CHAPTER-THREE
DREISER’S NATURALISM
AND
HIS CREATIVE TENSIONS
Chapter III
Dreiser’s Naturalism and His Creative Tensions

Dreiser tried to show how man struggles to overcome the influence of environment and heredity. The characters who people the novels of Dreiser have a free will and suffer intensely. In going to refashion romantic aspiration engendered by the society around him, he wanted to explore plurality and receptiveness of the genre of fiction by producing inexhaustible elaborate effects contained within a pattern of divergence and convergence. Dreiser’s characters trust their selves and they are marked by individualism which distinguishes them from the victims of determinism in a novel of Zola or Norris. Dreiser was attracted by Emerson’s firm adherence to the doctrines of self-reliance, individualism and in his view of life there is a kind of affirmation, an assertion of the inalienable worth of man.

In his youth Dreiser enjoyed reading works of Carlyle, Thoreau and Emerson. His philosophy was far removed from the orthodox Christian dogma but it was more consistent with the more mystical conception of an immanent deity of the transcendentalist thought. Dreiser himself defined the breath of life as the energy radiation contained in and emanating from all material things and equated that energy with what Emerson called “the oversoul.” The Emersonian mysticism was reflected in the joyous
celebration of individuality of the characters in the earlier novels of Dreiser. In the novels of the later period there is a deeper interest in Quakerism and Brahma concept which was attuned to the transcendentalism of the Emersonian philosophy. What is still more interesting is that there is an attempt to interpret transcendentalism in the light of the new gospel of wealth.

Transcendentalism permeated the spirit of American expansion, the American dream of individual opportunity, freedom and greatness. Transcendentalism rises through the belief that knowledge brings liberty and makes man equivalent to God. The essence of transcendentalism is found in Emerson's statement that nature is a symbol of spirit. In Emerson's system man's mind is an aspect of spirit, his body a fact of nature. To interpret transcendentalism in the light of this new gospel of wealth as Andrew Carnegie was to put it, is thus to understand the trend of American writing in a new light. Max Weber also analysed how the central doctrines of Calvinism inculcated 'a worldly asceticism' to inspire the spirit of Capitalism:

.... the inherent sinfulness of the world and worldly possessions, Predestination and the Calling supplied the basis of the Protestant ethic and provided the bridges by which religious belief was linked to early capitalistic practice. The first condemned covetousness and urged the puritan to deny himself the physical allurements of play and entertainment and to check sensual pleasure; the second led to the search for signs of one's election to one's daily activity and the doctrines of the Calling led to the position that not withdrawal from the world but the conscientious discharge of the duties of business is among the loftiest of religious and
moral virtues. Combined together they inculcated "a worldly asceticism" in which hard work, thrift, self-discipline and rational foresight were heavily emphasised.\(^1\)

Max Weber's interpretation very clearly explained the role of religious ethic in the development and growth of Capitalist class-structure of America and this again shows how the rush for gold or the desire for dollars and social rank did never come in conflict with idealism and religion. The Horatio-Alger rags to riches theory of success was never in conflict with the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy which encouraged laissez faire and the Westward expansion of the frontier. The war for freedom in America was quickly replaced by holy war for dollars and it ushered in a new sense of expansive optimism. The law of life, at least for America, was progress and:

organically connected with this optimism was the individualism inculcated from the first by the American world and by American thought.\(^2\)

Long since Cotton Mather had said that a man must have twin callings “to serve Jesus Christ” and to pursue his “certain Particular Employment” and that the two callings are:

like the two oars of a boat— a man must pull both oars to reach the shore of Eternal blessedness.\(^3\)

In short, work for earning dollars was not next to Godliness:

it was equal to Godliness in the progress towards blessedness.\(^4\)

Even a selfish acquisition of prosperity was preferred over
selfish indolence. Long before the advocacy of Mather in the heyday of Protestantism and the new prosperity after the Civil war, clergymen philosophers and other intellectuals hymned “the Godliness of gainful pursuits”.

