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The Trouble with Dreiser: Harper and the Editing of Jennie Gerhardt (review)

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with him, referring to, among other materials, the profiles Dreiser wrote for *Success*. This history helps the reader understand the novel's significance; as Mulligan explains, the newly included passages offer a better account of both Cowperwood's complexity and Dreiser's complex feelings towards the real-life magnate who inspired his trilogy.

In his section on the composition of the novel, Mulligan offers a thorough overview of both the reading and the writing practices that shaped Dreiser's work, with a particular emphasis on Lefevre's "What Availeth It?" Mulligan also provides an explanation of Dreiser's authorial trajectory, including the level of editorial intervention he received throughout his career that teachers may find useful in explaining the shift from earlier novels like *Carrie* or in describing editorial practices and pressures of the day. In the section on the novel's place in the tradition of American business novels, expected names like Charles Dudley Warner and Mark Twain, Upton Sinclair, and Howells appear, as well as those of writers who are less popular today, like Henry Blake Fuller, Harold Frederic, David Graham Phillips, and Robert Herrick, of whom it is nice to be reminded. Unfortunately, as part of the case for Dreiser, Mulligan argues that Howells, Frederic, and Fuller focus on individuals and personal stories, not epic financial battles, effectively diminishing the work of these authors. However, Mulligan proposes an interesting possible influence of Norris's trilogy on Dreiser and suggestively accounts for the great number of Sinclair novels on Dreiser's book shelf. The carefully researched and sometimes contentious back matter is a joy to read and is likely to inspire new valuation of both *The Financier* and the other business novels of the period.

Such scholarly generosity and openness run throughout the project. Mulligan's and Riggio's work is sure to reinvigorate Dreiser criticism, and *The Financier*, in this comprehensive new form, reminds one of the important cultural work literature does to enable readers to peer out at a new century through a haze of economic uncertainty.

—Katherine Fusco, Vanderbilt University

The Trouble with Dreiser: Harper and the Editing of Jennie Gerhardt,
by Annemarie Koning Whaley. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press,
2009. ix + 235 pp. Cloth, \$104.99.

For most writers the path from idea to publication ranges from daunting and difficult to mystifying and mysterious. Yet every writer who hopes to forge a career in writing must confront its tangled path. As a result, a vir-

tual industry has sprouted up in books not only about the writing process, but also in guides and memoirs mapping the particular route an author took in getting published. Obviously, other writers are interested in these works, but the subgenre has also attracted general readers curious about publication and its consequences for those they read.

When it comes to literary greats, one might expect publication is less of a challenge. Yet literary history is full of the travails faced by those who are now considered central to the canon. Theodore Dreiser fits into this category, with much of his career influenced by his often damaging interactions with publishers. Annemarie Koning Whaley's investigation of Dreiser's challenges in getting *Jennie Gerhardt* published and examination of how editors at the publisher altered the text makes *The Trouble with Dreiser: Harper and the Editing of Jennie Gerhardt* an important book. Approaching the topic with deft detective skills and shedding new light on Dreiser's quest to get the novel published, Whaley provides a deeper understanding of Dreiser and his publication woes.

At the heart of *The Trouble with Dreiser* is the fascinating story of how and why Harper's editorial team made thousands of editorial changes in the author's original manuscript, which was, as Whaley notes, "a blunting of the cultural, moral, and social force of the novel as a whole . . . [uncovering] the kind of damage editors can inflict upon a text when they approach it with a social, moral, and financial agenda." According to Whaley, when the manuscript is restored to reflect Dreiser's original version, the novel not only stands among Dreiser's greatest works, but it also may necessitate that scholars reassess his oeuvre.

Like a literary Sherlock Holmes, Whaley painstakingly describes the editorial decisions that transformed every character in *Jennie Gerhardt*, giving the main characters each their own chapter, such as "Editing Fathers, Daughters, and Cultural Identity: William Gerhardt" and "Editing Wealthy Wives and Mothers: Mrs. Kane and Letty Gerald." Perhaps even more valuable for scholars, though, Whaley also takes themes central to the novel, such as "Corporate America" and "Romanticism," and reveals how Harper editors manipulated the manuscript to fit their conservative company culture.

For example, editors at the publishing company disagreed with Dreiser's negative portrait of American business life, particularly his characterization of Corporate America as greedy and exploitive. Dreiser took great pains to show the differences in management styles between Robert and Lester Kane and how their father, Archibald, sides with his ruthless son Robert. However, as Whaley explains, "All of these passages . . . were ex-

cised entirely from the 1911 edition. . . . [T]he Kanes become more sympathetic, which in turn destroys Dreiser's sharp dichotomies between the Kane and Gerhardt families." As a result, Dreiser's depiction of Robert as an aggressive, cutthroat capitalist is softened through editorial changes to accentuate the character as strategic and intelligent, rather than as ruthless, when Dreiser meant to show through Robert's heartlessness that he would even destroy his own brother for personal gain.

Whaley's purpose in writing *The Trouble with Dreiser* is to show how the editorial decisions made by the Harper editors essentially destroyed *Jennie Gerhardt*. She did not intend to present a cultural history of the early twentieth century. However, this reviewer would have liked to see a deeper level of historical contextualization.

To her credit, Whaley does provide some broad overview of Harper's business practices and conservative culture, which worked hand-in-hand to shape the firm's editorial vision, and she discusses some of Harper's leaders from a biographical perspective. Yet one is left with the notion that there is more to the story. One way Whaley could have addressed this concern is by including a "Note on Sources" or some other overview that explained the challenges in researching the topic. For instance, could Whaley access Harper archival material, or is that corporate information off limits to researchers? Providing this kind of explanation would have provided the reader with additional insight into how the existing and available archival sources played a role in the construction of the book.

These minor criticisms, however, do not detract from Whaley's overall accomplishment. *The Trouble with Dreiser* is a fine piece of literary historical detective work and the author should be applauded for examining the controversy. She adds to the body of knowledge regarding Dreiser studies by asking the reader to reexamine *Jennie Gerhardt* from a new perspective, which is supported by the 1992 University of Pennsylvania restored edition, edited by James L. W. West III, that aims to create a definitive text that is closer to what Dreiser wrote.

Sadly, as the digital age progresses, studies like *The Trouble with Dreiser* will become rare because the textual evidence of such editorial work has been zapped into the electronic heavens. Just as historians, political scientists, and other scholars are dealing with new methods for studying issues when the paper trail no longer exists, future literary scholars will have to devise ways to examine these topics. What *The Trouble with Dreiser* reveals is that the study of how novels are created is important and that such work raises new questions about how scholars interpret an artist.

—Bob Batchelor, Kent State University