
Reviews

Dreiser's "Other Self": The Life of Arthur Henry, by Maggie Walker and Mark Walker. McKinleyville, CA: Fithian Press, 2005. x + 258 pp. Paper, \$17.95.

"Surely there are no better friends than we are," Theodore Dreiser wrote to Arthur Henry in July 1900, expressing heartfelt sentiments in his characteristically clumsy and somewhat verbose style. "You are to me my other self, a very excellent Dreiser, minus some of my defects, plus many laughable errors which I would not have. If I could not be what I am, I would be you." Thus the apt title of this highly readable biography, written in a dispassionate tone and exhibiting scrupulous scholarship, by Henry's granddaughter Maggie Walker, a former journalist, and her husband and coauthor Mark Walker, an editor and freelance writer. Maggie Walker is the daughter of Dorothy Henry Van Auken, who was the only child of Arthur Henry and his first wife Maude Wood Henry. Benefiting from the authors' reportorial and literary talents, as well as invaluable knowledge of intimate family details, *Dreiser's "Other Self"* is a book which, it seems, had to be written by the Walkers. Nature abhors a vacuum, and American literary history (and, by extension, Dreiser scholarship) has been well served by the authors' collaboration on this book. This is the first biography of Henry, about whom there has been scant biographical and almost no critical material available other than the accounts of his relationship with Dreiser (most of which recycle essentially the same anecdotes and information) available in Dreiser biographies and studies focusing on the composition of *Sister Carrie*.

The friendship and intimacy of Henry and Dreiser was actually of brief duration, lasting from 1894, when they first met in Toledo, Ohio, to about a decade later, when the relationship cooled and essentially died in the aftermath of the publication of Henry's memoir *An Island Cabin* (which contained an unflattering portrait of Dreiser, thinly disguised by a pseudonym).

Thanks to Dreiser scholars, highlights of the friendship and literary collaboration of the two are well known: their meeting in Ohio when Henry,

then city editor at the *Toledo Blade*, hired Dreiser to cover a trolley strike; the summer they spent together (with their wives) at Arthur and Maude Henry's summer home in Maumee, Ohio, in 1899, where Dreiser, at Henry's urging, wrote his first story, "The Shining Slave Makers" (later published as "McEwen of the Shining Slave Makers") and perhaps began *Sister Carrie*; the role played by Henry in the gestation, writing, and publication of *Sister Carrie* (Henry's importance as mentor, editor, and, in effect, literary agent in Dreiser's dealings with the novel's publisher, Doubleday, Page and Company, cannot be underestimated); the period during the early 1900's when Henry and Dreiser lived together briefly and collaborated as freelance magazine writers to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to determine authorship. The Walkers contend that, with the exception of Richard Lingeman, "Dreiser's biographers have only slightly acknowledged Henry's role in the making of the great American novelist."

Although the details of this period are already well known, the Walkers cite rare and previously inaccessible passages in Henry's writings containing vivid descriptions of Dreiser, specifically Henry's impressions upon first meeting Dreiser—recorded in Henry's unpublished novel *Roger Allen*—and his description of the scene at Howley, Haviland, and Company (the publishers of *Ev'ry Month*) when both Dreiser and his brother Paul were present.

The relationship between Henry and Dreiser was truly what the Walkers call an "intellectual love affair." The unraveling of the friendship was perhaps inevitable, given its intensity and Dreiser's idealization of Henry, his alter ego. It was at around this time that Henry became romantically involved with Anna Mallon, who would become Henry's second wife (and who is the prototype of Rona Murtha in Dreiser's *A Gallery of Women*). Anna Mallon ran a typing agency in New York that Dreiser and later Henry patronized. Her financial support enabled Henry to purchase the "island cabin" and later a house in the Catskills region, which is the setting of Henry's memoir *The House in the Woods*. It is clear that tensions between Dreiser and Mallon contributed to the deterioration of the Henry-Dreiser relationship.

Other than Dreiser's cruel and disparaging portrayal of Henry and their friendship in *A Gallery of Women*, little has hitherto been known about Henry and Mallon's relationship. The authors make use of an invaluable biographical source, Anna Mallon Henry's letters to Delia Farrell Seifferth, which were discovered by Donald Oakes, editor of a recent (2000) edition of Henry's *The House in the Woods*. In her afterword, Maggie Walker acknowledges indebtedness to Oakes's discovery but asserts that Oakes mis-

represents details of Henry's life in his afterword to the reprint edition of Henry's book.

