

endless loads of half-crushed rock into a concrete mixer.

Nevertheless, he achieved in his own way effects that must be called monumental. He had a supreme sense of tragedy and a kind of pachydermous pity that made him almost comparable in some respects with the greatest of the Greeks. In the selection of his subjects and materials and in his attitude toward his characters, he was a naturalist, very much in the pattern of Zola. Philosophically, he was a deterministic nihilist; he believed that the race of humankind is lost in a universe which is without rules or guides and that human destinies are at the mercy of pure caprice. The race is seldom, and then only by the blindest accident, to the swift or the battle to the strong or bread to the wise. The essential moral of what is probably his best, though not indeed his most pretentious, work, namely *Sister Carrie*, is that virtue has nothing to do with a happy and successful life, and the same forces that irrationally exalt one human being may as irrationally destroy another.

In his strange and heavy-footed way he was able to make his readers experience in themselves the helplessness of his characters and the utter desolation of the world in which they were forced to waste their lives. It was probably this, rather than, specifically, his attitudes toward matters of sex, that shocked an earlier and more sanguine generation and led to the suppression of some of his books. These suppressions, however, probably had much to do with the great, if belated, popularity and influence of his novels, which began in the 1920s, the decade of revolt, and reached its crest with the publication of *An American Tragedy*. The curious thing is that for one who, as we have said, wrote very badly, his cult has been greatest among other novelists. If, as a stylist, he had, happily, few conscious imitators, he nevertheless communicated his philosophy and his attitude toward life to many writers, and through them influenced the whole age. Thus he must be counted among the forces which have led the world to its present climate of spiritual anarchy and intellectual despair.

### **Theodore Dreiser**

Theodore Dreiser was characterized by one of his critics as "a giant in chains," by which was meant that his massive powers as a novelist were offset by equally massive handicaps. Apart from ethical grounds, the chief complaint against him as a writer is that he could not write; that is to say, his syntax was invariably garbled, his style clumsy, turgid, prolix and ungrammatical. Whereas in the case of his much younger but equally prolix contemporary, the late Thomas Wolfe, on whom Dreiser had perhaps much direct or indirect influence, the words gushed out in a fierce, unceasing cataract; in the case of Dreiser the words fell noisily into the minds of his readers like