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The American Novel series provides students of American literature with introductory critical guides to the great works of American literature. Each volume begins with a substantial introduction by a distinguished authority on the text, giving details of the work'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 a group of new essays, each specially commissioned from a leading scholar in the field, which together constitute a forum of interpretative methods and prominent contemporary ideas on the text. There are also helpful guides to further reading. Specifically designed for undergraduates, the series will be a powerful resource for anyone engaged in the critical analysis of major American novels and other important texts.

New Essays on Walden reviews Thoreau's classic from four important contemporary perspectives. Lawrence Buell explains how decisions at Houghton Mifflin (Thoreau's publisher) around the turn of the century combined with promotion of Thoreau by early Thoreauvians, literary critics, and reviewers to turn *Walden* into a classic. Nature writer and ecologist Anne LaBastille writes of her own responses to *Walden*. H. Daniel Peck examines how the pastoralism of *Walden* serves to contain not only the forces of industrialism and commerce in American society but also psychic forces in Thoreau's inner life. Finally Michael Fischer reevaluates *Walden* in the light of modern literary theory, finding that Thoreau's forthrightness in presenting and analyzing his own politics disarms his skeptical critics. In introducing these new essays, Robert F. Sayre provides a masterful short biography of Thoreau, an account of the writing of *Walden*, and a summary of other critical views. The volume will prove useful and appealing to students and professors reading *Walden* for the first time or for the hundredth time.

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★ The American Novel ★

GENERAL EDITOR

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 interpretations has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many works of American literature 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 works 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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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 American literature, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives on these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott
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