Oh, blessed are the children of endeavor in this, that they try and are hopeful. And blessed also are they who, knowing, smile and approve.

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie.*
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is one of the ironies of research in American literature that while Dreiser's novels have been a subject of extensive literary review, his short fiction has suffered a relative neglect at the hands of critics. In their book-length studies on Dreiser, such prominent scholars as Matthiessen, Elles, Gerber, Swanberg, McAlear, Lehan, Moers, Mookerjee and Pizer, took a note of some of his short stories mainly for their biographical value. The brilliance of his novels seems to have outshone the glow of his short fiction. Not only some of Dreiser's stories are "the finest and most moving,"¹ but are also unquestionably central to an understanding of his novels. A comprehensive evaluation of Dreiser would demand an equally incisive critical examination of his short stories which this study purports to do.

Dreiser's short stories, like his novels, portray touching human situations, charged with moments of great intensity. His short stories are "cut from the same fabric

as his novels. The stories reflect the author's searching mind, which can absorb details and put them to use. Dreiser was truly Henry James's ideal writer of fiction "upon whom nothing is lost." Filled with compassion for his characters, Dreiser broods over their suffering and innocent dreams. He is a mastermind, especially through monologues, in effectively introducing a staggering change in the personality of his central characters, in building the background for this change and in portraying its implications. All this makes his short stories deeply moving and immensely absorbing. They offer ways of accosting reality, sharpen our perception and compel us to feel and to think. Indeed, each of his stories is a fascinating literary object, an object worthy of study in its own right. It is quite possible that an objective literary evaluation may eventually place Dreiser's short stories higher in rank than his novels, as William C. Lengel hopes.

The scope of the present analysis is limited to the stories included in *Free and Other Stories* (1918) and the more important ones in *Chains* (1927). The purpose

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was to achieve greater depth through a close examination of these stories. For analysing the short stories, I have followed Eudora Welty's sane advice: "Let's look at a particular story and see it solitary out in space." The publication history of each story and its genesis have also been traced. The stories chosen for examination have been grouped in different chapters chronologically and thematically.

In the following section is given a brief survey of the American short story to Dreiser.

II

The American soil, with the possible exception of the French and the Russian, has been very congenial to the growth of the short story. Even if splendid achievements in novel, poetry, and drama are cut off from the literary map of the United States, a corpus of imposing short fiction will still be left to compel the attention of students of literary geography. The nineteenth century produced an incredible long roll-call of celebrated names: Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman,

Hamlin Garland, Ambrose Bierce, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane and Jack London. The twentieth century also has been prodigious in short fiction and can present an all-star cast: Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, William Carlos Williams, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow.

Why has the United States embraced the short story so avidly? The American society is mobile; in fact, at all times it has been on the move. The Song of the Open Road has ever throbbed in their hearts. In the opening years of the seventeenth century people from England, and later on from all over Europe, emigrated to America in search of new pastures. Wilderness and age-old forests greeted these denizens from Europe. Practical affairs of life kept these people busy, leaving no modicum of leisure for study and reflection. They seized the day to get for what they could from it. There was also a tendency to rush and hurry, because new vistas and widening horizons were constantly beckoning them. A whole virgin continent lay before them to challenge their manhood. The American temperament has evolved out of this preoccupation with their New World, demanding its literature to be crisp and compact. The short fiction meets these requirements and appeals to them.

Washington Irving (1783-1859) helped open up the short fiction as a form of conscious art. He put more
emphasis on character than on theme. His local colour idea was later followed by many regional writers of America. After him came Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). He was the first American writer of the short story who attached the greatest importance to theme, which in his case was mostly centred around the problem of good and evil. Like Hawthorne, Herman Melville (1819-1891) also was concerned with the problem of good and evil. Theme or character was the main intent of these writers.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was the first American to consider seriously the short story as an art form. He adjudged the unity of effect or impression a point of the greatest importance. With him it was the work of art that became a thing in itself and left in the mind of the reader a sense of the fullest satisfaction.

The opening of the American frontier has furnished material for many stirring and revealing tales. The individualistic exploits of the westerners were celebrated, magnified, and overcoloured in the frontier stories. Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), better known as Mark Twain, was a westerner by birth. He wrote some of his best stories in the tradition of the frontier tall tale.

