has always been the centre of attention for view him as 'the crown of life' as well as those regard him as a 'trembling creature.' For a novelist takes a negative view of the world, human society is in a state of chaos. We cannot but find heroes of horror and despair in the novels of such a novelist. There suddenly appears, not man but Schopenhauerian "evil beast", a Spencerian "slave of leaden instincts", a Nietzschean "blond beast." On the other hand, a positive view of man and human society enables the writer to depict the diversity of human characters - their versatility, complexity, contradictions, failures, successes and man's constant growth. Faith in man's ultimate triumph, in man's will to endure, to bear everything and overcome all obstacles are at the root of all the novels of Dreiser. Dreiser never sacrifices human values to philosophical implications.

Emerson saw society in conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members. Thoreau's work is a paean of man's resistance to an defiance of social pressure. Walt Whitman, like Thoreau, upholds the dignity of man and does not care a fig for society. Hawthorne and Melville were intrigued by
the polarity between individual freedom and social authority.

In making Heyster Pynne, a social outcast in *The Scarlet Letter*, so much attached to her sin-begotten daughter, Pearl, Hawthorne has installed the supremacy of human emotions over law and authority. Likewise, in *Moby Dick*, Melville brings out the spirit of rebellion and defiance in his characters. We have the apotheosis of the individual in his works. The characters of James Fenimore Cooper and Hemingway find claims of society too oppressive.

The individual may find himself as a fish out of water in an altogether unfavourable environment because of the antagonism between the forces of heredity and those of social environment. The individual and his human environ are continually in an interactive state. Moreover, one cannot grow in isolation. Without social participation, one is likely to become corrupt and stale. Eudora Welty, a modern American novelist, has stressed the contribution of society towards the development of an individual. Man is a pawn in the hands of the hands of the forces of heredity and those of social environment. The quantum of happiness and misery in life depends upon his capacity to adjust himself with the prevailing social environment.
There is a note of compassion in the works of the novelists of the later half of the 19th century and modern age because the tragedy in the life of their characters is caused by the brutal social forces. The individual is shown as shrivelling up morally and emotionally. The society is in shambles. Faulkner laments a general decay of morale with the emergence of the new tribe of profit-motivated people called the Snopeses who wield both power and influence. Scott Fitzgerald in his Great Gatsby has shown society as thoroughly contaminated by the crass materialism of the age. Henry James stands up for the individual as against society. But James' world is not our world for his characters are seldom troubled by economic factors which perpetuate the worst tyranny on them. Arthur Miller blames those organs of society in which power rests. In All My Sons, Joe Keller lays the fault on the compulsive nature of economic process for his ruin.

The characters of Dreiser evoke the feelings of pity and sympathy in our hearts because they are more sinned against than sinning. They are not the author of their woes. They fall an easy prey to the powerful forces of social environment. They do not possess the strength to keep themselves away from the viciousness rampant all round. Society sets
up false gods before them. There is disintegration of personality because of urbanization and intense societal pressure which dampen human emotions and cause loss of self awareness. They offer no resistance to the adverse forces of heredity and those of social environment. We feel all the more compassionate towards them for their soft, wheedling nature. There is no lifting of hands against 'the fingers of the power above' nor against hostile forces of social environment. Consequently, there is a complete absence of mental conflict and tension in his novels. The drive for money and sex is so great that his characters in their quest for happiness lose their grip on what is lasting and permanent. The pleasures they seek are ephemeral, the happiness they dream is an illusion. But life is to be learned from life and the professional moralist is at best a manufacturer of shoddy wares.¹ The characters of Dreiser are neither gods nor demons. They are essentially human beings prone to basic human urges. Their vulnerability depends upon the degree of cohesion between the forces of heredity and those of social environment.

In a materialistic social environment, poverty is a great deterrent to man's happiness in life. The characters of Dreiser do not rest content with their poverty and lack of means. They are all infected with the very virus of ambition and craving for pleasures. What moves us is their will to live and faith in life. They may be victims of the forces of heredity and those of social environment but their zest for life never ceases. They are always yearning and aspiring. It is another matter if their soul is lost in the vortex of social transactions. The longing for something better is always there.

Louisville Times published in November 30, 1900, called Sister Carrie 'a plain woman', plain in the sense of being of the great common people for there is no suggestion of 'the girl with the laughing eye and the glowing cheek.'

The infinite suffering and deprivation of great masses of man and women moved Dreiser to tears. He himself had his own share of the difficulties and discouragements that fall

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to the lot of most men. In describing life as it is, Dreiser does not point out any moral. He is neither anti-man nor minus-man. Even when there are no ideals, there is a strong personal desire to survive, to fight to win, the stretching out of the fingers to grasp the mysteries of life in the heart of his characters.

