

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC

83

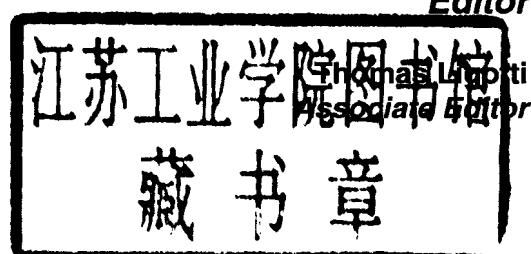


Volume 83

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1960,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**

**Jennifer Baise**  
*Editor*



*The Gale Group*  
DETROIT • SAN FRANCISCO • LONDON • BOSTON • WOODBRIDGE, CT

## STAFF

Jennifer Baise, *Editor*

Thomas Ligotti, *Associate Editor*

Maria Franklin, *Interim Permissions Manager*

Kimberly F. Smilay, *Permissions Specialist*

Kelly A. Quin, *Permissions Associates*

Sandy Gore, *Permissions Assistant*

Victoria B. Cariappa, *Research Manager*

Michele P. LaMeau, Andrew Guy Malonis, Barbara McNeil, Gary J. Oudersluys, Maureen Richards, *Research Specialists*

Tamara C. Nott, Tracie A. Richardson, Cheryl L. Warnock, *Research Associates*

Corrine Stocker, *Research Assistant*

Mary Beth Trimper, *Production Director*

Deborah L. Milliken, *Production Assistant*

Christine O'Bryan, *Desktop Publisher*

Randy Bassett, *Image Database Supervisor*

Robert Duncan, Michael Logusz, *Imaging Specialists*

Pamela Reed, *Imaging Coordinator*

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Gale Research neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Gale accepts no payment for listing, and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

All rights to this publication will be vigorously defended.

Copyright © 1999  
Gale Research  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

All rights reserved including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-2738-0

ISSN 0276-8178

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

## Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series

For criticism on	Consult these Gale series
Authors now living or who died after December 31, 1959	<i>CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM (CLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1900 and 1959	<i>TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM (TCLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1800 and 1899	<i>NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE CRITICISM (NCLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1400 and 1799	<i>LITERATURE CRITICISM FROM 1400 TO 1800 (LC)</i> <i>SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM (SC)</i>
Authors who died before 1400	<i>CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE CRITICISM (CMLC)</i>
Authors of books for children and young adults	<i>CHILDREN'S LITERATURE REVIEW (CLR)</i>
Dramatists	<i>DRAMA CRITICISM (DC)</i>
Poets	<i>POETRY CRITICISM (PC)</i>
Short story writers	<i>SHORT STORY CRITICISM (SSC)</i>
Black writers of the past two hundred years	<i>BLACK LITERATURE CRITICISM (BLC)</i>
Hispanic writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries	<i>HISPANIC LITERATURE CRITICISM (HLC)</i>
Native North American writers and orators of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries	<i>NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE (NNAL)</i>
Major authors from the Renaissance to the present	<i>WORLD LITERATURE CRITICISM, 1500 TO THE PRESENT (WLC)</i>

# Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities, and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many libraries would have difficulty assembling on their own."

## Scope of the Series

*TCLC* is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1960 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and excerpting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topic entries widen the focus of the series from individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

*TCLC* is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, which reprints commentary on authors now living or who have died since 1960. Because of the different periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*. For additional information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism titles, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

## Coverage

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to present:

- criticism of authors, or literary topics, representing a variety of genres and nationalities
- both major and lesser-known writers and literary works of the period
- 6-12 authors or 3-6 topics per volume
- individual entries that survey critical response to each author's work or each topic in literary history, including early criticism to reflect initial reactions; later criticism to represent any rise or decline in reputation; and current retrospective analyses.

## Organization of This Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, list of principal works, excerpts of criticism (each preceded by an annotation and a bibliographic citation), and a bibliography of further reading.

- The **Author Heading** consists of the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at

the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.

- The **Biographical and Critical Introduction** outlines the author's life and career, as well as the critical issues surrounding his or her work. References to past volumes of *TCLC* are provided at the beginning of the introduction. Additional sources of information in other biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *Short Story Criticism*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and *Something about the Author*, are listed in a box at the end of the entry.
- Some *TCLC* entries include **Portraits** of the author. Entries also may contain reproductions of materials pertinent to an author's career, including manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, and drawings, as well as photographs of important people, places, and events in an author's life.
- The **List of Principal Works** is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors with both foreign-language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Critical excerpts are prefaced by **Annotations** providing the reader with information about both the critic and the criticism that follows. Included are the critic's reputation, individual approach to literary criticism, and particular expertise in an author's works. Also noted are the relative importance of a work of criticism, the scope of the excerpt, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author. In some cases, these annotations cross-reference excerpts by critics who discuss each other's commentary.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation** designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Criticism is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles of works by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to easily locate discussion of particular works. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. Some of the excerpts in *TCLC* also contain translated material. Unless otherwise noted, translations in brackets are by the editors; translations in parentheses or continuous with the text are by the critic. Publication information (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of works) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- An annotated list of **Further Reading** appearing at the end of each author entry suggests secondary sources on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

## Cumulative Indexes

- Each volume of *TCLC* contains a cumulative **Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in Gale's Literary Criticism Series, along with cross references to such biographical series as *Contemporary Authors* and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. For readers' convenience, a complete list of Gale titles included appears on the first page of the author index. Useful for locating authors within the various series, this index is particularly valuable for those authors who are identified by a certain period but who, because of their death dates, are placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC*, yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC*.

