INTRODUCTION

DREISER AND THE RESTORATION OF JENNIE GERHARDT

In his poem “Theodore Dreiser,” Edgar Lee Masters compares Dreiser to a jack-o-lantern because his mouth droops and his eyes are “fixed” and “scarcely sparkling.” Underneath his unassuming facade, however, was a mind that could understand deeply and see clearly, a mind that contemplated life as it was and wrote stories so profoundly true that it was as if the reader were sitting “before the sphinx” (37). Although there have always been those like Masters who have appreciated Dreiser’s genius, his recognition by the literary community has not always been solid. Although *An American Tragedy*, published in 1925, was a best seller and was eventually made into a movie in 1931, Dreiser, by the time of his death in 1945, had dropped into relative obscurity. In the last forty years, however, scholars have reexamined his work, acknowledged his literary accomplishments, and have assured his place in the pantheon of great American writers. Critics, however, have generally considered *Jennie Gerhardt* to be his least satisfactory work. The probable reason for this
assessment is that the edition published in 1911 by Harper and Brothers was not the novel Dreiser originally submitted. During the editorial process, the editors deliberately softened and in some cases cut or severely blunted the novel’s social and moral commentary. More than likely, the changes were initiated to make the novel palatable to a larger, more conservative reading public. The overall effect, however, was that the characters became stereotypical, flat, and static, and the story predictable, sentimental, and morally conventional. As a result, critics have seen Jennie Gerhardt as a strange anomaly in the Dreiser canon. The 1992 edition of Dreiser’s original novel, however, published by the University of Pennsylvania Press and edited by James L. W. West III, restores Dreiser’s original manuscript essentially unchanged. The restored novel compares favorably with Sister Carrie (1900) and An American Tragedy (1925). It is also quite unlike any other Dreiser novel because it has strong romantic as well as realistic, even naturalistic, elements.

Dreiser’s status as a writer has been erratic at best. From the republication of Sister Carrie in May of 1907 until the late 1930s, his work was heavily discussed, even though critical opinions of it differed considerably. When An American Tragedy was published, “[f]ifty thousand people bought copies in the first few years, many more read the book, and still more read of attempts in Boston to have the book banned” (Gogol, “Intro” vii). During these early years, many believed that Dreiser’s bold thematic concerns would set the pace for the future of American novels, but others argued that his choppy and verbose rhetorical style would keep him from ever being considered a great novelist. For instance, John W. Crawford writes in his review of An American Tragedy that although Dreiser can be recognized as a “pioneer” in the field of realism, “he writes as badly as ever….There are the same slipshod sentences, the bulky paragraphs, the all but unleavened chapters” (454). Stuart Sherman adds: “I will not quarrel with any one who contends that ‘An American Tragedy’ is the worst written great novel in the world” (440).

The controversy over Dreiser’s place in the American literary canon continued into the 1940s, when the topic of critical conversation turned from Dreiser’s style and subject matter to his personal politics. His
association with the Communist Party during the ’30s and ’40s caused his work to be labeled as anti-American. During this period of nationalistic fury, Dreiser’s work could not be made to fit into the paradigm prescribed by nationalist patterns. Because his fiction did not seem to represent accepted American ideals and values, it was seen as inferior, unworthy of any real literary inquiry or interest. H. L. Mencken wrote that what offended the critics of this later generation most was “not actually Dreiser’s shortcomings as an artist, but Dreiser’s shortcomings as a Christian and an American” (“Bugaboo” 87). Probably the most damaging criticism of Dreiser’s work during this period, however, was Lionel Trilling’s influential essay “Reality in America,” first published in The Partisan Review in 1940 and later republished in his book The Liberal Imagination (1950). Trilling accuses Dreiser of being “awkward and dull,” and states that unlike Thoreau and Emerson, whose works are “specifically American,” Dreiser “lacks [a] sense of colloquial diction” (16). He wonders “how [Dreiser’s] moral preoccupations are going to be useful in confronting the disasters that threaten us” (12), and criticizes him for “thinking” amorally:

He thinks…[that] religion and morality are nonsense, ‘religionists’ and moralists are fakes, [and that] tradition is a fraud….Dreiser’s religious avowal is not a failure of nerve—it is a failure of mind and heart. We have only to set his book beside any work in which mind and heart are made to serve religion to know this at once. (17, 20)

