CHAPTER ONE
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The new millennium demands a new interpretation of Dreiser's world of fictions. One hundred year old tradition of Dreiser criticism is no longer obsessed with the question of naturalism in Dreiser's fictions. A galaxy of critics have treated the problem from infinitely diverse points of view. The phase began with reviews of *Sister Carrie* in 1900 and the fierce literary debate between Stuart P. Sherman stressing 'decency' and H. L. Mencken upholding 'freedom', reached its boiling point in 1915, the year of publication of *The Genius*. The critics of this period focussed on the social and ethical acceptability of his fictions. The publication of *An American Tragedy* in 1925 won the laudatory appreciation even by Sherman and the attack against Dreiser on the plea of "barbaric naturalism" began to die down. The second phase of criticism began in 1930 and in spite of objections from Lionel Trilling, critics accorded recognition to Dreiser as a great novelist of never-withering repute. Robert H. Elias analysed the contradictions and inconsistencies in Dreiser's philosophical and political ideas by delving deep into the details of Dreiser's life in his biography *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature* (1949). F. O. Matthiessen led the critical society of his time to give recognition to Dreiser's greatness. This phase of criticism reached its peak when Dreiser's death in 1946 stimulated a number of conflicting evaluations of his life and work.
The scholarly stage of Dreiser criticism, however, started with Charles Walcutt's PMLA essay on the three distinct phases of naturalism in Dreiser's writings. The three volumes of Letters edited by Thomas P. Riggio brought into light many unexplored facts and the debate over Dreiser's naturalism engaged critics of the stature of Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro in the 1950s. Two different trends of criticism were noticed—one dealing with major novels in particular and the other with Dreiser's work as a whole. James T. Farrell, Matthiessen and Kazin were all praise for Dreiser's social realism. W. A. Swanberg's lengthy biography published in 1965 opened the floodgates of critical essays and books on Dreiser who in the last half century has already become a cultural symbol of America. In the 1960s the availability of Dreiser's literary estate at the University of Pennsylvania provided scope for scholarly criticism and estimation of Dreiser, the man and Dreiser, the writer. Among the important critics of the post-sixties the names of Ellen Moers, Richard Lehan, Philip Gerber and Donald Pizer have surfaced most prominently on the scene of Dreiser criticism.

By mid-1960s the controversy rages violently over the strains of naturalism, Darwinian materialistic determinism and transcendentalism. One seminal essay was written by Eliseo Vivas early in 1938 which triggered of fiery controversy over the antithetical strains of mysticism and transcendentalism on one side and the amoral objectivity on the other in Dreiser's writings. In spite of all the dislike of the critics of the school of New Criticism for Dreiser's works, a number of critics including stalwarts like Ellen Moers, William L. Phillips, Julian Markels, David Weimer and Robert Penn Warren have discovered considerable artistic pattern in Dreiser's
fictions. Julian Markels and David Weimer have tried to interpret the novels of Dreiser and discovered in them a form that creates its effect through both symbolic construct and language.

Since 1980's a good deal of criticism aims at exploring elements of mysticism in the writings of Dreiser. His spiritual pilgrimage has been charted out so that the inter-relationship of mechanism and vitalism in Dreiser's fictions has become distinct. These critical groups included critics of the stature of Louis J. Zanine, Yoshinobu Hakutani, Miyodo Takeda and John Demarkowski. The International Conference (2000) on Dreiser by the International Dreiser Society has also made this aspect of mysticism a focal theme. Another group of critics emerged to take vital interest in the dream element in Dreiser's fictions. Clifton Fadiman raised the issue as early as 1932 in an essay “Dreiser and the American Dream” in The Nation and the next year Louis Manusell Field also referred to the quality of romance in Dreiser's novels in North American Review. This idea was later developed by Louis Filler in an article published in Southwest Review in 1955. In the same year Kenneth S. Lynn in “Theodore Dreiser: The Man of Ice” studies Dreiser's view in the context of modern American imagination. In the collection of essays Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism edited by Miriam Gogol in 1998, the stress is distinctly given on the qualities of individual will and freedom of mind in Dreiser's novels. In 1961, Roger Asselineau in his essay “Theodore Dreiser's Transcendentalism” invited our attention to the question of individual assertion in Dreiser's writings. This was also the central point of interest in Lawrence E. Hussman's book Dreiser and his Fiction: A Twentieth Century Quest, (1983). Raja L. Jegannatha of the Dreiser
Society of India also stressed on the quality of individuality and freedom of human will in Dreiser's writings in his book *Theodore Dreiser: The Man and His Message*. This book was of immense help in shaping my ideas.

