The dream of success and wealth has permeated the American imagination ever since the decade before the Civil War when the foundations of huge fortunes were laid. Success literature became popular especially during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. When Dreiser was born (1871), the Gilded Age or the Age of the Gospel of Wealth was in its heyday. Such success books as There's Plenty of Room at the Top or Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Americans distilled a way of life which ought to be followed; people getting along or not getting along should strive to get ahead.

Horatio Alger, Jr. (1832-1899) created in his novels and stories the Alger Hero or the Alger myth. The Alger Hero is an adolescent boy who, beginning in poverty and obscurity, reaches the top of the world. In other words, he is an embodiment of the rags-to-riches theme:

Alone, unsided, the ragged boy is plunged into the maelstrom of city life, but by
his own pluck and luck he capitalizes on one of the myriad opportunities available to him and rises to the top of the economic heap. Here, in a nutshell, is the plot of every novel Alger ever wrote; here, too, is the quintessence of the myth.

Theodore, like the children of his generation, was fed on the American dream of success and wealth. Kenneth S. Lynn has said that for Dreiser "pluck and luck meant success, and success meant wealth and women. These conclusions, arrived at in mid-adolescence, stained Dreiser's mind forever." Telling of his boyhood years, Helen, his wife, writes:

When Theodore was only twelve he read serials in the Family Story Paper, the New York Weekly, Golden Days, and George L. Monroe's Seaside Library ... showing how the poor working girl dreamed of marrying the rich scion of wealth, and how, after many trials and tribulations in which he sought to betray her, true love conquers, and she became the lawful mistress of a brownstone mansion on Fifth Avenue, New York.


2Ibid., p.19.

Recalling his own boyhood years when smart picture magazines appealed to him, Dreiser wrote: "For my own part I preferred Truth, or Life, or Puck, or Judge, publications which had been introduced into our family by my brother Paul when we were living in Evansville (1881-1884)."  

In *A Book About Myself*, Dreiser writes that he had become a newspaper reporter so that he could meet eminent men and move up in the world. As a newspaper man he interviewed eminent men without moving up in the world. His journalistic work enabled him to see a different facet of the American Dream. He saw the application of the Law of the Jungle to the world of finance, the ruthlessness and Machiavellism of money barons and empire builders, their unmindful sordid mechanism. Industrial warfare and expansion brought about contrasts that appalled Dreiser, "the immense gap that existed between the rich and the poor; a gap that was not supposed to exist in a republic devoted to human brotherhood and the equality of man."  

It was this slice of life that went to vitalise his fiction in a direction different to that of the Alger novels and stories. The man of compassion became the critic of the American Dream.  

---


5Dreiser, *The Color of a Great City* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), p.173. McAleer, p.31, has well noted that "the one man upon whom Dreiser expends no compassion is the man motivated by greed."
Robert Forrey has truly observed: "To see Dreiser only as a success monger, as Kenneth Lynn does, is to overlook the moral depth of his nature, which was most evident in the mid-nineties, when he was writing as the Prophet."  

The major trouble in American society, Dreiser thought, stemmed from the fact that almost everybody believed that man's happiness is purchasable. The financier might have mansions, carriages, servants, and numerous visitors, but he had no friends. 'They are higher up,' Dreiser wrote (in Ev'ry Month), 'and are allured by the heart alone. He who has given that to his fortune has none for his fellows, and that is often the cost of riches.' Dreiser discovered, as any sensible observer would, that America's commercial success was a paradoxical comment on its moral failure.

One of the pervasive pre-occupations in Dreiser's novels is the dream of success and wealth. Dreiser's characters, according to George J. Becker, "are all imbued with an almost tropistic attraction toward 'better' or 'higher' things, striving toward them without thought or evaluation, dominated by the easy moral optimism that accepts any glittering thing as gold." Especially in

---


such novels as *Sister Carrie*, *An American Tragedy*, and "The Trilogy of Desire," the pattern is that the dream is sought and, if realised, found lacking. Dreiser expresses perhaps his own point of view through Ames (mark the pun) in *Sister Carrie* that happiness does not lie in earthly possessions which are only phantoms of human desire. Barring *An American Tragedy* (originally intended to entitle *Mirage*) where the dream is sought but not realised, success achieved by the protagonists of the other novels is at the expense of others. The realisation or the near-realisation of their dream does not bring them hoped-for contentment or satisfaction; they win and lose. For them it has all been vanity and vexation of spirit.

The dream of material success gives impulse to many short stories in the *Chains* volume. The pattern is the same. As many as five out of the fifteen stories in this volume deal with this pre-occupation in one form or the other. These stories are: (1) "The Hand," (2) "The Old Neighborhood," (3) "Phantom Gold," (4) "Fulfilment," and (5) "The Victor." Three stories—"The Old Neighborhood," "Fulfilment," and "The Victor"—have been chosen for detailed analysis as these represent more fully my thesis in this chapter. Also, because from the technique point of view, these stories are more significant. Like the protagonists in the longer fiction, the protagonists especially in these stories come to the
stunning realisation that the American Dream for them has been a dupe or, to use the caption of one of the stories listed above, "phantom gold," metaphorically speaking. They futilely seek fulfilment in the material rather than the spiritual world. The protagonist of "Fulfilment" tries to transcend the American Dream, but ultimately she also succumbs to it. The American Dream has been a lure for them, but the lure has been false.

In the June 1898 issue of Demorest's Family Magazine, Dreiser published a poem called "With Whom Is Shadow of Turning." The tenor of the poem is optimistic, but the first verse reads:

Where the pleasure? Where the pain?
Where the bliss which men attain?
None, thou sayest. All a lure!
All a fancy, nothing more?
O, my soul!

