THEODORE DREISER IN PITTSBURGH, 1894

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Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) was a metropolitan man. Several attempts to take up the small-town life — not unlike those overtures Hamlin Garland and his restless brothers from the Middle Border felt compelled to make — were abortive. Dreiser was, and remains posthumously, tied to the City. His “intrinsic interest in the city as a unique place and atmosphere” is nowhere more evident than in his early novels, in particular Sister Carrie (1900), The Financier (1912), and The Titan (1914). If it is fair to say, as Blanche Gelfant suggests it is, that “With the publication of Sister Carrie, the twentieth-century American city novel came into being,”¹ then Dreiser’s pre-1900 urban experiences assume considerable significance. Between 1890 and 1900 Dreiser worked and lived for varying periods of time in Chicago, St. Louis, Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and New York. Gelfant contends that Dreiser’s exposure to the “indescribable luxury and indescribable degradation” prevalent in Pittsburgh in 1894 was “crucial to the education of his [literary] characters.”² In The Financier, Burton Rascoe noted in 1925, there was clear evidence of the “resentment [Dreiser] had felt as a reporter against the steel barons of Pittsburgh from their treatment of their employees . . .”³ Robert Elias and Robert Shafer have both stressed the importance of the six months Dreiser spent in Pittsburgh in terms of his intellectual development.⁴ Dreiser himself dwelled on the meaning of the Pittsburgh interlude (April-November 1894) for over forty pages in his A Book About Myself.⁵

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2 Gelfant, American City Novel, 74.
3 Burton Rascoe, Theodore Dreiser (New York, 1925), 45.
Dreiser was neither an innovative nor systematic thinker. The dynamics of late nineteenth century urban life conditioned him to draw cumulative, pragmatic conclusions — seldom altered, once adopted — about his environment. As Dorothy Dudley put it: "If conditioned at all, it was more by the decrees of the moment, by the American scene." 6 The overriding significance of Dreiser's half-year hiatus in Pittsburgh lies in its crucial impact upon his evolving philosophy of life and labor. Vital to an assessment of the Pittsburgh experience are: considerations of the attitudes held by Dreiser in 1894, the character of the city itself, and any discernible residue of the meeting of Dreiser and Pittsburgh in his later thinking.

I

The Theodore Dreiser who arrived in Pittsburgh7 in April 1894 was a twenty-two-year-old man of some complexity. A generation later (1922) he described himself as having been "a poetic melancholiac, crossed with a vivid materialistic lust of life"; cowardly but "blazing with ambition, vanity and self-confidence"; a "realist in thought and a sentimentalist in action." 8 An 1894 photograph shows a homely man with conspicuous ears, protruding upper teeth, wavy hair parted in the center, ill-fitted clothing and neckwear, and a startled look on a forgettable face.9 Dreiser was self-conscious about his non-athletic physical construction, certain that his awkward appearance (6'1½", 137 pounds, loosely arranged) rendered him unappealing to the fairer sex. Socially, he recalled, he was "nervous, shy, [and] poorly spoken." In his opinion, by the time he reached Pittsburgh he had already had certain "sobering and broadening" experiences which moved him toward adulthood.