Another writer Bret Harte (1836-1902) may be called the first local colourist whom the rugged, florid days of the California gold rush inspired to create a characteristic western American literature and to open up
a new frontier. He delighted in the use of the trick ending which has become an integral part of the short story. Apart from Harte there were other regional writers. The stories of Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) bring out the local flavour of New England character and language. Like Jane Austen, Miss Jewett's range was limited. She took her art seriously and strove always for perfection. She tried to infuse her stories, as did Dreiser, with real life and vitality by seeing significance in things commonplace. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930) also, like Miss Jewett, was a New England local colourist. Her method of telling the story was usually objective, written in restrained prose style. The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw the publication of local colour stories by such southern writers as George Washington Cable, Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris and James Lane Allen. The rich and varied culture of the South as well as its people are portrayed in these stories, which are at times realistic, at times idealised.

The Middle-West inspired, among others, Hamlin Garland (1880-1940) to write stories of prairie life which are included in Main-Travelled Roads (1891). In "Under the Lion's Paw," he depicts a prairie farmer who has been entrapped by a land speculator. This story is the story of millions of farmers in our own country who are under the money-lender's paw.
The American Civil War left its own impact on the imagination of many writers. A literary heir to Poe, Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?), his stories in *Can Such Things Be?* (1883) equal Poe's in creating atmospheric effects. Their unity, terseness, clear style and striking imagery demonstrate that they are the creation of an adept technician.

With Henry James (1843-1916) the short story became a fine art. A painter of surging life, his stories are a peep into human nature and experience which have life and validity. They are also exercises in sheer technical skill. His technical innovations especially his practice of limiting the point of view have profoundly influenced the twentieth century writers. James's disciple, Edith Wharton (1862-1937) was born into the same social world that furnished Henry James materials for his fiction. She studied her social world with a satiric intelligence and an exquisite expertness. She exposed with telling irony the false values of New York polite society. Like Dreiser, she wrote many stories which underscore the consequences arising from unhappy marriages.

Naturalism as a literary movement began to dominate American literature in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a literary method, it attempted to give fictional representation to deterministic theories that were developing in biology, philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences. Naturalist writers stressed the
overpowering aspects of man's environment and heredity, of his passions and instincts. Frank Norris (1870-1902) was the youthful father of fictional naturalism in America. Another writer was Stephen Crane (1871-1900) whose works show that environment is a powerful thing in the world. Symbolism and irony are the special features of his technique of writing. The thought of Jack London (1876-1916), another prolific writer of short stories, developed out of the ferment of socialism and Darwinian beliefs. London wrote for the great American En Masse of which Whitman was so proud. He tried to make his stories crisp and crackling and interesting. In his stories each word has an aim in the sentence and each sentence is directed towards a preconceived effect.

By around 1900, approximately three-quarters of a century after Irving, the short story had evolved into a well-established literary form.

With Theodore Dreiser we step into the twentieth century. The following section is devoted to his biography.

III

Dreiser was born at Terre Haute, Indiana, on August 27, 1871. His father, John Paul Dreiser, a Roman Catholic, was a fanatically religious person; his mother, Sarah Dreiser, a warm and powerful spirit. Paul Dreiser
was ruined financially when in "the fall of 1870" his woollen mill burned to the ground. His American Dream was replaced by a wild need to propitiate the fates. When Theodore was born, the family was in outright destitution. At Terra Haute the Dreisers were reputed to be a chaotic, hard-pressed clan, whose older sons were wild and whose older daughters were flirty. Theodore, the ninth child of the family, grew up among tensions. In his boyhood years he was homely, nervous, sensitive, and non-athletic.

At six, he was taken to the parochial school. The nuns and priests there were an extension of his father who censored the joys from his life by their must-nots and avoid-evils. During his eighth through twelfth year, the family moved from place to place in search of home and work. Shamed by family scandals and sick of family failures, Dreiser quitted school and came to Chicago at the age of sixteen to work there with "Arabian Nights" dream of success. There he found petty jobs. Miss Mildred Fielding, Dreiser's former Warsaw teacher, now principal of a Chicago high school, met him one day. Believing in his abilities, she sent him to Indiana University, Bloomington—at her expense. Dreiser studied at the University just for one year during 1889-1890.

On his return to Chicago, he found small jobs, yearning meanwhile to become a writer. As Dreiser was greatly attached to his mother, her death in 1890 was a great shock to him. She was a unifying force in the family; after her death their home was more or less broken. In 1892 Dreiser got the job of a reporter on Chicago Daily Globe. In November of the same year he was taken on as a reporter by St. Louis Globe-Democrat, of which paper he became shortly the drama critic. In 1894 journeying east he worked for newspapers in Toledo, Cleveland and Pittsburgh. In 1895 he moved to New York and became editor of Ev'ry Month. In 1898 he was married to Sallie White, a Missouri schoolteacher, after much temporising. He considered this marriage the greatest mistake of his life.