It may not be irrelevant to remember here that the infinite potentiality of individual human beings even in the Emersonian sense was measured by materialist standards since dollars were divine blessings and poverty was a curse. It is not an exaggeration to say that the romance of transcendentalism was the romance of business in America that opted for the new order, in which

the Horatio Alger books promised every lad that by energy, honesty, faithful attention to duty and a little luck with his pluck he would someday be rich too.

By 1900, America was a world in which

a great new structure of corporations and financial organisations had sprung up.

In America spiritual blessedness was never divorced from monetary contentment. By the end of the 19th century Bishop Lawrence of Massachusetts paraphrased Emerson in a new context and summed up everything:

Godliness is in league with riches..... Material prosperity is helping to make the national character sweeter, more joyous, more unselfish, more Christlike.

The bishop like many other Americans held the good Calvinist
view that

... godliness was not only in league with riches but that riches were the evidence of Godliness; In the long run, it is only to the man of morality that wealth comes.\(^9\)

**Wealth in American concept was**

the result of God’s decree and was a mark of the man of morality; poverty was by the same line of reasoning also the result of God’s decree and was very likely to be the mark of the man of immorality\(^10\)

As to the question of Emersonian individualism, as H. L. Mencken stressed it,

it was obviously Emerson’s central aim in life to liberate the American mind to set it free from the crippling ethical obsessions of Puritanism, to break down hard thinking, to make liberty more real on the intellectual plane than it could ever be on the political plane.\(^11\)

For Mencken Emersonian individualism is significant and it gives him the stature of a seer and a prophet”. Emerson was not outmoded to a writer like Dreiser in whose writings we may discover a new definition of transcendentalism which Ferthingham has described as “an assertion of the inalienable worth of man”. Denying original sin it affirmed that all men, and not merely the elect few might achieve of grace by casting off external authority. Yoshinobu Hakutani pointed out how Thoreau and Emerson fasci-
nated Dreiser even at a tender age:

At the age of fifteen and sixteen he enjoyed reading works by Carlyle and also liked Thoreau and Emerson.\textsuperscript{12}

Mencken not only extended the Emersonian credo of freedom, but also stressed the

Emersonian doctrine of soaring individual made articulate by freedom and realizing the responsibility that lies upon us, each in the measure of his own gift.\textsuperscript{13}

The objectively deterministic quality of nature is something that directly comes into conflict with the ever changing and never resting self of man and there emerges a continual crisis of adjustment on the part of man and his self. Herein lies the conflict between the two schools of thought—the Emersonian individualism and the 18th and 19th century naturalism. The naturalists observe closely and report clearly the character and the behaviour of man's physical environment since the writers of this group go to the extent of saying that there is no reality beyond nature. This is in direct conflict with transcendentalism which believes in idealisation and going beyond nature or imposition of value judgement on nature. H. L. Mencken who never wanted to reduce man from his heroic status to a helpless victim in the manner of the naturalists was in favour of putting stress on the ordeal of man's strength and his capacity for suffering.

In Dreiser there is a frank acceptance of the ugly in life which takes the form of an honest presentation of the lived experiences. Dreiser evidently wrote what he knew from his presonal experiences
and rarely with an objective and scientist like detachment. This has been praised by Mencken as “the intellectual honesty of the artist”\textsuperscript{14}

Alfred Kazin has observed that

naturalism has always been divided between those who know its drab environment from personal experience to whom writing is always a form of autobiographical discourse and those who employ it as a literary idea.\textsuperscript{15}

Dreiser’s position as a naturalist is unique because he wrote from personal experience and to him writing was always a personal discourse. At the same time he employed naturalism as a literary idea. Dreiser himself said that he would rather be a “seeking Prometheus” than a “whimpering slave praying for some Nirvana.”\textsuperscript{16} It was not much difficult to see the Promethean quality in his thinking. Richard Lehan rightly remarked:

The city compelled him because it was creating through industry and finance capitalism, a new world\textsuperscript{17}

On the one hand Dreiser firmly believed in the mechanistic philosophy that “all life was determined by forces and counter forces.”\textsuperscript{18} It made Dreiser believe that

man had no more individual motives—had no more free will—than the individual bee in the hive.\textsuperscript{19}