6 Dorothy Dudley, Forgotten Frontiers: Dreiser and the Land of the Free (New York, 1932), 11.
7 During the period covered by this paper Pittsburgh was being spelled both with and without a final "h." The "h" was legally eliminated by decree of the U.S. Geographic Board of Names in 1890. Thereafter, until its restoration in 1911, the "h" was dropped by some newspapers, journals, and authors. An equal number of persons and institutions refused to conform to the Geographic Board's directive. For the purposes of this paper the name will be given just as it appeared in the sources used. I am indebted to the staff of The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania for its assistance, with particular gratitude to Mr. James Waldo Fawcett who directed my attention to relevant materials and shared willingly of his personal knowledge of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Pittsburgh.
8 Dreiser, A Book About Myself, 106-08, 308, 373.
Behind him, as he rode a Pittsburgh and Lake Erie train from Buffalo toward The Iron City in April 1894, were his first serious contacts with the “social cellars” (as Benjamin O. Flower would have called them) of Chicago, St. Louis, Toledo, Cleveland, and Buffalo. Newspaper assignments for the Chicago Daily Globe had introduced him to the wretchedness and depravity of the city’s “vilest slums” in 1892. Reportorial duties on the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and St. Louis Republic (1892-1894) brought additional contact with the sordid aspects of lower city life and resulted in “a period of mental dissatisfaction and unrest” for Dreiser. More importantly, in St. Louis he drew his first conclusions about the labor-management struggles of the 1890’s. Before he departed Missouri in early 1894 Dreiser came to think that “all laborers had a just right to much better pay and living conditions, and in consequence had a great cause and ought to stick together.” By the time he had seen more strikes and poverty in Toledo (February 1894) he was ready to declare that his “sympathies were all with the working men.” Brief stopovers in Cleveland and Buffalo (February-March 1894) sharpened the differences between rich (management) and poor (labor) to the extent that Dreiser was willing to believe that “our boasted Democracy and equality of opportunity” was little more than a “profound delusion.” In short, as Dreiser approached Pittsburgh, he was at the height of a typically subjective, self-indulgent, proletarian mood. The untrained mind normally identifies “wrongs” more facilely than it can (or cares to) organize remedies. Often, it selects a single target upon which it projects total blame for various injustices. Dreiser had begun to do so before he entertained the idea of seeking employment on a Pittsburgh newspaper. Already he was dichotomizing in terms of money-lords: poor, big brain: little brain, executives: common man, and financial oligarchy: liberty-deluded mass. Little wonder, then, that as Pittsburgh loomed up before him Dreiser felt that “great financiers were plotting and conniving at the enslavement of the people . . .” He was not prepared, however, for what was ahead. In a real sense, Pittsburgh disarmed Dreiser.

Before Dreiser’s arrival in April 1894 Pittsburgh, too, had undergone some “sobering and broadening” experiences.¹⁰ The Panic of

¹⁰ The depictions of Pittsburgh which follow are based on information taken from: Richard Edwards (ed.), Industries of Pittsburgh: Trade, Commerce and Manufactures (Pittsburgh, 1879); Fisher and Stewart, The Illustrated Guide and Handbook of Pittsburgh and Allegheny (Pittsburgh, 1887); G. M. Hopkins, Atlas of the City of Pittsburgh, I (Philadelphia, 1889); J. Morton Hall, Pittsburgh’s Great Industries (Pitts-
1893 left hard times in its wake. Annual area bank exchanges dropped to their lowest point since 1888. Real estate transactions and building operations were down forty per cent from 1893. The city’s net debt was climbing to the eight million dollar mark. J. M. Kelly’s *Handbook of Greater Pittsburg* for 1895 described the winter of 1893-94 as “the bleakest period in the industrial career of Pittsburg.” The *Pittsburg Bulletin* for February 10, 1894, recognized that, for many of the city’s 265,000 souls, it was a “long winter of idleness and stagnation” and a period of “bitter discontent.” Labor unrest in the Pittsburgh area — stirring memories of Homestead and July 1892 — was magnified by outside events and influences. Coal strikes were due in Ohio and Pennsylvania. On Easter Sunday (March 25) 1894, “General” Jacob S. Coxey’s “industrial army” began its march to Washington, D. C., passing through Pittsburgh in early April, and instigating a disrupting series of marches by other “armies” throughout the nation.11 On Saturday, April 21, 1894, the front page of the *Pittsburg Dispatch* — the newspaper which, two weeks later, would hire Theodore Dreiser — Headlined items such as: “10,000 Workers Steal A Train For Gen. [Charles T.] Kelly”; [Omaha] “A Frightened City”; “Big Coal Strike Already Begun”; “Rioting in Cleveland”; and “The Siege of Cincinnati” [by Lewis C. Frye’s Indiana “army”]. Clearly, 1893-94 was, for Pittsburgh, a time of apprehension, suffering, bewilderment, and disorder.

