ON AT LEAST THREE DIFFERENT OCCASIONS, Theodore Dreiser was confronted with the charge of plagiarism. The most publicized incident was Dorothy Thompson’s accusation that Dreiser had used passages from her articles on the Soviet Union to pad his book, *Dreiser Looks at Russia*.1 Two years earlier, in 1926, Dreiser was accused by Franklin P. Walker of the New York *World* of

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having cribbed part of Sherwood Anderson’s story “Tandy” for his poem, “The Beautiful.” This incident, in turn, once again brought to light the contention that Dreiser had used part of George Ade’s fable “The Two Mandolin Players and the Willing Performer” in one of the early chapters of *Sister Carrie*.

When Ade was asked by the New York *Herald Tribune* if there was any truth to the claim that Dreiser had plagiarized from his fable, he replied:

When the very large and important novel called ‘Sister Carrie’ came out I read it, and I was much amused to discover that Theodore Dreiser had incorporated in a description of one of his important characters the word picture of Cousin Gus which I had outlined in my newspaper story [“The Two Mandolin Players and the Willing Performer”] and which later appeared in a volume called ‘Fables in Slang.’ It is true that for a few paragraphs Mr. Dreiser’s copy for the book tallied very closely with my copy for the little story. When I discovered the resemblance I was not horrified or indignant. I was simply flattered. It warmed me to discover that Mr. Dreiser had found my description suitable for the clothing of one of his characters. . . . Most certainly I do not accuse Mr. Dreiser of plagiarism even by implication or in a spirit of pleasantry.  

The accusation, and Ade’s response, has most recently been discussed in W. A. Swanberg’s *Dreiser*, where Swanberg comments that he finds “no real Dreiser lift from Ade’s work.” But there was a real “lift,” as a look at the first edition of *Sister Carrie* makes clear.

In “The Two Mandolin Players and the Willing Performer” Ade described the tactics which would be employed by cousin Gus if he spotted “a good looker on the train between St. Paul and Chicago”:

He was the Kind of Fellow who would see a Girl twice, and then, upon meeting her the Third Time, he would go up and straighten her Cravat for her, and call her by her First Name.

Put him into a Strange Company—in route to a Picnic—and by the

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8 Swanberg, pp. 313-314.
8 New York *Herald Tribune*, Sept. 9, 1926.  
4 Swanberg, p. 562. In Theodore Dreiser, F. O. Matthiessen has commented that the similarity between the two writers “would appear to be a common indebtedness to American ways” (New York, 1951, p. 67).
8 New York *Herald Tribune*, Sept. 9, 1926.
time the Baskets were unpacked he would have a Blonde all to himself, and she would have traded her Fan for his College Pin.

If a Fair-Looker on the Street happened to glance at him Hard he would run up and seize her by the Hand, and convince her that they had Met. And he always Got Away with it, too.

In a Department Store, while waiting for the Cash Boy to come back with the Change, he would find out the Girl's Name, her Favourite Flower, and where a Letter would reach her.

Upon entering a Parlor Car at St. Paul he would select a Chair next to the Most Promising One in Sight, and ask her if she cared to have the Shade lowered.

Before the Train cleared the Yards he would have the Porter bringing a Foot-Stool for the Lady.

At Hastings he would be asking her if she wanted Something to Read.

At Red Wing he would be telling her that she resembled Maxine Elliott, and showing her his Watch, left to him by his Grandfather, a Prominent Virginian.

At La Crosse he would be reading the Menu Card to her, and telling her how different it is when you have Some One to join you in a Bite.

At Milwaukee he would go out and buy a Bouquet for her, and when they rode into Chicago they would be looking out of the same Window, and he would be arranging for her Baggage with the Transfer Man. After that they would be Old Friends.⁶

In the first edition of Sister Carrie, there is the following passage pertaining to Drouet:

Let him meet with a young woman twice and he would straighten her necktie for her and perhaps address her by her first name. In the great department stores he was at his ease. If he caught the attention of some young woman while waiting for the cash boy to come back with his change, he would find out her name, her favourite flower, where a note would reach her, and perhaps pursue the delicate task of friendship until it proved unpromising, when it would be relinquished. He would do very well with more pretentious women, though the burden of expense was a slight deterrent. Upon entering a parlour car, for instance, he would select a chair next to the most promising bit of femininity and soon enquire if she cared to have the shade lowered. Before the train cleared the yards he would have the porter bring her a footstool. At the next lull in his conversational progress he would find her something to

read, and from then on, by dint of compliment gently insinuated, personal narrative, exaggeration and service, he would win her tolerance, and, mayhap, regard.\footnote{Sister Carrie (New York, 1900), p. 5. I am indebted to Michael Millgate for first calling this change to my attention. It should be noted that the typescript of Sister Carrie, in the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania, even more clearly demonstrates the similarities between Dreiser's description and that of George Ade.}

The similarity between the descriptions of Ade's "swift worker" and Dreiser's "drummer" was noted by a reviewer for the Syracuse Post Standard in February, 1901, who commented: "With a generous adoption of the principle of absorbing whatever you want, wherever you find it, Mr. Dreiser in describing the drummer in the early part of the story, clips a page entire from Mr. Ade's Fables in Slang, namely, the description of the ways of Gus of Milwaukee with the women."\footnote{The review is reprinted in The Stature of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Survey of the Man and His Work, ed. Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro (Bloomington, Ind., 1955), p. 61.} That same year, when he was condensing Sister Carrie for its inclusion in William Heinemann's Dollar Library: A Monthly Series of American Fiction, Dreiser deleted the section detailing Drouet's technique, as well as the paragraph immediately following "A woman should some day . . . ").\footnote{A shortened version of Sister Carrie was published by William Heineman in London in 1901. This edition, with an introduction by Jack Salzman, was reissued by Johnson Reprint Company in the fall of 1968.}

But in 1907, when Sister Carrie was reissued in the United States by B. W. Dodge & Company, the original plates were used, and this time Dreiser rewrote the offending lines, fitting the new ones into the place of the original lines:

Let him meet with a young woman once and he would approach her with an air of kindly familiarity, not unmixed with pleading, which would result in most cases in a tolerant acceptance. If she showed any tendency to coquetry he would be apt to straighten her tie, or if she "took up" with him at all, to call her by her first name. If he visited a department store it was to lounge familiarly over the counter and ask some leading questions. In more exclusive circles, on the train or in waiting stations, he went slower. If some seemingly vulnerable object appeared he was all attention—to pass the compliments of the day, to lead the way to the parlor car, carrying her grip, or, failing that, to take a seat next her with the hope of being able to court her to her destination. Pillows, books, a footstool, the shade lowered; all these figured in the things which he could do. If, when she reached her destination he did not
alight and attend her baggage for her, it was because, in his own estimation, he had signally failed.¹⁰

These lines, written to cover up the apparent plagiarism, have appeared in all subsequent editions of *Sister Carrie* and mark the only significant alteration made in the published American text of Dreiser's first novel.

¹⁰ *Sister Carrie* (New York, 1907), p. 5.