CHAPTER-FOUR
THE SEARCH FOR PATTERN :
THE WORLD OF DREISER’S FICTION
Chapter IV

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“Dreiser” wrote Sherwood Anderson, “is to my mind the biggest and the most important American of our times.” Dreiser is impressive in all his books and no other author of his stature has survived so much hostile criticism and misinterpretation. In spite of all that his place in modern American literature has been established. His historical importance is undeniable but for the perception of life and the innovative pattern of his fiction he may be called a great artist of his time. Dreiser looked on life as none of his predecessors had done and he was not afraid to tell what he saw. He led a tortured life but he made something out of his torment. We should not go for searching out distinct stages in Dreiser’s life so that we can conclude that each succeeding stage negates the preceding one. In fact, Dreiser worked on all his novels simultaneously. Only they were published far apart from one another. The Titan, An American Tragedy, The Stoic and The Bulwark were published much later although Dreiser started working on them along with Jennie Gerhardt and The Financier. The proximity of their genesis is reflected in the commonality of their themes and inspiration.

Thus we get the quintessence of Dreiser’s own self in nearly all of them. He shared the viewpoints of his own characters and
their emotions, their ecstasy and despair, the only notable thing is his artistic presentation of the views of life that he saw. He had been called by the critics a mechanist, a pessimist, a determinist, the antithesis of a transcendentalist largely on the basis of the first six novels. But the last two novels were not to be seen as merely the works by a senile Dreiser. The last two novels were the outgrowth of a transcendental philosophy that was merely less evident in the first six novels. The title "Trilogy of Desire" given by Dreiser had also misled many critics. In fact, The Genius is more close in spirit to the last two novels than to the earlier two The Titan and The Financier. At best it can be bracketed with Sister Carrie. In The Genius the Dreiserian view of life, his artistic tensions became more distinct. He could not fully resolve the tensions in the last two novels but there is a tone of serenity which he seems to have reached after the restlessness of thoughts reflected in the earlier novels. The Genius marked a transition in the pattern and perception of Dreiser. Even Fitzgerald praised the novel in the superlative. Dreiser made Chicago a compelling symbol of social evil. In The Genius the hero moves from Chicago to New York. Dreiser is a seminal figure in the tradition of the urban novel. But Dreiser's novels provide a larger viewpoint. He challenged the status quo and had to pay a high price. The opposed selves in Dreiser have bewildered his critics.

Although he was a professed agnostic there was in most of his work an implied reference and a norm of values. He was a determinist but one who worked hard to find success and recognition and one who urged reform through socialism and communism. He was a materialist but he had also a streak of soft idealistic
monism in his make up that was eventually to lead him to a position which Emerson could have understood. Much of the enthusiasm for Dreiser seemed to grow out of the anti puritan crusade of the era and critical attacks and misinterpretations of his viewpoints were largely moralistic.

It is important to remember that Dreiser's greatness lies in his artistic potential — the creation of the memorable characters and providing a deep perception of life. With all his talk about 'chemisms' he had a passionate antagonism to extremes of genuinely scientific attitude. He got rid of his religion or tried to, but he did not accept, or enter into the scientific conception. He did not join the march of science or the ecstasy of conventional Christianity. Dreiser's greatness consists in his devotion to truth both about external facts and inner life. He had assimilated the whole background of aspirations, exaltation, despair, experiences and scholarship into one composite whole to offer a new vision of life. Dreiser is a realist because he deals descriptively with material directly before him but he is also a romanticist whose attitude is one of horror, joy and wonder. Dreiser took on the subject of ambition in America with a directness and complex understanding of all that is involved and surpassed all other writers of his time. In one way or another all of Dreiser's novels are about ambition and success in America. The lobster and squid metaphor which appeared in *The Financier* is classic and may be taken as the central metaphor for all his novels portraying success and ambition.

It has been rightly pointed out that America of Dreiser's time
wanted romance and Dreiser came forward to fulfill the need. thus
Louis Filler is of the opinion:

Dreiser did not betray America by presenting its sordid and ugly
aspects. He recorded the dreams of person whom he had known.
He was at times out of touch with what had been called the
American dream.²

In fact, Dreiser did not belong to what was called the
“sweetness and light” school. He was interested in telling the
truth.”³ Five American poets and novelists served apprenticeship,
in their youths as “documentors of fact” journalists and they are
Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Hemingway, Dos Passos and Theodore
Dreiser. They have all been preoecoped with the impulse to record
and communicate the physical social, psychological and political
facts of American life that they have witnessed. Each writer had
to grapple with the problem of converting fact into fiction and each
one approached the problem in his own way.