As noted above, the success literature "stained" Dreiser's mind forever, but equally remarkable is the fact that he was not spoiled by it, both as a man and writer. He knew that the "'golden calf of success' was a creature of Mammon, not of God." And as Dreiser did not belong to Mammon's party, recognising the falseness of Mammon's party, recognising the falseness

---

9 Forrey, p.24. Lehen, pp.86-87, notes "two different states within Dreiser's own psyche ... (his attraction) to both Charles Yerkes and Henry David Thoreau." Yerkes (1837-1905) the traction magnate was a financial wizard nonpareil who became the prototype for Dreiser's hero of "The Trilogy of Desire."
of the lure, he refused to serve him and with a bow
made his departure from the contemporary novelists and
popular magazine writers, for he heard, like Thoreau,
a different drum.

The Old Neighborhood

The unnamed protagonist of the story, now rich and
powerful—an engineer and inventor—visits the old
neighbourhood and his apartment in which he lived twenty-
four years ago with Marie, his first wife, and their
children later born to them. The old, strenuous but
happy life always with wolf at the door, unfolds before
his eyes with a pang of sentiment. He feels the
injustice done to his wife, now dead for many years, whom
he had deserted long ago. A victim of the American dream
of success, he realises while revisiting the old
neighbourhood that there is something cruel in all wealth
and ambition and love. Self-reproach and memory overcome
him. Filled with gloomy and contrite mood, he leaves
the place swiftly in his costly car.

II

The theme of "The Old Neighborhood" is explicitly
stated at the end of the story: "There is something
cruel and evil in it all, in all wealth, all ambition,
in love of fame—too cruel." The story underlines Dreiser's strong feelings about basic tension in American life. The fulfilment of the American dream in the case of the protagonist results in the realisation of the irony and futility of the Dream and Desire. Moreover, the success takes the tang out of his life. The following comment by Maxwell Geismar has a bearing on the thematic significance of this story: "The undertones of this story suggest those of Scott Fitzgerald's 'Babylon Revisited'—the false hopes of the past. And compare Willa Cather's statement that the unexpected favors of fortune, no matter how dazzling, do not mean very much in comparison with 'those things which in some way met our original want.'" A victim of dreams and crazy for success, the protagonist of "The Old Neighborhood" ultimately becomes aware of the fact that life traps and deludes. Thematically, this story is another version of An American Tragedy and "The Trilogy of Desire."

III

Like Dreiser's many characters, the protagonist of "The Old Neighborhood" felt himself years ago to be an

10 Dreiser, "The Old Neighborhood," Chains (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927), p. 247. All future references to this story are to page numbers in this edition, cited parenthetically in the text.

11 Geismar, p. 352.
outside:

All the world was apparently tinkling and laughing by, eating, drinking, dancing, growing richer, happier, every minute; whereas he—he and Maria, and the two babies which came a little later—seemed to make no progress at all. None. They were out of it, alone, hidden away in this little semi-rural realm, and it was all so disturbing when elsewhere was so much—to him, at least, if not to her—of all that was worth while—wealth, power, gayety, repute. How intensely, savagely almost, he had craved all of those things in those days, and how far off they still were at that time! (p.220)

Ambition was "the then devil of his nature" (p.246). He was then seeing too clearly, like Cowperwood of "The Trilogy of Desire"

the wonder of what he might be ... what he was already becoming.... What he really desired was that his greater career, his greater days, his fame, the thing he was sure to be now—should push everything aside. And so—Perhaps he had become sharper, colder, harder, than he had ever been, quite ready to sacrifice everything and everybody, or nearly, until he should be the great success he meant to be. (p. 246)

Years ago his thinking had been actuated by certain axiomatic sayings. His aspirations have been, for instance, fired by Emerson's "Hitch your wagon to a star" (p.220). To him his wife and children have been "hostages to fortune" and "a ball and chain on one foot" (pp.236, 237). They are seen by him as impediments in
the realisation of his dreams. In the present state of remorse when all his achievements seem to him futile, he thinks that he had been deceived by these sayings and understates the logical basis of his course of action. He fails to realise that he had been thrust into a situation over which he had no control. His present guilt-ridden condition understates the rationale behind the crucial decision he had to take. Matthiessen has rightly observed that the stories in Chains "give point to this title in that they all illustrate some overpowering force, some love or hate or fear, inhibition, jealousy, or greed that chained its protagonist to his fate."^12

IV

The protagonist of "The Old Neighborhood" comes from the vast commercial city to its suburban satellite, which is separated by a large bridge-spanned river. The objects which he views from the bridgehead have "a certain idyllic sweetness," but "dark memories they generated, too" (p.225). His present moment serves only to discover sights of woe of yesteryears.

He crosses over the bridge and turns into Edgewood Avenue. When he looks at the familiar houses, his past is revivified before him. When his thought focuses on

^12 Matthiessen, p.214.
Marie, he asks himself: "Would it ever be forgiven him? Would his error of ambition and self-dissatisfaction be seen anywhere in any kindly light—on earth or in heaven? ... Indeed, now that he was rich and so successful the thought of it had begun to torture him" (p.227). He has come here "to see, to dream over the older, the better, the first days" (p.225), but soon realises that, far from being lulled with the pleasant nostalgia he had longed for, he has become pathetically depressed and weary as the objects of his past strike his awareness.

Presently the protagonist's reflections focus on Abijah Hergot, a successful businessman, whom he had known in the past in this neighbourhood. He observes that he himself had once yearned for the material success of this man, and now "he had far more imposing toys than old Hergot had ever dreamed of" (p.229). In spite of all his money, life did not bring unalloyed happiness to old Hergot, for his oldest son, "his pride ... had turned out a drunkard, gambler, night-life lover" (p.229).

These reflections fill the protagonist with a sense of the uselessness of earthly possessions. The omniscient narrator records the utterance thus:

Toys!
Toys!
Yes, they were toys, for one played with them a little while, as with so many things, and then laid them aside forever.
Toys!
Toys! (p.229)
The whole struggle for him has become ironic. Even if he has achieved his dream, he is victimised by the loss of inner spiritual unity.