The present study deals with the possibilities of romance and role of free will in Dreiser's writings. Dreiser's novels can in no way be called a doctrinaire study in heredity and environmental determinism that denies freedom to individual. What is more, in going to explore the varied aspects of the pattern and perception in Dreiser's novels a subversion of the very romance mode is palpably found present. The romance elements which are attuned to Dreiser's transcendentalist ideas give a concrete direction to his writings. What I have noticed in my course of studies is that none of Dreiser's characters is under the sway of fate that is massively malign. As an organism, man is more like a plant than an animal and what is at stake is not their survival but growth. In the sixties Ellen Moers advanced this viewpoint. A struggle for emergence into consciousness comprises the romantic aspirations of Dreiser's characters. Raymond Williams used the term 'counter—romance' in his book *The Country and The City* to emphasise the antithetical pattern in Virgil's pastoral romance in the *Eclogues*. Arnold Kettle also attempts to suggest such subversion of the romance mode by using the term 'anti-romance'. Dreiser was not a literary theoretician like James or Proust, but from his writings a pattern certainly emerges—the pattern of 'anti-romance' or 'counter-romance'. The characters of Dreiser's novels do not reel under the pressures of environment but feel the thrill and thunder of romantic aspirations only to get disillusioned about them in the end. This "discovery of the delusion" is the subversion of the romance mode. In my book
Francis Scott Fitzgerald: The Quest for Meaning and Form (2000), I have shown how this mode of anti-romantic romance was operative also in the writings of Fitzgerald who had been a successor to and admirer of Dreiser.

James Lundquist has beautifully compared the dreams of Fitzgerald's Gatsby of The Great Gatsby with the dreams of Dreiser's Clyde of An American Tragedy. The quest for the infinite and the unlimited possibilities of an individual were explored by Dreiser in his novels where he has shown the aspirations of his characters in term of consciousness of human mind. It is a reality projected by imagination and therefore not the reality of common experience. Dreiser has explored this reality to provide an all-embracing vision of life. This vision resembles the Emersonian vision of man. Dreiser is indebted to Emerson not because he borrowed his religious ideas of the 'oversoul', but chiefly because like Emerson he reposed his faith in man's perfectibility and in the power of 'consciousness' of human mind. In novel after novel Dreiser has discussed the conflict between the inescapable animality of man's fate and the assertion of free will. We get a fundamental fact of life that permeates American experience of the time. Dreiser documented reality to explore the limitlessness of American Dream and set it up as a microcosm epitomizing a distopic vision regarding the American ideals and values.

