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Dreiser's *The Girl in the Coffin*, or, What's Death Got to Do With it?

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[The dwarves] had made a coffin of clear glass, so as to be looked into from all sides, and they laid her in it, and wrote in golden letters upon it her name, and that she was a King's daughter. Then they set the coffin upon the mountain, and one of them always remained by it to watch ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" 336).

The Grimm brothers' fairy tale, "Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs," reproduces several familiar images of women—the self-sacrificing, voiceless woman as victim, the wicked step-mother envious of youth and beauty, the female narcissist's lack of nurturance and love, female vain reluctance to face mortality and loss of beauty. "Snow-White" also literalizes what John Berger has labeled the "primary element" of a woman's identity—being "surveyed," becoming "most particularly an object of vision: a sight." If, as Berger writes, "men act and women appear" (46-47), Snow White appears the epitome of motionless passivity. Her body is an art object made visible from all angles whose display confirms the spectators' powerful gaze. Her rosy cheeks beneath the glass suggest a beauty resistant to time and decay. Placed in a position to be honored and revered, she is the community's would-be link to hierarchical social bonds and class arrangements. Yet Snow White's "death" turns out to be staged. The prince, who "cannot live without looking upon Snow-White" (336), orders his servants to carry away the coffin. As they stumble over a bush and jostle the coffin, Snow-White is awakened and the poisoned apple piece is dislodged from her throat. She had been merely sleeping, removed from

time, limning two worlds of social and spiritual existence, awaiting the crowning conclusion to her narrative.

But Dreiser's girl in the coffin, Mary Magnet, is not, like Snow White, rescued or reanimated. She cannot recover from paralyzing "tight-lacing;" she cannot brush a poison comb from her hair; her "blooming" cheeks will decompose along with the rest of her body and its ability to reproduce and nurture. She is *not* asleep, though co-worker Nick Blundy adorns her casket with a "white pillow of immortelles with the word 'Asleep' formed upon it in large purple letters" (*The Girl in the Coffin* 21). Neither can she claim a socially sanctioned position as (royal) wife. If Snow White is the victim of an evil Other, Mary Magnet is the victim of her own sexuality. If Snow White recalls the purity of the Virgin Mary, Mary Magnet recalls the sin of the seductress Eve. Since Mary has violated social norms, redemption is available to her only through the sacrifice of her material body.

Dreiser's drama, *The Girl in the Coffin*, centers around the protagonist's dilemma over mourning his recently deceased daughter on an evening he is to address textile strikers. William Magnet, the galvanizing force behind workers, has established himself as a leader who can "speak their own tongue and has lived in the same place and worked in the same job" (*The Girl* 14). The success of the strike depends upon Magnet's accompanying the nationally known strike leader John Ferguson to a meeting aimed at rousing the workers of the Tabitha Mill to join forces with other strikers. Since Ferguson can't speak Italian to the workers and Magnet can, Magnet's presence is the deciding factor in the strike's moment of crisis. Though Magnet persists in remaining home to grieve for his daughter, Ferguson convinces him in the play's final moments to address the crowd, and thus, victory is all but guaranteed.

Magnet's parlor, the setting for the entire play, signifies his straddling of both working and middle classes; he is a "well-to-do workingman" and his home exhibits typical Victorian furnishings—heavy draperies, a "cheap mahogany upright piano with silk drapery hung over one corner," bookcases filled with "sets," a "crayon portrait" of an unidentified woman, oil lamp and plush sofa—but the one object that dominates the stage is placed in the middle of the back wall directly beneath the portrait of John

Ferguson “standing in oratorical fashion” (9-10). Mary Magnet, lying in her coffin, positioned *under* Ferguson, who we learn at play’s end is her lover, lies prostrate in submission to a masculinist social order that mandates female sexuality be contained. Between Ferguson and her father, Mary and/ in her dead body crystallize the triangular structure of “gift giving” gone awry. William Magnet cannot, like Shakespeare’s Prospero, bestow his daughter upon a younger man as a “rich gift” (*The Tempest* IV, i, 8).

Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss theorizes that a daughter is the most valuable “gift” a man can offer another to create partnerships, to ensure that their hostilities are smoothed over by their common interest as affines. “The supreme rule of the gift,” he claims, is the enforcement of the incest taboo not so much to prevent marriage to a sister or mother as to ensure transmission of women to other men. Community arises as the network of kinship relations is thus established and allows men the ability to structure social ties as benefits them, rather than women who become the objects of their exchange. Women, perceived as mediators of male social relations, are, according to Levi-Strauss, “merely the occasion of this real relationship” (481, 116).¹ The dead Mary Magnet is a commodity taken out of circulation, but nevertheless maintains her function as an agent of male connection.

In *The Girl in the Coffin*, the literal container, the coffin, is also a text that, once decoded, signifies the social construction of female sacrifice. As gossiping women speculate about the cause of Mary’s unexpected and sudden death, we learn she has died from complications during an abortion. The identity of the father, Ferguson, is known only by old Mrs. Littig, Magnet’s housekeeper, and revealed to the audience in a final scene—Mrs. Littig hands Ferguson a gold ring we know belongs to Mary suggesting a legitimization of their illegitimate union, in (authorial) deference to cultural norms.

Mrs. Littig’s function corresponds to what Susan Albertine has explored as an inversion of the “traffic in women” described by Gayle Rubin. Albertine argues that “the psychic space between women is a locus of power; yet in Dreiser’s variation on the theme of exchange or ‘traffic’ in women, female relations are meaningless without a man to whom this

power is bartered" (63). Albertine reads the bond shared by Jennie Gerhardt and her mother as a mutual agreement that Jennie "should become a medium of exchange, her body the currency of the transaction" (65) in relations with Brander and Kane; Albertine sees Jennie and Letty Pace sharing "mutuality, even... sympathy" (67), but only insofar as such feeling empowers Lester. By protecting the identity of Mary's lover, Mrs. Littig does not, like Mrs. Gerhardt and Letty Pace, stand to gain materially; nor does Littig have any sexual/romantic investments in Ferguson. She does, however, participate in Ferguson's cover-up and thereby indirectly facilitates his political career by protecting him from Magnet's wrath. Her complicity in safeguarding Ferguson's name may be a byproduct of her love for Mary, but it nevertheless retains the triadic structure of enabling men. In contrast to the wives on stage, Mrs. Shaefer and Mrs. Rickert who would eagerly disclose the lover's identity, Littig is not a buxom matron; hardly a presence, she is a "thin, pale, vapid-looking old woman with scraggly gray hair" (11). Taciturn and wispy, Littig withholds information when questioned by the women, refuses to gossip about anyone, and proves her loyalty to Mary by eluding Magnet's questions:

Magnet

What did you say was the last thing Mary said to you?

Mrs. Littig

She says: "Tell pap it's all right. Tell him he ain't to worry."

Magnet

Didn't she ever leave a message for anybody else?

Mrs. Littig

Not as I heard.

Magnet

Didn't you ever hear the nurse or the doctor say there was somebody she was talkin' about?

Mrs. Littig

No, I didn't hear.

Magnet

Whatever became o' that ring Mary used to wear?

Mrs. Littig

What ring?

(38-39)

If Mrs. Littig is a surrogate for Mary's deceased mother, she fulfills what Magnet (and Dreiser) see as a mother-daughter bond of sentiment similar to that shared by Jennie and Mrs. Gerhardt. Mirroring each other's mind, the Gerhardt women nearly blur boundaries (Albertine 64-67). Mrs. Littig *does* know the identity of Mary's lover, as Magnet assumes her mother would: "Her mother would 'a' knew! Her mother would 'a' knew!" (40). Littig says little to Ferguson at the play's conclusion; she hands him the ring and looks at him "sadly and timidly but simply and quite without reproach" (53).

Unlike Mrs. Littig, Mrs. Ferguson, who never appears in the play, is another agent of male empowerment; pitted against Mary, she is ultimately though indirectly both the cause of her death and the gateway to Ferguson's access to a higher class. Because of her affiliations, he is the recipient of "a good living." Ferguson tells Magnet:

My wife and I haven't lived together at all this many a day. If we had I'd never be here in a loom worker's cottage, fighting within an inch of my life to win a strike. I'd be sitting in some hotel parlor hobnobbin with a lot of bishops and politicians and college professors... I'd wear a medal and have a good fat bank account. I'd kowtow to ladies and gentlemen. ... I'd be a respectable labor leader—that's what I'd be if I'd stayed with my wife. Maybe you think I'd better have stayed with her. (48-49)

Ferguson's wife retains his name, his "freedom... [S]he's got that locked up safe enough..." (49). She also retains his social status while Mary did not "get a living... [His] name... a right to blame [him] if [he] wasn't faithful to her. She didn't even get a right to tell anybody she loved [him]" (49). Mrs. Ferguson is entitled to shared material assets Ferguson provides, while Mary is entitled to nothing, and thus *becomes* nothing.

If women's class positions and roles signify the arrangement of male positions, it is women's bodies, especially Mary's, exploited, as Foucault describes, as "an object of knowledge and element in relations of power" (107) that signify the commodification of sex. It is Magnet who reveals his daughter's affair as a violation of the process that transforms the raw material of female bodies into situated women:

Ferguson

This man you say has done your girl so much harm—how do you know but what she loved him?

Magnet

[*In a savage tone, looking up swiftly.*]

Loved him! Loved him! The damn dog. Suppose she did love him! What's that to do with it? (46)

If the body is, as Foucault has theorized, the site at which domination is achieved, the body of the girl in the coffin emblemizes ultimate and final containment—a nullification of the threat of her sexuality. I would pose or paraphrase the question Irene Gammel asks in her stunning *Sexualizing Power in Naturalism: Theodore Dreiser and Frederick Philip Grove*, "How is sexuality put to work in the social machinery of power?" (7). Indeed, *The Girl in the Coffin* thematizes sexual politics as much as it does labor politics, and Dreiser's problematizing of what Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby have called the female "sexuated" body has been explored in key texts by Gammel's inquiry. Dreiser's play, with its "honest-to-goodness coffin as one of the props" that Keith Newlin quotes a contemporary reviewer as marveling at (45), represents the epitome of docile female bodies.