When he reaches his apartment on the top floor of the old five-storey building, the sense of misery overmasters him as he recalls one by one the important events of his life there with Marie and their two sons. His mind goes back to that "blackest and bleakest" winter of his life, "that last one with Marie" (p.239). He could not endure the disasters which followed one after the other when he was in the deepest state of impoverishment. At that time he had defiantly raged:

To hell with life itself, and its Maker,—this brutal buffeting of winds and cold and harrying hungers and jealousies and fears and brutalities, arranged to drive and make miserable these crawling, beggarly creatures—men! Why, what had he ever had of God or any creative force so far? What had God ever done for him or his life, or his wife and children? (p. 239)

One night, when he was crossing the bridge over the river, speculating as to his life and his future, his eye was attracted by two lights which seemed to come dancing down the hill from the direction of his apartment and passed out over the river. Suddenly it was as if something whispered to him: "'Behold! These are the souls of your children. They are going—never to return!'" (pp.240-241). Just a few weeks after he
had seen these lights, his children died one after the other. After the death of his children, "the cords which had held him and Marie together were weaker, not stronger—almost broken, really" (p.242). It was then that he decided to send her to her parents in Philadelphia to better his prospects in a different city "until he was ready to send for her" (p.243). But with the passage of time "other forces, other interests" had intervened and so he had not returned to his home and wife (p.244). After his college course in the city, he had become an assistant plant manager and a developer of ideas of his own. It was then that by degrees the idea of a complete independence and a much greater life had occurred to him. Why not be free, once and for all? Why not grow greater? Why not go forward and work out all the things about which he had dreamed? The thing from which he had extricated himself was too confining, too narrow. It would not do to return. The old shell could not now contain him. Despite her tenderness, Marie was not significant enough. So— He had already seen so much that he could do, be, new faces, a new world, women of a higher social level. (p.245)

Characters in Dreiser driven by the desire for success have much in common with one another. According to Lehan, "all have to break with their family in order to pursue success; all feel the need of the big city; and all are over-sexed—their enormous sense of desire making them restless, as dissatisfied with one woman as they are dissatisfied with their place in the community."13

13 Lehan, p.118.
Now "older, wiser" (p.219), the remorse of the protagonist becomes acute when he reflects on "how the tragedy of her [Marie's] life had been completed" which he had long since learned (p.246). He feels that he has come to the old neighbourhood only to realize how cruel he had been:

"By God," he suddenly exclaimed, a passion of self-reproach and memory overcoming him, "I can't stand this! It was not right, not fair. I should not have waited so long. I should have acted long, long since. The cruelty—the evil! ... I must get out! I must think no more—see no more." (p.247)

He hurries to the door down "the squeaky stairs," and walks swiftly back to the costly car which is to whirl him away—"that car which was so representative of the realm of so-called power and success of which he was now the master—that realm which, for so long, had taken its meaningless lustre (italics added) from all that had here preceded it—the misery, the loneliness, the shadows, the despair" (p.247). After all, he has not reconciled with his past, he cannot reconcile with it; he is confronted with one of those Dreiserian dilemmas for which there can be no solution. And the solution is not possible, for the contingent on time passed.

In the context of the story the phrase "meaningless
lustre" assumes great importance as it is part of a reiterated motif. As the protagonist reviews his whole life, he becomes conscious of the falseness of the lure. He now realises that he had been carried away by outward attractiveness at the expense of real worth. This awareness is voiced in such statements as: "All the world was apparently tinkling and laughing by, eating, drinking, dancing, growing richer, happier every minute; whereas he ... seemed to make no progress at all" (p.220); "Life had tinkled so in his ears then" (p.237). He considers his present worldly possessions as toys: "for one played with them a little while, as with so many things, and then laid them aside forever" (p.229). Even in the choice of his wife, this attitude of superficiality is mirrored. He had been drawn to Marie by her "waxy white pallor, delicately tinted cheeks, soft blackish brown eyes, her tresses and her delicately rounded figure ... her delicate white blossom of a face" (pp.220-221). Like many of Dreiser's protagonists, he makes decisions on shiny but shaky bases.

But could the protagonist of "The Old Neighborhood" have done otherwise than leaving his wife to satisfy his scientific and inventive urge?

Constituted as he was twenty years ago, he could not have done otherwise: "Life was so automatic and
unconsciously cruel at times. One’s disposition drove one so, shutting and bolting doors behind one, driving one on and on like a harried steer up a narrow runway to one’s fate.... Really, he was a victim of his own grim impulses, dreams, passions, mad and illogical as that might seem. 14 He was crazy for success, wild with a desire for a superior, contemptuous (sic) position in the world.... He had to do as he did, so horribly would he have suffered mentally if he had not" (p.228). He has been like Covperwood, who is “impelled by some blazing internal force which harried him on and on.”15

It is only now that the protagonist indulges in self-recriminations, but at that time a real tension existed in him which resulted in the hiatus in him. He was then “like some brooding Hamlet of an inventor” (p.235). His urge to accomplish something meaningful in the domain of science finds culmination in the following statement:

It had all come to him, the evanescence of everything, its slippery, protean changefulness. Everything was alive and everything was nothing, in so far as its


seeming reality was concerned. And yet everything was everything but still capable of being undermined, changed, improved, or come at in some hitherto undreamed of way—even by so humble a creature as himself, an inventor—and used as chained force, if only one knew how. And that was why he had become a great inventor since—because he had thought so—had chained force and used it—even he. He had become conscious of anterior as well as ulterior forces and immensities and fathomless wells of wisdom and energy, and enslaved a minute portion of them, that was all. (pp.235-236)

The meditative bent of the mind of the protagonist comes out clearly in the abstracted colouration of the above passage. His single-mindedness, total commitment to the passion his heart is set upon, and the inevitable tryst with his inescapable destiny are underlined here. It is to fulfil this insistent impulse which prompts him to leave his home and wife. It is only in his present consciousness that he suffers from the effects of his crucial decision and, therefore, understates in his monologue the real tension which existed before and at the time of taking the most important decision of his life. It is through this understatement that he tries to avoid the most painful realisation of all; that, considering his mental make-up, there was no choice open to him but to take the decision he did take. It is this realisation in the monologue which stings him. So much he suffers in his present consciousness that he does not make any reference to the positive aspect of his decision; it is by owing allegiance to his ideal that he has achieved a certain ethical stature.
VII

Such a story as this should communicate emotion to the reader which the protagonist feels. Dreiser does this to a great extent by employing description, by creating the setting of the old neighbourhood in a way that the reader is made to see it through the personal frame of reference of the protagonist; hence the apt choice of the third person restricted omniscient point of view. The interior monologue of the protagonist goes on in one continuum. There is break in it when reference is made to present action only to trace his steps as he walks through the old neighbourhood and up into the apartment where he lived with his wife and children years ago.

