Chapter-vi

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In the novels of Theodore Dreiser, we have a vigorous treatment of love. In fact, love is the noblest sentiment of the human heart. As Dreiser comments, "Love is not a terrible thing between any two. It is just lovely." (The Genius 120) As Dreiser had a high opinion of love, his novels present this human emotion in a very excellent manner. Like the other great novelists of his age i.e., like Sherwood Anderson and Edith Wharton, Dreiser presents the feeling of affection between two persons of the opposite sex.

Being a novelist, Dreiser does not believe in love at first sight. His women characters are not innocent like that of Tess in Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles. We witness
the failure of romantic love between Eugene and Angela in *The Genius*, and they cannot live happily. The traditional writers hardly found any flaw in romantic love. But Dreiser opposed it. "Rarely has American literature witnessed such an indictment of romantic love as Dreiser presents in *The Genius.*" (Gerber 116) This change in the traditional love can be taken as a change in the attitude towards the women who, despite the fact that they were losers in most of the love affairs, were forced to compromise.

Dreiser succeeds in saving his women characters from disgrace because he discourages them to indulge in romantic love. It is here that his feminist attitude towards love comes to light. He gives the message that women should be realistic in their approach towards love. In the above novel, Eugene’s love for different women is
only his attraction towards their beauty. Dreiser explains, "And as for love - what had he never had of love before? When he went back in his mind, it seemed now that all, each and everyone had been combined in some way with lust and evil thinking...." (The Genius 536) Of course, usually the ultimate goal of love is its culmination in sexual enjoyment. Sex is an essential and integral part of love and they are inseparable. Since physical attraction is short lived and diminishes as time passes, love based on it fades automatically. If we consider love in this perspective, we find that Eugene’s love for Suzanne Dale is of this kind because “he wanted to be with her, to hold her hands, to kiss her lips, to watch her smile; but nothing more.” (The Genius 536)

In The Genius, Eugene Witla falls in love with Angela because her love-letters impress him greatly. He
comes in touch with other women like Christina who has intellectual quality, and Miriam is liked by him for her artistic ability. What attracts him towards Angela is her emotional quality. "There was poignancy in her love letter; intensity about her personal feelings when in his presence which moved him in spite of himself, an ache went with her, which brought a memory of the tales of Sappho and Marguerite Gautier." (The Genius 139) It appears that different women are loved by Eugene for different reasons, but none of these women achieves true love. Eugene does not love any of them from the core of his heart.

Eugene's feeling of love cannot be said to be a feeling for a single person because he feels attracted towards many. It seems that he develops this weakness in him because he is an artist. A true artist usually loves
whatever is beautiful. As a matter of fact, his leaning towards different women should be interpreted only as an attraction for beauty. But this is not all. His ideology regarding love is different. He does not believe in loving a single person in one’s life. That’s why, it can be said that he is not sincere towards Angela. “To have a bright, joyous girl of eighteen put her arms about you --- Could you risk too much for it? That world said one life, one love. Could he accede to that? Could any woman satisfy him? Could Frieda if he had her?” (The Genius 271) Dreiser’s feministic approach towards love warns women against false love.

Sometimes, a feeling of kindness towards a person of the opposite sex turns into love in the course of time. Though he likes Ruby because of her liberal ideas, but primarily his love for her is a feeling of kindness. “He
liked Ruby, though she was sweet. He felt sorry for her at times because she was such a little thing, so unthinking. Who was going to marry her eventually? What was going to become of her? (The Genius 90) Dreiser reminds a woman to watch that she is loved for the sake of love, and for no other reason. He constantly keeps an eye on the interests of women. Dreiser, in his novels, depicts woman’s psychology of love. Every woman wants to be loved right from her adolescence. Patriccine Barlow, a girl of twelve, likes to be kissed a number of times by Frank Cowperwood in The Financier. Cowperwood loves Dora Fitler, when she was fourteen years old. Marjorie Stafford loves Cowperwood at the age of fifteen. Dreiser also proves in his novels that woman’s desire to be loved makes them fancy they are in love whereas they are really not. That is why, sometimes they are misunderstood.
Suzanne’s love for Eugene in the novel *The Genius* appears to be a passing fancy. It does not endure. When Suzanne tells Angela about her liking for Eugene, she reminds her that some other women before her also thought that they love him. “Oh, no you don’t! You only think you love him, as so many women have before you, Suzanne”, said Angela frozenly, the thought of the coming child always with her.” (*The Genius* 545)