If, as Susan K. Harris notes, Dreiser "explores the nature of inertia perhaps more than any other American writer" (72) then from a feminist perspective, this play is an important marker in his oeuvre: it participates in the cultural ideation of female as passive, male as active. The public display of a dead woman in a half open coffin affirms a homosocial alliance between the two protagonists; they negotiate the sharing of power over her dead body. Staging the ritualization of loss as a screen for the

spectacle of male identity politics, Dreiser literalizes the “fallen woman’s” sacrifice to the social order, the law and the language of the father. Her death is a necessary insurance that the “deployment of alliance is attuned to a homeostasis of the social body, which it has the function of maintaining; whence its privileged link with the law” (Foucault 107).

Mary’s illicit sexual behavior—for which she is punished *and* redeemed—stands in stark contrast to the matronly respectability of the other women characters. Though Mary is completely silenced and passive like the leaden casket Freud discusses, she is not yet totally effaced; the “thick dark hair of a dead woman . . . barely visible” (10) suggests a sensuousness lacking in the other women.² And having “the ginger in her” (20) implies, if not outright defiance of social strictures, at least zest or spiritedness. Both Mrs. Shaefer and Mrs. Rickert are *wives* of working men, and throughout their appearance on stage, they perform gendered activities of domesticity such as crocheting lace edging and rocking in a rocking chair. Mrs. Shaefer, “stout, neat, vigorous, red-cheeked, her hair brushed tightly back” doubles her appearance in Mrs. Rickert who is “also stout and rosy, but of a more placid type [who] wears a brown shawl and over her head a knitted scarf of pink wool” (10). Settled, stable but suggestive of *asexuality*, these two women offer commentary on the dangers of sexual behavior not sanctioned by legalized marriage. Claiming Mary “did enjoy a good time as much as any girl” (19), Mrs. Rickert pursues a line of discussion that leads Mrs. Shaefer to say:

In my belief it’s some rich fellow she met up to the city. Many a Saturday night when work was over she’s been seen take the train. I understand she spread round the report she was goin’ to business college up there. I guess, if truth be told, it was the gay life she was after. —Well, she’s not the first girl foolishness has brought to her grave. (*She nods wisely.*) Them rich ones knows how to cover their tracks” (28).

Like working-class Roberta Alden, whose inability to arrange for an abortion dooms her, Mary Magnet cannot successfully “cover her tracks.”

Seeking intimacy killed Mary Magnet, and unlike Carrie Meeber who is *not* punished for her sexual transgressions, but, Gammel observes, “controlled in a much more effective way: she is seduced into voluntary submission to society’s norms” (55), Mary Magnet *is* punished with death at the hands of an abortionist. Mary is an *unmarried girl* in a coffin, not a married woman in a coffin, and since she has violated (hetero)sexual codes of conduct, doubly so since Ferguson is not legally divorced, her bridal bed becomes her coffin to be sealed up and removed from the social group.

However, before her impending internment (and disappearance from the stage, signifying her eternal absence and dispensability), viewers are invited to gaze upon her remains and witness her redemption in death. Mary does not lie in a glass coffin, like Snow White who is seen from every angle, but she does elicit the sort of “aesthetic viewing” that Elisabeth Bronfen notes of Snow White’s display (Bronfen 99-107). Mary also elicits relief—relief of the viewer’s own anxiety that his/her own death is deferred, relief that sexual and kinship alliances will not be disordered, relief that the Other (the “dark continent”) is exteriorized and visually polarized to the Self, relief that the status quo will endure. Gazing upon her coffin/body allows viewers the assurance that the object of their gaze is rendered totally safe, that the threat of sexual liberation (in the form of a woman) is neutralized. Since she is defeated by her womb, her *hyster*, the viewers’ gaze functions here in much the same fashion as that described by Helene Cixous in her discussion of the male desire to know the female body.

As a “fallen woman” narrative, *The Girl in the Coffin* more closely parallels Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, as Lawrence Hussman describes it, than it does Dreiser’s own *Sister Carrie*. Hussman observes, “*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is far from a revolutionary naturalistic document in its treatment of the woman’s code of sexual conduct. Indeed, it moves only a quarter step forward, replacing death before dishonor with death immediately after dishonor” (97). So too with *The Girl*. The Dreiser who authored *Sister Carrie* sixteen years earlier, “more dangerous [than Crane] to those who held inviolable the sexual standards of the time for women” (Hussman 100), seems to turn an about face and en-

dorse middle class sex/gender prescriptions while both sympathizing with and condescending to working class codes. As Laura Hapke has noted, Dreiser's ambivalence about wage-earning women is played out in his novels which are divided "between locating his heroines in the feminine workplace and rescuing them from its coarsening influence" (4). Dreiser is ambivalent, too, perhaps, over the representation of the materiality of the female body. He seems to resist presenting Mary as *only* a body. Though she is at the center of the characters' and the audience's gaze and thereby made the foremost object of attention, Dreiser is careful to include non-material aspects of her characterization. He constructs her subjectivity through reportage: what characters say about her, as well as what she is quoted as saying. The corporeal reality of her body—an essentializing effect—contrasts to her socially constructed self—an anti-essentialist impulse—and seems to parallel Foucault's project to theorize how the materiality of the body lends itself to cultural power arrangements while resisting essentialist reductionism (*HS*).

The Girl in the Coffin fixes Mary Magnet's position—her death regenerates male social order—and at the same time embeds what Bronfen has labeled "a transmitted narrative" (189). Mary's body is the site of storytelling, since what evolves as exposition is revealed mainly by gossiping women, and she *is* the story. Bronfen notes that the deathbed scene signals "a transformation and reorganization in kinship succession... whose aim is to preserve or re-establish the social stability" (77). The narrative signified by Mary's dead body is that of the normalization of stabilized male alliances: Foucault's focus on the categorization of individuals, the regulation of their daily functions, the assignments of the spaces they occupy bodily, seeks to elucidate how bodies/subjectivities are shaped and controlled by institutions, how disciplinary practices emanate from power which is diffused from institutionalized discursive sources. In *The Girl*, Mary's body reminds audiences of the dominant contemporary discourses of the female body that Foucault demonstrates originated in the nineteenth century. The process of hysterization, he writes, pathologized the female body; since the female body was "thoroughly saturated with sexuality..." it was "placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which

it had to be a substantial and functional element) and the life of the children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education)" (HS 104). Since Mary has sacrificed her potential role as moral mother by abdicating her role as moral daughter, she has sacrificed her exchange and use value as a female.

Jamming the traffic in women, Mary disrupts "men's business" as described by Luce Irigaray. Following Marx's paradigm of commodity exchange, Irigaray sees heterosexuality as "an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men." She describes the virginal woman as

pure exchange value. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist; she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense, her natural body disappears into its representative function. Red blood remains on the mother's side, but it has no price, as such, in the social order; woman, for her part, as medium of exchange, is no longer anything but semblance. The ritualized passage from woman to mother is accomplished by the violation of an envelope: the hymen, which was taken on the value of taboo, the taboo of virginity. Once deflowered, woman is relegated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property; she is removed from exchange among men (172, 186).

Mary *becomes* her coffin, and her role as mother never sees the light of day. Rejecting docility, Mary *did* assume a sense of personal determination or agency. She is *not* simply seduced by Ferguson, but has willingly engaged in sexual relations—suggesting both her personal decision to give away her virtue and Dreiser's allusion to the suspect moral values of the working-class—only to succumb to the consequences she alone bears. Since reproduction outside the bonds of marriage cannot be sanctioned,

her pregnancy must be concealed or terminated. Her botched abortion, causing her death, reaffirms and resituates Ferguson's status in the kinship alliance structure: he is already a married man.

Mary, hardly the beneficiary of Ferguson's financial largesse, is no stranger to physical labor and is thus victimized by class arrangements. Though her sexuality dooms her, her gender was no impediment to industrial productivity, especially to men in her own class. A fellow worker claims, "There was few fellows could do with a loom what she could" (20). He continues,

Why, I seed her one day on a bet run six looms, at onct—seventy picks to the inch, mind you—and not a snarl in one o' them six machine. While we was standing there watchin' the boss come by, and he says: 'Mary Magnet,' he says, 'ef I could get the rest o' these chaps to work the way you kin work,' he says, 'I'd git a damn big raise to me wages,' he says; and quick as a flash Mary says back: 'Well, just because me and the boys *kin* make human shuttlecocks out o' ourselves, that ain't no reason why we're a goin' to *do* it.' she says, 'just to raise your pay. We know darn well we'd never raise our own,' she says, all the time jumpin' around from one loom to another as springy as a cricket (21).

Mary's value to the labor market ensures others' profits while her value to her father would/should ensure the hierarchical gender structures that legitimate sexual/kinship alliances. Since Mary's mother is dead, any legacy of female support (or "lack") is erased for Mary, and Magnet's patriarchal authority is indisputable. As a father, he is entitled to the control of exogamous exchange of his daughter and since Mary is his only child—no son is present to replace Magnet and thus guarantee the continuity of paternal authority; nor does a sister compete for paternal love—she represents high stakes in commodity value. The women on stage remind us that Magnet was "terrible devoted to Mary" and he "made a great mistake to indulge her the way he did... A great mistake" (15-16). Since she has violated the process, that is, announced her defloration through a

failed abortion, she has dishonored her father and his status as an affine in the community. In her Choragos-like function, Mrs. Rickert comments on Magnet's loss of repute:

Ain't it a terrible shame now for a man like Magnet, a man as has worked hard and lived an honest life and everybody respects, that his girl should make a common woman of herself and his name be made a shame in the town? (28).