Rolf Lunden's book The Inevitable Question: The Antithetical Pattern of Theodore Dreiser's Thought and Art (1973), was also a thought-provoking book in this direction. The romance and its subversion have formed the antithetical pattern in Dreiser's perception of life.
Money as the naturalistic equivalent presupposes a thraldom for the characters of Dreiser. We cannot ignore the fact that Dreiser goes beyond naturalism and in a book published only five years ago in 1995 edited by Miriam Gogol, a host of critics have confirmed this viewpoint. Dreiser's transcendentalist view has been the subject of good many essays in the volume edited by Miriam Gogol. Dreiser's reaction to consumer culture was ambiguous. He was both fascinated and disgusted by this culture of consumerism which has been discussed in Racel Bowlby's recently published book *Just Looking Consumer Culture in Dreiser*. Today we see the ugly side of this culture more distinctly. The situation was certainly not so nearly one hundred years earlier. Marguerite Tjader in a recently published book *Love That Will Not Let Me Go: My Time With Theodore Dreiser* (1998) beautifully stressed the non-consumerist side of Dreiser's nature. It is more or less enigmatic that Dreiser on the one hand joined the Communist movement and simultaneously expressed his faith in Quakerism, Brahma concept and Emersonian oversoul. The lures of consumerist culture could not hold the attention of his characters. The spell of consumerism continues only for a briefer span of time. Gradually the expectations were belied and a consciousness dawned upon the characters. They do not get fully lost in the mess that the society has become under the orgy of materialistic pleasures.

Dreiser's interest in love was greater than his interest in animality. His love—letters are a good proof of that. Thomas P. Riggio has edited a volume of Dreiser's billet-doux under the title *Dearest Wilding with Love Letters from Theodore Dreiser* (1998). I acknowledge my indebtedness to Yvette S. Eastman for the
publication of this immortal volume of love letters clarifying for us Dreiser's conception of love in a consumerist culture. Rachel Bowlby has seen critics to have neglected the polyphonic voice of Dreiser's fictions. In 1998 another book was published by Paul A Orlov. Only one particular novel was taken out for thread-bare analysis. Incidentally, the novel is *An American Tragedy* and Paul Orlov's analysis of the dangers of the self-seeking success brings us to the same theme of distopic vision engendered by the awareness caused by the disillusionment in the mind of the romantic aspirants of the time. Miyodo Takeda's book *The Quest for the Reality of Life* is a confident reaffirmation of the Quakerism and transcendentalism in Dreiser's fictions. Thus it may be concluded that Dreiser's fictions are not detached isolated literery works.

An essential thread of unity runs through Dreiser's entire works. In the first group we may include works such as *Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt, An American Tragedy, The Titan* and *The Financier*. In the second group of the fictions we have *The Genius, The Bulwark* and *The Stoic* to include. The two groups are again one in their manifestation of a single theme presented through the 'counter—romance' pattern by insisting the involvement and detachment on parallel levels. The novels of the earlier group represent in a microcosm which reflect the macrocosm of pleasure-seeking American society. The latter group embodies 'meaning' in a mess in that society. The glorious mode of existence was inspired in the earlier group by the mystic of money, the single-minded devotion for material success. The latter group emphasises the mystic view of life. *Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt* and *An American Tragedy* portray the wealth romance on personal and domestic level
while *The Titan* and *The Financier* portray the gospel of wealth on a public level. Frank Cowperwood is not therefore, a Nietzche Superman. In him we have a combination of two myths- one related to Benjamin Franklin and the other to Horatio Alger in allegorical nomenclature of the name of Frank Algernon Cowperwood. The rise from rags to riches, treated metaphorically in these novels points toward the successful rich in action who are like knights of the past performing difficult deeds as a sort of challenge. This resembles the mythical pattern of "initiation — involvement—alienation" of the hero in Campbell's "A Hero with a Thousand Faces. The artistic value, however, lies in their 'counter-romance' pattern through which the tragic individuation of a great art is achieved. Dreiser's novels represent an ideal hero of the popular myth, the Franklinian poor Richard who rose to the top through courage, enterprise, hard work, intelligence and sheer determination. Their beginning was humble but their struggle was glorious. These novels, in a sense, may be aligned to a Quest romance. A close study of these aspects in the following chapters will project Dreiser in a new light and help us to understand him better and with more depth.

In my thesis with all these factors in mind, I have tried to focus on certain important aspects of Dreiser's thoughts and pattern which have not been fully explored, yet I have tried to give a new dimension to the fictive world of Dreiser.

