

been reading for the firm, and . . . it pleased me as well as any novel I have read in any form, published or otherwise" (*Letters* 1: 52n.). Shortly thereafter he met Dreiser and witnessed the contract between Dreiser and Doubleday, Page. The subsequent publishing debacle became famous. After **Frank Doubleday** had second thoughts about publishing such a decidedly ungentle book and urged him to take the manuscript to another publisher, Dreiser held the company to the terms of his contract and forced the book's publication. In later versions of the story, only Norris escaped blame for what Dreiser insisted was the suppression of the book; according to Dreiser, Norris "stood steadfastly" by him, urging him to stick by the terms of the Doubleday, Page contract, writing "many letters," and sending out 300 copies for review. Although Dreiser maintained that he was not influenced by Norris's *McTeague*, reading it for the first time after his manuscript of *Sister Carrie* was rejected at **Harper & Brothers's** before coming to Doubleday, Page, he soon placed it among the "few books" that constituted his "private library of American realism" (*Letters* 3: 949). Of Norris's other works, *The Octopus* also ranked high with Dreiser, who called Norris "the first novelist to produce an American novel of social protest" (*Letters* 3: 877). *The Pit* did not fare as well. Perhaps drawing on his own experiences with Frank Doubleday, Dreiser said that Norris had told him that Doubleday had asked him to change his original plan, so that what was left was, in Dreiser's words, "a bastard bit of romance of the best seller variety" (*Letters* 1: 329).

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NOTES ON LIFE. After the publication of *An American Tragedy* in 1925, Dreiser's literary output declined markedly, with non-fiction works constituting most of his output until the posthumous publication of *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic*. During the last two decades of his life, a great deal of Dreiser's time and effort was devoted to a massive undertaking—called at various times by Dreiser "The Mechanism Called Man," "The Formulae Called Life," "The Formula Called Man," and "Illusion Called Life"—that was intended to be a final testament of his personal philosophy and that he hoped would give him credit and status as a thinker and provide empirical confirmation of the views he had been developing ever since reading **Herbert Spencer's** *First Principles* in 1894. The work contemplated by Dreiser was left uncompleted at his death and consisted of a trove of miscellaneous materials inserted by Dreiser into hundreds of folders with titles such as "Mechanism Called the Universe," "Necessity for Repetition," "The Factor Called Time," "The Emotions," "Myth of Individuality," "Myth of Free Will," "Beauty and Ugliness," "Order and Disorder," "Good and Evil," "The Salve Called Religion," and so forth that he envisioned as individual chapters of the proposed work. Dreiser also left an outline of the projected work's contents. The folders themselves comprised a miscellany of both materials, in holograph and typescript, that Dreiser had composed (i.e., brief essays on the folder topics as well as aphorisms and commentary on developments in science and other fields that he found interesting) and materials he had compiled to stimulate his thinking and provide support for, and clarification of, his views (i.e.,

notes based on his readings, observations, and exchanges with scientists; and newspaper clippings and magazine articles on various phenomena, often of a scientific or pseudoscientific nature, that Dreiser had collected over the years with the help of amanuenses). Some of the materials date from the early 1920s and earlier, which is not surprising, since Dreiser acknowledged, in a letter to his friend George Douglas, that he had a "glimmering" of the proposed work as far back as 1915 (*Letters* 2: 718). Some of the central ideas in the work, which was published posthumously in 1974 as *Notes on Life*, were first adumbrated by Dreiser in *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub*, a book of essays published in 1920.

The archival materials on which *Notes on Life* is based were bequeathed to the University of Pennsylvania in 1952 by Dreiser's second wife, Helen Dreiser, who had hoped to assist in preparing the materials for publication but who was prevented by illness from doing so. The task was undertaken (with Helen Dreiser's approval) by a young Dreiser scholar, Sydney Horowitz, who died unexpectedly in 1953, bringing the project of preparing the work for publication to an abrupt halt. The project languished for a considerable period of time before being revived by Marguerite Tjader and John J. McAleer, by whom *Notes on Life* was coedited. Tjader, who was closely associated with Dreiser at several periods during which he was working on *Notes*, was familiar with Dreiser's thinking and intentions during the work's generation and was acutely aware of his desire to publish a definitive and final statement of his views. She played a major role in bringing about the work's publication. The title "Notes on Life" was not Dreiser's. It was apparently coined by Helen Dreiser and was used thereafter to refer to Dreiser's collection of

philosophical papers, of which *Notes on Life* represents an abridgment.