Angela is right because after sometime she forgets him. Love for Eugene can be witnessed in the scene when she is ready to live with even without caring for public opinion. “I don’t care anything at all about what people think. I don’t care what any society friends so. They are not making my life. They are all just as narrow and selfish as they can be, anyhow. Love is something different from that.” (*The Genius* 591) But in the course of time, she
goes elsewhere for one year and during this time she carries on practically no communication with Eugene. It appears that with the lapse of time, she forgets Eugene. Thus, this novel highlights Dreiser’s opinion about love, according to which, sometimes love begins with the feeling for sexual satisfaction. Pure love in which a person loves the other person only for the sake of love succeeds in our life. Eugene himself feels that pure love is very rare.

In his first and the best novel, *Sister Carrie*, Dreier very categorically explains what love is. According to him, there is attraction between Carrie and Hurstwood. But Hurstwood’s attraction towards Carrie can’t be called ‘love’. It is merely a passion for physical pleasure. In Dreiser’s opinion, love is “that majesty of passion that sweeps the mind from its seat fuses and melts all arguments and theories into a tangled mass and destroys
for the time being the reasoning power.” (Sister Carrie 172) He believes that this great emotion influences nearly every person once in his or her life but it usually happens during a person’s youth. It may also result in his marriage.

Dreiser’s belief that women frequently imagine that they are in love but actually they are not can be very well seen in Sister Carrie, in which Carrie is given to believe that she loves Hurstwood, which is not true. Her this weakness gives Hurstwood a chance to deceive her which ultimately results in her elopement with him. The reason why Carrie thinks she loves Hurstwood is the psychology of a woman to be loved. “It flows from the fact that in each exists a bias towards affection, a craving for the pleasure of being loved. The longing to be shielded, bettered, sympathized with, is one of the attributes of the sex.” (Sister Carrie 173)
*Sister Carrie* very well presents the psychological side of the feminine affection. What Carrie says about herself is true about most of the women. Their love is passionate and with all possible force. A woman usually tries to be sincere in her love — 'Love is all a woman has to give.' "But it is the only thing which God permits us to carry beyond the grave." (*Sister Carrie* 151) Thus, Dreiser presents the various facets of women.

According to Dreiser, for woman also love affairs yield unbounded pleasure. Jealousy is very often the proof of love. It is, of course, very difficult to understand the complex feeling of love. "A real flame of love is a subtle thing. It burns us a will-o-the-wisp, dancing onward to fairy-lands of delight. It roars as a furnace. Too often jealousy is the quality upon which it feeds." (*Sister Carrie* 181) Woman is jealous by nature particularly in love. No
woman can tolerate the other woman as her rival in love. Very often this jealousy is coupled with suspicion. This jealousy is greater when the other woman is younger or more beautiful.

As a feminist, Dreiser wants that man’s love should be sincere. Hurstwood’s love for Carrie is not sincere because his love is just for the feminine form, not for a particular woman. That is why we find Carrie repenting for having loved Hurstwood. “He had presented all this affection, all this passion and he was trying to her all the while. Oh, the perfidy of men! And she had loved him; there could be nothing more in the quarter. She would see Hurstwood no more.” (Sister Carrie 179) Dreiser also depicts woman’s innocent and selfless love.

