This volume of collected interviews represents the most recent work in the steadily advancing Dreiser Edition project sponsored by the University of Connecticut and the University of Pennsylvania library. The book’s editors are veteran scholars who have written extensively about the Indiana-born author of Sister Carrie (1900) and An American Tragedy (1925). The seventy-four interviews presented here account for the most important of the nearly two hundred that Dreiser gave. They date from 1902 to 1946, the latest published a few months after his death by one of his literary secretaries. Rusch and Pizer have also provided their own excellent historical commentary and textual methodology essays. In addition, the editors have included an exhaustive bibliography of Dreiser interviews, both those reprinted in their book and the others extant but unselected.

A host of newspaper and radio interviewers elicit Dreiser’s comments on a wide range of subjects including influences on his writing, censorship, the arts, American consumerism, the two world wars, Russian communism, leftist politics in the U.S., the role of human sexuality, and Hollywood, among many others. The compilation provides an important addition to the Dreiser record. Read in tandem with a biography such as The Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser by Jerome Loving (2005), this book would equip the curious with a firm grasp of the novelist’s core convictions. The reader also gets a feel for Dreiser’s work environment and personal habits, thanks to many of the interviewers’ recorded impressions. And because they demand unrehearsed and therefore less guarded observations than do other formats, these particular question-and-answer sessions make for fascinating reading. In fact, if the reader assumes the place of the interviewers, the experience simulates an extended conversation with a highly opinionated, sometimes outrageous, but always provocative companion. Moreover, the book delivers valuable first-half-of-the-twentieth-century historical context. Thanks to the editors’ excellent footnotes concerning the events and personalities Dreiser mentions, the milieu in which he operated comes alive. Of particular interest to Hoosier readers will be his scattered remarks about Indiana, both complimentary and critical.

The book will also supply several surprises for those whose notions about Dreiser are confined to common misperceptions. For example, many of the interviewers comment on his generally optimistic outlook
and mostly sunny disposition, a far cry from the dour determinism projected in his novels. Similarly, some readers will be unprepared for the complexity of his thought, which is much more nuanced than widely credited even by his admirers. In addition, the broadly accepted belief that he was programmatically anti-Semitic may undergo some revision. The interviews are sprinkled with laudatory comments about Jewish sensibilities and appreciation of the arts, though his attitude toward Jews did harden after his financial setback in the wake of the Wall Street collapse of 1929. Readers who think successful writers need a settled environment in which to produce will be disabused by the number of times Dreiser moved from apartments to studios to houses and back again, a function of his incessant restlessness.

Finally, some readers will be surprised to discover just how highly regarded Dreiser had become by the 1940s, after the tremendous popular and critical response to An American Tragedy. Nearly all of his interviewers proceeded from the assumption that he was the premier modern American novelist, an assessment that, though seldom broached today, is nonetheless still arguable. And the key to his importance is signaled by a 1907 interview in which he designated the subject matter that would continually absorb him, “the stretching out of the fingers to grasp.” All of Dreiser’s best writing explores the ways in which desire, most often followed by disillusionment, directs our lives.

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The Ohio Hopewell Episode
Paradigm Lost and Paradigm Gained
By A. Martin Byers

The term Hopewell, in its most inclusive sense, refers to a series of regional prehistoric cultures that were situated in the mid-continent of North America and that existed for a few hundred years on either side of year zero of the Common Era. These people were hunters, gatherers, fishers, and horticulturalists who had domesticated several indigenous plant species including sunflower, squash, goosefoot, sumpweed, and, perhaps,