Mary remains *Mary Magnet*, and for attempting to separate herself from her father's house without his authorization, she is re-enclosed in it. For upsetting the narrative of kinship exchange, she is appropriated, literally contained by it. Displayed in her father's parlor, Mary is an aesthetic object—decorated and adorned with pillows and purple satin ribbons—rather than a legitimately exchangeable one. Mrs. Shaefer's remark, "She would never 'a' been content to be a mill worker's wife—Mary Magnet wouldn't. She'd too many notions for that. It takes a hard jolt to bring some off their high horse," which stage directions tell us she exclaims "significantly" (16), suggests Mary's desire to separate from class affiliations as well. A "bright, stylish girl like Mary" (16) participates in turn-of-the-century working class women's experience of "city pleasures" Kathy Peiss has described and challenges what Irene Gammel describes as the (naturalist) "conceptualization of the female as always already seduced, enchained, and subjugated through her body and sexuality, rendered docile in the social networks" (208). Mary's resistance, though, is recontained in her dead body and regenerates the patriarchal order of things.

Like old Gerhardt's disgrace at Jennie's "fall," Magnet, so distraught over Mary's death, is in reality angered at her disruption of the system. He desires retribution, compensation for his loss. Because his daughter's value is usurped by an unknown male rival, he "breaks out fiercely":

Damn it, there's some rotten coward, some beast, some low down scoundrel has ruined my girl. I don't know who he is. But I want to know! I want to find out! I want to kind him! I want to kill him! It's the only thing I do want. Until

I've done that, this strike can go to hell. You can go to hell.
They all can go to hell. [*He drops into a chair and covers his face with his hands*] (46).

Paternal identification of Mary's fetus remains undisclosed to Magnet while the audience feels the full impact of the dramatic irony of Magnet's curse in the play's closure when we learn Ferguson is the very "coward" Magnet wants to destroy. Learning who has disrupted the "traffic in women" consumes Magnet more than grief over Mary's bodily erasure. Whoever has denied Magnet his role in a public ritual of transfer of "gift giving" is complicit in the daughter's rebellion and must be exposed and punished. Mrs. Shaefer quotes her husband as saying, "whoever it is, *Magnet has still to learn his name*. It's a short lease o' life for the man that wronged Mary Magnet, once her father finds out the truth. That's what ails Magnet... *He can't find out*. Ef something don't happen to take his mind off it he'll brood hisself crazy" (27). The process of establishing sexual alliances has, in Mary's case, been inverted, subverted and resisted, and the community expects reprisals for such transgression. Lying in her coffin, Mary constitutes a tableau as death's bride; she dons not the garb of virginity, but a burial shroud. Rather than mediate between a father and a husband as a marriage ceremony would dictate, she defames the father and creates anxieties for the would-be husband.

Yet Dreiser refrains from judging Ferguson as a villain, one who "ruins other men's daughters" (50), and casts both protagonists as heroes of the people. Ferguson appeals to Magnet's sense of duty to the strikers, to their collective needs, in an impassioned speech about his own grief over the loss of his lover, "the only human being... that could stand between me and mortal loneliness" (50). By articulating a shared experience, Ferguson empathetically waxes eloquent and shifts the content of his soliloquy from the personal to the political in an attempt to prove to Magnet that the personal *is* political. "You can't do more to prove your sorrow than to meet it the way a man ought," (44) he admonishes Magnet, suggesting the valorization of work over private emotion, work as a means of coping with private emotion. Answering the call to duty is, in this male club economy, the requirement of membership in the public sphere. Particu-

larly for two well noted figures, a woman's death cannot keep the "boys... waiting" (44). Appearing in public confirms Magnet's solidarity with the workers and his partnership with Ferguson while at the same time, proves his valor in facing his shame. Even though Magnet is ignorant of Ferguson's role as Mary's sexual partner, the male bond which would have constituted a family kinship, is nevertheless concretized as a fraternal connection enabling both to carry on a mutually benefiting alliance which also promotes the good of others. Each man inspires the other and both embrace the work ethos as a means of procreation. Like Freud working through his grief over daughter Sophie's death by literally working (Bronfen 15-38), Magnet too chooses work over mourning.

The Girl in the Coffin follows an historical moment Bram Dijkstra claims is fascinated with what he calls the "cult of woman as corpse" that promoted the images of wasting waifs as icons of "virtuous femininity" (46). The drama also echoes Poe's gothicism, particularly the image of "the death of a beautiful woman [as] the most poetical topic in the world" thematized in his "Philosophy of Composition."³ Since the play equates (ultimate) passivity with femaleness and activity/work/social activism with maleness, it evokes what Susan K. Harris call "authorial paranoia" suggesting the "tenaciousness of conceptual structures that mandate gender warfare even when writers attempt to resist reinscribing them" (17).

Criticism on this play is scant, and Keith Newlin's "Dreiser's 'The Girl in the Coffin' in the Little Theatre" is a welcomed addition to both Dreiser studies and American theatrical history. Newlin's illuminating article situates the play in its contemporary theater scene, provides background data on the actual strike Dreiser takes as his inspiration, specifies historical figures Dreiser took as models for characters and notes the play's innovative features ("evocation of pathos, ... realistic characterization, and especially... employment of naturalistic detail in its staging" [47]). Newlin's focus is to historicize rather than analyze or criticize, and his excellent contextualized study helps renew reading interest in this minor work. But I am concerned too with the drama's ideological endorsements and/or challenges. I would interrogate Newlin's summation of the play as a one-act "study of the conflict between duty and desire" (31) to ask *whose*

duty, *whose* desire is being probed, *why* conflict exists, and *how* characters enact a politically charged script. Since the reviews Keith quotes are positive, contemporary audiences were quick to endorse an enactment of power/knowledge relations that, at bottom, confirmed their sexual politics.

¹See Lynda E. Boose for a brilliant discussion of the daughter-father relationship through an anthropological, social constructionist lens in her discussion of the practice of "gift giving". She cites Levi-Strauss' *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* which draws on Marcel Mauss' "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques." *Année sociologique* ns I (1925): 30-186. See also Gayle Rubin.

²See Judith Fryer for a discussion of the dichotomy between the "fair maiden" and the "dark lady," especially p. 24.

³See also Thomas Riggio.

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Dreiser Constructs Russia

Andrea Wolff

The impact of Dreiser's Russian trip on his image of the Soviet Union has been noted by a number of critics (Lehan, Lingemann, Lundén, Mookerjee, Swanberg, Takeda, Tjader). However, close analysis of Dreiser's writings shows that his vision of Soviet Russia is not only the result of his Russian trip, but a complex mental construct which was influenced by a variety of factors. It is the aim of this essay to analyze the process which led to the formation of Dreiser's image of Russia.

Theodore Dreiser was one of 1,500 United States citizens who were invited by the Soviet authorities to Moscow in order to take part in the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The author arrived in Russia on November 3, 1927, where he stayed until January 13, 1928. Although Dreiser spent most of his time in Moscow and Leningrad,¹ he went on two extensive trips which took him to the Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Crimea. While traveling through the Soviet Union, Dreiser kept an extensive diary which served after his return to the United States as a basis for his reports on Russia. These reports include a series of articles, which were published in the *New York World*, as well as his travelogue, *Dreiser Looks at Russia*.²

According to Dreiser, he had been fascinated by Russian literature from childhood. He describes the impact this reading had on his early ideas about Russia as follows:

As a boy in Chicago, around the late eighties, I was deeply moved by what I read of Siberia and the exile system. For reasons of temperament, perhaps, I sorrowed for the people whom I judged were being cruelly used by an unjust and tyrannical government. By degrees I learned more of the nihilists so called--their struggle to free the Russian people of their enslavers. Then I came across the novels of Tolstoy and later

those of Turgenev, and those of Dostoevsky. I was awakened by the fact that there was a numerically great and temperamentally fascinating people—one of the really great peoples of the world whom we Americans should know and whom, if we did, we would come to like and appreciate. (“Why I Like”)³

It is therefore not surprising that Dreiser gives a literary reason to explain his departure for the Soviet Union: “I have always thought that country which could produce such writers in such profusion must be one of the most interesting countries in the world. That’s why I am going there” (“Theodore Dreiser Sails”).

Dreiser’s literary fascination with Russia structured his response to Soviet reality. Being in Russia he felt “reminded of Dostoevsky’s weird and talkative groups” (*Dreiser Looks* 230). One of his sweeping statements about the Russian people is based on Dostoevsky: “They are a mystical people, these Russians. A fanatic idealist like Tolstoi appeals to them. Dostoevsky in all of his books indicates as much” (*Dreiser Looks* 218).

Dreiser’s reaction to Russia was further influenced by the Soviet period. From the time Dreiser started his career as journalist and author, he grew increasingly involved with the American left. In 1914 Dreiser moved to Greenwich Village, where after the October Revolution “the word ‘tovarishch’ became current, tea was served in a samovar, returning visitors of Russia were eagerly sought, red victories were hailed, and the United States policy of intervention was bitterly attacked” (Mohrenschildt, *American Intelligentsia* 61). In this pro-Soviet atmosphere, Dreiser not only got to know leading left-wing intellectuals, such as Floyd Dell, Max Gold and John Reed; he also made friends with the Russian anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, who were ardent admirers of the Soviet system up to their deportation to Russia in 1919.⁴

Dreiser’s ideas about Russia were also shaped by contemporary accounts and the media. First of all, there were reports from American intellectuals who had already travelled to the Soviet Union and who were fascinated by the Soviet system (Bryant, Bullitt, Hindus, Reed, Strong,

Williams). Translations of Soviet authors, such as Esenin, Gorky, Mayakovsky and Pilnyak, were available for the first time in the United States and more than forty Soviet films were shown in American cinemas between 1926 and 1930 (Mohrenschildt, *American Intelligentsia* 62). The favorable American image of Soviet Russia was enhanced by the mass media, in particular by the well-meaning but uninformed attitudes of the American correspondents, the effects of Soviet censorship, and the more relaxed political relations between America and Russia during the New Economic Policy (Filene; Mohrenschildt, *The Early American* 64-74). Against this background, it is not surprising that Dreiser was in favor of the October Revolution. As he remarked, "News from Russia that Bolsheviki have overthrown Kerenski. Good" (*American Diaries* 202).