Love can also be interpreted as a product of the various social forces prevailing at that time. “Dreiser’s
attitude towards love is not Victorian......for, to him love is dependent upon all the social, financial and personal forces that operate at any moment.” (Kazin Alfred 59) No doubt, Eugene repents for his insincerity and ultimately returns to Angela. Dreiser advocates sincerity in love towards women and presents the feministic approach in such description. “She was in Blackwood, evidently and wanted him to come back to her. He held her hand and cried, for he knows that there was never any recompense for that pain. What a dog he had been! He bit his lips and stared out of the window. Once he said, Oh, I’m no damned good! I should have died!” (The Genius 704) Such thinking towards love which is sincere and pro woman is because of his (Dreiser) personal experience in his life.
We witness the revival of Eugene's love for Angela. When she is in hospital to deliver a child, a complication develops. When the doctor puts before him the option of saving either the mother or the child, Eugene immediately decides to save Angela's life. For the time being, his old force and dignity were restored. "Save her life if you can, by any means that you can. I have no other wish." (The Genius, 695-96)

Dreiser presents woman's sincerity in love. We have a description of a sincere love that appears in the novel in the form of Angela's love for Eugene. Most of the women dream of a beautiful house after their marriage but Angela is ready to live just in a cottage. She dreams of a home based on love. Her love for Eugene is quite sincere. Even after knowing of his other affairs, she is given to self-criticism. She analyses the reasons of her
failure in keeping Eugene to herself. She is upset to think that despite every sacrifice made by her, she fails to gain Eugene's sincere love. "Why did God torture her so? Why she made to bleed at every step by this her sacrificial love? Had she not been a good wife? Had she not laid every tribute of tenderness, patience, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and virtue on the alter of love?" (The Genius 360)

After coming to know that Eugene had started liking Suzanne, (Angela) persuades Suzanne not to go ahead. She makes it clear that she will not divorce Eugene and hence she can seldom marry him. "I won't give him a divorce. I can't as he will know later, and he has no grounds for obtaining one. Do you expect to be his mistress? You have no hope of ever being anything else. Is not that a nice
ambition for a girl of your standing?” (The Genius 546)

Thus, Dreiser presents a wife’s point of view.

*An American Tragedy*, another very famous novel by Dreiser, displays Roberta’s genuine love for Clyde. She is a factory girl and her financial condition is not up to the mark. She meets Clyde Griffiths in the factory and develops a feeling of love for him. Roberta’s love for Clyde is his really heartfelt and it has no selfish purpose. As she loves him greatly, she wants Clyde to meet her frequently. Love finds expression through the gestures of a person and through his or her other activities. Roberta does not love Clyde because he belongs to the family of the Griffiths. She is an ordinary working girl who does not have very high dreams and remains bound to the earth. She loves Clyde for Clyde’s sake.
Among all of Dreiser’s women characters, Roberta is prominent for her simplicity and innocence. She was entirely ignorant of the complications that could arise when her intimacy with Clyde was constantly increasing. Of course, it is not her poor family background but genuine feeling of love that allures her towards Clyde.

Her love for Clyde is the real feeling of the heart. It was a kind of chemic compulsion to get attracted towards Clyde, and there is no selfishness in her sentiments. “Day after day and because so much above, and further more because of so strong a chemic or temperamental pulls that was so definitely asserting itself, he could no longer keep his eyes off her — or she her from him.” (An American Tragedy 254) Both Roberta and Clyde love each other and their love was displayed very often through the brightness of their eyes, and through the other signals that passed
through their eyes from one person to the other. Very often, there were “feverish eye-flashes between them.” (An American Tragedy 254) As a feminist, Dreiser is sympathetic towards woman. In the character of Roberta, Dreiser draws a pathetic picture of a girl who constantly remains in a state of confusion. She is worried about her social prestige and also about the reactions of her parents. Clyde utilizes the slightest opportunity to avoid Roberta. Once he is informed that there has to be a meeting of the heads of departments but this meeting was not necessary. Clyde takes this opportunity to cancel his appointment with Roberta. “Honey! Awfully sorry, but just told that I have to be at a meeting of department heads downstairs at there. That means I can’t go to Fondace with you, but will drop around to the rooms for a few minutes right after closing.” (An American Tragedy 335)
For Dreiser the man and the woman have equal rights. As such a woman has a right to love. That is why in his novels, a woman takes initiative in love. This is what Sondra does. Of course, she also makes Clyde aware of the possible difficulties. Her affection for Clyde is sincere because at the time Clyde experiences the lack of money, she is ready to help him even financially.

