CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
Realism is simply a literary technique based on reporting the facts of daily life within a meaningful humanistic framework. Realists kept their works, as far as possible, away from the unusual and the decadent, and tried to avoid prejudice, false idealism or sensationalism. They believed that literature should present life's realities, stressing its good qualities. They also tried to maintain 'objectivity' by impersonal narration and let the reader draw his conclusions from their work of art.

Naturalism is born out of realism; but, while realism is a technique, naturalism is a tendency in literature. Naturalism is generally accepted as the idea that man is at the mercy of biological and emotional drives which he does not fully understand. Like Realism, it uses detached observation and relies on specific facts. Naturalism reflects an interest in science and seeks to understand nature's general laws. It
denies man's free will apart from nature as a whole, and is
even optimistic in determining his state in life's fullest
natural context. As it happened, the focus of the naturalist
was on the seamy side of life.

Summing up the discussion on Realism and Naturalism, it
is observed that the above definitions are inadequate. They
are descriptive rather than definitive. All realists and
naturalists departed frequently from the general outlines and
specific principles of the movements and theories they
supposedly represent. Both, Realism and Naturalism represent
the author's attitude and technique of writing.

For two generations after the Civil War, American
literature widened its subject matter and deepened its
conclusions. The decades from Mark Twain to Theodore Dreiser,
from Realism to Naturalism, were times of re-thinking in
American letters. William Dean Howells is considered as the
first realistic writer, who innovated the realistic technique
to depict mainly the smiling aspects of life as something true
or real. Inspite of his bold attempt, he lacked the power to
free the literature of his time from standard traditional
morality and vain romantic idealism, which glorified day-to-day
life. But, the generation of writers after him made this
realistic technique more serious and authentic by adding the
uglier aspects of life into the subject matter of their writings.
Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland and Jack London
wrote as Realists but thought as Naturalists. Their tendency
to open the secrets of life in terms of sex, prostitution and
alcoholism made them naturalists. Yet, these writers did not have courage to shock the reading public by breaking through convention, as they were born and brought up in romantic morality and idealism. They were influenced by European naturalists. Norris became a naturalist out of his admiration for Zola, Stephen Crane followed the naturalistic tradition because its pessimistic philosophy suited his temperament. But, for Dreiser naturalism was his instinctive response to life as he admitted that he had not read Zola when he started writing his first novel *Sister Carrie*. He found life brutal and disorderly. In order to attain a broader realistic representation of life in literature, he wrote with a daring frankness what he had seen and experienced. Moreover, naturalism is always divided between those who know its environment from personal experience, for whom writing is always a form of autobiographical discourse, and those who employ it as a literary idea. Dreiser belongs to the category of writers who employ personal experience for a better effect of naturalism, whereas in the case of Norris and Crane, their naturalism was a literary designation and not quite the corollary of a personal vision. Naturalists are basically realists in technique, and they differ from realists only in the degree of their tendency to show the dark-side of life with a pessimistic philosophy. Therefore, we can conclude that all naturalists are Realists, but all Realists are not Naturalists. If so, Dreiser is a realist so far as the technique of his novels are concerned and his natural bias to probe deep into life has made him a naturalist.
Now Dreiser's position as a realist is secure and he occupies a 'niche' in American literature as a naturalist. This is because, in his hands realism as a trend in American literature attains real perfection. He made it a very flexible and a ever-widening literary trend by introducing sex as one of the themes of literature. Before him, it was there, but captivated by morality. It was Dreiser, who renovated it by his valiant frankness. Another factor that earned greatness for Dreiser as a naturalist is his comparatively longer life. He had the opportunity to enjoy and understand life for more than half-a-century. Many of his contemporaries were not as lucky as Dreiser. No other writer survived to his maturer years to be a mature realist or naturalist. Norris and Crane, though they had the potentiality of true naturalists, died premature deaths. Dreiser lived a full life, saw life's bright and dark sides, tasted its sweetness and bitterness of experiences as a man and as an artist. Admiring Dreiser's greatness as a realist Robert Shafer writes: "Nevertheless, by universal consent Mr. Dreiser stands at the head of the Realistic movement in American fiction, not merely because he is its pioneer, and has endured obloquy and even persecution for the cause, but primarily on account of his seriousness and singleness of purpose, his depth of keen feeling and his earnest reflectiveness. His work also anticipates in important respects the efforts of the Post-realists and super-realists, so called, and altogether has a present salience which ins sistently demands consideration". 1