In 1899 he started writing *Sister Carrie* at friend Arthur Henry's home in Maumee, Ohio. After much dilly-dallying the publishers published the novel in 1900, but did not publicise it because of the publisher's wife's objections to the moral attitudes in the novel. Frank Norris, who was reader-editor of the firm (Doubleday, Page & Company), was greatly impressed and knew at once that he had found a great book. After the 'failure' of the novel, Dreiser moved toward nervous breakdown, suffered poverty, insomnia, hallucinations and near-madness. His eldest brother Paul Dresser (he "Americanised" his name in the interests of euphony), singer and comedian of
national fame, helped restore him by sending him to Muldoon's health camp in Westchester, New York.

From 1904 to 1910 Dreiser worked as a successful editor of various magazines. In 1907 he became top editor of the Butterick "Trio" at a starting salary of $5,000 a year plus a bonus for circulation gains. In two years the Butterick trio had risen to a combined circulation of 140,000—an astounding figure for those days. During these years Dreiser had both fame and gold. It was during this period that he met H.L. Mencken, a Butterick contributor. Later on Mencken became Dreiser's drum-beater. Dreiser's love for Thelma Cudlipp, the daughter of a woman employee, was responsible for his 'dismissal' from editorship. She was Dreiser's dream of beauty. Two years before his death in 1945 Dreiser met Thelma. At that time she was the wife of New York's former Governor Charles Seymour Whitman. She had carried on an affectionate correspondence with Dreiser over the years. Dreiser had a magic with women.

Between 1911 and 1925 Dreiser published a number of books, which are listed in Section IV. With the publication of An American Tragedy in 1925, the critic of the American Dream realised his American Dream. The Tragedy was an immense success; critics hailed it. Dreiser became public property, people asking him to issue statements in favour of this or that cause. During the last twenty years or so of his life, he was inflamed by
social causes and absorbed in scientific readings and philosophical writings.

When Russia was to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution in October 1927, the Russian Government invited Dreiser to be its guest. The Soviet people believed Dreiser to be the outstanding literary intelligence of America. Later, Dreiser wrote a book about his Russian tour. Dreiser enjoys a great vogue in Russia. In 1951 the state publishing house in Moscow published a 900,000-copy, 12 volume edition of Dreiser and also an anthology of his essays and articles in 150,000 copies.

When in 1930 Sinclair Lewis was chosen by the Swedish Academy for the Nobel Prize, the choice was generally disparaged. (The Swedish Academy appointed a three-man committee to take the vote. Lewis got two votes; Dreiser, one.) In his Acceptance Speech to the Swedish Academy, Lewis gave a special laudation to Dreiser, saying in part:

Now to me, as to many other American writers, Dreiser, more than any other man, is marching alone. Usually unappreciated, often hounded, he has cleared the trail from Victorian, Howellsian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty, boldness and passion of life. Without his pioneering I doubt if any of us could, unless we liked to be sent to jail, express life, beauty and terror. 7

The Nobel Prize for 1937 went to Eugene O' Neill, who replied to Dreiser's congratulations: "I have a sneaking feeling of guilt—an if I had pinched something which I knew damned well should, in justice, be yours." Sherwood Anderson wrote Dreiser a letter in 1938, saying: "Anyway Teddy you are my Nobel Prize man." In 1944 the American Academy of Arts and Letters honoured itself by presenting to Dreiser the Award of Merit Medal for his courage and integrity in breaking trail as a pioneer in the presentation in fiction of real human beings and a real America.

Dreiser died on December 28, 1945. His last two novels were published posthumously.

IV

Dreiser, a multi-faceted genius, wrote for fifty-three years (1892-1945). During this period he wrote a formidable mass of materials which is preserved in "750 folders and 441 manuscript boxes" at the Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Below is given a list of his most important works:


works.

I. Novels

1. *Sister Carrie* (1900)
2. *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911)
5. *The "Genius"* (1915)
6. *An American Tragedy* (1925)
7. *The Bulwark* (1946)

   The *Financier*, *The Titan*, and *The Stoic* comprise
   "The Trilogy of Desire."

II. Story Collections

1. *Free and Other Stories* (1918)
2. *Chains: Lesser Novels and Stories* (1927)

III. Drama

2. *The Hand of the Potter* (1918)

IV. Poetry

*Moody, Cadenced and Declaimed* (1928)
V. **Autobiography** (Arranged in order to provide the chronological sequence of Dreiser's life)

1. *Dawn* (1931)
2. *A Book About Myself* (1922)
3. *A Traveler at Forty* (1913)

VI. **Letters**


About 19,500 letters written by Dreiser remain unedited.

