

研究ノート

セオドア・ドライサー・ペーパーズについて

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I had an opportunity to do some research on Theodore Dreiser papers in Kislak Center for Special Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts of Pennsylvania University from March 20 to 22, 2019. The collection of Theodore Dreiser papers in the center comprises various kinds of documents, including manuscripts of several of his works, memoirs, diaries, and articles which he collected. On this research trip, I focused on three types of documents, namely,

- 1) Theodore Dreiser's Greenwich Village Diary (1917-18)
- 2) Articles on the Federal Writers Project (FWA) and Federal Art Project (FAP), collected by Dreiser himself
- 3) Dreiser's notes on the Catholic Church

In this study note, I will give a brief outline of these documents and explain how scholars have dealt with them. Moreover, I will examine his views on Christianity.

The first document “Greenwich Village Diary” (1917-18), was written by Dreiser himself during the five years he lived there from 1914 onward, and was subsequently collected and published in *Theodore Dreiser American Diaries 1902-1926* (1982). Greenwich Village is located in the south of Manhattan, New York, and is known as the district wherein many artists lived in the early 20th century. Dreiser originally planned four volumes of autobiography but completed only two volumes (*A Book about Myself* [1922], later republished as *Newspaper Days* in 1991 and *Dawn* [1931]). However, although the completed volumes dealt mostly with his earlier life, he left behind detailed diaries of his later life. The “Greenwich Village Diary” has a curious history. H. L. Mencken, a famous critic and contemporary of Dreiser, originally owned the diary, before he donated it to the New York Public Library. Mencken explained how he had come into possession of the diary:

This curious document was handed to me in 1920 or thereabout by Dreiser's secretary. Whether she gave it to me because she was then on bad terms with Dreiser and eager to make him look foolish or because she thought that the diary would aid me in my writings about him I don't know. I put it aside and forgot it completely, and it was only the other day that I disinterred it.

It seems to me that it may be of interest to someone writing about Dreiser in the future. It at least reveals his state of mind at a critical point in his career. (Folder 13728)

Here, the secretary to whom Mencken refers is Estelle Bloom Kubitz, Dreiser's intimate secretary in the 1910s. For Dreiser, a secretary and a lover were almost the same thing, or precisely, his lovers often acted as secretaries, doing typing and correcting his writings and the like. As a result, they had great influence on his works and so we cannot discuss his works without referring to his “secretaries.”

The “Greenwich Village Diary” detailed his friendships with various artists and, often quite baldly, described his sexual relationships with many women. In the diary, the latter is quite notorious as the various scandals of his love-life damaged his professional and social reputation. Koji Oi, in his book, *Erottiku America: Vikutorianizumu no Shinwa to Genjitsu* (2013), refers to the sexual relationship Dreiser had with Estelle Bloom Kubitz. Gregory M.

Neubauer's dissertation describes how Kubitz participated in Dreiser's writing and how she created her dramatic work under his influence.

The "Greenwich Village Diary" is also valuable in that it allows us to examine his writing process. In 1917-18, he was working on *The Bulwark*, published posthumously in 1946, and "America," which was a satirical essay on American society but was never published. The diary also describes the banning of his autobiographical novel *The Genius* (1915) by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. In this diary, he complains that a distribution version of *The Genius* was abridged: "Boy brings cut version of The Genius [sic] from Hearst's. They don't want it." (Folder 13728: June 7, 1917)

The second collection on which I focused is made up of articles Dreiser collected on the Federal Writers Project (FWP) and the Federal Art Project (FAP) in Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal era. In the 1930s, the U.S. government implemented many public works intended to bring down the worst unemployment rate in American history. As part of this program, the "Work Progress Administration (WPA)" was established. During the Great Depression, many artists and writers were in an economically difficult situation, and the WPA established the FWP and FPA to support artists financially—by commissioning, among other projects, the American Guide series (a travel guide to every state written by novelists and writers), and murals on public buildings such as city halls or post offices.

Dreiser was attracted by the government-funded art projects. Through the work of other scholars, we know he was involved in the labor movements of the 1930s: he volunteered to be an intermediary for the laborers involved in the 1931-32 Harlan mine strike in Kentucky along with several other left-wing comrades, which was notorious as strikebreaking and unwarrantable oppression of the strikers. He had furthermore become hostile to government policy and more sympathetic towards the American Communist Party, and his collection of articles in relation to FWP and FAP for critics is significant in giving a broader sense of his political views.

His collection of articles on the FWP and FAP includes:

1. "Catalog of Publications: Federal Writers Project" by the Works Progress Administration
2. "Art as a Function of Government: A Survey" by the Supervisors Association of the WPA Federal Art Project, 1937
3. "Unemployed Arts," reprinted from *Fortune*, May 1937.¹

In "Art as a Function of Government," and "Unemployed Arts," someone, presumably Dreiser himself has underlined some passages and made notes in the margin. A cursory inspection suggests that Dreiser was positive about the U.S. Government's involvement in and support of art. In last passages of "Preface" to "Art as a Function of Government," John Taylor Arms, who was a famous printmaker and illustrator, says,

Broadly conceived, thoughtfully and painstakingly organized, and wisely administered, the Federal Art Project represents one of the most significant advances our government and our country have made. Its growth has been astonishing, its purpose high, its influence widespread, its achievement a matter for pride. And as it has extended recognition and support to artists, young and old, all over our land, so it is, in its turn, deserving of sympathy and support from all of those who believe that art is for the many, not the few, and that the artist is a laborer as worthy of his hire as are those in any other field of human endeavor.² (Armes 2. The underlining is Dreiser's. Folder 13624)

In this passage, Arms proclaims that art activities need government support and that art belongs to the people. Dreiser sympathized with this, and underlined, and so we can reasonably assume he believed that art should become popularized. Additionally, Dreiser was interested in the role of art played in the people's lives, in particular how children could be artistically creative in the modern school system. He underlined passages of "Art as a Function of Government" as follows:

Facts can be taught by pedagogues. Dates and data on the history of art can be drilled into children by trained teachers. Art appreciation can be developed by familiarity with art objects. But creative activity in the arts can be fostered only by artists who have not only the technical equipment to produce works of art, but also an understanding of the processes of creation and self-criticism. (27. Folder 13624)

From these lines, we can surmise that Dreiser believed that children should be trained by artists to develop their creative activities, so that when they grow to be adults, art would be genuinely popular.

