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978-0-521-38714-9 - New Essays on Sister Carrie

Edited by Donald Pizer

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★ The American Novel ★

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Emory Elliott  
University of California, Riverside

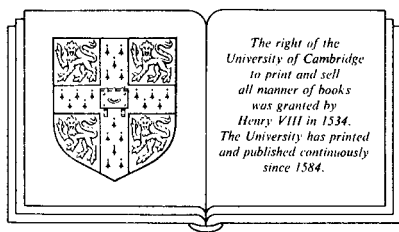
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## Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

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*Series Editor's Preface*

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott  
University of California, Riverside



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## Note on the Text

*Sister Carrie* was published by Doubleday, Page and Company of New York in early November 1900. In later years, Dreiser made only one change in the text of the novel, in 1907, when he revised a passage in Chapter 1 describing Drouet. Several reviewers of the first edition had noted Dreiser's verbatim use in the passage of a portion of one of George Ade's sketches in *Fables in Slang* (1899), and Dreiser was undoubtedly sensitive to the charge of plagiarism. The 1907 revised text served as the text for many later reprintings of *Sister Carrie*, including the popular Modern Library edition of 1932 and the frequent paperback reprints of the novel since the 1950s. In 1981, however, the University of Pennsylvania Press published an edition of *Sister Carrie* based not on Dreiser's 1907 revision of the Doubleday, Page edition but on his handwritten first draft of the novel, a draft which contains many passages later cut by Dreiser and his friend Arthur Henry as well as a different ending. Although the editors of the Pennsylvania Edition claimed that Dreiser's cuts and revisions constitute his self-censorship of the novel in order to assure its publication and that the handwritten draft is therefore the superior work, these claims have met with serious objections, and many scholars have preferred to maintain the revised text of 1907 as the principal text of the novel. The essays in this volume therefore rely primarily on the Norton Critical Edition of *Sister Carrie*, edited by Donald Pizer (New York: Norton, 1970; 2nd ed., 1991), an edition which is based on Dreiser's 1907 revision of the Doubleday, Page edition. However, all students of Dreiser have also acknowledged the importance of the Pennsylvania Edition in making available for critical use Dreiser's uncut prepublication version of the novel. Thus, several of the

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essays in this volume rely occasionally on the Pennsylvania Edition for specific passages not in the Norton Edition; and the essay by Thomas P. Riggio, because of its dependence on the fuller portrayal of Carrie in the Pennsylvania Edition, cites that text primarily. Except for Riggio's essay, therefore, page references to *Sister Carrie* which appear in parentheses after quotations are to the Norton Critical Edition; page references to the novel which refer to the Pennsylvania Edition have "Penn" immediately following the page number. For Riggio's essay, page references in parentheses are to the Pennsylvania Edition; references to the Norton Edition are followed by an "N" within the parentheses.