VII. **Non-fiction**

1. *Twelve Men* (1919)
2. *Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub!* (1920)
3. *The Color of a Great City* (1923)
4. *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (1928)
5. *A Gallery of Women* (1929)
7. *The Living Thoughts of Thoreau* (1939)
8. *America is Worth Saving* (1941)

These Notes represent Dreiser's most revealing testament. They were a preparation for his philosophical magnum opus which he could not complete; death intervened.

The University of Pennsylvania is currently engaged in publishing "The Complete Works of Theodore
Dreiser under the general editorship of Dr. Nade Westlake, who has been looking after the Dreiser Collection of the Library for the last over thirty years.

A brief survey of Dreiser scholarship and criticism is given in this section. H.L. Mencken's A Book of Prefaces (1917) contains the first biography of Dreiser, based largely on what Dreiser himself told him. Burton Rascoe's Theodore Dreiser (1925) stresses Dreiser's capacity to respond to the epic quality of American life. It is with Dorothy Dudley's Forgotten Frontiers: Dreiser and the Land of the Free (1932) that serious, full-length treatment of Dreiser begins. She insists with verve and passion upon Dreiser's literary dominance and modernity. Robert H. Elias's Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (1949) is concerned with the career of Dreiser's attitude toward the individual and with how an understanding of that career can clarify the meaning of Dreiser's writings. F.O. Matthiessen's Theodore Dreiser (1951) describes the artistic virtues of Dreiser's images of social insecurity, his symbols, and even his language. He treats Dreiser with a respect and devotion that only the important writers can earn. Charles Shapiro, in Theodore Dreiser:

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Our Bitter Patriot (1962), is interested in interpreting Dreiser's life in terms of a sequence of underlying themes in the novels; Sister Carrie is "a close study of the individual"; Jennie Gerhardt concerns "the American family"; the Commerwood trilogy treats business; The "Genius," the artist; The Bulwark, religion; and An American Tragedy is "the story of all America." Philip L. Gerber, in Theodore Dreiser (1964), is primarily interested in emphasising the events in Dreiser's life that bear most directly on the writings and the extent to which the novels in particular embody Dreiser's ideas. W.A. Swanberg's Dreiser (1965) is probably a definitive biography. He brings together such a mass of materials, and cites so many sources, that he makes available to the student of Dreiser almost all that a biographer can. Marguerite Tjader's Theodore Dreiser: A New Dimension (1965) serves to complement Swanberg's. Richard Lehan's Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels (1969) focusses on the genesis and evolution of the novels, their pattern, and their meaning. Ellen Moers offers, in Two Dreisers (1969), new light on Dreiser's literary methods. R.N. Mookerjee discusses Dreiser's philosophy in Theodore Dreiser: His Thought and Social Criticism (1974). Recently Donald Pizer published The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study (1976). Relying heavily on the manuscripts and letters in the Dreiser Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Library, Pizer seeks to establish the facts of the sources and composition of each
of Dreiser's eight novels and to study the themes and form of the completed works. Modern Fiction Studies saluted Dreiser by bringing out a Special Number on him in Autumn 1977 (Vol. 23, No. 3). The various aspects of Dreiser's individual novels have been discussed in numerous articles in the leading journals of America.

A study of his short stories, it is hoped, will add a new dimension to Dreiserana.

VI

In this section is given the plan of chapters of the present study.

Chapters II, III, and IV discuss the stories found in the Free volume. Four early stories are analysed in Chapter II. The germ of Dreiser's later fictional themes and techniques can be traced to these stories. In Chapter III is to be found a discussion of those stories the theme of which is "The Hymeneal Yoke." In Chapter IV three stories are studied: the first is a fantasy, the second is about the rivalry of two newspapermen, and the third is about the ways of the politicians.

From the Chains volume only those stories have been discussed which have themes or techniques not found in the Free volume. A selection, therefore, became
inevitable from this volume to avoid repetition and in the interest of economy. Chapter V is devoted to the analysis of those stories which are about the American Dream of Success and Wealth. The stories analysed in this chapter form a group of ironies. The protagonists of the three stories discussed in Chapter VI are motivated by the dream of love. The dream of love, like the dream of success and wealth, proves to be ironic. Protagonists in the Chains volume wish to be "free" and find themselves chained.

The concluding Chapter VII attempts to sum up Dreiser's house of short fiction.