Now, what is the way Dreiser adopted for himself? Waldo
Frank beautifully analyses the mode of Dreiser’s writings in one
of his essays on achievenent of Sherwood Anderson:

Dreiser is a classic because his novels are a portal from which
an American soul emerges. He had caught the crass life of the
American, armoured himself with luxury and wealth. Beneath his
books one senses vaguely a grandiose movement.⁴

Dreiser succeeds in doing this by rejecting novel as the
mimetic mode. His works blend a realistic treatment of American
culture of the twentieth century with a sense of the abstract, and the ideal.

The widened perception about life made him disillusioned about the old fictional mode of his predecessors and he could not but find out a new way of explaining the chaos of life - the wonder and terror of existence - as an American and as a man. This takes us to the heart of Dreiser as a writer - the problems of exploration cum expression.

Dreiser tells the story of Sister Carrie to reveal how her selfish pursuits of the materialistic ambitions were romantic in their aspirations. But in the course of the pursuit her yearning is divested of its glamour. The repulsion caused by the degrading effect of materialism on human life is related in this novel to the process of self-discovery in American life. In order to understand the book we should realize the all important role played by money. We see in Carrie the impossibility of realizing one's hopes and wild dreams.

In *Sister Carrie* the meaninglessness of the glittering life has been highlighted. The novel contains some elements which are also found in the naturalistic novels of Zola and Norris. There is the picture of victimisation of a woman and the lures of glamorous life, sexual pleasures and material comforts which Carrie could not resist. Animalism is more clearly demonstrated through Carrie's
pursuit of selfish ambitions. She found all these things great. Dreiser beautifully used the form of a naturalistic fiction for a totally different purpose. The story of *Sister Carrie* is simple. Carrie Meeber, a young small town girl was coming to Chicago and on her way met a travelling salesman, named Drouet. He extended a promising welcome to Carrie on the train into town. She was soon brought up short by the bleak world of her sister’s home and a grim job in a shoe factory. Carrie saw Chicago as a place of material wonders and endless pleasure. The city reflected the glory of an emerging dynamic metropolis of the 1880s. Dreiser compares the city to a seducer whose restless charms include “the gleam of a thousand lights” and “a blare of sound, a roar of life, a vast array of human hives” (SC 4).

Carrie craves for actualizing her yearning for clothes and jewellery. She was fascinated by the department stores. Carrie found in Drouet a friend to realize her aspirations. She was ready to become his mistress. When Drouet introduces Carrie to George Hurstwood, the manager of a Chicago bar, she is attracted more by Hurstwood’s superior social position. Compared to Drouet’s, Hurstwood’s imported suits and elegant manner were more attractive to her. She succeeded in winning over Hurstwood who also saw in her an avenue of escape from his shrewish wife and social-climbing children. He ignored the qualms of conscience and seizes the opportunity for a theft of ten thousand dollars. Carrie had been nursing an ambition to become an actress. Hurstwood had hinted that he could do more than simply encourage her. Carrie agreed to elope with Hurstwood to New York. On reaching New York, Carrie rose to fame and some fortune while Hurstwood gradually declined into despair. Carrie moved toward the apogee of her good fortune
untroubled by any thought of yesterday. When Hurstwood's money ran out she rekindled her dream of becoming an actress. Helped by a series of lucky breaks and a previously unrealized talent, her career was launched. By the end of the novel she attained nearly all the things she had dreamed about at the beginning. She had money, carriages, gown, social acceptance, applause and a great city at her feet. Just before her stage career was launched in New York, Carrie had met the Vances, a rich couple who sponsored her socially at the moment when her longing was sharpest for material success. Her friendship with the couple allowed Carrie for the first time to step within the magic circle of New York's luxurious restaurants and glittering theatres. At a pre-theatre dinner party at Sherry's restaurant the Vances introduced Carrie to Ames, an engineer and inventor who worked for an Indianapolis electrical company.

It is interesting to notice that all of her achievements could not bring to Carrie the sense of fulfilment she wished for throughout her life. Ames convinced Carrie that her dreams of luxury and pleasure were misguided. Ames told her that he would not care to be rich enough to spend his money in such a vulgar manner. The remark overawed Carrie for whom such pleasures had been the essence of the good life. Through Ames, Carrie learnt to criticise the American success formula. The aimlessness of Carrie seemed to have an end after her acquaintance with Ames (His name is a play on 'aims'). So long Carrie was (to borrow Fitzgerald's phrase) "a cut-glass bowl"—inane, empty, showy and full of vanities. Ames praised those who took the acting profession seriously. This brought a great change in Carrie's outlook. She had liked Drouet and Hurstwood for their showiness — their dress and luxurious life-
style. No sign of that remained. The things which they made her adore were illusions. But while she appreciated Ames, she did that for totally different reasons. She appreciated Ames for his mind that was "speculative and idealistic" (SC 485). This was a new capacity. Drouet and Hurstwood ended miserably. Ames remained. It was the truth of life. At the end of the novel we see Carrie sitting again in her rocking chair. But the Carrie who sat in the rocking chair in her sister's house at Chicago in the early part of the novel and the Carrie of the concluding part of the novel were different persons. Carrie was redeemed. She had been able to realize the truth, the meaninglessness of the glittering and glamorous life for which she yearned so much. Ames' advice to Carrie to read Balzac and Hardy is significant. He interpreted the failure of Balzac's Lucien de Rebeompre in *The Great Man from the Provinces* as merely the result of his being deprived of wealth, position and romantic love. This would have been tragic if he could realize that the pursuit of these things had deflected him from the authentic human goal of knowledge. This was an eye-opener for Carrie. She had pursued selfish ambitions throughout her life. She learnt from Ames for the first time that altruistic action could make her great:

If you want to do most, do good. Serve the many. Be kind and humanitarian. Then you can't help but be great. (SC 486)

Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies in the character of Ames. It is not fully convincing that Carrie has all on a sudden relinquished her yearning for material possession. Ames' estimation of Carrie is also not fully believable. Ames found:

something exceedingly human and unaffected about this woman—a something which craved neither money nor praise. (SC 484)
Once again Carrie is unsatisfied not because she desires money and fame but probably because she does not any longer desire them. She will now have to seek more serious dramatic roles.

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Dreiser's second novel is indeed a far cry from the naturalistic novel. He has introduced the framework of romance in the novel. While dealing with illusions of Sister Carrie, Dreiser had faltered a little. In *Jennie Gerhardt* Dreiser deals with the romance that is fostered by money and also destroyed by it. The romantic aspirations of Jennie Gerhardt clash with the society, restrained by an awareness of the limit of illusions. In spite of the victimisation that is found in the naturalistic novels, we find wild human aspirations and gradual acquisition of serenity in the novel. Jennie Gerhardt is first introduced as a scrubber of floors in a posh Columbus, Ohio, hotel where she along with her mother had been assigned odd jobs. Jennie is poor but exceedingly beautiful. Like Carrie, Jennie is also fascinated by the glamour of city life. The spectacle of wealth in the hotel and the palatial houses of the city filled her mind with "half-defined emotions." Jennie's everyday life at home is stricken with bleak poverty. She has to help her brothers and sisters steal coal from the railroad yards to provide winter warmth for the family. While collecting laundry at the Ohio hotel, Jennie
met a United States Senator George Brander. She could not resist his influence and wealth because of their potential to help others, including her parents, brothers and sisters. Rich people had the privilege of being generous. This appealed to Jennie. Once Jennie waited for the return of the Senator who arranged for the release of her brother from the jail. Jennie's brother was arrested for stealing coal. Brander's supplications made Jennie yield to him sexually. This was the first time Jennie used her beauty for acquisition of wealth and power. She wanted Brander to be generous.

Jennie's father was a religiously committed character. He could not believe that Jennie, the noblest among the children could deviate from the path of morality and purity. After Jennie had been exiled by her father, Senator Brander died, leaving her pregnant. Jennie was forced to look for work. She found the situation as a maid for a well-to-do family in Cleveland. Here Jennie met the second man in her life, Lester Kane, the thirty six-year old son of a prominent Cincinnati family. Lester met Jennie and felt magnetically drawn by her beauty. Jennie was not ready to stoop for conquering the wealthy Lester. But he overcame all her objections. The disapproval came from the socially sensitive family of Lester. Lester could not marry Jennie for fear of losing the property he would inherit. Love was outweighed by Lester's desire for material advantage. Jennie's loss of Lester is compounded by the death of her daughter, Vesta. Jennie adopted two homeless orphans. Lester's heart underwent a change in the twilight hour of his life. Lester's death shows that all his pursuit of earthly pleasures had come to nothing: Lester had chosen material pleasure and comfort over commitment. It had all been meaningless. Dreiser's description of
the final scene of the novel significantly stresses this futility of material pursuits:

Passers by are “gay with the anticipation of coming pleasures, and the names of many cities are cried over and over again through the station loud speaker—the world’s chatter and bustle signifying nothing (TG 430-31).

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In *The Financier* Dreiser linked appetite for money to the transcendalist ideal of freeing man from the limitations of circumstances. The lofty sense of heightened life that is rare in a Zolaesque novel underlies the lusty ambitions of Cowperwood who is no carbon copy of Charles Yerkes of Philadelphia. In *The Financier* Dreiser fictionalized the character of the street-railway magnate and robber baron Charles Tyson Yerkes as Frank Cowperwood. The Young Cowperwood’s business and romantic affair in Philadelphia are recorded. He was a natural leader by the age of ten. He was curious about how life had been organized. One day he watched a lobster devouring a squid in a tank and the natural brutality left its mark on the boy. He read in the lobster’s mode of operation his own projected career:

The [Lobster-squid] incident made a great impression on him. It answered in a rough way that riddle which had been annoying him so much in the past. (SC 13-14).