However, the month Dreiser arrived in the city the curtain of depression was beginning to lift. As the *Pittsburg Bulletin* phrased it, the “sun of prosperity” was slowly defrosting “the spell of paralyzing times.” A large measure of the credit for the improving conditions in the spring of 1894 went, quite properly, to individuals and institutions within the city who retained their optimism — and their dedication to fellow Pittsburghers. The business community held fast. On April 23, 1894, William R. Thompson told those gathered to commemorate the centennial of Pittsburgh’s incorporation: “We have gone through

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11 One of the few reliable sources on Coxey and the “army” movement remains: Donald L. McMurry, *Coxey’s Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894* (Boston, 1929). Coxey was born on Easter Sunday, April 16, 1854, at Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania.
a year of extreme depression . . . and our banks, bankers, and financial institutions were never in a healthier condition than at present.” 12 Each of the city’s fifty-nine charitable and benevolent organizations, in consort with private associations, strove to make the winter of 1893-94 easier for the unemployed and the destitute. Between December 19, 1893, and April 5, 1894, an area-wide campaign to raise funds for the jobless and needy families brought in $256,721.52 in voluntary contributions, nearly half of which was donated by Andrew Carnegie. The city invested another $133,678 in the care of the poor. School continued uninterrupted for Pittsburgh’s 36,435 pupils and their 789 teachers, small business licenses were issued as usual, and property damage from fire was held to one-fifth of the 1891 figure. Hopes were high that A. C. Buckenberger’s baseball club, a second place finisher in 1893, would carry the city’s name to a league pennant. Pittsburgh’s population was rising at an average of 82,000 each decade. Words of confidence and reassurance from all quarters more than balanced the temporary decline in human fortune. Many agreed with Reverend A. A. Lambing, President of The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, that it was “not at all improbable that our anticipations [of Pittsburgh’s growth] will be more than realized before the flowers of 1994 bloom over our narrow homes.” 13 Perhaps this is what moved Theodore Dreiser to say that, in 1894, “in Pittsburgh there was still something of a singing spirit.”

II

Dreiser arrived in Pittsburgh, then, fully prepared to see his worst fears for the plight of the laboring man confirmed. His newspaper work had made him privy, however vicariously, to reports of strikes from all sections of the country. He “knew” a number of things about the area: that Carnegie, Oliver, and other steel manufacturers “had built fences and strung them with electrified barbed wire in order to protect themselves” against their working men; that Henry Clay Frick “had been slightly wounded by a desperado named Alexander Berkman”; and that “a large number of State or county or city paid deputy sheriffs and mounted police and city policemen” were guarding company property against “lawless and unappreciative” elements.14

13 Historical Society, Centennial Celebration, 27.
14 Dreiser, A Book About Myself, 373-85.
In essence Dreiser's opinions were prematurely formed, simplistic, unjustifiably cynical, and biased. He was contradictory as well. In his autobiography, *A Book About Myself*, Dreiser states — despite his strong St. Louis, Toledo, Cleveland, and Buffalo platforms — that, at Pittsburgh: "I had not made up my mind that the [labor-management] argument was all on one side." Nor could he decide which city of the seven he visited in the 1890's exemplified the "contrast between wealth and poverty" at its worst. Pittsburgh won that dubious honor on one page of his autobiography, and New York ninety-five pages later. The mind which is careless about the rules of scholarship and evidence is often very impressionable. Dreiser was obviously overwhelmed by Pittsburgh's aesthetic qualities and independent character. For a while, his susceptibility to the city's "airy grace and charm" moderated his extreme views on the decay of democratic processes and it seemed that Pittsburgh might soothe the restless, mystical ambitions which drove him from city to city. It was not to be, through no fault of Pittsburgh itself.