Sondra can guess very well the cause of Clyde’s sadness and as she loves him she wants to see him happy.

“And then Sondra, sensing a note of depression about him (She had determined from his obvious lack of equipment on his first visit) that perhaps the want of money was at the bottom of his present mood, and so proposed later to attract seventy five dollars from her purse ... that at no point where petty expenditures should be required, should he feel the least bit embarrassed during his stay this time.”
Here Dreiser’s feminist attitude is quite evident in this novel when Sondra displays her love for Clyde openly.

In *Jennie Gerhardt*, the novel which is said to be very close to Dreiser’s heart, we have a beautiful description of a love affair between Jennie and Senator Brander. Jennie loves Brander deeply and whenever Brander expresses his love one way or the other, she enjoys it quite innocently. She is unaware of the fact that his relationship may invite great problems for her. Her love for Brander is a typical example of innocent love. In this novel, Dreiser presents various facets of love. Since Jennie is not worldly wise, she is given to the feeling of love in a quite natural way. It’s unfortunate that her simplicity, like that of Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, becomes the cause of her tragedy. She is given to her
normal emotion of love because of the lack of her intellectual strength. "Jennie enjoys it all innocently. Elements of fancy and novelty entered into her life. She was an unsophisticated creature, emotional, totally inexperienced in the matter of the affections, and yet nature enough mentally to enjoy the attentions of this great man who had thus bowed from his high position to make friends with her." (Jennie Gerhardt 43)

Actually, through the depiction of Jennie’s innocence in love, Dreiser tries to present the psychology of a young girl who takes the offer of love in an easy manner because she wants to be loved. As a matter of fact, this is applicable not only to Jennie Gerhardt but also to every young girl.

Brander’s love for Jennie, on the other hand, is primarily a genuine feeling, and it has no ulterior motive.
Jennie visits Brander every day for doing domestic work, and Brander is very much influenced by her poverty. In the course of time, Brander’s attachment to her turns into love and he starts calling her by her first name. “Senator Brander found himself more and more interested in her and in time he managed to remove from her mind that timidity and fear which had made her feel uncomfortable in his presence.” (Jennie Gerhardt 23)

As Brander’s affection increases for Jennie, she becomes confident that Brander really loves her. By and by, her fear and shyness start disappearing, which show that she takes pleasure in Brander’s company. Here we discover Dreiser’s feminist approach in this novel because he knows that a woman also has an equal right to love. For the people of Dreiser’s age, this aspect of a woman was exposed for the first time so clearly in
Dreiser’s novels. That is why, they failed to appreciate her love affair.

Dreiser’s sympathy toward woman is evident. In *Jennie Gerhardt*, Jennie is shocked when Brander suddenly passes away. She finds herself in a what-to-do situation and unable to decide her next action. Eventually, she happens to meet Lester Kane, and, after developing a kind of relationship, she once again finds herself in deep trouble. Her love affair cannot culminate into marriage because Lester Kane had some family problems. As Jennie’s love for Lester Kane is genuine, she gets ready for a sacrifice. She advises Lester Kane to leave her and follow his father’s advice. This is what she does in the interest of Lester Kane but for it, she has to pay a heavy price.
Jennie tolerates Lester Kane in spite of his fickleness. In Lester Kane’s character, we find the depiction of love which is inconsistent because at one time Lester loved Jennie but his love fluctuates after meeting Letty. After his telling Letty that actually he loves her, it appears that his love for Jennie was just a passing fancy. Dreiser seems to dislike people who are inconsistent in love. “I never cared for other women but you before and — I’ll be frank — I didn’t know whether I wanted to marry you. I thought I didn’t want to marry any woman. I said to myself that I could just take Jennie, and then, after a while, when things had quieted down some, we could separate. She wouldn’t care. You understand.” (Jennie Gerhardt 337) But Jennie is not clever enough to guess about Lester Kane’s insincerity. Being a feminist, Dreiser seems to advise women tacitly not to depend on a man who is not constant in love.
There was, of course, a time when Kane’s love for Jennie appeared to be a genuine feeling of his heart. But the difference of the social standard between Lester and Jennie probably diverted Lester to Letty. Jennie was also simpler in nature and intellectually not as strong as Letty. But at a later stage, Lester is bound to realize that love, as the real sentiment of the heart, has nothing to do with simplicity or intellectual power of social standard. Love is just love and this is what Jennie has bowed for Kane. He readily helps Jennie when her father got his hand burnt. It appears that probably Lester Kane suppressed his feeling of love for Jennie for the sake of some other qualities in Letty. Kane suffers for his wrong decision.

