CHAPTER IV

THEMES: ELEMENT OF REALISM AND NATURALISM
IN THE NOVELS OF THEODORE DREISER
Realism and Naturalism are terms which have been used loosely by critics to interpret a work of art. In the words of James T. Farrel, a modern novelist and critic: "various definitions of these words (naturalism and realism) have been given. Some say naturalistic writers have in common a theory of pessimistic determinism... Some hold that naturalism is optimistic. Others believe it pessimistic and will say that if a book has a hopeful ending, it can't be naturalistic. I do not know all the definitions of naturalism, but I have come across enough to know that there are many."\(^1\) Therefore, for our purpose, it will be useful to show the difference between realism and naturalism at the outset, and establish the interrelatedness of these terms.

In the preceding chapter, we have seen that naturalism is only a prolongation of the realistic movement. Generally

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speaking, there is no difference between these two methods of writing. The conclusion that the difference lies in the relative density of detail is baseless because all good novels should deal with experiences of life logically specifying the detail. As Henry James observes in his essay "The Art of fiction" novel writing is above all "the solidity of specification".² Hence, it is difficult to say exactly where realism ends and naturalism starts. Yet, Philip Rahv finds several subtle differences between the two methods and says:

"A more conclusive test, to my mind is its treatment of the relation of the character to background. I would classify as naturalistic that type of realism in which the individual is portrayed not merely as subordinate to his background but as wholly determined by it — that type of realism, in other words, in which the environment displaces its inhabitants in the role of the hero",³ is naturalism.

Thus, the naturalist in contrast to the realist, creates a closed world where there is no possibility of the singular or the unique experience which is the product of a particular social or historical complex. He deals with typical experiences. He analyses characters in such a way as to reduce them to standard types. He adopts an organic structure putting different themes into one novel. He elaborates certain facts and ideas, stresses much on characterization and tells a little story. The

² Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" Realism and Romanticism in Fiction. p. 96.
³ Philip Rahv, "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism" in "Realism and Romanticism in Fiction", p.185.
traditional plot had lost its force in naturalistic novel. According to William R. Thayer, the followers of naturalism unanimously agree that "there shall never be any more plots"\(^4\) essential for the novel.

If at all, naturalism differs from realism, it is on the ground of conventional morality. While dealing with the seamy-side of human life, naturalism verges on immorality but yet there persists a functional morality which is unavoidable from any work of art in literature. Further philosophically naturalism is considered as pessimistic, though not always, at times it is neutral whereas realism theoretically always emphasises on optimism.

Having broadly distinguished between realism and naturalism, it remains now to clarify Dreiser either as a naturalist or a realist, or as influenced by both these modes of writing. Dreiser's position, regarding these two modes has been a subject of controversy. One among his bitterest critics is Stuart P. Sherman, who attacked Dreiser's writings in his essay "The Barbaric naturalism of Theodore Dreiser" making a distinction between realism and naturalism, and called Dreiser a naturalist rather than a realist, whose novels are only a colouring of news. Realism and naturalism are, according to Sherman "representations of life of man in contemporary or nearly


See also, Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen's essay: "The great realists and the empty Story-Tellers" in Realism and Romanticism in Fiction, pp. 161-68.

In this essay Boyesen discusses Zola's Nana and Tolstoy's Anna Karenina where he holds some view like Thayer.
contemporary society, and both are presumably composed of materials within the experience and observation of the author. But a realistic novel is a representation based on a theory of human conduct. If the theory of human conduct is adequate, the representation constitutes an addition to literature and to social history. A naturalistic novel is a representation based upon a theory of animal behaviour. Since a theory of animal behaviour can never be adequate basis for a representation of the life of man in contemporary society, such representation is an artistic blunder. When half of the world attempts to assert such a theory, the other half rises in battle.5 Pointing his attacks at Dreiser's novel Sherman adds: "so one turns with relief from Dreiser's novels to the morning paper".6 But this statement was immediately counter-balanced by the objective and sympathetic criticism of H.L. Mencken in his article "The Dreiser Bugaboo". Mencken reacted by saying that such criticism of Dreiser is quite irrelevant. He asserted:

"He (Dreiser) is really something quite different, and in his moments, something far more stately. His aim is not merely to record, but to translate and understand, the thing he exposes is not the empty event and act, but the endless mystery of which it springs, his pictures have a passionate compassion in them that is hard to separate from poetry...at all events, he is a realist."7

6. Ibid.
Randolph Bourne also defended and wrote that Dreiser can not be classified and condemned as a naturalist out and out in the sense Sherman held him. Supporting Mencken's view Bourne said that Dreiser "is a very human critic of very common life, romantically sensual and poetically realistic, with an artist's vision, a thick, warm feeling for American life". He is a curious artist who writes "about people, about their sexual inclinations, about their dreams, about the homely qualities that make them American. His memories give a picture of the floundering young American that is so typical as to be almost epic. No one has ever pictured this lower middle-class American life so winningly, because no one has had the necessary literary skill with lack of self consciousness. ... He seems to have found himself without losing himself. ... He feels a holy mission to slay the American literary superstition that men and women are not sensual beings".

Thus, Dreiser stands on the confluence of the two streams of the literary movements: Realism and Naturalism. He combines both the trends. Dreiser as a naturalist can not stand without the firm footing of realistic description of the subject-matter. The themes of his novels are common but broad enough for classification, and invariably they belong to both the realistic and naturalistic trends. Therefore, Robert E. Spiller has rightly remarks, "in him (Dreiser) two movements become one".

9. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
Dreiser is considered as the pioneer naturalist and leader of the naturalistic writers in America. His naturalism has been so persistently and for so long been talked about that it has become the standard description of his novels. A close observation of his novels reveal that they have many common features that generally go by the name of naturalism. But at the same time, there are found elements distinctly spiritual and moral as well as the exercise of "free will" on the part of the characters.

As such very few definitions are broad enough to include Dreiser who has been called as a naturalist. Besides this, the American brand of naturalism differs from the European tradition in many important respects and a definition valid for one is not wholly valid for the other.

The theory of literary naturalism postulated by Zola is taken as standard and authentic naturalism. Zola's theory is largely based on science and dispassionate observation of human life as "experimental method" in the novel and drama. Such an objective approach has no room for expressing the author's personal feelings. A character's destiny is determined by heredity and environment. Moreover, virtue and morality are completely alien to the naturalists and man is only a sophisticated animal, a creature of his instincts and passions. On the contrary, Dreiser's characters are more human, having virtues and vices. Sometimes, these characters are attributed his (Dreiser's) personal feelings and often he feels a strong
compassion or a bitter indictment against the social conventions which appear in his novels making a wider gap between Zola's experimental novel and his novels. This "gap" is best observed by C. Walcutt where he says; "just where Zola, for example, would theoretically put most emphasis, i.e. on the extraction of laws about human nature, Dreiser is most uncertain and most sure that no certainty can be attained." In fact, the same is true in the case of Crane and Norris, who were also greatly influenced by Zola but neither of them "strictly speaking should be labelled as a pure naturalist; perhaps the term experimental in naturalism is more descriptive of their aims and methods." This is more true of Dreiser who can hardly be labelled as a naturalist in the same sense as Zola.

What Dreiser and other naturalists have derived from Darwinism and modern science is the conviction that physical, economic and social environment, and not strength of character, nor divine intervention determines the fate of man. In the case of Dreiser, though one can be sure of his outright rejection of any divinity, one is hardly sure if he really does away with strength of character in his novels (Cowperwood and Jennie are examples) or extra natural factors as determining forces. David Maxwell's observations on naturalism, therefore, seem to come nearest to incorporating, though not fully, the scope and nature of Dreiser's naturalism:


"Naturalism was based on philosophical as well as aesthetic postulates. Aesthetically, it demanded scientific accuracy in the fictional use of social backgrounds and the admission into the novel of all aspects of experiences, particularly the sordid and the socially unjust. Philosophically, it depicted man as largely the product of his environment and his heredity: thus from people reared in the violence, dishonesty and squalor of slum life we can expect only violence, dishonesty and dirt. Clearly there is a leaning towards Marxist socialism and the evolutionary theories of the formative effects of environment on species. For the outright naturalist, man was the helpless plaything of impersonal economic forces, and life a struggle for existence in which only the strongest survive. This did not, however, prevent his believing that humanity might somehow rise against these forces and direct them to more beneficent ends."\(^\text{13}\)

Incidentally, it may be pointed out that the purpose of naturalistic novel is social amelioration and naturalistic novelists are impartial critics of the society. Speaking of Zola's novel, Warren Beach remarked: "The most abused of these French Writers is Zola; but it must not be forgotten that he believed in science as a means of diagnosing the ills of society with a view to their eventual cure."\(^\text{14}\) This view is applicable to Dreiser's last novels, especially *An American Tragedy* and

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The Bulwark.  

Now it is obvious that Dreiser's novels represent a type of naturalism which theoretically resembles Zola's naturalism but with a flavour of his own. Dreiser's novels, while moving within a deterministic frame work, are yet not wholly confined to realism and naturalism. Humanitarianism, socialism and spiritualism appear in his novels, making it difficult to classify him. To understand Dreiser's novels and pursue the working literary trends (realism and naturalism) which he followed, we can divide his novels as belonging to "four distinct stages".  

Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt are the two novels of the first stage. If the general literary trend is to be pursued, these two novels are realistic; but the characterization and the final philosophy of life which emerges from these two novels are naturalistic. Both the novels show purposelessness of life, poverty, starvation and destitution. The protagonists of both the novels are fettered by their environment and biological impulses; but nevertheless they lived upto life. Dreiser challenged the social conventions and ethical codes, and the overall view of these two novels shows Dreiser's unconscious surrender to naturalism.

15. This view is also maintained by George W. Mayer in his article "The original social purpose of the Naturalistic novel" Sewanee Review, Vol. 50, October, 1942, pp. 563-570.

The novels of the second stage are more naturalistic than all of his novels. *The Financier*, *The Titan* and *The Genius* belong to this stage. Dreiser entertains the idea of "Darwinian superman". His reading of Nietzsche's philosophy gave him the idea of superman like Frank Algernon Cowperwood and Eugene Witla. Both the supermen dominated these novels and have the quality of a naturalistic hero (according to Zola's theory); but in the long run, they experience the futility of life, and the inadequacy of conventional morality which governs society. They did master their world (one in the world of business and finance, and the other in the world of arts and letters) by showing fortitude of their will to some extent.

*An American Tragedy* is the only novel, belonging to the third stage. This novel shows Dreiser's conversion to socialistic realism and philosophically he provides social determinism. Here the ideas that dominated in the first stage remain the same, as Charles Child Walcutt says "but instead of advocating individual anarchy, as he tended to do under the agies of Nietzsche, he has come to believe that something can be accomplished toward the amelioration of social evil if men will unite in a concerted attack upon those evils".17 Dreiser's naturalism takes the form of socialism.

*The Stoic*, though a part of the Cowperwood Trilogy, appears in the final stage along with *The Bulwark*. These two novels were pre-conceived earlier, but due to Dreiser's social preoccupations and lack of time, they were put off for a long

time till the last years of his life. Here, in this stage, Dreiser the realist and the naturalist becomes a mystic dealing with oriental philosophy, Yoga and "nirvana". Spiritualism becomes the main theme of these novels. He prescribes religion and religious belief as panaceas for all evils. A Character like Solon Barnes loses the power of his "Will" and Dreiser again returns to cosmic determinism from mechanistic determinism. Naturalism is liquidated by firm faith in spiritualism.

Dreiser's novels are "Wellsprings of life" and human actions. He takes American culture and experiences as the subject matter of his novels. American culture is based on the "national myth" of the Frontier. This myth created the belief of an ideal world where divinity reigned supreme and man possessed free-will. But later on, with the rise of science, the old agrarian civilization changed into modern merchantile civilization, and industrialization and urbanization changed the world view of the people. They lost faith in the "old myth" of hope and faith, and added a conviction of destiny and desire for material prosperity to it. Gradually the myth was reduced into a form which came to be called the "American Dream." It is a dream of success, of desire for power and material prosperity. Dreiser as a realist sees many facets of this dream in his novels as well as in his plays. As a journalist he chronicles contemporary American society and life, as he saw it. Therefore, the "American Dream" has become the all pervasive

and all pervading theme of his novels. His treatment of this theme and his compassion for his characters who are failures in the pursuit of happiness, are mistaken by critics who alleged that Dreiser glorifies materialism through them. On the other hand John J. McAleer says "it is quite otherwise, he (Dreiser) sought consistently, through his tragic protagonists, to condemn the American Dream as destructive illusion." 19 Dreiser has also been criticised as a "disillusioned artist" who is incapable of articulating his views. But, Dreiser stands much above these criticisms.