The train from Buffalo left Dreiser at the Carson Street depot of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. Across the Monongahela River he saw for the first time the city in which he would spend the next six months. It was twilight in Pittsburgh. The city "was already smartly outlined by lights, a galaxy climbing the hills in every direction." The Monongahela "for a mile or more was suddenly lit to a rosy glow, a glow which . . . came from the tops of some forty or fifty stacks belching a deep orange-red flame," Dreiser recalled. He chose to walk across the Smithfield Bridge to the city beyond. As he traversed the 407 yards which separated him from the inner city his powers of observation grew sharp: the bridge itself he felt was "pleasingly designed" and of "fair size"; from it Dreiser could see other bridges to his left (Point Bridge) and right (Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and St. Louis Railroad Bridge) and steamboats packed tightly against the wharves. Exhilarated, Dreiser thought to himself: "I was truly adventuring into a new and strange world. I was glad now that I had not found work in Toledo or Cleveland or Buffalo." Continuing along Smithfield Street on foot Dreiser made note of "a large smoke-colored stone building," the famed Monongahela House. Too expensive for his dwindling funds — three dollars per night in 1894 — the Monongahela House was left behind and Dreiser went on in search of more reasonable accommodations, strolling past a "most attractive and unusual" Post Office building and on to a "brightly

15 Dreiser's reactions described below may be found in *Ibid.*, 385-86.
lighted" street which carried "unusual traffic": Fifth Avenue. He stood for a moment, looking about, and concluded that the section was "most puzzlingly laid out," and he did not "attempt to solve its mysteries." Dreiser knew one thing that first night. "Something about the city drew me intensely. I wished I might remain for a time," he wrote. "What a city for a realist to work and dream in!" he reflected as he looked for a one-dollar-a-night hotel room.

As was his habit in each new city Dreiser spent his first three days in Pittsburgh familiarizing himself with the area, on foot and by streetcar. Equipped with a city map he set out to survey "one of the most curious and fascinating" cities he had ever visited. His itinerary covered: Allegheny (still a separate city), Mt. Washington, Homestead, eastern portions of Pittsburgh, Fifth Avenue's residential sections, and Oakland. Fifth Avenue, Dreiser discovered, was "lined with some of the finest residences in the city." He noted its "well-cropped trees," "well-curbed, well-drained and well-paved thoroughfares," and the "expensive carriages" peculiar to the general neighborhood. "Even the street-lamps were of better design than elsewhere," he thought. In the Schenley Park area Dreiser examined the "botanical garden under glass" and observed that "a large graceful library of white limestone . . . was in the process of construction," referring to the Carnegie Library which was eighteen months away from completion. The Carnegie Free Library in Allegheny, completed in 1890, was "a very handsome building" in Dreiser's view and he was impressed with the "forty or fifty thousand volumes" on the library's shelves.

Dreiser's reactions to Mt. Washington and to Homestead are enlightening examples of the conflict within him in 1894. What he saw in both places widened further the gap between the real and the ideal, a division he was never able to reduce to manageable size during his seventy-four years. Predictably, Dreiser was shaken by his one-day visit to Homestead and each time thereafter when he was on assignment by the Pittsburg Dispatch to the area. Doubtless, he found what he expected. Homestead was "depressing," characterized by "sullen

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16 Dreiser's comments on his tour of the area are contained in Ibid., 386, 392-93.
17 It is relevant to note here that Dreiser's sense of size and numbers was not reliable always. As his biographer, W. A. Swanberg, phrased it: "Dreiser had a remarkable capacity for getting facts twisted — a weakness he never conquered." Dreiser's intuitive estimate of the number of volumes in the Allegheny Carnegie Library is a case in point. Library records show that Dreiser exceeded the actual number (28,264) by some twenty-thousand. See William M. Stevenson, Fifth Annual Report of the Carnegie Free Library (Allegheny, 1895), 8; W. A. Swanberg, Dreiser (New York, 1965), 69. Appreciation is due Miss Margaret Scanlin of the Carnegie Free Library for her assistance during my research.
despair,” “dwarfed” trees, streets that were “mere mudtracks,” “foliage withered by a metallic fume” — all shrouded in a “pall of gray smoke.” 18 Once again indulging in superlatives, Dreiser felt he had witnessed scenes worse than “the lowest phases of Chicago slum-life.” Following brief looks at the local men at work in the mills — and at play in the raucous saloons — Dreiser returned to Pittsburgh, further stimulated to wonder about the magnate and his counterpart in the Homestead hovel. Unfortunately Dreiser could not relinquish his single-minded conviction, often tinged with unwarranted sarcasm, that many of the local laborers “worked and lived so [lowly] in order that Mr. Carnegie might give the world one or two extra libraries with his name plastered on the front, and Mr. Frick a mansion on Fifth Avenue.” This from the man who would receive his first intellectual sustenance from books by Balzac, Spencer, Huxley, and Tyndall made available to him at the Carnegie Library in Allegheny, and who was so inspired by the forms of beauty the Henry Clay Frick family tried so diligently to preserve.