In *The Financier*, Dreiser as a feminist is sympathetic with the plight of Mrs. Cowperwood. We have the depiction of insincere love once again in *The*
*Financier* in which Cowperwood, after developing relationship with Aileen Butler, tries to find fault with the activities of Mrs. Cowperwood. When Dreiser presents their relationship in the novel, it is a strained one. It is probably this lack of love between the husband and the wife which diverts Cowperwood to Aileen. Dreiser has a firm conviction that like man, woman also has a right to love.

Aileen’s love for Cowperwood is definitely her real feeling of love. Aileen can tell her father plainly that she is waiting for Mrs Cowperwood’s divorce and she has no doubt that Cowperwood will marry her. Even without thinking whether it is moral or immoral, Aileen hopes that there will be a divorce between Cowperwood and Mrs. Cowperwood shortly. Dreiser in this novel does not seem to object to their divorce or to Aileen’s relationship with
Cowperwood because he does not believe that people leading a cat's and dog's life should carry on their marriage.

Here Dreiser presents a sharp contrast to the Indian way of life where marriage becomes a lifelong bond. That is why Aileen can declare her view openly before her father. "But father", she protested, "I love Mr Cowperwood. It is almost the same as if I were married to him. He will marry me some day when he gets a divorce from Mrs Cowperwood. You don’t understand how it is. He is very fond of me, and I love him. He needs me." (The Financier 168)

Truly speaking, through the depiction of Aileen’s love for Cowperwood, Dreiser depicts the psychology of a teenaged girl. What he says about Aileen is true about every young girl in her teens. At this stage, love becomes
a romantic feeling for a girl and she wants to be loved by someone. In her teens, a girl is not mature enough to take into account the pros and cons of having a love affair. "Her (Aileen's) craving was for love, to be fondled and caressed — and she really did not think so much further."

(The Financier 126) That is why a young girl in love does not think of the consequence. She just enjoys being loved.

Dreiser finds that love is a natural feeling and we cannot stimulate it in a natural manner. Usually once it is dead, it is dead forever. "Love is not a bunch of coals that can be blown by an artificial bellows into a flame at any time." (The Titan 458)

Cowperwood's love for Mrs Cowperwood has faded Aileen's love for Cowperwood continues in the novel The Stoic. Her love for Cowperwood in The Stoic forms an example of sacrificial love. Practically, love to be true
usually requires service and sacrifice, Aileen feels that she
has cut off herself from her home and the social circle for
the sake of Cowperwood. "She had sealed that tie with a
true love and a true marriage, and never should that be
taken from her! He would not dare assail her in any open
or legal way." (The Stoic 34)

Dreiser depicts different facets of woman's love
and, if we examine them though roughly, we find him
adopting totally feministic approach. His personal
experience played a vital role in this regard and that is
why, he is so vehement in influencing women's way of
thinking and insisting on their freedom to love a person of
her liking.

While a woman's love is a major aspect in the
novels of Theodore Dreiser, his views regarding marriage
are in no way less important. All his major novels give us
a glimpse of his opinion in one way or the other, and a brief survey will bring out this perspective of his thinking in detail.

We find his own presence as Eugene Witla in *The Genius*. Dreiser attaches no importance to the formal marriage ceremony. For him, "it seemed a silly formula—this piece of paper from the marriage clerk’s office and this instructed phraseology concerning love, honour and cherish."