This was again in sharp contrast to Dreiser’s awareness of man’s goodness and greatness. To reduce life to the mechanistic level was to destroy man’s ideal to negate aspiration.
Although as a young man Dreiser rejected much of the Catholic dogma and superstitious beliefs of his mother, his world view continued to be shaped by his belief in “Christian brotherhood” and in the individual’s free will to choose between good and evil and to determine one’s own fate. The description of Dreiser as “a pessimistic naturalist” was challenged by Helen Dreiser:

He had a cosmic consciousness—a scientific searching and direct approach to the study of the natural laws of existence. Naturalist? Yes, but a naturalist with an intuition which had its roots in the cosmic elements of the universe itself.  

Ellen Moer’s Two Dreisers chiefly rests on the analysis of the scientific and nonscientific influences on Dreiser’s mind. Robert Elias, Charles Walcutt and Donald Pizer have amazingly taken cue from the reviewers of Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy to place Dreiser in the mainstream of naturalistic writing. Ronald E. Martin has analysed the nineteenth century theories of force or energy particularly as they were expressed in Spencer’s philosophy and showed their impact on the novels of Dreiser. There is again another extreme of criticism and critics like F. O. Mattheissen, Robert Shulman and Carolyn Porter who have tried to show that Dreiser’s writing was marked by a socialist attitude as the characters represent social forces. Helen Richardson with whom Dreiser had lived intermittently for the past twenty five years and whom he finally married in 1944 however contended: “Dreiser was a mystic, first, last and always.” The final two novels of Dreiser contain much of these mystical ideas. The metaphysical and even spiritual subject matters of considerable importance abound in these works.
But even as early as in 1920, in *Hey Rub-a-Dub-Dub* Dreiser speaks of a certain power controlling the universal order including man of some great elemental spirit holding things together. In *Notes on Life* Dreiser imagines life as a mirror, a tool for the creator to contemplate and appreciate itself:

All existence is (evolving) toward more and more of that — the universe mirroring itself to itself.\(^{22}\)

What is still more important is that the vitalist philosophy was deeply rooted in the most important period of his career as a novelist. H. Alan Wycherley rightly maintained that

Dreiser’s non-fiction after 1900 fluctuated between "mechanism" and "vitalism.\(^{23}\)

In the earlier novels of Dreiser the dominant theme seemed to be the tragic victimisation of man who is a mechanism and his pitiful existence is determined by factors of biology and social environment. Man is more or less a slave of hypnotic incomprehensible drives for sexual conquest, for esteem, fame, power and money. The predicament is brought about by the misdirected American Dream. But even in these earlier novels there is the quest for meaning in life. Philip Gerber describes how Dreiser reiterates the story of individuals crippled by environment in the hostile world. Man in this world

dwindles to the ignominy of an expendable pawn — and a poorly made one at that — in a chess game played not by responsible goods but by impersonal mechanical and chemical forces set in motion by a cosmic accident.\(^{24}\)
But what we miss here is the process of winning regeneration through Inner Light which sustains a Dreiser protagonist towards the last phase of his life. In nearly each and every one of his novels Dreiser stressed on the possibilities of life and we feel that beyond the will of each character is the possibility of self-fulfilment. All these are the outcome of the conflict between Dreiser’s mechanistic philosophy and romantic idealism. Throughout his career as a novelist Dreiser was in quest of a syncretistic resolution to the thematic extremes. The reconciliation of dualities— the extension of the materialist self into the spiritual self—was an attempt to negate materialism by romantic idealism. It was an ambitious attempt to reconcile the terrestrial with the super-terrestrial, the lower with the higher, the ignoble with the noble, the negative with the positive, the darkness with the light and thus to provide a fuller conception of life. Richard Lehan referred to the dichotomy as “two voices — a Shelley’s, and a Babbitt’s”25 This contradiction puzzled even H. L. Mencken who commented severely on the two selves of Dreiser:

One half of the man’s brain so to speak, wars with the other half.26

Mencken criticized Dreiser’s “other half” which seems ready to take refuge behind an indeterminate sort of mysticism, even a facile supernaturalism27

H. L. Mencken criticized P. Sherman’s verdict on Dreiser and remarked that Dreiser is no more a realist than a naturalist, he is really something quite different and stately. His aim is not merely to record but to
translate and understand; that he exposes is not the empty event and act but the endless mystery out of which it springs.28

Dreiser began his writing career as a newspaperman working in Chicago, St. Louis and Pittsburgh. In 1907 he was appointed editor-in-chief of the Butterick publications in New York City. With the publication of The Financier (1912), Dreiser was able to give up newspaper work and devote himself to writing. Dreiser’s newspaper days started with his determination to concentrate on ingratiating himself with the editor of Chicago Daily Globe although he was yet to secure the access to the bright shiny world as he expected the newspaper world to be. But what he gained was the chance to remain close to the significant events of his time as a reporter under the friendly guidance of John Maxwell, who advised him “to be a writer, not just an ordinary newspaper man.” The city editor John T. McEnnis called his features “slum romance.”29 The offer Dreiser received from The St. Louis Globe-Democrat to work under Joseph B. McCullagh made him jubilant. It did not take him long to make a place for himself on the paper. In August 1893, he was working for The Republic. He was advised to read Zola and Balzac by H.B. Wandell. Elias wrote:

Dreiser would always nod, even though he had never read either Zola or Balzac.30

While Wandell preferred features involving crime and bloodshed, only few of Dreiser’s assignments were related to brutality and crime. He had exhibited his grasp of detail and a confidence in the presentation of facts. His narrative skill developed, as he worked in St. Louis for The Republic, but his new acquaintance with
Arthur Henry stirred his latent desire to become a poet, playwright and novelist. Arthur Henry was the city editor of *The Toledo Blade* for which Dreiser did a covering of the Streetcar Strike in March, 1894. Dreiser got interested in the bewildering complexity of life as he was writing features for *Pittsburgh Dispatch*. He was no more busy with merely describing things as they were, but delved deep into the heart of the event to analyse and interpret.

Thus he tried to explain in his article the nature of the industrial strife as he wrote features on the worst slums of the city. Even as a reporter whose chief job was to describe he groped for a pattern that underlay the outward complexity. Yoshinobu Hakutani remarked:

> However acute an observer young Dreiser might have been, he was not at all prepared for the writing, the trade of journalism demanded.³¹

Dreiser collected materials for his newspaper stories from slums which he saw closely and also from his own family life which he knew intimately. He depicted life not “as it is” but “as he sees it” thus giving the facts a character of fiction. Dreiser's career began in journalism and he was one with Whitman, Mark Twain, Hemingway, Dos Passos, William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris, Upton Sinclairs, Willa Cather, James Farrell, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, Eugene O’Neill, Robert Frost, Eudora Welty, Sinclair Lewis, Carl Sandberg and countless others. Truman Capote, Norman Mailer or Tom Wolfe succeeded in the new fusion of novelistic technique and factual reporting, what Capote called “non-fiction novel.”
Emerson stressed the importance of
fronting the fact, not dealing with it at second hand and, through
the perceptions of somebody else.\textsuperscript{32}

As a journalist Dreiser encountered facts and there was an urge towards an immersion in experience. Shelley Fisher Fishkin remarked:

The turgid and expansive quality of Dreiser’s prose can be traced to lessons he learned as a journalist in the 1890’s, as he can his insight into the dynamics of American society and the distorted images of it presented in newspapers and fiction.\textsuperscript{33}