Being born in the midwest region, Dreiser had a chance to observe the scope and manner of the "American Dream". Though poverty kept him isolated from active participation in it, he could sense its inadequacies as well as its grandeur. He accepts as a polemicist consistently and logically both the grandeur and inadequacies of this dream to arrive at an objective opinion which is a distinct realistic characteristic. Along with this theme of "American Dream", themes like love, marriage, money, sex, nature and chemico-mechanistic philosophy are recurrent themes of his novels. Dealing with this vast range of social and conventional themes, he becomes a partisan of the causes, and loses his "objectivity" commenting on them. At times, the immensity of the theme baffles him to propound a sound philosophy of life. He can be condoned in the words of Eliseo Vivas:

"He has a deep sense of dramatic movement of human life and a knowledge of its dark urges and baffled quality. He also

has a wide range of vision and a deep sense of the relation of man to the cosmos ... The mystery of the universe, the puzzle of destiny haunts him, and he, more than any of his contemporaries has responded to the need to relate the haunting sense of puzzlement and mystery to the human drama. No other American novelist of his generation has so persistently endeavoured to look at men under the form of eternity".  

The American Dream of material success and desire for money is the central theme of Dreiser's first novel *Sister Carrie*. Carrie Meeber, the heroine and the chief character of the novel feels urges of the "American Dream", and leaves the country-side for Chicago and New York City, meets Charles Drouet, a drummer, first, then Hurstwood, who are "ambassadors" of American Dream to her. She tries to rise up the social ladder by bartering sex among them. She sees in Hurstwood more than in Drouet a man of her "Dream" of success and leaves Drouet for Hurstwood. Both the lovers surrender to her their wealth and position only for "love" and she surrenders to them only for "success", to rise upto her sweet dream. Finally she comes out successful defeating both the lovers. She achieves fame and comfort while the lovers, especially Hurstwood loses his wealth, social position, pride and finally his life.

"Love", 21 here, is reduced to mere sexuality and the urges of sex are like "chemism". Men and women are magnetically attracted to each other only to gratify sexual desire. Traditional passionate love is examined scientifically as a chemical reaction where "money" is a catalytic agent to enhance the process of love-making. Carrie's desire for money creates desire for sex in Drouet and Hurstwood. Conventional marriage is dealt in passing showing divorce of Mr. and Mrs. Hurstwood. Thus, these common themes are made uncommon by Dreiser's realistic observations and naturalistic treatment.

In the first-half of the novel, Dreiser presents Carrie's idea of success and happiness something as purely materialistic. Money, she considers the key to success. It is her lack of money which tortures her most. She dreams of money and "her imagination trod a very narrow round, always winding up at points which concerned money, looks, clothes or enjoyment." 22

Carrie finds beauty in money. She, like many others of her age, has hardly any idea of the significance of money: "money: something everybody else has and I must get, would have expressed her understanding of it thoroughly." 23 This is the

21. Dreiser's concept of love is expressed in his autobiography where he says, "By love I do not mean that poetic abstraction celebrated by the religionist—devoid of sex—nor yet the guttural sensuality understood by the materialist. My dreams were blend of each: the diaphanous radiance of the morning, plus a suggestion of the dark, harsh sensuality of the Lecher and the libertine—a suggestion merely, none the less a potent one which gave to all beauty and all reality a meaning". Theodore Dreiser, Dawn, p. 210.


23. Ibid., p. 59.
conventional idea on the meaning and significance of money. But "the true meaning of money", Dreiser writes, "yet remains to be popularly explained and comprehended. When each individual realizes for himself that this thing primarily stands for and should only he accepted as a moral due — that it should be paid out as honestly stored energy, and not as a usurped privilege — many of our social, religious and political troubles would have permanently passed". 24 Here Dreiser implicitly tells that Carrie, would not have been lured by money, if money would have equally shared among all. Therefore, Carrie being ignorant and young, is not responsible in desiring money, rather the society or the social status made her so.

Along with Carrie, Drouet and Hurstwood also crave for money. They buy Carrie by money and Carrie sells herself for money to fulfill her desire for success. Hurstwood makes much of it, being a successful businessman, but in the end of the novel, it is only lack of money that sends him to the street begging. Thus, money is a means for a better living but it is not all. This realization comes through Carrie in the end when she finds herself with profusion of money and prosperity for which she yearned all the years until she becomes a successful actress, a matinee idol. Material prosperity and happiness eluded her, she becomes restless and dissatisfied. Dreiser loses his objectivity as a realist and gives his authorial comment:

24. *Sister Carrie*, p. 59
"Oh, Carrie, Carrie! oh! blind strivings of the human heart! onward, onward, it saith, and where a beauty leads there it follows... Know, then, that for you is neither surfeit, nor content. In your rocking chair by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel."25

These major themes of the novel are emphasised by one sentence: "the vagaries of fortune are indeed curious."26. It is the fortune's wheel which rises and falls determining man's position in the society. Carrie's rise is relatively portrayed through Hurstwood's fall. Poverty and material prosperity point to one end, that is unhappiness and disillusionment. Here Dreiser as a realist observes the two extreme poles of life.

*Sister Carrie* is taken as a landmark in American naturalistic fiction. It shows more thoroughly the implication of literary naturalism than any other novel which came out at the beginning of twentieth century. When Dreiser began this novel, he had not thought about what it would be and which method he would adopt in building up the novel. As Oscar Cargil has put it, "like life itself, it is deterministic to a determinist and moral to a moralist. ...It is an unusual Naturalistic novel which leaves the reader as free to draw his conclusions from the facts as does Sister Carrie."27

26. Ibid.
In this novel, Dreiser presents contemporary American life as truthfully as he had observed it. He deals with the life of "average" men and women, and takes a "low middle class" girl as protagonist which is a characteristic feature of a realistic novel. As a journalist, he records events like Brookyleen Trolleyman's strike and New York theatrical society which are real events in the American history of that time. It is also based on the elopement and subsequent history of his sister, Emma, who had eloped with a much older person named Hopkins. More or less, Dreiser's own experiences are translated into this novel. This accounts for the absence of any conventional plot conflict which a modern realistic novel demands for.

His naturalism is revealed in the portrayal of characters. All the characters are portrayed in such a manner that, it seems, they are at the mercy of incomprehensible forces within and without, over which they have little control. A sense of fatalism prevails throughout the novel as in those of Thomas Hardy's which he had read and admired greatly. Carrie is a "lone figure in a tossing thoughtless sea",28 "a soldier of fortune", a victim of her instincts and heredity on the one hand and the environment on the other. The responsibility of Carrie's actions are partly attributed to "forces wholly superman."29 But, yet, Dreiser is not a hard and fast mechanical determinist in his novel. Carrie's experiences in Chicago, her sufferings and her success reveal a depth of human consciousness

29. Ibid., p. 2.
and will power which raise her above the level of a helpless puppet. In the case of Hurstwood, Dreiser does not entirely deny his responsibility for the act of his theft from the safe. Hurstwood's hesitation, his troubled state of mind, indecision, the prolonged debate whether he should steal or not, are dramatic expressions of the conflict in his mind. Dreiser gives a scientific explanation for Hurstwood's mental condition:

"Constant comparison between his old state and his new showed a balance for the worse, which produced a constant state of gloom or, at least, depression. Now, it has been shown experimentally that a constantly subdued frame of mind produces certain poisons in the blood, called Katastates, just as various feelings of pleasure and delight produce helpful chemicals called anastates. The poisons generated by remorse inveigh against the system, and eventually produce marked physical deterioration. To these Hurstwood was subject."\(^\text{30}\)

In fact, Hurstwood's chemical physiology is responsible for the act of theft. But, nevertheless it is evident that the forces beyond this internal force act on him. Dreiser, like Hardy, adds the chance factor to it: if the safe would not have clicked-shut after the theft, he would have put the money in the safe.

Dreiser here does not deny or accept the existence of absolute morality. He says: "for all the liberal analysis of Spencer and our modern naturalistic philosophers, we have an

\(^{30}\) Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 299.
infantile perception of morals. There is more to the subject than mere conformity to the law of evolution. It is yet deeper than conformity to things of the earth alone. It is more evolved than we, as yet perceive. Answer, first why the heart thrills, explain wherefore some plaintive note goes wondering about the world, undying, make clear the rose's subtle alchemy evolving its ruddy lamp in light and rain. In the essence of these facts lie the first principles of morals.  

Thus, he gives only a Spencerian analysis of moral without providing a complete sense of what it means. Later on, from his comments on Hurstwood's state of mind after taking money from the safe, it seems that he accepts existence of absolute morality:

"Hurstwood could not bring himself to act definitely. He wanted to think about it — to ponder over it, to decide whether it were best... yet he wavered. He did not know what evil might result from it to him — how soon he might come to grief. The true ethics of the situation never once occurred to him, and he never would have, under any circumstances."

Dreiser thus implies that in Hurstwood's mind there definitely was an awareness of an ethical principle being involved in the situation. Another passage, in this context expresses the view that man has an inborn moral sense which operates in his mind in such crucial situations:

"To those who have never wavered in conscience, the predicament of the individual whose mind is less strongly

32. Ibid., p. 240.
constituted and who trembles in the balance between duty and desire is scarcely appreciable, unless graphically portrayed. Those who have never heard that solemn voice of the ghostly clock which ticks with awful distinctness, "thou shalt", thou shalt not",...are in no position to judge. Not alone in sensitive, highly organised natures is such a mental conflict possible. The dullest specimen of humanity, when drawn by desire toward evil is recalled by a sense of right, which is proportionate in power and strength to his evil tendency. We must remember that it may not be a knowledge of right, for no knowledge of right is predicated of the animal's instinctive recoil at evil. Men are still led by instinct before they are regulated by knowledge. It is instinct which recalls the criminal — it is instinct (where highly organised reasoning is absent) which gives the criminal his feeling of danger, his fear of wrong."\(^{33}\)

Carrie like Hurstwood also takes a semi-moral decision before going to live with Drouet. Her decision led Dreiser to comment and the passage reveals Dreiser's insight into naturalism:

"Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilization is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason. On the tiger no

\(^{33}\) Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 239.
responsibility rests. We see him aligned by nature with the forces of life — he is born into their keeping and without thought he is protected. We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too near an approach to free-will, his free-will not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance. He is becoming too wise to hearken always to instincts and desires; he is still too weak to always prevail against them. As a beast, the force of life aligned him with them; as a man he has not yet wholly learned to align himself with the forces. In this intermediate stage he wavers — neither drawn in harmony with nature by his instincts nor yet wisely putting himself into harmony by his own free-will. He is even as a wisp in the wind, moved by every breath of passion, acting now by his will and now by his instincts, erring with one, only to retrieve (sic) by the other, falling by one, only to rise by the other — a creature of incalculable variability. We have consolation of knowing that evolution is ever in action, that the ideal is a light that can not fail. He will not forever balance thus between good and evil. Where this jungle of free-will and instinct shall have been adjusted, when perfect understanding has given the former the power to replace the latter entirely, man will no longer vary. The needle of understanding will yet point steadfast and unwavering to the distant pole of truth."^34

This passage reveals Dreiser's notion of free-will, his view of complexity of human beings and their essential

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34. Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 70.
differences from the animal species. The passage also reveals Dreiser's concept of choice and free-will. Commenting on this particular passage a recent critic has pointed out that "characters deliberate their aims and means as though they were absolutely free...and they have ethical implications since they invariably affect the lives of other people," and suggests that even in Carrie, "negative choices must not be mistaken for no choices".  

Thus, in many respects the first novel is representative of Dreiser's naturalism.

Jennie Gerhardt, the second novel of Dreiser, once again deals with the same theme of desire for success and material prosperity. Jennie the poor, young girl is swayed and beaten-down by the forces of life. No doubt, perpetual poverty prepares her to be victimised by her desire for money and material prosperity; but at the same time she shows her courageous willingness to sacrifice herself for the good of his family and friends. She is like Carrie, she escapes from physical miseries of the struggle for existence only to taste the worse miseries of the struggle for happiness. While Carrie is "self seeking"—makes her fortune by defeating others; Jennie is "self-giving"—sacrifices all that little life has given her. Despite this difference, both the novels point to the same thematic end — the maddening search for happiness. Carrie rocks on her chair with prosperity, yet unsatisfied, seeks for real happiness;

likewise, Jennie stands by the "iron grating", losing all by
Lester's death and is waiting for the happy days to come.

Jennie Gerhardt, daughter of a poverty-stricken but
religiously Lutheran father, works in a local hotel in Columbus,
with her kind-hearted, all-forgiving mother. Eventually, she
meets Senator Brander who feels pity for an affecting
combination of beauty and poverty in her, loves her, makes her
pregnant and dies. Jennie falls to poverty till Lester Kane
comes to her rescue. She spends the better part of her life
with Lester. But Lester leaves her for the inheritance of his
parental property and marries Letty Pace. Jennie loses vesta
and adopts a daughter and a son. Later on, Lester reconciles
with her in his illness. She nurses him until death and
finally is left alone to sojourn over life — how inscrutable
its ways are.

Thus, the novel deals with the common theme of love,
mARRage, poverty and search for happiness.