In Chapter II of the book "*American Naturalism and Dreiser*" I have discussed how the Zolaesque naturalism had influenced the American mind and gave rise to a large corpus of pessimistic literature. With William Dean Howells admiring Zola and his documentation technique Stephen Crane attempting to present a
fragile dignity for man and Norris taking all the load of Zolaesque ideas of determinism and heredity, the drift to naturalistic technique seemed complete. Romantic individualism soured in the decades after the civil war into a documentary pessimism, and the diminution of individualism worried the writers. As Marx also spoke of economic determinism the crisis of individual identity became a very important theme in the fictions of Dreiser’s contemporaries. The application of scientific principles to literature became the favourite method. There was an eagerness of the writers to represent reality by making an analytical study of character, motives and behaviour of man. Thus the naturalistic techniques stood in sharp contrast to the spiritualism and belief in Emersonian Oversoul or Divinity on the one hand and on the other to imaginative and subjective transfiguration practised by the Romantics. To separate fatalism from determinism was to deny the “monism of the cosmos’ which is the foundation rock of naturalistic theory. Zola did not recognise either God or human will. To him man was a Machine with an interacting mechanism of wheels. Zola had shown man being defeated by social conditions or inner urges. Norris emulated Zola’s approach to human documents and scientific observations of the events of life. In his novels there was conscious attempt to reduce to a minimum the role of imagination. In Dreiser’s writings freedom and individualism constituted the central theme and human dignity is shown to assert its importance. Mencken compared the intensity of human suffering in Dreiser’s novels with the Greek tragedies. In his opinion Dreiser subscribes more to Emersonian individualism than to his spiritual idealism. Unlike the naturalists Dreiser’s aim was not merely to record but to translate
and understand. Man is shown not as an instrument in the hands of deterministic forces of the universe but as man of will against his fate.

In Chapter III "Dreiser’s Naturalism and his Creative Tensions", I have discussed how Dreiser’s career as a journalist gave him scope for recording dispassionately. But gradually he came out of the boundary of factual details and asserted in the way of the romantics his personal self in his writings. He was fascinated by Emerson’s firm adherence to the doctrines of self-reliance and individualism. He appreciated in Emerson affirmation which upholds the assertion of the inalienable worth of man and grandeur of individualism. His readings of Carlyle, Thoreau and Emerson since his boyhood days inspired him to participate in the joyous celebration of individuality. But his uniqueness lies in the fact that he linked transcendentalism to the new gospel of wealth. The desire for dollars was not seen by Dreiser as an obsession that makes a man victim but as an aspiration that is almost romantic, reminiscent of the ideals of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy and Westward expansion of the frontier. He interpreted the craze for dollar as a new sense of expansive optimism. Work for earning dollars was next to Godliness, the progress towards blessedness as Dreiser discovered the Horatio Alger promises in the craze for dollars and materialistic well-being. Secondly, Dreiser’s desire to liberate American mind from the crippling ethical obsessions of puritanism was man’s pursuit of materialistic comforts and pleasures indicative of this eagerness for liberation. Dreiser was reluctant to reduce life to the mechanistic level and to negate aspiration by destroying man’s ideal. I have tried to show how
Dreiser worked for the reconciliation of dualities by the extension of the materialist into spiritual self. The dichotomy of two voices—one Shelley's and one Babbitt's—is the central theme of his novels. Like Zola and Norris, Dreiser collected facts dispassionately but his creative tensions stirred in him an urge towards an immersion in experience. As he fronted the facts with a pietistic "sense of wonder", naturally he was in search of a fictional mode that rightly suits his creative urges. By mingling the world of facts portrayed in the daily newspaper with the Horatio Alger romance, Dreiser made the text of fiction panoramic and dense. The glory of individualism was reflected in the writings of Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau which I have distinguished as literatures of Light from the Literature of Darkness reflected in the writing of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville. Dreiser stood a midway. He saw the dark world of desires and animalism, At the same time he had immense faith in transcendentalist optimism. His search for a romantic mode could open new avenues for the fictional world. It was a personal need, a search for a pattern to fictionalise his perceptions. Dreiser wanted to explore the plurality and receptiveness of the genre of fiction, by playing on appearances and reality and by producing inexhaustible elaborate effects contained within a pattern of alternating divergence and convergence. Thus, under the gigantic shadow of Zolaesque naturalism, Dreiser sets up a deliberate tension between subjective and objective perspectives.

