

THEODORE DREISER DIES AT AGE OF 74

**Author of 'American Tragedy,'
Leader in Realistic Fiction,
Succumbs in Hollywood**

By The Associated Press.

HOLLYWOOD, Calif., Dec. 28
—Theodore Dreiser, noted American author, died at his home tonight of a heart attack at the age of 74.

His wife, Mrs. Helen Dreiser, was at his bedside.

The famous writer died shortly after he had completed two novels, his first in more than twenty years. One was "The Bulwark," due off the press in March. The other he named "The Stoic." In recent years, however, he had done little writing.

Besides a widow, he leaves a brother, Edward, and a niece, Vera Dreiser, both of New York.

Endured Years of Scorn

Years of bitterness, scorn and derision had been endured by Theodore Dreiser before a changing world accepted him as one of the world's outstanding writers of realistic fiction. His tall, gray form, as ungainly as his own prose, had battered its way amid the hoots of critics and for years he was neglected by the arbiters of taste.

And then one day, H. L. Mencken gazed from his Baltimore study across the country's literary wasteland and said, in one of his most lasting essays: "He stands isolated today, a figure weather-beaten and lonely, yet I can think of no American novelist who seems so secure or so likely to endure."

Whatever the judgment of posterity may be, since then few critics have had the hardihood to ignore the granite figure of Theodore Dreiser. They may have said he did not know the first principles of writing, that his mind was mired in a world of petty standards, but

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none of them ever again dared say he was without significance. The censors kept pecking at him, but he remained steadfast; and although he no longer stood in isolation, he maintained an Olympian aloofness befitting one who had seen an American literature come to flower around him in his own time.

More than anything else Mr. Dreiser was concerned with the brutalities and, as he called them, the brittle cruelties of life. He brooded over the American scene, an inordinately sentimental man, seeing it as one vast tragedy and the people in it as victims of an unkind destiny over which they had no control. From his earliest days in Terre Haute, Ind., where he was born on Aug. 27, 1871, he had been in continual conflict with the moral, political and economic criteria of his native land.

This conflict gave him the material for the series of great novels that he wrote, beginning with "Sister Carrie" in 1900, a time when even the mandates of William Dean Howells had not cleared the way for realism in literature. Practically all of Dreiser's books were written out of direct experience; one of them, "An American Tragedy," being an almost literal transcription of an actual murder trial. He considered himself a reporter of life, the novel merely being a convenient form in which to express the things he observed.

Parents Were German Immigrants

Mr. Dreiser's father and mother were German immigrants and his ancestry undoubtedly had much bearing upon the heavy, Teutonic quality of his prose. But young Theodore was predominantly a son of the middle border. Soon after he was born his family, a restless, bickering group, moved to Warsaw, Ind., whose public schools Theodore attended. Later he went to Indiana University. Before he was out of his teens the family joined the influx from the country towns and moved from the banks of the Wabash to Chicago.

Mr. Dreiser had written of this period unforgetably in "A Book About Myself," an autobiography in which he has caught the very ache of that city. He trudged its streets, a collector for an easy-payment furniture company, vaguely conscious even then of wanting to do something with his life. He turned to the city rooms of the newspapers and after many rebuffs was taken on the staff of The Chicago Daily Globe in 1892.

One day his brother, Paul Dresser—whom he has immortalized in one of his sketches in "Twelve Men"—arrived in St. Louis with a show. Paul was a song writer, a gay liver, a member of the New York fraternity of popular creative artists. His magnetic personality, his stories of New York, turned Theodore's mind in that direction. Already, he felt, that he "was obsessed with the brittle cruelty of life that was all too apparent around me. Virtue, more often than not, did not receive the reward the preachers promised; blackguards were triumphing every day."

A fortuitous accident ended his St. Louis career. He had become dramatic editor, under a city editor who did not like him. One night three new shows were scheduled to open. As was the St. Louis custom Mr. Dreiser wrote his reviews in advance. None of the shows opened, but The St. Louis Globe-Democrat carried reviews of them all. Mr. Dreiser's forced resignation followed.

On the way East he stopped at Pittsburgh, found work there, but

spent a great deal of his time in the Public Library, where he read all the works of Balzac, Huxley and Darwin.

"Balzac affected me more than had any writer up to that time," he wrote later; "all the lingering filaments of catholicism were torn from me as I read Huxley; and Spencer's 'First Principles' blew me intellectually to bits."

Somewhere about this time he began working on his first novel. "The months and years that followed until I completed 'Sister Carrie' were marked with bitter despair," he wrote. "I lived in wretched quarters. For a time I worked at manual labor on a railroad outside New York, and later still became editor of a small magazine."

This was Every Month, the editorship of which was but one of many similar posts he had held. Of this period he has written extensively, but perhaps his recollections of it come best alive in his descriptions of poets and writers and politicians and others he knew, given in "Twelve Men," which some critics call a minor classic.