Dreiser was delighted with Mt. Washington. His visits there, courtesy of the Monongahela Inclined Plane, swept away the sights and sounds of Homestead. Once again, on the heights, he became the dreamer. He marvelled at the “skyscrapers” of downtown Pittsburgh and the “simple and homelike aspect” of the city spread out before him. 19 Later in life Dreiser would travel extensively. He would insist, however, that from Mt. Washington he observed “a scene which impressed [him]” far more than any he saw from the hills of Rome, Los Angeles, or Florence. Often, he would return to the heights after dark. In his own words: “I had the pleasure of looking down upon as wonderful a night panorama as I have ever seen, a winking and fluttering field of diamonds that outrivaled the sky itself.” Living on Mt. Washington, which Dreiser thought he might do — but never did — “would be like living in a mountain resort, and most inexpensively.” The entire panorama moved him so that he was willing to say: “The best I should ever do was to think and dream, standing aloof as a spectator.” Dreiser also saw Pittsburgh in a manner few others have been inspired to view the city. In 1894 he had not been abroad in fact, but through the novels of Honoré de Balzac he knew Paris in his imagination. During those “Idyllic days, dreamy days, poetic days, wonderful days” in the spring and early summer of 1894 Dreiser saw

18 Dreiser, A Book About Myself, 391-92.
19 Dreiser’s comments on Mt. Washington may be found in Ibid., 388, 390, 395; Pittsburgh as Paris in Ibid., 412.
Pittsburgh and Paris as one. "These charming rivers, these many little bridges, the sharp contrasts presented by the east end and the mill regions," he wrote, "the huge industries here and their importance to the world at large, impressed me more vividly than before. I was in a workaday, begrimed, and yet vivid Paris."

III

Even in Paris men must work at their trades, and Dreiser was a newspaper reporter of some skill and experience in 1894. His first full day in Pittsburgh was spent, in part, looking for employment. Turned away by the *Times* Dreiser found encouragement in the offices of the respected, conservative *Pittsburg Dispatch*. Once again Dreiser was pleasantly surprised. Prior to this time he was severely critical of journalism as a vocation and the men who worked at it. Journalism was a slough of muck." Newspaper reporting was "pagan and unmoral," dishonest, and "cut-throat." Reporters plied their "heartless and brutal" trades for whatever financial, social, and political gain they could realize. Dreiser's association with the *Dispatch* was quite the opposite of what he had known previously. The newspaper reporters he judged to be "genial," "sociable," "intelligent," "helpful," and "companionable." City editor Harry Gaither was a "cool, speculative, diplomatic soul" who refused to sensationalize labor, religious, or social news. Founded in 1846 by Colonel J. Herron Foster the *Dispatch* became known as a Republican, "influential and profitable," "cleverly conducted" newspaper whose quality Sunday editions, Sarah Killikelly wrote, were "clearly superior to any Pittsburgh had ever enjoyed in that line...." From his rented room on Wylie Avenue Dreiser departed each day in late April 1894 for Smithfield and Diamond Streets to await word of some assignment by the *Dispatch*. In early May he was given two missions — neither of which suited his tastes. Officially he was assigned to cover stories, if any arose, which emanated from the municipal, police, and hospital affairs of Allegheny. Editor Gaither also told Dreiser to submit a series of short essays of the human interest variety — in Dreiser's words, "some sort of idle feature stuff which they could use in place of news and still interest their readers." Both assignments did a good deal more for Dreiser than he did for his employer. By his own admission he "rendered as little reportorial service as was consistent with even a show of effort."