In Chapter IV, "The Search for Pattern: The World of Dreiser's Fictions", an outline of the novels is given with a critical selection of the incidents that highlight the underlying pattern of the critical synopsis of the novels. It is clear that there is no distinct stage in
Dreiser's literary career. In fact, each succeeding stage confirms the preceding one. There is a commonness of their themes and inspiration. In all of these novels, we get the projection of Dreiser's own self. This projection of the self is unthinkable in the Zolaesque novels. What is still more important is the artistic tension reflected in the novels. The earlier novels *Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt, The Titan* and *The Financier* formed one group. *The Genius* marked a transition. *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic* were close in spirit. However, in all these novels Dreiser took on the subject of ambition with a directness and complex understanding of all that is involved and in this he surpassed almost all the writers of America of his time. Dreiser did not present sordid and ugly aspects but recorded the American Dream.

In Chapter V, "Towards the Evolution of a Fresh Fictional Form: *Sister Carrie*" I have analysed how strains of naturalism and anti-naturalism seem to co-exist in *Sister Carrie*. Dreiser groped for a pattern that could transcend the mimetic mode of fiction. *Sister Carrie* is the first step in the evolution of Dreiser's fictional form.

In Chapter VI, "The Double Vision: *Jennie Gerhardt*" I have shown how the story of Jennie is enriched with a new vision of life. The depiction of man as a victim of environment and heredity is always inadequate as a vision of life for Dreiser.

In Chapter VII, "The Subversion of Romance Pattern: *An American Tragedy*", I have analysed *An American Tragedy* thoroughly to provide a critique of the perception and pattern of Dreiser's novels as a whole. The personal involvement in the
idealised self-portrait in the novel distinguishes Dreiser from the naturalistic school of writers.

In Chapter VIII, "The Grandeur of Individualism and Human Freedom: The Financier and The Titan", Dreiser's transcendentalist ideas are explored. I have tried to discover the roots of these ideas and the grandeur of individualism and human freedom as is reflected in the fictional construct of these novels.

In Chapter IX "The Height of Ecstasy: The Genius, The Bulwark and The Stoic", Dreiser's sense of wonder at the magnificent beauty of life is expressed. The two novels The Bulwark and The Stoic are analysed to show that they are the culmination of the fictionalised perception of Dreiser.

In Chapter X "The Conclusion: Paradigm of Dreiser's Perception", Dreiser's craft of fiction as well as the chief motif of his works have been anatomised. I have tried to show how Dreiser's use of 'anti-romance' pattern is linked to the thematic polarity of illusions and disillusionment reflected in the 'antithetical' text of the novels symbolising the shift from desires to renunciation. The subversion of romance is also reflected in the linguistic construct of the novels. This chapter contains the conclusion that Dreiser's enriched vision of life necessitated the crossing of the boundary of mimetic mode of fictionalisation of reality.

In course of my study of Theodore Dreiser, extensive use was made of the biographies: Dreiser (1965) by W. A. Swanberg, and the two-volume study, Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City, 1871-1907 (1986) and Theodore Dreiser: An American Journey, 1908-1945 (1990), by Richard Lingeman; the biographical study

[ Abbreviation used in this Thesis ]

SC = Sister Carrie
JG = Jennie Gerhardt
TF = The Financier
TG = The Genius
AAT = An American Tragedy
TB = The Bulwark
TS = The Stoic
SL = The Scarlet Letter