**About Theodore Dreiser**

With the publication of "Sister Carrie" in 1900, Dreiser became the first American author to step into the 20th century, rejecting the cumbersome Victorian morality for what was considered to be a shocking new form of descriptive realism. This novel irrevocably altered the landscape of American literature and gave the country its first modern heroine, Carrie Meeber. In chronicling the rise of a fallen woman, Dreiser unwittingly also touched off a censorship battle that helped end the Victorian era and inspired a new generation of writers.

Herman Theodore Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Ind., on Aug. 27, 1871. He was the ninth of 10 children. DreiserХs childhood was marred by the downfall of his successful father, John Paul, the manager of a cotton mill. A series of unfortunate mishaps sent the family spiraling into poverty. In 1864, the mill burned down, and during the millХs reconstruction (according to family legend), a beam hit John Paul on the head, an injury from which he never fully recovered. DreiserХs father subsequently became obsessively religious and was easily cheated by his business partners. Theodore would remain deeply resentful of his father and of the poverty into which he plunged the family.

At the age of 15, Dreiser moved to Chicago where he found work at numerous low-paying and frustrating jobs washing dishes, clerking in a hardware store and tracing freight cars. His working life was interrupted when a former teacher offered to send him to Indiana University for a year. During this time, Dreiser developed an interest in writing. When he moved back to Chicago, he decided to try his hand at journalism, and over several years, became a successful newspaper writer.

Sufficiently secure at his job, he married Sara ТJugУ White and the couple settled in New York. Arthur Henry, a friend, encouraged him to write a longer work, and Drieser turned his attention toward writing fiction. With editing help from Henry and "Jug," Dreiser wrote what is now considered one of his finest novels, Sister Carrie. Frank Doubleday, the publisher, objected to the novelХs immorality -- the tale of a young woman in a big city who succeeds despite, or even because of, her immorality. To fulfill his contact he agreed to publish DreiserХs work, but refused to promote the book. Charges of obscenity soon followed, making Dreiser a cause célèbre for many young writers.

After the publication battles of "Sister Carrie," Dreiser became deeply depressed. Paul Dresser, TheodoreХs eldest brother, sent him to a sanitarium. In later years, Dreiser finally repeated the triumph of "Sister Carrie" with another monumental novel, "An American Tragedy." Whether his characters were prostitutes or an entrepreneurs, Dreiser remained dedicated to portraying their lives as realistically as possible.