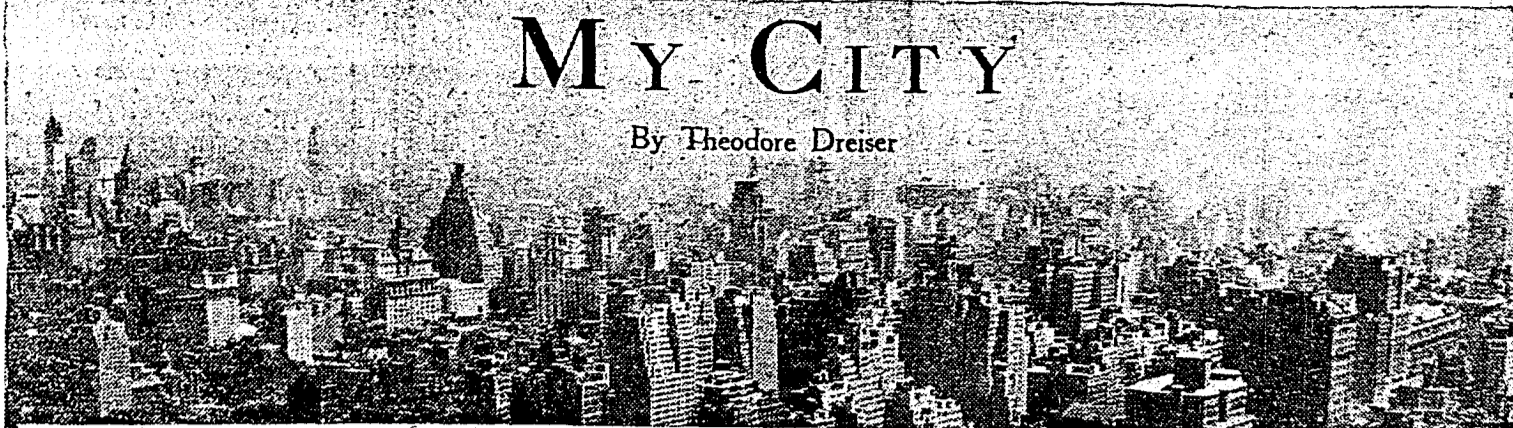


# MY CITY

By Theodore Dreiser



**N**OWHERE is there anything like it. My City. Not London. Not Paris. Not Moscow. Not any city I have ever seen. So strong. So immense. So elate.

Its lilt! Its power to hurry the blood in one's veins, to make one sing, to weep, to make one hate or sigh and die. Yet in the face of defeat, loneliness, despair, the dragging of feet in sheer weariness, perhaps, what strong, good days! Winey, electric! What beauty! What impressiveness! Neither hungry days nor yet lonely nor hopeless ones have ever broken this impressiveness—this spell for me.

A cruel and brutal city by turns; a callous, money-seeking and unsentimental city, as one looks here and there. But lyric, too. And spendthrift. Frittering, idle, wasteful—saving nothing, hoarding nothing, unless maybe, unmarketable dreams. And dreaming so, even in the face of brutality and calculation. Yet, in the face of this strain, failure, none of its lyric days going unnoted, none of its spell evaded. They have burst on me—its days—with shouts, with song, a sense of deathless verse—or have come crawling, weeping, opening and closing in despair. Yet to this hour I cannot step out of my door save with a thrill responsive to it all—its grandeur, mystery, glory—yea, Babylonian eternity.

**S**EE, here it is. Miles and miles. You shall not be rid of it in any direction under hours of rapid riding. And the millions and millions tramping to and fro within it! A veritable stream of them; as at Times Square at the theater hour—a Niagara of them, as in Wall Street or Fifty-seventh Street or Fifth Avenue at the opening or closing hours of each day. And each so small. A Parsee of dust. Yet each with its hunger, lust, hope.

Each with that something—call it mind, soul, mood; electrons in electro-physical combination, ions in electro-chemical union or libido or what you will. But each with the power to stir the other—to hate, to love, to longing, to dream, to aches, to death. And all gathered here in this endless pother of dreaming and seeking—seeking, seeking among canyons of stone, beneath tall towers of matter that stand foursquare to all the winds.

**I**T IS as old and as young as I am. As curious and as indifferent. Amid all the stupendous wealth of it a man may die of hunger—a minute atom of a man or child, and so easily fed. And where there is so much wherewith to feed. Or of loneliness—where millions are lonely and seeking heartease, the pressure of a single friendly hand. Ho! one may cry aloud for aid and not be heard; ask for words only and harvest silence only, where yet all is glare. Or be harried by too much contact, and fall of peace; be driven, harried, buried by attention. God!

**A**ND yet for all its this or that, here it runs like a great river; beats and thunders like a tumultuous sea; or yawns or groans or shrieks or howls in sheer ennui.

I never step out but I note it. Yet I never step out but I think, ha! power, energy, strength, life, beauty, terror! And the astounding mystery of it all! You—I—all of us—with our eager, futile dreams. We are here together, seeking much, straining much. You, I. We are yearning to do so much here in my city—be so much—have some one group or phase or audience, or mayhap one other somewhere in all this, to recognize just us—just you—me. And not always finding that one. My fateful city!

**T**ALL towers—  
 Clustered pinnacles—  
 Varied and fretted flowers of stone and steel  
 That island the upper air,  
 That tops the fogs and storms.  
 Erect—  
 Elate—  
 Frowning—  
 Stern—  
 That shoulder in toothy canyons;  
 That march in serried ranks.  
 Dreams—  
 Ambitions—  
 Illusions—  
 Moods.  
 An architect has uttered a building;  
 A poet a tower.

**T**ALL towers that ants have builded;  
 That mite and midge have reared.  
 Clustered pinnacles—  
 That prow and pierce the windy sky,  
 That ark a horde of trudging ants,  
 That roof a world of burrowing moles.

**Y**ET at your base an immemorable river;  
 And about your feet the contemptuous,  
 Immemorable soil;  
 And before your strength the innumerable years.

**T**ALL towers—  
 Clustered pinnacles—  
 Defiant spears of steel and stone.  
 Aye, but the inevitable winds that rag your strength!  
 Aye, but the inevitable cold that bites and eats!  
 Aye, but the inevitable days that front and wait!  
 Aye, but the unbroken grass that will bed you all!