Notes on Life received scant attention upon its long-awaited appearance in print, and the notice that it did receive consisted of reviews in scholarly journals that were in the aggregate decidedly unfavorable. Joseph K. Davis stated that the *Notes* "are little more than miscellaneous fragments; and they are all too frequently pompous and awkward in composition, contradictory and reductionist in argument, and—worse—thoroughly dull in content" (*Sewanee Review* 85 [1975]: cxxvii). Observed James Lundquist in his review, "Dreiser's philosophizing leads to far more inanities than it does profundities. His interest in philosophy and his passion for science fail to compensate for his inability to think clearly for more than a paragraph or two" (*Old Northwest* 1 [1975]: 427). Donald Pizer observed that "those seeking to find in *Notes on Life* a logically organized and defended representation of Dreiser's final philosophical position will be disappointed. The book is a collection of fragments in which the reader will have to search for the connecting edges in order to puzzle out the nature and shape of Dreiser's beliefs. . . . When Dreiser expounds his ideas as philosophy, the ideas plod and stumble; they become silly and jejune and eventually resolve themselves into absurdities or platitudes" (*American Literary Realism* 8 [1975]: 365). A problem noted by reviewers is that in reading *Notes on Life* it is difficult to get a sense of the chronology of their completion, for most of the pieces are undated, and the reader is challenged to understand what period of Dreiser's thought they represent.

The range of topics that engage Dreiser's attention in the volume is truly impressive, as is the sense of awe and reverence he exhibits for the workings of the cosmos and natural phenomena. Dreiser

was, as Ernest Griffin observed, "a great evidence-collector, apparently tireless in following up the latest discoveries of research professors in applied science, especially physiologists, entomologists, geneticists, zoologists and the like. He was fascinated by the habits of the lower forms of life and would relate them to the human condition" (*Modernist Studies* 2 [1977]: 77). No topic seems too small or large for Dreiser's attention, whether it is the behavior of ants, spiders, and grasshoppers; the nature of physical forces; the process of evolution; the birth and death of stars; the speed of calculations performed by Vannevar Bush's differential analyzer (an early computer); or research into telepathy by J. B. Rhine of Duke University. Dreiser also commented on scientific discoveries such as cosmic rays, relativity, and the uncertainty principle; trends in psychology and the social sciences such as behaviorism; and the theories of scientists such as the geneticist Calvin Bridges, whose work Dreiser had observed firsthand (and who became Dreiser's friend) in the course of his research. Often, Dreiser segues from the scientific to the purely speculative or philosophical—for example, is the attraction of the elements to one another an

emotional as well as scientifically observable (chemical) phenomenon? Is there a physical basis for the emotional responses caused by different colors? In the metaphysical domain, he addresses questions such as the problem of good and evil, the problem of death, the ultimate origins of energy, whether the universe has purpose or design, and one's place in the universe.

See also "Equation Inevitable"; "The Essential Tragedy of Life"; Mechanism.

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ability of that reportorial competition. In the first, a ghetto romance that ended with a beautiful Negro girl's being trapped and razor-slashed by her vengeful ex-lover, Dreiser's more fertile imagination and literary superiority allowed him to make a colorful story out of an incident that Galvin had dismissed as insignificant. The second episode involved a bandit who had single-handedly robbed a Missouri Pacific train and, having been captured, was being transported by that same line to St. Louis for incarceration. Dreiser had created the opportunity for an interview en route, but Galvin, through his aggressive nature and manipulative powers, had not only forced his way into that interview but also, upon arriving in St. Louis, maneuvered the subject to the *Globe-Democrat*, where that paper's victory over the *Republic* was photographically captured for its readers. Dreiser brooded over this defeat and its naturalistic implications, realizing how his own intellectual superiority and tactical advantages could be "superseded or set at naught by the raw animal or psychic force of a man like Galvin."