*(The Genius 199)*

After his marriage with Angela, Eugene embraces her, "there was more of crude desire than of awed delight in the whole proceeding." *(The Genius 199)*

In Dreise’s views regarding marriage, we find him close to Thomas Hardy who believed that marriage was possible where there existed a common interest, and similarity of ideals and aspirations between the parties who enter matrimony. Hardy discovers that most of the
sufferings are directly traceable to maladjustment in respect of marriage. He thinks that man can break the chains of such union when love is lost.

Eugene knew that generally people interpreted marriage like that, “but it did not appeal to him. Union ought, in his estimation to be based on a keen desire to love together or on nothing else.” (The Genius 198) Marriage was actually “a trick of Nature” (Ibid 198) to perpetuate men and women. “As a contrivance through which conventions were held in force, marriage gave Dreiser a theme to which he returned again and again in his fiction.” (Mc Aleer 26) The Genius explores the theme marriage countermands Nature.

In Jennie Gerhardt, Lester Kane accepts the conventional marriage for social reasons, but repents in the end. “He would not wear the social shackles if it were
possible to satisfy the needs of his heart and nature, and still remain free and unfettered. Marriage was not only impossible but unnecessary.” (Jennie Gerhardt 136)

Dreiser faced a big setback in his own case as his marriage with Jug ended in a smoke. “In The Genius, Dreiser fictionalized the break-up of his own marriage.” (McAleer 24) When Angela is rebuked by Eugene for asking him to stick to conventions, “the complaint was Dreiser’s own.” (Ibid 24) We also come to know that Eugene has very bitter opinion about marriage and even calls it a part of man’s ill back. “Most people, so far as he could see, were unhappily married. It seemed to be the lot of mankind to make mistakes in its matrimonial selections. He was probably no happier than many others.” (The Genius 354)
In Dreiser’s personal life also, he took marriage as “debasing institution which not only killed the love that brought men to it, but also deformed and dwarfed their personalities.” (Roberta 117) In his opinion, love appears to be the chief test of marriage. Modern psychology and its developments affect him a lot, and that is why his views on marriage are based on these developments. Havelock Ellis considers marriage to be a relationship based on common interests and mutual understanding. Suzanne Dale in *The Genius* comments: “I think marriage ought to be a happy bargain and if it is not, you ought not to try to stay together just because you thought you could stay together once.” (*The Genius* 587)

In the same novel, we have Angela’s conventional view of marriage in which she tells that men belong to one woman only. “I do not hold Suzanne absolutely guiltless
...She has been out in society long enough to know that a married man is sacred property to another woman. Mrs Dale, Suzanne's mother, also scolds her daughter for loving Eugene Witla. Look at the situation from Mrs Witla's point of view. How would you like to be in her place? How would you like to be in mine? Suppose you were Mrs Witla and Mrs Witla were the other women what then?" (The Genius 614)

As a matter of fact, no woman tolerates the presence of another woman in her married life. In The Titan, Dreiser tries to tell us the same. According to him a woman finds her monopoly disturbed. "Of all living things, women dread women most of all, and of all women the clever and the beautiful." (The Titan 148) Aileen, though she herself has acquired Mrs Cowperwood's position is very cautious about Rita Sholberg's intimacy
with her husband. "She meditated as she rode. She would not sit back and be robbed as Mrs Cowperwood had been by her. Never.....would she prefer to die that way than lose his love. Oh yes, a thousand times." (The Titan 150)

Aileen forgets her own immoral deed of ushering Mrs Cowperwood’s position. Cowperwood, on the other hand, does not follow the conventional pattern of marriage. He continued to maintain illicit relations with other women. He could display affection which actually he did not feel. Angela, Eugene’s wife, in The Genius accepts that “he (Eugene) could not only look upon or run after girls as he had in the old days.” (The Genius 291) After marriage he must limit himself to her only. Such was the normally accepted view of married life.

To sum up, we can say that Dreiser has his own views regarding love and marriage which are very much
influenced by his feministic approach. His characters are ready to break the set, conventional norms if they find them against their personal liberty. In fact, he seems to be advocating personal liberty; especially that of women who were, during the major part of the history, subjected to live under men folk. That is why his characters like Carrie Meeber, Jennie Gerhardt, Suzanne Dale and Roberta --- are all so strong.

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