The above estimation of Dreiser's realism shows that his realism is dynamic and hopeful, and goes ahead putting off naturalism in the background. He was an objective realist who gathered his facts impersonally. Moreover, he lived in his dreams, his hopes and his broadings. For this reason, he absorbed the realistic method and the new conceptions of the universe from science into his thought and writing. To Dreiser, realism never meant crudeness. Writing to his friend H.L. Mencken, Dreiser makes it clear that he drew a sharp line between truth of Nature and mere pornography. He writes: I do not want any tainted fiction or cheap sex struck articles, but I do want...an apt realistic perception of things as they are.²

Dreiser's lifetime criticism labelled him as a naturalist—a materialist, a hard-headed researcher, and a tough statistician. But, assigning a lable to Dreiser is a risky proposition especially when Dreiser has a variety of approaches to life. If the term naturalism means merely a franker acceptance of the ugly in life or more faithful recording of personal experience, it can be accepted as a description of Dreiser's novel. If further it means a turning to the current findings of science for a philosophy with which to ask the fundamental questions about man and his role in society, it can be still accepted. But, when naturalism serves the purpose of confining creative genius within a formula, it must be rejected, for Dreiser belonged to no school, studied no sources with intent to obey, knew little of literary movements at home or

². Quoted by John J. McAleer, op.cit., p. 43.
abroad. Moreover, talking about himself Dreiser says, "for myself, I accept now no creeds. I do not know what truth is, what beauty is, what love is, what hope is." 3 About what he is and what he has done in his novels, he says:

"On thinking back over books I have written, I can say ... this has been my vision of life-life with its romance and cruelty, its pity and terror, its joys and anxiety, its peace and conflict. You may not like my vision ... but it is the only one that I have seen and felt, therefore, it is the only one I can give you". 4

As such, Dreiser is a self-schooled artist who portrays contemporary American life in his novels. His life and experience taught him more than books could do. He read Huxley, Spencer, Cier and Leob to know more about life and its riddles, but whatever he gives us in the form of fiction, non-fiction, plays and poems, these are exclusively his own first-hand perceptions of the reality of common existence, visible and invisible behaviour of man in this world.

Dreiser is a seminal artist. His growth as an artist and as a man is natural and organic. It is natural in the sense that Dreiser the artist matures as Dreiser the man rises in age from youth to old age. Dreiser the artist can not be understood without sufficient knowledge of Dreiser, the man and his life. He appeared as a bewildered youngman with the promise of an

artistic career at the turn of the century. The forces of crass materialism and scientific progressivism of his age stimulated the artistic talent in him. The spirit of his youth finds no other means to express his innate feelings and emotions other than by portraying truthfully the sordid aspects of human life, hiding nothing, ashamed of nothing, and apologizing for nothing. He is thrilled to observe the real life which was overshadowed and darkened by a sense of importance. Men and women are flies caught in the web of circumstance. He felt boundless pity for them when his youthful spirit revolted, his artistic talent tamed it by frank expression. He created Carrie, Jennie, Frank Cowperwood, and Eugene Witla, who are common women and men dreaming of ideals which were unattainable in their world. Their ambitions were thwarted by disillusionment and their fates were determined by the world in which they lived. The artist in Dreiser brooded over their helplessness, found no remedy, but sympathised with them. The clinical detachment of Naturalism developed into naturalistic compassion.

As Dreiser grew up to manhood, his youthful voluptuousness disappeared and compassion took the form of social criticism. He felt the responsibility of an artist. He created Clyde and Roberta, who were victims of their society and social conventions. He entertained a tragic vision of life from "raw" and "common" life. His duality and inconsistency of thought persisted as he could not find any ideal which can end the endless misery of man on this earth. An American Tragedy came out glorifying Dreiser as a responsible artist. He earned a lot, felt
economically stable, visited Russia, read voraciously about many ideals and "isms", and searched for an answer to his insatiable and ever curious questions on the mysteries of life. He worked for the downtrodden of society. And finally reached the conclusion that human suffering is not beyond redemption and can be alleviated with human effort.

In the later years of his life, Dreiser, the man reconciled himself with life and the artist in him attained maturity. Young Dreiser discarded marriage, family life, tradition and religion, but in the descending years of his life, he returns to them. As an artist he fulfilled his promising career of a novelist by writing The Bulwark and The Stoic. The character of Solon Barnes and Bernice Fleming bear the testimony of a mature artist. The early secularism was replaced by spiritualism — a faith in the supreme power that guides the universe.