The panoramic view with which the story opens is presented through exposition and description, and it greatly helps to establish the atmosphere and tone of the story. Dreiser's use of nature description brings out the sharp contrast between the protagonist's two existences, "the once grassy slopes on the farther shore, now almost completely covered with factories" (p.219) parallels the advancement in his life from the happy, if poverty-stricken, days of early marriage to his present affluent circumstances. Later on, as he walks around the old neighbourhood, he is struck with the pastoral surrounding represented by the pigeons, the blacksmith's shop, and the trees and greenery. In a
sense, he has been pushed into the past. Just as in the case of Haymaker, the protagonist of "Free," nature is symbolic of the dream of ideal love and artistic aspirations, for the protagonist of "The Old Neighborhood" nature symbolises an existence difficult or impossible to recover. The same function is performed by the river. In the course of the story the river becomes, so to say, a line of demarcation; it symbolises the sharp division that exists between the protagonist's two existences: the old, suburban world of familial ties, located far in the past and no longer within reach; the big city, the "new faces, a new world, women of a higher social level" (p.245), that world he had longed for to belong but which is now devoid of meaningful lustre.

VIII

Not only setting but certain images also strengthen the story. The deeply churned mind of the protagonist, for instance, is captured in the beautiful image of "the eddying water of the river below" (p.219). The image of the "swirling waters below" (p.224) represents the chaos of his earlier life. The imagery of light is one of Dreiser's favourite devices for evoking glamour. When the protagonist looks out of the windows of the apartment, he is reminded of his days here when he used to enjoy "the stars or the lights of the city or the sun shining on the waters of the little river below" (p.235). This
imagery of light evoked glamour for him and fed his ambitious nature. The passage of time and the recovery of bygone time is suggested by the imagery of closed doors and running water: "How the water ran under this bridge now, as then, eddying out to sea" (p.223); "one's disposition drove one so, shutting and bolting doors behind one, driving one to one's fate" (p.228). After his visit to the old neighbourhood, he comes to the realisation that "doors opened and doors closed. It [life] had no consideration for eleventh hour repentances" (p.227). Such images add intensity to the poignant situation of the protagonist.

IX

"The Old Neighborhood," according to Geismar, is "a story of Dreiser's own youth." Mookerjee also states that it is a story "based on Dreiser's own early days." Dreiser's childhood and youth were spent mainly in Indiana. Late in November 1894, he went to New York. Dreiser came to the old places in Indiana after twenty-one years in the late summer of 1915. "In Indiana," writes Svanberg, Dreiser "grew alternately nostalgic and bitter as he visited Warsaw, Terre Haute, Bloomington, Sullivan, Vincennes and Evansville, the

16 Geismar, p.352.

17 Mookerjee, Theodore Dreiser, p.104.
scenes of childhood and youth." During this trip the days of his family's poverty and his ambition to rise in life came back to him. It was at these places that Theodore saw himself in the role of an outsider; it was here that he yearned for a future of wealth and power. "The Old Neighborhood" seems to be a fictionalised account of the nostalgia and bitterness evoked by this Indiana trip.

"The Old Neighborhood" was first published in Metropolitan magazine in its December 1918 issue. The story was later collected and appeared in the Chains volume in 1927. This story is also available in The Best Short Stories of Theodore Dreiser, edited with an introduction by Howard Fast (Cleveland: World, 1947). Dreiser received "a measly $300 from Metropolitan" for this story.

---

18 Swenberg, p.191.

19 Dreiser describes this trip in detail in A Hoosier Holiday, published in October 1916.

20 Pizer, Dreiser...Bibliography, p.46.

21 Swenberg, p.227. Before publication, Metropolitan, the story was rejected in 1918; see Swenberg, p.226.
Ulrica, the protagonist of this story, is fed in her childhood and youth on the gospel of wealth. When she grows up, a number of men of means come into her life, but she is disenchanted with everyone till she meets Vivien, a painter, who is the personification of her ideal. He is not financially successful but wonderfully different in his Shelley-like beauty. However, after his death—the death of her ideal—she marries Harry (Harris), a man of fifty. He is a millionaire, but his millions do not bring her happiness. She tries to transcend the American Dream but ultimately succumbs to it.

II

The gospel of wealth motivates Ulrica in her childhood. In her young womanhood, she is led to the conviction that "wealth was so essential." Later, however, she rejects the mythology of success and wealth when she rejects the 'success' men: "She was a little weary of men who could think only in terms of money" (p.307). She is in the grip of an ideal: her soul yearns to soar above "the common seeking and

---

Dreiser, "Fulfilment," Chains, p.305. All future references to this story are to page numbers in this edition, cited parenthetically in the text.
clayiness" (p.306). She seems less the prey to the glamour of life which victimises the other Dreiser women. Vivian for her symbolises aspiration—a man who has transcended the gospel of wealth and success: he was "the worshipper of that which is profitable to the soul only" (p.315). Vivian is like Ames of Sister Carrie. In Vivian (a musical, poetic name) Ulrica sees the realisation of her ideal. She has the legitimate human desire to transcend the prosaic everyday world into a world of fulfilment. Vivian's death is the death of a symbol for her. In the death of her ideal is the beginning of her own 'success' story. By marrying Harry (a commonplace, prosaic name), she bows submission to the American Dream: "... she herself needed someone to fall back upon, a support in this dull round of living" (p.322). Indeed, in a wealth-and-success oriented society, it is difficult to keep to one's ideals. After reading the story, the irony becomes evident: when Ulrica has love, she has no success; when she has success, she has no love.