Dreiser’s Allegheny post gave him an opportunity to do some long overdue reading. He claims to have said to himself as a boy: “Books! Books! Books! How wonderful, fascinating, revealing!” His enthusiasm was not matched by application, apparently. Not until he was assigned to Allegheny, and found time hanging heavy on his hands, did he avail himself of the Carnegie Library and embark upon a reading schedule. At that, Dreiser set about the task without an organized plan. He followed faithfully the serialization of George Du Maurier’s “Trilby” in Harper’s Magazine. Herbert Spencer’s First Principles and Thomas H. Huxley’s Science and the Christian Tradition engrossed him. In the “windownooks” and on the “chairs between stacks and in alcoves” Dreiser spent many days absorbing the character development and detailed description of Honoré de Balzac’s works, particularly The Wild Ass’ Skin. In a May 13, 1916, letter to H. L. Mencken Dreiser noted that Spencer and Huxley (among others) “shifted my point of view tremendously, confirmed my worst suspicions and destroyed the last remaining traces of [my] Catholicism . . . .” Thereafter Dreiser would conclude: “Man was a mechanism, undevised and uncreated, and a badly and carelessly driven one at that.” Du Maurier’s Little Billee was a tragic figure with whom Dreiser could identify, as he could with Balzac’s character Raphael. He saw himself as “the brooding, seeking, ambitious beginner in life’s social, political, artistic and commercial affairs.” Exposure to Balzac was, for Dreiser, a “literary revolution.” It was not a revolution in his thinking, however, but rather a revelation that what he had suspected intuitively had some support and confirmation from other, highly respected quarters. Balzac, Spencer, and Huxley sent him into paroxysms of delight because they “verified” his uncertainty and legitimized his relativism. They did not make him aware of his shortcomings as a speculative analyst. What Dreiser discovered in the Carnegie Library he construed to be an endorsement of, not a challenge to, certain a priori views of human existence.

28 Dreiser, A Book About Myself, 458.
Between May 5 and November 13, 1894, Dreiser is said to have written forty-two short feature columns for the Dispatch. Thirteen of the features have been identified as Dreiser's beyond all question. In each Dreiser is revealed as a sensitive craftsman with a consummate eye for detail. Pittsburgh has seldom been described with such artistic restraint by a transient personality. There is much Balzack in Dreiser's May 19, 1894, column on the city, "After the Rain Storm," composed after a visit to Mt. Washington:

From Mt. Washington St. Paul's spires seemed to glisten with the trickling drops that had so lately fallen. The proud head of the Court House Tower still dripped the water from its pea-green slate. Black old Trinity [church], fringed about with its elms and grass plot, seemed more peaceful than ever, and its few moss-grown gravestones satisfied to totter upright another hundred years.

He wrote, too, depending on his daily mood, of the children at Morganza, the city mosquito, literary affectation, the disappearing gold piece, and General William Booth's final "farewell" to Pittsburgh on November 11, 1894. Of the annual July harvests in the Ohio Valley Dreiser said,

The whirr of the reaper is heard in the land . . . . This is the season of nature's most generous offerings to man. It is now that the whole temperate zone witnesses the fruit of the chill winter, the rainy spring and the dry summer. Pittsburgh, as a humble portion, may likewise distend her optics and behold.

To sustain his column Dreiser "wandered out into the country or into strange neighborhoods for ideas." Frequently his resultant "words pictures" grew from the people around him, as in "Odd Scraps of Melody," a final example of his work.

Music, as a numerous quality, is very prevalent in Pittsburgh at present [July 1894] . . . At night time tunes float out upon Pittsburg's evening air like bats. With the cessation of toil begins the murmurings of songs. On their way home men with tin buckets go hobbling along all wrapt in their own thoughts singing softly to themselves. On the street cars . . . people sing under their breath. Others take advantage of the rattle of the wheels to hum their favorite air . . . . In the East End real melody in a hundred forms steals through the soft curtains and out over the shadowy lawn, causing one to dream of all the places where one wishes but cannot be.