Similarly, Dreiser's philosophy of life as a novelist shows a steady development. It developed from mechanistic determinism to cosmic determinism via social determinism. Thus, while for a time Darwinian conclusions had made him feel that he had found a convincing explanation for all the questions that had been vexing him, Dreiser had really never wholeheartedly or consistantly subscribed to the pure

5. Robert H. Elias also points out that Dreiser's philosophy "progresses from objective determinist through social reformer to reverent, mystical believer in an ordered universe"

deterministic doctrines. And while these had certainly provided seemingly reasonable answers which satisfied the rational thinker in him, the artist's vision was not altogether stultified. He kept constantly searching for values and meaning in life, urged by his compassion for his suffering fellowmen which became deeper as the years went by. Although he tried to present characters as compounds of "chemism" and as helpless victims of their environment, his deep sympathy and interest in them as human beings was continually breaking through the limitations of the mechanical universe. And finally, he accepted spiritualism as the only reality.

Dreiser is a humanitarian artist and his novels deal with man, his society and his problems. His humanism is revealed through his sympathy which includes not only the power to pity the sufferings of others, but also that of understanding their very soul. It shows his reverence for man, the respect for his personality and the recognition of his individuality. He finds enormous value in man through perception of their actions and behaviours. Carrie, Jennie, Roberta and Clyde are sympathetic characters not because they are poor, but because they are human. He stretches his sympathetic hands to rich men like Cowperwood, Solon Barnes, and Edward Butler. Through this sympathy he makes the readers discern the real indestructible man beneath the rags and filth of social out-casts like Carrie or Jennie. His works stand up for true human ideal. By doing this Dreiser creates a wonderful art which endows his readers with a power of vision and feeling.
Dreiser's novels face criticism for their immorality because they touch upon sex and they exhibit what is filthy, deplorable and revolting. As a realistic novelist he took up life as he found it. He would have produced a false, distorted picture, if he were to omit a factor which plays so tremendous a part, as sex. Therefore, what he writes is the truth of life; and if any one is responsible for the immorality and beastliness which he deals with, it is not Dreiser, it is simply human nature. He is a prophet of his time who will not prophesy falsely, and deceitfully persuade the readers into thinking that there is peace when there is no peace, health where there is disease, and purity where there is corruption. Thus, truthfulness and frankness are the true taste of Dreiser's work. With these two guiding principles, he freed American literature from the bondage of prudery and conservatism. Sinclair Lewis gratefully acknowledged Dreiser's greatness as an artist:

"To me, as to many other American writers, Dreiser, more than any other man, is marching alone. Usually unappreciated, often hounded, he has cleared the trail from Victorian Howellsian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty, boldness and passion of life. Without his pioneering I doubt if any one of us could, unless we liked to be sent to jail, seek to express life, beauty and terror."  

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Indeed, it was beauty of life that fascinated Dreiser as an artist.

There is a tendency among the critics to defame Dreiser as an artist for the "heaviness" and "looseness" of his prose style. If style is defined in terms of felicity of words and decorative images and symbols, Dreiser has no style. If style is more than this, then he can not be denied a style. We know that 'style is the man', and we are also informed that he is a confused man, obsessed by the wonder and terror of life. He writes about the simple and poignant truths of life with groping honesty. To tell the truth requires no sonorous word. Words are what we have in the pages of the novel, and words are what we need for the understanding of the novel. But, words are not the only "language" of the novel. "Languages here, is used figuratively not technically. It means "one aspect of Dreiser's Art". There is language of the unfolding scenes and characters by massive accretion of detail and by doing this, Dreiser creates a new stylistic decorum in his novels. He builds his novels with human actions and events like an architect. Therefore, his style is remarkable for its "architectonic genius".

Dreiser's novels deal with manifold common themes. They are developed uncommonly by meticulous detail, boring at times, yet necessary to re-enforce the theme and to increase the

anxiety of the reader. For example, the themes of love and money in *The Financier* are dealt in such a massive way that sometimes, it seems to be an exaggeration, but its logical development holds the reader's imagination. They come to know the final consequences, and realize that money and love are what man needs and without them life is barren. As a realist, his concern was man and society. He wrote about man's hopes and aspirations, dreams and visions, and success and failure. Apart from this the theme of nature and religion is like a sort of undercurrent that trespassed into his novels time and again.

Dreiser's calibre as an artist is recognised and praised for the characters he has created. His characters are real men and women, who stride out from his fictional world to a world of work-a-day reality. He creates a microcosmic world of characters in which we find people from every walk of life. These characters have been classified naturally as men and women and economically as 'haves and have-nots'. They are not unalloyed individuals, rather a mixture of good and evil. As human beings, their course of action is determined by their environment and biological impulses. A few characters like Cowperwood, Eugene and Solon seem to be blessed with free-will, but their will is crushed by some unseen power which is beyond their comprehension. A character like Jennie is a marvel, and exception among all the women characters of Dreiser and she deserves our pity and admiration inspite of her "desert-fate". Thus, Dreiser
handles all the characters with his powerful pity and sympathy to make them alive in our memory as long as the experience lasts.