Compounding the problem that Dreiser’s work did not fit nationalistic critical attitudes, the emphasis on scientific or philological methodology promoted during the 1940s and ’50s as a way of legitimizing the study of American literature in the universities also made it difficult for Dreiser’s work, with its stark realism and prosaic verbosity, to be accepted as worthy of serious study (Pizer, Dowell, and Rusch 92). As a result, Dreiser’s novels were not only attacked for their inappropriate political and social views, but also for their complete disregard of “form and structure” (92). In 1951 Saul Bellow wrote that “Dreiser is not very
popular now, unfortunately...” (147). In 1954 John Berryman added that although Dreiser had been one of the pivotal figures in American literature “his immense frame [has] so deteriorated, especially after his death in 1945, that when a detailed biography was produced by Robert Elias in 1949, an influential book reporter could question whether Dreiser was a subject of general interest to the public at all” (149). The cold critical reception Dreiser received during these two generations did not subside until the mid-1960s, when Dreiser’s fiction finally could be seen with more clarity as literary works: “No longer was it necessary to defend or attack [Dreiser’s] subjects or ideas because of their challenge to contemporary convention” (Pizer, Dowel, and Rusch 93).

The result was an explosion of interest in Dreiser’s work. These studies are varied in their scope and application, but the majority are still concerned with the way his work deals with the question of naturalism in American life. Miriam Gogol states that “much of the significant writing about him since the mid 1960s has focused on the issue of whether he is a naturalist, which suggests that this controversy has become one of the permanent centers of Dreiserian criticism” (“Intro” ix). These essays differ from their predecessors, though, in that they use Dreiser’s fiction as a way to better understand how the definition of naturalism has shifted over the years. Pizer, Dowell, and Rusch explain:

In short, though such critics as Donald Pizer (1984), John Con- dor (1984), June Howard (1985), Walter Benn Michaels (1987), and Lee Clark Mitchell (1989) still engage the problem of defining American literary naturalism and explaining Dreiser as one of our principal naturalists, they incline toward an acceptance of the complexities and ambivalences both of the movement and of Dreiser. (93)

Also during the past three decades, Dreiser scholars have begun the process of reexamining claims that his prose is heavy-handed and awkward, that “his style [is] atrocious, his sentences are chaotic, his grammar and syntax faulty” (Whipple 96). Recently, scholars have actually found the opposite to be true. They argue that Dreiser’s prose is, in fact, a delicate
blend of “subtlety” and “finesse” (Pizer, Dowell, and Rusch 93). Most important in current Dreiser studies, however, is the way in which scholars have been able to reclaim his work as a truthful mirror of American life, both now and in the past. Gogol says that Dreiser, unlike Henry James, was willing to “get his hands dirty.” Dreiser “shows us the external forces that shape his characters’ lives and [therefore] provides some of the first authentic portrayals of working-class people” (“Intro” viii). As a result, Gogol argues, Dreiser’s canon can be seen as “a repository for the era’s literary and cultural developments” (x).

In addition to the emphasis on Dreiser’s naturalism, his rhetorical style, his depiction of American life, and his biography, other critical issues have emerged. During the 1980s, for instance, there was an effort to place Dreiser within the scope of Marxist and new historical notions of “capitalist values” (Pizer, Dowell, and Rusch 93), and, even though Gogol asserts that not enough women have written on Dreiser or about Dreiser’s women, a “handful of women scholars” have sparked an interesting discussion on Dreiser’s treatment of women (xi). Also of interest are essays dealing with Dreiser’s attitude toward issues of ethnicity and class, such as Arthur D. Casciato’s essay “How German is Jennie Gerhardt?” Much of the more recent discussions have been facilitated by the International Dreiser Society, which, until 2006, published Dreiser Studies. The journal has since merged with Studies in American Naturalism, but Dreiser continues to remain a focus of discussion even within this larger literary context.