III

Ulrica's interior monologue begins on the day Harry is returning from the West where he had gone to look after his "interminable interests" (p.301). The thought of his coming back "after several weeks of decidedly acceptable loneliness" (p.301) makes her mind
go back from the present-time to the past-time in the course of which her entire past life is revealed. By the time the story is about to end, she emerges from the past into the present to live again "this dull round of living" (p.322). Also, her interior monologue opens with the spiritual presence of Vivian, revolves around him (in whose "eye was never the estimating glint of one who seeks to capture for profit"—p.315), and ends with the thought of him. The thought of Harry's return makes her leave her apartment to visit the neighbourhood where Vivian lived and struggled; when she thinks how her old-time longing has been belatedly fulfilled through Harry's kindness (the putting of Vivian's painting in the museum and his monument now being erected), she returns to her apartment. The motif of circularity, already referred to in this study, is quite manifest in this story.

IV

Ulrica's interior monologue, divisible into five parts, presents a chronological account of her life.

Brooding on her acceptance of Harry after Vivian, her mind goes back to her childhood and extreme youth when her parents were so very poor. The following incidents which she recalls now must have then left psychic wounds. She recalls
Acceptance of Harry makes her think of her first marriage with Byram when she was seventeen. The second part of her interior monologue (pp.304-309) is taken up with Byram and the other men who come into her life. Her marriage with Byram is a very sad affair. He "was no money-maker.... For two whole years what had she not endured" (p.304). Even while she is living with Byram, "men of the world and of means" try to influence her (p.304). After separating from Byram, she does not marry. In the meanwhile an ideal takes root and grows in her. The ideal concerns some one man who should be "wise and delicate, a spirit-mate, some such wondrous thing as a great musician or artist might be.... He was to have a firmness of mind and body, a breadth, a grasp, a tenderness of soul such as she had not seen except in pictures and dreams" (p.305). In yearning for the realisation of this ideal, she rejects the gospel of wealth personified by different suitors: "she was a little weary of men who could think only in terms
of money" (p.307). At this time of her life she is like Dreiser's another heroine, Berenice Fleming, who reasons from time to time to "equip herself with the mental and spiritual data that would brush completely out of her consideration the whole Western materialistic viewpoint that made money and luxury its only god."23

In Vivian she meets her ideal mate. When she thinks about him in the third part of her interior monologue, she goes into an euphoric reverie. Almost one half of her entire interior monologue is devoted to him (pp.309-319). She recalls meeting him one late afternoon when he "seemed half the time to be a-dream" (p.310). Her 'chemic' attraction to him is pictured through the power of the eye:

And she had looked at his hands, at his commonplace clothes, and then, a little troubled by his gaze, had withdrawn hers. Again and again her eyes sought his or his hers, as though they were furtively surveying each other; as though each was unable to keep his eyes off the other. And by degrees there was set up in her a tremendous something that was like music and fear combined, as though all at once she had awakened and comprehended. She was no longer the complete master of herself, as she had always imagined, but was now seized upon and possessed by this stranger! (p.310)

---

Their ideal relationship continues for over a year. But once she comes to him, he senses "his inefficiency as a creator of means" (p.316). Realising how little life has done for him, Ulrica turns to the stage to make some money herself. Success and fame come slowly to her and she has to go on the road with the show; Vivian is compelled to remain behind owing to their limited means. One day she learns that he has been down with influenza which was sweeping the city. She returns immediately to find him "far along the path which he was never to retrace" (p.318). His death is perhaps symbolically foreshadowed by the predominance of the dark colours in the painting which he shows to her when she goes to his studio for the first time: "... he had shown her the picture he was painting, a green lush sea-marsh with a ribbon of dark enamel-like water laving the mucky strand, and overhead heavy, sombre, smoky clouds, those of a sultry summer day over a marsh. And in the distance, along the horizon, a fringe of trees showing as a filigree" (p.312). In fact the foreshadowing was so obvious in its significance that it permitted the reader to take an ironic view of the action.

The fourth part of her reverie deals with her life after the death of Vivian. She sums up her situation in a significant metaphor: "A bowl of joy had been placed in her eager fingers, only to be dashed
from them... Life had lost its lustre" (p.319). It is with the thought of helping her mother that after a year she returns to the city and the stage, but "exhausted, moping, a dreary wanderer amid old and broken dreams" (p.319). Her agony deepens when she thinks how by degrees her life becomes a success story but after the death of Vivian:

And now nature, cynical, contemptuous of the dreams and longings which possess men, now lavish upon her that which she and Vivian had longed for in vain. Fame? It was hers. Money? A score (sic) of fortunes had sought her in vain. Friendship? She could scarcely drive it from the door. She was successful. (p.320)

Fame, money, and friendship she has, but these do not lift the weight from her soul. What she thinks about her own fate is perhaps true of the predicament of the successful man in Dreiser's world:

But what mattered it now? Was it not a part of the routine, shabby method of life to first disappoint one—sweat and agonize one—and then lavish luxury upon one,—afterwards? (p.320)

The last part of her monologue deals with Harry, her alter ego and present husband. Dreiser makes a deft choice of name for him. Like her, Harry/Harris was harassed/harassed by circumstances in his early
life. "In his earlier years he had risen at four in a mill-town to milk cows and deliver milk, only later to betake himself, barefooted and in the snow, to a mill to work" (p.320). Later on, he moves from job to job—vertically. "Yes, now he was a millionaire, and lonely—as lonely as she was. Strange that he and she should have met" (pp.320-321). As in the case of many 'successful' characters, it suddenly strikes Harry at fifty that "his plethora of wealth was pointless. As a boy he had not learned to play, and now it was too late....Where lay his youth or any happiness?" (p.321). Through Ulrica, Harry seeks the youth which can be his no more. Yet she "could not love him, never had and never would" (p.321).