Dreiser is sympathetic with the weaknesses and foibles of his characters. By giving the title Sister Carrie to his first novel which aroused storm of protests from the genteel society for advocating and defending transgression, Dreiser challenges the conventional society for its hostile attitude towards a kept woman. Carrie is after all a member of a family and has to break away from it because of economic compulsion. She, therefore, deserves our sympathy and admiration more than our wrath. Her helplessness before social and economic forces, her fall and rise which might have been against the ethical standards of the victorial society, are quite natural. She may be the victim of the social and economic forces, but she never surrenders herself before them.

The will to live, the longing for better social status and
social recognition is always there despite her bafflement in understanding the forces which work against her. Dreiser denies her happiness but he does award her unmistakable success as an actress. At the same time, he brings Carrie to the point of discovering that success and happiness are not identical. Carrie reaches the pinnacle of glory and achieves success according to the prevalent American attitude. Yet, she remains restless for some undefinable inner satisfaction:

"Oh, Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart; onward, onward, it saith and where beauty leads there it follows .............. It is when the feet weary, and hope seems vain that the heartaches and the longings arise. Know then that for you is neither surfeit nor content. In your rocking chair, by your window dreaming shall you long alone. In your rocking chair by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel."  

Sister Carrie is a book of life. Dreiser communicates with great success, a sense of wonder at the mystery of life. We

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get a sense of warm humanity in this novel. The individual is neither arbiter of his fate nor the pawn in the hands of implacable forces. He is 'even as a wisp in the wind, moved by every breath of passion, acting now by his will, and now by instincts, erring with one, only to retrieve by the other, falling by one, only to rise by the other - a creature of incalculable variety.'

Dreiser upholds human values in his novels. Carrie's rise, even though not justified by conventional standards, is acceptable to us because of her impressive character. Hurstwood's decline and fall is not so shocking because he has certain qualities which deprive him of our sympathy. Dreiser has adopted an unusual approach to the problem of men in Sister Carrie.

In Jennie Gerhardt (1911) Dreiser has challenged and questioned the conventional values of society by presenting a kept woman as good and possessing positive virtues. But goodness is not always rewarded in practical life. Despite her positive qualities, Jennie's life was shattered because her conduct was against the mores of a conventional society.

4. idem.
Dreiser has exposed the inadequacy of the standard Christian morality in judging the conduct of a person. The moral and ethical standards which operate in society are force, in view of the double standards practised by the people. The fact that such a lovely innocent and sincere woman like Jennie has to suffer for no fault of hers, shows the difference between example and precept, between actuality and morality. Jennie had to yield to Senator Brender because of economic compulsion and was left as an unwed mother because of his sudden demise. She was again seduced by Lester Kane who, despite his idealism, was too weak to resist the forces of capital. He left Jennie for fear of losing the lion's share in his father's property.

The character of Lester Kane is a glaring example of a split personality. Lester Kane, though he loved Jennie, did not have strength enough to stick to her. In him, Dreiser has shown the contrast between what people profess and what they actually practise. Although he was conscious of the fact that the best that a person can do in an age of materialised forces, is to keep his personality intact. He was unable to do so.

He advised Jennie but he himself could not live by this standard. In Sister Carrie, the moral codes are held as invalid.
Jennie Gerhardt they are shown as impotent because they are unable to protect a woman of virtue and save her life from being blighted. While testing his characters, Dreiser puts into test the society also which discriminates between haves and have-nots in according justice. Poetic justice is a myth. The right is seldom rewarded and the wrong is not always punished. Honour and recognition come to persons of affluence and influence effortlessly, whereas women like Jennie are destined to suffer. But, despite her trials and tribulations, Jennie rises in our estimation because of her self-sacrificing nature and 'the wonderous sea of feeling' in her.

Dreiser's detractors are absolutely unjust in branding him as a champion of vice and defender of fallen women. In fact, they are not fallen women in the eyes of Dreiser. Dreiser believed that it is our society which is to blame, not they, for compelling a woman to part with her most-prized possession - chastity - in order to live. Jennie impresses us more by her individuality and strength of character. We feel compassionate towards her when we see the life of such a simple women going to seed. She is not an ordinary woman but of a significant type emotionally. That is why persons of such a high political
stature like Senator Brander and of high family like Lester Kane are drawn towards her. Jennie is entirely different from the standard bitches of contemporary American novel. The pathos of Jennie's life is the outstanding fact of the novel. Through this novel, Dreiser has condemned the social conditions which hamper the growth and development of an individual.

The works of Dreiser are not didactic in character. There is no attempt on the part of the novelist to moralize upon life. We have life in its most palpable form in all his novels. That is why it has been said that he writes fiction like fact. He unfolds a huge panorama of life through them. His characters are not wooden. They are creatures of flesh and blood and fulfil their destinies in a natural way. The publishers of his novel The Genius (1915) had to withdraw it because of the hostile attitude of the society as it was considered to besmirch the morals of the people. Though the hero of the novel reaps the consequences of his immoral life, there are in the novel, 'certain female delinquents who do not suffer any ill consequence from their misconduct but in the language of the day 'get away with it.'

the book because in their opinion the effect of reading this book 'on the young and impressionable mind' was harmful.

