During the course of this study, I have been referring to Dreiser's longer fiction. One conclusion is inevitable: the themes of Dreiser's short fiction and of his longer fiction have much in common. Both deal with such subjects as love, business and art. At the beginning of the present century the reading public in America wanted stories that dealt with love and business. A critic has noted that "there was an emphasis on three types of subject-matter—business, public affairs and romance ... and even the romantic fiction was based on financial deals and the pursuit of wealth."¹ This should not mean that Dreiser in dealing with these subjects bowed before the popular demand. In fact, Dreiser never bothered about the public nod. This similarity in the subject-matter of Dreiser's fiction and of the popular magazines indicates that like the magazine editors Dreiser understood the prominence these subjects occupied in the American psyche.

II

In Dreiser's early stories is implicit the value of art through which human predicament finds articulation. The early stories of Dreiser dramatise man's plight; while dramatising man's plight, the artist yields control and, in a way, asserts man's majesty and glory. In one way or the other, this is the explicit thematic base of the early stories. In "McEwen of the Shining Slave Makers," the protagonist cultivates a new awareness of the human condition wrought by his dream experience in the ant world. In "Cruise of the 'Idlewild'" men lead a drab existence but they create a romantic world with their imagination. The theme finds its most forceful dramatisation in "Nigger Jeff." Elmer Davies, the protagonist, is horrified by man's cruelty to man and nature's nonchalance to it. In trying to "get it all in," he contends the pre-eminence of man, the predominance of the artist over his material.

III

A number of stories in the two volumes, Free and Chains, deal with man-woman relationships. "Old Rogaum and His Theresa," "The Second Choice," "Sanctuary," and "Typhoon" follow a similar pattern. In these four

2Dreiser, "Nigger Jeff," Free, p.111.
stories young unmarried girls are trapped by young men of superficial charm. The young girls have led shoddy or restrictive lives. These inexperienced girls think that their lovers can lead them to a haven of happiness. The young men also conform to a type: they are suave, masculine, smooth and manipulative. They are like Carrie's first lover, Drouet, who is a brisk man of the world with his purse, the shiny tan shoes, and the smart new suit. Such young men for such young girls create an aura of a world of fortune, of which they themselves are the centre. In course of time each one realises that a serious and permanent attachment with the girl is an obstruction to success and happiness. The protagonists of these stories—Theresa Rogauem, Shirley, Madeleine Kinsella, and Ida Zobel—resemble the early Carrie Meeber. Like Carrie, they belong to a man's world and their happiness depends on the whims of men. In these four stories the girl protagonists and their lovers have quite different concepts of fulfilment. Arthur Bristow of "The Second Choice," for instance, is somewhat aware of this divergence and in his explanatory letter to Shirley he voices it and tells her that his fulfilment lies in his advancement through his vocational life. This tension of the two incompatible opposites is not so well-marked in "Old Rogauem and His Theresa," "Sanctuary" and "Typhoon," because in these stories the focus is entirely on the girl protagonists. However, all
four stories share the fundamental characteristics of Dreiser's better short fiction: the depicting of a world in which misery flows from divergent ideas to the real source of human satisfaction. The author tells these stories with a Jamesian thoroughness and nothing escapes his microscopic, reportorial eye. In fact, this observation is applicable to whatever Dreiser ever wrote.

If the previous four stories are about unmarried girls and their beaus, the following four stories are about young couples in their married relationships. These stories are: (1) "Married," (2) "Convention," (3) "The Shadow," and (4) "Marriage—For One." These stories have in common this pattern: one of the spouses intensely believes in the ideal of marriage and is dedicated to its exclusiveness; the other partner has nothing to do with this ideal of exclusiveness and in order to satisfy his yearnings which cannot be fulfilled within marriage does not hesitate to establish liaison with another person of the opposite sex. In "Married" and "Convention," the husbands are dissatisfied; in "The Shadow" and "Marriage—For One," it is the wives. Only "Married" was chosen for a thorough analysis because in this story the profile of the pattern is much more explicit and evident. Such a selection was in the interest of the economy as well. In "Married" the husband is a musician, a man of some artistic propensities. Whereas Marjorie
stands for the ideal of exclusiveness in marriage, Duer typifies the artist's demand for varietism. This kind of tension exists in the four stories falling under this group. Duer is quite aware of this tension. Marjorie is an ideal representation of American womanhood. Despite his dissatisfaction with her, Duer still admits her emotional greatness.