For the most part, the emphasis in critical studies has always centered on Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy, but recently an increasing amount of work has been published on Dreiser’s minor novels, such as Jennie Gerhardt and The Bulwark. Collections and editions of Dreiser’s unpublished works have also emerged, such as James L. W. West III’s An Amateur Laborer (1983); Yoshinobu Hakutani’s Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser (1985); Keith Newlin and Frederic E. Rusch’s The Collected Plays of Theodore Dreiser (2000); Theodore Dreiser’s Uncollected Magazine Articles (2003), also by Hakutani; Theodore Dreiser: Interviews (2004), edited by Rusch and Donald Pizer; and most
recently, Hakutani’s *Theodore Dreiser: Art, Music, and Literature 1897–1902* (2007) and Pizer’s *Theodore Dreiser: A Picture and a Criticism of Life: New Letters* (2008). This new era of Dreiser studies was aided and enhanced by the massive collection of letters, diaries, and manuscripts donated to the University of Pennsylvania by the Dreiser estate in the early 1960s. This material has provided scholars with the much-needed biographical information necessary to place Dreiser and his work within a larger framework. Additionally, memoirs and correspondences written and/or collated by personal friends and lovers provide more intimate detail for Dreiser scholarship and biography.

Perhaps one of the most interesting debates taking place in Dreiser scholarship is the assessment of the University of Pennsylvania’s restored edition of *Jennie Gerhardt*, first published by Harper and Brothers in 1911. At the time of its first publication, both Dreiser and his longtime friend H. L. Mencken thought *Jennie Gerhardt* to be better than *Sister Carrie*. However, critics were divided as to its literary value. In turn, the public was hesitant to invest time and money in a novel that met with such skeptical reviews. Overall sales were barely mediocre, and by 1912 *Jennie Gerhardt* had disappeared from public view. Even with the enormous success and critical recognition of *An American Tragedy* and, eventually, of *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt* remained largely unrecognized by the critical community.

Only in the last fifteen years have critics begun to reconsider the novel’s place in the Dreiser canon. Although the critical material on *Jennie Gerhardt* is still minuscule in comparison to material on his other, more widely read novels, the interest has sparked a new discussion among Dreiser scholars. The novel’s renaissance can be attributed in part to the 1992 publication of the University of Pennsylvania Press’ edition of *Jennie Gerhardt*, commonly referred to as the Pennsylvania edition. This edition restores the thousands of cuts and emendations made to the text by the editors at Harper and Brothers prior to its publication in 1911. The questions now facing the academic community are: (1) how much damage, if any, did these changes do to Dreiser’s original story, and, depending on the effect of these changes, (2) which text, the Harper
1911 edition or the restored Pennsylvania edition, should be considered the authoritative text and used in scholarship and teaching? These questions, however, are not unique to Jennie Gerhardt. Over the past twenty years a number of great American novels have been published in restored editions, including Dreiser’s Sister Carrie, Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of Courage, Richard Wright’s Native Son and Black Boy, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, and Thomas Wolfe’s Look Homeward, Angel. In other words, the discussion extends itself well beyond Dreiser and Jennie Gerhardt.

The debate over the importance or even the necessity of a restored version of Jennie Gerhardt is intense. Proponents of the restored text contend that the editorial changes so altered the novel as to seriously undermine its artistic merit. West, for instance, argues that what emerged for publication in 1911 “was a considerably different work of art—changed in style, characterization, and theme” (“Historical” 442). Dreiser biographer Richard Lingeman, in his essay “The Biographical Significance of Jennie Gerhardt,” adds that senior Harper editor “[Ripley] Hitchcock and his subeditors tarted up Dreiser’s plain style with rewriting that made it closer to what was popular fiction” (13). In the preface to the restored edition, Riggio states that in

Dreiser’s original version [Jennie] is a much fuller, more clearly defined figure than she is in the published [1911] book….[she is] more of a force to be reckoned with; her power as a woman is clearer, and we are less likely to see her as a sentimental heroine. (ix–x)