Dreiser's reaction was not only influenced by what he knew about Russia and the Soviet Union, but also by his attitude toward American society. Being born the ninth child of a poor family of German immigrants, he was confronted in his childhood with poverty and social misery. At the age of sixteen, Dreiser moved to Chicago, where in the late nineteenth century the luxury of the new financial tycoons, such as George M. Pullman and Philip D. Armour, existed side by side with the poverty of the working class (Swanberg 26). Because these experiences were crucial to Dreiser's personal development, he especially praised about the Soviet system "that via Communism, or this collective or paternalistic care of everybody - it is possible to remove the dreadful sense of social misery in one direction of another which has so afflicted me in my own life in America and ever since I have been old enough to know what social misery was" (*Dreiser Looks* 252). Thus Dreiser, like most of his left-wing fellow intellectuals, criticized contemporary America for materialism and aesthetic starvation (*Some Aspects* 58-59).⁵

Because of his disillusionment with American society, Dreiser turned to the Soviet Union not so much to find a new faith, but to find an outlet for his old one. A central component of his faith was the belief common to American intellectuals in permanent and linear progress (Hoffman 15), which in fact seemed to characterize Soviet society in the late 1920's. With regard to Russia's industrialization, the term 'Amerikanizatsya' was coined which became "a metaphor of the time for speedy industrial tempo,

high growth, productivity, and efficiency" (Stites 149). As a result, Dreiser was extremely impressed by Russia's industrialization (*Dreiser Looks* 15, 156-157) as well as by its social progress, which was displayed in the new marriage laws and in the education system (*Dreiser Looks* 18).

But most of all, the author was attracted by Soviet idealism, which he contrasted with American materialism:

One of the things that I picked out of Russia was the sense of a Government that is thinking, that intellectually (idealistically) as well as economically is going somewhere. And what a thing that is for a government to do - think - have a program! Have we? Once I used to think so, to feel that at least theoretically we were going somewhere, seeking consciously for ourselves a higher spiritual or psychological state out of which might arise more and more wisdom, more and more intellectual curiosity, more and more of the glory of mentation. It may be, of course, that I was entirely wrong in assuming any such generative or mental bent in my people. I sometimes think that I am imagining what never was or will be in America. (*Dreiser Looks* 50)

In order to maintain this favorable vision of Soviet society, Dreiser even excused Russia's contemporary backwardness on account of its sure progress in the near future:

And, though I repeat that the Russia I saw was, in the main slow, backward, inclined to meditate too much, to trudge or stand in a resigned sort of way, I also saw everywhere at the same time, signs of things that must surely tend to shake and wake them out of this lethargy. (*Dreiser Looks* 67)

The author's strategic overlooking of those aspects of Soviet society that did not fit into his preconceived picture is even more obvious when analyzing his reaction to Stalin's dictatorship. By 1927 the first concentration camps had already been built and private as well as public life was controlled by the OGPU, Stalin's secret police (Hingley 134-140). Trotsky, Zinovyev and Kamenev were expelled from the Communist Party and in 1928 the Shakhty-Trials started off the first wave of persecution aiming at the Soviet intelligentsia. Although the political oppression in the Soviet Union must have clashed with his democratic ideals, Dreiser justified Stalin's dictatorship by calling it "a weapon for a particular end" (*Dreiser Looks* 49). Furthermore, he maintained that "the Russians are a people who crave temperamentally some form of tyranny and cannot really be happy without it" (*Dreiser Looks* 115).

But even in *Dreiser Looks at Russia*, the author remains doubtful of the success of the Soviet experiment. This critical attitude can be attributed to Dreiser's belief in Social Darwinism which made him argue "that the greatest stumbling block of this greatest and newest experiment in government is humanity itself, its immemorial traits of avarice, cruelty, vanity, and what not else" (*Dreiser Looks* 255). Also Dreiser cannot conceive "how people are to be made equal in mental significance however equal they may be in means" (*Dreiser Looks* 79). Dreiser's scepticism with regard to the Soviet experiment is in line with his defense of American capitalism:

Choosing to disagree with his arraignment of capitalism [Alexander Adomovitch Janen's], I went on to inquire where America would be without its capitalists, money geniuses, inventors, and what not else, and I traced the rise and services of various financial giants. I explained what they had done for a land that then needed to be developed and developed quickly by genius functioning individually and for gain. I insisted that always the big brain had powers and capacities for services which the little one had not and which it must respect, though I held no brief for ex-

ploitation and least of all for tyranny. (*Dreiser Looks*
153)

Dreiser's statement shows that although he consistently defines America in opposition to Soviet Russia and vice versa, his evaluation of the two systems kept shifting. As Dreiser was not only critical of capitalism but was at the same time intrigued by it,⁶ his reaction to America as well as to Russia was determined by a pattern of rapprochement and withdrawal. This ambivalent attitude also explains the conflicting images of Russia which the author conveys in his writings. Whereas the diary is clearly dominated by a pro-American stance, *Dreiser Looks at Russia* contrasts stagnating America with progressive Russia.

This shift in Dreiser's attitude toward the Soviet Union was triggered by a variety of factors, including his inability to observe it in a direct and unmediated fashion. Since Dreiser did not know Russian, he was not able to speak directly with the Russian people and depended on his interpreter. He knew little of the Soviet Union and less of the economic and industrial processes with which he was confronted during his trip. According to William Woodward, "Dreiser's acquaintance with mechanics and industrial enterprises amounted to zero. He had no experience in such matters, and a room full of moving machines, with people tending them, would prove to him that Russian industry was moving onward and upward" (Woodward 315-316).

Consequently, Dreiser made crucial mistakes when interpreting Soviet reality. Although Soviet life during the New Economic Policy was still characterized by severe supply problems, Dreiser came to the conclusion that "there might be undernourishment in some quarters for lack of means, but no real necessity for famine anywhere, unless the Government should prove incompetent or indifferent to its own theories of distribution" (*Dreiser Looks* 30). Even the queues in front of the Moscow stores he interpreted as signs of prosperity:

And more you see long lines of buyers in the stores.
And perhaps wonder at this. One explanation is that
many persons have two or three jobs. Also you must

consider the fact that most of the usual expenses are lifted from the shoulders of the worker.... Therefore he has money to spend in this fashion if he desires to do so. (*Dreiser Looks* 30)

Dreiser's response to Russia was also shaped by Soviet cultural policy of the late 1920s.⁷ When inviting Dreiser to Russia, Fred Biedenkapp, the secretary of the International Workers' Aid, emphasized that "the Soviet government believes you [Dreiser] to be the outstanding literary intelligence of America and it would like to convince you, among others of the meaning & value of its existence" (*Dreiser's Russian Diary* 28).

In order to ensure that Dreiser's impressions of Soviet Russia would conform to the official image, his trip was carefully planned by VOKS, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Dreiser himself was supplied with unsolicited propaganda material by the Soviet authorities seventeen months before his departure (Wolff 144), and according to Woodward, preparations for Dreiser's trip were already taken before the author arrived in Moscow:

In about a week one of the Communist emissaries came again unexpectedly and told me that Dreiser had accepted their invitation, and he wanted me to tell him of Dreiser's habits and preferences. As I talked, he made notes, saying as he opened his notebook, "He'll be a guest of the government, you know, and of course we want to make his trip a pleasant one." I did not tell him [Dreiser] of the Soviet representative's visit to get this information. (Woodward 314-315)

According to Richard Lingemann, Dreiser was the only one of 1,500 guests to rate a private tour with all expenses paid (290). During his trip, the author was treated like a privileged guest. He had "one of the best suites in the best hotel in Russia" (Dreiser to Helen Richardson, November 13-14, 1927), was provided with a chauffeur and generally travelled

first class. Even more important were the immaterial privileges. Shortly after his arrival in Moscow, Dreiser complained to William Reswick that the Soviet authorities did not pay enough attention to him.⁸ Reswick passed Dreiser's complaint on to Chicherin who in turn reacted as follows:⁹

Chicherin was grateful for the cable. He considered Dreiser one of the outstanding friends of Soviet Russia and thought Moscow could ill afford to alienate him. He telephoned Ms. Litvinov and Ms. Kamenev, getting both ladies out of bed at 3:00 A.M. and urging them to visit Dreiser first thing in the morning and arrange a number of interviews for him at the Kremlin. After phoning the ladies, Chicherin suggested that I invite a number of Soviet writers to meet their American colleague. A few days later Dreiser was at my home in the company of Asseyev, Katayev, Alyoshin, Tretyakov, Erdman and other famous Russians. (Reswick 239)

Such meetings were arranged with a variety of high-ranking artists and officials, such as Ossip and Lilya Brik, Sergei Eisenstein, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Anastas Mikoyan and Konstantin Stanislavsky. Dreiser was enthusiastic about these attentions paid by the Russian intelligentsia:

I have all I wanted to drink, my carriage service free, visitors every day & carte blanche to go where I please. Last night for instance I met Chicherin the former minister of foreign affairs; Doletsky, the Chief of the Russian telegraph, Madame Kameneva, the wife of Kamenev, the secy of the interior, oh, a lovy group and was offered all sorts of attentions for this week. (Dreiser to Helen Richardson, November 13-14, 1927)

In order to make Dreiser's trip to the Soviet Union a pleasant one, the author's itinerary was carefully planned by VOKS and controlled by his travel guides. These guides "were to interpret reality, broadly speaking, and to ensure, as much as possible, that the lessons of the conducted tour would sink in and appropriate political conclusions be drawn" (Hollander 377-378). Although Dreiser was accompanied by a varying number of guides, his reaction to the Soviet Union was most strongly influenced by the American Communist Ruth Kennell and by Sergei Dinamov, who was the Russian editor of Dreiser's books. He regarded both of them not so much as guides, but as potential allies and reliable sources of information.¹⁰

As a rule these guides functioned as obstacles in the way of spontaneous conversations between foreign visitors and natives. In Dreiser's case, this artificial barrier was permeated a couple of times. First of all, Dreiser managed to talk to Karl Radek, who had at the time already fallen out of Stalin's grace (*Dreiser's Russian Diary* 102-103). In Kharkov, he visited an electromechanic company where one of the workers confided in him that he "should not believe that the conditions for the workers are good, that they live very poorly, that they have no freedom at all, they can't open their mouth to criticize and so on" (*Dreiser's Russian Diary* 219). Also a barber in Stalino complained to Dreiser that "things here are dreadful" (*Dreiser's Russian Diary* 232).