The focus of my review thus far has been Henry's relationship with Dreiser. But the biography, of course, is Henry's. It was obviously a labor of love that has gleaned details from diverse sources such as Henry's memoirs (*An Island Cabin*, *The House in the Woods*, and *Lodgings in Town*); a biography, written by Henry's sister, of his mother, Sarepta Myrenda Irish Henry, a prolific author and leader in the temperance movement; Sarepta Henry's own works; anecdotal material about the Chicago newspaper scene and its luminaries in the 1890s, when both Henry and Dreiser did journalistic apprenticeships there; and Henry's unpublished autobiographical novel, from which the authors have teased details about Henry's youth. Knowledge of the whereabouts of Henry's family during the early years and his education, early travels, and youthful employments is often lacking. But the authors have pulled back the curtain a little, discovering, for example, that Henry made a trip to New York City long before it has been known that he did.

The authors' speculations about Henry's whimsical, fanciful, and otherworldly temperament are illuminating. They note the importance of his mother in his emotional development, which is understandable, given that his father, James Henry, a Civil War veteran, died when Henry was three and a half years old. But this fact alone does not account for peculiarities of Henry's upbringing. He was often separated from his mother (who supported the family as an author and later lecturer and was often traveling) and sometimes from his siblings, living for a while as a boarder on a farm, a memorable experience described in *Roger Allen*. In adulthood, the authors note, Henry tended to be overly dependent on women and unrealistic or indifferent in the pursuit of material goals. His philosophy of life was summed up in an essay entitled "The Doctrine of Happiness," published by Dreiser in *Ev'ry Month*. The authors' speculations about Henry's sex life are provocative and persuasive. To put it crudely, they suggest that Henry (in marked contrast to Dreiser) was undersexed. "The major defect in his character," they conclude, "lay in his aversion to and fear of the physical act of love."

A chapter is devoted to *Nicholas Blood, Candidate*, an early (1890) novel by Henry that was known by hardly anyone other than Henry himself to have been written by Henry until Dreiser scholar Ellen Moers discovered the fact of Henry's authorship and published it in an article in *The Dreiser Newsletter* ("A 'New' First Novel by Arthur Henry," *Dreiser Newsletter* 4 [1973]: 7-9). Echoing noxious sentiments which were prevalent at the time

in the locale where it is set (to what extent they reflected Henry's own views is problematic), the novel, which was hastily written and is poorly constructed, portrays Southern blacks in the Reconstruction Era as subhuman brutes who are a menace to whites and civilized society. Realizing that the book would be distasteful to his liberal friends, Henry subsequently took "great pains to hide this first novel from the world," the authors note. They are inclined to agree with Ellen Moers's suggestion that the novel, written by Henry at age twenty while on a trip south with his brother Alfred, was perhaps written at the behest of some local political interest, and they agree with Dreiser biographer Richard Lingeman that the book was "probably a youthful indiscretion."

Mention should be made of the excellent photographs in this biography, many of them from the authors' private collection. My favorites are a stunning photo of Henry's mother as a young woman and a photo of Henry and his third wife, the playwright Clare Kummer, taken on a beach in Santa Monica, California, when Henry was in his sixties. Henry's smiling, slightly upturned face radiates warmth and serenity.

This biography inspired me to read Arthur Henry's memoirs and fiction, and I'm glad it did. Henry is a fascinating figure in his own right; his story is a compelling one, and he shouldn't be totally forgotten as an author. His novel *A Princess of Arcady* is a bit fanciful for today's tastes, but it has a unique charm, and his novel *The Unwritten Law* not only tells a gripping and moving story that would do Frank Norris credit but also provides a wonderful peep at life in a German immigrant family and among various classes in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Brooklyn and well-described Manhattan locales such as Washington Square. His memoirs, which constitute a trilogy, hold up very well. They are at the same time charming period pieces with a wealth of finely realized descriptive detail and Thoreauvian musings.

No Dreiserian should neglect to acquire this book.

— Roger W. Smith

Mencken: The American Iconoclast, by Marion Elizabeth Rodgers. NY: Oxford University Press, 2005. ix + 662 pp. Cloth, \$35.00.

Rodgers's book is the third new Mencken biography to appear since the posthumous publication of Mencken's *Diary* (1989), *My Life as Author and Editor* (1993), and *Thirty-five Years of Newspaper Work* (1994). Mencken's diary, kept from 1930–48, and both reflections on his career and contempo-