- Each *TCLC* volume includes a cumulative **Nationality Index** which lists all authors who have appeared in *TCLC* volumes, arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities, as well as Topics volume entries devoted to particular national literatures.
- Each new volume in Gale's Literary Criticism Series includes a cumulative **Topic Index**, which lists all literary topics treated in *NCLC*, *TCLC*, *LC 1400-1800*, and the *CLC* year-book.
- Each new volume of *TCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes, includes a **Title Index** listing the titles of all literary works discussed in the volume. In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale has also produced a **Special Paperbound Edition** of the *TCLC* title index. This annual cumulation lists all titles discussed in the series since its inception and is issued with the first volume of *TCLC* published each year. Additional copies of the index are available on request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the following year's cumulation. Titles discussed in the Topics volume entries are not included *TCLC* cumulative index.

## Citing Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in Gale's literary Criticism Series may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to materials drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

<sup>1</sup>William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, (AMS Press, 1987); excerpted and reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 94-105.

<sup>2</sup>George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," *Partisan Review*, 6 (Winter 1949), pp. 85-92; excerpted and reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 40-3.

## Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began, including annotations to excerpted criticism, a cumulative index to authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to criticism on a single work by a major author, more extensive illustrations, and a title index listing all literary works discussed in the series since its inception.

Readers who wish to suggest authors or topics to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors.



# Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *TCLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

## COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *TCLC*, VOLUME 83, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

*The Centennial Review*, v. XXIII, Spring, 1979, for "Native Son and An American Tragedy: Two Different Interpretations of Crime and Guilt" by Yoshinobu Hakutani. © 1979 by *The Centennial Review*. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*The Dreiser Newsletter*, v. 9, Spring, 1978. © 1978 *The Dreiser Newsletter*. Reproduced by permission.—*The Eastern Buddhist*, v. XIV, Autumn, 1981, for "Views and Reviews: The Diary of a Zen Layman, The Philosopher Nishida Kitaro" by Shibata Masumi. Translated from the French "Vie d'un Laïc selon le Zen" by Frederick Franck. Dans les Monastères Zen au Japon, Hachette, Paris, 1972. Copyright © 1981 by The Eastern Buddhist Society, Kyoto, Japan. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the translator.—*Essays in Criticism*, v. 6, 1956, for "The Prisoner of *The Prisoner of Zenda*: Anthony Hope and the Novel of Society" by S. Gorley Putt. Reproduced by permission of the Editors of *Essays in Criticism* and the author.—*ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, v. 43, Summer, 1986. Reproduced by permission.—*Hispania*, v. 59, May, 1976, for "This World and Beyond: Mário de Sá-Carneiro's Struggle for Perfection" by William W. Megenney. © 1976 The American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, Inc. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Human Studies*, v. 16, 1993. © 1993 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Reproduced by permission.—*International Philosophical Quarterly*, v. XXX, June, 1990, for "Experiential Ontology: The Origins of the Nishida Philosophy in the Doctrine of Pure Experience" by Andrew Feenberg and Yoko Arisaka; v. XXXII, September, 1992, for "'Inverse Correspondence' in the Philosophy of Nishida: The Emergence of the Notion" by Masao Abe. Both reproduced by permission of the publisher and the respective authors.—*Luso-Brazilian Review*, v. 12, Summer, 1975. © 1975 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Reproduced by permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.—*Modern Fiction Studies*, v. 23, Autumn, 1977. Copyright © 1977 by Purdue Research Foundation. Reproduced by permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.—*Modern Language Quarterly*, v. XXIX, December, 1968. Copyright © 1968 by the University of Washington. Reproduced by permission of Duke University Press.—*Monumenta Nipponica: Studies in Japanese Culture*, v. XX, 1965; v. XXI, 1966; v. XXII, 1969. All reproduced by permission.—*The New Yorker*, v. 35, October 3, 1959. © 1959 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—*Papers on Language and Literature*, v. 27, Spring, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by The Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University. Reproduced by permission.—*Philosophy East and West*, v. XIX, October, 1969; v. 40, July, 1990; v. 41, April, 1991; v. 44, April, 1994; v. 45, April, 1995. Copyright © 1969, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995 by The University of Hawaii Press. All reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*Prospects: An Annual Journal of American Cultural Studies*, v. 1, 1975, for "An American Tragedy: A 50th Anniversary: Dreiser's Tragedy: The Distortion of American Values" by James T. Farrell. © 1975 Burt Franklin & Co., Inc. & Jack Salzman. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Scribner's Magazine*, v. LXXIX, April, 1926. Copyright 1926, renewed 1954. Reproduced by permission of Scribner, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.—*Studies in the Novel*, v. 22, Winter, 1990. Copyright 1990 by North Texas State University. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*Thought*, v. XLVII, Winter, 1972. Copyright © 1972 by Fordham University Press. Reproduced by permission of Fordham University Press, New York.

## COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *TCLC*, VOLUME 83, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Algeo, Ann M. From *The Courtroom as Forum: Homicide Trials by Dreiser, Wright, Capote, and Mailer*. Peter Lang, 1996. © 1996 Ann M. Algeo. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Davis, Joseph K. From "The Triumph of Secularism: Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*" in *Modern American Fiction: Form and Function*. Edited by Thomas Daniel Young. Louisiana State University Press, 1989. Copyright © 1989 by Louisiana State University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Elwin, Malcolm. From *Old Gods Falling*. Collins Publishers, 1939. Copyright 1939 by Collins Publishers. Reproduced by permission of William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd.—Guest, David. From *The American Novel and Capital Punishment*. University Press of Mississippi, 1997. Copyright © 1997 University Press of Mississippi. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Harter, Carol Clancey. From "Strange Bedfellows: *The Waste Land* and *An American Tragedy*" in *The Twenties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. Edited by Warren

French. Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1975. © Copyright 1975 by Warren French. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Hayne, Barrie. From “Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*” in *Rough Justice: Essays on Crime in Literature*. Edited by M. L. Friedland. University of Toronto Press, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by the University of Toronto Press. Reproduced by permission.—Heine, Steven. From “Is the Place of Nothingness Not a Place?: Worldmaking and Criticism in Modern Japanese Philosophy” in *Worldmaking*. Edited by William Pencak. Peter Lang, 1996. © 1996 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Maugham, W. Somerset. From *Points of View*. William Heinemann Ltd., 1958. © by William Somerset Maugham 1958. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of A.P. Watt on behalf of The Royal Literary Fund and Random House, U.K.—Mitchell, Lee Clark. From *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism*. Columbia University Press, 1989. Copyright © 1989 Columbia University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Parker, John M. From *Three Twentieth-Century Portuguese Poets*. Witwatersrand University Press, 1960. Reproduced by permission.—Pizer, Donald. From *Edith Wharton: New Critical Essays*. Edited by Alfred Bendixen and Annette Zilversmith. Garland Publishing Inc., 1992. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992. © 1992 by Garland Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Thomas, Harry and Dana Lee Thomas. From *Living Biographies of Great Scientists*. Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1941. Copyright 1941, 1951 by Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—Viglielmo, Valdo Humbert. From “Nishida Kitaro: The Early Years” in *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*. Edited by Donald H. Shively. Princeton University Press, 1971. Copyright © 1971 by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Yoshinori, Takeuchi. From “The Philosophy of Nishida” in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School*. Edited by Frederick Franck. Crossroad, 1982. Copyright © 1982 by Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

**PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN *TCLC*, VOLUME 83, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:**

Hope, Anthony, 1896, photograph. The Granger Collection, New York. Reproduced by permission.

# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

<b>Theodore Dreiser</b> 1871-1945 .....	1
<i>American novelist; entry devoted to An American Tragedy</i>	
<b>Ernst Haeckel</b> 1834-1919 .....	125
<i>German natural scientist and philosopher</i>	
<b>Anthony Hope</b> 1863-1933 .....	163
<i>English novelist</i>	
<b>Paul Léautaud</b> 1902-1957 .....	184
<i>French novelist</i>	
<b>Nishida Kitaro</b> 1870-1945 .....	213
<i>Japanese philosopher</i>	
<b>Mário de Sá-Carneiro</b> 1890-1916 .....	396
<i>Portuguese dramatist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 419

Literary Criticism Series Topic Index 485

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 494

Title Index to TCLC, Vol. 83 499

# *An American Tragedy*

Theodore Dreiser

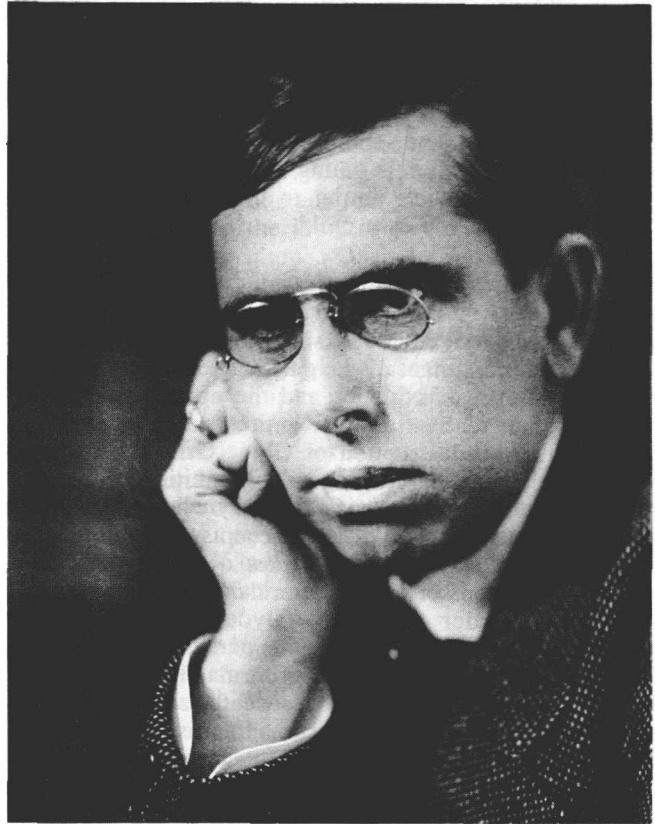
(Full name Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser) American novelist, essayist, autobiographer, journalist, short story writer, dramatist, and poet.

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the principal American exponents of literary Naturalism at the turn of the century, Dreiser led the way for a generation of writers seeking to present a detailed and realistic portrait of American life. Widely considered his most important work, *An American Tragedy* (1925) was a departure from traditional American stories in which hard work and perseverance inevitably yield success and happiness, instead portraying the world as an arena of largely random occurrences. While the novel has often been criticized for its awkward prose style, inadequately conveyed philosophy, and excessive length and detail, it retains critical regard for its powerful characterizations and strong ideological convictions.

