

chology" suffices to achieve that rather elusive quality. Too frequently we read Eric Berne and talk about the games other people play. Skimming the newspaper or attending the meeting of any academic committee usually provides evidence enough that self-interest, rather than self-knowledge, still prevails in human nature. Literature does offer one means of enlarging our perceptions about both ourselves and the world we inhabit. That is not to say that literature is the only means to such perception, nor is it to claim that such knowledge is the only achievement of literature. Neither is it to make reading Spenser an exercise in self-flagellation or a delighted indulgence in *mea culpa*. But the Bower of Bliss does cause us to experience an understanding, good-humored, and loving recognition of what it means to be human. "Reason enough to read," would be, therefore, my answer to that.

ARLENE OKERLUND

California State University, San Jose

Dreiser and C. T. Yerkes

To the Editor:

While Philip L. Gerber's discussion of Dreiser, Yerkes, and Cowperwood (*PMLA*, 88, 1973, 112–21) is valuable, I believe that it overemphasizes Dreiser's identification with the financier, and, consequently, tends to slight some of Dreiser's craft. Perhaps this can be seen most clearly in respect to Cowperwood's sex life.

Gerber, terming the treatment of this aspect Dreiser's "outstanding exception" to his usual fidelity to the facts of Yerkes' life, explains Dreiser's exaggeration of Yerkes' promiscuity by writing that "Dreiser, personally hesitant, self-conscious . . . observed in Yerkes a superman whose private dalliance fulfilled all his own most sensuous dreams." Yet Dreiser's sexual activity was hardly confined to wistful dreaming, and his treatment of Cowperwood's love affairs reflects more than frustrated envy of Yerkes. Cowperwood is assigned at least one of Dreiser's own affairs (with Kirah Markham, fictionalized as Stephanie Platow), and other aspects of Dreiser's active love life are applied to Cowperwood. In one complex instance, when Cowperwood's mistress deceives him with Forbes Gurney, Dreiser as Cowperwood is betrayed by Dreiser as Gurney, for the latter, "a tall melancholy youth" who is trying to be a writer and "identify himself with the Chicago newspaper world" while working as "an installment collector for a furniture company," is clearly based on the young Dreiser.

Given Dreiser's complicated use of autobiographical material, it is worth looking beyond Gerber's explanation. I believe that Dreiser's thematic concerns are at

least as important as his psychological problems in conditioning his transmutation of fact into fiction. To help present the trilogy's central ideological issue, the conflict between the Individual and the Mass, resolved in "Nature's equation," Dreiser provides Cowperwood with what, were this American story a tragedy, would be a tragic flaw: his womanizing. This man of affairs is by no means as competent in love as he is in business. Through his weakness, his sex life, the mass strikes back at the individual who would rise above it. This weakness has two aspects. The biological urges which drive Cowperwood into continual promiscuity, even if they may be uncommonly strong, indicate his common humanity; his striving after "beauty" is related to a search for the social acceptance he associates with the "right" woman. If the alternation of sex and business produces "a huge club sandwich," an understanding of the thematic role of Cowperwood's love life indicates a basic unity—like sandwiches, some books are "to be chewed and digested."

It is not difficult to trace, throughout the trilogy, the pattern that shows the financier's vulnerability. Cowperwood's first marriage is clearly a mistake; he is motivated to enter into it through a combination of biological and social desires. "He wanted her physically"; he also wants an attractive home and children. Lillian, "a natural conservator of public morals," temporarily reduces Frank to conventionality; he comes to believe "There was a good deal to this home idea." Yet, although this is only a temporary view for the Individual, his rising "above" it and turning to Aileen is, in terms of his career, another mistake. The climax of *The Financier* occurs when Aileen's father, "parental love back of his anger," refuses to aid Cowperwood, and Frank thinks "how easy it would have been if Aileen and he had not been exposed by this anonymous note." But, from the anonymous note, the story takes Cowperwood inexorably to prison.

His comeback, detailed in *The Titan*, is handicapped by Aileen, and at the end he is again, temporarily, defeated by those forces, representing conventional society, which he has antagonized by his sexual activities. Partly because, given Aileen's "personality or lack of it," social acceptance does not come as easily as financial success, Cowperwood turns from Aileen to a series of affairs. Significantly, these involve "two women—one the daughter, and the other the wife, of men of repute and standing in the community." While other mistakes contribute to Cowperwood's Chicago defeat, it is caused primarily by the opposition of the men on whose sexual domains Cowperwood has poached. "The local elements in finance . . . brought about this terrible onslaught"; to an extent greater than they wished, they unleash public opinion.