In the process of fictionalizing these episodes, Dreiser gave himself the name Augustus Binns, a "tall, college-y, rather graceful" fellow whose sartorial pretensions annoyed the city editor. Galvin became "Red" Collins. The *Globe-Democrat* and the *Republic* were the *News* and the *Star*. Beyond these name changes, Dreiser sharpened the contrast between the sophisticated, artistically talented Binns and the pugnacious, but highly manipulative, Collins; however, he did little else to distinguish "A Story of Stories" from its autobiographical source. In fact, numerous sections of the short-story text were copied virtually verbatim. According to Joseph Griffin in *The Small Canvas*, Dreiser's reluctance to thoroughly recast the material from *A Book about Myself* contributed to the

"artistic failure" (63) of "A Story of Stories." The thematic focus on Collins's animal nature, a focus suggested by the tentative title "Force," is overwhelmed by the narrative detail, and the omniscient point of view, superimposed on the first-person narration of the original telling, is inconsistent. Still, Griffin concludes, "'A Story of Stories' effectively articulates Dreiser's fascination with the psychic, as well as his nostalgia for the excitement of the newspaperman's life" (64).

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STREET AND SMITH. After a period of poverty and despair when he did no literary work and worked on the New York Central Railroad (as recounted in his posthumously published work *An Amateur Laborer*), Dreiser was hired in August 1904 by the publishing firm of Street and Smith as an assistant editor for various boys' books at a salary of fifteen dollars per week. He was subsequently promoted to editor of *Smith's Magazine*, a Street and Smith "home magazine" that made its debut (with Dreiser as editor) in April 1905. Dreiser spent about a year and a half in the employ of Street and Smith, where he was paid the handsome sum of sixty dollars a week as editor of *Smith's*, launching what proved for a while to be a successful career in commercial publishing. Dreiser left Street and Smith in April 1906 to become editor of *Broadway Magazine*.

Founded by Francis Scott Street (1831-1883) and Francis Shubael Smith (1819-1887), Street and Smith became one of the largest publishers in the United States of dime novels, which it began publishing in 1889 in the form of boys' "libraries," and was a pioneer in developing home magazines that provided substantial fare for the general public rather than (as was the case with older publications such as *Harper's Weekly*) being aimed primarily at an edu-

cated readership. Street and Smith made its entrée into magazine publishing in 1898 with *Ainslee's Magazine*. Dreiser was a regular and prolific contributor to *Ainslee's*, whose editor, **Richard Duffy**, became his close friend. It was probably Duffy who recommended Dreiser for an in-house position at Street and Smith.

In his autobiography *Dawn*, Dreiser recalls being an avid reader of the Street and Smith "story paper" the *New York Weekly* during his boyhood in Evansville, Indiana, and "being introduced, by some of the youths who gathered in the shade of our barn," to the spellbinding world of dime novel heroes such as Diamond Dick. The dime novels were a natural outgrowth of the story papers and featured many of the same characters, written according to strict formulas by a stable of mostly anonymous writers. They included several basic plot types: Wild West adventures, detective stories, school and sports stories, and "working-girl" stories.

The working-girl stories told of innocent girls working and living in the city for the first time who are beset by the perils of living away from home amid temptations of the city and threats to their virtue. In an unpublished portion of the *Dawn* manuscript, Dreiser describes the strong effect such stories had on him: "I just had to see what became of the poor, beautiful, struggling working girl who was seized by thugs on her way from work, bundled into a carriage and driven, gagged, and blindfolded, to a wretched shanty far out on the Hackensack meadows, where she was confronted by her lustful and immoral pursuer of the Four Hundred" (qtd. in Godfrey 66-67). This effect is clearly discernible in *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, and *An American Tragedy*, the three Dreiser novels featuring "working-girl" protagonists.