In his discussion on textual editing, Philip Cohen argues that although West does not go far enough in his textual reconstruction of Jennie Gerhardt, “[t]wo editions are better than one” (736). Cohen agrees with West’s contention that the editorial cuts and emendations transform the novel from a “blunt, carefully documented piece of social analysis to a love story merely set against a social background” (“Historical” 442), and adds that a careful examination of these changes could be instrumental in demonstrating how “a commercial editorial process reinforced
a masculine perspective” (Cohen 735). Supporters of the restored text, such as West, contend that Harper’s bowdlerization of the novel may explain why it has never measured up critically to such Dreiser classics as *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy* (“Intro” ix). In his essay on the restored *Jennie Gerhardt*, Robert Elias states:

Like *Sister Carrie* the story contrasts material success and failure, and also like *Sister Carrie* it suggests that there is something elusive beyond material success that the sensitive individual experiences and that no one can definitely verbalize. But where *Sister Carrie* concludes by leaving readers sensing they have followed the account of two ultimately diverging careers, *Jennie Gerhardt* portrays connections. (“Janus” 3–4)

Such arguments are supported by comments on the original manuscript that were made before or during Harper’s revision and publication of the novel. For instance, when Dreiser asked Lillian Rosenthal to comment on the original manuscript, she writes in her letter dated January 25, 1911:

> There is a simplicity of action and expression which is distinctive. It is aesthetic and convincing, and one is constrained to recognize the truth about life. A book of this kind may well stand comparison with the best works on psychology. It is worthy of applause which you may well claim for its versatile realism. (Dreiser Collection)

An unsigned letter to Dreiser dated March 23, 1911, reads, “I should infer from these letters that ‘Jennie’ is better in technique than ‘Sister Carrie’...I always regretted there wasn’t more of that bit of realism in ‘Sister Carrie’” (Dreiser Collection). James Huneker, too, writes to Dreiser on June 4, 1911:

> I’m not yet certain whether I like it better than Sister Carrie, but it doesn’t matter—it’s different....What made me happy while reading it was that it attempted to prove nothing; didn’t advocate socialism, or Christian Science, or any of the new thought breakfast foods. A moving, vivid picture of life, nothing else. (Dreiser Collection)
After he read Dreiser’s manuscript, H. L. Mencken wrote to Dreiser: “I needn’t say that it seems to me an advance above ‘Sister Carrie’. Its obvious superiority lies in its better form” (Dreiser-Mencken I 68). Lillian Rosenthal writes similarly of the original text in her letter of January 25, 1911: “It is aesthetic and convincing, and one is constrained to recognize the truth about life” (Dreiser Collection).

The critical opinion that the restored Pennsylvania edition is a better novel, however, is not unanimous among Dreiser scholars. Lawrence Hussman, in his essay on the restored edition, states:

[a]lthough a few restored passages in the Pennsylvania text add ever so slightly to [Jennie’s] still scant world sophistication, there is little evidence to justify Riggio’s claim in his preface to the restored novel that ‘her power as a woman is clearer, and we are less likely to see her as a sentimental heroine.’ (“Jennie” 44)

Hussman adds that Jennie remains a “plaster saint” even in the restored edition (“Jennie” 44). Stephen Brennan argues that the 1911 “Jennie Gerhardt is preferable because it is a historical artifact that not only reflects the conditions of its production but also has served generations of scholars as object of study” (37). Specifically, Brennan takes issue with the textual method West used to restore the novel. He argues that because West preserves some of the original Harper editorial changes and introduces a few of his own, the novel cannot be considered a pure restored text. Issues of textual scholarship, however, are tricky and complex, and to date textual scholars have achieved no consensus as to the best method of textual restoration. Most agree, however, that textual restoration is not simply a matter of tossing aside all editorial changes simply because they are not the author’s. Yet, the question remains, how many editorial changes should be retained and why?

Textual editors have tried to answer these questions, but to date have not. Rather, they have arrived at various textual methods of restoration. The method an editor chooses depends on the type of text, the available extant texts, and the intended use of the restored text. The simplest is to create a non-critical edition. This type of restoration does not attempt
to make any critical decisions about editorial or authorial cuts and emendations. Instead, its purpose is “to present a faithful version of a single document, with only minimal textual involvement by the [textual] editor” (Greetham 349). The most “faithful” of the non-critical editions is the facsimile, which is normally used for manuscripts or other documents that “have some specific interest in themselves, either textual or codicological” (349). A facsimile would, for instance, be ideal for studying not only the text but authorial comments written in margins, handwriting style, erasure marks, font and type size, margin size, and other idiosyncrasies of an original manuscript or printed edition. A less “faithful” non-critical approach is the “diplomatic method” or a variation of it. This method does not attempt to photographically re-create a document, but simply to reproduce its text (350). With the exception of perhaps normalizing spelling, punctuation, and usage, the objective of this method is to publish a faithful version of one manuscript, usually the last one the author himself produced or a first edition. The assumption is that an author submits his/her work to an editor ready for publication, and so any editorial changes, with the exception of accidentals, are not in the best interest of the work of art. It is this text that the editor hopes will become the “authoritative” text.