“Unemployed Arts” is an article of *Fortune*. It describes four operations of FAP, the projects for painting, writing, theater, and music, which a caption describes as “an account of WPA’s Four Arts Projects: their operation, their cast of 40,000, their audience of 70,000,000.” As suggested by the caption, the article summarizes the details of four operations. As with “Art as a Function of Government,” Dreiser read carefully and underlined some passages. He underlined the latter part of the quotation given below.

What the government’s experiments in music, painting, and the theatre actually did, even in their first year, was to work a sort of cultural revolution in America. They brought the American audience and the American artist face to face for the first time in their respective lives. (The underlining is Dreiser’s. Folder 13625)

Again, Dreiser was interested in the influence of artists on ordinary Americans. He focused on Holger Cahill’s³ remark about the purpose of FAP and art:

“The organization of Project has proceeded on the principle that it is not the solitary genius but a sound general movement which maintains art as a vital functioning part of any cultural scheme. Art is not a matter of rare occasional masterpieces. The emphasis upon masterpieces is a nineteenth-century phenomenon. It is primarily a collector’s idea and has little relation to an art movement...”⁴ (Folder 13625)

According to Cahill, the purpose of the project was to liberate art from the privileged few and make it possible for anyone to experience art. Therefore, he rejected the idea of masterpieces because only a select few can encounter them. There is no doubt that Dreiser agreed with Cahill’s idea: art should be devoted to the majority of common people. Coming in contact with laborers and the poor, Dreiser refined his thoughts about the role of art: he felt that common people did need art. As a result, we can assume that his concern focused on three points: the first, how art makes influence on people; the second, that art belongs to ordinary people; and the third, how the government supports or intervenes the creative activities. We can gain insight into what Dreiser thought about “culture” and “art” through these documents.

The third set of documents on which I focused is Dreiser’s notes on Catholicism. Generally, critics are aware that Theodore Dreiser felt intense hatred towards established religions, especially the Catholic Church. While his father had been a devout Catholic and had educated his children in dogmatic parochial schools, Theodore was discontented with his education. He often depicts religious people in his works, such as Asa Griffiths in *An American Tragedy* (1925) and Solon Burns in *The Bulwark* (1946). Like his father, both characters are represented as being strongly faithful but impractical men who could not save their children from delinquency—that is, they cannot fill the paternal role. Furthermore, he often described essays or memo on religion, however, many of those have not been published.

“My Quarrel with Catholic Church,”⁵ which demonstrates Dreiser’s hostility toward the Catholic Church, lists his reasons for attacking it. In the beginning of the essay, he reasons:

That it is a very large and powerful organization, which pretends to be religious, but actually is a purely commercial and political organization, using religious theory and dogma to advantage itself in these other realms. (1. Folder 13615)

Dreiser distrusted the Catholic Church at least partly on the grounds that it had gathered great financial and

political power under the guise of being a religious institution. Moreover, in his letter to journalist Claude Bowers, he said, “I have stated over and over that the chief menace to the world today is the Catholic Church because it is a world wide organization and because chiefly it attacks intelligence... since for its own prosperity’s sake it believes in mass stupidity.” (quoted in Lingeman 449) His reproach may have been based on his belief that the parochial school education he had received was so governed by Church dogma that he had not received the education he longed for. On the influence of religion on children, Dreiser said,

The most damning proofs of their dishonesty, one, their lack of faith in the intellectual weight of their arguments and, two, their downright dishonesty in peddling the same, are that their chief attack is made upon the undeveloped and, of course, untrained mind of the child. One might almost say the infant in arms, since the attack begins with baptism, and continues through the most obscure, sensitive and formative period of every grouping mind, that is, the years which lie between one and twelve. After that, as they themselves boast, the average child can be safely left to the world, its temperament, plus whatever intelligence it has, poisoned by lies which the leaders of that great organization know to be lies and yet which, in the face of that, for political, material, financial and other reasons, they continue to spread and even enforce. (2. Folder 13615)

Here, we must remark on the connections Dreiser makes between children and religion. Dreiser says that by being so influential, and potentially harmful, towards children, religion—especially the Catholic Church—would come in time to rule the world.

Problems to be resolved

As mentioned before, in the second document, Dreiser focuses on influence of art on children. Since Dreiser had no children, his remarks on children could have hardly been considered. That said, he seems to pay attention to children and poor laborers as socially disadvantaged people, and, at the same time, he was concerned about the future of the United States. In future research, I would like to survey how his anxiety would be reflected in his works.

Notes

This research was supported by the research funds for strategic promotion from Yonezawa Women’s Junior College.

1. This article in Dreiser papers is unpagged.
2. Dreiser marks with an × on the left side of the underlined line in the margin.
3. Holger Cahill was one of four directors for FAP, had real control over the project for a sphere of painting and sculpture.
4. Dreiser draws a vertical line in the margin around this quotation.
5. This document does not record when it was written.

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