Wild West hero Diamond Dick was one of Street and Smith's most popular dime

novel characters. The primary author of the Diamond Dick stories at the time of Dreiser's employment at Street and Smith was George C. Jenks, a newspaperman whom Dreiser had befriended while on the staff of the *New York World*. As seems to be indicated by internal evidence (a handwritten note by Dreiser summarizing some of this early literary experiences that is preserved in the Dreiser Papers), Dreiser probably had a hand in preparing some of the Diamond Dick stories for publication in *Diamond Dick Jr. Boys Best Weekly*. Whether he actually wrote any of the Diamond Dick or other pulp fiction stories while at Street and Smith is unknown.

In 1959, Street and Smith was acquired by Condé Nast Publications, the publishers of *Vogue* and other fashion magazines.

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SUCCESS was an inspirational journal founded in 1897 by Orison Swett Marden to promote his credo, "Unceasing struggle in adversity brings triumph." Initially, *Success* gained a wide following by featuring stories about, and interviews with, prominent Americans from all walks of life who had surmounted obstacles through the practice of virtues emblazoned on the magazine's cover: Education, Enterprise, Enthusiasm, Economy, Self-respect, Self-reliance, Self-help, Self-culture, Self-control, Work, Sagacity, Honesty, Truth, and Courage. Eventually, however, according to Marden biographer Margaret Connolly, "insidious" members of the journal's staff "secured control of the magazine" and made it an instrument of the muckraker movement sweeping the country (226-27). *Success's* popularity declined; it went into bankruptcy; and in 1911 the magazine ceased publication. Marden, undaunted by this setback, founded a "new" *Success* in 1918 and edited it until shortly before his death in 1924.

During *Success's* heyday, Dreiser was one of that journal's most prolific contributors, publishing thirty interviews and one poem between January 1898 and June 1900. Among his interviewees were Thomas Edison, Philip Armour, Marshall Field, Andrew Carnegie, and William Dean Howells. Typically, these interviews conformed to a formulaic pattern. Dreiser would establish the circumstances of his meeting with the subject, then introduce, when applicable, any barriers to success that person had overcome. The bulk of the piece highlighted the virtues that allowed the interviewee to win through to wealth and/or acclaim. Edison, for example, at-

tributed his success to hard work and singleness of purpose; Armour, to honesty and frugality; Field, to the sagacious use of money; and Carnegie, to industry, perseverance, and thrift. Dreiser himself, for each of these tributes to ambition and enterprise, earned \$100.

In view of Dreiser's criticism of the capitalistic system, both before and after his association with *Success*, scholars have sought and occasionally found hints of irony embedded in these tributes to robber barons such as Carnegie. When biographer Robert Elias asked about the possibility of a satirical intent, however, Dreiser responded, "If you will look at the magazine you will understand why a denunciation of Mr. Carnegie would have lost me \$100" (qtd. in Lingeman 1: 187).

After an eighteen-month hiatus, during which *Sister Carrie* failed and his struggle with neurasthenia began, Dreiser published three more essays in *Success*. The tone of these later contributions, however, was more subdued, and the successes they narrated were more humanistic than material. "A Cripple Whose Energy Gives Inspiration" (February 1902) told the story of a physically handicapped boy whose industry, thrift, and honesty kept him economically independent amid the malaise of a commercially depressed Connecticut community. "A Touch of Human Brotherhood" (March 1902: 140-41, 176) focused on the humanitarian efforts of an ex-soldier, known as the "Captain," who solicited coins amid the glitter of New York's theater district to provide shelter for the homeless on winter nights. The "Captain" had also appeared in *Sister Carrie*. Finally, "The Tenement Toilers" (April 1902) described the deplorable living conditions of sweatshop workers whose struggle to survive in a capitalistic system taught their children "that wealth is all." These final contributions to *Success* would seem to