An additional method of textual restoration introduced more recently involves the study of all extant manuscripts and/or editions as a type of unit, emphasizing the process of creating a text rather than the product of the text itself. In this sense, no one text is given priority or “authority” over another. Instead, the focus is on the development of a particular work of art from manuscript to first edition, to second edition, and so on. As Pizer explains: “it is neither the holograph nor the typescript nor the first edition which is of principal interest, but rather the process by which the holograph became the first edition” (Pizer, “Text” 45). In addition to the various texts, the editor provides the reader with indexes listing the cuts and emendations made to each edition. The reader, therefore, has all the tools necessary to make critical decisions about the work’s development and the necessity of editorial alterations in any one edition. In the end, the reader can construct his/her own text.
The more common method of restoration is the creation of a critical edition from the various existing manuscripts, published and unpublished. The aim of this method is to create an authoritative text that “represent[s] as nearly as possible the author’s intentions” (Gaskell 336). The method is commonly referred to in critical circles as the “intentionalist” theory and method, though “intentionalist” does not mean that the critic presumes to know more about the work than the author himself. Rather, the editor must examine each change within the context of the work’s artistic integrity to establish a text that reflects the author’s vision in its best light. In other words, unlike a non-critical edition, a critical edition “demands both criticism and conjecture…” (Greetham 352). West used the intentionalist method in the restoration of Jennie Gerhardt, following guidelines set out by W. W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and G. Thomas Tanselle, all of whom are pioneers in the study of textual editing. These scholars were instrumental in setting the foundation for intentionalist theory and in bringing about significant recognition to the field of textual studies. The guidelines set out by Greg, Bowers, and Tanselle have been adopted by the Center for Editions of American Authors (CEAA), and have been followed by all critical editions endorsed and financially supported by the CEAA. West, however, does not note in the Pennsylvania edition of Jennie Gerhardt whether the text is endorsed by the CEAA.

The intentionalist method is best explained by a brief overview of Greg, Bowers, and Tanselle’s influential works. W. W. Greg’s 1948 essay “The Rationale of Copy-Text” has been, by far, the most important in establishing a ground for intentionalist studies. The purpose of Greg’s essay was to dismantle the popular idea that the most authoritative text is always the last edition published during an author’s life, an “assumption” that “rested on an undocumented (and often undocumentable) theory that it was the normal practice for authors personally to see all editions of their works through the press” (Greetham 333). Instead, he suggests a method of dual authority, wherein the first edition, if available, is used as a starting point. Because “spelling is now recognized as an essential characteristic of an author,” he explains, the first edition should be the most authoritative text for establishing accidentals (Greg 43). In determining
substantive readings, however, the textual scholar should use his/her critical skills because “the choice between substantive readings belongs to the general theory of textual criticism and lies altogether beyond the narrow principle of the copy-text” (48). The result is the formation of an eclectic but stable text:

The copy-text is therefore converted into a critical text by means of a technique of controlled eclecticism whereby the editor, in the light of all the evidence, emends the copy-text by substituting or by supplying new ones himself; he does this where he believes that the alterations represent the author’s intended text more closely than the copy-text readings.… (Gaskell 5)

Fredson Bowers’ theoretical works amplify Greg’s theory and clarify his ideas concerning the use of the first edition as copy-text. Bowers asserts that the purpose of Greg’s theory is not to exclude earlier authorial manuscripts for use as copy-texts, but to keep scholars from assuming that a later edition is more authoritative than an earlier edition. Bowers, like Greg, argues that the copy-text should be that which most closely reproduces the author’s original words, usually one that is “set directly from manuscript, or a later edition that contains corrections or revisions that proceeded from the author” (195). Also, like Greg, he states that once the copy-text is established, the textual scholar should differentiate between accidentals and substantives, constructing “[a]n eclectic text…which combines the superior authority of most of the words of the revised edition with the superior authority of the forms of words of the first edition” (195). G. Thomas Tanselle, a later proponent of Greg and Bowers, explains:

It follows that the editor who chooses the edition closest to the author’s manuscript as his copy-text when he does not have strong reason for choosing a later one, and who follows the reading of that copy-text when he does not have strong reason to believe them erroneous or to believe that a later variant in wording (or, more rarely, in punctuation or spelling) is the author’s—that such an editor is maximizing his chances of incorporating the author’s intended reading in his text. (14)
Dreiser scholars are fortunate that he rarely destroyed any of his drafts, and therefore it is fairly easy to reconstruct the evolution of Jennie Gerhardt from its earliest versions (Pizer, “Text” 42). There are three extant pre-Harper manuscripts of Jennie Gerhardt available to scholars for use as copy-texts. The first is the ur-manuscript, which is the novel in its earliest form—thirty chapters (Riggio, “Dreiser’s Song” 23). The second is what is commonly referred to as the “Fair Copy” document. This is the completed text Dreiser sent to the typist to produce the manuscript eventually sent to Harper for publication: “in its early chapters it incorporates parts of the ur-manuscript and the typescripts of 1901–1902; the bulk of its text, however, is inscribed in black-ink holograph” (West, “Historical” 486). The third text is the Barrett typescript, a carbon-copy of the manuscript sent to Harper for publication (486–487). Although any one of these documents could have served as copy-text, West chose the Barrett typescript document for the restored text because it best reflects the author’s language before the intrusion of outside editorial forces. The copy-text was then compared to the first edition published by Harper in 1911. The comparison reveals that some time during the publication process 16,000 words were cut and just as many emended, thousands more than in Dreiser’s earlier novel, Sister Carrie, first published and then suppressed by Doubleday Page in 1900. Unfortunately, we do not know who made these changes because the plates and proofs are no longer extant. However, we can decipher from letters and other outside documents that Dreiser was not happy with these changes and wanted a great deal of material put back into the novel.

West’s method in establishing the ideal text was to examine the changes made to the copy-text in the context of what he believed was Dreiser’s “active” intention. In discussing the composition of the restored text, West states that he relied on the sense of “intention” as first defined by Tanselle. West states that “active intention is the author’s intention to be seen or understood as acting in a particular way” (487). It is different from programmatic intention, which is the author’s “general plan” to “create something,” and final intention, which is the author’s “intention to make something happen” (487). For the textual scholar and for West, active intention is most important, because, as Tanselle explains, it
“concerns the meanings embodied in the work” (qtd. in West, “Historical” 487). For West,

The aim of this edition is…to…recapture, as nearly as possible, Dreiser’s own active intentions as they existed in the spring of 1911 when he submitted Jennie Gerhardt, through his agent, to Harper and Brothers. Such intentions are seen as extending horizontally throughout the compositional process and achieving a kind of systematic wholeness. (486)

In this sense, West did not feel it imperative to restore all of Dreiser’s original language, only that which constitutes Dreiser’s active intention. Nevertheless, a comparison of the Barrett typescript and the Pennsylvania edition shows that West restored virtually all of Dreiser’s original language, making very few changes of his own. West did include some Harper changes in the recognition that “[a]uthors can delegate intention to editors or amanuenses, and these persons can act in the author’s stead, correcting errors and repairing verbal confusions in ways that are satisfactory and beneficial to the author” (487).

The restored edition of Jennie Gerhardt is, as Brennan states, an eclectic text. However, West argues that “[t]he history of Jennie Gerhardt is so complicated that definitiveness is not possible,” and therefore an eclectic text is the only possible solution (485). As is common in most restored editions, the Pennsylvania edition does provide the reader with an index listing all cuts and emendations made by the Harper editors and the pages on which they appear (or should appear). In this way, the reader can choose to accept or reject West’s critical decisions. As a matter of fact, the reader could even construct an entirely different restored edition from the one West offers.

