

DREISER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

OF THE INTERNATIONAL DREISER SOCIETY

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Calls for Papers

American Literature Association Annual Convention
Baltimore, MD, May 26-28, 1995

THEODORE DREISER SOCIETY

The Dreiser Society seeks ten-page double-spaced papers (20 minute presentations) on "New Approaches to Dreiser's Fiction: Discussions from the Perspectives of the Deconstructionist, New Historicist, Feminist/Gender Critic, and/or Cultural Critic." As for the texts of *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, both the original and new editions shall be considered. Please send a copy of your paper, not an abstract, by December 31, 1995, to:

Yoshinobu Hakutani
Department of English
Kent State University
Kent, OH 44242

STEPHEN CRANE SOCIETY

"Stephen Crane in England": A Panel

Send completed paper, suitable for twenty-minute presentation, or two-page summary no later than December 1, 1994, to:

James B. Colvert
Vice President and Program Chair
Stephen Crane Society
149 Spruce Valley Road
Athens, GA 30605

The Society is sponsoring a second panel of distinguished scholars who have accepted invitations from the Program Committee to present papers in recognition of The Centennial of *The Red Badge of Courage*. The readers will be J.C. Levenson, Eric Solomon, and Stanley Wertheim.

More on page 8.

E-mail Interview: James L.W. West III

With a revised title to reflect changing times, we are continuing a popular feature of both the "old" and the present *Newsletters*.

James L.W. West III is University Distinguished Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University. He has been one of the textual editors of the Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition since 1974 and has recently been named general editor of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. West is the author of *American Authors and the Literary Marketplace since 1900* (1988). He is completing a biography of William Styron, scheduled for publication in 1996.

DSN: Describe the fundamental differences between the "old" and "new" *Jennie Gerhardt*.

West: The 1911 *Jennie Gerhardt* was a collaboration between Dreiser and his editors at Harper and Brothers. It was a negotiated text, domesticated for public consumption. As such it has a good deal of historical and social interest. This was, after all, the text that restored Dreiser's reputation as a serious author and launched the second phase of his career. The new *Jennie Gerhardt*, by contrast, is much more nearly the book he submitted to Harper and Brothers before it was cut, bowdlerized, and made more palatable for the public. It contains fuller social and historical documentation; it retains its original sexual voltage; and it resurrects the character of Jennie from obscurity.

DSN: In a recent review, Donald Pizer claims that "the Pennsylvania *Jennie Gerhardt* is, despite its announced intent, not the novel Dreiser completed in the spring of 1911." Further, he writes that "critics other than the editors of the Pennsylvania Edition may in the end prefer the Harpers version—not because it

does or does not reflect Dreiser's final intentions and not because it is a social artifact, but because it is the better novel." How would you respond to these claims?

West: The Pennsylvania edition of *Jennie* claims only to be "essentially the [text] that Dreiser brought to a point of stasis in the spring of 1911" (p. 495). If it were exactly the text that survives from that moment, either in the MS at Penn or the TS at the University of Virginia, then the Pennsylvania editors would be practicing a technique known as "versioning," a cautious, unadventurous course followed by editors who have little confidence in their literary judgment. "Versioning" is essentially high-class secretarial work. The Pennsylvania text, on the other hand, is an eclectic text, reconstructed from several witnesses. It's an attempt to construct an ideal text, with the caveat always that perfection in such an effort is impossible.

Certainly a teacher might prefer to teach the 1911 *Jennie Gerhardt*, but that teacher would now be morally bound to explain that its text represents a collaborative compromise, and that the text was bowdlerized and made more saccharine. The teacher would also have to explain what happened to Jennie's character between Dreiser's version and the Harper version. Why did she become submerged? Why was Lester allowed to dominate the book? I should think that with the Pennsylvania edition in print, a teacher could now do a much better job with the 1911 text, explaining how social forces in 1911 influenced Dreiser's publishers to cut and soften his book, and to edit down a strong female character, who might have seemed threatening to them.