## Biographical Information

Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, into a large and impoverished family. While Dreiser did not excel as a student, he received encouragement from a high school teacher who paid his tuition when he entered the University of Indiana in 1889. Acutely self-conscious about his poverty and his appearance, Dreiser left the university after his first year and pursued a journalism career in Chicago. After several years as a reporter in Chicago, he began writing for newspapers and magazines in St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and New York. With the disappointing reception of his first novel, *Sister Carrie*, in 1900, along with marital difficulties, Dreiser's physical and mental health began to fail. After not working for several years, Dreiser was sent by his brother to a health resort to recuperate. In 1905 he resumed magazine writing and editing and over the next two years rose to the editorship of three prominent women's magazines. He lost this position in 1907 because of a scandal involving his romantic pursuit of a co-worker's teenage daughter. The same year, *Sister Carrie*, which had been received favorably in England, was reissued to positive reviews and good sales in the United States. Over the next eighteen years Dreiser published a succession of novels to widely varied but rarely indifferent critical notice; the publication of *An American Tragedy* in 1925 established him as the country's foremost living novelist. He went to Russia in 1927 to observe the results of the revolution, publishing his findings in *Dreiser Looks at Russia*, and he joined investigations of labor conditions in Kentucky coal mines in 1931. At the time of his death in 1945 Dreiser was better known as a social and political activist than as a novelist.



## Plot and Characters

*An American Tragedy* is based on the real-life murder case in 1906 of Chester Gillette, who was executed in the newly-invented electric chair for the drowning of his pregnant working-class girlfriend Grace Brown in Big Moose Lake in New York's Adirondack Mountains; Gillette's motive was allegedly that he hoped to advance socially by pursuing relationships with members of the upper class, and he believed that his impending fatherhood would impede that. Dreiser had been fascinated by the case for years when he decided to fictionalize it in a novel. In Dreiser's version Chester Gillette became Clyde Griffiths, the son of fanatical evangelist parents in Kansas City whose attempt to "spiritualize" their son as much as possible makes the boy dangerously rebellious. When Clyde takes a job as a bellhop in a large hotel, he becomes intoxicated by the idea of pleasure, material wealth, and the American ideal of success. He leaves his position when the car he is riding in with drunken friends kills a little girl, and eventually moves to upstate New York to work in his wealthy uncle's collar factory. There



he meets Roberta Alden, the daughter of a very poor farmer, to whose trusting and loving nature Clyde is attracted. At the same time, Clyde attracts the attention of Sondra Finchley, the daughter of a wealthy vacuum cleaner manufacturer. Clyde is torn between the two women until Roberta tells him she is pregnant and wishes to marry him. Wanting to impress Sondra's family and move into her circle of friends, Clyde decides his only way out is to kill Roberta. He takes her rowing on Big Bittern Lake and, rather than murdering her, allows her to drown when she falls out of the boat after he accidentally hits her in the head with his camera. He is arrested for her murder, tried, and sentenced to death. The novel ends in a scene with Clyde's young nephew sitting through a family prayer service similar to those that strongly impressed upon Clyde as a child.

### Major Themes

*An American Tragedy* is considered by most critics to be a powerful indictment of the gulf between American ideals of wealth and influence and the opportunities available for their realization. The entire American system is blamed for the destruction of Clyde Griffiths, from his militant religious upbringing to the ambition of the local district attorney and the unfeeling jury who send Clyde to his death. Additionally, Clyde accepts everything he is told, never questioning the values of his parents' religious convictions or of the American ideals he later kills Roberta in order to obtain. Clyde's—and the rest of society's—blind allegiance to the pursuit of high social status and material wealth are ultimately, according to Dreiser, to blame for Roberta's death, as the American culture of consumption robs the human spirit of an ethical stance as well as the ability to express genuine feelings and beliefs, and dooms individuals like Clyde to destruction and decay.

---

## CRITICISM

H. L. Mencken (essay date 1926)

SOURCE: "Dreiser in 840 Pages," in the *American Mercury*, Vol. 7, No. 17, March, 1926, pp. 379-81.

[In the following essay, Mencken praises the second volume of *An American Tragedy*, but calls the first "vast, sloppy, chaotic."]

Whatever else this vasty double-header [*An American Tragedy*] may reveal about its author, it at least shows brilliantly that he is wholly devoid of what may be called literary tact. A more artful and ingratiating fellow, facing the situation that confronted him, would have met it with a far less difficult book. It was ten years since he had published his last novel, and so all his old customers, it is reasonable to assume, were hungry for another—all his

old customers and all his new customers. His publisher, after a long and gallant battle, had at last chased off the comstocks. Rivals, springing up at intervals, had all succumbed—or, what is the same thing, withdrawn from the Dreiser reservation. The Dreiser cult, once grown somewhat wobbly, was full of new strength and enthusiasm. The time was thus plainly at hand to make a ten strike. What was needed was a book full of all the sound and solid Dreiser merits, and agreeably free from the familiar Dreiser defects—a book carefully designed and smoothly written, with no puerile clichés in it and no maudlin moralizing—in brief, a book aimed deliberately at readers of a certain taste, and competent to estimate good workmanship. Well, how did Dreiser meet the challenge? He met it, characteristically, by throwing out the present shapeless and forbidding monster—a heaping cartload of raw materials for a novel, with rubbish of all sorts intermixed—a vast, sloppy, chaotic thing of 385,000 words—at least 250,000 of them unnecessary! Such is scientific salesmanship as Dreiser understands it! Such is his reply to a pleasant invitation to a party!