The critical discussion of which edition is authoritative, the restored edition or the 1911 Harper edition, began with the publication of Jennie Gerhardt: New Essays on the Restored Text (1995). In his review of the book, however, Brennan states that although the essays are useful in their “interchange of ideas, information, and interpretations” concerning the novel, only one of the nineteen essays in the book specifically examines
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exactly how changes made to the original text affect certain thematic concerns. Brennan also notes the absence of editorial criticism, stating that “[s]urprisingly, the collection neither directly defends the Pennsylvania edition nor directly attacks the 1911 edition” (36). He adds that West’s contention that the restored version represents the “dialectical novel” is a generalization that is “repeat[ed] by [a]t least five other contributors… [who] offer little or no textual evidence” (37).

To date, only two essays address specific changes made to Dreiser’s original text and their effects. The first essay, and the one to which Brennan refers, is Susan Albertine’s “Triangulating Desire in Jennie Gerhardt.” In this essay, Albertine examines how editorial cuts alter Dreiser’s women characters and the relations between them. Albertine argues that in the original manuscript Dreiser “uses relations between women to confer power on a man” (65). In the Harper edition, “key phrases indicating Jennie’s womanly power and her closeness to her mother are dropped from the narrative,” and these deletions obscure Dreiser’s point entirely (66). In the latter half of the novel, she states, Dreiser develops a mutual “thoughtfulness” between Letty Pace and Jennie, and he “evidently intended that Letty’s and Jennie’s self-awareness and mutuality should not create antagonisms” (68). The second essay is West’s “Historical Commentary,” published as a part of the Pennsylvania edition of Jennie Gerhardt. This essay examines the effect of more obvious editorial cuts and emendations on the text. Specifically, West points out, the editors cut all profanity and all references to sex, alcohol, and “organized religion.” These cuts, he says, were “an intentional effort by Harper to ‘socialize’ or ‘domesticate’ Dreiser’s novel for public consumption” (442–444). According to West, the most glaring problem is in the revised characterization of Jennie, who loses her place as the central character. As a result, “Lester and his point of view come to dominate the novel” (446). West’s commentary is rather sweeping, and he only cites a few specific cuts and emendations. However, his intent was not to definitively describe how all the editorial changes affected the novel but to give the reader an idea of how several large scale changes altered Dreiser’s manuscript.
The Trouble with Dreiser: Harper and the Editing of Jennie Gerhardt continues the discussions begun by Albertine and West. My methodology for this study was to examine the thousands of changes made to Dreiser’s original manuscript and their effect on character development, unity and coherence of plot, rhetorical style, and thematic concerns already established and those that became clear during the study.

I also examined biographical and autobiographical materials, as well as historical, cultural, and social data, to help establish authorial intent and the external conditions surrounding the novel’s creation, editing, and publication. Once the cuts and emendations were placed within these contexts, clear patterns began to emerge. These patterns suggest the Harper editors deliberately approached Dreiser’s original manuscript with the intention of softening its social and moral content to make it more agreeable to a conservative, genteel reading public. My study shows the precision of these changes and how they work seamlessly and subtly together to blunt Dreiser’s criticism of the wealthy capitalist; society’s understanding and treatment of the poor, the working class, and the immigrant; and traditional notions of motherhood, womanhood, relationships, and the American Dream. The patterns of changes affect every major character, their interaction with their environments, and their relationships with others. The overall result was a blunting of the cultural, moral, and social force of the novel as a whole. The discussions presented in this book will show the kind of damage editors can inflict upon a text when they approach it with a social, moral, and financial agenda.