DSN: What characterized Dreiser's composition process during the writing of *Jennie*? Did it differ significantly from the way he went about writing *Sister Carrie*?

West: The central fact to remember with *Jennie Gerhardt* is that Dreiser put the book down for

eight years between inception and completion. When he took it back up, he had matured as a man and an artist. Thus one has two levels of thinking and writing in the book. *Sister Carrie*, by contrast, was written in one long burst of creativity—though with a few interruptions. For me this makes *Jennie* a more complex, layered novel. I don't mind saying that, in its restored text, I think *Jennie Gerhardt* a much superior novel to *Sister Carrie*.

DSN: What would you say to teachers who have room for only one Dreiser novel in an American literature course to convince them to adopt *Jennie Gerhardt* rather than *Sister Carrie* or *An American Tragedy*?

West: I'd suggest that they give *Jennie Gerhardt* a try, in order to broaden their range and expose their students to something other than *Sister Carrie*, which is taught in many courses. I've tried to make available all materials necessary for a successful run in the classroom for *Jennie*. The full-dress Penn edition should be in the library in hardback (and possibly on the teacher's desk in paperback); the text and historical notes are now available, at a reasonable price, in the Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics Series for the students. And early in 1995 Penn will publish Dreiser's *JENNIE GERHARDT: New Essays on the Restored Text*. This is a collection of nineteen fresh essays on the new *Jennie* by Dreiserians from several different generations. The collection is meant to begin a critical conversation about *Jennie*; it's also meant to give teachers ideas for their lectures, and to provide materials for students writing term papers. The collection will be available in both cloth and paper.

DSN: What is the next project for the Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition?

West: Tom Riggio and I are finishing an edition of Dreiser's *Russian Diary*, the document that he and Ruth Kennell produced

during his trip to the Soviet Union in 1927-28. It's a fascinating account, and quite challenging editorially. We hope to have that edition in print by the summer or early fall of 1995. Then we have *Twelve Men*, edited by Robert Coltrane, scheduled for publication after that. Work is also moving ahead at a good rate on Renate von Bardeleben's edition of *A Traveller at Forty* and the Philip Gerber/James Hutchisson edition of *The Financier*. Lots of activity!

Dreiser's Circulation in Sweden Roark Mulligan

Roark Mulligan has recently completed at the University of Oregon a dissertation on Theodore Dreiser, in which he re-examined Dreiser's fiction, especially *An American Tragedy*, in the light of modern rhetorical theory. He is currently teaching in the English Department at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia.

Several articles in the recent *Dreiser Society Newsletter* (Spring 1994) remind us that Dreiser's fiction is well received by an international audience. Lawrence Hussman in a letter from Poland, where he was teaching as part of the Fulbright program, wrote that his students often named Dreiser as the greatest American writer. Kiyohiko Murayama outlines the recent Dreiser scholarship in Japan. And Jeganatha Raja lists more than eighteen works that were published in India on Dreiser. Philip Gerber, who recently helped inaugurate a Dreiser society in India, began one of the Dreiser sessions at the ALA conference in San Diego by delineating several reasons for India's interest in Dreiser. Gerber compared Dreiser to one of India's leading writers whose fiction shares with Dreiser's a focus on the difficulties encountered by characters whose society is shifting from an agrarian economy to an industrial one.