In Fishkin’s opinion Dreiser “grew impatient with the limits of conventional journalism”\textsuperscript{34} and turned to fiction. Dreiser’s choice of journalistic career was also the outcome of an illusion created in his mind by the romantic and glamorous world of Chicago journalism. But he got disillusioned and tried to overcome the limitations of journalism by exploring the liberating possibilities of fiction. He worked on a part-time basis in \textit{The Chicago Daily Globe} and later as a full time reporter for \textit{The Globe}. He joined \textit{St. Louis Globe-Democrat} and left that paper for \textit{The Republic}. Among other papers he worked for were \textit{The Toledo Blade}, \textit{Pittsburgh Dispatch} and \textit{New York World}. In 1895 he edited the publication called \textit{Ev’ry Month} which contained Dreiserian meditations on city life. At that time he also contributed as a free-lance reporter to magazines such as \textit{Ainslee’s Munsey’s}, \textit{Metropolitan}, \textit{Success}, \textit{Cosmopolitan}. \textit{Pearson’s}, \textit{Leslie’s} and \textit{Demorest’s}.

From the articles and news coverage published in these his
interest in profiles of businessmen, artist, and beautiful women of the city life is revealed. While he edited another magazine called *Broadway*, he wrote for the departments such as “Beautiful Women of New York Society” and also occupied position of editor-in-chief of Butterick’s women magazines such as *The Delineator*. Dreiser could write on diverse subjects and Thomas P. Riggio rightly points out that he used to write in the same week for magazines as diverse as *Masses, Cosmopolitan, The Seven Arts* and *Saturday Evening Post*.

Critics have commented on Dreiser’s use of journalistic materials in his fiction. The event of streetcar strike on which he wrote for *Toledo* was accommodated in *Sister Carrie*. The facts of the life of a Chicago financier named Charles T. Yerkes proved to be the source of inspiration for *The Financier, The Titan* and *The Stoic*. Dreiser’s account of the grand attractions of the hotels and of the tyrannies of the American Court of Justice appear to be similar to the accounts given of them in *American Tragedy*. Whitman regarded the world of fact as emblematic of God and his handiwork. Dreiser likewise used the realities as a starting point for exploration of the wonder and terror of life.

David Brian Davis rightly says that Dreiser approached “the dense world of fact with an almost pietistic sense of wonder.” The original title of *An American Tragedy* was to be “Mirage” and the central theme of the novel was also a mirage of illusion. Dreiser based the story upon the facts and conditions which proved very common in his lifetime and his personal experience as a journalist. Dreiser succeeds in exposing as illusions some of the facts which dominate American society.
Fisher Fishkin wrote:

By merging the world of the Horatio Alger romance with the world reported in the daily newspaper, Dreiser forces his reader to see both texts in a new way.36

Dreiser knew the difference between the facts of journalism which require verification and the truths of an artist that must cohere into an aesthetically satisfying whole. Facts presented in his fictions enabled the readers to see more clearly. As a journalist he knew the gap between rhetoric and reality. As artist he exposed that gap by rearranging familiar facts and visions and by casting them in new lights and by placing them in larger context of romance. This is how he deciphered the invisible codes that pervaded the culture of the society he wanted to depict. Kenneth S. Lynn points out that

Dreiser was working in the characteristic American vein which has always been empirical, innovative and exploratory.37

The quality of imagination transformed Dreiser's view of life as a journalist. In place of objective and dispassionate recording of facts, Dreiser endeavoured to create and explore regions which belonged to imagination. Kenneth Lynn calls Dreiser's first novel *Sister Carrie* "a conscious work of the imagination."38 Shelley Fishkin also stressed this imaginative quality of Dreiser's fiction:

In its jumbled, cacophonous montage Dreiser found a reality that he endeavoured to capture in his art.39

The shiny surfaces of the city and the shadowy gloom beneath provided him new images of old tales of mystery and magic. As
a journalist Dreiser was exposed to the kaleidoscopic array of facts about American life. But as a novelist he gave his readers an unprecedented inside view of the world of business and finance, ambition and desire.