The outspoken criticism of Soviet society in *Dreiser's Russian Diary* is not repeated in *Dreiser Looks at Russia*. The following extract from a letter to Ruth Kennell shows that Dreiser deliberately contrasted idealistic Russia and materialistic America after his return to the United States:

Being back among to me, more agreeable conditions than even in Europe, led me to much quiet thought. I feel that I should not confuse any personal discomforts and temperamental reactions to a changed world with the actual Russian approach. Most of all I decided that however I like/might, I should not seriously try to injure an idealistic effort. Besides, learning that there were breadlines here -- the first time since 1910

-- I became furious because there is too much wealth here to endure it. Hence, while I am going to stick to what I saw favorable and unfavorable I am going to contrast it with the wealth and extravagance and social indifference here. (Dreiser to Ruth Kennell, February 14, 1928)

This letter provided the beginning of Dreiser's, Kennell's and Louise Cambel's collaboration on the manuscript of *Dreiser Looks at Russia*. Whereas Cambel concentrated on the editorial work (*Theodore Dreiser's Letters* 52), the correspondence between Dreiser and Kennell demonstrates that she supported him in his intention to show Soviet Russia in a favorable light.¹¹

The different visions of Russia which Dreiser conveys in his writings illustrate that the author's image of Russia is best understood as a dynamic mental construct which was shaped by a variety of factors. The author's preconceived image of the Soviet Union, as well as his ambivalent attitude toward America, initially resulted in a well-meaning but sceptical view of the Soviet experiment. However, Dreiser's favorable attitude toward Russia was enhanced by a variety of factors -- including his own lack of qualification as an observer, Soviet cultural policy, and his continuing collaboration with Kennell. As a result, Dreiser's published version of his Russian experiences turned out to be even more flattering than would be expected from his spontaneous reaction to Soviet reality. As Dreiser says, "Ideals are what I want. That is my view of Russia. I am interested in it, its change, its ideals, its dreams" (*Theodore Dreiser Here* 10).

It is a pleasure to thank Peter Funke for many conversations about Dreiser and for the encouragement of my work on Dreiser's and Thompson's Russian trips.

¹For reasons of clarity, I will be referring to sites and place-names by their contemporary names, i.e., as they were used by Dreiser himself in his writings.

²For a listing of Dreiser's writings on Russia see the *Works Cited* of this essay.

³Dreiser refers to Kennan's *Tent Life in Siberia and Adventures among the Karaks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia*, and to Kennan's *Siberia and the Exile System*.

⁴For Berkman's and Goldman's reactions to Soviet society, see Berkman's *The Bolshevik Myth (Diary, 1920-1922)* and Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia*.

⁵The reaction of the American left to the Soviet experiment is studied in detail in the works of Aaron, Aron, and Lasch.

⁶Dreiser's ambivalent attitude towards capitalism is a central element in many of his fiction and non-fictional works, such as *The Trilogy of Desire*, *A Book about Myself*, *Tragic America*, and *America is Worth Saving*.

⁷For relevant analyses of Soviet cultural policy see Hollander's *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928-1978*, and Margulies' *The Pilgrimage to Russia. The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937*.

⁸William Reswick worked as correspondent for the *Associate Press* in Moscow.

⁹Georgiy W. Chicherin was People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1918 to 1930.

¹⁰Cf. Kennell's description of an incident that occurred during their trip: "Davi [Sofiya Davidovskaya, a Soviet guide,] of course, refused to give him [Dreiser] the document which, at the moment, she held in her hand. Denouncing 'your incompetence, this lousy organization, and the whole damn business,' the American delegate snatched the document and strode out into the street. I ran after him. 'Give me that paper!' I said. He stared at me in hurt surprise - 'the only person he could trust in Russia, the only person who could get him out of this country alive'" (Kennell, *Theodore Dreiser* 197).

¹¹For a listing of Dreiser's and Kennell's letters see the *Works Cited* of this essay.

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Reviews

A Conversation about the (Sort of) New *Jennie Gerhardt*

Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt: New Essays on the Restored Text. Edited by James L. W. West, III. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. ix + 226 pp.

In bringing out this collection as a companion to his scholarly Pennsylvania edition of *Jennie Gerhardt*, James L. W. West III intends to start a new critical "conversation" (ix) about a novel long overshadowed by *Sister Carrie*. He also wants to encourage teachers to assign the novel more often to their students, now that the restored text is also available in a Penguin paperback. With nineteen essays by three generations of scholars, the collection certainly offers a wealth of critical approaches. Seven essays under the heading General Assessments variously relate the novel to Dreiser's personal and public life, discuss its place in the naturalistic and sentimental traditions, and explore the dynamic relations among the major characters. Except for one psychological study, the twelve pieces grouped as Critical and Historical Contexts all view the novel as an expression of its historical moment, ranging across influences and parallels (Spencer and Veblen) and various objects of Dreiser's social analysis--broad social problems (the growth of industrial capitalism, the migration to the city, the assimilation of ethnic minorities) as well as specific cultural

practices (real-estate speculation, hotel life, rituals associated with death and dying).

Surprisingly, the collection neither directly defends the Pennsylvania edition nor directly attacks the 1911 Harper edition, which West considers simply “a different work of art” (ix). This relatively neutral stance is both a weakness and a strength. On the one hand, since most of the contributors obviously *assume* the authority and artistic superiority of the Pennsylvania edition, at least some of the collection’s intended audience -- “the scholar, teacher, and student” (viii)—may get a mistaken impression of the state of Dreiser criticism. On the other hand, since few of the essays make much of the textual differences and since West includes a bibliography of earlier criticism, the collection could make a useful companion to either version of the novel.

First the question of the two competing texts, which does not involve a simple choice between the corrupt and the pure. In his own editing of the Pennsylvania *Jennie*, West has followed the practice recommended by W.W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and Thomas Tanselle by producing an eclectic, ideal text that differs from any actual version produced in Dreiser’s lifetime. From West’s perspective, the 1911 first edition has “validity” only “as an historical artifact” (*New Essays*, viii), one he dismisses as “a collaborative, negotiated text, socialized and domesticated by the cultural forces of its day” (ix). Since essays by Richard Lingeman and Daniel H. Borus largely repeat West’s own account in the Pennsylvania edition of how the editors at Harper and Brothers expurgated the novel, readers might think that the restored text has somehow escaped cultural forces. West, however, has accepted hundreds of the original editors’ emendations, introduced hundreds more, and used his own critical judgments in handling textual cruxes (for example, he does not include the coda even though it is part of the copy-text and appeared in all printings of *Jennie* until the early 1920s). The Pennsylvania text may well be “much closer to Dreiser’s original conception” (vii), but it is also, West acknowledges, “spoken by the culture of its times” (ix), the 1990s.

According to another school of editorial theory--the names James Thorpe, Donald Pizer, and Jerome McGann come readily to mind--it makes better sense to read works spoken by their author’s times. Liter-

ary texts are *always* collaborative, these theorists argue, and the 1911 *Jennie Gerhardt* is preferable *because* it is an historical artifact that not only reflects the conditions of its production but also has served generations of scholars as object of study.

Along with other volumes in the Pennsylvania edition, the restored *Jennie Gerhardt* has already generated considerable critical discussion by readers of both persuasions. Even without including essays devoted to opposing editorial theories, West could have given readers an even broader context within which to read the book by a modest expansion of the introduction and bibliography to cover these important issues.

Editorial theory aside, most readers will choose the version they think is the better novel. Rather than offering a solid basis for deciding, however, West and some of his fellow contributors merely repeat his earlier generalizations. "Speaking generally," West writes in the Pennsylvania edition, "one can say that *Jennie Gerhardt* was transformed from a blunt, carefully documented piece of social analysis to a love story merely set against a social background" ("Composition," 442). "By excising Jennie's sexual urges," writes Daniel H. Borus in an essay about Dreiser's complex relations with the genteel tradition, "the editors produced a touching love story merely set against a social background" (*New Essays*, 121). West's most important contention is that Ripley Hitchcock and his underlings at Harper and Brothers so thoroughly suppressed Jennie's perspective that only the restored version represents the "dialectical novel" (viii) Dreiser intended. At least five of the contributors repeat the same idea in one form or another while offering little or no textual evidence.

The problem with this interpretation is that readers have long noted in the 1911 version the very balance Hitchcock supposedly destroyed. In his 1964 *Theodore Dreiser*, Philip Gerber found Jennie to be "a recognizable human figure" who achieves a positive "philosophical position" that more than offsets the weaker Lester's pessimism (83-84). Her grasp of life, Donald Pizer argued a decade later in *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser*, "has a weight and significance equal to Lester's beliefs" (121). As West admits, a comparative analysis of the two versions "is a useful (even an essential) exercise" (*New Essays*, ix). In leaving the comparison

to others, he and his fellow contributors offer a largely unexamined article of faith as if it were a well established fact.