By this time, I suppose, you have heard what it is all about. The plot, in fact, is extremely simple. Clyde Griffiths, the son of a street preacher in Kansas City, revolts against the piety of his squalid home, and gets himself a job as bellboy in a gaudy hotel. There he acquires a taste for the luxuries affected by travelling Elks, and is presently a leader in shop-girl society. An automobile accident, for which he is not to blame, forces him to withdraw discreetly, and he proceeds to Chicago, where he goes to work in a club. One day his father's rich brother, a collar magnate from Lycurgus, N. Y., is put up there by a member, and Clyde resolves to cultivate him. The old boy, taking a shine to the youngster, invites him to Lycurgus, and gives him a job in the factory. There ensues the conflict that makes the story. Clyde has hopes, but very little ready cash; he is thus forced to seek most of his recreation in low life. But as a nephew to old Samuel Griffiths he is also taken up by the Lycurgus *haut ton*. The conflict naturally assumes the form of girls. Roberta Alden, a beautiful female operative in the factory, falls in love with him and yields herself to him. Almost simultaneously Sondra Finchley, an even more beautiful society girl, falls in love with him and promises to marry him. Clyde is ambitious and decides for Sondra. But at that precise moment Roberta tells him that their sin has found her out. His reply is to take her to a lonely lake and drown her. The crime being detected, he is arrested, put on trial, convicted, and electrocuted.

A simple tale. Hardly more, in fact, than the plot of a three page story in *True Confessions*. But Dreiser rolls it out to such lengths that it becomes, in the end, a sort of sequence of serials. The whole first volume, of 431 pages of small type, brings us only to the lamentable event of Roberta's pregnancy. The home life of the Griffithses in Kansas City is described in detail. We make intimate acquaintance with the street preacher himself, a poor fanatic, always trusting in the God who has fooled him incessantly, and with his pathetic, drab wife, and with his

daughter Esta, who runs away with a vaudeville actor and comes home with a baby. There ensues a leisurely and meticulous treatise upon the life of the bellboys in the rococo Green-Davidson Hotel—how they do their work, what they collect in tips, how they spend their evenings, what sort of girls they fancy. The automobile accident is done in the same spacious manner. Finally, we get to Lycurgus, and page after page is devoted to the operations of the Griffiths factory, and to the gay doings in Lycurgus society, and to the first faint stirrings, the passionate high tide, and the disagreeable ebb of Clyde's affair with Roberta. So much for Volume I: 200,000 words. In Volume II we have the murder, the arrest, the trial and the execution: 185,000 more.

Obviously, there is something wrong here. Somewhere or other, there must be whole chapters that could be spared. I find, in fact, many such chapters—literally dozens of them. They incommode the action, they swamp and conceal the principal personages, and they lead the author steadily into his weakness for banal moralizing and trite, meaningless words. In *The "Genius"* it was *trig* that rode him; in *An American Tragedy* it is *chic*. Did *chic* go out in 1896? Then so much the better! It is the mark of an unterrified craftsman to use it now—more, to rub it in mercilessly. Is Freudism stale, even in Greenwich Village? Ahoy, then, let us heave in a couple of bargeloads of complexes—let us explain even judges and district attorneys in terms of suppressions! Is the "chemic" theory of sex somewhat fly-blown? Then let us trot it out, and give it a polishing with the dish-rag! Is there such a thing as sound English, graceful English, charming and beautiful English? Then let us defy a world of scoundrels, half Methodist and half aesthete, with such sentences as this one:

The "death house" in this particular prison was one of those crass erections and maintenances of human insensibility and stupidity principally for which no one primarily was really responsible.

And such as this:

Quite everything of all this was being published in the papers each day.

What is one to say of such dreadful bilge? What is one to say of a novelist who, after a quarter of a century at his trade, still writes it? What one is to say, I feel and fear, had better be engraved on the head of a pin and thrown into the ocean: there is such a thing as critical *politesse*. Here I can only remark that sentences of the kind I have quoted please me very little. One of them to a page is enough to make me very unhappy. In *An American Tragedy*—or, at all events, in parts of it—they run to much more than that. Is Dreiser actually deaf to their dreadful cacophony? I can't believe it. He can write, on occasion, with great clarity, and even with a certain grace. I point, for example, to Chapter XIII of Book III, and to the chapter following. There is here no idiotic "quite everything of all," and no piling up of infirm adverbs. There is, instead, straightforward and lucid writ-

ing, which is caressing in itself and gets the story along. But elsewhere! . . .

Thus the defects of this gargantuan book. They are the old defects of Dreiser, and he seems to be quite unable to get rid of them. They grow more marked, indeed, as he passes into middle life. His writing in *Jennie Gerhardt* was better than his writing in *The "Genius,"* and so was his sense of form, his feeling for structure. But what of the more profound elements? What of his feeling for character, his capacity to imagine situations, his skill at reaching the emotions of the reader? I can only say that I see no falling off in this direction. *An American Tragedy*, as a work of art, is a colossal botch, but as a human document it is searching and full of a solemn dignity, and at times it rises to the level of genuine tragedy. Especially the second volume. Once Roberta is killed and Clyde faces his fate, the thing begins to move, and thereafter it roars on, with ever increasing impetus, to the final terrific smash. What other American novelist could have done the trial as well as Dreiser has done it? His method, true enough, is the simple, bald one of the reporter—but of *what* a reporter! And who could have handled so magnificently the last scenes in the death-house? Here his very defects come to his aid. What we behold is the gradual, terrible, irresistible approach of doom—the slow slipping away of hopes. The thing somehow has the effect of a tolling of bells. It is clumsy. It lacks all grace. But it is tremendously moving.

