hall in which alone and undisturbed, and that in spite of himself, he now sat thinking on the mystic or evil and terrifying desires or advice of some darker or primordial and unregenerate nature of his own, and without the power to drive the same forth or himself to decamp, and yet also without the courage to act upon anything.

For now the genie of his darkest and weakest side was speaking. And it said: "And would you escape from the demands of Roberta that but now and unto this hour have appeared unescapable to you? Behold! I bring you a way. It is the way of the lake — Pass Lake. This item that you have read — do you think it was placed in your hands for nothing? Remember Big Bittern, the deep, blueblack water, the island

to the south, the lone road to Three Mile Bay? How suitable to your needs! A row-boat or a conoe upset in such a lake and Roberta would pass forever from your life. She cannot swim! The lake — the lake — that you have seen — that I have shown you — is it not ideal for the purpose? So removed and so little frequented and yet comparatively near — but a hundred miles from here. And how easy for you and Roberta to go there — not directly but indirectly — on this purely imaginative marriage-trip that you have already agreed to. And all that you need do now is to change your name — and hers — or let her keep her own and you use yours. You have never permitted her to speak of you and this relationship, and she never has. You have written her but formal notes. And now if you should meet her somewhere as you have already agreed to, and without any one seeing you, you might travel with her, as in the past to Fonda, to Big Bittern — or some point near there."

"But there is no hotel at Big Bittern," at once corrected Clyde. "A mere shack that entertains but few people and that not very well."

"All the better. The less people are likely to be there."

"But we might be seen on the train going up together. I would be identified as having been with her."

"Were you seen at Fonda, Gloversville, Little Falls? Have you not ridden in separate cars or seats before and could you not do so now? Is it not presumably to be a secret marriage? Then why not a secret honeymoon?"

"True enough — true enough."

"And once you have arranged for that and arrive at Big Bittern or some lake like it — there are so many there — how easy to row out on such a lake? No questions. No registry under your own name or hers. A boat rented for an hour or half-day or day. You saw the island far to the south on that lone lake. Is it not beautiful? It is well worth seeing. Why should you not go there on such a pleasure trip before marriage? Would she not be happy so to do — as weary and distressed as she is now — an outing — a rest before the ordeal of the new life? Is not that sensible — plausible? And neither of you will ever return presumably. You will both be drowned, will you not? Who is to see? A guide or two — the man who rents you the boat — the innkeeper once, as you go. But how are they to know who you are? Or who she is? And you heard the depth of the water."

"But I do not want to kill her. I do not want to kill her. I do not want to injure her in any way. If she will but let me go and she go her

own way, I will be so glad and so happy never to see her more."

"But she will not let you go or go her way unless you accompany her. And if you go yours it will be without Sondra and all that she represents, as well as all this pleasant life here — your standing with your uncle, his friends, their cars, the dances, visits to the lodges on the lakes. And what then? A small job! Small pay! Another such period of wandering as followed that accident at Kansas City. Never another chance like this anywhere. Do you prefer that?"

"But might there not be some accident here, destroying all my dreams — my future — as there was in Kansas City?"

"An accident, to be sure — but not the same. In this instance the plan is in your hands. You can arrange it all as you will. And how easy! So many boats upsetting every summer — the occupants of them drowning, because in most cases they cannot swim. And will it ever be known whether the man who was with Roberta Alden on Big Bittern could swim? And of all deaths, drowning is the easiest — no noise — no outcry — perhaps the accidental blow of an oar — the side of a boat. And then silence! Freedom — a body that no one may ever find. Or if found and identified, will it not be easy, if you but trouble to plan, to make it appear that you were elsewhere, visiting at one of the other lakes before you decided to go to Twelfth Lake, What is wrong with it? Where is the flaw?"

"But assuming that I should upset the boat and that she should not drown, then what? Should cling to it, cry out, be saved and relate afterward that ... But no, I cannot do that — will not do it. I will not hit her. That would be too terrible ... to vile."

"But a little blow — any little blow under such circumstances would be sufficient to confuse and complete her undoing. Sad, yes, but she has an opportunity to go her own way, has she not? And she will not, nor let you go yours. Well, then, is this so terribly unfair? and do not forget that afterwards there is Sondra — the beautiful — a home with her in Lycurgus — wealth, a high position such as elsewhere you may never obtain again — never — never. Love and happiness — the equal of any one here — superior even to your cousin Gilbert."

The voice ceased temporarily, trailing off into shadow, — silence, dreams.

And Clyde, contemplating all that had been said, was still unconvinced. Darker fears or better impulses supplanted the counsel of the voice in the great hall. But presently thinking of Sondra and all that

she represented, and then of Roberta, the dark personality would as suddenly and swiftly return and with amplified suavity and subtlety.

"Ah, still thinking on the matter. And you have not found a way out and you will not. I have truly pointed out to you and in all helpfulness the only way — the only way — It is a long lake. And would it not be easy in rowing about to eventually find some secluded spot — some invisible nook near that south shore where the water is deep? And from there how easy to walk through the woods to Three Mile Bay and Upper Greys Lake? And from there to the Cranstons? There is a boat from there, as you know. Pah — how cowardly — how lacking in courage to win the thing that above all things you desire — beauty — wealth — position — the solution of your every material and spiritual desire. And with poverty, commonplace, hard and poor work as the alternative to all this.