30 "After the Rain Storm," Dispatch, May 19, 1894, 2.
31 Features not quoted in this paper but authored by Dreiser appeared under the following titles in the Dispatch: "Hospital Violet Day," May 12, 1894, 2; "And It Was Mighty Blue," May 15, 1894, 2; "Soldiers of Morganza," July 5, 1894, 3; "Fenced Off the Earth," July 19, 1894, 3; "Confound the Mosquito," July 28, 1894, 3; "Some Dabbling in Books," August 14, 1894, 3; "Snap Shots at Pleasure," August 18, 1894, 3; "Where Sympathy Failed," August 25, 1894, 2; "Our Fleeting Shekels," August 26, 1894, 2; and "Gen. Booth Says Farewell," November 12, 1894, 1-2.
32 "Reapers in the Field," Dispatch, July 6, 1894, 2.
33 "Odd Scraps of Melody," Dispatch, July 7, 1894, 3.
IV

If Dreiser wished to be anywhere permanently it was (he thought) New York. There is every reason to believe that the stopovers in Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh were nothing more than postponements of his aim to reach New York — and conquer it — in stages. As he moved East from Chicago and St. Louis, sampling unsystematically the smorgasbord of urban life, he was deceiving himself into thinking he could resist the siren song from Manhattan. “I was intensely interested in America and its cities,” he wrote, “and wondered, in spite of my interest in New York, which I would select as my permanent resting place.” In fact, no other city could have held him. Pressure from his brother, songwriter Paul Dresser, and the nagging conviction that whatever greatness he was to achieve was somehow tied to New York City prodded Dreiser on. Each city, Pittsburgh especially, promised to be different — perhaps the end of his restiveness and mystical compulsions — but each time he became disenchanted and moved on. Three months after his arrival in Pittsburgh Dreiser went to New York, returning only to save sufficient money to leave for New York forever. “Pittsburgh, after New York and all I had seen there!”, he exclaimed. Dreiser was prepared to depart the “dismal scene” that was Pittsburgh — or any city — for “the charm of the great city beyond.” By 1895, buffeted and unappreciated by “the great city,” Dreiser would say: New York — “After the peace and ease of Pittsburgh — God!”

Dreiser, at age fifty-one, noted that “Of all the cities in which I ever worked or lived Pittsburgh was the most agreeable.” Aesthetically and vocationally that may have been the case. The personality of the city and the conditions under which he worked for the Dispatch were attractive and relaxed, comparatively. Dreiser obtained valuable back-

34 Dreiser, A Book About Myself, 371.
35 Paul [Dreiser] Dresser (1857-1906) was Theodore Dreiser’s eldest brother. Dresser’s most popular song, “On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away” (1899), became the State Song of Indiana. Some have contended that Theodore wrote a portion of the lyrics — which he did not deny — but there is evidence to the contrary submitted by Sigmund Spaeth in A History of Popular Music in America (New York, 1962), 278-79. Dresser is fondly remembered in Indiana, Theodore less so. Dresser’s birthplace in Terre Haute has been preserved by the Vigo County Historical Society. A median marker on South Third Street in Terre Haute was erected in Dresser’s name in 1966 but does mention that his “famous brother, author Theodore Dreiser, wrote An American Tragedy and other novels.” Several blocks away is Dreiser Square, a housing project for the aged sponsored by the city of Terre Haute. Based on visit by writer to Terre Haute on June 6, 1967.
36 Dreiser, A Book About Myself, 457, 470.
ground information on city life while in Pittsburgh which lent strength and credence to his urban novels to follow. When his *Sister Carrie* was published in 1900 a Pittsburgh *Commercial-Gazette* reviewer recognized it as "A Novel of City Life" and went on to say that "If the function of the novel be to give lessons in the art of life, this book has not been born in vain." Dreiser may have disagreed with the reviewer's interpretation but that he learned some of the "lessons in the art of life" in Pittsburgh seems clear. In no other city did he have, or take, the time to improve his undernourished literary education. Pittsburgh, despite its problems, had a good deal to offer Dreiser culturally — and he took advantage of most of it. The Pittsburgh interlude placed him in the midst of men and women whose ideas and actions were changing the course of American industrial history. At the Duquesne Club, on assignment by the *Dispatch*, Dreiser was fortunate enough to hear Andrew Carnegie speak "on the subject of America and its political needs." Unfortunately, in later years, when Dreiser addressed himself to the same subject, he forgot his inheritance. His pleasant memories of Pittsburgh were all but erased by his bitter conviction that too much power rested in the hands of an elitist cult of cunning capitalists. Repetitively, Dreiser insisted that if one were "lower in rank than the top level" one was "practically helpless" and obviously at the mercy of "plotting, fighting, [and] dreaming" plutocrats. In *Hoosier Holiday* (1916) he rudely stated that he "could not recall anyone in American political history or art or science who had come from Pennsylvania" and that America "could not be vastly proud" of men like Carnegie or Frick. Pittsburgh was the site of "trust building, stock gambling, stock watering, [and] get rich quick-ing." In June 1931 Dreiser visited Pittsburgh to witness first hand the contest between two unions for the loyalty of regional mine-workers. He brought with him twenty years worth of prejudices, and went back to New York convinced that the workingman was the victim of oppression. In a July 17, 1931, letter to William L. Green, then head of the American Federation of Labor, Dreiser demonstrated that his analytical powers were no stronger in 1931 than they were in 1894. His understanding of the labor movement was seriously limited by his inability to depersonalize and update his views in an organized manner. There was an unresolved contradiction between his "chemic" determinism and his dedication to