The stricture passed on The Genius was quite baseless. On the other hand, it is an excellent work of art. According to Merton S. Yewdale, "The Genius is a work of literary excellence and not an immoral tale, calculated to fire prurient minds to besmirch the morals of infants and imbeciles." 7

Dreiser gives such a careful attention to details by giving the hereditary traits, environmental influence and the natural predilections of his characters as to give an impression that a real flesh and blood person is passing before us. There is no sudden conversion of his characters. Those who are immoral continue to be so, those who are moral remain the same. We have immoral characters like Eugene Witla in The Genius on the one hand on the other hand, we have moral characters like Angela Blue who has an altogether different family background as compared to Eugene Witla. The libidinous ways of her husband,

6. idem.
Eugene Witla, were beyond her comprehension as she was brought up in an extremely pietistic atmosphere. She saw no reason why Eugene should not be devoted and sincere to her husband because the example of her father was before her who had been quite devoted and loving to her mother, and also the examples of Eugene's father and brothers who had been quite faithful and sincere to their wives:

"Her parents had raised her to see marriage in a different light. Her father was faithful to her mother. Eugene's father was faithful to his wife — that was perfectly plain. Her brothers-in-law were faithful to her sisters. Why should not Eugene be faithful to her?"  

We love the characters of Jennie Gerhardt and Angela Blue for their devotion and submissiveness but we admire the characters of Sister Carrie and Eugene Witla for their dynamism and struggling nature. Jennie and Angela — both were victims of the circumstances or forces beyond their control.

There is meek submission before these forces by them. Both are more acted upon than acting. Carrie and Eugene, conversely though they are victims of the forces of heredity and those of social environment, are not vanquished by them. They struggle against the odds of life and achieve remarkable success in the end. Carrie rises by her dramatic talent, Eugene by art. Dreiser, when interviewed by the interviewers, told them that 'a little transcript of life as it is would require a 'special kind of guts' and declaring that such a transcript would show "most lives are failures" insisted, he himself was "not a pessimist", "I am not even sentimentally aroused by suffering. I sympathize with struggling merit more than I do with poverty in general." Art should show, "he said, not only the concentrated filth at the bottom but the wonder and mystery of the ideals at the top."  

Dreiser has not only shown, 'the concentrated filth at the bottom' but 'the wonder and mystery of the ideals at the top' also. Although he saw life as meaningless, he was


10. idem.
impressed by its inconclusiveness. His trilogy of desire (The Financier (1912), The Titan (1914) and The Stoic (1947) demonstrates his belief that the only good lay in exercising one's will power. We have the apotheosis of individualism in these novels. Dreiser has endeavoured to show the life of modern financial superman who acts as an agent for the development of the capitalistic society. He does not agree with Jack London who writes in Sea Wolf that 'the superman cannot be successful in modern life ....... , he acts like an irritant in the social body.' We have a sort of celebration rather than indictment of the modern superman in the works of Dreiser.

Frank Algernon Cowperwood, the chief protagonist of these novels (The Financier, The Titan and The Stoic) was fictionalized version of Charles T Yerkes, a business magnate of Philadelphia and Chicago of the times of Dreiser. Cowperwood who had inherited financial skill from his father became a millionaire by achieving success from business to business.

A superman, devoid of moral inhibitions, he commanded money and sex both. Money gave him means to enjoy the love of hosts of women. His conquest of women was like winning of several shields in the game of love. He was not weak like Carrie, Hurstwood, Jennie and Lester Kane. He was a man of rare ability.
Dreiser might have been inspired by Nietzsche's philosophy 'that the significant individual will always appear and will always do what his instincts tell him to do.' The Financier Cowperwood became the Titan by conquering both wealth and women. He seemed 'a kind of Superman, and yet also a bad boy - handsome, powerful and hopeful .......... impelled by some blazing internal force which harried him on and on. Cowperwood illuminated 'the terrors and wonders of individuality' by violating the social codes.

Dreiser saw society as jungle in which the unscrupulous equalled strength and morality equalled weakness. When Miss Marshall asked if such business titans as Cowperwood were not frankly unscrupulous, Dreiser replied sounding a note of protest.