These discussions will, at the same time, show that once Dreiser’s original language is restored, the novel can stand alongside such great works as Sister Carrie, The Genius, and even An American Tragedy, and that it can add to and perhaps even define critical discussions on class, gender, morality, ethnicity, and the American ideal in Dreiser’s fiction. This is because Jennie Gerhardt, when read in its restored condition, presents the reader with a wider picture of American life than any other Dreiser novel. Unlike the characters in An American Tragedy or
Sister Carrie, whose actions are solely defined by external forces, the characters in Jennie Gerhardt respond to a variety of internal and external stimuli. These different responses, are, in turn, blended with each character’s specific ethnic, financial, social, and cultural background. In the original text, for instance, Lester Kane is sensitive and perceptive, but his upper-class rearing also makes him a cynical, deterministic snob. Although attracted to Jennie’s innate spirituality, he eventually abandons her for a life of wealth and prestige. His father and brother, Archibald and Robert, are also accustomed to great wealth and prestige, and their actions are motivated by their desire to increase their already enormous profit and power. In contrast, Jennie is a romantic mystic who, although tossed and turned by a succession of different circumstances beyond her control, always remains loving toward everyone, even those who abuse her. In the end, although her lover has left her and members of her family have either died or deserted her, she maintains her integrity and openness to others. Jennie’s parents, too, react to their environment in a way that is consistent with their specific ethnic background and economic conditions. These different responses keep Dreiser’s novel from being restricted to one predetermined perspective.

Once the editors completed their cuts and emendations, however, the characters’ responses to their external stimuli become stereotypical, flat, and at times completely unmotivated. Jennie, who is able to find beauty in even the most tragic of circumstances, becomes, in the 1911 text, little more than a woman who, seeking a better life, makes bad decisions and ends up tragically alone, as all immoral women should. Lester rightfully leaves her for a socially acceptable woman, and although he and Jennie are momentarily reunited in the end, Jennie is left unfulfilled, looking only to “an endless reiteration of days” (P418; H431). In the 1911 edition, the wealthy, as represented by the Kanes and Letty Gerald, are less selfish and less egocentric. They are even less wealthy. The poor, on the other hand, as represented by the Gerhardts, are less familial, less moral, less ethnically motivated, and even less poor. Once the gap between the classes is closed, as it is in the 1911 edition, the Kanes become more sympathetic and the Gerhardts less sympathetic.
As a novelist, however, Dreiser was interested in portraying the human condition as it was, and for him this included the world’s beauty as well as its ugliness. Dreiser’s earliest philosophical leanings show him to be continuously contemplating the tension between the beauty and peace inherent in a larger natural order and the ugliness and decay that accompany the circumstances of man’s existence. He reflects in his autobiography *Dawn*, “I have...thought that for all my modest repute as a realist, I seem, to my self-analyzing eyes, somewhat more of a romanticist than a realist” (198). It has been difficult, however, for scholars to reconcile Dreiser’s romantic tendencies with his deep roots in realism and naturalism, and therefore, seeing these elements as odd intrusions into otherwise typical, even ideal, novels of realism and naturalism, have made only passing remarks about them. However, more recent criticism on the restored *Jennie Gerhardt* and the restored *Sister Carrie* argue that Dreiser’s fiction, at least his restored fiction, exhibits strong characteristics of romanticism and naturalism. In other words, Dreiser can be seen as both a romantic and a naturalist. Judith Kucharski, for instance, states that the romantic elements in the restored *Jennie Gerhardt* are not strange anomalies, but representations of “a sensibility that was not an idiosyncratic deviation but that persisted throughout his life” (25). Valerie Ross adds that critics “in search of hopelessness are likely to miss the underlying subtleties and beauties, the knot of interests and emotions that [Dreiser] so brilliantly and painstakingly analyzes in [the restored] *Jennie Gerhardt*” (39). Yoshinobu Hakutani, in his essay on the restored *Sister Carrie*, states that “Dreiser has more affinity with a romantic naturalist like Frank Norris than a realist” and that the restored text reveals that the novel is “less realistic than usually perceived...” (26, 30).

Dreiser, in his original manuscript, expresses the tension he himself felt between the beauty and goodness he saw in a larger natural order and in some persons, and the desperation, greed, selfishness, and poverty that people so often confront and embody. In his original manuscript, Dreiser’s characters are confronted with and respond to these various forces. Thus, the restored novel becomes a rich mixture of romanticism, realism, and naturalism. Kucharski states that it is “the fullest expression
of an idealism and a sensitivity to life that are often ignored but that were central to Dreiser’s thinking” (24). We can only see this “fullest expression” in the restored text, because unlike the 1911 edition, it presents Dreiser’s intricate portrait of the personal social, cultural, moral, and economic complexities and ambiguities of human experience.