One more generalisation can be made about these four stories: the dissatisfied partners seek escape from the monotony and conventionality of their marital condition through their contact with the world of the arts and with artists. Moreover, people with artistic bent of mind free themselves from the limitations imposed by conventional relationships; in their unconventionality they seek the satisfaction of their urge in their own type.

This group of stories also, like the previous one, emphasises the point that two different attitudes jeopardise the problem of contentment and that this problem cannot be happily resolved. In "Married," no doubt, Duer makes some adjustment, but one can intuit that complete rupture between the husband and wife is bound to come sooner or later. Parallels between this story and Dreiser's own life and the story's thematic relationship with The "Genius" point to this conclusion. Beryl (in "The Shadow") and Steele
(in "Convention") decide to resume their conventional married lives. Beryl, of course, harbours doubt about the success of this marital reunion. Even in the case of Steele the narrator is certain that Steele's gesture is an unwilling concession to the pressure of conventional society. In "Marriage—For One" the situation has become intolerable and husband and wife decide to separate. These four stories show that Dreiser's sympathies tend toward the male artistic characters who have not been happy in their marriage. However, Dreiser does treat women of artistic temperament with the same sympathy and understanding. This inclination toward the artistic type may be attributed to Dreiser's own bohemian way of living and to his love of varletism.

In "Chains" and "Fulfilment" Dreiser deals with marriage relationships in which men are older and women much younger. Women stick to their husbands because with their husbands' wealth they are able to lead a life of luxury; men remain drawn to their wives because they are young and beautiful. These two stories are interior monologues which lay bare the inmost thoughts and emotions of the protagonists as also their pathetic relationship with their spouses. The protagonists meditate about the circumstances that are responsible for their unhappy marriages. The stories employ the same technique; however, each story examines different facets of the marriage relationships.
In "Chains" Garrison is attracted toward Idelle for her youth and also because he wants to re-vitalise himself by his contact with her. She has a combination of qualities: vitality, sensuousness, beauty, and intelligence. These qualities have great fascination for Garrison as these embody polarities to which he is attracted. However, tension persists in him. The cause of the tension is that his wife does not lead a conventional life and he wishes her to conform to conventional ways of life. Garrison frequently refers to Idelle's surpassing beauty and this can be interpreted as attempts to transcend the sexual fascination.

The protagonist of the other story, "Fulfilment," is in search of an ideal love relationship. Ulrica realises this ideal in her unmarried union with Vivian, who is a painter. The relationship between them is unconventional. Her ideal of beauty is spiritual rather than sexual. For Vivian, Ulrica embodies beauty of feature and line. After his death, she has to endure an older man who offers her his wealth. It is worth noting that Ulrica and Carrie Meeber resemble in many ways: both have had relationship with men outside and within the bounds of marriage; both have sought an ideal of contentment. Ulrica does find it, but only temporarily. Perhaps Dreiser was trying in this story to examine beyond the limits of *Sister Carrie* to resolve Carrie's predicament.
Two stories, "Free" and "The Old Neighborhood" deal with the protagonists who are now beyond middle age. Both the stories are interior monologues. The protagonists, Haymaker and the engineer, married women of their own age as young men. Just after their marriage disenchantment sets in. The protagonists wanted to achieve heights in artistic and scientific fields respectively. Their families, especially their wives, act as hurdles, and they find it difficult to actualise their ambitions. The engineer does leave his wife. Both the protagonists ultimately come to the sad realisation that they have deluded themselves and suffer pangs of guilt. In Dreiser's fiction artistic and entrepreneurial achievement is a source of male fulfilment. This tendency is most evident in The "Genius" and "The Trilogy of Desire."