Cowperwood decided that he must appear to be what he was
not, to deceive his victims. He lied only when absolutely necessary. He worried more about the effect of a Southern victory on business than about the plight of slaves. His only bond of affection was with his father. He maintained consistent disdain for his competitors. By following his genius and adhering strictly to his own self-interest he became a millionaire through a series of exhaustively documented financial transactions. In his life Cowperwood had a succession of women. At the age of thirteen the budding business giant became enthralled with girls. By nineteen he had gathered sexual experiences for many times. He was fascinated by Lillian Semple, a beautiful widow Cowperwood found in her many qualities which he wished a woman to have. Cowperwood married her for the sake of acquisition. Lillian was five years his senior. She could not for long satisfy a dynamic man like Cowperwood by her placid and retiring nature. They remained technically married for twenty years but Cowperwood's dissatisfaction surfaced when he began comparison of his wife with younger women. At the age of twenty seven Cowperwood encountered the sixteen year old Aileen Butler. Not only beautiful she was also richly emotional and vivacious. Cowperwood unscrupulously arranged for the extramarital arrangement with Aileen without any moral or mental concern for his wife. Cowperwood had also a keen interest in assembling a distinguished collection of painting. He pursued paintings and sculptures as relentlessly as he pursued women. Sensitivity to art was an unusual trait for a businessman. But in both these pursuits a yearning for the limitless was revealed. Both the art collection and the business of Cowperwood were threatened with ruin, when he had displeased the powerful political forces in Philadelphia. Aileen's father, a
politician whom Cowperwood had used for obtaining railway franchises took revenge against him for ruthlessly ruining his daughter. He connived with his cronies to have Cowperwood tried in a federal court for technical embezzlement. Cowperwood was convicted by a corrupt justice system. Cowperwood's case before the appellate court was weakened by the breaking scandal of his affair with Aileen and lost when the jury decided against him. Cowperwood had changed his Darwinian standpoint when after conviction he and his co-conspirator the former city-treasurer Stermer were led before the judge along with two housebreakers, a horse thief, and a negro. He felt sorry for the entire shabby row of convicts, sorry for all who were in jails. His feeling for the oppressed was not accounted for in his Darwinian system. He thought about the convicts and was sorry for all who were in jails.

In the prison Cowperwood was grateful for the sympathy of Mr. Chapin, the unkindly Quaker cell overseer. The tender compassions of Aileen moved Cowperwood and the emotional vulnerability of a superman was as astonishing as his sensitivity to art. Beneath the rough exterior of Cowperwood's brazen self-aggrandisement there was a tenderness, a largeness of spirit. Selfishness is therefore not a virtue in spite of the rapacious activities of Cowperwood. Cowperwood used that stock market for his second rise. He instructed Wingate to dump all his holdings at low prices. While others were unloading their properties at any price offered, Cowperwood bought steadily and consistently at reduced values. Within days he has made more than a million dollars. He became richer then ever he was before. He moved to Chicago, quietly divorced Lillian and prepared himself for the second phase
of his career, Cowperwood's plans were made synonymous with the will of God. Even at the conclusion of The Financier Cowperwood's worldly triumphs are placed in a perspective that diminished them. His inevitable disilluisionment and defeat were forecast in the second section of the epilogue, "The Magic Crystal". In spite of power, mansions, art treasures, endless riches and glory which are to come from his Chicago and London ventures, all will turn to "the ashes of Dead sea fruit".

Dreiser purposefully remarked that Cowperwood became in the final analysis the victim of

an understanding that could neither be inflamed by desire nor satisfied by luxury, a heart that was long since wearied by experience, a soul that was bereft of illusion as windless moon.

(TF 780).

The vanity of accomplished wishes was stressed in The Financier. The lobsters must finally go the way of the squid.

