
Book Reviews

Theodore Dreiser: Volume I, At the Gates of the City, 1871–1907.
By Richard Lingeman. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986.
Pp. 478. Illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index.
\$22.95.)

Given twelve other biographical/critical works on Theodore Dreiser—including *chef-d'oeuvres* by H. L. Mencken (1924), Alfred Kazin (1965), John J. McAleer (1968), Robert Penn Warren (1971), and Donald Pizer (1976); not to list Dreiser's autobiographicals—one may ask, is Richard Lingeman's entry supererogatory?

No! It integrates, illuminates, sometimes corrects its predecessors. Except for McAleer's, with which it competes, Lingeman's surpasses the others in literary distinction. Aside from his impeccable accuracy (expected from an editor on *The Nation*) he creates the poignancy of a *Bildungsroman*. ("He [Theodore] saw himself a failure, after nineteen years . . . he had no skills, no place, no prospects" [p. 84].) Indeed, *At the Gates of the City* reads like a novel; page after page, one excitedly anticipates what happens next.

Lingeman also achieves a charming poetic: "He [Theodore] could escape from his fears in rambles about the countryside, rising early when the horizon was streaked with pink and orange, and the grass . . . beaded with dew" (p. 43). Yet, he avoids rhapsody and the explicit sex that Warren, for example, indulges in ("From lies, masturbation . . . / dreams of ladies . . . with asses ample and sweet," *Homage to Theodore Dreiser*, p. 3.)

No prude, however, Lingeman deals honestly with Dreiser's sex life and dependence on women. As a twelfth child, Theodore clings to the skirts of Sarah Schänäb, his solicitous Mennonite mother, who shields him from his harsh father and from the chicaneries of his generous but libertine brother Paul ("Dresser," co-author with Dreiser, of "On the Banks of the Wabash"). Theo idolizes his sisters Sylvia and Emma, is devastated by their extra-marital pregnancies. (Emma's predicament inspires *Sister Carrie*.) While working on the *Chicago Globe* and the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, he is seduced by matronly landladies. Aside from his mother, and before his marriage to Sara White ("Jug"), wholesome female influences are the Warsaw, Indiana, high school teachers May Cal-



THEODORE DREISER, C. 1893

Courtesy Theodore Dreiser Collection, Department of Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

vert and Mildred Fielding. Miss Fielding stakes him (albeit abortively) to a year at Indiana University.

More indelible intellectual influences are Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, which turns him from Christianity to humanism; Honoré Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, which turns him from the genteel tradition to naturalism; and Arthur Henry (of the *Toledo Blade*), who turns him from journalism to writing fiction.

As for Dreiser's socioeconomics, in all the big cities where he works as a reporter he observes that the titans of industry grow rich at the expense of oppressed laborers. These observations Lingeman renders graphically, suggesting how they will contribute to such novels as *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914).

Finally, Lingeman's triumph: his explication of *Sister Carrie*, harvesting the fruits of his *selective* plantings ("the [random] seeds had been planted" [p. 421]); harvesting Dreiser's experiential inferences ("stubbornly telling the truth as he knew it" [p. 421]) that only the fittest—no ordinary mortals—survive in a chancy naturalistic/industrial universe. Lingeman adds, "Only George Ade at this time had recorded the speech [and behavior] of ordinary Americans so truly" (p. 255).

If the excellences demonstrated in Volume I are sustained in Volume II (1908–1945) Lingeman should be a shoo-in for a Pulitzer Prize.

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We the People: Indiana and the United States Constitution. By Patrick J. Furlong, Alan T. Nolan, Kenneth R. Stevens, Emma Lou Thornbrough, Irving L. Fink, and David Ray Papke. (Lectures in Observance of the Bicentennial of the Constitution; Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1987. Pp. 136. Notes, index. Paperbound, \$4.00.)

In one of the better volumes of the Constitutional bicentennial, *Beyond Confederation*, Richard Beeman, one of its editors, points out perceptively that Constitutional studies heavily tilted toward the Supreme Court are beginning to give way. And while studies focusing on the evolution of federal power continue to appear, it is becoming increasingly apparent that only through studies of legal and constitutional development in the individual states will we be able to discover where we have been, constitutionally, in this country. This revival of interest in local applications of constitutionalism gets refreshing and valuable emphasis in this volume through its focus upon constitutionally significant cases that arose in Indiana. Except for Alan T. Nolan's essay on *Ex parte Milligan*, the cases here are seldom mentioned in standard constitutional histories. But, as the editor of this volume properly points out, they are representative of general constitutional developments in the United