Only Susan Albertine gives anything like a detailed account of how the cutting and revising affected the novel's themes. In "Triangulating Desire in *Jennie Gerhardt*," Albertine describes a pattern of recurring triangles in which two women bond emotionally in order to empower a man. This pattern, she demonstrates, appears only sketchily in the 1911 version, while in the restored text it constitutes a well defined male fantasy. Had the other contributors followed Albertine's lead, or at least identified restored passages, readers could see more clearly how the two versions differ.

Even granting contributors their subjects, readers may find some of the essays rather brief, perhaps because of limits set by the editor or publisher. A short essay can, of course, be a good one. At only five and a half pages, for instance, Robert H. Elias's "Janus-Faced *Jennie*" is among the most satisfying general estimates, managing to suggest how the novel both looks back to *Sister Carrie* and forward to the later novels and to affirm the "arresting gravity" of Dreiser's characters even while they "act out their gender roles in ways that today can only make us squirm" (8). Elias's piece does not seem too short even though it covers a lot of ground, probably because the long view naturally does not call for much close reading.

Other essays do seem to call for fuller development, even though their focus is relatively narrow. One instance is the concluding essay, James M. Hutchisson's "Death and Dying in *Jennie Gerhardt*," which, at a little over nine pages, is near the collection's average length. Because Americans in the late nineteenth century became increasingly doubtful of an afterlife, Hutchisson writes, they managed grief by developing an "almost fetishistic" attitude towards the beloved's corpse and by turning death into "an extended aesthetic spectacle" (213). Dreiser does kill off most of his characters, so such spectacles occur often in the novel. But is Jennie's pain "to a large degree mitigated" (216) by them, as Hutchisson says in closing? Here is what Dreiser says in the novel about her response to Lester's funeral: "Jennie was overawed and amazed, but no show of form--colorful, impressive, imperial--could take away the sting of death

--of infinite loss" (415). This passage suggests that Dreiser employed the climactic scene of ritual grieving to dramatize the failure of social forms to supply Jennie's more profound spiritual needs. Hutchisson points out an aspect of Dreiser's social realism; he would have added more to our understanding of the novel as a work of art if he could have examined specific passages for their dramatic function and thematic implications.

Some of the longer General Assessments also break off just when they open up a new, promising line of argument. Philip Gerber's "*Jennie Gerhardt: A Spencerian Tragedy*" is one. Gerber makes a good case for reading both Jennie and Lester as "essentially passive individuals" (84) who illustrate the Spencerian "law of least resistance" (82) by always doing what comes easiest. Gerber goes on to discuss newspapers as a "new and powerful social force" (87) that is at first restrained and then released with devastating effect when Lester and Jennie become romantized figures in the Sunday supplements. "The protective dam of silence once broken," Gerber states in his penultimate paragraph, "the waters of social retribution rush down on the lovers, swiftly, catastrophically" (89). If Gerber is right, Dreiser is, to employ the terminology of evolutionary theorizing, more a catastrophist than a gradualist. But in the Pennsylvania edition, Dreiser takes some 13 additional chapters--almost a fifth of the novel--to show Lester's *drift* toward his actual desertion of Jennie. Gerber seems closer to the mark when he treats the newspaper story as a "nudging toward dissolution" (89) rather than a sudden catastrophe. His essay is valuable in suggesting that *Jennie Gerhardt* is more of a piece than is usually supposed with Dreiser's other novels from this period, all of which show strong Spencerian influence; nevertheless, it ends just at the point where it raises the important issue of the relation between theme and narrative pacing. Since several other essays call for fuller demonstration, it seems that the decision to include a generous "cross section of approaches" (viii) within a book of modest length has meant sacrificing some depth of analysis.

Most of the other essays deal with the two areas largely affected by the restored passages--the characterization of Jennie and the novel's socioeconomic background. Jennie has always been problematical--sometimes seen as simple and static, sometimes as complex and dynamic. If

anything, the collection makes her seem even more problematical. In "Jennie One Note: Dreiser's Error in Character Development," Lawrence E. Hussman is the plain-spoken man who won't pretend to see the emperor's new clothes. What West calls "the full-dress Pennsylvania edition" (viii) is for Hussman even more nakedly sentimental than the 1911 text, the heroine remaining "a wish-fulfillment stick figure of self-sacrifice" (49) marring the book's realism. Other readers, however, do not consider her one-sidedness an artistic lapse. Clare Virginia Eby calls her "a perfect Veblenian heroine" whose "instinct of workmanship" and "parental bent" toward virtue (94) expose "the corrupt values of pecuniary civilization" (99), while Judith Kucharski and Valerie Ross both treat her idealism in its strained relationship with Dreiser's determinism. (In 1930, Eliseo Vivas argued that Dreiser was an "inconsistent mechanist"; every generation of critics since then apparently has to make the case anew.)

Leonard Cassuto and Miriam Gogol find complexity within Jennie herself. In "Dreiser's Ideal of Balance," Cassuto considers her to be "a perfectly integrated personality" (60) who tames the id in Brander and Lester and loosens the hold of the superego on Old Gerhardt. Cassuto's psychoanalytic model works pretty well in describing Jennie's effects on men, but it does not account for her own anxiety, which Gogol explains in terms of family systems theory. Like Dreiser himself, Gogol observes in "Self-Sacrifice and Shame in *Jennie Gerhardt*," Jennie springs from a family ruled by a moral-perfectionist father and hence driven by "the dynamics of shame" (137). Her "duplicitous," secret life is, in fact, necessary to create the shame and "self-loathing" (143) that motivated her self-sacrifices. This is a startling and provocative conclusion. It suggests one reason for responding to Jennie not as a stick-figure but as a tragically divided woman, and it invites further exploration of the human reality too easily obscured by Dreiser's paeans to her spirituality and goodness as child of nature.

If Gogol is right, the others who deal with Dreiser's heroine must be wrong, for Jennie cannot be both simple and complex, both perfectly adjusted and miserably neurotic. Fortunately, the essays dealing with the historical background tend to qualify or complement rather than contradict one another. Because Dreiser was an inconsistent mechanist who

demonstrated Jennie's capacity for growth and happiness within a world of limiting forces, it is not surprising that some contributors emphasize her possibilities, some her limits. For instance, West himself generally agrees with Yoshinobu Hakutani, who argues that Jennie encounters in the city not a naturalistic trap but a "fluid, indeterminate space in which to gain her new identity" (151). West, however, also recognizes the "rootless and detached" (202) quality of life in the luxurious hotels Jennie and Lester frequent. He thus lends support to Emily Clark, who, in treating the novel's historically accurate portrayal of real estate speculation, argues that what all the characters want--and what Jennie largely achieves even after Lester departs--is not freedom so much as a home that measures up to some personal "ideal of domesticity" (192).

Seeing more economic determinism in the novel than freedom, Nancy Warner Barrineau concludes that Jennie, while becoming "more polished" as Lester's companion, remains to the end "essentially a domestic worker" (133) dependent on men. Barrineau even partly attributes Jennie's sexual appeal to her class, for Lester, like others before him, naturally considers a pretty maid "fair game for the 'browsing' of the upper crust" (132). Barrineau probably undervalues both Jennie's power and Lester's feelings, but, like Gogol, she also exposes a dark side to this touching love story that warrants further critical examination, especially links between Lester and other Dreiserian males--George Hurstwood, Eugene Witla, Clyde Griffiths--who fail to understand the women they pursue.

The most provocative essays in the collection find Dreiser working toward some reconciliation of the novel's dialectic, and in doing so they attempt to account for its deep pathos. John B. Humma's "*Jennie Gerhardt* and the Dream of the Pastoral" argues that Lester and Jennie constitute "that necessary balance between the urban ethic and the pastoral one" (158) but that Lester fails to undergo the spiritual rebirth that would make *Jennie* a truly pastoral novel rather than one dramatizing the tragic "disintegration of the American dream" (165).

Arthur D. Casciato does something similar in "How German Is *Jennie Gerhardt*?" In a survey of past attitudes towards Dreiser's German heritage, he manages to make Robert Penn Warren and Thomas Riggio, two of Dreiser's most sympathetic readers, appear to be the second coming

of Stuart Pratt Sherman because they set up a schematic "binary model of ethnicity" (171) that presumably privileges Americanness over Germanness. Casciato does not, however, reject binary models; rather, he inverts the earlier one in order to privilege Old World values and to judge characters by their relative degree of ethnicity and Americanness. While some of his reasoning is suspect, Casciato eventually reads portions of the text in a very interesting way. Jennie, he argues, acts as a mediating force once her father joins the ménage in Hyde Park, and thus helps realize "a utopian possibility" in the novel, as the family for a time operates according "to an economy of abundance and cooperation" (179) that enables Gerhardt and Lester to remain locked in "their polarized positions as American capitalist and German workingman" (180). Though this is among the few essays in the collection one might wish shorter, it not only accounts for much of the dream-like quality of this part of the novel but acknowledges that the cost of maintaining the "ethnic utopia" is Jennie's continual "silence and self-sacrifice" (181) and her profound sense of loss as the utopia recedes into the past.

Christopher P. Wilson's "Labor and Capital in *Jennie Gerhardt*" complements Casciato's reading, as well as Eby's Veblenian one. Wilson, too, finds Dreiser introducing economic values that further the novel's critique of modern capitalism, but he locates these values not in the Old World or in a Veblenian state of savagery but in pre-Civil War America. While Old Gerhardt and Archibald Kane are remnants of a time when "republican mutuality" (107) characterized the relations between bosses and artisans, Robert and Lester represent a new order in which a Jennie Gerhardt is reduced to an employee who can be moved about and laid off at her lover/boss's pleasure. Yet Dreiser is ambivalent toward the older order, for Gerhardt finds himself in the same plight as Dreiser's own father, his injury and subsequent penuriousness revealing a mutualism become paternalism, trust become a "naive faith and risky dependence" (108) on others.

