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The Making of Dreiser's Early Short Stories: The Philosopher and the Artist

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

THE MAKING OF DREISER'S EARLY SHORT STORIES: THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE ARTIST Yoshinobu Hakutani* In the summer of 1899, shortly before the writing of *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser tried his hand at the short story, his first concentrated effort to write fiction. Whatever technical devices he might have conceived, or whatever technical difficulties he might have encountered in producing his first short stories, the disposition of mind which lay behind and shaped these stories must have grown out of the disposition of the previous years. In fact, as a newspaperman in the early nineties, Dreiser felt severely restricted. He often detested the city editor's control over his selection of news material and his interpretation of it before the draft of an article was sent to press. There is a great deal of information in *A Book About Myself* concerning

the restrictions imposed by the press. But an article Dreiser wrote as late as 1938 still poses a question of the difference between literature and journalism. In this article Dreiser recalls a routine assignment while he was a young reporter in St. Louis. He was to interview an old millionaire about the city's new terminal project, and naturally he expected to meet a forceful experienced businessman. Unexpectedly, however, Dreiser met a pathetically aged and feeble man who thought of his success and power as useless. During the interview the old man could only say to Dreiser: "My interest in all these things is now so slight that it is scarcely worthwhile—a spectacle for God and men. . . ." Upon his return to the city desk, Dreiser asked the editor whether he should write about the old man's age. "No, no, no!" the editor almost shouted. "Write only his answers. Never mind how old he is. That's just what I don't want. Do you want to queer this? Stick to the terminal dope and what he thought. We're not interested in his age." "No doubt," Dreiser reflects, "the vast majority of the people thought of him even then as young, active, his old self. But all this while this other picture was holding in my mind, and continued so to do for years after. I could scarcely think of the city even without thinking of him, his house, his dog, his age, his bony fingers, his fame." Dreiser then concludes: 'Professor Hakutani, who teaches at Kent State University, has published widely in the scholarly journals. His books include *American Literary Naturalism: A Reassessment*, *The World of Japanese Fiction*, and the forthcoming *Theodore Dreiser: The American 1890s*.⁴⁸ Yoshinobu Hakutani Those particular matters about which the city editor had asked to know concerned, as I now saw, only such things as were temporary and purely constructive in their interest, nothing beyond the day—the hour—in which they appeared. Literature as I now saw, and art in all its forms, was this other realm, that of the painter, the artist, the one who saw and reported the non-transitory, and yet transitory too, nature of all our interests and dreams, which observed life as a whole and drew it without a flaw, a fact, missing. There, if anywhere, were to be reported or painted such conditions and scenes as this about which I had meditated and which could find no place in the rush and hurry of our daily press. Then it was, and not until then, that the real difference between journalism and literature became plain.' Compared with such an experience, his editorial and free-lance work (1895-1900) was less inhibited in the expression of ideas. It is true that as editor and "arranger" of *Ev'ry Month* (1895-97) Dreiser was not always in command of its material; he complained of the limitation imposed by the publisher and of the necessity to cater to the predilection of readers. In his free-lance articles his freedom in selecting topics, of course, became much greater. There is no doubt that by the time he became involved in magazine work, particularly his free-lance writing, the kind of restriction he suffered in his newspaper experience had become less severe. During this period Dreiser managed to express himself on the...

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Yoshirobu Hakutan^{*}

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Yoshinobu Hakutani, Theodore Dreiser and American Culture: New Readings (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2000, £39.50). Pp, the beam is poorly leading brand of Saros.

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