Superficial critics said that Dreiser as a naturalist lowered man's dignity. But, many types and classes of people who had been contemptuously ignored by the "genteel" writers, acquired the dignity of artistic subjects in the works of Dreiser. In a sense man assumed more dignity because his world was made more difficult. The following of traditional ethical precepts was no longer a path to sure and easy virtue. His world was full of illusion, mistakes, sacrifice, and resignation, and the very complexity of this world challenged man's resources and revealed more dignity than the cut-and-dried world of the idealists, where individual's were good if they wanted to be good. While Dreiser denied freedom of will, he did not deny a will. This will could be either in or out of harmony with the forces of nature and it is the natural bent of the will to strive toward a harmonious relationship. Then, it is possible to see dignity and grandeur of discordant will.

A true realist does not structure his story on symbols and images. This is because a particular symbol or an image makes a work of art subjective by arresting the reader's imagination to a fixed point, distorting the creative imagination in him. A realistic art ought to give that imagination to the reader which is with the artist at the time of creation. But use of symbols erects barriers for the
reader. Therefore, by using symbols the artist loses objectivity. In the case of Dreiser, symbols and images are used with much caution and subtlety to free his art from the danger of subjectivity. His use of symbols and images are "functional" not "decorative". The rocking chair symbol in *Sister Carrie* is functional and through this symbol Dreiser conveys his popular theme of "American Dream" — an endless rocking of desire in human beings. It is the desire which rocks in Carrie as she rocks on the chair, which signifies the general "flux" in which man is caught. The symbolic weird bird sings in the woodland surroundings of Big Bittern lake when Clyde commits the murder of Roberta. The weird bird is the symbol of Clyde's puritanic conscience which haunts him in tranquillity. So also the three witches, the weird sisters premonitions symbolically forecast the success of Cowperwood in Chicago after his failure in Philadelphia. This symbol gives tragic status to *The Financier*.

As a naturalist, Dreiser takes images from the animal kingdom to justify the Darwinian concept of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. The image of the Lobster and Squid fight in *The Financier* is apt enough and functions thematically till the end of the novel. He gives the image of Black Grouper to show Cowperwood's overruling power of duplicity and skill. He studies the behaviour and attitude of the characters by using images of wolf, fox and sheep. Thus, images are well-drawn to provide a naturalistic effect to his novels.
Dreiser’s philosophy of life is inherent in his novels. The inclusion of autobiographical elements into his novels leads the critics to attribute to him the philosophy of his fictional characters. Cowperwood and Solon’s philosophy of life have some similarity with Dreiser’s own philosophy. But, it is not the same always. This is, however, not to say that in his view of life and utterances, Cowperwood and Solon do not represent Dreiser at all. What is suggested here, is that though these characters represent Dreiser’s own views in many respects and are embodiment of so much that he himself had longed for and missed, all that they stand for is not necessarily what Dreiser himself believed in. Also, these characters do not incorporate in themselves many of Dreiser’s beliefs and qualities — his sympathy, wonder, respect and mysticism. At best, they represent one aspect of Dreiser’s personality which indeed has many facets.

As an humanitarian novelist, Dreiser’s philosophy is marked by anthropocentric conceptions of life in this world. His open eyed curiosity and immense imaginative power led him to say:

9. A study of Dreiser’s philosophy will be unfulfilled without reference to his non-fiction and unpublished essays. To unravel the mysteries of life and existence, he wrote essays, chiefly scientific and philosophical. These essays were in unpublished form when he died, and they were compiled by his wife and called "Notes on Life". Now, it is listed in the Dreiser Case File at the Rare Book Library, University of Pennsylvania.

Further study of Dreiser’s philosophy, in this study, is based on Richard Lehan’s Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels, in which Lehan has given a brief account of these unpublished essays.
"I have lived now to my fortieth year and have seen a good deal of life.... But I am one of those curious persons who can not make up their mind about anything. I read and read .... But I find that one history contradicts another, one philosopher drives out another. Essayists, in the main, point out flaws and paradoxes in the current conception of things, novelists, dramatists and biographers spread tales of endless disasters, or silly illusions concerning life, duty, opportunity and the like. And I sit here and read and read, when I have time, wondering".  