Love, if it is not all of the spirit, then it binds
lover and beloved in this novel with an inextricable bond.
Here Dreiser sees two sides of love — physical and spiritual.
Senator Brander finds some strange gentleness and natural
potentiality in Jennie and loves her putting his senatorial
dignity aside. He admires her "for all her soft girlishness"
and he wonders "how he could help her without offending". 36

36. Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt (New York: Dell

All future references to the novel are from
the same edition.
He loves Jennie out of his generosity. The outcome of their "love" is "simply a more sympathetic relationship between them". 37 Though Brander's love turns into sexuality, he has no intention to trifle with "love".

Like Brander, Lester Kane is also irresistibly dragged towards Jennie sexually. But right from their first meeting, Dreiser suggests that there exists between them some "unaccountable affinity and compulsion towards each other". After meeting Jennie for the first time, when "a flash that was hypnotic ... passed between them", the next sentence that Lester utters is: "you belong to me. I've been looking for you". 38 His love is "based solidly on a big natural foundation, but rising to a plane of genuine spiritual affinity". 39 Towards the end, Lester on his death bed confesses his love for Jennie is spiritual. Lester says, "I loved you. I love you now ... It seems strange, but you are the only woman I ever did love truly. We should never have parted". 40

Jennie presents love's other aspects, as a daughter, as a sister and as a mother. Her love for her brothers and sisters let her surrender to Brander, and later to Lester. Her love for Vesta is incomparable. She epitomizes love and is loved by everyone till the end of her life. Thus, love as a traditional theme, finds a realistic treatment in Dreiser's novel.

38. Ibid., p. 134.
39. Ibid., p. 204.
40. Ibid., p. 405.
'Marriage' here is taken as a mere formality, to be put off for tomorrow. It is because of the conventional society and economic disparity. Bander assures marriage to Jennie and dies making it uncertain. But for Lester marriage is a necessity as much as wealth and social recognition. When he proposed to marry Jennie, he was threatened by social convention and economic insecurity. His father threatened him that if he marries Jennie, its penalty will be poverty and social ostracism; if he leaves her without marriage, he will be rewarded with wealth and everything for success in life. Therefore, Lester keeps his marriage with Jennie in abeyance and marries Letty Pace to gain material prosperity. Marriage as a sanctimonious social institution loses its value in the society where materialism counts much and this shows Dreiser's realistic approach to conventional themes.  

Money is again, as we find in the case of Carrie, a prime attraction for Jennie in the early stages of the novel. As a poor girl, "there lay deep seated in her a conscious deprecation of poverty and a shame of having to own any need." She often wonders: "Isn't it fine to be rich?, and "how beautiful life must be for the rich".

42. Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 37.
43. Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 21.
Money and the effects of unjust social conventions are responsible for Jennie's tragedy. Dreiser repeatedly makes it clear that it is because of poverty and poverty alone that Jennie compromises her position with both Brander and Lester. Her explanation to Lester for her surrender to Brander is: "We were so terribly poor". This is fully borne out by the events in the novel. Though Lester's love for Jennie was based on a solid foundation of "spiritual affinity", "a love on a higher and sublime plane" was thwarted by social conventions. Dreiser makes a realistic explanation in this regard:

"We live in an age in which the impact of materialized forces is well-nigh irresistible; the spiritual nature is overwhelmed by the shock. The tremendous and complicated development of our material civilization, the multiplicity and variety of our social forms, the depth, subtlety, and sophistry of our imaginative impressions, gathered, re-multiplied, and disseminated by such agencies as the railroad, the express and the post office, the telephone, the telegraph, the newspaper, and, in short, the whole machinery of social intercourse—these elements of existence combine to produce what may be termed a kaleidoscopic glitter, a dazzling and confusing phantasmagoria of life that wearies and stultifies the mental and moral nature. It induces a sort of intellectual fatigue through which we see ranks of the victims of insomnia, melancholia, and insanity constantly recruited. Our modern brain-pan does not seem capable.

44. Jennie Gerhardt, p. 212.
45. Ibid., p. 247.
as yet of receiving, sorting, and storing the vast army of facts and impressions which present themselves daily. The white light of publicity is too white. We are weighed upon by too many things. It is as if the wisdom of the infinite were struggling to beat itself into finite and cup-big minds.  

Here in this passage Dreiser reveals the dark aspects of modern city life and its crushing pressures upon individuals. Lester Kane feels the "moral panic" of his age. He fails to over-ride social conventions as he is reared up in the conventional ideas of wealth and position where love has but little value, and the force of social convention and money ultimately comes out victorious. Wealth and position act as a "great fence, a wall which divided her (Jennie) eternally from her beloved." Jennie finds her life a "patch-work of conditions, made and affected by things which had found her unfit. She had evidently been born to yield, not seek."  

For her tragedy, it is not so much the cosmic forces which are to blame as man-made social conventions.

Thus, Dreiser as a naturalist provides social determinism as a determining factor of life of his characters.

It must also be noted that while Dreiser certainly shows the force of social and biological factors on human beings and their actions, he does not at the same time deny human choice and free-will altogether. Lester Kane tries to justify his

46. Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 137.
47. Ibid., p. 412.
action in not marrying Jennie by telling her that "the
individual doesn't count much in the situation. I do not know
whether you see what I am driving at, but all of us are more
or less Pawns. We're moved about like chess men by circumstances
over which we have no control." But Lester himself is not
sure of it and suffers from, as Dreiser describes, "that painful
sense of unfairness which comes to one who knows that he is
making a sacrifice of the virtues—kindness, loyalty, affection—
to policy." Again, Lester thinks that it is he, who is
responsible for Jennie's misery. Dreiser makes him feel like
a man having freewill: "Worst of all, his deed could not be
excused on the grounds of necessity. He could have lived on
ten thousand a year, he could have done without the million and
more which was now his. He could have done without the society,
the pleasures of which had always been a lure. He could have
but he had not, and he had complicated it all with the thought
of another woman."

Such a moral consciousness in Lester's mind raises him
to the level of a tragic character than a mere naturalistic one.

Again we see that absolute values like virtue, sacrifice,
love and sympathy are accepted in this novel. Naturalistic
characters ought to have animality, selfishness and malice.
But Jennie, the central character of the novel, is far away from
the characteristics of a naturalistic character. She is the
very embodiment of nature. She impresses all by her selflessness,

49. Ibid., p. 356.
50. Ibid., p. 361.
sacrifice and magnanimity. Her virtue scarcely receives due recognition in the materialistic society. Dreiser writes:

"The world into which Jennie was thus unduly thrust forth was that in which virtue has always vainly struggled since time immemorial, for virtue is the wishing well and the doing well unto others. Virtue is that quality of generosity which offers itself willingly for another's service, and, being this, it is held by society to be nearly worthless. Sell yourself cheaply and you shall be used lightly and trampled under foot. Hold yourself dearly, however unworthily, and you will be respected. Society, in the mass, lacks woefully in the matter of discrimination. ..."

Jennie had not sought to hold herself dear. Innate feeling in her made for self-sacrifice. She could not be readily corrupted by the world's selfish lessons on how to preserve oneself from the evil to come.\textsuperscript{51}

This may not be true of man in general but it is certainly within the reach of human beings, who believe in nature, and Jennie proves it by her affinity toward nature. She seeks resort in nature at the moment of her predicament. Dreiser like a pantheist says:

"It is in such supreme moments that growth is greatest. It comes as (sic) with a vast surge, this feeling of strength and sufficiency. We may still tremble, the fear of doing

\textsuperscript{51} Jennie Gerhardt, p. 99.
wretchedly may linger, but we grow. Flashes of inspiration come to guide the soul. In nature there is no outside. When we are cast from a group or a condition we have still the companionship of all that is. Nature is not ungenerous. Its winds and stars are fellows with you. Let the soul be but gentle and receptive, and this vast truth will come home—not in set phrases, perhaps, but as feeling, a comfort, which, after all, is the last essence of knowledge. In the universe peace is wisdom."

Here Dreiser ceases to be a naturalist as the term is generally understood. If it is naturalism, it is the naturalism of W. Wordsworth asserting the peace and harmony that exists between man and nature.

Towards the end of the novel, Dreiser's ambivalent views on life is revealed in two passages wherein he sums up the outlook on life of his chief protagonist. About Lester Kane, he writes:

"The truth was that Lester, in addition to becoming a little phlegmatic, was becoming decidedly critical in his outlook on life. He could not make out what it was all about. In distant ages a queer thing had come to pass. There had started on its way in the form of evolution a minute cellular organism which had apparently reproduced itself by division, had early learned to combine itself with others, to organize itself into bodies, strange, forms of fish, animals and birds,

and had finally learned to organize itself into man. Man, on his part, composed as he was of self-organizing cells, was pushing himself forward into comfort and different aspects of existence by means of union and organization with other men. Why? Heaven only knew?...why should be complain, why worry, why speculate? — the world was going steadily forward of its own volition, whether he would or not."53 Thus, Lester is pragmatic and rational in his outlook, and he is the last man to believe in "the one divine, far-off event of the poet."54 Above all he is a sceptic.

Jennie, on the other hand, though of "no fixed conclusion as to the meaning of life," and despite all her sufferings, bore no bitterness towards life. She accepts life as it is. She has a "feeling that the world moved in some strange, unstable way...was it blind chance or was there some guiding intelligence — a God? Almost inspite of herself she felt there must be something — a higher power which produced all the beautiful things — the flowers, the stars, the trees, the grass. Nature was so beautiful! If at times life seemed cruel, yet this beauty still persisted."55

Thus, Dreiser wavers in propounding a sound philosophy of naturalism in Jennie Gerhardt. Taking an over-all view of the novel, Jennie Gerhardt is not so much a naturalistic novel as a novel which powerfully portrays the force of social and economic factors, rather than cosmic, in determining and directing the course of our lives. In the process of showing

54. Ibid., p. 390.
55. Ibid., p. 390.
this, Dreiser does not deny the existence of free-will and of choice. Even absolute values are accepted. Of course, blind chance as a controlling power in the world is also to be found, but man, in this novel is less a helpless victim of external forces and internal drives.

The two novels, The Financier and The Titan, which followed the publication of Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt are, however, by the consent of most Dreiser critics, the most naturalistic. Of all his novels, these two are certainly most in the tradition of literary naturalism in its doctrinaire aspects as they portray the ruthless world of business and high finance where only the strong and the fittest can hope to survive. These two novels are a departure from Dreiser's earlier practice. He is no longer writing his own experiences, nor depends on his family history to give him his materials. Dreiser, like most of the realists and naturalists of his time, followed the "method of documentation" for the materials of these novels — "the Cowperwood Trilogy". The trilogy is based largely on the real life of a man, Charles T. Yerkes, the traction magnet of Chicago, New York, and London. Dreiser had to undertake extensive research work including two visits to Europe to be able to depict Yerkes' life truthfully. He has traced with minute detail and almost photographic accuracy the course of American socio-economic development and the life of a typical and interesting businessman, his love for power and women.

Frank Cowperwood is the fictional name of C.T. Yerkes. 56

The Financier is one of the best business novels ever written in America. Initially Dreiser conceived The Financier as a trilogy of that name, but in revision he made it three separate books — The Financier, The Titan and The Stoic. The Titan was the immediate successor of The Financier, but The Stoic was left to his creative workshop yet to be born just before his death, to sing the "Swan's song" to his artistic career. In this projected Trilogy Dreiser made an attempt to create an "American business epic". Thematically, it is an extreme emphasis on the American dream of success, an unceasing struggle for power and beauty, to prosper materially. Commenting on the thematic aspect of the trilogy Stuart P. Sherman says: "He (Dreiser) finds for example, a subject in the career of an American captain of industry, thinly disguised under the name of Frank Cowperwood. He has two things to tell us about Cowperwood: that he has a rapacious appetite for money and that he has a rapacious appetite for women ... a sort of huge club — sandwich composed of slices of business alternating with erotic episodes — how Frank Cowperwood made money and captivated women in London". 57 Though the comment is a disparaging one, it hods truth. The major theme of business is alternatively intertwined with the love affairs of Cowperwood where politics acts as a balancing factor. Thus, the trilogy verges on complexity thematically.

Frank Cowperwood, the son of a Philadelphia banker is mentally alert and physically a handsome boy. He grows up and

proves himself to be a natural leader, a fearless fighter and
instinctively pragmatic. His world view was established
easily when he was a boy of ten, he observed an aquarium tank
in the nearby fish-market where a squid was devoured by a
Lobster. He thinks:

"That's the way it has to be, I guess", he commented
to himself. 'The squid waasn't quick enough. He didn't have
anything to feed on.' ...The squid couldn't kill the Lobster —
he had no weapon. The Lobster could kill the squid — he was
heavily armed. ...What was the result to be? What else could
it be? "He didn't have a chance",...