But interest in Dreiser's fiction continues even in highly industrialized countries such as Japan and Sweden. If we think of realism as being factually and culturally specific, then we might be surprised by Dreiser's acceptance in other lands, since works that rely on masses of information should lose their value when shifted in time and place from one context to another. Yet, we find that not only do Dreiser's works translate well but that Dreiser is considered a more significant American writer in some foreign countries than in the United States. One justification for this popularity is that Dreiser was critical of the United States and that many of the issues he explored are still problems today. Thus, readers in other nations find Dreiser's attacks a corroboration of their own criticism of America. But a second and more compelling explanation is that Dreiser's fiction is a source book of American culture. In countries where American studies are emphasized, Dreiser's novels are appreciated for their inclusion of historical and cultural details. Third, Dreiser was able to capture the particular experiences of common humans and to universalize them—his fiction is a model of how an author can symbolize all elements of society in a creative work. As Kenneth Burke in a letter to Malcolm Cowley wrote: "Anyhow, it is a fact that American realists or naturalists, when they are good, keep lapsing instinctively into symbolism—yes, even Dreiser" (275).¹

Dreiser's influence on writers outside the United States is less often discussed than the effect of European realists on Dreiser, but Dreiser had and still has an impact on writers and scholars who are interested in fiction as a means of symbolizing all levels of a society. The European realists of the nineteenth century were from the middle class and represented middle-class individuals and their concerns. It was not until the 1930s that international writers from the lower social classes became prominent. These writers would have read and would have been encouraged by Dreiser's novels. Ivar Lo-Johansson in Sweden is a good example. Although Lo-Johansson's early works were

primarily concerned with illustrating the exploitation of Swedish farm workers, he, like Dreiser, depicted characters who grew up in poverty. Dreiser exemplified for successive generations of writers the method by which fiction could be employed as a means of communicating and ameliorating the conditions of all humans.

Dreiser's influence and acceptance moved his writing beyond the United States to a larger audience, and his books are still often read in the schools of other countries. Three members of the present Swedish Academy serve as referees for a Swedish book club called "Världsbiblioteket," which offers to its subscribers the one hundred best novels ever written. Of the one hundred works, eight are American, and one is *An American Tragedy*. My point in this brief article is to give one more demonstration of the continued international support of Dreiser's fiction by briefly considering the reading habits in Sweden.

The Swedish public takes great pride in awarding the Nobel Prize and in having a population that is highly literate. Serious reviews of new literary works are included in the daily papers. Informal reading circles for adults are common, but books are very expensive, so libraries are utilized extensively. On March 12, 1951, Carl Anderson contacted twenty-one Swedish public libraries and asked how many volumes by Dreiser the library had and how many were in circulation. He divided these statistics into two categories: works in Swedish and works in English. Rolf Lundén conducted a similar investigation in March of 1974, and I conducted this poll again in 1992.² Each study is roughly twenty years apart. The following is a compilation from all three surveys:

Circulation of Dreiser's Books
from Swedish Libraries

Date	Books in Translation		Books in English	
	Tot Vols	Vols/Loan	Tot Vols	Vols/Loan
03/51	388	141	82	11
03/74	276	48	113	29
03/92	210	34	91	26

While the total number of volumes by Dreiser dropped from 1951 to 1992, the number of books in English increased, and the circulation of the translated works remains strong.³ This steady circulation of original English versions reflects the large number of Swedes who are bilingual, but it might also suggest a scholarly rather than a popular interest in Dreiser.

What purpose does this Scandinavian perspective on Dreiser serve? By moving outside the United States to consider Dreiser's fiction, we see an intricate connection between the writer and the writer's audience. These glances from other lands show that, despite difficulties in transplanting fiction from one culture to another, "good" realism appeals to a broader audience than the prophets of pure aesthetics might claim. Dreiser's realism attempts to "get it all in," to represent the particular experiences of Americans but to weave these into the largest possible fabric of society. In doing this, he reaches out to a universal audience.

Notes

¹This letter is found in *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley: 1915-1981* (Ed. Paul Jay. Berkley: U of California P, 1990).

²Carl Anderson's extensive survey of Swedish library circulation is in his book *The Swedish Acceptance of American Literature* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1957). Rolf Lundén's study can be found in an appendix to his book *Dreiser Looks at Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1973).