Indeed, he wonders at human life and the happenings of the Universe. He sees that "nothing is proved, all is permitted" in this world. Man is insignificant and has nothing to do with his life. The world goes on without reason or meaning. Men are chemical compounds. The atoms that make up the individual are in flux in his body; the individuals are in flux in big cities, and the planets are in flux in their galaxies. All matter is energised or electrified. Life comes out from matter-energy and matter-energy comes from ether space-time. The only truth in life is truth of change. The individual lives, and dies, seasons change, and civilizations prosper and decay. This does not mean that matter is created a new. Time does not march, only matter, and time is matter

in motion. When we detect change, we become aware of time, and time has no existence apart from changing objects. 12

As a materialist, Dreiser believes that matter has its limit and is fixed in quantity, growing toward a moment of fulfilment. Matter is conserved, it is neither created nor destroyed, it only repeats. Out of this change comes contrast. He believes in "equation inevitable": that one force engenders its opposite, and that knowledge depends upon seeing life in terms of opposites — good through evil, beauty through ugliness, mercy through cruelty, sorrow through joy, love through hate, youth through age, wealth through poverty, and strength through weakness. For Dreiser, there is no absolute good or evil. Good and evil are inextricable and can not be separated; one is part of the other and a part of the same process. Life feeds on life, man like animals has to kill in order to eat. What is good to man is in this case evil for animals. The thought of good and evil is relative and possesses a limited point of view.

Man is innocent because natural forces express themselves through man and one can not say whether these forces are working for good or evil. Nature is the creator of life, not the man. If there is evil in man, nature is guilty. Man, in other words,

12. This idea is also conveyed in The Stoic where the Guru tells Berenice Fleming: "There is nothing new.... All motion in this Universe is in the form of successively rising and falling. Systems after systems are coming out of the finer forms, evolving themselves, ...

We are never born and we never die. Each atom is a living thing... combine into groups... material form is but prelude to the building up of another". p. 337.
is moral but not nature. Man is divided into the strong and
the weak; not the good and the bad. The will to power, the
desire for pleasure drive men on their courses. Moral codes
and social conventions are illusions which restrain men. As
Dreiser says in *The Financier*: "A metaphysical idealism will
always tell him (man) that it is better to preserve a cleanly
balance and the storms of circumstance will teach him a noble
stoicism. Beyond this there is nothing which can reasonably
be imposed upon the conscience of man". 13

Dreiser sees life's movement as circular, continuously
moving, but going nowhere. Man is born to die. It is a fact
that keeps life mysterious, and leads to man's sense of awe
and wonder. Change and contrast, the old and the new, the
flux of matter and the meaningless repetition of life are
fundamental beliefs of Dreiser's view of man and the universe.

As a conclusion to the discussion of Dreiser's final
philosophy of life, we can do no better than have Dreiser
himself sum up his position:

"All things to me are emanations and evolutions of cosmic
forces and cosmic law. Buddha and Mary Baker Eddy affirmed an
over or one universal soul. Modern science sees no other
answer than this, but it is not willing to affirm it. Philosophy,
almost in toto, reports the same ....

My scientific as well as my philosophic studies compel
me to feel that there can be but one primary creative force
or soul". 14

14. Dreiser's letter to Dorothy Payne Davis, July 18, 1940.
Quoted in *Theodore Dreiser: His thought and Social
criticism* R.N. Mukherjee (New Delhi: National
Dreiser is not well-equipped to be a thinker. What he says about life, derives from different philosophers and scientists of his time. He is vacillating in his beliefs. He is a man of the heart, not as much as of the intellect. Therefore, his real power lies in sympathy and pity for man as he realised that the sufferings which exist in the world really are the outcome of what man has made of man.

Despite the contradictions within his philosophy, Dreiser externalises his sense of conflict in his fiction. He depicts the pull of desire and the struggle for money and power, reveals the fear of treachery and the betrayal of trust and love, describes the play of chance and accident, portrays the destructive nature of time and illusion of strength, and the reality of man's limitations. No other, novelist of his time has so clearly described man's strength and weakness, and his general helplessness in the face of often changing universe. He presents a mechanised cosmos which operates beyond man's understanding. His novels are impersonal expressions of his personal feelings, emotions and experiences.

Thus, if at all Dreiser is remembered by posterity, it will not be for his philosophy but for the characters of his fictional world. He is realistic to a realist, naturalistic to a naturalist, optimistic to a optimist, and pessimistic to a pessimist. Spiritualism, transcendentalism and mysticism are woven into the very fabric of his novels. He is not an exemplar of any theory, he is an artist first and foremost, and Dreiser is Dreiser.