In brief, the book improves as it nears its shocking climax—a humane fact, indeed, for the reader. The first volume heaves and pitches, and the second, until the actual murder, is full of psychologizing that usually fails to come off. But once the poor girl is in the water, there is a change, and thereafter *An American Tragedy* is Dreiser at his plodding, booming best. The means are often bad, but the effects are superb. One gets the same feeling of complete reality that came from *Sister Carrie* and especially from the last days of Hurstwood. The thing ceases to be a story, and becomes a harrowing reality. Dreiser, I suppose, regards himself as an adept at the Freudian psychology. He frequently uses its terms, and seems to take its fundamental doctrines very seriously. But he is actually a behaviorist of the most advanced wing. What interests him primarily is not what people think, but what they do. He is full of a sense of their helplessness. They are, to him, automata thrown hither and thither by fate—but suffering tragically under every buffet. Their thoughts are muddled and trivial—but they can feel. And Dreiser feels with them, and can make the reader feel with them. It takes skill of a kind that is surely not common. Good writing is far easier.

The Dreiserian idealogy does not change. Such notions as he carried out of the experiences of his youth still abide with him at fifty-four. They take somewhat curious forms. The revolt of youth, as he sees it, is primarily a revolt against religious dogmas and forms. He is still engaged in delivering Young America from the imbecilities of a frozen Christianity. And the economic struggle,

in his eye, has a bizarre symbol: the modern American hotel. Do you remember Carrie Meeber's first encounter with a hotel beefsteak in *Sister Carrie*? And Jennie Gerhardt's dumb wonder before the splendors of that hotel in which her mother scrubbed the grand staircase? There are hotels, too, and aplenty, in *The Titan* and *The "Genius"*; toward the end of the latter there is a famous description, pages long, of the lobby of a New York apartment house, by the Waldorf-Astoria out of the Third avenue car-barn. It was a hotel that lured Jennie (like Carrie before her) to ruin, and it is a hotel that starts Clyde Griffiths on his swift journey to the chair. I suggest a more extensive examination of the matter, in the best Dreiser-Freud style. Let some ambitious young *Privat Dozent* tackle it.

So much for *An American Tragedy*. Hire your pastor to read the first volume for you. But don't miss the second!

John Cowper Powys (essay date 1926)

SOURCE: "An American Tragedy," in *The Dial*, Vol. LXXX, 1926, pp. 331-38.

[In the following review, Powys praises the scope and vision of *An American Tragedy*.]

The fact that Theodore Dreiser's new novel [*An American Tragedy*] seems likely to leave many readers repulsed and many critics confounded does not detract from its value. Its cold Acherontic flood pursues its way, owing little, if anything, to the human qualities that disarm, endear, or beguile, owing nothing to the specious intellectual catchwords of the hour. The pleasure to be derived from it is grim, stark, austere, a purely aesthetic pleasure, unpropitious to such as require human cajolery in these high matters.

To use the expression "objective" with regard to it is only illuminating if what one means is that the writer's energy is so powerful that his vision of things is projected to a certain distance from himself; to such a distance, in fact, that there are no trailing and bleeding fringes left to tug at his vitals or to hinder him from taking up his load and going on his way. In this sense the book is certainly a planetary projectile. It lives, if it lives at all, by its own revolution on its own axis. Its creator has written no *apologia*, no consolatory interpretation, on the sky of its orbit.

But what chasms and crevasses, what dark cavities worse than lunar craters, have we to enter, in order to geologize and botanize among the lava-cracks and the grey mosses of this scarcely congealed metallic microcosm! One reads somewhere that certain aboriginals of North America used to murmur of mysterious presences they named *manitou*, *wakanda*, *orenda*. The Bantu Africans whisper too of an invisible essence called *mulungu*. These primordial emanations do not appear to have been exactly divine or exactly diabolic. Rather do they present them-

selves as diffused magnetic dispersions, thrown off by the motions of primal Matter, as it stirs in its sleep, groping forward from the inanimate towards the organic. Some such *orenda*, some such *mulungu* seems to be the motive force and indeed the subject-matter of *An American Tragedy*; only in this case the mysterious effluence is given off rather by psychic than by physical forces. But to catch, out of the "palpable obscure," these secret stirrings and to follow them in their furtive motions a writer has to break many rules of language.

Perhaps the *Introibo ad altare* of any scrupulous initiation into the Dreiserian cult is to put one's finger upon the "blind mouth" of the historical method and wash one's hands clean of all rules, standards, conformities, traditions.

*An American Tragedy* certainly justifies its title. It is not merely American in its external stage-sets and the superficial idiosyncrasies of its characters. Plenty of American novels offer these allurements and yet remain as much afloat and deracinated as drifting seaweed. This extraordinary creation is American in its bones and blood and entrails. It is American in the heave of its breath, in the swing of its stride, in the smoke of its nostrils. Its Atlantean shoulders are American; so are its portentous buttocks. Its solemn wink, its shameless yawn, its outstretched, nonchalant limbs, all betray the sardonic sentiment, the naïve brutality, the adamant stoicism of that organized chaos whose event is "in the hands of God."

The greatness of this work lies in the fact, among other things, that it covers so much ground. Some of the most arresting of Mr Dreiser's contemporaries are vigorous and convincing enough when on their own particular native soil. But where these "localists" lose their plumage is when they leave home and like all ill-advised migratory birds settle and chatter upon alien roof-tops. No one except Dreiser seems strong enough to swallow the whole chaotic spectacle and to disgorge it into some form of digested brain-stuff. His alone is the sprawl and the clutch, his alone the gullet and the stomach, competent to make away with such a cantle! On their own immediate ground these other writers can be suggestive enough. Off their ground they are nothing at all. But to be off the American of Dreiser's saturation you would have to take ship; and even then you would be miles out at sea ere that voice of Polyphemus fell upon silence or that Cyclopean eye, along with the light-ship of Sandy Hook and the search-light of Alcatraz, sank below the horizon!