³The twenty-one libraries in this study are located throughout Sweden: Borås, Eskilstuna, Göteborg, Halmstad, Hälsingborg, Huskvarna, Jönköping, Kalmar, Karlskoga, Karlskrona, Karlstad, Kristianstad, Linköping, Lund, Malmö, Örebro, Östersund, Sundsvall, Umeå, Uppsala, and Visby. The Stockholm library was excluded since Anderson considered it in a separate study. In my 1992 survey, I wrote to the twenty-one libraries, and I received responses from all twenty-one. The systems

that the libraries used for recording circulation data varied, and at least two libraries were in the process of adopting new systems; so in several instances the libraries were unable to report circulation on a particular day. Instead, they reported circulation for the month or year.

Are you interested in a list of names, addresses, and, when available, e-mail addresses of fellow International Dreiser Society members? If so, contact me by mail, e-mail (nwb@pembvax1.pembroke.edu.), or fax (910-521-6162), and include all pertinent updated information about how we may reach you.

Dreiser Papers at the June 1994 ALA, San Diego, CA

Session I: "Theodore Dreiser:
Influences from the Past"
Chair: James Hutchisson

"*Sister Carrie's* Tragic Hero: An Aristotelian Perspective," Loren F. Schmidtberger, Saint Peter's College

Aristotle's comments in *The Poetics* help to explain why Dreiser's representation of Hurstwood's destiny is so deeply felt by readers from a diversity of cultural backgrounds. Hurstwood's suicide is pitiful because his misfortune seems so excessive in relation to the momentary error of judgment that precipitates it. But the novel does not set aside traditional concepts of morality. Instead, as Aristotle advises, it minimizes their importance as factors in shaping the plot of a tragedy.

Enacting what Aristotle calls a peripety, Hurstwood unwittingly plots his own destruction as he maneuvers Carrie away from Drouet. Leaving nothing to chance, he even manipulates a game of cards. Then, as if prearranged by Chance, Hurstwood comes upon the unlocked safe just at that moment when he is

vulnerable. Coincidences like this, Aristotle points out, “are striking when they have an air of design.”

But Dreiser offers no rationale that would explain “the vagaries of fortune” represented by the contrasting destinies of Carrie and Hurstwood, and Hurstwood’s gradual abandonment of all hope arouses the emotions that Aristotle considered appropriate to tragedy: pity and fear.

“Style, Psychology, and the Ambiguities of ‘Fate’ in *Jennie Gerhardt*,” Paul A. Orlov, Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County Campus

An obvious and important part of Dreiser’s technique in *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) is his frequent use of authorial “intrusions” upon the action, in passages of philosophical and moral commentary meant to influence a reader’s responses to the emerging story. And an apparent key effect of these narrative statements—conveyed by both the general tone and themes of forces shaping his characters’ lives and by their specific references to “fate”—is to emphasize one’s sense of the work’s determinism. So the novelist’s narrative stance encourages the conclusion that the *causes* for his heroine’s increasingly “tragic” life-history lie almost entirely in forces and factors external to her.

But while it is surely true that Jennie’s “undeservedly” sad destiny evolves from circumstances and accidents vividly portraying the impact upon her individuality of forms of environmental and biological determinism, there is a crucial difference between saying that an individual’s will is quite circumscribed by causes outside or greater than herself, and saying that she *has* no will at *all*. And through his use of a different narrative technique in the work, indirect discourse, Dreiser raises troubling questions in our minds about the extent to which actions she (in some sense) *chooses* to take *partly* shape her story.

Influenced by the frequent dominance of Dreiser’s *objective* narrative voice, a reader may not notice how important a part in the depiction of Jennie (and Lester Kane) some key passages of indirect discourse (along with dialogue) play. And the curious effect of these passages—in which the novelist gives us seemingly interior reflections of his characters’ thoughts and feelings at notable moments in the action—is to contradict or at least qualify the view of the causality of events suggested by some of his own objective comments. In the process, through this device of style, Dreiser creates a “window” into Jennie’s and Lester’s psychology, as they make important decisions shaping their story, that complicates and enhances the novel’s meanings.