'...How is life organized? ' Things lived on each
other — that was it. Lobsters lived on squids and other things.
What lived on Lobsters? Men of course! Sure that was it! And
what lived on men? He asked himself. Was it other man? Wild
animals lived on men. And there were Indians and Cannibals. And
some men were killed by storms and accidents. He was not so
sure about men living on men yet, but men did kill each other.
How about wars and street fights and mobs?"  

Thus, Cowperwood derived a less on from this episode
which is simple and direct: if life must feed on life, better
to be an armed Lobster than a defenceless squid. It made a
lasting impression on his mind and later on, it became the
philosophy of his life. Cowperwood like the Lobster defeated  


All subsequent references to the novel in the text are
to this edition.
others ruthlessly being heavily armed with money and power. He knew the secret of existence that it is the "fittest" who can "survive" in life's "struggle".

Through this symbolic episode Dreiser has condensed major themes of the Cowperwood trilogy.

Frank takes up his first business deal at the age of thirteen when he bids an auction for cases of soap and gets a profit of about hundred percent. He finds that his natural talent is for business and finance. He leaves school and tries to enter into the business world with a plea that:

"Time and chance happened to all men. Look at the squid, he had seen. Was it its fault that it had been put in the tank with the Lobster with no chance ultimately of saving its life? Some great curious force was at work here throwing vast masses of people into life; and they could not all succeed. Some had to fail — many. Only a few could lead. He wondered about himself — whether he was born to lead. He had strength, health, joy in life..." 59

Assuming such a view about business and success he goes to work for the grain — and commission house of Henry Waterman and company at the age of seventeen. There he proves his talent almost at once, learns rapidly the principles which govern success in the brokerage business and at christmas time he gets a bonus of five hundred dollars as a reward. Until this time Frank has been serving without pay as an apprentice.

Now, waterman company offers him a weekly salary of twenty dollars. But Frank soon leaves the job for a better post in Tighe and Company. He serves as a clerk on the floor of the stock exchange and in this capacity he learns the mechanism of stock market. He is now twenty years old. His uncle Seneca Davis dies and leaves him a bequest of fifteen thousand dollars. Frank feels self-sufficient financially and enters into independent business. Till this stage, we are enraptured by the theme of business and development of Frank as a young businessman. Dreiser is almost silent about Frank's love affairs. To show the natural growth of Cowperwood, Dreiser describes Frank's "love" which runs parallel to the theme of "business".

When Frank establishes himself financially secure, his attention turns toward women. Lillian Semple, the widowed wife of Alfred Semple, by her "natural grace" of a wife, catches Frank's eye. Inspite of her five years seniority in age, Frank considers her to be his wife — a suitable match for a rising businessman like him. His judgement of women says Dreiser, "was largely from the artistic stand point from the beginning. Powerfully passionate in a material way, not only in his desire for wealth, prestige and dominance, but in his desire for women and beauty, he saw them from the artistic side only. The homely women meant nothing to him". 60 With this view, he proposes marriage to Lillian Semple and she accepts it. In time two children arrive, Frank Jr. and then Lillian. Frank

60. Dreiser, The Financier, p. 68
prospers on all sides with a happy family and profitable business. He comes in contact with Drexel & Co., Jay Cooke & Co., Gould and Fisk, The Third National Bank, The First National Bank, which are the chief institutions of international business and commerce. Thus, Frank has been exposed to the big business world.

Frank's marriage to Lillian Semple is certainly a step against convention and shows the strength of a naturalistic character, which is always against set conventions and moral values. Further, he gives his own views on business and people concerned with it. When his father talks of business, honour and commercial integrity regarding Stock Exchange, Frank reacts and asserts:

"What was honor? ... Honor was almost...a figment of the brain. ... men came down to the basic facts of life — the necessity of self care and protection. There was no talk...of honor. There are rules of conduct which men observed because they had to. So far as he could see, force governed this world — hard, cold force and quickness of brain. If one had force, plenty of it, quickness of wit and subtlety, there was no need for anything else. Some people might be pretending to be guided by other principles — ethical and religious, for instance... he could not tell. If they were, they were following false or silly standards. In those directions lay failure. To get what you could and hold it fast, without being too cruel, certainly not to individuals that was the thing to do..."\(^{61}\)

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Here, Frank's approach to business ethics is amoral though not immoral. He sees the practical side of business deal which is least concerned with moral values and thus, he stands opposed to conventional morals as a naturalistic character.

Politics and political contacts is one among the themes of *The Financier*. Politics controlled the business and social life of the gilded age. Like Hamlin Garland's *Spoil of the office*, the Cowperwood Trilogy chronicles the political corruption and effect of the politicians on the businessmen. Frank approaches Edward Malia Butler, a selfmade wealthy Irishman, in selling his war loan. Butler has an excellent political contact by which he owns a huge contracting firm with an extensive business in the city water mains and sewers. Now, both become friends and start street car companies — a new mode of urban transportation. Frank's success in placing his war loan marks him as potentially a financier of note and a man of import in Philadelphia. Along with Butler, he starts a political lobby and politicians like Henry A. Mollenhauer, Senator Mark Simpson and George W. Stener befriend him. The newly elected city treasurer Stener offers a proposition that Cowperwood will be given two hundred thousand dollars in city loans with which to speculate, his mission being to bring them up to par value on the local market. Thus, Frank gains the power to raise or lower the market price of loan certificates almost at will and Stener also makes profit by sanctioning a good amount of money for street car companies. Having a good
hold on politics, Frank's father also is promoted to the
presidentship of the Third National Bank.

Frank's "fairness" in business or in money-making ends
when he joins politics, and simultaneously he loses "fairness"
in love-making when he meets Aileen. His business deal with
Edward Butler introduces him to Aileen Butler, a lively, high
spirited beauty of seventeen years. He reflects over her
beauty and determines to make her his own. He persuades his
father to purchase property on Girard Avenue just adjacent to
Butler's and to build a new home to show affluency of his wealth
to attract Aileen. A grand reception is planned for opening the
new home and Frank finds an opportunity through the ball to be
acquainted intimately with Aileen. Teenaged Aileen is drawn
irresistibly by Frank's magnetic force to marry him. Being
married Frank has a real problem. Dreiser gives a long passage
carrying naturalistic argument to justify Aileen's love for
Frank:

"It is so easy in this world to divide the sheep and
the goats in a superficial way. The slogan of the moralist is
that we can all do right if we want to. The answer is that the
spirit of man is clothed over with a fleshy envelop which has
moods and subtleties of its own. The spirit of man may, as the
idealistic metaphysicians have it, be a reflection of a perfect
unity which governs the universe, or it may not. It depends on
how one conceives the governing spirit of the universe. But of
the mold into which this spirit is born, who shall say? There
are time moods, and nation moods and climate moods, and they
bring forth great clouds of individual ... You might as well
have said to a thistle, 'Be a grape vine, or we will destroy you', as to have said to Aileen Butler, 'Be a calm, placid, virtuous girl, or society will cast you out'. Aileen Butler might well have answered, if she could have reasoned so far, 'How can I? Even in the face of the threatening society it would have been difficult for her at anytime. There were strange unconventional moods stirring in her, and strange longings. She was seeking some wonderous, peculiar individual destiny, just as a thistle is unquestionably seeking to perfect a red thorny blossom..."62 Here, Dreiser shows how nature is unalterable. It may be man or plant or animal, all are creations of nature and they abide by natural laws. Any superimposition on them checks their growth. For men, conventional social orders are at odds with their natural flow or growth and check individual development and fulfilment. Therefore, Dreiser's attack is always pointed at society, not at man.

Frank is not a man who is troubled by conscientious scruples. He raises his voice against society and religion. His contempt for morality makes him a typical naturalistic character devoid of morality. He says:

"There is or has been much theorizing...concerning the need of following the inward light or leading which all are supposed to possess. That there may be superimposed upon the mass a social conscience which has nothing to do with the normal bent or the chemical nature of the individual occurs to

few. A Christian ideal had been poured out upon the world like a sea of air, and those who live in it, who are many, draw their convictions as their breath from that. It is not necessarily native to them. Something underneath — the flash, for instance, and material pleasure — wars against it. ... Before Christianity was man, and after it he will also be. 63

Thus, religion is only a fiasco, a miasma, an illusion which restrains man from exercising his "will". Frank continues in the same vein and says: "Our conscience as someone has said, may be as the shell is of the sea, murmurous of morality; but it avails nothing. There appears to exist an age old fight between the spirit and the flesh, God and the devil, idealism and materialism, heat and cold, wealth and poverty, strength and weakness, and so on — a struggle without evidence of victory or failure on either hand. "From everlasting to everlasting" may as well have been spoken of evil as of good or there is no evil nor any good, as we understand them. 64

Thus, the trilogy is replete with the views of Frank Cowperwood on different aspects of life and social institutions.

Dreiser as a believer of modern science, lets his protagonist think scientifically. Frank's views on marriage and love are scientific. To him men and women are chemical compounds and "love" is like "a drop of coloring added to a glass of clear water, or a foreign chemical agent introduced

63. The Financier, p. 250.
64. Ibid. p. 240
into a delicate chemical formula. A definite change had taken place, and never again could things be as they had been before.\textsuperscript{65} Such a scientific approach to love leads Frank to unconventional marriage and polygamy. His marriage to Lillian Semple is "worthwhile\textsuperscript{66}" for the time being as he has not prospered in business. But when he reaches the peak of prosperity he finds Lillian useless to quench his thirst for beauty, as he sees "a bright luminary radiating health and enthusiasm\textsuperscript{67}" in young Aileen. Likewise, he always finds beauty of womanhood in "raw youth and radiance\textsuperscript{68}.

Frank's desire for beauty manifests itself in three things: wealth, women and art. As soon as he satisfied his desire for money and women, he shifts his attention toward art and architecture. His new houses on Girard Avenue stand as symbol of modern art and architecture. The houses were built with sincere and direct supervision of Philadelphia's eminent architect Ellsworth which shows Cowperwood's affinity for art and architecture. The passage needs to be quoted at length to show Dreiser's photographic realism of setting:

"When the houses were finished they were really charming to look upon. They were quite different from the conventional residences of the street. The architect had borrowed a note from the Gothic, or rather Tudor theory of art, not so elaborated as they style later became, in many of the residences in Philadelphia and elsewhere; but still ornate and picturesque."

\textsuperscript{65} The \textit{Financier}, pp. 287-88.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 287.
His idea was to have the facades of the two residences blend as one. The most striking features in each instance were rather deep-recessed doorways under wide, low, slightly floreated arches, and three projecting windows of rich form, one on the second floor of Frank's house, two on the facades of his father's. There were six gables showing on the front of the two houses, two on Frank's and four of his father's. In front of each house on the ground floor was recessed doorway, formed by setting the inner external wall back from the outer face of the building. This window looked out through an arched opening to the street, and was protected by a dwarf parapet or balustrading. It was possible to set potted vines and flowers here, which was later done, giving a pleasant sense of greenery from the street, and to place about a few chairs, which were reached via heavily barred French easements.

...on the ground floor of each house he placed a conservatory for flowers facing each other, and in the yard, which was jointly used, he placed a pool of white marble eight feet in diameter, with a marble cupid upon which jets of water played from concealed pipes, gurgling for joy. The yard, which was enclosed by a high but pierced wall of green-gray brick especially burnt for this purpose, the same color as the granite of the house and surmounted by a white marble coping, was sown to grass, and had a lovely, smooth, velvety appearance. 69

69. The Financier, pp. 183-84.
Frank Cowperwood is the best student of "chance" who
avails it timely and makes much out of it. The great civil
war as a "chance" put him on the highway of prosperity. But
again it is "chance" in the form of "Chicago fire" that causes
financial panic for him and draws him down. Here Chicago fire
is more an economic factor than "mere chance". Frank along
with his father and politicians has already monopolised banks
and street car business using public funds for their own benefit.
By this time, Stener and Frank also have ransacked huge amounts
of money from the city treasury. The shock of Chicago fire is
felt deeply in Philadelphia demanding all the loans to be
recovered immediately. Stener withdraws himself from the scene
being afraid of embezzlement leaving Frank alone to be indicted.
Frank requires time to reinstate the fund to the city treasury
but he does not have time. He approaches his business and
political boss, Edward Butler and others for help. To add to
his misery, Butler has been informed about his daughter
Aileen's seduction by him. So instead of help, Butler tries
for his imprisonment. No one comes forward with help. Frank
thinks over the selfishness and ingratitude of his business
friends:

"They were all hawks— he and they. They were all tigers
facing each other in a financial jungle. If they were surfeited,
if they were happy, if the mood were on them — any one or many
of them — they might let him go, otherwise not... They were none
the less the same as they always were— wolves at one moment,
smiling, friendly human beings at another. Such was life."70

70. The Financier, pp. 354-55.
Frank is convicted for embezzlement. He has risen quickly but he has fallen even more rapidly. His business life is ruined, but he does not bother for this mishap. He takes it philosophically by saying "what is to be will be". 71 Even in the jail he rejects the temptation to become despondant at his condition. He reflects on the path by which he has come to the prison cell. It is not that he has done wrong that disturbs him, but that he has been careless. If he would have guarded himself not to be caught by circumstances, it would not have occurred. He maintains a sort of stony equanimity and diehardism. He holds his will to power. Dreiser studies realistically his mental condition in the prison:

"The strongest have their hours of depression. There are times when life to the greatest brains — perhaps mostly to the greatest — takes one (sic) a somber hue. They see so many phases of its dreary subtleties. It is only when the soul of man has been built up into some strange self-confidence, some curious faith in its powers, based, no doubt, on the actual presence of these same powers subtlety, involved in the body, that it fronts life unflinchingly. It would be too much to say that Cowperwood's mind was of the first order. It was subtle enough in all conscience — and involved, as is common with the executively great, with a strong sense of personal advancement. It was a big mind, turning like a vast search light, a glittering ray into dark corner; but it was not sufficiently disinterested.