IV

Dreiser devotes many stories to the dream of success and wealth theme. The lives of characters in these short stories are shaped by the forces which are within or outside themselves. The most powerful shaping force in them is that they are actuated by the false promise of material achievement and sexual fulfilment. One can quite legitimately say that many of the stories are American tragedies in capsule form in the sense that characters believe that they can realise the American Dream; in believing so they are lured and suffer delusion.
Dreiser is distinguished from the popular magazine contemporaries because unlike them he knew the lure for what it was. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he recognised the powerful sway of the American Dream not only for simple, inexperienced Madeleine Kinseelas but also for the educated, sophisticated Duars and Haymakers.

The pattern in the dream of success and wealth stories is that the dream is yearned for and, if realised, is found lacking real contentment. Moreover, the success which the protagonists in these stories achieve is invariably at the expense of others. Women long for love and material success, but realise that exclusive love relationship is forbidding to them. In "The Victor," "Phantom Gold," and "The Hand" the quest for material success occurs outside the context of love relationships; in "The Old Neighborhood," of course, the quest for material success occurs within the context of love relationship. Osterman, Queader, and Morsereau have absolutely devoted themselves to the gathering of wealth. In pursuit of their aim, all these protagonists have to participate in some immoral activity. Ultimately they become prey to retributive justice; for Queader and Morsereau the dream of success turns into a nightmare; Osterman fails to do the altruistic deed dear to his heart.
In Dreiser the dream of success is related to psychic phenomena. According to Lynn:

Evidence of Dreiser's faith in these matters occurs in his fiction from beginning to end. Several of his short stories are concerned with hallucinations and hypnosis and the correlation between these phenomena and the winning of wealth and women. In *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser dramatized sexual conquest completely in terms of mental magnetism and hypnotic eye-power.

In the course of this study I have referred to Dreiser's experience and observation of psychic phenomena. The fact that Dreiser uses in his fiction such phenomena many times shows that he believed in them. In "A Story of Stories," for example, Collins, who is much inferior to Binns in intellectual competence, demolishes his superior competitor with the magnetic effect of his gaze. Binns is so confused and soothed by Collins's eyes that he abandons his competitive guard and is thoroughly undone. In *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt* also the eye-power and magnetism negate the power of the will with the result that the victim is incapable of denial. In "Sanctuary," Madeleine Kinselle's first onset of fascination for boys is described in terms of the "chemic harmonies in youth." In other stories such

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3 Lynn, p.50.

words as "telepathic" and "hypnotic" appear. The recurrent use of such words not only metaphorises the enigma and sway of the sexual attraction but also tries to clothe it in a transcendental garb.

It is to be noted, however, that the supernatural is not employed only in the portrayal of inter-personal relationships. Sometimes it adopts a more solemn pose within the dramatic mould of the stories. For example, in "The Old Neighborhood," supernatural manifestations in the shape of apparitions appear to disturb the poise of the protagonist. The supernatural shapes function in the story as signifying the engineer's morality wearing away as also anticipating the tragic finale of his family. Similarly, in "The Hand" the protagonist is harried and mortified by psychic manifestations in the form of spectres and sounds.

VI

The hand of the artist and his shaping power are manifest in the fusion of substance and form in the stories. Dreiser was very critical of the magazines he had read in 1895. After referring to "the happy roseate way" in which they portrayed life, Dreiser remarked: "Most of these bits of fiction, delicately phrased, flowed so easily, with such an air of assurance, omniscience and condescension, that I was
quite put out by my own lacks and defects." From Dreiser's comment it can be construed that he was frustrated by his own lacks and defects. In fact he turned these liabilities into positive points as he abandoned the delicately phrased sentences and easy flow of his contemporary writers. Instead, he chose a style that articulated his vision of reality. He chose a prose that gushed directly out of his heart. However, this should not mean that he wrote without difficulty. If "as a writer Dreiser is sui generis," as Michael Millgate says, if "he continued along his own individual path, cutting out his own footholds step by step as he went," this should compel us all the more for attending to his expression.

Louise Campbell, who helped Dreiser in revising his works, writes:

Elegance of style, of course, was never one of Dreiser's strong points. Perhaps it was just as well that my limitations prevented me from striving to remedy that defect.... I recognized that his awkwardness of style and expression was not to be indiscriminately tampered with.

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5Dreiser, A Book About Myself, p.490.