Autobiographical literature becomes a strategy for transcending one’s historical essence. The personal experience of the writer enters into a formal relationship with the collective experience. As a journalist Dreiser had to present facts of life “as they are.” But as a writer, as of every writer it is expected, he gives a simple and sincere account of his own life. In Dreiser’s case, autobiography, however, is the fictionalization of a life lived. He selects and transcends facts and the meaning has to be discovered out of the multiplicity of viewpoints offered in the novels. Dreiser is split into author, narrator and here the multifaceted-self mirrors images that endure. Kenneth Burke analysed the difficulties of a writer like Poe:

For though it is true that artist use art, sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully, to get themselves out of trouble, the practice of art just as often gets artists into trouble.40

Poe’s personal difficulties could easily be seen as practical reflections of his literary methods. This is also true of Dreiser. The art of fictionalization has helped him involve himself in and at the same time detach himself from the experiences. The claims of the personal and the claims of the archetypal self that Dreiser creates are beautifully reconciled in his novels. This ‘double vision’ reflected in the dichotomy of mythic and historical offers a certain clue to the inner meaning of the novels. For Henry James the development of
a book is natural and necessary because it is organic. The vision that a novel embodies is deeply ingrained in the artist’s consciousness. In fact, if a narrative structure is necessarily fictional, it is also basic to the conception of life. The world of contemporary realities out of which Dreiser made his newspapers was the same world out of which he would make his novels not only in one particular phase of his life, but throughout his career. Long after Dreiser had ceased writing for newspapers himself, his novels were filled with the same events that filled the daily newspapers. *An American Tragedy, The Financier,* and *The Titan* are examples of such novels in which the power of massed details is felt. There are the events from real life like the Toledo Strike.

Dreiser settled upon the case of Chester Gillette, a young man who had drowned his sweetheart Grace Brown in Big Moose Lake in the State of New York in July 1906. Dreiser used this event for the plot of *An American Tragedy.* Even the criminal lawyer Clarence Darrow concluded after reading the novel that Clyde Griffiths could never have been convicted in real life on the basis of the evidence given. Now this is where Dreiser’s mode of writing differs from the existing mimetic model which he felt inadequate for portraying the events of his time on a high literary level. Ford Madox Ford has pointed out that Dreiser’s story is not merely an absorbing imaginative creation, but the story of America at a particular juncture in its history. In a letter to Jack Wilgus Dreiser wrote that he wanted to encompass in his novel:

> every phase of our national life—politics, society, religion, business, sex.
He firmly rooted his book in actuality but at the same time he transcended the bounds of reality. Robert Penn Warren also stressed this point when he says that in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* one feels

a historical moment, the moment of the Great Boom which climaxed the period from Grant to Coolidge, the half century in which the new America of industry and finance-capitalism was hardening into shape and its secret forces were emerging to dominate all life.42

By mingling the world portrayed in the daily newspaper with the world of Horatio Alger romance, Dreiser transcended the world of facts and made his text panoramic and dense. It is a world of typical adolescent yearnings and fantasies stirred by the maniac acquisitiveness of the day. In a 1922 essay on "The Scope of Fiction" Dreiser rightly distinguishes the world of facts from the world of fiction,

I know by now that life may not be put down in a mode of writing different from that of Zola's43

If Zola had to write about a ride on a railway locomotive or a night in a brothel. Zola had to get it all out of a book. Dreiser had only to call on his undimmed memories and the episode will be there in all its freshness and vigour. This is more apparent in the use of facts in the making of a novel like *An American Tragedy*. As a journalist he took considerable interest in the stories about the Gillette case which he came across in the New York newspapers. Dreiser kept extremely close to the record throughout much of the
book although he departed from Gillette’s story in his novel in several significant ways. These structural innovations distinguished Dreiser’s method of narration from that of the Naturalists. He deviated in the description of Clyde’s character and background. The second point of deviation is the account given of the drowning. The third point of deviation which is most important occurs in the description of the American culture that emerges from the shared values of other invented characters in the novel. Since his newspaper days Dreiser was groping toward the task of writing fiction. He wanted to transform his materials as Dos Passos later stressed it in a review of Robert Cantwell’s *The Land of Plenty*:

> The writer has to be continually transforming his tools while he’s using them.44

One sacred rule of formalism is that the writer must not invent. But Dreiser as a writer could do this and here he got scope for establishing structural unity through a pattern of descriptions, comments, repetitions, imageries and contrasted settings. Individual vision ultimately coincided with the omniscient narrative. This resulted from the primacy of synthesis in his vision during his treatment of actuality in a fiction. Fictional facts are for ever counterfeit. But great writers can rearrange facts and visions, cast them in new lights and place them in larger contexts.

