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Preface

When in 1991, Renate von Bardeleben identified a Dreiser renaissance in the United States, she could not have foreseen its eventual scope and productivity. The latter is demonstrated by the fact that the five volumes of the Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition which had been published by then have more than tripled in number, that the periodical devoted to Dreiser has transformed from a small-scale newsletter to a major literary journal, and that critical analyses of Dreiser’s life and writings – facilitated by the appearance of new miscellaneous collections, memoirs, and reference works – have accumulated to total more than 1200.

1 See p. 147 of this volume.
6 Though far from complete, the International MLA Bibliography as of 1 April 2010 lists 1203 publications referring to Dreiser in general and 1156 publications under the more specific subject heading.
Engaging Dreiser

Having started to work on Dreiser long before there was any renaissance to speak of, von Bardeleben has played an active part in all these positive developments, for instance as volume editor of A Traveler at Forty (Dreiser Edition, 2005), contributor to the Dreiser Newsletter, Dreiser Studies, and Studies in American Naturalism, and author of entries in reference works such as A Theodore Dreiser Encyclopedia. She has also served on the editorial and advisory boards of both the aforementioned journals and the International Dreiser Society. From the outset interpreting her task as an Americanist as an "interdisciplinary academic endeavor" (Fluck and Claviez ix) – with research interests as diverse as autobiography,7 gender,8 ethnic literature,9 linguistics,10 and translation studies11 – and proceeding from a concept of culture that in its comprehensiveness recalls Clifford Geertz,12 her research has never depended on short-lived methodological fads or fashionable theories.

12 "The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures 5).
loration, intertextuality, and scholarly editing which foreground both the versatility of Dreiser’s extensive oeuvre and its dependence on the literary marketplace.

The strengths of von Bardeleben’s critical work lie in her superior command of the entire Dreiser corpus, her admirable knowledge of world literature, and an exemplary combination of archival research and readings in secondary sources. Always in a dialogue with the best of international scholarship, and fruitfully collating extraliterary facts and their literary manifestations, she often succeeds in revealing subtextual principles, implicit themes, and hidden layers of meaning in the primary materials she examines. Perhaps most importantly, she demonstrates the various ways in which Dreiser’s works were shaped by the interests and constraints of the publishing business of his time. It is certainly no exaggeration to say that the power struggle between author, editor, and publisher, from which so many of Dreiser’s writings inevitably emerged in a truncated form, has rarely been illustrated in such a vivid manner as in von Bardeleben’s studies in the genesis of A Traveler at Forty.\footnote{New studies such as Annemarie Koning Whaley’s The Trouble with Dreiser: Harper and the Editing of Jennie Gerhard (2009) may be interpreted as evidence that von Bardeleben’s example catches on.}

Engaging Dreiser for almost half a century, Renate von Bardeleben has definitely proved that Dreiser is engaging. That she is not alone in being thus fascinated by the multifaceted personality of an author to whom she has devoted much of her life is underlined by the fact that, major biographical endeavors such as Swanson (1965) and Lingeman (1986/90) notwithstanding, biographies on Dreiser continue to be written. A case in point is Jerome Loving’s The Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser, which was published in 2005 by University of California Press.\footnote{New perspectives on the author’s life will hopefully be provided by the “Dean of Dreiser Studies,” Thomas P. Riggio, whose biography on Dreiser is in progress. He also recently completed another biographical project, namely “Theodore Dreiser: America’s Tragic Muse,” a film script for a forthcoming PBS documentary. For details, see list of works cited.} Taken together, the essays collected in this volume not only add to extant scholarship by elucidating underexplored aspects of Dreiser’s life and works but also represent the most comprehensive examination of A Traveler at Forty to date. They also show the organic growth of the biographical, literary, and historical knowledge that went into the first unabridged edition of Dreiser’s travelogue (2005), which may safely be called von Bardeleben’s magnum opus. Should the following pages, in addition to surprising a distinguished Dreiserian on her 70th birthday, inspire old hands at the game as well as up-and-coming researchers to investigate this long-neglected keytext in Dreiser’s oeuvre, this volume will have served its purpose.

A book project such as this one is not possible without incurring many debts which I acknowledge with gratitude and pleasure. For their generous financial support, I wish to thank, in alphabetical order, the Abteilung für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Anglophonie, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Fachbereich Translation-, Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft (School of Translation Science, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies) in Germersheim, especially Klaus Peter Müller, the Fachbereich Translation-, Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft, especially its Dean, Michael Schreiber; the Freundeskreis FTSTK Germersheim e.V. (Friends of the School of Translation Science, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies), especially its Chairwoman, Birgit Menzel; the International Theodore Dreiser Society, especially its President, Roark Mulligan, its Vice-President, Donna Campbell, its Secretary-Treasurer, Gary Totten, and also Keith Newlin for diplomatically negotiating in the background; the President and the Vice-President of the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Georg Krausch and Ulrich Förstermann, as well as the Stabsstelle Forschung & Technologietransfer, especially Petra M. Schwarz and Ulrike Krick, for sponsoring this project within the framework of the university’s internal promotion of research (inner-universitäre Forschungsförderung, “Stufe I”); and the Zentrum für Interculturelle Studien, especially its Speaker, Anton Escher (as well as Alfred Hornung for putting in a good word). I would also like to thank the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien (German Association for American Studies), whose statutes did not allow direct financial support, but whose President, Peter Schneck, Vice-President, Jürgen Wilzewski, and Executive Director, Carmen Birkle, on behalf of the Association wish the author a Happy Birthday and gratefully acknowledge her contribution to the rise of American Studies in Germany.

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