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Victimisation of human beings is the theme a Zolaesque novel. In Dreiser's The Titan man is not victimised but discontented. The city offers irresistible attractions for Cowperwood in The Titan. He is shown as the victim of city's glamour. But Cowperwood erotic adventures had in them a discontentment. The immense romantic possibilities that the city life offered were fraught with a disillusionment. But the importance of the awareness gained in the process
The novel gives us the account of Cowperwood's career in Chicago, the city that, Dreiser believed, offered limitless possibilities. Cowperwood succeeded in his campaign to control the street railway system. Chicago was a fishing background for Cowperwood's unbelievable fulfilment of expectations. His fortune accumulated to twenty million dollars, his extensive art collection was the most important in the nation and his power was virtually unchecked. Nevertheless, there was dissatisfaction in the mind of Cowperwood. Cowperwood's dissatisfaction led to his erotic episodes. These were the restless pursuits of the elusive paragon of womanly perfection. His search for feminine ideal was rooted in his social ambitions. The elite circle was not ready to accept the new rich. The pursuit of a worthy woman of the elite society might give him the access into that society. The tycoon had series of affairs with mistresses at least twenty years younger than he. It was a search for "the realization of an ideal." The fervent quest for the feminine ideal was fraught with disillusionment, because his expectation was excessive. He was involved in a love affair with Rita Sohlberg, a more seductive woman than Aileen. Another affair began with Antoinette Novak whose sexual appeal was irresistible. Cowperwood met Stephanie Platow, a brilliant Russian—American Jew from the Southwest with a penchant for art reminding us of Rita. In sophisticated sex gratification she surpasses Rita. But Stephanie did not want to devote herself entirely to Cowperwood since she had a simultaneous affair with a poet named Forbes Gurney. Cowperwood was next enthralled by Mrs. Hosmer Hand, the wife of another financier. He appreciates her superior social graces, assertiveness and ambition, but he is troubled by her lack of heart. On a business
trip to Louisville Cowperwood met Hattie Starr, the keeper of a brothel. The combination of passion and background has helped to form in her daughter Berenice Fleming all the qualities which Cowperwood yearned for. Berenice was seventeen and Cowperwood was fifty two. Her social talents were limitless, beauty ravishing and her ambition needed his money for its realization. Cowperwood found all these quality missing in all the women he loved earlier. One summer evening Berenice caught a young sparrow and Cowperwood felt that Berenice could and would command the utmost reaches of his soul in every direction (TT 394)

The spiritual equipoise of Berenice was appreciated by Cowperwood. The real is transmuted into fiction. Charles Yerkes' philandering has been transmuted into a mystical search and this was fictionalised in the Berenice-Cowperwood love relationship. Cowperwood found the perfect woman in Berenice but the forces opposing him frustrate his ultimate triumph. In the end Cowperwood lost his supremacy. He was left disillusioned. Dreiser highlighted the pathos of the discovery that "even giants are but pigmies". The terrors and wonders of individuality are considered in the cosmic context. The tycoon achieved everything but peace. In the section called "In Retrospect" at the close of *The Titan* this question is raised:

What shall we say of life in the last analysis — "Peace, be still?" (TT 552).
In *The Genius* Dreiser beautifully explored the wonder of Womanhood. Simultaneously, there is the disillusionment. In fact, the materialistic and erotic quests made Eugene the typical Dreiserian protagonist a Knight engaged in the Search of the Grail. Like Carrie, Eugene also felt overawed by the first glimpse of Chicago. Gradually, he could gain his control over his surrounding. The search for recognition which is so common with a Dreiser character is also the central theme of the novel, *The Genius* making it distinguished from the deterministic writings of the Zolaesque School.

Written in 1911 but published in 1915 *The Genius* is the dramatization of the artistic dreams of power and perfect woman. Eugene Witla, the shy boy, sensitive and unsure, the son of a sewing machine agent with a middle class upbringing. Eugene is a dreamer, and his dreams centre on wealth, fame, art and women. He envies the wealthy. Like Sister Carrie Eugene also felt overawed by the first glimpse of Chicago. He sought work as a newspaper artist. His search for recognition led him to New York where he got his first success. He sold his first painting to *Truth* magazine for seventy five dollars. He rose to the position of the art editor with a ten-thousand dollar salary. Eugene belonged to the so-called Ashcan school of artists, who found beauty in the commonplace scenes of American cities. These artists whom Eugene admired were Dore, Verestchagin, Monet, Degas, Ribera, Monticelli, Corot, Daubigny, Rousseau, Turner, Watts, Millais, Rossetti, Winthrop,
Aubre Beardsley, Helleu, Rodin, Thaulows and especially, Bourguereau. But Eugene himself is moved more by the wonder of womanhood than by the hidden beauty of the city scenes. At seventeen Eugene had his first amorous adventure, when he fell in love with Stella Appleton. But the romance was shattered. Eugene’s next love was Margaret Duff, whose simplicity of attitude also lost its charm. Eugene who longed for a woman capable of discussing Emerson, Carlyle and Whitman as well as sexually satisfying began the search anew. He met Angela Blue, an older woman than he. She was a small-town girl who was virtuous and yet passionate. But Eugene was not disinclined to pursue other relationships including an affair with Ruby Kenny a made model. Eugene’s search for a woman that satisfied all sides of his character did not end with his marriage with Angela Blue. Eugene was only partly happy. Dreiser explained in an elaborate account:

He even tried to deceive himself into the belief that this was a spiritual relationship, but underneath all was burning sense of her beauty, her physical charm, her passion. (TG 159)