A distinguishing feature of this story is the use of typographical differentiation to keep apart interior activity and exterior events. By managing exterior events outside the context of the monologue, Dreiser gives his whole attention to the recording of Ulrica's consciousness. A flavour of life—continuous, flowing—is lent to the story by simultaneously dealing with Ulrica's past and present. The italicised brief statements almost invariably, either explicitly or implicitly, indicate Ulrica's moods, attitudes, and her present prosperity, as is evident from the following
examples:

"I cannot endure that perfume, Olga!" (p.305)

"Yes, you may send me this one, and the little one with the jade pins." (p.308)

That single tree blooming in this long, hard block: (p.317)

The very street! The very studio! (p.315)

This wretchedly wealthy West Side! (p.319)

One more useful purpose is served by these italicised inter-paragraphs: they outline the passage of time:

"You may have Henry serve breakfast and call the car!" (p.305)

"To Thorne and Company's first, Fred." (p.306)

"To McCafferey's, the Post Street entrance." (p.309)

"Drive me through the East Side, Fred." (p.312)

She must be returning now. It was not wise for her to sit here alone. (p.317)

Yes, she must be going. His train was due at four. (p.317)

The words which she addresses to others are differentiated by quotation marks from the words which she addresses to herself. In this way her spoken words are distinguished from her silent thoughts. Her movements which are evident in the above sampling betoken restlessness in her life.
The italicised sentences have a link with the main paragraphs in a more subtle way as well. The substance of the inter-paragraphs sets off certain trains of thoughts. Their juxtaposition reveals the meaning symbolically. Here are some illustrations:

"I cannot endure that perfume, Olga!"
In part she could understand her acceptance of Harry after Vivian (only it did not seem understandable always, even to her) ... she could remember an old brick house with a funeral air.... (p. 303)

That single tree blooming in this long, hard block:
There and then, ... and with longing and seeking, on the part of each, had begun that wondrous thing, their love.... (p. 311)

Yes, here was where they had come to gaze at the towers of the bridge beyond.
And so for over a year it was that they clung together, seeking to make of their lives an ideal thing.... (p. 316)

The immense walls these hotels made along the park:
And then against the utmost protest of her soul had come the end (of Vivian), a conclusion so sudden and unexpected that it had driven despair like metal into her very soul.... (p. 318)

In the *Free* volume, the stories are narrated in the traditional fashion. 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."24

VI

To trace the source of "Fulfilment," we have to go to Dreiser's biography. Helen Richardson, Dreiser's beautiful cousin who later became his second wife, came to him in mid-September 1919. "Inviting her inside, he was kindliness itself, but he was sending out such powerful Dreiserian waves that Helen reflected with gross understatement, 'Something was happening.'... By the time Helen left, she was enchanted—overjoyed next morning when he telephoned her at 8 to say, 'I haven't slept all night. I must see you.'"25 This recalls the first meeting between Ulrica and Vivian. "During the days that followed," Helen writes, "we could not endure being apart for more than an hour or two ... there was

a combustion of two forces, with some doubt as to which one was to be annihilated. Like Ulrica, Helen wanted to become an actress: "She wanted to go to Hollywood, to become an actress, and Dreiser thought her chances good." Dreiser and Helen left for Hollywood early in October 1919: "Starting as an extra at $7.50 a day, Helen now found minor film roles at $20 a day and was studying dancing and voice on the side, eager for stardom." It should be noted, however, that instead of devoting herself entirely to a career in the films, she chose rather to consecrate her life wholly to Dreiser. Like Ulrica, "she had one most endearing quality: reverence for his (Dreiser's) genius." Lehan is perhaps right to suggest that Ulrica and Vivian are modelled on Helen Richardson and Dreiser himself. When Helen met Dreiser in 1919, he resembled Vivian in the matter of worldly possessions: "Beauty was his ... a beauty of mind and of dreams and of the streets and the night and the sea and the movements of life itself, but of that which was material he had nothing" (p.314). It was only after the

26 Helen Dreiser, p.26.
27 Swanberg, p.243.
28 Ibid., p.249. Helen Dreiser died on September 22, 1955, aged sixty-one, leaving an estate of $184,380.85. She was buried beside Dreiser at Forest Lawn." See Swanberg, p.528.
29 Ibid., p.249.
30 Lehan, p.138.
publication of *An American Tragedy* in 1925 that money problems ceased to harry Dreiser.

VII

"Fulfilment" was first published in *Holland's Magazine*, published from Dallas, Texas, in its issue of February 1924. Later, it appeared in *Chains* (1927). The *Chains* volume was reprinted in England in 1928 and 1937 by Constable Publishers of London.

The Victor

It is a fine short story about one late J.H. Osterman who rises from the mire of poverty to become a multimillionaire oil king. He vanquishes his financial adversaries with his talent and ruthlessness. Marrying when far advanced in age, he is unhappy with his wife Nedia and the two stepsons as all the three are wastrels. He has the premonition that his huge wealth would be spent wantonly by them; to counter this he has a will drawn whereby his millions are to be utilised for the benefit of orphans toward whom he has always been sympathetic. Somehow this will remains unsigned. One

31 Pizer, *Dreiser...Bibliography*, p.46.

32 Ibid.
day he asks his legal adviser to come to him with the will; lying on his deathbed, he struggles but vainly to sign it.

A critic has rightly commented that "The Victor" is "a miniature companion piece to The Financier (1912) and The Titan (1914), Dreiser's two lengthy novels of unscrupulous financial dealings."

II

This story is unique among Dreiser's short fiction. It is structured in five sections on the basis of written and oral perspectives. The life and career of Osterman is viewed from different angles and the reader is thus shown one facet after the other of Osterman; in the process Osterman's character at the various stages of his life is unfolded.

III

The underlying purpose of the story is to stress the fact that it is not important how people view or have viewed Osterman or how he views himself; what is of importance is that the idea of his grandiose scheme or purpose is checkmated by forces stronger than himself, call them irony of fate or web of circumstance. In the over-all scheme of nature, even giants are but pygmies.