71. The Financier, p. 356.
to search the ultimate dark. He realized in a way, what the
great astronomers, sociologists, philosophers, chemists,
physicists and physiologists were meditating, but he could not
be sure in his own mind that whatever it was, it was important
for him. No doubt life held strange secrets. Perhaps it was
essential that somebody should investigate them. However, that
might be, the call of his own soul was in another direction.
His was to make money."

When Frank shows his fortitude of mind amidst his social
downfall, his father and wife Lillian are terribly obsessed;
while the former is for his position and social prestige, the
later is obsessed with her husband's philandering. Lillian's
ambitions are thwarted. She, like Carrie and Jennie, finds
life's purposelessness and wonders to what end life points.
Dreiser studies her condition sympathetically:

"Her fortieth year had come for her, and here she was
just passing into time when a woman ceases to be interesting to
men, devoted to her children, feeling innately that life ought
naturally to remain grounded on a fixed and solid base, and yet
torn bodily from the domestic soil in which she was growing and
blooming, and thrown out indifferently in the blistering noonday
sun of circumstances to wither. You have seen fish caught
ruthlessly in a net and cast indifferently on a sandy shore to
die. They have no value save to those sea-feeding buzzards
which sit on the shores of some coasts and wait for such food.

It is a pitiable spectacle — a gruesome one; but it is life. That is exactly the way life works". 73

The parallel theme business and love reaches its climax in *The Financier* when Frank goes to jail and promises to marry Aileen leaving Lillian. Before going to jail, he appoints Stephen Wingate, who is too strategic like his master, to look after his business. After thirteen months in the jail, Frank comes out to re-enter into his financier career and feels that it is unwise to hold on business in Philadelphia as an ex-convict. Butler's death and Lillian's divorce allow him to marry Aileen. Frank sets out for Chicago for a new business life. *The Financier* ends here, but before concluding the novel, Dreiser gives a fine analogy of Cowperwood's condition as that of *Mycteroperca*, a marine fish which saves and changes its life's course by secretion of black colour in the water whenever it needs.

"There is a certain fish whose scientific name is *Mycteroperca Bonaci*, and whose common name is black grouper, which is of considerable value as an after thought... It is a healthy creature, growing quite regularly to a weight of two hundred and fifty pounds, and living a comfortable, lengthy existence because of its very remarkable ability to adapt itself to conditions. That very subtle thing which we call creative power, and which we enduce with the spirit of the beatitudes, is supposed to build this moral life in such

fashion that only honesty and virtue shall prevail. Witness, then, the significant manner in which it has fashioned the black grouper. One might go far afield and gather less forceful indictments — the horrific spider spinning his trap for the unthinking fly; the lovely Drosera (Sundew) using its crimson calyx for a something pit in which to seal and devour the victim of its beauty; the rainbow colored jelly-fish that preads its prisms tentacles like the streamers of great beauty, only to sting and torture all that falls within their radiant folds. Man himself is busy digging the pit, and fashioning the snare, but he will not believe it. His feet are in the trap of circumstances; his eyes are on as illusion.

*Mycteroerca* moving in its dark world of green waters is a fine illustration of the constructive genius of nature, which is not beatific, as any which the mind of man may discover. Its great superiority lies in an almost unbelievable power of stimulation, which relates solely to the pigmentation of its skin... You can not look at it long without feeling that you are witnessing something spectral and unnatural, so brilliant is its power to deceive. From being black it can become instantly white, from being an earth-colored brown it can fade into a delicious water-colored green...one marvels at the variety and subtlety of its power... .

What would you say was the intention of the over-ruling, intelligent, constructive force which gives to *Mycteroperca* this ability? To fit it to be truthful? To permit it to
present an unvarying appearance which all honest life-seeking fish may know? Or would you say that subtlety, chicanery, trickery, were here at work? An implement of illusion one might readily suspect it to be, a living lie, a creature whose business it is...to get its living by great subtlety, the power of its enemies to forefend against which is little. The indictment is fair.

Would you say in the face of this that a beatific, beneficent creature overruling power never wills that which is either tricky or deceptive? Or would you say that this material seeming in which we dwell is itself an illusion? If not, whence then the Ten Commandments and illusion of justice? Why are the beatitudes dreamed and how do they avail? 74

Here, Dreiser's naturalism is intense; he thinks like a naturalist and describes as a realist. But yet he is morally neutral towards Cowperwood, who is presented almost as a magnificent animal for whom ends always justify means and who triumphs and deserves to triumph because of his superior vitality and ruthlessness, which are seen as much the same thing.

At the end of the novel it is seen that Cowperwood, despite all his strength and financial success finds insignificance of human life in the larger scheme of cosmic nature. Dreiser explains what the human situation ultimately amounts to, even for a giant like Cowperwood there is "Sorrow, sorrow, sorrow." 75 But the thing to be noted here is that Cowperwood

74. The Financier, pp. 777-779.
75. Ibid., p. 779.
is not completely disillusioned. Dreiser portrays him as being convinced that he is the man whose aim is money-making, he should not be disillusioned so soon. Therefore in the afterwords of *The Financier* Dreiser like a fairy godmother (or weird sister) predicts a bright future for Cowperwood in Chicago. He writes:

"The witches that hailed Macbeth upon the blasted heath might in turn have called Cowperwood, 'Hail to thee, Frank Cowperwood, master of great railway system! Hail to thee, Frank Cowperwood, builder of a priceless mansion! Hail to thee, Frank Cowperwood, patron of arts and possessor of endless riches! You shall be famed hereafter'. But like the weird sisters, they would have lied, for in the glory was also the ashes of Dead Sea Fruit — an understanding that could neither be inflamed by desire not satisfied by luxury, a heart that was long since wearied by experience; a soul that was as bereft of illusion as a windless moon. And to Aileen as to Macduff, they might have spoken a more pathetic promise, one that concerned hope and failure. To have not to have! All the seeming, and yet the sorrow of not having! Brilliant society that shone in a mirage, yet locked its doors; Love that eluded as a will —0'— Wisp and died in the dark. 'Hail to thee, Frank Cowperwood, master and no master, prince of the world of dreams whose reality was sorrow!' So might the witches have called, the bowl have danced with figures, the fumes with vision, and it would have been true. What wisemen might not have read from such a beginning, such an end?"\(^76\)

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Such an ending gives epic dimension to *The Financier* and this last passage foreshadows Frank Cowperwood's course of action in *The Titan*.

*The Titan*, the second part of the trilogy, presents the great struggle in the pursuit of the American dream in all its complexity. Imprisonment has destroyed whatever humanity Cowperwood possessed earlier. He has become selfish, ruthless and invulnerable, and his actions are really titanic. Dreiser changes the setting from Philadelphia to Chicago, but the theme remains the same. The novel moves in a brisk and episodic fashion repeating and emphasizing Cowperwood's business ventures and amorous interludes. From the artistic point of view the novel is "repetitive and static." 77

Cowperwood appears in Chicago as a seasoned businessman. As soon as he sees the raw city on the shore of Lake Michigan, its suburbs growing at an unprecedented rate, he knows that he has a rare opportunity. He dreams of controlling a vast network of streetcar lines that will monopolise urban transportation in Chicago. He applies all his business tactics and craftsmanship to win over other businessmen. He establishes a business in partnership with Peter Laughlin, a member of the Chicago Board of Trade; and with Laughlin's help he enters the public utilities field and purchases a group of small suburban gas companies. Each of these firms owns a service franchise, unimportant separately, but in conjunction forming a small

monopoly, a very effective tool with which to harass the larger and more complacent public utility firms. He begins to employ men who can be helpful to him and will be faithful partners in future enterprises. Thus, his first "financial coup" earns a princely sum of money and he advances upon his true target, the city's street railways.

Frank Cowperwood's success is not accomplished without a price. His business opponents and civic leaders can not surpass him in finance, and find him vulnerable socially. The truth of his past deeds spreads rapidly and he becomes a social outcast in the city. The foundation of his marriage to Aileen weakens as he takes varietistic interest in other women. For a diversion, he travels abroad and works at assembling a noteworthy collection of paintings and sculpture.

The second-half of The Titan deals with the deteriorating married life of Aileen and Cowperwood. Cowperwood falls in love (sexual promiscuity) successively with Reta Sohlberg, the beautiful young wife of a Danish violinist; Antoinette Nowak, a stenographer; Stephine Platow, a nineteen-year-old daughter of a Chicago furrier; Cecil Hagenan, Young daughter of his supporter on the Press; Caroline Hand, young wife of a Chicago financier. These affairs lead Aileen to take heavy drinking and to initiate sordid affairs (though her heart never really being in it) with other men. On the other hand, Cowperwood's business affairs could scarcely go better. The last two lady-loves prove most unfortunate for his business career in Chicago. Public opposition arises; he fails to get long term franchise for street-car railways.
Cowperwood has married to advance himself, he has speculated to advance himself; but neither venture has prospered. He is still strong, "he seemed a kind of Superman, and yet also a badboy — handsome, powerful, hopeful...impelled by some blazing internal forces which harried him on and on".\(^7\) He is confident of his power because he knows that the man who moves the mass he ought to endure the effects of both internal and external forces. He also realises that he has to maintain a sort of "eternal balance" to equate the opposing forces. Dreiser says: "Rushing like a great comet to the zenith, his path a blazing trail, Cowperwood did for the hour illuminate the terrors and wonders of individuality. But for him also the eternal equation — the pathos of the discovery that even giants are but pygmies, and that an ultimate balance must be struck. Of the strange, tortured, terrified, reflection of those who, caught in his wake, were swept from the normal and the common place, what shall we say? Legislators by the hundreds were hounded from politics into their graves; a half-hundred alderman of various councils who were driven grumbling or whining into the Limbo of the dull, the useless, the common place."\(^8\)

These sentences repeat the philosophy outlined in connection with *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*. But what distinguishes *The Financier* and *The Titan* from the previous


All subsequent references to this novel are from this edition.

two novels, is the force of character. Cowperwood is a greater
force than the earlier characters, but their position in the
cosmos is essentially the same. It is neither chance nor his
'will' that controls the individual's life but in the end it
is part of the "eternal equation" which controls the destiny
of society as a whole. In the final pages of The Titan
Cowperwood's views on life begins to change as he comes in
contact with Berenice Fleming, a teenager Irish beauty to whom
he is "spiritually dragged." He comes out with his philosophy —
"inevitability of balance":

"At the ultimate remove, God or the life force, if
anything is an equation, and at its nearest expression for
man — the contract social — it is that also. Its methods of
expression appears to be that of generating the individual, in
his all glittering variety and scope, and through him
progressing to the mass with its problems. In the end a
balance is invariably struck wherein the mass subdues the
individual...

There have sprung up social words and phrases expressing
a need of balance — of equation. These are right, justice,
truth, morality, an honest mind, a pure heart — all words
meaning: a balance must be struck. The strong must not be
too strong; the weak not too weak. But without variation how
could the balance be maintained? Nirvana! Nirvana! The
ultimate, still, equation." 80

This last passage of *The Titan* anticipates the melting of rigorous naturalism to spiritualism in *The Stoic*.

The two Cowperwood novels discussed so far chronicle the deeds of a Darwinian superman who ruthlessly fights all opposition, eliminating his weaker rivals and finally climbs to the pinnacle of worldly success inspite of early failure which had made him bankrupt and spend a period in jail. All this he achieves by his own strength, tact, resourcefulness and insatiable love of power. In thus portraying Cowperwood, Dreiser was, in fact, fictionally recording a typical case-history of many a late nineteenth century business giant. As such, "realism of Dreiser's Trilogy", says Philip L. Gerber, "gained its effects, at least in its author's eyes, by its fidelity to verifiable facts in the life of Charles T. Yerkes, Jr." 81 After examining the sources and Dreiser's working notes on Cowperwood's character, Gerber feels that "in this central fictional figure also is found a clear, though submerged, portrait of Dreiser's own hopes and desires". 82

These two novels are also not completely devoid of the softer and humane side of Dreiser, his feelings of pity and sympathy. Even Frank, who shows very little consideration for others, has sympathy for the fate of individuals. If Dreiser portrays ruthless self-interest on the part of his business characters, he also recognizes the presence of selfless love and devotion in intimate human relationships: "The love of a


82. Ibid., p. 120.
father for his son or daughter, where it is love (sic) at all, is a broad, generous, sad, contemplative giving without thought of return... It is a lovely, generous, philosophic blossom."