Naturalistic novels deal with the ugliness of life reflected in the Literature of Darkness that includes the writings of Hawthorne, Poe and Melville. This is again distinguished from the Literature of Light that glorified the Supreme will and immense possibilities of human being. In the writings of Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau the glory
of individualism is reflected. Their writings can be distinguished from the naturalistic writings predominated by the ugly and the dark, pessimism and deterministic despair. There is an obsession with sin, disappearance of the rational boundaries, the whirlpool of desires and animalism as well as the voyage into the land of nightmare and delusions. These writings reflect the gloom and pessimistic fatalism seen in the nightmarish novels of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville.

Poe's tales of the grotesque are tales of desolation and disintegration. We find this morbid atmosphere of alienation and guilt also in Hawthorne's writings. Roger Chillingworth is the worse sinner in the *The Scarlet Letter*. Arthur Dimmesdale goes deeper and deeper into the pit of sin as he violates the Puritan belief that a man must be a true confessor. His thirst for self-torture both physical and mental is goaded on by an impulse that negates the Emersonian will power and affirmation. Even in the depiction of little Pearl, Hawthorne gives evidence of his deep distrust in the power and possibility of human nature. He calls her "a born misfit of the infantile world."

T.S. Eliot rightly says:

The work of Hawthorne is truly a criticism ......... of the Puritan morality of the Transcendentalist morality and of the world which Hawthorne knew.45

The world of Melville is no less bleak. Melville himself described his great book *Moby Dick* that it was "broiled in hell-fire." Though drawn towards transcendentalism for a while, Melville was cured of his enthusiasm for this when he came into contact
with Hawthorne. His epic tale was fatalistic and merciless. Behind Ahab's cry is the fear that man's covenant with good has been broken that there is no purpose to our existence. Ahab is a man of heroic temper but he resolves on his own destruction.

The rejection of existence in the world of paradox and illusion becomes the rejection of life itself. *Moby Dick* in a sense is the exemplification of Milton's philosophy in *Aeropagitica*:—the knowledge of good is involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil. For Ahab the white whale concentrates in itself the malignity and the evil of the world. But whereas writers of the naturalistic schools were worried about the ugliness, Dreiser heightened the romance in going to reveal the disillusionment and alienation. His fictions reveal not only the tragic thoughts but the tragic truth of American society as well.

Dreiser may be called a great writer simply because of this capability for metamorphosing facts into fiction. Even in *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser used facts in a way different from that of a Zolaesque novel. While Zola is interested in recording life as he sees it, Dreiser makes his novel

a conscious work of imagination, not a passive mediumistic transcription. Like most fiction of importance, *Sister Carrie* is controlled by its creator's objective understanding of and detachment from his material.46

While Howells, Norris or Crane dealt with the sordidness of the metropolis from the standpoint of an onlooker, Dreiser wrote as: "an insider writing out of the heart of his own experience."47
This is absolutely different from the detached and objective rendering of facts in naturalistic fictions. The imaginative freshness and trailblazing originality of *Sister Carrie* have been manifested again and again in the course of Dreiser's career. For in addition to goading him into a ceaseless productivity, his ambition to tell the entire story of twentieth century America made him a continuously inventive author for ever anxious to extend the lines of literary inquiry into new areas of the national experience.

Thematically his novels fall squarely at the centre of an important literary succession. They look back to William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane and Norris especially in the panoramic survey of the city. He agreed with them that:

> city life was artificial and its ambitions false, its love of light and show and finery somehow diseased.  