Occasionally Mr. Dreiser published something which pleased him as he eked out a negligible living as editor and free lance writer while working on his novel. But he could find no place in the better-known magazines for his reactions to life. It was not until five years after he reached New York that he finished "Sister Carrie." He peddled it from publisher to publisher without success. He even contemplated suicide at this time, so deep was his despair.

Finally a publishing house accepted the book on the advice of Frank Norris, author of "McTeague" and himself one of the earliest of American realists. It seemed as if Mr. Dreiser at last was to have recognition. "But this," he said, "with what happened, was to be the greatest blow I was ever to know."

"When Norris," he wrote later, "was met with rebuffs from the publisher (who did not read the book until it was ready for distribution), he admitted that it was rather revolutionary but at the same time insisted upon its merits and suggested that in order to pave its way for distribution a limited number of copies be sent to critics who were certain to recognize its worth. But instead of the expected praised there were shouts of derision. And subsequently the books were all stored in the basement."

"Sister Carrie" Appears

It was not until 1907 that another publisher agreed to bring out "Sister Carrie." Even then the cries of outrage were greater than the cheers. "But all this," he said in 1930, "served to build up a protective barrier around me and perhaps is one of the reasons why I never trouble now to read critical reviews of my books."

Other novels followed. There was "Jennie Gerhart" in 1911, which brought down upon his head the wrath of the prurient who regarded this frank story as a menace to the moral standards of the country. When, in 1916, "The Genius" appeared the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice threatened to prosecute the publishers if the book was not withdrawn from sale. Its distribution was suspended for a time, but the book eventually was reissued. In Boston "An American Tragedy" was banned toward the end of the famous book censorship fiasco in 1927, and Donald S. Friede, a New York publisher, was convicted of selling it, a book, according to the court, "manifestly tending to corrupt the morals of youth."

His third novel was "The Financier," written in 1912, first of a trilogy of American life which included "The Titan" (1914) and "The Genius" (1915). Between this last year and 1925, which saw "An American Tragedy" published, he produced eight other books. Most noted was "Twelve Men," a series of pen portraits. Others were "Plays of the Natural and Supernatural" (1916), "A Hoosier Holiday" (1916), "Free, and Other

Stories" (1918); "The Hand of the Potter" (1919); "Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub: a Book of Essays and Philosophy" (1920), "A Book About Myself" (1922), "The Color of a Great City" (1923).

"An American Tragedy"

The climax of Mr. Dreiser's writing career came in 1925 with the publication of his two-volume novel, "An American Tragedy."

This grim but sprawling story told in minute detail the life story of Clyde Griffiths, whose slum birth led him, in the end, to the electric chair for the murder of a girl with whom he had an illicit love affair. Mr. Dreiser not only condemned the society which made the tragedy possible but the forces of law and order which refused to see into Clyde's life beyond the simple fact of the murder. The book created a storm of critical appraisal, some condemning it as "gutter literature," others hailing it as the greatest American novel written up to that time.

The book was made into a moving picture. Mr. Dreiser unsuccessfully sought an injunction against the producers, claiming that in its transcription to the screen they had "ruined" his story. Critics hailed the film and it had long runs everywhere.

Two books followed in 1927, "Moods" and "Chains," the latter his "lesser novels and stories." In 1927 Mr. Dreiser traveled to Russia and wrote a series for The New York World, praising the experiment of the revolution. This was published as "Dreiser Looks at Russia" (1928). Other books that followed, none of which attracted the attention of those that had gone before, were: "A Gallery of Women," "My City," "Epitaph," "Fine Furniture," "Dawn" and "Tragic America."

A Clash With Sinclair Lewis

In 1928 Dorothy Thompson (Mrs. Sinclair Lewis at that time) accused Mr. Dreiser of plagiarism and cited passages in his Russian book which, she protested, had been "lifted" almost word for word from certain of her Saturday Evening Post articles. This charge, denied by Mr. Dreiser, flared up some two years later when Mr. Lewis publicly accused Mr. Dreiser of plagiarism, and the Indiana author slapped Mr. Lewis thrice in the face, bringing both much publicity.

Previously Sinclair Lewis, in his speech accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature, had been lavish in his praise for Mr. Dreiser, who, he said, had written in "Sister Carrie" the first book "free of English literary influence."

Mr. Dreiser's name had appeared in the news in recent years chiefly in connection with two things—his attacks on the English upper classes and his complete conversion to Communism.

In 1942 he was barred from making a public address in Canada for having allegedly said that he would "rather see Germans in England than aristocratic, horse-riding snobs." He later said he had been misquoted, but he continued to be quoted as having made statements of a similar kind.

In July of this year the Communist party in this country officially announced that Mr. Dreiser had applied for and been accepted as a member of the party. The announcement was later confirmed in Moscow.

In 1944 Mr. Dreiser was the recipient of the Merit Medal for Fiction of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Mr. Dreiser married Sarah Osborne White of St. Louis in 1898. She died on Oct. 1, 1942.