There is also the implied acceptance of things higher than money and Cowperwood's quest of art and beauty is an expression of this. Even spiritual values and their supremacy over material things is also sought to be maintained on occasions.

The basis of the Cowperwood—Aileen relationship is a physical one, but for Aileen, Cowperwood's chief attraction "is not his body—great passion is never that, exactly. The flavor of his spirit was what attracted and compelled like the glow of a flame to a moth." On his part, Cowperwood, too, "inspite of his physical desertion he was still spiritually loyal" to Aileen.

The "Genius", the last of Dreiser's novels, written during this second phase, is the most personal. It is cut from the same block as The Financier and The Titan. Both in form and theme it resembles those novels so closely that an extended analysis of it seems unnecessary. Yet, The "Genius" draws attention for a subtle difference: while The Financier and The Titan are operating mainly in the business world and with big businessmen, The Genius deals with the world of art and artists. Dreiser gives the portrait of a man as an artist.

In fictional form, The "Genius" recapitulates in detail, Dreiser's middle years and his gropings. He writes as a

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83. The Financier, p. 246.
84. Ibid., p. 137.
85. The Titan, p. 199.
bruised mortal, seeking a healing therapy in disclosure. In The "Genius", he concentrated all his aspirations, disappointments, and self-doubts as a man, and all his schemes, conjectures, and contrivings as a writer. Thus, the artist-protagonist of this novel, Eugene Witla is Dreiser in thin disguise. The novel reiterates the theme of desire — desire for sex, money and power. Dealing with this insistent theme says Randolph Bourne "what Mr. Dreiser has discovered is that "libido", which was nothing more than the scientific capturing of the nineteenth century desire." 86 Moreover, he says that the real hero of Dreiser's novel is not the "Genius" but "Desire."

Eugene Witla, like his creator grows up in a middle-western family. As a boy his principal character trait is an intense affinity for beauty which makes it predictable that he may one day become an artist. He dreams: "what a great country America was! what a great thing to be an artist here! Millions of people and no vast artistic voice to portray these things — these simple dramatic things like the coke oven in the night. If he could only do it." 87 This artistic trait also manifests itself, as he matures, in a strong sex urge. He admires girls — "was mad about them." He develops a fixation for lovely teen-aged girls, which never diminishes.


All subsequent references to the book are from this edition.
At the age of seventeen Eugene meets his first girl friend Stella Appleton when he enters the local high school. At the close of the second year of high school, he obtains a job setting type for a newspaper. Like Dreiser, he travels for Chicago for a better prospect and in search of a true vocation. He is tremendously impressed by the growing city's great structures, its crowds of people and clatter of traffic. Days pass on, he still has not located a job with a newspaper. His funds run low, he takes up petty jobs like storing stoves, house runner for real estate office, driver for a laundry and as a collector for a furniture company. The hardship, depression and poverty have not destroyed his ambition—desire for success, power, money and sex. In his quest for these he is in line with Cowperwood and Carrie. Dreiser describes realistically his yearning for money and status that drove him on and which highlighted the feelings of countless other Americans of his age placed in a similar situation:

"It is difficult to indicate to those who have never come out of poverty into luxury, or out of comparative uncouthness into refinement, the veil or spell which the latter comes eventually to cast over the inexperienced mind, coloring the world anew. Life is apparently striving, constantly to perfect its illusions and to create spells. There are, as a matter of fact, nothing but these outside that ultimate substance or principle which underlies it all. To those who have come out of inharmony, harmony is a spell, and to those who have come out of poverty, luxury is a dream of delight". 88

88. The "Genius", p. 488.
At the age of twenty, Eugene is introduced to a beautiful Wisconsin girl some five years his senior named Angela Blue. Inspite of their basic difference in life, philosophy and their codes of behaviour, they are mutually attracted and married. Eugene progresses satisfactorily with his course at the Art Institute. In need of a companion for a student dinner, he invites a classmate, Ruby Kenny, to accompany him. These two soon find themselves involved in a passionate affair. This relationship continues, regardless of Eugene's strong feelings for Angela Blue. Being in love with Ruby he has a sense of moral obligation for Angela. Dreiser writes: "She (Angela) came again in early November and before Christmas, and Eugene was fast becoming lost in the meshes of her hair. Although he met Ruby in November and took up a tentative relation on a less spiritual basis — as he would have said at the time — he nevertheless held his acquaintance with Angela in the background as the superior and more significant thing. She was purer than Ruby; there was in her certainly a deeper vein of feeling, as expressed in her thoughts and music... Why should he part with her, or even let her know anything of this other world that he touched? He did not think he ought to". 89

Thus, Eugene is torn between the remnants of his morality. Still, something of an idealist, he reasons that his connection with Angela is pre-eminently a spiritual one, whereas that with Ruby Kenny is wholly physical. Afterwards

89. The Genius, p. 269.
he defeats his reasonings and surrenders to his uncontrollable inner forces. Like Cowperwood, he thinks that since he is brilliant and an artist, the world ought to make exceptions of moral conduct for him. He is both the extraordinary man in an ordinary world and the sensitive man at the mercy of uncontrollable naturalistic forces.

Viewed thus, the novel makes a strong plea for the special recognition of the artist who is not to be governed and judged by the same moral and ethical codes as ordinary human beings, especially in the matter of intimate personal relationship between sexes. The novel is largely based on Dreiser's own experiences in this respect, particularly his passionate but unsuccessful infatuation with the young and beautiful Thelma Cudlipp. As Dreiser himself was faced with the impossibility of getting out of a marriage he had entered into reluctantly and half-heartedly, it may be the reason for his unconventional attitudes on love and marriage which he held solely responsible for his own misery. Hence, in the case of Witlea, the great problem is not money but sex. An abnormally strong sex drive is the cause of his undoing.

Dreiser clarifies his naturalism in The "Genius".

Witlea's sex drive is a means of defining the force and apparent purpose behind it. Dreiser begins to see the large

90. The description of the married life of Witlea and Angela is, beyond doubt, an almost literal rendering of the actual married state and troubles of Theodore Dreiser and Sallie White. The "Genius" though published in 1915 was, in fact, written in 1913 when their marriage was facing a crisis.

outlines of what he calls the natural process. He now moves away from fascination with the individual in his world to the forces that shape the individual. "Love was a lure," he writes of Witla's conflicts, "desire a scheme of propagation devised by the way. Nature, the race spirit, used you as you use a work to pull a load. The load in this case was race progress and man was the victim."\(^\text{91}\) But though Witla does not wish to be the slave of this force, he knows he can not resist it. Nature has endowed him with drives, they must be fulfilled for nature's purpose. Moral law in man's society depends on "Will", and Witla as well as Dreiser doubt the power of human will in life. "It is a question whether the human will, of itself alone, ever has cured or even can cure any human weakness. Tendencies are subtle things. They involved the chemistry of one's being..."\(^\text{92}\)

Witla, however, having reached his goal of worldly success as an artist, does not find the happiness he has been looking and hoping for. Neither the attainment of power nor the satisfaction of pleasure is enough for abiding satisfaction; the need and the longing in both spheres is insatiable. In the broader scheme of nature, the individual matters very little. In his moods of sorrow and frustration, Witla feels that the chief characteristic of existence is "malevolence". But as the novel progresses, a change seems to occur in Witla and near the end of the novel, he is able to speculate more

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91. The "Genius", p. 198.
92. Ibid., p. 285.
widely. He refers to the English naturalist, Alfred Russell Wallace, who assumes "some vast intelligence" as the guiding factor of the world. Witla attempts to strike a compromise between this idea and Christian Science. Though confused and lost, as often Dreiser finds himself, Witla begins to see the totality of life rather than his own limited self. Though he is unable to perceive clearly the purpose behind this all, he feels that "life, at bottom, inspite of all its teeming terrors, was beautiful." 93

Towards the end of the novel, Witla learns the painful need of resignation. He, like Dreiser, endures all the vicissitudes of life and entertains a strain of deep mysticism. "Desire" or "Love" in the form of sex, which was haunting him throughout life, now takes the form of spiritual love. "Desire", he thinks, "was a thin reed to lean on; there could be no honest satisfaction in it." Therefore, the only enduring tie is spiritual affinity: "It is written that love is deathless, but this was not written of the body nor does it concern the favors of desire." Such feelings come to Witla when he comes across Suzanne Dale (as it happens with Cowperwood when he meets Berenice Fleming).

Thus, while the novel deals with physical and spiritual love, and the author is doubtful of the existence of "free will", it is risky to classify the novel as

93. The "Genius", p. 695.
94. Ibid., p. 197.
95. Ibid., p. 286.
naturalistic. But the novel is certainly realistic as it duplicates the life of its author which is a reality and consecutive incidents are "organized as patiently and methodically as a mason builds a wall." 96

After the acrimonious 97 and controversial publication of the novel, The "Genius", Dreiser shifted his attention from the novel to other literary genres. He wrote non-fiction, short-stories and one-act plays. While the non-fiction reveals his ideas on life, his beliefs and attitude of life; the short-stories and the plays dramatize the usual theme of desire for power, desire for sex and desire for success. These are projections of his restless, brooding mind. Dreiser found interest in the supernatural and mysterious things of life. His growing awareness of the importance of social factors as opposed to cosmic and biological in determining man's life on a material and worldly level is evident in his writings by the nineteen twenties. Being interested in the function of law as an instrument of punishment for social and moral wrongs, and eager to discover the source of moral wrong, Dreiser studied a number of sensational murder cases until a plot for his novel formed. In the early twenties, he digested


97. The reception of the "Genius" was acrimonious because critics like Stuart P. Sherman attacked it with uncommon severity for sex theme and accused Dreiser of "barbaric naturalism" and reducing the problem of the novelist "to the lowest possible terms", in his review of the book already referred in this study. S.P. Sherman, "The Naturalism of Mr. Dreiser".

Like Sister Carrie, The "Genius" was also banned for sometime.
factual material, visiting the site of a famous crime in upstate New York, and started to write An American Tragedy.

An American Tragedy published in 1925 marked the peak of Dreiser's career as a novelist. It was read extensively and evoked the keen attention of the critics. While critics like Joseph Woodkrutch out of admiration called it "the greatest American novel of our generation", others like J. Donald Adams regarded the novel as the embodiment of the worst traits of naturalists and Dreiser as not only a clumsy writer, but also "ignorant" and "befuddled". However, such mixed reception of the novel paved the way for its success.

Once again, like Dreiser's other novels, An American Tragedy incorporates the theme of 'American Dream'. In this novel Dreiser tells us "of the hopes and failures of the American Dream. The failure of the family unit, as chronicled in Jennie Gerhardt, the failure of business ethics, as told in the Cowperwood trilogy; the failure of religion, as related in The Bulwark — all these themes come in the long novel of the short life of an American boy". Dreiser devoted much labour and time to wield multiferous themes into this novel. Originally An American Tragedy was entitled as the "Mirage". But Dreiser found it a most inapt title to convey his intended social themes. "Mirage" tended to suggest the deceptive and

unreal nature of the values of money and social position. He revised the title of the novel to convey his theme more appropriately. Therefore, it is necessary to begin the discussion on theme from the title of the book itself.

"Thematically, An American Tragedy is a resonant work", says Grebstein, "which, like all enduring literary creations, reverberates on multiple levels of meaning, at one and the same time bearing individual, social and universal implication. We need look no farther than the novel's title for an outline of its themes, each word in the title signifying a thematic dimension: 'An'—a single but not singular tale; 'American'—a tale somehow representative not only of a particular nation but also, as the word increasingly connotes, a social structure, an experience a life style; 'Tragedy'—a tale which concerns the end of man and its import".  

Coming to the text proper it is seen that the theme of struggle for existence by acquiring wealth is mingled with the theme of socially immoral sexual infatuations whose end is death. Clyde Griffiths, the protagonist of the novel, contends with poverty and his evangelical family life for a better life. Poverty makes him think, "what a wretched thing it was to be born poor and not to have any one to do anything for you and

101. Claude Bowers records Dreiser telling him: "I call it that (An American Tragedy) because it could not happen in any other country in the world. It was not tragedy of an isolated individual called Clyde Griffiths; it was an American tragedy."


not to be able to do so very much for yourself."¹⁰³ He feels a stirring dissatisfaction with his family's poverty. He obediently accepts his parents' religious teachings, but quickly realizes the gulf between the practice and preaching of religion. His own mother talks of God's law and man's morals, yet secretly hides his pregnant unwed sister. Clyde thinks over his sister's pathetic plight and bitter tears she sheds over social ostracism and disappointment in love. He sees man's true predicament as those of a man who strides on razor sharp principles of religion. Thus, like many of Dreiser's characters, Clyde escapes into the world of material lushness and becomes a bellhop in a fancy hotel in Kansas city. The vast luxury hotel with its "opulent tinsel glitter of the lobbies and dining rooms", casts a spell on Clyde "because of the timorous poverty that had restrained him from exploring such a world."¹⁰⁴ To Clyde this hotel presents the "perfectly marvellous—marvellous realm"¹⁰⁵ and he tastes the quintessence of luxury and ease of life. He sees immorality and world's practice of paying lip service to a public standard of conduct while following the hotel guests in the privacy of the hotel's room. Soon he becomes infatuated with an incipient prostitute, Hortense Briggs and spends money to satisfy her. Thus, the glamour of hotel life and the conviction that the chief end of life is getting and spending money remain permanently imprinted on Clyde's mind, and finally costs him his life.


