ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Dawn
Theodore Dreiser
Black Sparrow Press
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From one of the great American novelists of the early twentieth century comes an autobiography written with tremendous frankness and introspection. Theodore Dreiser, author of such classics as *Sister Carrie* and[/i] An American Tragedy[/i], presents a candid examination of his life growing up in poverty in the late nineteenth century. Completed in 1916, but not published until 1931—in the midst of the Great Depression—this autobiography's timely criticism of social stratification, religious rigidity and moral hypocrisy was well received by critics. It seems appropriate then that Dawn, a book which reveals the vast social and moral changes taking place at the turn of the century, might be re-released now, as we prepare to see the sun set on this waning millennium.

Throughout Dawn, Dreiser alternates relating the twists and turns of his life with thorough, somewhat long-winded introspection. Of particular emphasis are his criticisms of capitalism and education and his contempt for Catholicism. Equally notable is the author's unflinching treatment of sex. Other highlights include the vividly drawn characters that intersect Dreiser's life, his touching portrayal of his mother—always the hub at the center of Dreiser's reeling family, and a few clear windows out of which Dreiser and the reader together gasp at the wonders of nature.

Because of its considerable length and tendency to meander about sometimes in circles, this work requires the luxury of time, and is not recommended for those seeking a quick history lesson. For history or literary scholars, however, along with those who enjoy long quiet walks and those seekers of great American autobiographies, Dawn will ignite flames.

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