*An American Tragedy* begins in Kansas City, the geographical navel of the land, moves thence to upper New York State, and terminates with the execution of its hero in Sing-Sing; but the psychic chemistry, of which it captures the *mulungu*, has its body and pressure in every portion of this country, and needs no map nor chart. This would hardly have been the case had what interested Dreiser most been those particular idiosyncrasies of our common nature that require a local habitation for their richest efflorescence. His Ygdrasil, his occult World-Ash-Tree, straddles its roots

from coast to coast; finds nourishment as easily from the sands of Arizona, as from the red soil of the Carolinas; and it can do this because its roots are not really in the earth at all but in a vast diffused life-illusion, rising up like a thick mist out of a multitude of defrauded souls. This accounts for the fact that *An American Tragedy* is so lacking in what is soothing and healing to the mind, so sombrely naked of the kind of charm which pastures upon old usages, grows sweet and mellow upon the milk of ancient fields. Bell-hops, store-keepers, drummers, lawyers, sheriffs, politicians, factory-owners, factory-managers, factory-hands, stenographers, policemen, ministers, waiters, crooks, doctors, newspaper-men; all these, together with their counterparts in the residential sections, are perpetually throwing off, from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine, from Duluth to Miami, a cloud of invisible eidola, airy images of their grosser desires; and these are the filmy bricks of which Dreiser builds his impregnable dream-world.

It needs something thaumaturgic in a writer to enable him to separate this *mulungu* of accumulated life-illusions from the rest of the cosmic spectacle. But what Dreiser has done is nothing less than this; and we are compelled to accept as reality the "grim feature" thus starkly presented; although we cry to it in our dismay—"Hence, horrible shadow, unreal mockery, hence!" For it is as if, in Dreiser's work, *America itself*—the "commensurate antagonist" of the old civilizations—*saw itself* for the first time; cast a sly, shrewd, exultant, inquisitive look at itself; and turned away with a sardonic shrug.

Why is it that agriculturists and sea-faring people play so small a part in Dreiser's books, though both Witla in *The Genius* and Clyde in this story find their friendliest sweethearts in a farmhouse? Is it not because the doom is on him to recreate just that particular life-dream which cannot co-exist with any close contact with earth or sea? The traditions of earth-life and sea-life surround the persons committed to them with all manner of magical encrustations such as have the power to reject and ward off that garish hubbub, that crude hurly-burly, of an existence dominated by "modern improvements."

The very fatality of this spectacle, as Dreiser half discovers and half creates it, is something that sets its rhinoceros-horn, rampantly and blindly against all that is quaint, delicate, subtle in human nature. And yet throughout those scenes in the Kansas City hotel, throughout the coarse duplicities of the boy's first infatuation, throughout the scatter-brained jovialities in brothel, wineshop, and automobile, throughout the rough-and-tumble on the frozen river—so like a picture by Teniers or Jan Steen—throughout these pathetic struggles of Clyde and Roberta to outwit the vulgar respectability of Lycurgus, New York, one grows increasingly conscious that, rank and raw as it all is, there is something in the relentless and terrible *gusto* of the author's relish for what he is about which rises to the height of a monstrous sublimity.

It seems a strange use of the word "realistic" to apply it to this stupendous objectification of the phantasmal life-

dreams of so many tin-tack automatons of a bastard modernity; but when one grows aware how Dreiser's own Deucalion-like mind murmurs, weeps, laughs, and gropes among them, a queer oppression catches at the throat and a kind of grim hypnosis—as if a beast-tamer were luring us into his cage of snouts and tails and hungry nonhuman eyes—makes us almost ready to cry out, in kindred delusion, "It's the truth! It's the truth!"

*An American Tragedy* is the other side of the shield of that "plain democratic world" whereof Walt Whitman chanted his dithyrambic acceptance. And we may note that just as Whitman took ordinary human words and made them porous to his transcendent exultations, so Dreiser has invented a style of his own, for this monody over the misbegotten, which is like nothing else in literature. I think it is a critical mistake to treat this Dreiserian style as if it were a kind of unconscious blundering. If it is unconscious it certainly could find a very sophisticated defence; for who is not aware to-day of many recondite craftsmen who make use of the non-grammatical, the non-rational, and even of the nonsensical, to most refined aesthetic results?

It is much easier to call Dreiser naïve than to sound the depths of the sly, huge, subterranean impulses that shape his unpolished runes. The rough scales and horny excrescences of the style of *An American Tragedy* may turn out to be quite as integral a part of its author's spiritual skin as are the stripes and spots and feathered crests of his more ingratiating contemporaries.

The subject of the book, this tragedy that gathers and mounts and accumulates till it wrecks the lives involved, is the tragedy of perverted self-realization, the mistaking of the worse shadow for the better. All are shadows; but the art of life is still in its infancy when we make the mistake that this poor Clyde Griffiths made. But, after all, such in its own day and place was the tragedy of Macbeth; such, with yet insaner convolutions, the tragedy of Raskolnikoff. One has to take refuge in a different world altogether, in a world that has vanished with the philosophy of the ancients, to find an ignoble mistake of this kind unworthy of the ritual of Dionysus. Certain it is that with the exception of the unfortunate Roberta, not a character in this book wins our deeper sympathy. Clyde is pitiable, if we renounce all craving for mental and moral subtleties, but we pity him as we would pity a helpless vicious animal driven to the slaughter-house, not as we pity a fully conscious human intellect wrestling with an untoward fate. And yet the book produces a sense of awe, of sad humility, of troubled wonder. How has this been achieved?