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social reform. To prove a point he would often distort a fact. Writing in *Tragic America* (1931) of his version of the suppression of dissent, Dreiser cited an incident at the University of Pittsburgh as a blatant abuse of academic freedom by certain power figures in the city. According to Dreiser, a philosophy instructor was summarily and unilaterally dismissed from his post for having been a part of an off-campus assembly convened to hear a speech by Professor Harry Elmer Barnes of Smith College in April 1929. "For this, and this alone . . . ," Dreiser wrote, the instructor (and two students) were dismissed from the university.41 The facts do not support such an oversimplification of a complex and significant event.42

In 1971 those who are so disposed will pause to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Theodore Dreiser's birth. It may be, as James T. Farrell has suggested, that when the centennial arrives Dreiser's "memory and his books will have acquired a greater popularity and respect than he ever knew when he was alive."43 Although the prospect of a Dreiser renaturation does not please everyone — for some, whatever literary honors may be due Dreiser are overshadowed by the excesses and inconsistencies of his personal life — the fever of rediscovery will have to run its course. Partisan and detractor alike, however, might agree with Farrell that, having read Dreiser, "One does not forget his work." Perhaps one should also recall that Dreiser's Pittsburgh experience — as a reporter, essayist, student of literature, observer of social upheaval, and resident — contributed significantly to the more memorable aspects of that work.

42 The instructor, whose misfortune Dreiser chose to capitalize upon for his own purposes, was one Frederick E. Woltman, graduate assistant in Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, 1928-1929. Interested parties may review the entire case by consulting the following sources: George H. Sabine and Carl Wittke, "Academic Freedom at the University of Pittsburgh," American Association of University Professors Bulletin, XV (December 1929), 578-591; *The Pitt Weekly*, November 28, 1928, 5; February 15, 1929, 1; April 26, 1929, 1; May 3, 1929, 1; June 6, 1929, 1; Raymond F. Howes, "Sweetness and Light in Pittsburgh," Outlook and Independent, December 4, 1929, 523-26, 554-56; Frederick Woltman and William L. Nunn, "Cossacks," American Mercury, XV (December 1928), 399-406; William L. Nunn and Frederick E. Woltman, "Murder by Coal and Iron Police," The Nation, CXXVIII (March 20, 1929), 338-39; and local newspapers of the period. Valuable assistance on matters concerning the Woltman case was rendered by Dr. P. W. Hutson, Professor Emeritus of Education, University of Pittsburgh. I am indebted to Dr. Hutson, who served the University from 1922 to 1961, for both materials and personal recollections relevant to the period.