This analysis throws a new light on Eugene’s sexual drive which was not the be-all and end-all of his life. Eugene met through an editor friend two women — one Mirian Finch, and the other Christina Channing. Miriam was a professional sculptor, gifted pianist and singer of classical music. But Eugene pursued the equally artistic but decidedly more sensuous opera singer Christina Channing. Eugene found Christina

so beautiful, so perfect physically, so incisive mentally, so full of a fine artistic perception. (TG 159)
Eugene had been engaged to Angela for three years when Christina ended her relationship with him. Angela was contemplating suicide when Eugene fantasized a blissful affair with Angela’s extroverted sister, Marietta. But Eugene married Angela and settled in Alexandria. Eugene wanted to be both married and single. He began to feel dissatisfaction and dreamt of a new liaison with the vivacious eighteen-year-old Freida George whom he identified with

the unattainable desire — the holy grail of beauty. (TG 284-85).

Eugene worried about the moral aspect of the quest and withdrew to a small town but got involved with a married woman named Charlotta Wilson. But this was a vice and Eugene felt disconcerted. He felt that common laws of existence should not apply to an artist. But at the same time he realized that womanizing was deflecting him from success.

Nevertheless, Eugene’s quest for the ultimate woman continued and his relationship with Suzanne Dale, the beautiful widow of a prominent banker seemed to have been idealized to utter unreality. Suzanne’s mother threatened the artist with exposure and saved her daughter from the rigours of living up to Eugene’s expectations. Thus we find that Eugene in his loneliness fantasized about his next affair throughout his life. This was due to his artistic temperament. Art especially art that depicted beautiful young womanhood could achieve a permanence unattainable and unapproachable in real life. A genius is too great to be confounded by social responsibility.
Angela’s illness and death proved instrumental in Eugene’s realization. He had always been metaphysically inclined. He was influenced not only by the naturalistic philosophers but also by Plato, Emerson’s “Oversoul” and the “Sermon an the Mount.” He also developed a grudging respect for religion. Through his faith he might get cured of his vile lusting after women. When Eugene decided to read Mary Baker Eddy’s *Science and Health*, he was annoyed by the Biblical quotations. although he did retain

a profound acceptance of the spiritual understanding of Jesus.

(TG 693).

Eugene liked that Angela’s sister defined God as manifested everywhere. He accepted the broad non-dogmatic basis of her faith. Eugene wavered between belief and disbelief, yet he could not believe in sin and faith might give him some consolation. He was doubtful that the existence of a benevolent god might have given him such a great suffering. And he felt that life was good at times. He felt pursued like the narrator of Francis Thomson’s “Hound of Heaven”. Finally he conceived god as a dual personality. Eugene returned to his painting after a long absence from it. His work was remarkable for it’s brooding suggestion of beauty that never was on land or sea.

The novel bore witness to the continuing longing for the comfort and peace of religious faith. Eugene could not sustain his belief in God. But there is throughout the novel a forecast of Dreiser’s spiritual avowal as set forth thirty years later in *The Bulwark*, where Solon Barnes reached a truly mystical experience.
and apprehended the immortality of his dead wife Beneda. The conviction with which The Bulwark rang was missing in The Genius. Only much later in An American Tragedy Dreiser had made substantial progress towards the culmination of his long quest for moral direction and spiritual peace.

In An American Tragedy Dreiser tells the story of a bellboy, indecisive like Hamlet, who sets out to gain worldly success and fame. In this novel Dreiser's perception accommodated in it the same pattern of counter-romance which simultaneously engenders illusions and frustrates them.

Dreiser's transcendental search for mystic realization of life is not yet enriched by spiritual faith. The quest for dollar presented as the Horatio Alger myth is equated with transcendental desires that are indicative of individual will denied to human being in a naturalistic fiction. Dreiser used the running account of the Gillet case in the New York World as the foundation for An American Tragedy. Clyde, the son of poverty-stricken Kansas City evangelist is the central character of the novel. For Clyde the lure of the great world soon comes in conflict with his parents' religion. Their solemn preachments were not accommodated in his mind which was much too responsive to phase of beauty and pleasure.

Clyde saw the people all around him and longed for better days and resolved to escape from his family to a job in Kansas City as a bellhop at the Green Davidson Hotel for fulfilling his quest for
a life of luxury and ease. Clyde and some friends accidentally ran over a child while driving in an automobile, he was forced to flee Kansas City to avoid punishment. He passed several years in Chicago where he met his wealthy uncle Samuel Griffiths who offered him a job in his factory. Clyde cherished a dream of affluence and supremacy for himself. He made up his mind to join the post and moved to Lycurgus. The high society inflamed Clyde's imagination in Lycurgus. However, he was not given any access into the high society. In spite of the blood-kinship with the wealthy Griffiths, he was a common labourer and had to work in the shrinking room of the collar factory of his uncle. Later he got a supervisory post. He was temporarily contented. His desk commanded a view of the stitching section which employed a number of girls and women. Clyde's amorous adventures began with several girls of the factory. He was then involved deeply with Roberta Alden who like Clyde himself was ambitious and came of a very poor and narrow background.