“Aladdin’s Dreams and Alnascharian Nightmares: Dreiser’s Romantic Means to a Realistic End,” Roark Mulligan, Christopher Newport University

Dreiser was reading or having read to him portions of *The Arabian Nights* during the period he was planning *An American Tragedy*. In that novel there are numerous allusions to Aladdin, including Clyde’s receipt of Miller Nicholson’s copy of *The Arabian Nights* on death row. While many of these allusions and this gift have been noted, they have been interpreted as ironically mirroring Clyde’s destructive, fanciful imagination. In my ALA paper, I analyze what would probably have first struck Dreiser when reading *The Arabian Nights*—its realism. The stories told by Shahrazad to King Shahrayar are predominantly concerned with money and sexual relationships, and they present these matters with a candor that would have been precluded as immoral from the popular American fiction of Dreiser’s youth.

Session II: "Theodore Dreiser:
Psychological Approaches"
Chair: Philip Gerber

"Desire and Regression in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*," John Clendenning,
California State University, Northridge

No abstract is available for this paper.

"Son and Mother in *Dawn*," Stephen C.
Brennan, Louisiana State University,
Shreveport

Although Dreiser may not have read Freud until late 1919, he was clearly using Freudian ideas in *A Hoosier Holiday* and, most importantly, in the holograph of *Dawn*, both completed in 1916. This early version of the autobiography, Dreiser writes, is a "self-analysis" in which his early memories come to him as dream-like images characterized by the association of ideas central to psychoanalysis. In *A Hoosier Holiday*, Dreiser shows familiarity with the "inversion of the psychoanalyst," the idea that repressed desires often find expression in their opposites. In the holograph of *Dawn*, Dreiser establishes a chain of associations revealing the reciprocal "occult inversion" of rage into love that characterizes Theo's relations with his mother. Clinging to his mother's breast, the boy experiences both consolation and a terrifying threat of deprivation, in psychoanalytic terms, a fear of castration that would make him incapable of normal relations with women. Unlike the 1931 published *Dawn*, however, the holograph has a comic ending. Theo's early psychic terrors are crucial to his emergence as an artist, for they ultimately cause him to take female beauty as a "fetich" and to sublimate his libidinous desires into the newspaper stories marking his first successes as a writer.

Our thanks to these writers for participating in the conference and for providing abstracts to the *DSN*.

International Dreiser Society
Financial Statement
May 25, 1993, to May 27, 1994

Balance on May 25, 1993		\$ 913.16	
Income			
Donations	\$ 35.00		
Memberships	905.00		
Sale of coffee mugs	<u>16.00</u>		
		\$ 956.00	1869.16
Expenses			
DS subscriptions	\$ 325.00		
Printing			
Newsletters	90.24		
Postage	74.25		
Supplies			
Coffee mugs	54.31		
'93 ALA Refreshments	<u>247.67</u>		
		\$ 791.47	-791.47
Balance on May 27, 1994			\$1077.69

**The woodcut of Dreiser is used by
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Dreiser Trust.**

Thanks to the Pembroke State University Office of University Computing and Information Services and to Kathy Vasilopoulos for production help with this issue of the *DSN*.

SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY

The Sinclair Lewis Society welcomes submissions on any aspect of Lewis's work. We are particularly interested in topics dealing with gender, economics, and the environment. Contextual and new historicist approaches are welcome. All submissions will be acknowledged, and session participants will be notified before the end of January 1995.

Send an abstract or a copy of the paper by November 30, 1994, to:

James M. Hutchisson
Department of English
The Citadel
Charleston, SC 29409

He may also be reached by e-mail at hutchissonj@citadel.edu. or fax at (803) 953-7084.

The Dreiser Society Newsletter reserves the right to edit any submission for clarity or length.