"Nature is unscrupulour!" he exclaimed "She takes her own way, regardless of the suffering caused, and the fittest survive. And in each one of us lingers this instinct of nature. In the weak it is mostly drowned under the rain of

ethical exhortations poured on them from the beginning. In the strong unmorality triumphs. And today America is great not because of, but in spite of, her pieties and her moralities." 12

But unmorality may triumph in the strong, it does not triumph for good. Cowperwood did for the hour illuminate 'the terrors and wonders of individuality' but he too was conscious of the fact 'that even giants are but pygmies' 13 and that 'an ultimate balance must be struck.' 14 Despite the fact that life 'sings and stings' the zest for living was always present in the heart of Cowperwood and he was fully satisfied in having lived life to his heart's content.

"In a mulch of darkness are bedded the roots of endless sorrows - and of endless joys. Canst thou fix thine eye on the morning? Be glad. And if in the ultimate it blind thee, be glad also| Thou hast lived." 15

14. idem.
15. ibid. p.552.
Dreiser was not torn between despair and idealism. Cowperwood trilogy demonstrates his belief in the ultimate human values and dignity of the individual.

Dreiser’s heart was in league with humanity. Mencken, a very great admirer of Dreiser, said ‘Dreiser can feel, and feeling he can move. The others are very skilful with words.’

In An American Tragedy (1925) Dreiser has described in the person of Clyde Griffiths, a victim of contemporary American dream of attaining success through money. The avenue of success for Carrie and Eugene Witle was art, the road to success for Cowperwood was business and finance, for Clyde, the possibility of success was through rich relations.

Dreiser who was objured as a ‘Chronicler of materialism in its basest form’ has exposed the inadequacies of American culture in his An American Tragedy (1925). Dreiser’s avowed purpose in giving this title to his novel was to describe the overwhelming lure of money-values in the contemporary American Society. Clyde’s aspirations to rise in the world

by acquiring money and social position was typical of an average American. The words of Dreiser in this respect are very revealing.

"I never can and never want to bring myself to the place where I can ignore the sensitive and seeking individual in his pitiful struggle with nature, with his enormous urges and his pathetic equipment." 17

There was hardly any crisis of moral guilt with Clyde because he was so exclusively a victim of the drives for money and sex that it was not possible for him to subdue them. This also shows the vicarious influence of the prevailing social environment. Our sense of pity is heightened when we learn about the awareness of Clyde regarding the tragic nature of these drives. Clyde was, after all, a human being placed in the most dangerous environment for his temperament. We are extremely touched by the fumbling reflections of Clyde in the death house.

"Would no one ever understand — or give him credit for his human — if all too human and perhaps wrong hungers — yet from which so many others — along with himself suffered." 18

17. ibid. p.204.
Clyde was neither a mentally crippled deviate of The Hand of The Potter nor the squid-devouring lobster of The Financier. His life was conditioned by the tension between poverty and wealth. The shakily based ideals of his parents were too weak to save his life from going to pieces. In the person of Clyde who had neither external nor internal power to fulfil his needs, Dreiser has shown the plight of an average American caught between the Universal and the American forces. But there was no meek submission before these forces on the part of Clyde. To stop struggling is to die. Clyde never allowed sloth to overpower him. Despite his poor family background and adverse circumstances, he left no opportunity unavailed whether by contacting rich family relatives or by trying to marry a rich woman like Sondra Finchley, to achieve success. The question of noble or ignoble means for attaining his ends did not bother him. The news item regarding the murder of a young lady by her lover by drowning her in the lake goaded him on to the path of similar action like the prophecy of the three witches in Macbeth by Shakespeare which inflame the fire of ambition in Macbeth and cause tragedy in his life.
Dreiser never reduced reality to sheer ugliness. The portrayal of the monstrous chaos of life in a materialistic social environment in no way deprives his characters of the principle of action. Like Dostoyevsky who showed that 'the dead houses' were inhabited by broken and corrupted but living men, Dreiser has also peopled his world with persons of abundant energy like Carrie, Eugene Witta, Cowperwood and Clyde who are always yearning and aspiring.

The will to live is always present in Dreiser's characters. Like Dostoyevsky's broken and corrupted but living men, they are also not obsessed by moral considerations in their zest for life. The free and frank description of the realities of life which might have been shocking to the conscience of the genteel society, was in fact a presentation of the general flux of life in the prevailing social environment of his times. There is no deracination of the individual in the novels of Dreiser. The contemporary modern novel is stocked with individuals who in their dullness justify the mechanical psychology. They are non-entities, they hardly exist.

Dreiser takes an affirmative view of life instead of affecting the wasteland attitude of modern novelists. Dreiser's individuals are large and heroic not because of what they accomplish but because of their innocence, their enormous capacity for suffering. In their defenselessness and suffering, we watch the working of a social process and feel the solitude of the individual even in society. Man writhes in solitude. The characters of Dreiser may be crushed by the hostile forces, they never surrender themselves before them. They may be weighed down by the leaden conservatism of their instinct, they may fall prey to the adverse forces of social environment, they express their individuality by their struggling merit and the freedom of their soul in its inarticulate longings.