However, Clyde's dissatisfaction continued. He longed for new girls not only for sexual gratification but also for a more prominent social tentacle. Clyde's acquaintance with Sondra Finchley provided him the desired passport for entry into the elite society. Sondra disliked Gilbert and regarded Clyde as an interloper. Sondra introduced Clyde into her circle. Clyde was purposive and he wanted to gain social supremacy through his relationship with Sondra. Clyde maintained links with Roberta as well and the tragedy triggered when Roberta became pregnant. He searched in vain for a solution to his problem. The abortion was not arranged.

The idea of killing her impressed itself upon him when he was
not able to fight off the dark thought. He managed to lure Roberta to the middle of the Big Bittern Lake in a canoe. Clyde could not kill her. But as Roberta came toward him in the canoe, Clyde pushed her with the camera and both of them fell into water. Clyde selected not to save her. He swam to the shore and made his escape. Clyde was apprehended, tried and executed. Clyde’s defence attorney made an eloquent plea for acquittal on the basis of moral cowardice. But the ‘diabolic wish’ of Clyde which refers to his “darker self” reveals Dreiser’s debt not to Darwin but to Dostoevsky. McMillan plays a significant role in inducing Clyde to throw himself on God’s Mercy and to sing a statement that he had accepted his punishment in a Christian spirit. Clyde hovers between belief and disbelief. Clyde was convicted by newspaper coverage before the jury was assembled. In addition, the officials in charge of the trial were motivated by political considerations. The vengeance-seeking townspeople, the newspapers and the hypocrites refused to help Clyde. Clyde’s quest for the dream girl Sondra was the quest for the impossible. Clyde realizes the futility of such quest.

In *The Bulwark* Dreiser relates the knowledge of Reality. If *The Genius* is the first step in the spiritual journey of Dreiser, in *The Bulwark* there is the speculation on the source of existence. In the earlier novels the mystique of money has been presented to unfold a vision of life that is beautiful. In *The Bulwark* the new recognition of the merciful God reveals the transcendental in sight which has never been the concern of the naturalistic writers. The novel opened
with a history of the Barnes family up to the time of marriage of Solon Barnes. His parents had been honest and industrious Friends in a small Maine community and thus Solon had experienced a loving home. Solon Barnes and Benecia Williams promised to devote themselves to each other at the Friends meeting house in Dukla Pennsylvania. Solon’s father had to look after the vast estate of a widowed sister-in-law. It included an imposing house and sixty acre grounds called Thornbrough. The estate was willed to Solon’s father.

The ostentation of the property was in conflict with the Friend’s stress on simplicity. But he had decided to restore the house little by little with money obtained from the sale of crops. He retained the Quaker integrity and echoes of social grandeur. His principal desire was to help others. The erosion of the Quaker precepts in the children was swift and devastating and this was felt most clearly after the estate and considerable wealth had been willed to Solon after his marriage to Benecia. Solon was the official of a Philadelphia bank. He seemed to be a misfit in the competitive world of high finance. He maintained his integrity and honesty chiefly because of his devotion to the Quaker ethic. Solon did not know life. All those who had sinned had their souls irredeemable. Solon as a boy in Maine witnessed a campaign waged by the Friends against certain saloons and houses of prostitution which had sprung up in a poor section of a town.