Read together, the essays by Humma, Casciato, and Wilson reveal why Jennie Gerhardt, in either version, is more than a carefully documented piece of social analysis. Dissatisfied with past and present, we

can infer, Dreiser grants Jennie a few "dream years" in a fragile world of love and abundance, a pastoral refuge in the heart of the urban jungle. Like many of our classic writers, he tells the story of an outcast who finds, then loses, this great good place. Finally, however, his retelling moves us, not simply because Jennie can't come back to the raft. For even if she wanted to light out for the territory, there's no more territory and no Aunt Sally waiting to adopt her when she comes home.

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A Collection of New Dreiser Criticism

Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism. Edited by Miriam Gogol. New York: New York University Press, 1995. 269 pp.

Miriam Gogol, co-founder and former president of the International Dreiser Society, has augmented her Dreiserian good works. She has in this collection of ten essays erected a big tent for an eclectic collection of what might be dubbed the New Dreiser Criticism. She pays tribute to earlier scholars like Donald Pizer, Charles Walcutt, Ellen Moers, and Richard Lehan, who (quoting a colleague) "defined an inviolate place for Dreiser in American literary history" (x), against the onslaughts of the reigning New Criticism. The "naturalism" that these essays take us beyond was a key word in the earlier Dreiser debate, pro and con. But beginning in the 1980s new critical theories began germinating in English departments -- feminism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, new historicism, Bakhtinianism, canon formation and so on. These multifaceted lenses have moved beyond the debates over naturalism and lead us into new ways of reading and understanding Dreiser.

That is sufficient rationale for this worthy collection, which assembles in a single volume some of the best efforts by practitioners of each of the various critical modes to shed new light on Dreiser. The book leads off with three examples of feminist criticism. Shelley Fisher Fishkin attends to

Dreiser's treatment of women in *An American Tragedy*. She poses the questions: "To what extent did Dreiser transcend the gender discourse of his time, and to what extent did he reinscribe it in new ways?" Drawing upon the same accounts of the Gillette-Brown case in the *New York World* that Dreiser drew upon, she finds that the real Billy Brown, prototype of Roberta Alden, was a much more independent, sexually desirous woman than either the reporters or Dreiser would admit in their accounts, which cast her as the pathetic victim. And in the morality play that is yellow journalism, Chester Gillette, who showed consideration for Billy and found her compliant to his amorous advances, served as the villain. Of course in his novel, Dreiser needed a Clyde Griffiths who was not a cad but rather an average man-boy whipsawed by youthful desires and inflamed ambitions. Dreiser's portrayal of Roberta, Fishkin says, is imbued with the dominant male attitudes that ordained that women be pathetic, innocent and helpless.

In tracing the interplay of fact and fiction, Fishkin turns to Dreiser's real-life treatment of his many inamorata. Here I think she goes overboard in indicting him. For example, she accepts Clara Jaeger's remark that Helen Dreiser gave up her movie career to follow Dreiser. A few bitparts hardly add up to a movie career. Fishkin says Dreiser devalued Marguerite Tjader Harris's work on *The Bulwark* and accused her of constantly demanding sex during working hours. The Dreiser letter she quotes, however, was triggered by Helen's laying down the law to Marguerite, telling her she could not come to California to work with Dreiser unless she agreed that there would be no sex between them. Actually, she gave Dreiser physical affection while they worked together in California, and he valued her editorial contributions, realizing there would have been no novel without her. But he let the editor at Doubleday wield the final blue pencil, to Marguerite's dismay. Cruel, perhaps, but otherwise the publisher might not have brought out the book -- the last of Dreiser's to be published before his death.

Sex, rather than work, is the centerpiece of Irene Gammel's critique of Dreiser. She questions Dreiser's reputation as a fighter for sexual liberation against the literary puritans. He was, she says, a reactionary in his portrayals of female characters. The women in his novels are shrewish,

too "easy" or, more commonly, like the heroine of "Emanuela," demivirgins in need of a real man to awaken their repressed sexuality. They exist as static objects of desire, serving Dreiser's idea of womanliness as "passive, yielding and sacrificial" (41).

And yet, she concludes, rather condescendingly, "what makes Dreiser's fiction rewarding -- even from a feminist perspective -- is that it simultaneously exposes the gender bias, the duplicity, and the arbitrary power politics of its male characters and narrators" (50). It seems to me that's a big "and yet" -- and that Dreiser deserves some credit for his sympathy with lower-class women like Carrie Meeber, who are "taken" by higher-class males. In Dreiser's novels, as Gammel concedes, there is a two-way dialogue between men and women; at least some of the time (e.g., Angela Blue in *The "Genius"*) they sit back and articulate their complaint. Though Dreiser does indeed snuff Angela when she plays the generative role, just as he has Clyde plan to kill Roberta when she is pregnant. Dreiser did have a hangup about women "entrapping" men by getting pregnant, which may be anti-woman but surely posits an activist role for the entrappers. Gammel's analysis is telling and she says things that apparently only a feminist could say (for no one else has said them), but I think she is too sweeping and too focused on Dreiser's handling of sex, which was heavy-handed. She does not account for the existence of the many important women characters in Dreiser's work; Dreiser may have talked sexual liberation, but that was mainly against the censors who knocked him down every time he attempted to deal honestly (and out of his own rather skewed experience, to be sure) with the "sex question" (as it was called in his day) -- the relations between men and women in marital and extra-marital liaisons. And what of the scene cut from *Sister Carrie*, but appearing in the Pennsylvania Edition, showing Carrie being ogled by a potential employer. Was the man expressing Dreiser's thoughts? I hardly think so.

And, as Nancy Barrineau amply demonstrates, Gammel has not adequately recognized one of Dreiser's most fully realized woman characters, Jennie Gerhardt. Barrineau defines Jennie in the context of her times, bringing to bear historical material on the unavailability of contraceptives and sex education to working girls like Jennie, a point Dreiser attempted

to make, though his editor (and his wife, Jug) toned down or cut this material, as the "restored" Pennsylvania Edition of *Jennie* proves.

As Scott Zaluda argues, Dreiser took a critical view of the kind of males Jennie and her sisters were up against. He describes the rarely examined role that fraternal organizations play in *Sister Carrie*. As ever, Dreiser's scenes are not mere plot devices; they have a deeper social resonance. Carrie's appearance at an Elks gala in a performance of *Under the Gaslight* reveals her as an actress of a kind and leads to her stage career in New York. But Zaluda shows that the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, of which Drouet and Hurstwood are loyal members, was, like other male-only lodges, a bastion of white male solidarity against the rising pariah classes in the city -- immigrants, Jews, blacks. Zaluda's ingenious account shows that Dreiser was aware of the real nature of this playground of exclusivity and "homosociality." My only reservation about the essay is the author's failure to note that Dreiser's brother Paul was an Elk; what is more he belonged to a minstrel troupe for a time and the founders of the Elks were former black-face performers. Did Dreiser have these ties in mind? Why indeed did he choose the Elks as the venue for Carrie's debut and the beginning of Hurstwood's downfall?

Biographical facts are utilized straightforwardly by Miriam Gogol in her study of shame in Dreiser's male characters. She finds some of the prominent ones -- notably Clyde -- immiserated by it, and she has much evidence that Dreiser too suffered from a crippling sense of it. By "shame" she means (quoting two psychologists), "a sense of inadequacy or exposure, often of a public nature, in which the sense of self feels in danger of being flooded or overwhelmed with [negative] feeling" (98). It is characterized by feelings of unworthiness, of not measuring up to impossible standards; it means, in short, feeling very bad about oneself. Dreiser showed such a sense of unworthiness in his youth, as well as the sense of guilt that is often shame's familiar, in his case imposed by his fanatically Catholic father, whom Dreiser blamed for the family's declining fortunes and its slide into ostracism and disgrace. In *An American Tragedy*, Gogol writes, Dreiser portrays shame being passed down the generations, ending with Clyde's little half-brother, Russell, who appears in the "Envoy" about to recapitulate Clyde's career. Clyde's "sense of inad-

equacy (shame) and his desire to break out of this image" (104) drive him to plot Roberta's murder. Her pregnancy threatens to drag him back into the shabby life of his father, Gogol says, so he must kill the father in himself to purge his shame by killing Roberta.

That is a new and relatively rare psychological insight into a novel that is saturated with psychology yet has attracted little psychoanalytic criticism. Leonard Cassuto, who brings the theories of Jacques Lacan to the case, contends that the reason for this lack in Dreiser studies is that "everything appears too simple at first glance" (115), psychologically speaking. That is, characters like Witla, Hurstwood, Griffiths all seem pat Freudian textbook cases. Take Clyde: Unhappy childhood, weak ego, unruly id. Result: murder. But as Cassuto says, that is "too easy," too simple; the afore-mentioned characters are more complex in thought and behavior than the stereotypical Freudian reading admits. He plunges into a Lacanian analysis of some of Dreiser's characters and concludes that they are trapped in repetitions of behavior symbolizing deeper, unrecognized motives. Their lives are the product of unarticulated wants, buried in the unconscious, which erupt in destructive ways. This is all intriguing, but at times it seemed to me that Cassuto was more convincing in describing the need for and relevance of Lacanian analysis than in producing the insightful plums. And I may be too literal, but didn't Dreiser draw upon Freud, or at least a free interpretation of him, not to mention Jacques Loeb's behaviorism, in mapping out his characters' psyches? I will leave it to the surviving New Critics to determine if my point transgresses the intentional fallacy.