33Voss, p. 181.
In an essay called "The Essential Tragedy of Life," Dreiser wrote: "... The world is full of laudations of the powers of man, their satisfactions, their vast, vast rewards and glories, while so many decayed steles and temple doorways and data unending bear testimony to their utter material and subsequent mental futility."

Indeed, Dreiser's intention in the story is not to present Osterman's character from a multiple point of view, but to show the meaning of his life. By the time the story ends, the ironic smashing in the title ("The Victor") becomes evident. In the crucial turn of events lies the significance of the story. In trying to become a philanthropist, the buccaneer loses all. In Dreiser's fiction even the superman is the ultimate victim of circumstance. Osterman's untimely death, coming as it does with the most inopportune timing, wrecks his dream of immortality through philanthropy. In his death is the moral of his tale. Osterman dies without that actualisation of his altruistic design that would have given him satisfaction. Moreover, like Dreiser's other protagonists, he suffers and is guilt-ridden for the unscrupulous methods he employs to satiate his heart's desire to amass wealth. In the Dreiser world, "each life is necessarily a tragedy. One by one, from high

---

to low, the objects of his pity are exposed to our view, trailing their stars of illusion into oblivion.\footnote{Gerber, p.175.}

The conclusion of the story does suggest that poetic justice rules the world. Perhaps such an idea is foreshadowed in Section II: "Mr. Doremus [financially vanquished by Osterman] died only a year after resigning, declaring at that time that a just God ruled and that time would justify himself."\footnote{Dreiser, "The Victor," Chasing, p.331. All future references to this story are to page numbers in this edition, cited parenthetically in the text.}

IV

In Section III (pp.332-333) of the story, the reader sees Osterman's "great success and his peculiar faults" (p.332) against the background of his childhood and young manhood. This section traces his family, social, economic, religious, emotional and intellectual background in broad strokes, the forces which have shaped his developing consciousness. This brief section begins with his family background, "the hard and colorless life that had surrounded him as a boy" (p.332).

His father and mother, especially the father like the fathers of many of Dreiser's characters, are crude, hard, narrow, harried by life. His only sister is rough-featured and narrow. After his father's death, they...
"were reduced to want and he had actually been sent to beg a little cornmeal and salt from the local store on the promise to pay, possibly a year later" (p.332). The citizens of Reamder from where he hails are "a hard and grasping crew ... (and) deny them aid and encouragement" (p.333). In the local branch of his mother's church, he hears certain maxims, such as "'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'; also 'with whatsoever measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again'" (p.333). Like the protagonist of "The Old Neighborhood," Osterman also has been deeply influenced by these maxims: "Obviously such maxims taken very much to heart by a boy of his acquisitive and determined nature might bring about some of the shrewd financial tricks later accredited to him" (p.333).

After the death of his mother he and his sister look after the family farm for some time, but when his sister decides to marry, and Osterman consenting, she takes over the farm; he betaking himself to the Texas oil-fields where he later masters the details of oil prospecting and refining. This section ends by making a reference to Osterman's consideration for orphans: "Of the forty or more eminent men who have been connected with him in his enterprises, all but four were farm or orphan boys who had entered his enterprises as clerks or menials at the very bottom, and some seven of the total were from his native State, Kansas" (p.333). This
Section III of the story is based on a supposed biographical study of the late Osterman. As the story is written from a multiple point of view, in the other sections, Osterman is viewed from different angles. For instance, in Section I (pp.323-324), Osterman's character is presented in broad strokes from the point of view of C.A. Gridley, Chief Engineer in the Osterman Development Company. Gridley's admiration for Osterman "was based on his force and courage and initiative, rather than upon his large fortune and the speed with which he had accumulated it after he had passed the age of forty" (p.323). Gridley's views are set forth in an article. Section I consists of excerpts from that article. The main thrust of his article is to present admiringly the late Osterman as a tycoon with a dynamo of energy plus genius for entrepreneurial success.

Section II (pp.324-331) is devoted to the founding and development of the fortune of the late Osterman, as developed by C.B. Cummings, Osterman's quondam secretary. Cummings gives the history of three men who are financially ruined by Osterman to grab their wealth. Osterman's ruthlessness in its full magnitude, his tricks and traps to enmesh the unwary are shown in this section.
If Section I is a study in admiration of the tycoon-protagonist, Section II then is a study in disapproval of the man; the juxtaposition holds the two sections in tension and this tension makes Osterman's personality to vibrate. By the time this section ends, Osterman begins to have the suggestion of a functional name: he becomes Osterman, so to say. What Gerber says about Cowperwood is applicable to Osterman: "... rapacious, classically Machiavellian, a wolflike superman who devours unsuspecting sheep by the flock and fattens on their succulent flesh to ever more massive economic girth." 37

Section IV (pp.333-338) deals with Osterman's interior monologue "during the last five years of his life" (p.333). His monologue is structured chronologically, a factor which perhaps deprives it of its spontaneity. It begins with "those days when he had been working and scheming to get up in the world and was thinking that money was the great thing—the only thing!" (pp.333-334). He recalls meeting one Messner from whom he learnt how one could make "quick fortune" by offering shares in bogus companies (p.334). Presently his monologue centres on De Malquitt and Grasedick of Section II, whom he had ruined financially in bygone days, which fills him with remorse. When he had succeeded in accumulating

37Gerber, p. 88.
a fortune of nine millions, he was able to interest Nadia. "His wealth had been the point with her—any one could see that.... At the time he had married her she had social position whereas he had none" (p.337). It is through her that he is able to interest the clever and well-to-do fashionable set to back his projects with their free capital. Later, his fortune swells to forty millions. Lehan has truly observed that "ever since he had read Spencer, Dreiser was fascinated with the nature of and the means to power—on all levels of being. On the most immediate level, he saw that women could often be a source of money, so that a victory in the battle of love was often a double victory—a triumph over the woman herself and a means to wealth." 38 Osterman seems to have the same conviction. The most moving part of his monologue is that where he contemplates the meaning of his struggle and success, its futility to him. He has become a multimillionaire, but what of it? Could he say he was really content? What was he getting out of it? Life was so deceptive; it used and then tossed one aside. At first it seemed wonderful to be able to go, do,