In financial defeat Cowperwood gains the love of Berenice Fleming. Society, through her, maintains a

hold on Cowperwood; she represents an ideal to him, not so much because of her youth and beauty, but because he sees in her "the true society woman, the high-born lady . . . on that score she appealed to him intensely." With all his wealth, Cowperwood is not, after all, so very different from Clyde Griffiths. But, like Clyde's Sondra, Berenice is a flawed ideal. In spite of her virtues, she is an opportunist, a point reinforced by the suggestion of Becky Sharp which Berenice's connection with Lord Stane, like Becky's with Lord Steyne, introduces. But, although gaining Berenice's love, Cowperwood, at the end of *The Stoic*, is again defeated. This time the defeat is the permanent one imposed by death, yet Cowperwood, in planning that his estate be used for a museum and a hospital, had hoped to live on in the respect of posterity. He receives, however, a final, posthumous, defeat when his estate is dissipated in litigation. This defeat, too, may be related to the botch that he has made of his sex life. As he recognizes shortly before he dies, while it must be Aileen, not Berenice, who will carry out his wishes, his attitude toward his wife has kept her from learning to handle financial affairs. Here, as throughout the story, Dreiser is following the general facts of Yerkes' saga; yet, as always, he is emphasizing his own interpretation. Through his particular version of the Eve myth, Dreiser consistently has shown the strong individual in a series of "falls" based on sex. Ultimately, thereby, "Nature's equation" is established.

Thus, the artistic structure of the trilogy, reflecting the thematic intention, demonstrates, I believe, that Dreiser was more detached from Cowperwood than Gerber indicates. While not denying that Dreiser had the feelings about Yerkes that Gerber ascribes to him, I suggest that Dreiser, as an artist, in creating the fictional Cowperwood was able to transcend and utilize his ambivalence regarding Yerkes.

WILLIAM B. STONE
Chicago, Illinois

Mr. Gerber replies:

In affirming a high level of personal identification between Dreiser and Yerkes/Cowperwood, hero of his *Trilogy of Desire*, my article cites a common pattern, for Dreiser seems to have worked most easily when his protagonists contained much of himself. This pattern by no means rules out Dreiser's ability to transcend and utilize his ambivalence regarding Yerkes. On the contrary, my article intends to suggest this, and I would argue further that this same ability can be credited with whatever measure of success Dreiser achieves in drawing characters as diverse as Carrie Meeber, Clyde Griffiths, and Solon Barnes.

My intention was to identify circumstances that

could compel Dreiser to admire a brilliant, aggressive millionaire while simultaneously obligating him to decry an arrogant, Napoleonic capitalist. Tensions created when both characteristics combine in a single man are responsible for much of the ambivalence in Dreiser's conception of Yerkes/Cowperwood and are reflective of the antagonistic directions in which Dreiser was torn throughout life, favoring at one moment the ruthlessly egoistic individualist and at another the common men over whom he rode roughshod. As Dreiser aged the pendulum swung perceptibly, the young Dreiser tending to glorify willful self-satisfaction, the mature Dreiser siding unequivocally with the masses.

In the Yerkes/Cowperwood saga the sex theme is of critical importance, as it is in all of Dreiser's novels, and Yerkes' freewheeling love life undoubtedly added to Dreiser's conviction that the streetcar mogul's life was the "most interesting" of all those he examined while preparing for his book. It is important particularly because Dreiser himself repeatedly equated sex with money. This was true in his college years, when his shyness, his general unattractiveness, and his failures with girls were explained away as concomitants of his poverty, in contrast to pampered sons of the rich whose ways were eased tremendously by fine clothes and generous allowances. It was true as Dreiser left St. Louis in 1893 and daydreamed of himself in the role of millionaire, reveling in the supposition that country bumpkins watching his Pullman streak past might look up, glimpse him dining, and imagine they had been privileged to witness the passage of some emerging Croesus. Sex plagued Dreiser, a fact he never tired of writing about. While composing *The Financier* and *The Titan* he was wracked principally by his failure in marriage and with Thelma Cudlipp. These concerns, particularly that with marriage, spill over into most of his post-1910 writing. In *The Titan* Dreiser's speculation on the Cowperwoods' exclusion from Chicago society led to a disquisition against monogamy which extended to proportions that threatened the narrative line. It needed to be cut from the manuscript and was.

In spite of this, it does seem mistaken to view Cowperwood's womanizing as a "tragic flaw" responsible for his series of falls. To do so is to assign the Yerkes/Cowperwood sexual concerns too high a priority, whereas it is clear throughout the *Trilogy* that the man's major thrust is toward power, with money-rich monopoly as the chief means of obtaining it. His houses, art collections, and his women (even Berenice Fleming) are subordinate, being means of displaying status conspicuously or of compelling recognition of Success.

The Chicago defeat, a case in point, is not engineered chiefly by cuckolded opponents but rather by