While Cassuto selects Lacan as his guide through the nether regions inhabited by Dreiser's lost souls, Paul A. Orlov summons Martin Heidegger's philosophy to interpret *Sister Carrie*. Orlov's approach is particularly illuminating to me because he elucidates a non-naturalistic aspect of that novel -- the strange glowing pulsations of illusion, role playing and representation vs. reality. In Orlov's Heideggerian reading, Carrie's fall to the seductive wiles of Drouet is actually a "rise" -- an ascent towards the state of spiritual authenticity she is unconsciously seeking. But she is diverted on her quest by the false "emissaries" of the material world. She seeks fulfillment in money, clothes, celebrity as an actress, ignoring

the advice of Bob Ames, who is the only protagonist who understands her talents and her real desires. Do we need Heidegger to tell us this? I think so. His benediction accords gravitas to Dreiser's story, highlights its philosophical implications.

Carrie's mesmerization with mere celebrity might, in an era closer to our own, have taken her to Hollywood, land of illusion par excellence, as Dreiser himself was lured there in 1919, with his mistress and much later second wife, Helen Richardson. Given his unhappy experiences in Hollywood, it seems appropriate in a perverse way that his novels met similar unhappy fates at the hands of filmmakers. Lawrence E. Hussman caustically documents the "squandered possibilities" of these films, beginning with *AAT*, which Paramount purchased in 1926 and Sergei Eisenstein was assigned to direct in the early 1930s. Eisenstein's script, which was as far as he got before he was pulled off the film for political and ideological reasons, is the Lost Masterpiece in the Dreiserian cinematic canon. Hussman thinks it could have been a great work, though he makes clear that Eisenstein changed Dreiser's conception by making Clyde completely innocent of murder. As for the others -- the Von Sternberg *Tragedy*, the Maron Gering *Jennie*, the William Wyler *Carrie* and the George Stevens *Sun* -- all were failures in varying degrees for reasons Hussman cogently states. Perhaps he might have drawn more of a moral from all this than he does. One is suggested to me by Hussman's mention of Ken Russell's *Women in Love* as an exemplary cinematic adaptation of a novel. Before the break up of the studio system and the rise of the independents, an eccentric genius like Russell would be persona non grata in Hollywood. Also, something about Dreiser aroused the pre-censors, such as the Breen office, the superpatriots who infest California, the studio bosses and the directors themselves. They found him as guilty as Clyde was -- only his crime was subverting the American way. Perhaps today, Dreiser's politics and morality will seem familiar enough to permit some contemporary independent to make that great movie. But I'm not counting on that.

Dreiser did have a fascination with mass culture; *Sister Carrie* is studded with allusions to songs, fads, plays, and books. The last named are the subject of M. J. Dunlop's offbeat essay on two popular novels that are much discussed by the characters in the novel -- Albert Ross's *Moul-*

ding A Maiden and Bertha M. Clay's *Dora Thorne*. Dreiser, Dunlop contends, uses these particularly vacuous examples of commercial fiction to reveal the superficiality of Carrie's hollow urban friends. But there is more to the story: Dreiser, Dunlop contends, is critiquing the falseness of the conventional values these novels inevitably affirm and the crassness of the commercial culture that produced them.

Carrie's immersion in the emerging consumer-advertising-market place culture is the large subject -- or rather one of the subjects--of James Livingston's capacious essay. He contends that Dreiser wrote the novel not in the realist tradition exemplified and propounded by William Dean Howells, but rather in an older tradition, that of the nineteenth-century romantics like Hawthorne and Melville of *The Confidence Man*. His argument is so complicated that I cannot do justice to it here, but it takes us from very sophisticated definitions of realism and romanticism to an explication of Dreiser's need to work within the conventions of the latter mode to his ultimate return to realism in the last part of the book; and the relationship of all this to "commodified culture," and how Carrie's surrender to false representations is animated, like that of modern advertising, by the "belief in the reality of illusion, appearance and representation" (233), and how this, in turn, relates to the dwindling distinction between self and society under late capitalism. Whew. One yearns to see these ideas tightened and compressed or else expanded into a book.

Whether these disparate approaches of the New Dreiser Criticism add up to a holistic new vision is questionable, but that is not to deny the worthiness and stimulation of the separate parts. Bringing together diverse critical perspectives gives the effect of a cacophony of contradictory voices. Who is the real Carrie, for example -- the passive sex object of Gammell's essay, the striving but thwarted seeker of Orlov's Heideggerian approach, or the romantic figure of Livingston who is entirely a romantic character -- a waif amid external forces -- until the end when she acquires the consciousness and autonomy of a character in a realistic novel? This galimaufry of critical theories, so deliberately -- even provocatively -- served up by editor Gogol, may say as much about the theories themselves as about Dreiser, but the impact of the book leaves

one further convinced that he is a great novelist of hitherto unplumbed depths and untraced complexities.

Nowadays, Dreiser's enemy is not the Puritans or the New Humanists or the New Critics; it is the New Illiteracy, the dumbing down of America, the commodification of culture, so advanced from Carrie's day. I hope that some of the critics represented here will turn their talents to the forces outside the academy and direct some shafts at the enemy outside the gates.

Richard Lingeman

The Depression's Woman Worker

Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the America 1930s. Edited by Laura Hapke. Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995. 286 pp.

Laura Hapke's *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* bolsters current study of the female proletariat, a field originating with Paula Rabinowitz's and Charlotte Nekola's influential anthology, *Writing Red* (1987). Unlike critics who primarily treat leftist female writers, Hapke studies the image of the working woman, in both domestic and waged occupations, as she appears in popular as well as radical works by both male and female authors. Hapke wields an impressive array of period sources -- autobiographies, popular newspapers, labor league reports, communist publications, women's magazines, and government documents, among others -- to contextualize and draw affinities between the disparate writers she studies. Gathering Depression era orthodoxies about working women, Hapke argues that 1930s fiction reveals the "conflict between traditional expectations and the realities of feminine economic desperation, between the still-potent ideology of women's separate sphere and her new roles as self-supporting or family breadwinner" (xx).

In early sections of her book, Hapke examines the tradition of bias against working women; conventional charges that women steal men's

jobs, work for superfluous "pin money," and are impermanent workers underlie government documents and policy, Hapke attests, as well as mainstream and women's journalism. Hapke outlines women's participation in socialist and protest movements, asserting that while the Communist Party offered limited liberation to its female members, ultimately its larger goals displaced women's issues. Hapke reads the period's prejudices and expectations in John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell, and Agnes Smedley.

The text next examines the working woman in social protest fiction written by men. Weaving statistics and life accounts of female laborers with analysis of their fictional counterparts, Hapke explores the emphasis on mothering over work in Steinbeck and James T. Farrell; she also scrutinizes Jack Conroy and Mike Gold novels which offer ambivalent and apolitical visions of the working woman. "Bottom Dogs" fiction, that subliterate genre describing the most sordid details of Depression era living, conflates women's work with sexual promiscuity, Hapke argues, finally envisioning prostitutes as ineffectual mother figures, "flawed comforters, [and] failed spiritual rescuers" (55). Conscious of prejudice and economic privation, African American male writers, such as Claude McKay, Langston Hushes, and Richard Wright, treat the working woman with more sensitivity than do white men, but like white social protest writers, also envision women as inextricably linked to a familial role.

In surveying female social protest writers' responses to the mothering imperative, Hapke concentrates on Tillie Olsen's unfinished *Yonondio* (1934-37), Meridel le Sueur's short fiction, and Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929; abr. ed.; 1935). Here Hapke mixes social and Communist Party history with a tendency to read the women's work autobiographically. Psychological cruelty to defenseless daughters characterizes mothering in Olsen; alternately, Le Sueur's often unrealistic "manless motherhood" (88) celebrates communities of women who raise children apparently unmired in daily demands of laundry, cooking, and housework. Smedley is the only leftist of the three to reject the mothering model in order to "concentrate on her alter ego's search for autonomy" (105). In each writer's text, however, the mothering debate eclipses treatments of women's waged occupations.

Hapke also explores literary responses to stereotypical images of the love-struck female worker, from popular writer Fannie Hurst, to leftist journalist Leane Zugsmith, to African American folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. Although collectively these writers counter the expectation that women's lives revolve around romance, individually, Hapke argues, their rebuttals contain compromising flaws of perspective or technique. Alternately, various writers who imagine the professional woman, such as Josephine Herbst, Sinclair Lewis, and Margaret Mitchell, share "a dialectic between erasure and celebration" (217) in their portrayals. Hapke analyzes this tension by reading fictional careerist women against the Depression's New Woman ideal, as well as against their real life analogues, such as Frances Perkins and Dorothy Thompson.

In what is perhaps Hapke's most compelling discussion, she examines six proletarian novels which depict North Carolina's 1929 Gastonia textile mill strike. Here Hapke's historical reading is most effective, as her discussion benefits from charting representations of a specific historical event, rather than tracking the period's pervasive myths. While Sherwood Anderson's and William Rollins' Gastonia fiction objectifies and depoliticizes mill women, the work of leftist novelists Mary Heaton Vorse, Dorothy Myra Page, Grace Lumpkin, and Fielding Burke attempts to reinscribe the female experience of the strike, but ultimately transforms the "revolt-minded mill girl into a female militant palatable to the dominant culture" (172).

The depth of scholarship grounding this ambitious book is impressive. Moreover, Hapke's deft source compilation and insightful textual explications produce exceptionally readable prose. In a work which resurrects forgotten texts by and about women, one might expect a tendency to present celebratory readings; instead, Hapke's assessments are remarkably balanced and incisive. In a project of this scope, however, some issues necessarily take precedence over others. Though she discusses one African American female novelist, Zora Neale Hurston, and several black male writers, Hapke concentrates on white women's labor, offering little study of the period's dissimilar cultural expectations for and fictional treatments of the black woman worker. Additionally, while Hapke mentions Mexican and Chinese workers in American, her analysis of the white

Ma Joads overshadows her inquiry of immigrant migrant laborers. Hapke should not be taken too much to task for these omissions, as her introduction acknowledges the text's selective method. Hapke's outstanding contextualization and correlation of so many writers, both acclaimed and neglected, is an accomplishment, one which will benefit students and scholars of the Depression and of women's history and literature.

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