All subsequent references to this novel in the text are to this edition.

¹⁰⁴. Ibid., p. 41.
¹⁰⁵. Ibid., p. 40.
The first book of the novel ends with Clyde's flight after a passive involvement in an automobile accident while out on a spree with friends. This "accident" and "Passive involvement" in the action anticipates Clyde's wished but accidental murder of Roberta and his escape into the forest. So also is the third book, which ends with the execution of Clyde. In this way, as a tragic novel _An American Tragedy_ reiterates the theme of death and shows man's incapability to escape death. 106

The Second Book opens when Clyde meets his wealthy and socially well-to-do uncle Samuel Griffiths in Lycurgus, New York. His uncle offers him a job in his shirt factory. He sees a new level of life and fancies that with time and patient care he can enter his uncle's lavish society. But his nature, compounded with weakness and ignorance leads him to adopt false social and material standards. He has been afflicted with the awakening of a powerful sex impulse in addition to his irresistible attraction for material things. The novelist writes: "Incidentally by that time the sex lure or appeal had begun to manifest itself and he was already intensely interested and troubled by the beauty of the opposite sex, its attractions for him and his attraction for it." 107

Adolescent Clyde meets first, Roberta Alden, a poor working girl in the factory and initiates her sexually. Roberta finds


herself pregnant and demands marriage. But Clyde has no such intention as "his ambitions towards marriage had been firmly magnetized by the world to which the Griffiths belonged."\(^{108}\)

He is already in love with Sondra Finchley, who epitomizes all the desirable and still unobtainable objects of his fondest dream. He dreams of what it would mean to have Sondra by marriage:

"What means! only to think of being married to such a girl, when all such as this would become an everyday state. One would have a cook and servants, a great house and car, no one to work for, and only orders to give."\(^{109}\)

But who is to blame for such thoughts coming to Clyde's mind? Dreiser leaves no doubt about his answer. The society in which Clyde has grown up has made him understand that money is all and he has seen in the case of his own father that righteousness and virtue, which demanded that he should marry Roberta, amounted to nothing and is seldom rewarded or recognized by his society. Moreover, the society with its degrading doctrines leads him to think that "thy desire shall be thy to mate."\(^{110}\) Therefore, if any one is to be censured, it is society which really is responsible for Clyde's reluctance to give up Sondra and marry Roberta.

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After fruitless effort to find an abortionist, he senses a terrible shock, "for apparently now here was illegitimacy and disgrace for Roberta. Exposure and destruction for"\textsuperscript{111} him. He is caught in a desperate dilemma and tries to find a way out. By chance, he reads an accidental double drowning and a plan born of desperation strikes him. He accordingly takes Roberta on a boat trip to an isolated lake to drown her to death. Clyde's courage fails at the last moment and he wavers. But when Roberta upsets the boat and he accidentally strikes her face with camera, and both of them are instantly thrown into water. Roberta sinks crying for help and Clyde strikes ashore. He lets her drown and thinks that "after all, he had not killed her. No, no. Thank God for that".\textsuperscript{112} But ironic enough, he leaves an untold volume of evidences and an extensive parade of witness on his wake, for a sure murder case.

The fairly long "book three" deals with Clyde's capture, trial and execution. Through the speeches of his defence lawyers and proceedings of the trial, Dreiser shows how Clyde is not only a murderer but a victim of unfair trial contrived by the machinery of justice which maintains a double standard. Not a single member of the jury is just in his opinion and the one who seems an exception, is so because of his opposition to Mason, the District Attorney who exploits the case for his own political purposes. Clyde is convicted and sentenced to death without being certain of his guilt.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{An American Tragedy.}, p. 407.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 494.
Such a story built on the theme of a poor boy's murder of a poor girl, to marry a wealthy one, was a prevalent theme in the then American literature and it fascinated Dreiser. He published a short story "Typhoon" on the similar theme in the year that followed the publication of An American Tragedy. Dreiser as a journalist has taken this theme from the then sensational "Chester Gillette-Grace Brown" murder case and has infused his own personal anguish into the character of Clyde. He shaped the novel with careful description of motivations and neatly constructed characterizations. As a realist, he has taken "a long stride toward a genuine and adequate realism" in creating this novel. Throughout, Dreiser is remarkably objective, but at moments, towards the conclusion of his narrative, unable to restrain himself, he drops the objectivity of a realist and critically comments on the unjust social order, corrupt officials, the concept of justice and brutality of prisons. This may be a flaw from the realistic point of view but it does not spoil the art of novel as such. "Despite the weight of its social burden" says Grebstein, "An American Tragedy is a chronicle of American life. In the handling of his material Dreiser once again simply but effectively transformed history into art by means of a skillful manipulation of time". Thus, An American Tragedy is realistic and Dreiser is the realist par - excellent.

113. Dreiser had been pondering over such a "theme" ever since he became a journalist. Mrs. Helen Dreiser remarks "This had been forced on his mind not only by the extreme American enthusiasm for wealth as contrasted with American poverty, but the determination of so many young Americans ... to obtain wealth quickly by marriage". Helen Dreiser, My Life with Dreiser (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1951), pp. 71-72.

In the earlier pages of this study it has been discussed that *An American Tragedy* belongs to the third stage of Dreiser's naturalism and is marked by his conversion into socialism. It is also obvious from the preceding examination of Dreiser's treatment of materials in the novel that it is based upon social point of view and Dreiser's concern is not with the crime or an advocacy on behalf of the criminal, but with a society which is responsible for tragedies. Like all his previous novels, *An American Tragedy*, too, is a human story which is deeply involved with man's tragic predicament. Here Dreiser is a naturalist in the sense that "for all his mechanistic determinism, he was never wholly objective, and his novels belong as much to the history of progressive movement as to philosophical naturalism."\(^{115}\) Dreiser also believes in change of social environment and the acceptance of the possibility of betterment by the "will" and efforts of man. But this attitude seems to be the opposite of the generally held view of naturalism. The naturalists believe in biological determinism and social determinism where there is no question of will power or effort of man to shape his character. Dreiser, here, grapples with social problems intensely and tries to ameliorate the society by pointing out its ills and entertains optimism. Therefore, some critics hold the opinion that such an attitude is far from being compatible with naturalism. But it is not so as George Meyer forcefully presents the view on the original social

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purpose of the naturalistic novel that "the naturalistic novel, as Emile Zola originally conceived of it was based not upon a philosophy of pessimism, as is commonly supposed, but upon a philosophy of optimism; and its fundamental purpose was not mere objective description of life as a trap, dirty and mean, but the immediate betterment of human society." 116 The issue (optimism and pessimism) raised by this thesis further complicates the question of Dreiser's naturalism as discussed while interpreting other novels. However, again to quote Meyer, "Dreiser does not move further from authentic Naturalism when as in An American Tragedy, he appears to sympathise with his characters and suggests that radical social reforms are imperative unless the tragedy is to recur again and again. By suggesting that such reforms be effected, Dreiser, far from impairing further his claims to the title of Naturalists, actually comes closer to the original purpose of Naturalism — as Zola conceived of it — than he has ever done before." 117 Thus, Dreiser's naturalism is marked by humanism. In An American Tragedy he tries to combine his monumental scheme of natural and social determinism with a pity for the ensnared individuals.

An American Tragedy is censured largely on the ground of the naturalistic philosophy which it is alleged to expound. The criticism more often is not so much of the novel as of the naturalistic creed. A good instance of such criticism is


117. Ibid., p. 569.
Randall Stewart's attack on the novel. Stewart finds fault with the naturalists because of their amorality and for assuming that man is a puppet. "Being a puppet of forces", he argues, "man can hardly appear in a heroic light and one may question whether the term 'hero' can properly be applied to the protagonist, or the chief actor, in a work of naturalistic fiction. The term 'hero' suggests a morally responsible actor, and suggests, too, that certain adverse forces are being overcome by wilful endeavour."¹¹⁸ He admits that "no one else, before Dreiser or since, has presented before our very eyes the American experience in such raw, astounding bulk, or has done such justice to the tremendous forces which play upon us,"¹¹⁹ but criticises the novel for it is "the most completely naturalistic of all American novels."¹²⁰

It is clear from the text of the novel that Dreiser follows his familiar theme that in the face of vast, uncontrollable forces, man finds himself helpless and that the human being is an insignificant creature in the vast cosmic scheme. As he himself wrote, the novel "seemed so truly a story of what life does to the individual—and how impotent the individual is against such forces."¹²¹ It is also obvious that Dreiser's protagonist, Clyde Griffiths, can hardly be termed as "hero" in the conventional sense, as he is morally irresponsible, a coward and a dreamer. But what one

¹¹⁹. Ibid., p.116.
¹²⁰. Ibid., p. 106.
must remember is that Dreiser's tragedy is not a tragedy of the type Stewart seems to have in mind. To apply such classical criteria in evaluating the novel is, hence, irrelevant and out of place in Dreiser's case. Harry Hartwick holds the opinion that Dreiser's "idea of tragedy is Shakespearean, not Greek. His Clyde Griffiths is a moral coward and weakling instead of a hero in the Athenian sense. He is a product of forces beyond his control, an Othello." But even this is hardly tenable, for, compared to Shakespeare's heroes; Dreiser's Clyde is a pigmy and has little in him to deserve a comparison with Othello. If Dreiser's tragedy is similar to any, it is Galsworthy's. Like Galsworthy's plays, Justice, Strife, and Silver Box, Dreiser in this novel is primarily concerned with social forces and the human tragedy it causes rather than with the fate of heroic individuals pitted against fate and giving a tough fight. Clyde belongs to the same class of average humanity as Galsworthy's bank clerk, Falder, in Justice and like him, Clyde is more sinned against than sinning, more a victim of himself than a culprit.

Clyde Griffiths in many respects is a weaker version of Thomas Hardy's Jude (the protagonist in Jude, the obscure), and like Hardy, Dreiser, too, is interested in portraying the tragedy of such insignificant lives. Like Hardy's heroine, Tess, a "pure woman" as Hardy himself has described her in the sub-title, Dreiser's Clyde, too, is a victim of unjust social conventions. But this comparison between the two novelists, in the context of discussion here, cannot be stretched too far, for, in An American Tragedy.

Dreiser marks a vital difference; while Hardy's tragic vision is cosmic, Dreiser's is social. Hardy, in his preface to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* quoted two well known lines from Shakespeare which may be taken as expression of Hardy's tragic vision: "As flies to wanton bodys are we to the Gods;/They kill us for their sport." But Dreiser's complaint is not against Gods, it is directed against a society (especially American) and its false degrading doctrines and unnatural restrictions. The novel really does not concern itself so much with the fate of man against a hostile nature beyond man's control or an unjust Providence as with the tragedy brought about by man-made social conditions and values.

In this novel, since characters are victims of social forces, Dreiser is sympathetic towards them. In dealing with religion, Dreiser, however shows no bitterness. On the contrary, he is more tolerant of the clergy and the portraits of Clyde's religious parents and the priest, Mr. McMillan, has been done with sympathy and tenderness. The Reverend Duncan MacMillan is undoubtedly the most sympathetically drawn clergyman in all his writings. He is described as "a strange, strong, tense, confused, merciful and too, after his fashion beautiful soul; sorrowing with misery and yearning toward as impossible justice."123

*An American Tragedy* can be read as a religious novel. The novel opens on a religious note with Clyde's evangelical

parents preaching at a street corner and his sister singing "The love of Jesus saves me whole,/The love of God my steps control." It also ends on a similar note with Clyde's nephew Russell, joining in a street service and spreading the gospel of God. Dreiser treats religion in relation to Clyde's growth and all three books of the novel bring up religion in one form or another. But Dreiser's basic attitude towards religion remains unchanged; religion as practised is ineffective in the making or saving of Clyde. According to Shapiro, "the implication of the final street scenes, echoing the opening scenes, is that it will continue to fail Clyde's nephew and America as well," and "part of the American Tragedy, as viewed by Dreiser and presented through the story of Clyde Griffiths, was the failure of religion to be a responsible force for good".

In bringing this discussion of the novel to a close, it can be said that An American Tragedy is realistic, as it faithfully records a true social event and naturalistic as the characters' destiny is determined by social forces and natural drives.