But unlike them Dreiser anatomised the quintessence of the hypnotism and romance. There is a more profound line than the simple story line. He raised his sights from a city to a nation. Dreiser's books were sui generis, indeed in their dazzling mixture of autobiography, fiction of social documentary and autobiographical reminiscences. They cover the ground of the twentieth century experience of the Americans as more orthodox storytelling could not have done. Dreiser's books were works of art which endeavoured to make the American novel relevant to a new generation of socially skeptical readers. Dreiser was an insider who had assumed his critical role by necessity rather than by choice. It fell on him to record the scheme of values which were irrevocably passing out of the national scene in the first place. Dreiser was looking backward
and recollecting. Secondly, he was looking inward and his attitude was one of self-consciousness. In looking backward Dreiser was not much concerned to present reality as a recollected sequence of events, but to re-create it as a process. The readers see this reality in a new way. The emotional reality of the American experience presented in his writing revealed new truths about their familiar experiences. As a journalist Dreiser had to deal with the leading issues of the time. He was also curious to know the art of recording reality in an artistic way. At this time he read Balzac’s “The Wild Ass’s Skin” and “A Great Man of the Provinces.” He got the chance to study George Eliot, Bulwer Lytton and Fielding. Dreiser’s articles written for The Dispatch showed the change in his attitude—from a mere description and narration of events and casual occurrences of daily life to an interpretation of the facts. As a reader of Henry George and Edward Bellamy he was able to perceive several of the leading issues that came to the surface.

Dreiser’s life as told by W.A. Swanberg in Dreiser (1965) is a case study of a man who disenchanted friends and alienated almost everyone else. Embittered by youthful poverty and made cynical by his years as a newspaperman and magazine editor, Dreiser angered many by his rejection of the normal views of life preached by the upholders of the Genteel Tradition and Puritanism. The Genteel Tradition which provoked Dreiser’s wrath was characterised by extreme regard for morality and ideals, marked by false, affected prudery. The genteel code had a solid base in the contention that all major issues of life and art were based on ethical questions of ideals and standards. Puritanism consists in the interpretation of life in terms of morality. Socio-political issues also
resolve into moral issues. One of Dreiser’s contemporaries H. L. Mencken also confronted and decided that Puritanism was an inevitable part of his demolition of tradition and institutions. Mencken analysed the aspects of old and new Puritanism in “The American” and “Puritanism as a Literary Force”. The new Puritanism was institutional in nature. But a man like Dreiser was not to be satisfied with the existing institutions. Dorothy Dudley too agreed on this point:

Dreiser was one of those born outside the convention and living outside of it.49

Both Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt were based on the seduction and subsequent events concerning two of his sisters, Emma and Sylvia. It was in the sphere of religion and the making and conditioning of his attitude towards it that Dreiser’s home environment and puritan father affected him most and laid down the seeds of his bitterness and hostility.

Dreiser revolted against the religious pressures of the house. His father John Paul Dreiser with all his religious beliefs could not rouse in him a deep veneration. His disillusionment was complete when his sister eloped with a man of the town. The religious restrictions could not do any good to her. Dreiser reacted strongly against any ready-made formula which might stult his individuality and freedom: In “Self-Reliance” (1841) we hear Emerson’s call “Trust thy self”, It is an expression of that fierce individualism that was a striking feature of transcendentalism. Emerson’s firm adherence to the doctrines of self-reliance, individualism and particularly his buoyant faith in the inevitable progress, both economic and
spiritual of mankind, provided some kind of affirmation which inspired even T.S. Eliot to call him one of the "outmoded guardians of the faith." Dreiser's father John Dreiser had a blind adherence to the Catholic faith while his mother, the daughter of Memonite and militant anti-Catholic parents, had no faith in such a creed. Thus in his early life, Theodore suffered from a confusion of values represented so differently by his father and mother. Again as a result of his early schooling, he had somehow come to harbour the notion that spiritual integrity and material well-being were closely related. But soon he got disillusioned by seeing the existence of poverty among the righteous and of wealth among those devoid of charitable feelings. Dreiser was a disillusioned man but at the same time a man who was able to retain his dreams, the Inner Light that sustained him even in his newspaper days when he had experiences of ugly reality. It was Dreiser's faith in a greater benevolent power which inspired him to believe that he was happier than the man having only his reason to depend on.