The slightest hint of dishonesty of his business associates shocked Solon. The son of a Quaker friend embezzled money. Solon was shocked by such an incident. But the activities of his own children stunned him. Except his priggish son Orville, the other four
children hurt him by their behaviour. Etta, a girl of artistic nature
given to romantic dreams stole her mother’s jewels to finance her
flight with a friend to the University of Wisconsin. Once Solon
chastized his daughter for reading an immoral French novel. But
Etta and her friend went to a Greenwich village where she embarked
on a love affair with an artist. This was enough for shocking the
artist. Stewart Barnes the artist had resented his father’s religion
because he was more interested in overwhelming hunger for
physical sex gratification. He rejected the Quaker conception of the
divine presence in every individual. He discarded the Inner Light.
Stewart stole to indulge in forbidden pleasures. One of his friends
administered some sedative to a girl named Psyche Tanzer who
resisted them in the past. The girl having a weak heart could not
bear it and she fell into a coma. Stewart was made responsible for
the crime. He could not bear it and being pursued by conscience
the lad killed himself in prison. Stewart’s death made Etta remorse­
ful. She felt guilty for her lies to her father. She asked her parent’s
forgiveness. Solon himself experienced a sudden and deep spiritual
uncertainty. His beloved Beneda died from the shock of her son’s
tragedy. Solon’s contemplation at the lonely moments marked the
beginning of his spiritual growth. He gradually arrived a mental
peace that astonished his daughters. His mystical experiences
attested to the reality of the Inner Light. Solon discovered the order
of the Universe. One day a snake passed knowingly over Solon’s
shoes. Solon read into the snake incident the benevolent Creative
Force that animated the world. Being a firm believer in the Inner
Light as a pious Quaker Solon might have discovered the transcen­
dental faith at the end of the novel. He grew spiritually after his
mystical experiences. Etta moves from her Quaker background through romantic dreams to the actualization of her worldly desires and finally to a deeper commitment to the Inner light and its moral imperative. Solon had lost all that he valued most in the world. When his daughter returned to his side after Stewart's death they noticed the absence of his old moral conviction. He seemed to have been full of frustration at the time of his death. But we cannot forget that he saw a vision in which the voice of an angel was heard by him. Etta Barnes discovered that man's deepest longing was to love his fellows and serve them. She felt her own need for affection and loyalty. By showing them to others she could evoke in them the qualities of loyalty and affection. In this love and unity with all nature Etta sensed that there was nothing fitful and changing or disappointing. This love was constant as nature itself. Etta's conviction is a broad nondogmatic faith which rejoices in the beauty of the universe.

Inner light is the emanation of the creative Force and Etta's belief resembles that. The lives of Solon and Etta show that the religion need not be merely a bondage for the weak. They display a set of beliefs and principles that demand considerable strength and discipline to put into practice the tenets of Quakerism. There is no gap between doctrine and observance in their life. In fact, they are the two rounded characters who undergo transforming growth. Solon's affirmation signifies the individual's responsibility to community and trust in a discernible human destiny. It has the message of renewed faith. In the final scene of the novel describing Solon's funeral Etta's tears flow not for herself or her father but for life.
In *The Stoic* Cowperwood’s non-acquisitive ventures are described. Witla in *The Genius* was Franklinesque in his search for happiness, in *The Stoic* the search for beauty in women becomes symbolic of the search for the Divine design. Clyde in *An American Tragedy* wanted wealth but he was more fascinated by the beauty of Sondra. Cowperwood also had illusions of beauty. In *The Titan* his desires to stay young and to keep the world in perpetual bloom were expressed. In *The Stoic* Dreiser’s belief in Quaker concept of Inner Light was more directly expressed. Dreiser is far away from the mechanistic viewpoints of the Naturalistic School of writers. *The Stoic* was to be published as early as in 1914 as the last volume of the Cowperwood trilogy after the publication of *The Titan*. He began writing it in 1932 and it was published posthumously in 1947.

The novel opens with Cowperwood venturing to purchase the railway lines and simultaneously contriving to bring together his wife Aileen to whom he had remained married only for the sake of appearance. While Cowperwood’s soul was committed to Berenice, he continued his affairs with other women - Arlette Wayne, a singer of great intellect and beauty, Caroline Hand, a society woman and Lorna Maris, a sensual nineteen year old dancer. These ventures were due to the consuming and overwhelming force of Cowperwood’s character, “the desire for youth and beauty and sex” (*TS* 169). *Berenice* attracted Cowperwood by her “seemingly non-material as well as mentally contemplative grace” and her “pagan modernity with its delight in luxury.” (*TS* 137)

Cowperwood wanted to blend the organic vitalism with the
permanence of art, passion with immutability and he sought this rare combination in the character of Berenice.

Cowperwood gradually becomes involved in non-acquisitive venture. He decided to endow a hospital and became a member of other charitable bequests. He developed a friendship with a doctor whom he started advising for goodness of heart and intention. After the death of Cowperwood Berenice sought for consolation. She wanted to regain her spiritual equilibrium. She once read a book called *The Bhagavad Gita* in the shelf of Cowperwood. She journeyed to the far East to study and to New York as a confirmed practitioner of yoga:

> Will will lose the suffering that comes from desire (TS 290)

— This lesson was taught to her by the guru who taught Berenice the fundamentals of faith. Berenice asked about the role of charity and learnt from the guru that we should do good works for their own sakes. This was the secret of non-attachment principle of *The Bhagavad Gita*. Christianity also regarded this need for love and charity as the best of human qualities. Berenice wanted to know about the lure of beauty and the guru beautifully explained:

> Even in the lowest kinds of attraction there is the germ of Divine Love . . . even the lowest form of attraction derive their power from God Himself . . . We Think we worship beauty but we are really worshipping the face of Brahman shining through. The Reality behind the scenes. (TS 297)

Berenice with her new knowledge even justifies Cowperwood's promiscuity as it is emblematic of the quest for Beauty in a much more holy sense.