Obviously, Louise Campbell acknowledges Dreiser's uniqueness of style, which has been felt by many other critics as well. For instance, Matthiessen speaks of Dreiser's "awkwardness" and Vivas of his "clumsiness." The point which should be emphasized here, especially concerning Dreiser's short fiction, is that "awkwardness" or "clumsiness" should not connote formlessness. In fact, Dreiser was quite mindful of form. Indeed, the critical analyses of the stories have shown that Dreiser was more aware of form in the composition of his stories than many critics have been willing to admit. Dreiser would not write anything unless first his mind was saturated with the idea. Once he told an interrogator: "I carry my plots around with me year after year before setting pen to paper. By the time I am ready to write I see the book as plainly as if it were a tree rising up before my eyes. Root, trunk, branches, twigs, so to speak, are all there; it is only the leaves that require to be sketched in!" According to McAleer:

The true artist does not structure his story as symbols, he functions through them. As a symbolist Dreiser has never been given

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8 Matthiessen, p. 52.


10 Dudley, pp. 409-410.
his due. Characteristic is the subtlety that inspirits the choir symbolism in Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt, a subtlety hallmark to a persisting symbolism of vehicles, windows, stars, seasons, weather, water, light, electricity, clouds, attire, cities, flowers, colors, dancing, sports, crowds, birds, names, prisons, roads, hotels and havens, real and ideal, that surges through the whole Dreiserian world. It is not tentative, nor is it a device selected and used with narrow deliberation. It is a function of that world which Dreiser is committed to explore. Out of the great raw substance from which America took its dreaming, he called forth implicit meaning. 11

Needless to say, the short stories are an inseparable part of the "Dreiserian world," and the best of them share the characteristics McAleer refers to. Writes Burrell: "For those who are given to carping about the unpolished style of Theodore Dreiser, this story The Lost Phoebe [sic], with its ease and grace and beauty, is sufficient evidence that he could, and often did, write beautifully." 12 Also, Dreiser had command over the following elements of fiction as well: skill in characterisation, effective presentation of nature and life, projection of the dramatic scene, patterns of action, and controlled invention. The study of his various stories drives one to these conclusions. Ford Madox Ford admits: "Indeed Mr. Dreiser, even on the surface,

11 McAleer, p. 72.

12 Burrell, p. 1322.
seemed to know quite as much of the technique of writing as I did ... and I gave him mental credit for knowing a little more."13

Dreiser's best short stories are interior monologues and stories told from the omniscient point of view. Moreover, the greater the narrator's immersion in the action of the story, the more effective is the story. Mencken rang true when he wrote of Dreiser's novels: "The truth is ... (they) deal fundamentally with the endless conflict between animal behaviour and the soarings of the spirit—between the destiny forced upon his characters by their environment, their groping instincts, their lack of courage and resourcefulness, and the destiny they picture for themselves in their dreams."14

As in the novels, so in the short stories the same fundamental conflict is dealt with and examined in diverse ways. Dreiser's preoccupation with the portrayal of the fundamental conflict is dramatised most impressively in those stories in which this conflict is viewed from inside the minds of his protagonists. Dreiser's recognition of the indwelling tension in American life is mirrored in the intensity of the interior monologues of the protagonists of "Free" and "The Old Neighborhood," for instance.


VII

For Dreiser life was the constant ultimate source of reference. Those stories of Dreiser are very effective which in subject-matter are closely related to his own experience; inversely, any story which is cut off from the ambit of his experience is not. However, "The Lost Phoebe" is a notable exception to this observation. In this story Dreiser projects himself into both old age and an almost primitive rural setting. The locale in most of Dreiser's stories, as in his longer fiction, is urban America, the place where his characters wage divers struggles in their quests for fulfilment. As a rule, the stories which are outside the purview of his milieu are not successful. His short stories of fantasy such as "Khet" come under this category. Similarly, an "American" story such as "The Hand" fails partly because of Dreiser's unfamiliarity with the milieu and partly because of his difficulty with dramatising a psychological conflict faced by a murderer.