THE SUPERNATURAL. Dreiser's world-view, as is well known, was heavily indebted to many of the intellectual trends and scientific developments of his day, which are associated with terms such as **naturalism**, **social Darwinism**, **mechanism**, **determinism**, and the like. Dreiser often posited (both as an essayist and as an omniscient narrator in his novels) and portrayed (as the artificer of a fictional milieu) a world that seems bleakly deterministic or mechanistic in which characters are at the mercy of impersonal forces. Dreiser rejected his father's Catholicism and found conventional religious belief to be an anathema. In view of his desire to ground his beliefs in science, as evidenced by the extensive investigations of scientific phenomena he did in preparation for his philosophical work *Notes on Life*, Dreiser's weltanschauung would seem to exclude anything supernatural. It is surprising, therefore, that the concept of supernatural forces (not a supreme being per se) played such a large role in Dreiser's consciousness and is clearly visible in his creative output.

The supernatural manifests itself in three major ways: first, in Dreiser's own superstitiousness, his willingness to give credence to extrasensory phenomena, and an underlying psychological makeup that made factors such as **chance** and **fate** loom so large in his consciousness; second, in the development of Dreiser's thought, primarily ideas he took from his reading of **Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*** (and from other writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), which led him to embrace mechanism and reject religion but which left him with an intellectual framework, based primarily on Spencer's concept of the Unknowable, in which it was possible to conceive of supernatural forces; and third, in Dreiser's works, in which supernatural forces (as well as superstition) often play a part, ei-

ther explicitly or implicitly. Dreiser was, as his biographer W. A. Swanberg has observed (using a term coined by the critic Eliseo Vivas), "an inconsistent mechanist. . . . Nor should any real mechanist be as superstitious as TD was" ("Airmail Interview," *Dreiser Newsletter* 1.1 [1970]: 3).

Dreiser believed in mental telepathy, hypnotism, Ouija boards, psalmists, and other occultisms; omens and spiritualism; premonitions; old folk sayings and practices; and charms. Dreiser had a lifelong fascination with fortune-telling and sympathetically portrays a **Greenwich Village** fortune-teller he knew and consulted, **Jessie Spafford**, in the sketch "Giff" in *A Gallery of Women*. Dreiser was also obsessed by the role chance or luck plays in everyday affairs and crafted such pivotal scenes as Hurstwood's theft from the safe and Clyde Giffiths's drowning of **Roberta Alden** to turn on matters of chance. Throughout his life, Dreiser advocated research in the field of psychic phenomena.

Dreiser's superstitiousness was frequently commented on by his contemporaries and is conspicuous in his diaries and memoirs. While recounting his experiences as a traveler in works such as *A Traveler at Forty* and *A Hoosier Holiday*, for example, he often takes note of, and speculates about, the possible outcomes of such occurrences as seeing a horseshoe, a cross-eyed person, or a hunchbacked man. Dreiser's superstitious beliefs and practices are one of the salient facts of his life and personality noted in the books written after his death by intimates such as Dreiser's second wife, Helen Dreiser, **Louise Campbell**, **Marguerite Tjader** (who attended séances with Dreiser), **Vera Dreiser**, and **Yvette Eastman**. H. L. Mencken fumed against Dreiser's superstitiousness and his credulousness, "giving a grave ear to quackeries," as Mencken

termed it in *A Book of Prefaces* (rpt. in *D-M Letters* 2: 786).

Dreiser states in *Dawn* that he inherited "a deeply-rooted vein of superstition which was one of the few traits of temperament my father and mother possessed in common and which was the heritage of most of their children." In the opening pages of that autobiography, Dreiser notes several instances of supernatural occurrences that were said to be associated with his birth and the death of his parents' first three children. These include the story (told to him by his sister Mame, who insisted on its veracity later in life) that spirits in the form of "three maidens . . . garbed in brightly-colored costumes" entered the Dreiser home when Dreiser was born, and another family legend that Dreiser's mother, Sarah, had a premonition of the death of her first three children associated with three lights his mother glimpsed in a backyard before they vanished into the woods. Another tale involves an old German woman in Terre Haute, Indiana (Dreiser's birthplace), believed to have occult powers, who advised Dreiser's mother to perform a secret ritual to ensure that Dreiser, who was scrawny and weak when born, would not die in infancy. Lights forewarning imminent death such as those spoken of by Dreiser's mother are depicted in two of Dreiser's stories, "The Old Neighborhood" and "The Lost Phoebe."