"But you must choose — choose! And then act. You must! You must! You must!"

Thus the voice in parting, echoing from some remote part of the enormous chamber.

And Clyde, listening at first with horror and in terror, later with a detached and philosophic calm as one who, entirely apart from what he may think or do, is still entitled to consider even the wildest and most desperate proposals for his release, at last, because of his own mental and material weakness before pleasures and dreams which he could not bring himself to forego, psychically ingrained to the point where he was beginning to think that it might be possible. Why not? Was it not even as the voice said — a possible and plausible way — all his desires and dreams to be made real by this one evil thing? Yet in his case, because of flaws and weaknesses in his own unstable and highly variable will, the problem was not to be solved by thinking thus — then — nor for the next ten days for that matter.

He could not really act on such a matter for himself and would not. It remained as usual for him to be forced either to act or to abandon this most wild and terrible thought. Yet during this time a series of letters — seven from Roberta, five from Sondra — in which in somber tones in so far as Roberta was concerned — in gay and colorful ones in those which came from Sondra — was painted the now so sharply contrasting phases of the black rebus which lay before him. To Roberta's pleadings argumentative and threatening as they were, Clyde did not trust himself to reply, not even by telephone. For now he reasoned that to answer would be only to lure Roberta to her doom — or

to the attempted drastic conclusion of his difficulties as outlined by the tragedy at Pass Lake.

At the same time, in several notes addressed to Sondra, he gave vent to the most impassioned declarations of love — his darling — his wonder girl — how eager he was to be at Twelfth Lake by the morning of the Fourth, if he could, and so thrilled to see her there again. Yet, alas, as he also wrote now, so uncertain was he, even now, as to how he was to do, there were certain details in connection with his work here that might delay him a day or two or three — he could not tell as yet — but would write her by the second at the latest, when he would know positively. Yet saying to himself as he wrote this, if she but knew what those details were — if she but knew. Yet in penning this, and without having as yet answered the last importunate letter from Roberta, he was also saying to himself that this did not mean that he was planning to go to Roberta at all, or that if he did, it did not mean that he was going to attempt to kill her. Never once did he honestly, or to put it more accurately, forthrightly and courageously or coldly face the thought of committing so grim a crime. On the contrary, the nearer he approached a final resolution or the need for one in connection with all this, the more hideous and terrible seemed the idea — hideous and difficult, and hence the more improbable it seemed that he should ever commit it. It was true that from moment to moment — arguing with himself as he constantly was — sweating mental sweats and fleeing from moral and social terrors in connection with it all, he was thinking from time to time that he might go to Big Bittern in order to quiet her in connection with these present importunities and threats and hence (once more evasion — tergiversation with himself) give himself more time in which to conclude what his true course must be.

The way of the lake.

The way of the lake.

But once there — whether it would then be advisable so to do — or not — well who could tell. He might even yet be able to convert Roberta to some other point of view. For, say what you would, she was certainly acting very unfairly and captiously in all this. She was, as he saw it in connection with his every vital dream of Sondra, making a mountain — an immense terror — out of a state that when all was said and done, was not so different from Esta's. And Esta had not compelled any one to marry her. And how much better were the Aldens to his own parents — poor farmers as compared to poor preachers. And why should he be so concerned as to what they would think

when Esta had not troubled to think what her parents would feel?

In spite of all that Roberta had said about blame, was she so entirely lacking in blame herself? To be sure, he had sought to entice or seduce her, as you will, but even so, could she be held entirely blameless? Could she not have refused, if she was so positive at the time that she was so very moral? But she had not. And as to all this, all that he had done, had he not done all she could to help her out of it? And he had so little money, too. And was placed in such a difficult position. She was just as much to blame as he was. And yet now she was so determined to drive him this way. To insist on his marrying her, whereas if she would only go her own way — as she could with his help — she might still save both of them all this trouble.

But no, she would not, and he would not marry her and that was all there was to it. She need not think that she could make him. No, no, no! At times, when in such moods, he felt that he could do anything — drown her easily enough, and she would only have herself to blame.

Then again his more cowering sense of what society would think and do, if it knew, what he himself would be compelled to think of himself afterwards, fairly well satisfied him that as much as he desired to stay, he was not the one to do anything at all and in consequence must flee.

And so it was that Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday following Roberta's letter received on Monday, had passed. And then, on Thursday night, following a most torturesome mental day on his and Roberta's part for that matter, this is what he received:

Billtz, Wednesday, June 30th.

DEAR CLYDE:

This is to tell you that unless I hear from you either by telephone or letter before noon, Friday, I shall be in Lycurgus that same night, and the world will know how you have treated me. I cannot and will not wait and suffer one more hour. I regret to be compelled to take this step, but you have allowed all this time to go in silence really, and Saturday is the third, and without any plans of any kind. My whole life is ruined and so will yours be in a measure, but I cannot feel that I am entirely to blame. I have done all I possibly could to make this burden as easy for you as possible and I certainly regret all the misery it will cause my parents and friends and all whom you know and hold dear. But I will not wait and suffer one hour more.

ROBERTA •