No one but Dreiser, as far as I know, could take a set of ragamuffin bell-hops, scurvy editors, tatterdemalion lawyers, greedy department-store wenches, feather-weight society chits, "heads without name, no more remembered than summer flies," could thrust into the midst of these people an ill-starred, good-looking weakling like Clyde; and then, out of such material—surely more uninspiring



than have ever been selected by the brain of man or artist—set up a colossal brazen-ribbed image, which the very wild geese, in their flight over the cities of men, must suppose to be fathom-based upon reality!

To taste the full flavour, the terrible “organic chemical” flavour, like the smell of a stock-yard, which emanates from this weird book, it is necessary to feel, as Dreiser seems to feel—and, indeed, as we are taught by the faith of our fathers—that the soul of the most ill-conditioned and raw-sensed of our race, gendered by man, born of woman, has a potentiality of suffering equal with the noblest.

Thus in place of the world we know there rises up before us Something towering and toppling and ashen-grey, a very *Balaena Mysticetus* of the abyss, riddled with devouring slime-worms. And we ourselves, so great is this writer’s power, become such worms. It is a formidable achievement, the creation of this “empathy,” this more than sympathy, in the case of such unfortunates; and to have brought it about is, say what you please, a spiritual as well as an aesthetic triumph. To watch the death-hunt of the faltering Clyde is to watch a fox-hunt in the company of some primordial Fox-god, who knows as you cannot know, both the ecstasy of stealing into the hen-roost and *what it is* to feel the hot breath of the hounds following your flying tail!

Balzac used to throw his protean magnetism into the urge of the most opposite obsessions, becoming sometimes an angel and sometimes a demon; but Dreiser does something different from this. He overshadows his herd of hypnotized cattle in the totality of their most meagre and petering-out reactions, meditating upon them in an ubiquitous contemplation that resembles the trance of some “astral body” of iron and steel and paving-stone, some huge impalpable soul of the inanimate, yearning in sombre tenderness over its luckless children. And yet it is not really out of the elements of the earth that Dreiser—moving like some vast shepherd of Jotunheim-flocks, among his rams and ewes—erects his sorrowful sheep-fold, but rather out of the immaterial hurdles and straw of their own turnip-tasting dreams.

The portion of the story that deals with the murder itself is so imaginatively heightened as to cast a Janus-like shadow backwards and forwards over the rest of the book. What the boy sees and hears as he sits in the train that is bearing him towards his victim; the “supernatural soliciting” that calls to him out of the air; the spasm of panic-stricken weakness that distorts his purpose at the supreme moment; his convoluted doubts, after the event, as to his actual guilt; these passages, like the dark waters of the lake where the girl is drowned, possess so much poetic porousness and transparency that they make the earlier and later portions of the work seem like an opaque face, of which they are the living and expressive eye.

Dreiser has always been a mystic. Only a mystic could capture the peculiar terror of *Matter become a ghost to*

*the mind*, as he captures it, so as to be a veritable confederate with the Chthonian divinities. Only a mystic could ponder so obstinately upon the wretched pulse-beats of a scamp like Clyde, till they respond to the rumble of Erebus, till they rise and sink in ghastly reciprocity with the shadow-voices of Typhon, of Loki, of Azazel, of Ahriman!

We can protest—and here, as I pen these lines in the very hotel where Clyde served his transients, I do most heartily protest—that there are aspects of human nature entirely obliterated from this gregarious shadow-dance. But such protests must conform to aesthetic intelligence. *An American Tragedy* is the tragedy of only such aspects of mortal consciousness as can get themselves objectified in such a psychic panorama. An artist, a mystic, a prophet if you will, must be allowed to *isolate his phenomena*. Dreiser’s phenomena are not lacking in their own inherent contrasts. Compare the letters of Roberta, for example, so poignant as to be almost intolerable, with the baby-talk in the letters of Sondra, so intolerable for the very opposite reason! Sondra is one stage further removed from nature than Roberta; but the genuineness of her infatuation for Clyde is not lost in her queer jargon. Infatuated young persons, of both sexes, do babble in this unpleasant way when they are devoid of all critical alter-egoism. Like some gigantic naturalist studying the twitchings and turnings of a crowd of shimmery-winged dung-beetles Dreiser has been put to it to invent human sounds such as shall represent the love-cries and the panic-cries of these husks of inane rapacity.

Had any of his rampaging bell-hops, his crafty lawyers, his sly department-store ladies, his bouncing society-chits, shown too marked a tendency to emerge into a more appealing stratum of consciousness, a certain formidable unity of “timbre” would have been lost to the book, a consistency of rhythm broken, a necessary pressure removed. Composed of everything that prods, scrapes, rakes, harrows, and outrages an intelligent organism the environment, to which these creatures of Dreiser’s contemplation respond, itself mingles with their lamentable response. It is out of this appalling reciprocity of raw with raw, that the mass and weight and volume of the book proceed. And this accumulated weight—so terribly mortis’d and tenon’d by its creator’s genius—has its own unparalleled beauty, as pure an aesthetic beauty (almost mathematical in the rigidity of its pattern) as the most purged and exacting taste could demand. Thus is brought about through the mediumship of this omophagous intellect, the only escape from the impact of a certain horrible dream-world which a lost soul can find; the escape, namely, of giving to the Chimaera itself the lineaments of a work of art. To the unhappy wretch by the wayside whom Zarathustra found with a snake in his gullet was uttered the magic formula—“Bite and spit!” This is what Theodore Dreiser has done; and the result is *An American Tragedy*.

In *Plays Natural and Supernatural* this same author bestowed an articulate voice upon that thundering ox-bellow of the American Locomotive (so different from