VIII

It cannot be claimed that every story penned by Dreiser is a first-rate short fiction. There are critics who censor Dreiser with regard to his technique or artistry. According to Shapiro, "the short stories too often read not as complete architectonic units within themselves, but as compressed, de-hydrated novels."15

Another critic, West, has observed: "Almost any of Dreiser's short stories might have been expanded into novels, for they are, as a rule, confined neither in space nor in time." There is some justice in what West says. For example, in "The Second Choice," one is not certain of the lapse of time between events or of the place where parts of Shirley's monologue take place. But such a story as this is rather the exception than the rule. Interior monologue stories such as "Free" and "The Old Neighborhood" are clearly confined in space and time. The other monologues, for instance, "Chains" and "Fulfilment," perhaps err in over-stressing the temporal and spatial circumscription of the action. Many other stories such as "Nigger Jeff," "The Lost Phoebe," and "Sanctuary" have a locale which is clearly defined.

The charge that Dreiser's stories "do not read as complete architectonic units within themselves, but as compressed, de-hydrated novels" does not hold good especially in the case of Dreiser's interior monologues. No doubt, the time-span in the interior monologues sometimes extends over years and the multiple events in the stories meander into prolonged stretches of the past, one undeniable point about the interior monologues is that they are dramatizations set within the minds of the protagonists forming a complete architectonic unit. Take the case of "The Old Neighborhood." The effectiveness

16West, p.7.
of this story lies in the fact that the interior monologue covers a period of two hours in a specific setting and at a certain time in the life of the protagonist. It is very certain that if "The Old Neighborhood" were written in a longer form, say, in the form of a novel, it would lack the thrust it now has. Moreover, any modification in the structure of the interior monologue would radically alter its nature. One characteristic which is common to all Dreiser's interior monologues is that they inevitably deal with the intensified periods in the lives of their protagonists. This essential quality of intensity would have been marred were the interior monologues written in a longer form. Whereas Dreiser's interior monologue stories are laudable, his first person point of view stories are generally polemic or discursive.

IX

In the Free volume, the stories are narrated in the traditional style. In "Fulfilment" and some other stories in the Chains volume, Dreiser employs a technique that is outside the mainstream of his fictional expression. This story experiments with a technique that Dreiser was to adopt later in Chapter 46 of Book II of An American Tragedy to record the thoughts of Clyde and Roberta before and during their fateful train trip.
to Utica. Pizer has noted this shift in technique. He writes: "Influenced by Freudian ideas and by experimental movements in contemporary drama and fiction, Dreiser for some ten years before undertaking An American Tragedy had been writing plays and short stories in which he had attempted to represent dramatically the workings of the subconscious mind."\(^{17}\)

Short stories in the Chains volume (not all, of course) are evidence of this shift in technique.

X

Certainly not all, but many stories in Free and Chains merit a place of permanence in the short fiction genre. From this study it becomes apparent that the stories are excellent aids to understanding the natural bent of Dreiser's mind, his preoccupations, his prejudices and sympathies, and the variety of his interests. Through these stories Dreiser captures moods and cadences of the American psyche that has found such distinct enunciation nowhere else in the short fiction genre. Dorothy Dudley has observed:

No other letter file of Dreiser's contains so many testimonials from strangers, because he had guessed their secrets, as the response to his two volumes of short stories. "How could you have guessed?"

\(^{17}\)Pizer, The Novels, p. 260.
they keep saying. Many so-called stylists have not written with hands so supple and alive to mystery.¹⁸

There cannot be a greater tribute to the genius of a man. Taken together, the short stories embody remarkable perceptions of both the uniqueness of contemporary American life and conflicts universal to the human condition. His stories are like doors of understanding and awareness opening outward into the world. His stories provide the reader with an experience, increase his understanding and offer among other riches revelation of the complexities of consciousness. In other words, by reading Dreiser's stories the reader becomes a developing character, for he grows in perception of reality. His short stories are interpretative re-creation of life; they do not teach, they reveal; they do not preach, they interpret. Really, the story that prompts us to examine critically our world or ideas about the nature of human nature has done all that a story can be expected to do. Indeed, Dreiser's house of short fiction gifts to the reader what Henry James called "the colour of life itself."¹⁹

¹⁸ Dudley, pp.387-388.