In Dreiser's days as a newspaperman, he was often sent to report on performances by psychics and mediums and to investigate their claims. Sometimes Dreiser described these performances with irony and skepticism; at other times, he was greatly impressed by what he saw. These included stories for the *St. Louis Republic* on the exploits of the famous mind reader and hypnotist J. Alexander McIvor Tyndall and on the medium Jules Wallace, who

was ultimately exposed (in stories attributed to Dreiser) by the *Republic* as "an unmitigated fraud."

In a March 1897 editorial for *Ev'ry Month*, Dreiser compared psychic phenomena to the wondrous discoveries made possible by modern science. "If a telephone apparatus and wire will instantly carry the voice for thousands of miles and reproduce it to the ear of another," he asked, why should not phenomena such as telepathy be possible in which "the ether of space carry a powerful mental vision or impression through equally great space and permit it to affect the already sympathetic and harmonized mind for which it is intended?" (rpt. in *Theodore Dreiser's Ev'ry Month*, ed. Barrineau, 259). In 1909, he wrote an anonymous editorial entitled "In the Matter of Spiritualism" for the *Bohemian Magazine* in which he stated that psychic phenomena were common, everyday occurrences, the existence of which could not be denied; that scientific evidence (and support within the scientific community) for the reality of psychic phenomena was growing; and that psychic energy was just another manifestation of "the forces of life," which also included matter and energy and other phenomena within the realm of physics.

Intellectually, Dreiser was greatly influenced by the writings of the British sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer, whose work *First Principles* (1862) completely overthrew Dreiser's previous conceptions of life. In *First Principles*, Spencer argues that an ultimate knowledge of the universe is incomprehensible to human beings and that both religion and scientific inquiry ultimately lead to the same realization that there is an unknowable force operative in the cosmos. The concept of the Unknowable caused Dreiser to despair of ever finding the foundation of any sort of personal belief system or

finding meaning in the universe, as Dreiser later confided to interviewer Frank Harris. Spencer's Unknowable, in other words, provided the foundation for a pessimistic view of the universe as essentially meaningless. But the Unknowable also "allowed Dreiser to maintain a belief in some sort of vague, supernatural force that controlled events in the universe," as Louis Zanine has noted (19). This has led to a curious phenomenon in Dreiser's oeuvre, what another Dreiser scholar, J. D. Thomas, has called his "supernatural naturalism," a naturalistic worldview overlaid with strong elements of supernaturalism.

Words such as "ghosts," "wraiths," and "spirits" are common in Dreiser's fiction, as are demons such as the Efrit (a genie associated with the tales of the Arabian Nights), who represents Clyde's unconscious in *An American Tragedy* and whose suggestion that Clyde can resolve his problems by murdering Roberta he cannot get out of his mind. Spirits and supernatural forces often play a role in Dreiser's short stories and plays—notably "The Hand," "The Lost Phoebe," *Laughing Gas*, *The Blue Sphere*, *In the Dark*, and *The Spring Recital*.

The "Genius," the most autobiographical of Dreiser's novels, offers an interesting portrayal of Dreiser's beliefs and their evolution in the context of the supernatural. The protagonist, Eugene Witla, is intensely superstitious, as was Dreiser; he is always looking for omens and signs of what fate intends for him. Eugene is also torn, as was Dreiser, by a "compulsion to accept a deterministic explanation of existence as opposed to his need to believe in a transcendent meaning" (Hussman 91). The

book ends on a philosophical and somewhat optimistic note with a quotation from Spencer about the Unknowable. The passage from Spencer leads Eugene, Dreiser's alter ego, to muse both on the limitations of human thought and on the wonders of the cosmos as he gazes at the nighttime sky.

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