After the publication of An American Tragedy, Dreiser involved himself in many social and political activities. He wrote philosophical essays on life and composed poems and

126. Ibid., p. 100.
non-fiction to convey his ideas and ideals adequately. He also continued to value science and at the same time he needed to look elsewhere for bringing peace to his troubled soul. He began his spiritual quest. Spiritualism, in fact, was never absent from his writings even while he was being hailed as an uncompromising naturalist, but the last years of his life are intensely marked by peace and reconciliation. He left materialism and found religion as the only means to realise life fully. Despite his failing health and dwindling mental and creative powers, he concentrated on two often thought and abandoned novels, The Bulwark and The Stoic. 127

Dreiser first conceived of The Bulwark on the basis of the story of a devout Quaker and his family, narrated to him by Anna Tatum, one of his admirers. He planned the novel to show how such religious and idealistic persons are out of place in the materialistic world. As a realist, he found it difficult to write a novel based on the quakers without properly understanding the quaker faith himself. Because of his numerous preoccupations, he did not find time to do so. In the late thirties he came into contact with Rufus Jones, a great quaker leader and gathered first-hand knowledge on quakerism for the final version of The Bulwark. He also had access to a fairly wide range of Quaker literature and used them for his purpose. Apart from this professional interest, his tragic sense of the mystery of life and his overwhelming

127. Dreiser thought of writing The Bulwark as early as in 1910. He finished the first draft by 1914, he revised it during 20s but could not finalise it till 1945. So also The Stoic.
sense of pity for the suffering of people brought him closer to the teachings of Quakers.

From the study of sources in creating The Bulwark, it is obvious that Dreiser followed the transcendental tradition—owing nothing at all to Herbert Spencer and everything to Thoreau and John Woolman. But the framework of the novel, the conflict it highlights, is Dreiser's own, set against the Quaker background. And towards the concluding part of the novel, it is more Dreiser's own view of the "creative force" than an expression of Quaker view.

However, The Bulwark is not different from Dreiser's other novels so far as the theme is concerned. It dramatizes the same old conflict between the lure of material possessions and the yearning for spiritual satisfaction. Through the story of three generations of a Quaker family, Dreiser alternately portrays this conflict. The family moves from piety to prosperity and finally to perdition. Solon Barnes, the protagonist is struck by intense personal tragedy and pain, does not turn bitter or sceptical, but with his mind "on religion and the Creative Forces" finds peace and is convinced that "God talks directly to man when His help is needed and man asks Him for it — He does not fail."


130. Ibid., pp. 333-34.
Dreiser takes the same American society for the background of the story as he does in the case of *Sister Carrie* and *The Financier*, to reap a rich harvest of realism. The novel begins with the pastoral setting of a farm house in a remote corner of Maine, where Rufus and Hannah Barnes happily live with their two children Solon and Cynthia. They lead a simple life as prescribed by their Quaker faith. When the boy Solon is ten years old his wealthy uncle dies willing him his estate and palatial Thornbrough house at Philadelphia. The family moves to Philadelphia city, Rufus renovates the mansion and gradually they approach the life of ease and luxury forbidden to Quakers. Rufus faces the first challenge, finding himself "between the two horns of this dilemma — simplicity for himself and reasonable luxury for a possible buyer — he was fairly caught."\(^{131}\) He decides in the end not to sell the house. He is obliged to live in luxury in order to avoid the greater evil of providing more luxuries for prospective buyers. Nevertheless, Rufus and his wife make a mighty effort to raise their children in the plain style. For guidance they rely always upon the "Inner Light" and they do achieve success. Thus, the first generation of the family sticks to piety and heads towards prosperity.

The second generation of the family begins when Solon marries his childhood sweetheart, Benecia Wallin, daughter of Justus Wallin, a clever and prosperous Quaker. Dreiser, here

sanctimoniously celebrates love and marriage between Solon and Benecia, and "faith" and "morality" are criteria for marriage rather than "chemic impulse" and "wealth".

Solon's marriage with Benecia earns prosperity for him. As he enters the business world and comes into contact with other Quakers, he becomes disturbingly aware of the fact that a large number of his fellow Quakers are compromising or even abandoning the friends' ideals for the sake of acquiring wealth and other material possessions. But Solon is determined to remain untainted. Despite his involvement with financial deals and his work in the bank he saw "everything in terms of divine order" and life appeared to him "a series of law—governed details, each one of which had the import of being directly connected with divine will ... To him, the religion of George Fox and John Woolman was the solution of all earthly ills". He considers money as a divine gift and "it came from God and was intended to be an instrument for the general good". When he reaches prosperity he introspects and wonder "where lay the dividing line between ambition and an irreligious greed, between the desire for power and wealth and a due regard for Quaker precepts".

Thus, Solon comes out successful in worshipping God and Mammon at the same altar. He orders his life to the conformity of Quakerism till his children arrive to take lead of life. His sons and daughters, though born to the parentage

132. The Bulwark, p. 90.
133. Ibid., p. 40.
134. Ibid., p. 113.
of Quakerism, can not maintain the balance between materialism and spiritualism. As a result, they come out as the victims of materialism making their father a bulwark of faith. The two elder sons Isobel and Orville devote themselves only to earn money, finding fault with their father's religion. Dorothea the elder daughter is tempted easily toward beautiful trinkets and a life of luxury. The younger son Stewart steals money, goes on a spree, becomes a party to a girl's death, goes to jail and commits suicide. The younger daughter, Etta falls in love with an actor and returns home frustrated when the lover leaves her desolate. Benecia dies in shock of her children's predicament. On the other hand, Solon faces the corruption of his fellow directors, resigns his position as a director. Thus, all the forces in congregation act upon Solon. He is baffled and stands in danger of losing the faith that has been his precious resource. He cries out in agony: "Our father who art in Heaven—help me, help me! ... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" 135

The Bulwark would have ended here, at this point, if it were An American Tragedy or Sister Carrie, but Dreiser's intention was not such. He didn't allow Solon to die uncertain and bewildered. Solon recovers from moral breakdown and loses himself in deep contemplation, he experiences not despair but an intense spiritual renewal and growth.

The novel from this point to the end describes Solon's mystical experiences, conveys the message of

135. The Bulwark, pp. 298-299.
"the need of love toward all created things"\textsuperscript{136} and the unity underlying all nature. These convictions of Solon are undoubtedly Dreiser's own. Dreiser as a realist, who writes from his own experiences, transfers his own mystical experiences to Solon. Solon's affirmation of the reality of the "Inner Light" is an oblique avowal of Dreiser's own faith in the creative force. Walking paths around Lever Creek, as Dreiser himself had done outside the Long Island Laboratory, Solon is "arrested by the various vegetative and insect forms obviously devised and energized by the Creative Force that created all things in apparently endless variety of designs and colors."\textsuperscript{137} Thus, Solon mystifies nature and examines the habits of fish, birds, butterflies, vines, flowers, and grass. He experiences "a kind of religious awe and wonder" and realizes that "surely there must be a Creative Divinity, and so a purpose, behind all this variety and beauty and tragedy of life." For tragedy "had descended upon him" but he "still had faith, and would have."\textsuperscript{138}

Nature holds revelation for Solon. One day he meets a harmless Puff adder in his garden. The snake at first seeks to menace him, but when he speaks to it calmly, it approaches him and crosses the toe of his shoe. Through this incident, Dreiser shows Solon's affirmation of the Creative Force and the sense of unity pervading throughout the world. Further

\textsuperscript{136} The Bulwark, p. 319.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 316.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 317.
this idea finds adequate expression when Solon advises Etta to overcome her own affections. He makes her feel the strength of love and spiritual power through equanimity. Now, with this awareness she understands that something "beyond passion and its selfish desires and ambitions" exists and realizes for the first time the great truth:

"In this love and unity with nature, as she now sensed there was nothing fitful or changing or disappointing — nothing that glowed one minute and was gone the next. This love was rather as constant as nature itself, everywhere the same, in sunshine or in darkness, the filtered splendour of the dawn, the seeded beauty of the light. It was an intimate relation to the very heart of being."139

With this realization, she is reminded, as if in a flashback of the wasted opportunities of her life, her inability to understand her father's ideals, the wonder and beauty of life, and sobs. But the tears are not for mortal man:

"Oh! I am not crying for myself or for Father — I am crying for life."140

Here Dreiser is the best, in the line of tragic novelists.

The Bulwark reveals Dreiser more as a philosopher than a novelist. Here, he is a realist in the metaphysical sense, who perceives "reality" or the "absolute essence" or what he

139. The Bulwark, p. 331.
140. Ibid., p. 337.
calls the "Creative Force" through his mystic experiences of life. The Bulwark is his "Pisaller" and Robert Elias calls the novel as "a kind of tribute to the Creative Force". 141

The third part of the Cowperwood Trilogy, The Stoic appeared posthumously in the year 1947. Though Dreiser had begun work on it in the 20's he set it aside due to inadequacy of material on the 'last-days of Yerkes' life. Moreover, he intended to conclude this "Trilogy of Desire" giving a different note other than materialism. Therefore, his writing of this novel continued till his last breath and he died leaving it unfinished. Helen Dreiser, his wife, gave it the final touch by adding one more chapter on the life of Berenice Fleming and revised it for publication. Strictly speaking, the novel is structurally weak and unfinished.

Thematically, The Stoic is just a prolongation of the same "Algerine theme: unceasing struggle in adversity brings ultimate triumph". But here this theme has lost its tenacious vitality as the hero is at the fag end of his life. In the words of McAleer "The Stoic is the story of Cowperwood's gradual extrication from the morass of the American Dream". 142 Dreiser, with his awakened faith in a creator and his changed social outlook which emphasized the need of love and equity, is no longer interested in the material pursuits and the worldly glory of Frank Cowperwood. The early chapters of the

novel take up the thread from *The Titan* and chronicle Cowperwood's activities and control of London underground railway system. Rest of the Chapters, except the last few pages, follow the pattern of first two volumes.

Cowperwood still goes on with his sexual exploitations and quest for art-objects. His varietism continues till Berenice Fleming warns him of her estrangement from him. At last he sees clearly a "Grail vision" in quest of beauty through a woman like Berenice Fleming. He finds real affection and emotional support in her and promises to live with her without variations in sexual life. Cowperwood falls ill and dies before his plans for an art museum and charity hospital are realized. Berenice has been shaken by Cowperwood's demise and it brings her face to face with the mystery of existence. She becomes sceptical of the various issues of life in this world. In search of an answer to these issues she visits India and investigates the philosophy of Yogis.

The last pages of the novel are almost exclusively concerned with Berenice, her interest in Hindu thought, and her spiritual quest in India. She reads a volume of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which bears the Asiatic religious thought in condensed form. Arriving in India, she finds peace in the abode of Guru Borodandaj and spends four years in her quest for spiritual salvation. The Guru, mostly takes up the various chapters of the *Gita* and analyses them. The Guru sums up the portions of *Gita* pertaining to non-attachment and enlightens his disciple about its importance:
"In truth non-attachment does not mean anything that we may do in relation to our eternal body. It is all in the mind... No human being can give up action altogether, but he who gives up the fruits of action is said to be non-attached." "All knowledge" the Guru adds, "is a gift of the spirit, and only to those who are grateful in the spirit will knowledge unfold like the petals of the lotus." And through perfect non-attachment one can realise the "Lord". 143

Then follows a long description of Yogic discipline and its various exercises with the use of yogic vocabulary "Kundalini", "Susumna", "Sahasara", "Samadhi", "Paranaya", "Pratyahara" and "Pranayam" and so on. 144 Berenice asks the Guru about "Brahman". The Guru explains that Brahman is "infinite", "absolute", a "divine mystery" which is "one". He explains the oneness of life. "From the lowest protoplasm to the most perfect human being, there is only one life. The design is inherent (sic) in the seed before the form is evolved", and the omnipresence of love: "Even in the lowest kinds of attraction is the germ of Divine Love." 145

Thus, the discussion continues on Dhyana Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jiana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga which shows Dreiser's smattering of Hinduism as he responds to Gita.

After realizing the supreme truth of life Berenice returns to America and rejects the materialistic way of life. She builds the Cowperwood Hospital and devotes herself to a

144. Ibid., p. 293.
life of labour with the neglected children of the poor. Thus, she aspires to amend her life and to achieve a redeeming spirituality.

In spite of the attempt made in this chapter to classify Dreiser as more of a naturalist than a realist, it is difficult to label him as an out and out naturalist. He undoubtedly is the pre-eminent naturalist of American Literature, but his inclination for spiritualism, transcendentalism and moralizing are to be seen in the novels discussed in this chapter. He obviously possessed a mature idealism which was confronted by the then current theories and discoveries of Spencer and Darwin. Dreiser is much more a complex figure than the terms "naturalist" or "materialist" would imply and we can conclude this chapter by commenting that in his unceasing concern for understanding life, he is occasionally a naturalist, a realist and a transcendentalist.