38 Lehan, p. 119. Clyde Griffiths, the protagonist of An American Tragedy, regards Sondra Finchley in this double context—sees her as a beautiful woman who also offers him a vision of empire.
act, buy and sell as one chose, without considering anything save whether the thing he was doing was agreeable and profitable. He had thought that pleasure would never pall, but it had. There was this thing about age, that it stole over one so unrelentingly, fattening one up or thinning one down, hardening the arteries and weakening the muscles and blood, until it was all but useless to go on. And what was the import of his success, anyhow, especially to one who had no children and no friends worthy of the name? It was each man for himself, everywhere, and the devil take the hindmost. It was life that used and tossed one aside, however, great or powerful one might be. (p.336)

This is what he comes to at the end of his 'success."

The following section, Section V (pp.338-346) also is a monologue by Byington Briggs, legal and confidential adviser to the late Osterman, addressed to the Metropolitan Club in New York. His monologue is a sympathetic portrait of the financier. The main burden of his monologue is to tell the audience of Osterman's plans for the founding of homes for the orphans:

... he wanted to establish an interstate affair, as wide as the nation, of which the place (his magnificent country house) at Shell Cove was to be the center or head—a kind of Eastern Watering-place or resort for orphans from all over America. It was a colossal idea and would have taken all of his money and more. (p.343)

The "idea of grandeur" (p.341) is Osterman's motivating force in anything he does. After thoroughly studying
the ways orphans can be helped, a will is drawn by Briggs which, however, remains unsigned for some reason. Then on the morning of one Saturday, Briggs receives a long distance call from Osterman to come along with the will for him to sign. Because of the dramatic interest and suspense, the events of this particular Saturday are detailed (pp.343-346). When Briggs reaches Osterman's house, he sees "some big doings on the grounds, white-and-green and white-and-red striped marque tents, and chairs and wings and tables everywhere. Some of the smartest people were there, sitting or walking or dancing on the balcony" (pp.343-344). When Osterman is walking towards Briggs to receive him, Briggs "saw him reel and go down.... I realized that it must be paralysis or a stroke of apoplexy and I chilled all over at the thought of what it might mean" (p.344). Osterman struggles to sign the will. "When he found he couldn't he actually groaned: 'The—the—I—I want to—to—do something—for—for—the—the' Then he fell back, and next moment he was dead" (p.345). Later, when Mrs Osterman reads the will, she is appalled: "When she fully comprehended what it was all about she fairly gasped and shook—with rage.... She looked at him, at his dead body, the only glance he got from her that day, I'm sure, then at me, and left the room" (p.346). Briggs's monologue comes to end with his reflection on the role of chance in life. In Osterman's death dies a
great idea. Briggs monologises:

Just an ounce or two more of strength in that old codger's system, and think what would have been done with those millions. She wouldn't have got even a million of it all told. And those little ragamuffins would have had it all. How's that for a stroke of chance? (p.346)

From the structural point of view, this story is an arresting one. Such a structure as this enables the author to view Osterman from different perspectives.

VI

When Dreiser travelled alone to Chicago for the first time in 1887, aged sixteen, to work there, the fortunes of such Chicago financiers as McCormick and Field, Armour and Swift, Gary and Pullman were in full career. Dreiser was fascinated, like many of his characters, by the bustling offices, throbbing industries and magnificent mansions of these Princes of Wealth. Dreiser experienced the same fascination when he came as reporter to St. Louis in 1892. According to Gerber, Dreiser was driven to depict the financier by his insatiable curiosity about those few favored ones upon whom Nature had lavished all the gifts she had withheld from himself—a fascination already apparent in his idealization of his college roommate and
others. In his frankness he lamented, 'Alas, I haven't the least faculty for making money, not the least,' but he admired those who did, and he was intrigued with the ways in which they were able to do it.39

Keeping Gerber's observation in mind, psychologists can interpret Dreiser's fiction dealing with the financier-protagonists as pouring out of his dammed-up ambitions and repressed desires, his imaginary world revealing or cloaking himself. However, when Dreiser fully comprehended the ways and pathology of the genus financier, the captains of Industry became for him financial demons as they held the society to ransom. It seems Dreiser's attitude towards them qualitatively changed after the publication of the first two volumes of "The Trilogy of Desire." Thereafter he became critical of them as is evident from the two invaluable essays in Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub.40 It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the source of this story lies in this phase of Dreiser's career.

VII

This story first appeared under the title "Victory" in the April 24, 1927 issue of Jewish Daily Forward of

39 Gerber, p.93.
40 These two essays are: (1) "The American Financier," Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub, pp.74-91; and (2) "Equation Inevitable," Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub, pp.157-181.
New York. When it was collected for publication in *Chains*, its title was changed to "The Victor." The revised title is more emphatic in underlining the ironic significance of the story: The Victor is not the tycoon-protagonist but—Death.

**VIII**

From an analysis of the stories in this chapter, it is clear that all the protagonists have a world of dreams whose reality is disillusion. As in the case of the protagonist of "The Trilogy of Desire," the glory of the protagonists of these stories turns into ashes. They yearn to fly above ordinary men and seek contentment in wealth and success or in some other achievement which may bring them lasting satisfaction. They come from small places and feel the magnetic pull of the big city which is their theatre of action where they seek the magic crystal of success and wealth.

It is also obvious that 'success' literature coloured Dreiser's mind, but he was not spoiled by it, both as a man and writer. This is evident from the fact that the achievements of his protagonists turn into gall. The analysis of the stories also shows that influenced by the modern-day tendencies, Dreiser used new fictional

---

41 Pizer, *Dreiser...Bibliography*, p.46.
techniques to record the consciousness of his protagonists or to look at his characters from different perspectives.